NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM ON CD (MS WORD FORMAT)

---

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with a Board of Revision of Taxes address)

Street address: 8330 Millman Street

Postal code: *19118* Councilmanic District: 8

---

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Vanna Venturi House; Mother's House

Common Name: Vanna Venturi House; Mother's House

---

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Site ☐ Object

---

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☒ excellent ☐ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: *Residential dwelling, single family*

---

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

SEE ATTACHED

---

6. DESCRIPTION

SEE ATTACHED

---

7. SIGNIFICANCE

SEE ATTACHED

Period of Significance (from year to year): 1959-1964

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1963-1964

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Venturi & Short (Robert Venturi, design architect)

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Contractor: Edmund A. Moyer

Original owner: Vanna Venturi

Other significant persons: Denise Scott Brown

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,

☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,

☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,

☒ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,

☒ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,

☒ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,

☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,

☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,

☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or

☐ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

SEE ATTACHED

9. NOMINATOR

Name with Title: Kathleen M. Abplanalp, Ph.D., edited by Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D.

Email: kmabplanalp@yahoo.com; emily.t.cooperman@gmail.com

Organization: Chestnut Hill Historical Society Date: 26 October 2015

Street Address: 8708 Germantown Avenue Telephone: 215-247-0417

City, State, and Postal Code: *Philadelphia, PA 19143*

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt:_____

☐ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date:_____

Date of Notice Issuance:_____

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name:_____

Address:_____

_____

City:_____ State:____ Postal Code:_____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation:_____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission:_____

Date of Final Action:_____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

5. Boundary Description

The Vanna Venturi House is located at 8330 Millman Street in the Chestnut Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia. The boundaries of the parcel (identified as 128N03-0053) follow:

Beginning at a point on the southwesterly side of Millman Street (50 feet wide) measured South 50 degrees 30 minutes 45 seconds East along the said Southwesterly sides of Millman Street the distance of 207 feet and 5 and 7/8 inches from the Southeasterly side of Gravers Lane (60 feet wide); thence extending South 50 degrees 30 minutes 45 seconds East along the said Southwesterly side of Millman Street 60 feet 0 inches to a point; thence South 39 degrees 29 minutes 15 seconds west 120 feet 0 inches to a point; thence South 5 degrees 30 minutes 45 seconds East 56 feet 6 and 7/8 inches to a point; thence south 39 degrees 29 minutes and 15 seconds West at right angles to Navajo Street and Millman Street 110 feet 1 and 3/8 inches to a point on the Northeasterly side of Navajo Street (50 feet wide); thence still South 39 degrees 29 minutes 15 seconds West partly crossing the bed of said Navajo Street 25 feet 0 inches to a point on the center of said Navajo Street (being the total distance of 135 feet 1 and 3/8 inches along the last described course); thence North 50 degrees 30 minutes 45 seconds West along the center line of Navajo Street 191 feet 7 and 3/4 inches to a point; thence North 39 degrees 29 minutes 15 seconds East partly recrossing the bed of said Navajo Street 25 feet 0 inches to a point on the Northeasterly side of Navajo Street; thence still North 39 degrees 29 minutes 15 seconds East at right angles to Navajo Street and Millman Street 118 feet 1 and 3/8 inches to a point (being the total distance of 143 feet 1 and 3/4 inches along the last described course; thence South 50 degrees 30 minutes 45 seconds East 91 feet 7 and 3/4 inches to point; thence 39 degrees 29 minutes 15 seconds East at right angles to Navajo and Millman Street 152 feet 0 inches to a point on the said Southwesterly side of Millman, being the first mentioned point and place of beginning (see Figure 1 for a boundary map of the property).

6. Description

The Vanna Venturi house is a two-story, rectangular-plan, gable-roofed building with eight-inch structural concrete block walls surfaced with green-painted stucco, with applied, wood tongue-and-groove boards in selected locations. The roof is clad in painted, standing-seam metal. The windows are a combination of sliding aluminum and steel sash, with simple, wood frames with slightly projecting lintels. A central, shed-roofed monitor volume rises at the peak of the main roof, and a brick chimney, stuccoed on the main, northeast elevation, rises from the monitor and is slightly off-center to the southeast. The house is roughly centered in the main section of an approximately .85-acre flag lot. From Millman Street, which abuts the property on the northeast, the house is approached via a paved drive that is intentionally off-center with respect to the main, northeast elevation of the building. The long, narrow drive, which is bordered by lawn and shrubs, terminates at the front elevation of the house near the recess for the entrance door.

