

DURST HOUSE  
857 Fairview Drive  
Fayetteville  
Washington County  
Arkansas

HABS AR-55  
*HABS AR-55*

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

ADDENDUM TO:  
DURST HOUSE  
857 Fairview Drive  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### Addendum to DURST HOUSE

HABS No. AR-55

**LOCATION:** 857 W. Fairview Drive, Fayetteville, Washington County, Arkansas.

The Durst House is located at latitude: +36° 3' 51.02", longitude: -94° 10' 22.34". The coordinate was taken on June 7, 2012, from Google maps. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

**PRESENT OWNER  
/OCCUPANT:**

The house belongs to Dana Durst Lawrence, daughter of original owner David Durst.

**PRESENT USE:**

The house is currently used as rental property.

**SIGNIFICANCE:**

Completed in 1952,<sup>1</sup> the Durst House was architect John Gilbert Williams's first built work. The home was an early example of the quality budget housing that would spring up in Fayetteville in the years to come, and had great influence on the "organic modern" movement that would become prevalent around Fayetteville. The house's significance as architecture lies in its unity with nature and within the arts.

**HISTORIAN:**

Todd E. Hansen (BArch, University of Arkansas, 2015), 2012.

**PROJECT  
INFORMATION:**

This recording project was completed by students in their 3rd, 4th, or 5th year of instruction at the Fay Jones School of Architecture at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. Faculty members Gregory Herman instructed the following students in this project: Estaban Ayala-Medel, Morgan Bilger, Abi Charles, Spencer Curtis, Joseph Davis, Leon Esmaeel, Todd Hansen, and Andrew Schalk. The project was completed during the University of Arkansas summer term 2012, with May 17 as start date and June 29 as finish date.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. PHYSICAL HISTORY

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<sup>1</sup> Durst Lawrence, Dana. 07 Jun 2012. Durst House, Fayetteville, Arkansas. Daughter of David Durst.

1. DATE OF ERECTION: February 1952.
2. ARCHITECT: John G. Williams, Fayetteville, Arkansas.
3. ORIGINAL AND SUBSEQUENT OWNERS, OCCUPANTS AND USES: The original owner was David Durst, and his family. The current owner is David Durst's daughter, Dana Durst Lawrence. The structure retains its original use as a residence.
4. BUILDERS: Not available.
5. ORIGINAL PLANS AND CONSTRUCTION: The original drawings depict an open planned house comprised of two rectangular volumes that have been shifted, resulting in a division of collective and private spaces.<sup>2</sup> The openness of the home suggests a collaborative environment, a design principle rooted in Williams exposure to then-prevalent modes of modernism. The original plans also included a covered carport that would be connected to the entry bridge, but during construction it was never built.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, the integrity of the original design was strictly observed in the built work.
6. ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS: The residence has undergone several renovations by the Durst family after 1952. The renovations include the enclosure of the previously open lower level picnic area (adding two bedrooms and a bathroom to the home), the addition of the spiral staircase in the playroom (to access the lower level), the painting of the Tidewater Cypress wood siding, the removal of a second staircase off the terrace on the south side of the home, and a wooden balustrade to replace the original wire mesh balustrade infill on the terrace.<sup>4</sup>

## B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Around 1946, students flocked to universities to become educated in hopes of starting a career and a new life after the war. The GI bill gave many young people the funds to attend school. At that time architect John G. Williams, a graduate of Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, OK), came to Arkansas to teach architecture.<sup>5</sup> During the 1946-47 school year Williams taught Architectural Design - Elements of Architecture and a three credit hour drawing course in shades, shadows, and perspective.<sup>6</sup> After his first year of teaching at the University of Arkansas, the dean of the College of Engineering asked Williams to outline a four-year curriculum in

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<sup>2</sup> Original Drawings.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Durst Lawrence, Dana.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, John G. *The Curious and the Beautiful*. (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1984.), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1.

architectural engineering to be reviewed by the faculty. Williams, enthusiastic about this opportunity, quickly outlined a curriculum and submitted it to be reviewed. The copy of his curriculum was accidentally transferred to the catalog of course listings, making it an official degree program.<sup>7</sup> The architecture program at the University of Arkansas was thus instituted.

Soon after the Architectural Engineering program started, the new President of the university, Dr. Lewis Webster Jones, who had a keen interest in the fine arts, implemented a plan that would move the program from the College of Engineering to the College of Arts and Sciences as part of the Fine Arts program. Jones believed that all students should have enough knowledge of the arts in hopes that they would become appreciative and support them all.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Jones did not know at the time how important this movement would prove to be.

