

The design, created by Bruce McCarty of Knoxville, Tennessee, won awards and was featured in Architectural Digest. Known as a champion of modern architecture, McCarty first gained national attention in the 1950s for his innovative home designs. Raised in Wisconsin, he was influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright. (When not on St. Croix, I live in Wisconsin, where Frank Lloyd Wright devotees abound.)

When I googled McCarty, I was delighted to discover photographs of the home he designed for himself and his family in Knoxville. It has some of the same wonderful characteristics as The Reef. Just before his home was put on the market to be sold in 2017, after both he and his wife had died, it was opened for architecture tours. A reporter for the Knox News described the home in a way which perfectly describes a villa at The Reef: touring the home, he said, "seemed both like visiting an art gallery and sitting in on a geometry class." Because of the jalousie louvered windows that substituted for air conditioning when it was built in the late 1950s and the glass expanses, an architect on the tour said it felt half like an indoor space and half like an outdoor space. Both of those descriptions capture how I feel about The Reef villas.



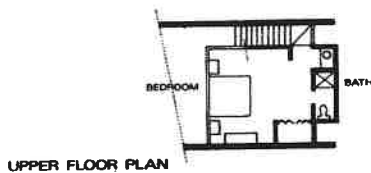
The Carolina Caribbean Corporation, developers of The Reef, promoted it as "A new world in an old world." I like the drawing which accompanied that slogan, evoking the charm of the island's historic architecture next to the modern lines of a Reef villa. The promoters also stressed that St. Croix is attractive for those "who demand more than neon and crowded beaches." The developers' description of construction methods and materials is instructive. At the time The Reef was built in 1969, there hadn't been a hurricane on St. Croix since 1928. Nonetheless, awareness of hurricane threats was key to construction decisions. Quoting from a promotional brochure, "Stability is a keynote at The Reef. It begins with life under the American flag, and it extends to villas that are virtually indestructible and maintenance-free." It goes on to explain that the concrete blocks walls were reinforced by vertical steel rods and the blocks were filled with poured concrete; termite-proof 4x12 roof beams were tied down with steel rods running through the walls to the base of the foundation; tops of the beams were covered with solid reinforced concrete to further anchor them in place and form the parapets; heavy 2x6 tongue & groove roof decking was used for floors and ceilings; fluorocarbon blown urethane foam was used for roof covering, providing a seamless, water resistant and fire retardant roof immune to rot,

and then coated with Hypalon to provide further sealing and a pleasing texture and color; floors were hardset brick laid over concrete, except for the carpeted bedrooms. All of this seemed very smart to me, until I got to the part about the wall to wall carpeting.

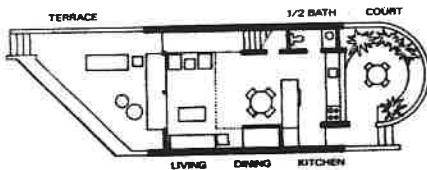
REEFNOTES

By Janet Newman

The Reef has reportedly been referred to by several less-than-complimentary descriptors over the years: The Chicken Coops, Da Huts, and Snaggle Tooth Ridge, to name a few. Those of us who own a villa here appreciate the angular architecture of The Reef – it provides privacy, maximizes views and air flow, and withstands hurricanes. Here's how the developers in 1969 described the villas' virtues:

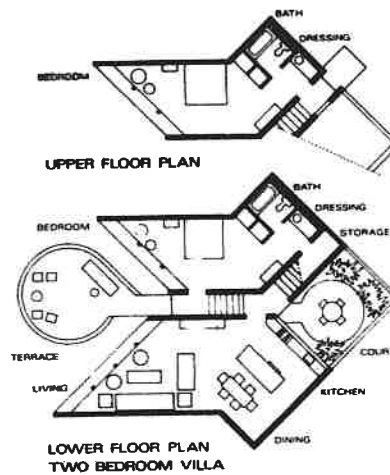


UPPER FLOOR PLAN



LOWER FLOOR PLAN
ONE BEDROOM VILLA

THE ONE-BEDROOM CONDOMINIUM. A wall of louvers, so characteristic of island living, opens up the two-story living room to the soft movement of trade winds and the spectacular view of the Caribbean. The 1,300 square feet of living space includes the soaring living-dining area, the carpeted bedroom which overlooks the living room, a ceramic tile master bath, plus a half bath downstairs, the walled rear court for indoor-outdoor living, and the superbly equipped kitchen. There is also a spacious front terrace. Meal-making is simplified with the 147 cubic foot refrigerator-freezer, range with radiant heat broiler, dishwasher and disposal. Surfacing materials of wood, brick and stucco were chosen for maintenance-free tropical living. Masonry construction exceeds specifications of The Miami Hurricane Code. All rooms are air-conditioned for year-round comfort.



UPPER FLOOR PLAN

LOWER FLOOR PLAN
TWO BEDROOM VILLA

THE TWO-BEDROOM CONDOMINIUM. This ingenious plan of 1,675 square feet is angled for privacy and convenience. Two identical bedrooms and baths are stacked one above the other, each a half flight from the living-dining area. The angle of the bedroom and living room wings shelter the low-walled terrace . . . located on the lower level so that views to the golf course, the beach and Buck Island are unobstructed from any room. There is a second outdoor living area in the walled court opening off the kitchen with a pass-through access. Ceilings cant upward in the living area and in one bedroom, their heavy beams and exposed planking reminiscent of colonial island architecture. Hinged louvered shutters open outwards to capture the full impact of the view. Materials used throughout the house require virtually no maintenance; the kitchen with its battery of labor-saving electrical appliances makes meal preparation almost effortless.



vintage Knoll chair

Original owners were able to purchase a complete package of furniture and furnishings, selecting from among a choice of color schemes. The furnishings included original art work, kitchenware, and linens. Reflecting that era, six ashtrays were part of the package, along with a shag area rug for the living room. The furniture was high-quality, and some of it is still in use today. The furniture for the outdoor spaces was Knoll terrace furniture. Knoll designs are found in the collection of the Musuem of Modern Art, including those which were part of The Reef furnishings.

Despite any disparaging or skeptical comments about the appearance of The Reef villas, they have stood the test of time and are indeed a combination of art and geometry.