Set the Wayback Machine for 1952; it’s the time of “I Like Ike” and America is popping out babies at a record pace. About the time we were all being born, Hawaii’s own Vladimir Ossipoff (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Ossipoff> ), Architect Extraordinaire was at the top of his game. It was during this period that this Russian born genius built an international reputation as an architect building in the quiet backwater that was Hawaii of the forties, fifties and sixties. He designed and built over a thousand homes in Hawaii during his career. The best of the best of these is a spectacular residence in Tantalus known as The Liljestrand House. It was built in 1952.

Howard Liljestrand was a physician working at Queens. He and his wife, Betty and their four children were overflowing their home in town and began an intensive search for ‘the site’. Tantalus was the perfect option. The steep pali right above the city offered great views and proximity to schools and work. That is the easy part. Consider that this site is more than a mile and a half past the Contemporary Museum and is still rural sixty years later.

One of Howard’s closest friends was Vladimir Ossipoff. Ossipoff examined the property and found a promontory that offered views to Diamondhead and Downtown. This was an opportunity to do something truly exceptional. Together they put together a home that is ultra modern, chic and special still.

Ossipoff and the Liljestrands were the perfect meld to design the perfect home. Both Howard and Vlad grew up in Asia and both spoke Japanese. They brought in two master woodsmiths from Japan and the team crafted the house out of straight-grained redwood, monkeypod and teak. House Beautiful named the Liljestrand House its Pace Setter House of 1958 and published a forty seven page spread covering every last detail of the residence.

The drive off Tantulus leads down a winding narrow lane with all views obscured by vegetation and the home itself. A porte cochere in front leads through the vestibule into the living room where Diamondhead is framed to the left and you look down on Moilili and out to the airport on the right. It is absolutely heart-stopping. Every room benefits from these expanses and they are never forgotten anywhere in the home.

Each feature, from the fireplace, the cabinetry to the furniture has been carefully considered for maximum aesthetic and practical effect. Storage is the order of the day and all the daily needs are tucked away so as to be readily available at a moment’s notice and yet invisible the next. Consider the master suite where closets are hidden in walls, there is a drop down ironing board, a hidden file cabinet and hidden storage for bedding. The bath features a sit down make-up station, built in space heater, sound system and separate shower and bath and an enclosed toilet. Remember this is 1952!

Ossipoff eschewed air conditioning and always designed for natural ventilation. The hall along the side of the house has fixed glass panes facing the mountain. Above each pain is a vent. Similar vents are below the panes on the ocean side of the home. The breezes change the air in the home every few minutes.

And then there is the kitchen. Betty Liljestrand called it a “happy blend of commodity and delight”. She insisted that her every whim was met and the result is a workspace that would rival that in any home anywhere. Take a close look at the attached drawing. The myriad details make this space extraordinary and yet it is amazingly calm and understated. The kitchen resulted from careful consideration of how the family lived and how best their needs could be met. The result is a room that is decades ahead of its time.

The Liljestrand House is built in what is known as the “kama’aina style”. Ossipoff’’s influence is readily apparent in many, many homes throughout the islands. Take a look around your house and you will likely find a feature or finish that owes its origins to Vladimir Ossipoff. The Liljestrand Foundation (<http://theliljestrandhouse.com/home.html>) is working to preserve the home in perpetuity. Although no longer a residence, it is available for events and is open for tours by appointment.