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This light-filled home designed by the owner's architect parents is for sale in Highland Park

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By **Dennis Rodkin**
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Architects often do their best work when they're their own client. There's less demand for compromise, more room for vision.

That effect was doubled when two architects collaborated on a house to raise their family in Highland Park half a century ago. On a little more than five acres, Zbigniew and Krystyna Cianciara composed a house of brick, wood and glass that is filled with daylight and views of the lush natural surroundings, all the way to a pond they dug at the far end of the property.

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Completed in 1973, the house on Ridge Road is “incredibly peaceful and quiet,” says the couple’s daughter, Anna Puharich, who now owns the house. “I feel like I’m on vacation every day,” despite being close to the schools, downtowns and train stations of both Highland Park and Deerfield.

The Cianciaras, both Polish immigrants, honed their vision while working in the offices of some of the great Chicago proponents of modernism.

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Krystyna worked at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in the 1960s, contributing to projects by Walter Netsch, including the behavioral sciences and

engineering buildings, before taking a break to raise kids. Zbigniew worked for C.F. Murphy on O'Hare International Airport and later for Bertrand Goldberg, working on the original plans for River City in the South Loop, and on hospitals Goldberg designed in Chicago, Boston. Milwaukee and Tacoma.

Krystyna Cianciara died in 2022, followed by Zbigniew in 2024.

Puharich and her husband, Mario Pucharich, have owned her parents' four-bedroom house for the past eight years. Now empty-nesters whose fledglings don't plan to live in the Chicago area, the couple will put the 5.1-acre property on the market soon.



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“In every space, you’re connected with nature,” Puharich says. That’s not only because of the floor-to-ceiling windows and long balcony adjacent to the dining room in this image, but the architects’ palette of materials, including wood overhead and beneath one’s feet. “It’s an incredible feeling of living in nature.”

“When I was growing up,” she says, “I didn’t realize how lucky I was until my friends came over and said ‘wow.’ ”

Bands of windows on the front facade invite daylight to stream into the home. The banding is in part tribute to Frank Lloyd Wright, whose work her dad admired, Puharich says.

While it’s mostly rectilinear, the house avoids looking blocky because of the diagonal planking in the wood sections and the second-floor projection cantilevered above the front door.

The big picture, Puharich says, was her dad's strength, and details her mom's.

In 1984, Krystyna returned to work after raising the kids and Zbigniew left Goldberg's firm. Going into practice together, they added an office for themselves and a few other architects. Seen in the photo above, it extends the main house's window banding. It's a two-story structure that steps down the site in back, just as the house does.

It's here that the couple designed, according to their daughters' written accounts, residential projects including housing for convents in Des Plaines and Wilmette and renovations for, among others, the Polish Consulate.

Puharich's family has used the office wing, which has its own kitchen, as family space, but she notes that in this work-from-home era, it could revert to its original purpose.

In the main house, ceilings are mostly 9.5 feet high, but reach 20 feet in the central part of the living space. "It almost brings the trees inside," Puharich says. For even more closeness with the trees, there are balconies on both levels seen in this image.

The photo above shows the full height of the living room, as well as something Puharich calls "a living reminder of my mother's presence."

The greenery seen winding around the edges of the staircase began as a few small ficus plants that Krystyna put in planters on the stairs. They eventually melded together into "a living sculpture," Puharich says.

The stair tower, an open wood style straight out of the 1970s, is a focal point in the open main living space. This space is more open than it was

originally, Puharich says, because she and her husband have opened up what was a partially walled-off kitchen, true to its era.

Much of the furniture in the home is from well-known midcentury lines, selected by Krsytyna Cianciara to complement the architecture.

“The original color scheme of the kitchen was orange,” Puharich says. “The counters were orange formica, the front door was orange. It was the 1970s.” When she and her husband moved in eight years ago, the time was right for an update, which her father helped design.

As redone, the kitchen amplifies the daylit quality of the room, pairing the original twin bands of windows with new white cabinetry.

Glass doors lead out to the deck, also designed for this couple by Zbigniew Cianciara.

For his daughter and son-in-law, Zbigniew designed a large, multi-level deck to replace a more conventional original. This one has space for outdoor cooking, dining and lounging.

One clue that architects designed this home is the look of the garage, seen above as the backdrop for the built-in couch and fire box. No typical shed for putting cars in, the garage has the same banded clerestory windows and beamed ceiling as the house.

From the deck, the view out over the yard takes in the pond, where Puharich grew up swimming in the summer and ice skating in the winter. It’s a circulating pond, not stagnant, and originally had a little sand beach. That’s been replaced with pebbles.

