



# The Gehry Residence

Frank Gehry · Santa Monica, CA · 1978

Before Frank Gehry was *Frank Gehry*, he was a busy architect who wanted to build a house for himself and his new wife Berta on a limited budget. Having scoped out potential sites together, they settled on a pink Dutch Colonial Revival-style dwelling on Washington Avenue in Santa Monica. Frank then set about stripping much of its interior (exposing joists and studs, and tearing down walls) while adding a jutting, free-flowing new shell made of economical materials like plywood, glass, corrugated metal, and chain-link fencing. The original home, albeit in its altered state, still peeks through.

Discussing the house in 1986, Gehry said, “I looked at the old house that my wife found for us to live in, and I thought it was kind of a dinky little cutesy-pie house. We had to do *something* to it. I couldn’t live in it... I decided to build a new house around the old house and try to maintain a tension between the two by having one define the other.”

The residence, which the neighbors immediately detested, was, Gehry said, a “balance of fragment and whole, raw and refined, new and old.” In designing it, the architect drew many of his ideas from the art world. For instance, he found inspiration in the immediacy of Rembrandt, the fluid sculptures of Bernini, the unapologetic loudness of Pop Art, and the abstraction of Picasso and Duchamp. Filled with unrelated, jarring details, it’s a design that has a purposefully unfinished quality—a kind of controlled chaos, paving the way for the exploded geometries that would become known as Deconstructivism—a label Gehry himself refutes.

Frank and Berta subsequently raised their two sons there, remodeling and expanding the property in 1991. In 2019, the Gehrys moved into a new home that faces a nearby canyon. Designed with their son Sam, its angled, cacophonous gabled roof, clad in wood, metal, and glass, is worthy of its predecessor, which still stands today, as influential as it was in 1978.

The north facade of the house combines everyday materials and a historic core with a jarring sense of deconstruction.