The main, northeast elevation (Photo 1), organized in a balanced, asymmetrical composition, is intentionally both overscaled in detail and flat in appearance, and is dominated by a broad, monumental gable with a parapet wall rising slightly above and hiding the roof. A central vertical spilt in the gable, which echoes the appearance of a broken pediment, extends from the roof peak to a reinforced concrete lintel positioned above the nearly-square, centered opening of the entrance vestibule. The entrance recess extends back to the plane of the central, shed-roofed monitor and chimney mass, with a beveled wall recessed behind the main front wall on the first floor. An applied, segmental-arch molding, broken at the split, intersects the lintel. A horizontal, double wood molding that echoes a chair rail and is interrupted by the entrance recess spans the front and rear façades of the house. A series of asymmetrical features intentionally counter the overall symmetry of the gable and centered entrance opening and lend the design a sense of dynamic tension. Chief among these is the chimney itself, which rises just southeast of center from the roof monitor volume. On this elevation the stuccoed monitor volume and chimney combine to give the appearance of an overscaled, monumental chimney. The main entrance is located on the northwest side of the centered, first floor recess, and is located below another recess behind the main front wall (Photo 2). The entrance, which includes a double-leaf, wood door lit by single, fixed, square, top-light sections above square paneled sections, is balanced by a built-in bench on the southeast of the recess. The recess is lit by a large, square, fixed-light window on the upper floor that appears like a centered window in the chimney mass in the manner of a window in a split-flue chimney of large eighteenth and nineteenth century houses of the region. As one approaches the entrance and can see into the recess, however, this window reveals itself to be off-center to the northwest, and to be partially cantilevered out over the wall bevel on the northwest side (Photo 3). The front wall is anchored on the southeasternmost part of the elevation by a single opening that accommodates a square window that appears to have vertical and horizontal muntins through the use of two, two-light, sliding aluminum sash with cross-bars. A smaller, square, steel awning sash window with its sill flush with the horizontal molding across the façade is found immediately to the southeast of the central opening. The wall on the northwest side of the

entrance is lit by a long, horizontal opening with a steel frame and sash ribbon window consisting of five square sash with two awning units flanking the center sash. This ribbon window is also visually anchored by the molding, and its sill lines up with the sill of the smaller, square, awning window to the southeast. The placement of the windows reflects the function of the spaces behind them: a bedroom and bathroom on the southeast side and a kitchen on the northwest side. Historic, industrial-style light fixtures survive in the ceiling of the entrance recess on its southeast side, and over the square, southeastern window.

The side elevations are narrower, asymmetrically organized, and dominated by the roof, with box gutters on each elevation. The shed-roofed monitor is lit on both elevations by large, fixed-light, trapezoidal windows, and the brick of the chimney, which rises above the monitor on these elevations, is exposed. The southeast elevation (Photo 4) includes two recessed, secondary entrances at the outside walls, with white-painted, wood, vertical tongue-and-groove board-clad side walls. The smaller, northeast door matches the leaves of the front door in its configuration. The southwest, double, aluminum frame sliding door, giving access to the first-floor bedroom, echoes the large, square, southeast window in its cross-bars, materials, and proportions. A square window with steel, awning sash matching the small window on the front elevation is anchored at the roofline northeast of center adjacent to a historic light fixture matching the one on the front elevation. Approximately three-quarters of the northwest elevation (Photo 5) is recessed in two principal sections. The larger, southwest recess forms a covered porch accessed from the dining area by a four-leaf aluminum sliding door matching those elsewhere. The center leaves are operable and the outer leaves are fixed. The recesses are clad in tongue-and-groove board matching the material on the southeast elevation. A segmental arch-plan screen of posts with square-section lower and circular-plan upper sections divides the porch from a more shallowly recessed, rear entrance section to the northeast. This includes a poured-in-place concrete stair to the basement level with a pipe railing and a single door matching the one on the southeast elevation. The threshold in front of the door is a poured-in-place concrete slab cantilevered over the basement stair. A historic light fixture is located to the southwest of the rear door, which leads into the kitchen area.

