

Umbrella House

In March 2018, I visited The Umbrella House in Sarasota, Florida. The mid-century modern house was designed by architect Paul Rudolph and completed in 1953 for developer Philip Hiss in the Lido Shore neighbourhood. The house is named after the large canopy that extends over the entire house and majority of the backyard. The umbrella was originally built out of wood but was lost in 1966 due to Hurricane Alma. It was recently reconstructed based on Paul Rudolph's original plans and drawings with much stronger materials by Hall Architects. The Umbrella House is privately owned as a residential house, however, a few times each year, the owners open the house to the public. The Sarasota Architectural Foundation hosts tours of the house, along with other modernist architecture from the modernist movement in Sarasota which lasted from the 1940s until the 1960s. One of the architects who worked on the restoration of the house and rebuild of the umbrella, leads the tours and paying guests are allowed to walk around the house and property for about an hour. I had the opportunity to visit this house in person on one of these tours when I was on vacation in Florida. I had driven past the house and seen it from the main road since I was little, but now I was actually able to see inside. The umbrella was originally built for that reason, along with being protection from the sun. The developer along with Paul Rudolph wanted to attract attention from the road to bring people into its neighbourhood of Lido Shores. As soon as I stepped foot in the house, I was invited by the warm glow of sunlight. Even though there is a large canopy, the sunlight shines through and creates gorgeous shadows that are constantly moving and creating lines throughout the house. The living room is two storeys high and windows cover the back wall. The stairs are by the front door and as you walk up them you can look out a slit in the wall through the house to the backyard. The hallway on the second floor is open and you can see down to the living room. When you look out the back windows from the second floor you're met with a view of the pool

under the beautiful umbrella. There is a rectangle cut out of the canopy above the pool so I can imagine when you're swimming you can look up to see the sky, while still feeling safe under the canopy. The shadows cast by the canopy inside and outside of the house remind me of shadows from the sun shining through blinds. It creates the illusion, even outside, that you're safe in your house from the sun and elements in the environment. I visited the house with my friend who is also studying interior design which made the visit that much more special. The house was not only beautiful, but also helped me realize I love mid-century modern designs. It is a style that I hadn't been exposed to as much before visiting Paul Rudolph's design. Paul Rudolph was a modernist designer and he received international attention along with other Sarasota based architects for it. The majority of the original furniture he chose was still in the Umbrella House when I visited. One of the two rooms on the second floor, which is newly being used as a photo studio, has a window out to the living room. You can open or close the doors to extend the room into the two storey open space. The house isn't very large and most architects might add another bedroom on the second floor, however, the open space makes the house feel larger than it is. The middle of the house is open while the two ends are more closed off. I loved getting to walk through the Umbrella House because I'd never toured a house this way before. I've only ever toured houses that are for sale but this gave me an opportunity to see a historical home. Not only that, but these people still live in it and keep as their private space, opening it up to the community a few times each year. I also found it inspiring because they opened the house through the Sarasota Architectural Foundation so the people visiting the home aren't just nosy neighbours. The people who were on the tour were all people who were either architects, designers or just interested in those fields. Visiting the Umbrella House reminded me why I want to be an interior designer, I want to create spaces that impact people like this house did and continues to almost 70 years later.