Early in the 1948-49 school year John Williams, David Durst, Kenneth Osborne, and Virgil Baker finished the architectural program for a new fine arts center for the University of Arkansas. It was soon after approved by the board of trustees.<sup>9</sup> Edward Durell Stone was selected to design the new facility. The Fine Arts center was a very forward thinking program, combining all the arts in one building, providing an “architecture which expresses the concepts of [the] arts as interrelated and as desirable, pleasant and rewarding parts of life.”<sup>10</sup> A Bauhaus-styled curriculum, in which students of all disciplines intermingle, learn, and share ideas together, was instituted, making Arkansas “a notable source of light and progressive learning in that region of the country.”<sup>11</sup>

While the Fine Arts Center was being constructed, it proved to be a learning laboratory for the Architecture program, with daily visits to the site to study the unique construction methods and design of the International Style building. Architect Stone frequently visited Fayetteville to monitor the progress on the building, and while on these trips critiqued and mentored students in the architecture program, some of which included: E. Fay Jones, Ernest Jacks, and Robert Laser, all later important architects in the region and nationally.<sup>12</sup> Stone’s presence in Fayetteville was genuinely appreciated and fundamental in designing a facility in which the “architecture functions well as a physical plant, providing excellent equipment and surroundings for an active workshop in the six arts: painting, sculpture, architecture, theater, dance, music.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Louchheim, Aline B. "Architecture Unites Art Center." *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1953.

<sup>11</sup> "About Art and Artists: Exhibition by U. of Arkansas Faculty." *New York Times*, June 4, 1954.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Louchheim.

The idea of an intertwining of the arts is what brought David Durst and John G Williams together. Durst, head of the Art department who was “responsible for much of the lively color in the [Fine Arts Center],<sup>14</sup> was a very open-minded creative thinker. Thus, when he was in need of a house near campus, he asked the founder of the School of Architecture to design it for him. Since Williams’ passion was teaching he had completed very few projects (in fact this house was his first built work), but was pleased to help a fellow colleague.<sup>15</sup> David Durst came to be the perfect client for the architect. Williams cherished the design and building process, and wanted total artistic license in his projects. Thus, he selected only those clients who shared his deep rapport with nature and his values of architectural design.<sup>16</sup> The Durst house was definitely a product of these two forward thinkers and their response to Fayetteville, Arkansas at the time.

Fayetteville, located in the northwest corner of Arkansas, was a small yet bustling community in the 1950s, then as now, its economy dominated by the University. David Durst established a total budget of twelve-thousand five-hundred dollars; after being rejected for a loan by the bank because of the project’s unconventional nature (the “roof was flat”), the house was financed privately by a businessman from Little Rock.<sup>17</sup> Given the southern sloping site overlooking the Boston Mountains, and the budget, Williams designed a house situated so the back of the house would hang off the hill. The way the house sits on the site could have been a reflection of Durst himself, claiming art “should always be on the edge.”<sup>18</sup> Once completed, the Durst family had an efficient and very liveable house that hosted many visitors, whether it be neighbors, kids and dogs, or guests of the university or from the art community. One particular distinguished guest, Ralph Bunche, who had served as Secretary General of the United Nations, was in town to lecture at the university, but couldn’t stay in the local hotels because he was an African American. The Dursts opened their home to him.<sup>19</sup> Other notable guests included Herbert Reed and Louis Armstrong.<sup>20</sup> The Durst house was not only an intellectual hub for Durst and his allied scholars, it fostered, like the arts center did, a sense of community for the children of other university faculty. The glassiness of the house was fondly remembered, as well; David Durst’s daughter recalled watching storms come in from the south with her best friend, Janice Jones (E. Fay Jones’ daughter), through the hurricane glass that lined the southern wall.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Louchheim.

<sup>15</sup> Williams Hein, Sue. Interviewed by Todd Hansen and Andrew Schalk. 21 Jun 2012. Phone interview between Fayetteville, AR and New York, NY. Daughter of John G Williams.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Durst Lawrence, Dana.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Durst Lawrence, Dana.