Unlike the front façade, the rear, southwest façade (Photo 6) is not pedimented, but includes the chair rail molding of the main elevation as well as a parapet wall rising above the roof. The parapet wall also encloses a balcony (Photo 7) on the second story, and includes a central, small slit echoing the larger split on the main elevation. A wide, centered lunette opening is positioned behind the balcony and includes fixed side lights flanking a centered, heavy, double-leaf door from the bedroom on this level. The wall framing the lunette opening is clad in painted tongue-in-groove boards matching those on the first floor on the side elevations. The first floor is asymmetrically fenestrated, with an open doorway into the northwest, recessed porch, an off-center, six-light window to the northwest of center at the living room, and a L-shaped window group lighting the first-floor bedroom on the southeast that includes a double window in an opening the same size as the doorway into the porch adjacent to a large, square, fixed light to the northwest of a rectangular casement in a steel frame. The living room openings hold aluminum sash like those on other elevations.

Integrity

The Vanna Venturi House retains the historic integrity required to convey its significance as an internationally significant work of architect Robert Venturi. In fact, it retains the "high degree" of integrity that would be necessary for National Historic Landmark designation. It retains integrity of location, having not been moved. It retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship, having sustained no alterations and having been meticulously maintained by its current owner. The property, which retains integrity of setting, has not materially changed since the house's completion.

7. Statement of Significance

The Vanna Venturi house been widely recognized as one of the most important works of the internationally distinguished American architect, Robert Venturi. The house has also rightly been characterized as one of the most significant architectural commissions of post-World War II world wide. Vincent Scully, the renowned American architectural historian, famously called the house the "biggest small building of the second half of the twentieth century."[1] Physically and metaphorically, Scully's description of the house is precise. For half a century, the Vanna Venturi house, which is small in size but large in scale, has exerted outsized influence on architectural design and theory, both domestically and internationally. Widely proclaimed as the building that changed the trajectory of Modernism and led to post-Modernism, the house excites and provokes, as much as for its exceptionalism as for the novel theory that informed its design and that continues to influence contemporary architecture.

Choosing the Site

Robert Venturi began work on the design of "Mother's House" in 1959, shortly before the death of his father, Robert, Sr. Vanna Venturi commissioned her son to design and build her a home that would accommodate her in advanced age and allow her to live comfortably as a single woman. For the building site, the Venturis identified an approximately three-quarter-acre vacant parcel on Millman Street in the Chestnut Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia.[2] The parcel was contained within a property owned by George Woodward, Inc., a real estate company that developed vast tracts of land in Chestnut Hill during the early twentieth century. Vanna Venturi purchased the parcel in 1963.[3]

The Venturis' decision to locate the house near the business district of Chestnut Hill was aided by several considerations, including Vanna Venturi's desire to live in an area that was both accessible to public transportation and within walking distance to stores and other conveniences. The Chestnut Hill site, which was a half-mile from Germantown Avenue and the regional railroad, satisfied these conditions. Robert Venturi also wanted to settle his mother in stylish surroundings.[4] Born to a second-generation Italian mother and an Italian immigrant father, Venturi lived his early years in a neighborhood of respectable yet modest houses in Upper Darby, a Philadelphia suburb that was populated with working- and middle-class families. Venturi was, however, steeped in patrician culture and had an early comfort with affluence. As a child, he was educated at a Quaker school in Lansdowne, a suburb to the

---

[1] Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 230.
[2] The parcel is first documented in Robert Venturi's 1959 plot plan, which is reproduced in Frederic Schwartz, ed., *Mother's House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 61.
[3] A deed of sale between Robert Venturi, Jr./Denise B. Venturi and Thomas Hughes /Agatha C. Hughes, 6 August 1973, references the 2 July, 1963 sale to Vanna Venturi. Deed Book 434/Page 553. On file, Philadelphia Department of Records.
[4] Denise Scott Brown, interview by Kathleen M. Abplanalp. Philadelphia, Pa. 25 August, 2015.
Denise Scott Brown notes that the move to Chestnut Hill affirmed Robert Venturi's rise in "society."

southwest of Philadelphia, and later at the Episcopal Academy, an exclusive private school on Philadelphia's Main Line.

The Philadelphia with which Venturi was familiar was famed for its collection of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century neighborhoods. Wealthy residents resided in select areas in and around the city, including Rittenhouse Square, Chestnut Hill, and the Main Line. Vanna Venturi was acquainted with the latter; in its Rosemont neighborhood, she had formerly occupied a house designed by society architects Savery, Sheetz, and Gilmour. Of Philadelphia's affluent enclaves, however, Chestnut Hill was and still is the most urbane. Chestnut Hill of the mid-century was home to scholars, academics, and architects. Venturi and his mother, who were both cerebral, were keen to surround themselves with similarly intellectual individuals.

