EDITH FARNSWORTH
Reconsidered
PERIOD IMAGES
EXHIBITION DEVELOPED IN COOPERATION WITH:

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*Edith Farnsworth Reconsidered* is a part of “Where Women Made History,” the National Trust’s multi-year initiative to recognize and protect historic places that showcase the vision, courage, and leadership of generations of women. Learn more and support our efforts at [savingplaces.org/womens-history](http://savingplaces.org/womens-history).
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In 1944, Dr. Edith Farnsworth purchased a nine-acre parcel of land, formerly used as a vegetable garden for Colonel Robert McCormick’s “Chicago Tribune Experimental Farms.”

In 1945, she hired well-known modernist architect Mies van der Rohe to design her country house, completed in 1951. She enjoyed it until 1968 when she sold the property and retired to Italy.
Land Taken Through Eminent Domain For New Bridge ca. 1968

Old Iron Bridge

House

Old Driveway & Tree Line (Removed ca. 1970)

Garage

Barn (Removed ca. 1952)

Home Orchard & Septic Field

To Plano

1954 USGS Aerial
Edith, Mies & others picnicking at site ca. 1945 (Duckett photo)
House construction ca.1949 (Duckett photo)
Edith planting garden during construction ca. 1950 (Duckett photo)
Even before it was built, an architect’s model of the house was featured in a New York exhibition – garnering praise and attention for its streamlined form and refined details.

As the house neared completion, Dr. Farnsworth and Mies parted ways and she declined the architect’s furniture – instead, selecting pieces by Florence Knoll, Jens Risom, Bruno Mathsson and other modernist designers.
Although there was no contract, Mies sued Dr. Farnsworth for expenses and she sued him for malpractice – due to several initial problems with the house.

Soon, the house flooded – ruining her Chinese shantung silk draperies, which she replaced with white basswood roll-up blinds. She gradually added Chinese antiques, including architectural fragments and a pair of stone lions on the terrace.
North Elevation after 1954 Flood – draperies are gone (Werner Blaser photo)
Entry Area ca.1955 (Edith Farnsworth photo)
South Elevation ca.1965 (Thomas Gorman photo)
During the later 1950s and early 1960s, Dr. Farnsworth enjoyed her country house: reading, writing poetry, playing her violin and entertaining friends.

In the late 1960s, Dr. Farnsworth and her neighbors fought unsuccessfully to stop the demolition of the old iron bridge and the taking of their property through eminent domain. After losing nearly 1/3 of her property for construction of a new highway bridge, she listed the property for sale.
After purchasing the property in 1970, the British nobleman, Peter Palumbo, thoroughly restored the house, landscaped the grounds and installed trails and sculptures, opening for occasional tours. The National Trust acquired the property in 2003, opening it to the public.

Dr. Farnsworth retired to Italy, where she translated the work of three notable poets from Italian into English.
View from Edith’s Villa near Bagno a Ripoli, Italy ca.1977
Edith Brooks Farnsworth 1903-1977