



Prairie House

Herb Greene · Norman, OK · 1961

Once a student of Bruce Goff and a former employee of John Lautner, designer Herb Greene carved his niche taking organic architecture to new levels of creativity. His first project, however, was a family home of his own and took a particularly weird direction. Dubbed the Prairie House (aka “Prairie Chicken House”), this two-story residence situated in a sweeping prairie resembles a fowl. Inside, it has the feeling of a cave—a distant cry from his later exploits.

Off-kilter, ever-surprising, and filled with complex rhythms, the building consists of a wood-sheathed frame covered with a warped surface of cedar boards and shakes, topped with mineral-coated roll roofing. Aluminum and granite are used for the carport and ramp, providing a dramatic contrast of color and substance.

The vibrating, rhythmic surface and sharp angles made by the shingle patterns express a sense of frenetic energy—one that evokes a wild, writhing animal—whereas the uniformity and softness of the overall structure creates a calming unity. “I wanted to juxtapose that which is vulnerable with that which is protective, sheltering, and comforting,” noted Greene.

The design’s multidimensional concept, Greene said, was inspired by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead’s esoteric idea of reality as a series of processes defined by their relations to one another. “The viewer interprets feelings and imagination from different symbols all within a single image. The result was a kind of collage to be inhabited,” he said in a 2021 interview for *STIR* magazine.

Beyond the home’s entrance, there is 2,100 ft² (195 m²) of living space where unfinished cedar, complemented by incandescent and natural light, creates a sheltering escape. Once complete, this idiosyncratic building caused an international sensation. Lauded in trade journals such as *Progressive Architecture*, as well as general interest publications such as *Life* and *Look*, its unique form captured people’s imaginations—as it still does today.

The iconic house juxtaposes its hulking organic form with its riotously curving metallic carport.