This house was an early example of the quality budget housing that would spring up in Fayetteville in the years to come. It symbolized a unity with nature and also a unity within the arts, its true foundations within the spirit of the Fine Arts Center. For the 1950s, the house seemed out of place, even radical, given the more traditional context of Fayetteville, yet remains to this day as a beautiful piece of mid-century modern architecture, spawned from the minds of two collaborating individuals, and a whole school of Art, Music, Sculpture, and Architecture students.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. GENERAL STATEMENT

1. ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER: In 1947 the newly appointed President of the University of Arkansas Dr. Lewis Webster Jones asked the heads of the architecture and art departments at the University of Arkansas to come up with a program to house a newly reconfigured curriculum. Together the two men envisioned what would be the University of Arkansas Fine Arts Center, subsequently designed by Edward Durell Stone. The complex would include proper spaces for the instruction of painting, sculpture, music, drama and architecture to take place. The art department chairman was David Durst and the head of the architecture program was John G. Williams. Soon after the Fine Arts Center was complete the two men started on a home for Durst and his family. The house may be described as California modern, exhibiting many of the same fresh qualities then being explored in the Case Study houses, as published by *Arts and Architecture* magazine in the later 1940s and into the 1950s.
2. CONDITION OF FABRIC: The residence has undergone multiple renovations by the Durst family since 1952. Some of the renovations include the enclosure of the previously open lower level picnic area (adding two bedrooms and a bathroom to the home), the addition of the spiral staircase in the playroom (to access the lower level), the painting of the Tidewater Cypress wood siding, the removal of a second staircase off the terrace on the south side of the home, and a wooden balustrade to replace the original wire mesh balustrade infill on the terrace.<sup>22</sup> The integrity of the design has remained faithful to the original. Several original furniture pieces and Durst's paintings remain in the residence. There is a crack in the north retaining wall, and there is also some ceiling sag in the living room near the fireplace.

### B. DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR

1. OVERALL DIMENSIONS: The Durst residence is a simple rectangle with one shift that

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

separates the living from private spaces. It is 26' 9 3/16" wide, 63' 9 9/16" long, and 18' 8 1/2" tall.

2. FOUNDATION: The house rests on a board-formed concrete foundation. The foundation is also visible on the north elevation of the house.
3. WALLS: Tidewater Cypress lines the upper and lower walls of the house.
4. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM, FRAMING: The house utilizes conventional 2x4 platform frame construction. Exposed structure consists of 2x8 pine beams. Steel lally columns of 4" diameter are used as necessary on the lower level.
5. BALCONY: The balcony starts with ground level entry on the east side of the house and wraps around the south side of the house terminating past the doorway in the kitchen. It is constructed from a wood joist system supporting a wood deck. The balcony serves as an outdoor space and transitional space for the house while taking advantage of the view to the south.
6. CHIMNEY: Located on the east wall of the home, the chimney is a unique component of the house. The chimney is double-flued and composed of Roman brick. The fireplace anchors the end of the living room and extends below the house to the ground floor, where it functioned originally as an outdoor fireplace and picnic area.
7. OPENINGS:
  - a. DOORWAYS AND DOORS: The front door, located at the shift of the two volumes, is the only entrance on the north side. The front door is connected to the site by a sixteen foot bridge that spans the continuously sloping site. There is one door to the balcony on the east wall and also another door to the balcony located in the kitchen. The ground floor, originally mostly open, had one door that allowed access to a storage area. However, with modification, a door on the south wall of the ground floor now accesses the lower bedrooms, and another door on the east ground floor wall accesses a large storage room.
  - b. WINDOWS: The north side of the home (side adjacent to the street) is lined with continuous operable awning windows. This allows for ventilation and privacy. The east and west sides have windows that express the structure on the inside of the house. The south side is mainly glazing with operable awning windows above and below a fixed pane of glass.

8. ROOF: The roof is flat, and cantilevers over the house on the north and south sides. It hangs over the north wall 2' and 6' over the south. The rear cantilever originally had a sun shading trellis incorporated into it; this was subsequently removed due to rot.<sup>23</sup>

## C. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR

### 1. FLOOR PLANS:

FIRST FLOOR: The first floor of the Durst home is the main living area. It includes the living room, which also accommodates the entry. Immediately to the left of the entrance is a narrow hallway that gives access to a small public bathroom and leads to the playroom. An open kitchen acts as a transition between the private and public spaces; past the kitchen is a playroom that contained a built-in bench with storage underneath (this was removed with the installation of the spiral staircase accessing the ground floor on the west side of the playroom). Across from the playroom on the north side of the house are two small bedrooms for children that were open to the playroom but had folding doors for privacy. The master bedroom is on the west wall and is the most private room in the house. The master bedroom has a built in wardrobe situated on its north wall.