Robert Venturi was also attracted to Chestnut Hill because of its outstanding design history. The village's building stock, an embarrassment of riches, was ceaselessly interesting to architects and historians.[5] The "suburb in the city" was a home to an impressive collection of eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth-century buildings. Abundant in number and varied in style, vernacular and architect-designed, these buildings were the subject of multiple articles, books, and critiques.

Beginning in the period after the Depression, Modernist buildings, too, began to dot Chestnut Hill's landscape. One of the earliest was a house by Kenneth Day, the Charles Woodward House of 1938-39 on Millman Street close to the future site of the Venturi House, followed by work in the 1940s by such important local firms as Bishop and Wright. In the 1950s, Robert Venturi worked on one of the most important Modernist projects in Chestnut Hill of the post-World War II period – Cherokee Village – while in the office of Oskar Stonorov. This development project, which included apartments and townhouses for rent as well as free-standing houses for sale, soon became a magnet for intellectuals, artists, and designers who moved there after its completion.[6] The arrival of these projects by noted Modern designers established the neighborhood's growing reputation as an incubator for progressive architecture. While Venturi was working on his mother's house, Louis I. Kahn worked on his famed project for Margaret Esherick a half-block away.

Resistance to the placement of these houses in the Chestnut Hill community receded slowly, however. Charles Woodward, a representative of George Woodward, Inc. and the son of its founder, recognized that Venturi's atypical residence had the potential to introduce an

---

[5] William Whitaker**,** the curator and collections manager of the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, was helpful in identifying a Chestnut Hill Historical Society interview in which Robert Venturi talks about his appreciation for Chestnut Hill's distinctive architecture (Collection the Chestnut Hill Historical Society).

[6] These residents included Ian McHarg, the Philadelphia-based landscape architect and world-renowned designer and ecologist. Emily T. Cooperman interview with Esther Cooperman, a resident of Cherokee Village in the 1950s, resident of Chestnut Hill in the 1960s-1980s, and acquaintance of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, 2004.

uncomfortable dissonance to a neighborhood that was largely characterized by late-nineteenth-century vernacular houses and stone, historicist residences of the early twentieth century. To Venturi's inquiry about purchasing the parcel at 8330 Millman Street, Woodward responded that he was "perfectly willing to approve an avant-garde house as long as it was only controversial and not detrimental to the neighborhood."[7]

Designing

Robert Venturi maintains that in designing the Chestnut Hill house, his mother burdened him with few constraints; she did not want a pretentious or expensive house and she declined to incorporate a garage into the plan because she did not drive. This freedom presented Venturi with the latitude to realize his own vision of how a house should be experienced and understood, by both its owner and by the public.

When Venturi began to envision the house on paper, he was teaching at the University of Pennsylvania (among his colleagues was Louis Kahn) and had not yet independently completed a single building. Venturi's accumulated experiences, however, which included his education, his study in Europe, and his employment in acclaimed architectural offices, including Eero Saarinen's in addition to Kahn's and Stonorov's, endowed him with a foundation of ideas that influenced the design of the house. At Princeton, where he received A.B. and M.F.A in architecture, Venturi's training was heavily focused on history and the study of architectural theory. Venturi's study in England, France, and especially Italy (where he was a Rome Prize Fellow), intensified his interest in historic architecture. These experiences profoundly influenced his use of history as reference in his designs.

In his monograph, *Mother's House*, Frederic Schwartz characterizes the Vanna Venturi house as a "brick thrown at the window of modernism."[8] Constructed during a period when the tenets of Modernism emphasized abstract minimalism and still forcefully dictated the design of buildings, the house brazenly exploited features that were conspicuously anti-Modernist, even traditionalist: a prominent gabled roof instead of a flat one, arches, framed windows with conspicuous muntins rather than fixed planes of uninterrupted glass, and a dominant vertical element that housed a central chimney, a quintessential symbol of the domestic house. Robert Venturi has noted that he took his ideas for the residence from classical and mannerist buildings including Luigi Moretti's Casa Del Giasole, Palladio's Villa Barbaro, and Michelangelo's Porta Pia. In his design, Venturi also referred to more recent buildings, including Edwin Lutyen's Middlefield, McKim, Meade and White's Low House, and Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. Famously, he painted the house green in response to a public Modernist's dictum that houses should never be green.

