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Website: www.SanAntonioVintageHomes.com
Email: homes@joebarfield.com

Architectural Analysis of 426 Rockhill Drive

*By: Architectural Historian
Shelley Roff, PhD*



Hey, remember Laura and Rob Petrie from the Dick Van Dyke Show? I can just see Rob walking down the sidewalk of this house at 426 Rockhill Drive with his brief case in hand, while Laura waves goodbye from the front porch. Picture it in black and white, of course! In the show we never got to see the car he drives off in, the writers kept it a mystery; but we were told it was a Tarantula, a sleek British sports car with finger tip control, chrome trim and bucket seats.

This sleek 1955 ranch-modern inside the loop in San Antonio epitomizes the post-World War II idealized American home. The contemporary ranch style home was often the chosen setting for many television series in the early 1960s, like *The Brady Bunch* and *Bewitched*. (In case you are interested, you can buy a book on Amazon that reconstructs famous TV Show houses, including that from the Dick Van Dyke Show). What was it that captivated the imagination of Hollywood writers and of the American public in general?



After World War II, Americans were ready for a taste of the American Dream and desirous of leaving the past behind. The style of the ideal American home changed pretty dramatically. After years of economic depression and a scarcity of building materials for civil purposes, the end of the war brought forth an almost euphoric surge in home construction, partly aided by the federal government. Popular home magazines no longer displayed picturesque bungalows or stately Neoclassical homes. The “Dream House of the Future” had clean lines, little ornamentation, and all of the latest modern appliances for the kitchen and laundry. These contemporary homes offered a new lifestyle with spacious living areas and large plate glass windows connecting the interior of the house with “nature”: usually an expansive, carefully landscaped and groomed yard.



Our house on Rockhill Drive is enclosed in a slick white brick envelope with a low, almost horizontal gable hovering over the entire house. The horizontal line of a secondary flat roof projects in front of

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the house and over the projecting dining area and open-air carport. The living room opens from a narrow, cozy entry with a brick planter into a spacious, well-lit room bearing the same white brick as the exterior envelope. The fireplace mantle, which repeats again in the den, is simply an extension of horizontal brickwork. The exposed wood beams of the ceiling follow the low, horizontal lines of the gabled roof. I can see Rob coming in that front door and tripping over the ottoman, as he did in the beginning to every episode to his show!



Typical of 1955 is the carved wood and glass paneling of the kitchen cabinets and, of course, the powder pink tile of the hallway bathroom. Other period details worthy of note are the glass jalousie windows and the matching designer cabinetry-closets seen in the den and bedrooms. The arrangement is a nicely proportioned system of wood panels that are hinged and or slide, and the cabinet drawers have this late 50's/early 60's "George Jetson" kind of angle to their face. The rooms to the north side of the house are a later addition.