More recently, Puharich has spent summer evenings with friends sitting by the edge of the pond “and our own fireworks show,” the sparkle of fireflies

all around, she says.

Out beyond the pond and the trees, the property ends at the middle fork of the Chicago River's North Branch, whose headwaters are about 10 miles north in Libertyville.

The property is "completely secluded," Puharich says. "You don't see any neighbors, but you're just minutes away from everything." Among the close-by amenities, she notes, are Ravinia and the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Her parents lived first in Goldberg's Marina City towers on the Chicago River and later in the Malibu, another midcentury classic, a tower on Sheridan Road in Edgewater designed by John Macsai. When they decided to build their own house for what was a family of three soon to become four, she says, "they picked Highland Park because it was as far from the city as they could stand to be."

Exterior of the house from the backyard at dusk

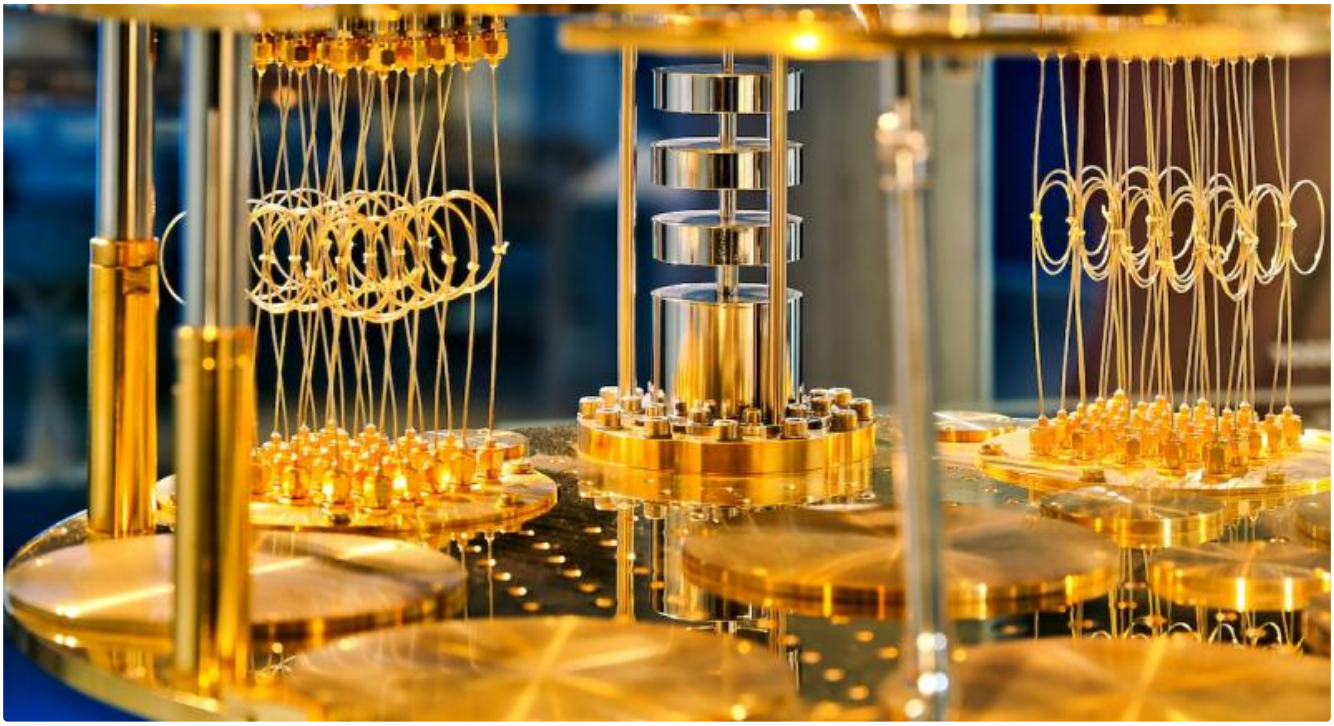
The house that the couple built is seen above from the west, with its full three-story height illuminated.

If the front of the house is more solid, the back is nearly transparent. "In the back my dad wanted that connection to the outdoors," Puharich says.

After half a century of watching the sun set from inside that wall of glass, Puharich says, "I have to let go and hope that another family gets to enjoy what we've enjoyed all these years."

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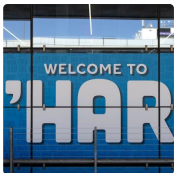
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