---

[7] Text taken from a letter reproduced in Frederic Schwartz, ed., *Mother's House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 6.
[8] Frederic Schwartz, ed., *Mother's House*, 13.

On more than one level, Venturi's affinity for historic forms was intolerable to orthodox adherents to the Modern Movement, although Venturi, like Louis Kahn, considers himself a Modernist. Architects of Modern buildings dispensed with historic elements with the aim of eliminating context and creating universal spaces, if not architectural truths. Their designs favored "clean lines" (an aphorism for simple, largely rectilinear prismatic massing, flat roofs, concrete walls, and ribbon windows) and precision. Venturi, by contrast, borrowed heavily from the past. In his mother's house, he alluded to Mannerist architecture to dramatic effect by employing a monumental gable with a broken pediment on the long facade. He gestured toward classical architecture with the application of a segmental arch over the front door. The arch was not merely a reference to traditional architecture. Used as a decorative element and applied to the face of the house, the arch offered no utility. Rather, it symbolized entry to the house. Its use in this way contradicted the Modernist axiom, "Form Follows Function." The interior of the house contains similar contradictions, including stairs that lead to nowhere and a grandly scaled fireplace.

The design evolution of the Vanna Venturi house occurred over a period of three-and-a-half years, beginning from the time of the Chestnut Hill lot's purchase. It is documented in a set of five preliminary schemes and one final one. These schemes trace Venturi's shifting ideas and detail countless modifications to the house. They end in a final design that is complex but that also foregrounds and distills the everyday, iconic features of a house. Critics have frequently remarked, and Venturi has concurred, that the front façade of the house looks like a child's drawing of a house in its abstract epitome of key ideas and forms of domestic architecture. The massive, chimney-like roof monitor and broad gable do summon images of a humble sketch in its abstraction. Its presence in the design reflects Venturi's philosophy that buildings should acknowledge and embrace the ambiguities of modern culture. Venturi outlined this philosophy in his seminal book, *Complexity and Contradiction* in *Architecture* (1966). In many ways, the Venturi House represents the physical working out of the ideas he would publish in this book.

The final expression of the Vanna Venturi house can be more fully appreciated when viewed within the context of Venturi's personal and professional relationships with several leading figures of the period, including Louis Kahn. Venturi concedes, in fact, that the house "started out more like" the work of his mentor and one-time employer.[9] If the 'ancestry' of the house cannot be rigidly charted, it may be that, as Vincent Scully suggests, "the forms original to the apprentice and to the master are not always easy to define."[10]

Scully's acknowledgement is also helpful in defining Denise Scott Brown's contribution to the design of the house. Over a period of more than 50 years, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi established a reputation as one of the foremost design teams of the twentieth century.

---

[9] Robert Venturi, "Robert Venturi," in *Architect: The Words of the Pritzker Prize Laureates in their Own Words*, eds. Ruth Peltason and Grace Ong-Yan (New York: Black Dog and Levanthal Publishers, Inc., 2010), 226.
[10] Vincent Scully, "Everybody Needs Everything," *Mother's House*: *The Evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill*, ed. Frederic Schwartz (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 44.

Scott Brown and Venturi's business partnership started in 1967 when they were married. However, their professional relationship dates to 1960 when they first taught together in a studio at the University of Pennsylvania. As a city planner, Scott Brown theorized that historically, public spaces often evolved organically at the intersection of main streets. In her collaborations with Venturi, Scott Brown applied this theory to building design. Multiple Venturi, Scott Brown commissions contain 'streets' that cross through their interiors. In the Vanna Venturi house, Denise Scott Brown notes, the intersection of the streets creates "a room for living."[11]

Legacy

When it was completed in the spring of 1964, the Vanna Venturi house attracted the immediate attention of architects and critics.[12] An *Evening Bulletin* review to which Romaldo Giurgola contributed characterized the commission as a "personal kind of house" and echoed Venturi's own sentiments about the value of juxtaposing the simple and the complex.[13] *Progressive Architecture* acknowledged that the ability of the design to communicate the complexity of modern life was still debatable, but that "when experienced as a living entity, the house has an undoubted impact."[14] During the years following its completion, a chorus of architects and critics echoed this pronouncement. If there is not universal affection for the house, there is consensus that the design vigorously represents a pioneering work of the twentieth century.