GROUND FLOOR: The ground floor was originally an open picnic area underneath the east side of the house, adjacent to which was an enclosed storage area. The picnic area is now enclosed and used for storage. The old storage area on the west half of the house is now a landing area for the spiral staircase, and two bedrooms with an adjoining bathroom.

2. STAIRWAY: The only stairway in the house was added in the late 1950s.<sup>24</sup> It was inserted into the west side of the playroom closest to the master bedroom. It leads to the two additional bedrooms on the ground floor.
3. FLOORING: Wood floors run continuously throughout the house, with an exception in the kitchen which has roll flooring.
4. WALL AND CEILING FINISH: All the walls of the home, except for the bathrooms and kid's rooms, are lined with Tidewater Cypress paneling.<sup>25</sup> The bathrooms, kids rooms and ceiling are all finished with painted sheetrock. The ceiling also has exposed trusses that run consistently throughout the house.

### 5. OPENINGS:

- a. DOORWAYS AND DOORS: The interior of the house has a very open floor plan; most of the spaces open en suite to one another to provide a more open and

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<sup>23</sup> Durst Lawrence, Dana.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

collaborative environment. There is a door at the end of the hallway leading to the playroom, and a door for the master bedroom.

- b. **WINDOWS:** The awning windows located in the north and south walls allowed the home to be cooled through cross ventilation. The minimal glazing in the north allows for privacy from the street and the abundant glazing in the south frames the view.
6. **DECORATIVE FEATURES AND TRIM:** The decorative features of the house are mostly subtle uses of wood, fins on the bays, and the simple yet beautiful wooden trim work throughout the house. Another decorative and functional aesthetic of the house is the exposed roof trusses that run consistently through the home.
7. **HARDWARE:** Knob door hardware was utilized on the exterior and interior. All cabinetry in the house uses a simple two inch by two inch rounded square knob and standard hinges for operation.
8. **MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT:**
  - a. **HEATING, AIR CONDITIONING, VENTILATION:** The house is heated by a forced-air furnace. There is no air conditioning, but the house utilizes the Venturi effect of cross ventilation, which keeps the house cool even in the hot summer months.
  - b. **LIGHTING:** Natural light from the large glazed windows on the south wall provides most of the light for the house. There are also recessed incandescent lights throughout the house.
  - c. **PLUMBING:** The house has conventional plumbing hooked up to the municipal water and sewer system. The house has three bathrooms: one includes a toilet, sink and tub; the other two include a toilet, sink and stall shower.
9. **ORIGINAL FURNISHINGS:** An early rendered plan of the house depicts it outfitted with an array of Fulbright furniture designed by Edward Durell Stone.<sup>26</sup> Many works of art by local artists (including paintings by the original resident) were included in the furnishings. Other furnishings were conventional pieces accumulated by the family.

#### D. SITE:

1. **HISTORIC LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** The lot is approximately 120' by 160'. The north boundary of the property is defined by Fairview drive. The semi-circle drive defined by a native rock retaining wall, is immediately off the road and the only flat

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<sup>26</sup> Original Drawings.

area of the site. Past the retaining wall the terrain of the site continuously slopes to the south until it reaches its border which is now a city-maintained bike trail. A view to the south facing the Boston mountains was a main focus when the house was first built, and is still visible today from the living room and balcony areas, though it is somewhat compromised by the thick stand of the mature trees and plants surrounding the house.

2. OUTBUILDINGS: No other buildings were built on the Durst property.

### **PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

#### **A. ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS AND EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS:**

Fay Jones Collection. Special Collections. University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

#### **B. INTERVIEWS:**

Durst Lawrence, Dana. Interview by Morgan Bilger, Leon Esmaeel, Todd Hansen, and Andrew Schalk. 07 Jun 2012. Durst House, Fayetteville, Arkansas. Daughter of David Durst.

Williams Hein, Sue. Interviewed by Todd Hansen and Andrew Schalk. 21 Jun 2012. Phone interview between Fayetteville, AR and New York, NY. Daughter of John G Williams.

#### **C. SELECTED SOURCES:**

"About Art and Artists: Exhibition by U. of Arkansas Faculty." *New York Times*, June 4, 1954.

Louchheim, Aline B. "Architecture Unites Art Center." *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1953.

Williams, John G. *The Curious and the Beautiful*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1984.