Criteria for Designation

The Vanna Venturi house meets multiple criteria for designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, as defined by the City of Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 14-1000, Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia zoning code.

The Vanna Venturi house satisfies Criteria D, E, and F:

(d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

The Vanna Venturi house profoundly affected the course of Modern architecture, opening it to reference, complexity, and ambiguity. One result of this opening was the later development of post-Modernism. The Vanna Venturi house is one of a handful of Philadelphia buildings (including Kahn's Richard and Goddard Buildings project at the University of Pennsylvania of

---

[11] Scott Brown, interview.
[12] In July 1963, Robert Venturi obtained a city permit to build his mother's house on the Millman Street site. Building permit No. 88610. On file, City of Philadelphia Archives. Construction on the house occurred under the supervision of Venturi's new partner, John Rauch. The project's contractor, which the permit identifies as Edmund A. Moyer, had previously worked with Venturi on the North Penn Visiting Nurses' Association Headquarters.
[13] Michelle Osborn, "A Personal Kind of House," *Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), 15 October, 1965.
[14] Ellen Perry, "Complexities and Contradictions," *Progressive Architecture* 46 (May 1965): 170.

1959-1965) associated with the "Philadelphia School" that became and remains globally significant. It can be asserted with reason that this structure is one of the top ten most consequential buildings of the twentieth century. The work of this "school" challenged the orthodoxy of "International Style" Modernism by engaging with context, environmental and sociological concerns, architectural history and precedent, as well as the question of monumental civic expression and symbolism in architecture. Venturi and Scott Brown resisted applying the term "postmodern" to their work. They have viewed their work, rather, as an extension of Modernism. Robert Venturi received the AIA Twenty-Five Year Award (1989) for the design of the Vanna Venturi house.

(e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation.

The prominent Philadelphia architect Robert Venturi designed the Vanna Venturi house, and it represents a crucial moment in his career. Venturi is among the most distinguished architects of the second half of the twentieth century. His commissions, which were frequently executed in collaboration with his wife and professional partner, Denise Scott Brown, were expressions of his groundbreaking theory about the value of complexity and contradiction in architecture. Venturi's work, (exemplified by Vanna Venturi House), his teaching at Penn (1956-65), and his writing (particularly *Complexity & Contradiction*, 1966), dramatically opened pathways closed in more orthodox definitions of Modernism. In this respect, Venturi set a generation of architects "free."

(f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation.

The novel use of symbolism, historic forms, and prosaic elements in the Vanna Venturi house represents a significant innovation not just in American architecture but in architecture internationally. Robert Venturi applied (if not worked out) his theory of "complexity and contradiction" to the design of the house by rhetorically distorting the scale of architectural devices, adopting functional elements purely for ornamentation, and using conventional building components in unconventional ways. The Vanna Venturi house represents a radical departure from the Modernist architecture that preceded it and is the design to which post-Modern buildings trace their origin.

8. Major Bibliographical References

Brown, Denise Scott. Interview by Kathleen M. Abplanalp. Philadelphia, Pa. 25 August, 2015.

City of Philadelphia

Department of Records.

City Archives

Evening Bulletin (Philadelphia) Michelle Osborn. "A Personal Kind of House." *Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), 15 October, 1965.

Peltason, Ruth and Grace Ong-Yan. *Architect: The Words of the Pritzker Prize Laureates in their Own Words*. New York: Black Dog and Levanthal Publishers, Inc., 2010.

Perry, Ellen. "Complexities and Contradictions." *Progressive Architecture* 46 (May 1965): 168-174.

Schwartz, Frederic, Ed. *Mother's House: The Evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill*. New York: Rizzoli, 1992.

Scully, Vincent. *Modern Architecture and Other Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966.

Photo 1: Northeast elevation, Vanna Venturi House. Photographer: Matt Wargo. Courtesy the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Photo 2: Detail, northeast elevation, Vanna Venturi House. Courtesy the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Photo 3: Detail, northeast elevation, Vanna Venturi House. Courtesy the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Photo 4: Northeast and southeast elevations, looking west. Courtesy the Library of Congress.

Photo 5: Northwest elevation, Vanna Venturi House, looking southeast. Courtesy the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Photo 6: Southwest elevation, Vanna Venturi House. Courtesy the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Photo 7: Second floor balcony, Vanna Venturi House, looking northwest. Courtesy the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

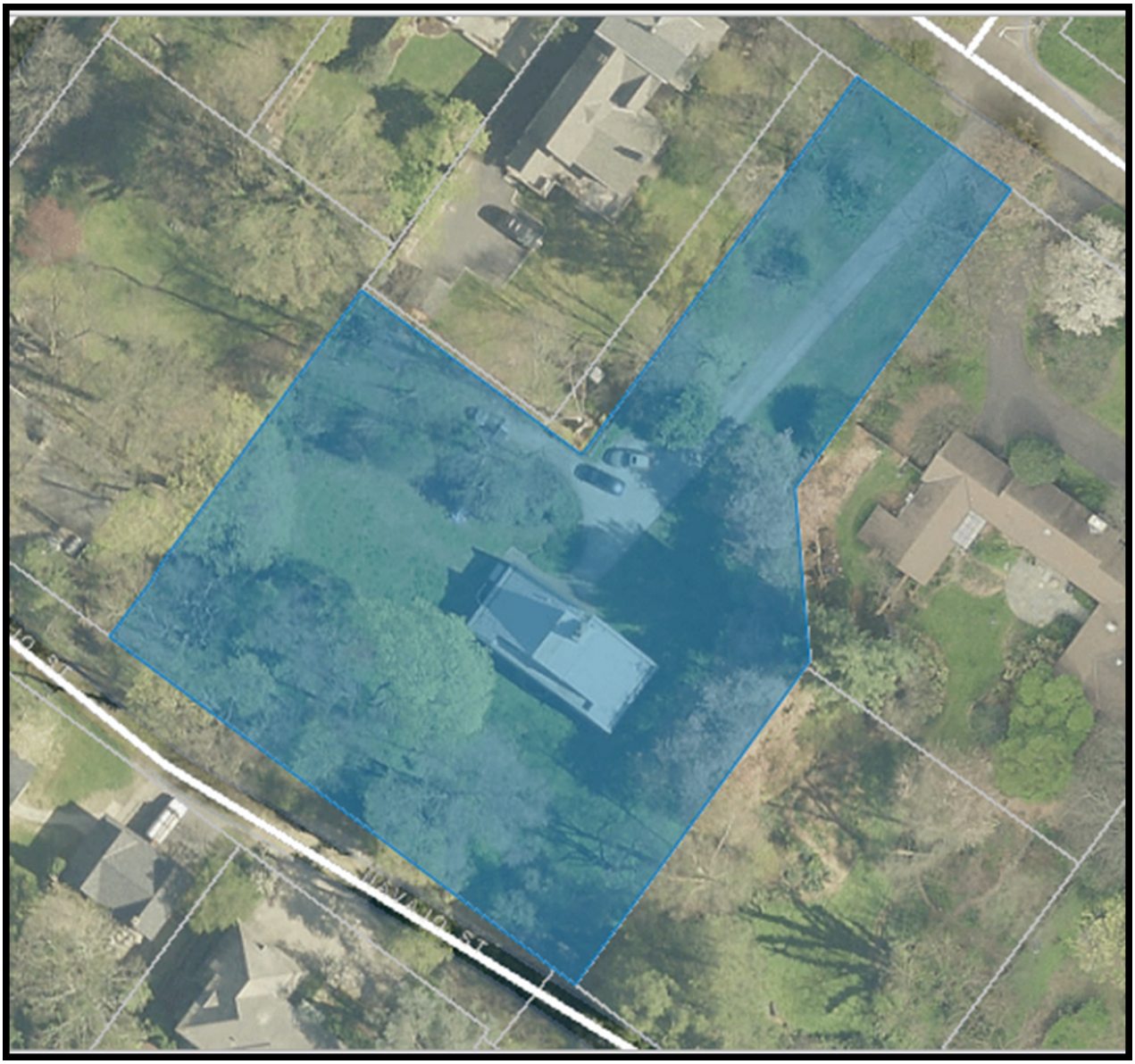

Figure 1: Plot plan of the Vanna Venturi House/ 8330 Millman Street, Philadelphia, Pa. City of Philadelphia, Parcel Explorer, 2015.

Figure 2: Vanna Venturi house, front elevation, undated. Rollin La France, photographer. Courtesy of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Figure 3: Vanna Venturi house, interior, undated. Rollin La France. Courtesy of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Figure 4 : Vanna Venturi house, rear elevation, undated. Rollin La France, photographer.

Courtesy of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.