

## **Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) aluminum Care-Free Homes**

Peter Lobner, 15 June 2020

After WW II, US aluminum manufacturers were faced with large stocks of aluminum ore and decreasing orders. Like the aircraft manufacturers, Alcoa sought alternate markets for their finished aluminum products.

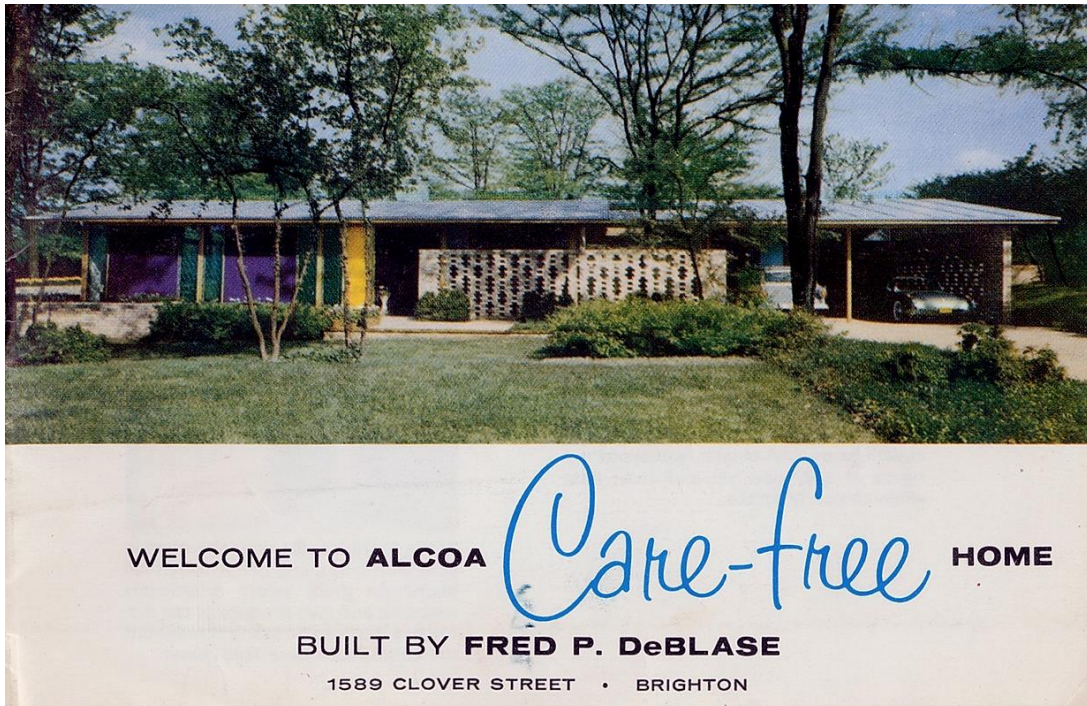
A decade after the end of WW II, Alcoa offered its one-story Care-Free Home, which is a mid-century modern aluminum ranch-style house designed by Charles M. Goodman. The house was designed for mass-production. Originally, Alcoa planned to build one Care-Free Home in each of the 48 states (Hawaii & Alaska didn't become states until 1959) to showcase the versatility of aluminum in home construction. By the end of a short production run, Alcoa made only 24 Care-Free Homes.

The three-bedroom, two-bath house has a 1,900 ft<sup>2</sup> (180 m<sup>2</sup>) living area, a full basement, and a 2-car carport. Construction is post-and-beam with a shallow pitched roof. The framing is aluminum and wooden posts are clad in aluminum. The exterior is aluminum siding with big, aluminum-framed windows and sliding doors, and an anodized aluminum front door. The anodized roof and the fascia strip also are aluminum. Several floor-to-ceiling windows have an exterior, hinged aluminum grill that can be removed for cleaning. The foundation incorporates an aluminum termite barrier. Each home used 7,500 pounds (3,402 kg) of aluminum.

The load-bearing structure of the house is comprised of standard, 12-foot (3.7 m) long frames that are joined together with two beams running the length of the house. Within the space of each frame, a wall, window, door or combination of elements can be placed to produce the desired floor plan.

The original price was expected to be about \$25,000, but the actual price of the finished product was closer to \$60,000. As a result, several builders filed a class action lawsuit against Alcoa. In the mid-

1950s, the Care-Free House couldn't compete with the lower cost of conventional wood construction.



*Sources: Alcoa pamphlet (above), Alcoa 1957 brochure (below)*







*Source, both graphics: Alcoa 1957 brochure*



*The house measures 87 x 42 feet (26.5 x 12.8 m), including carport.*

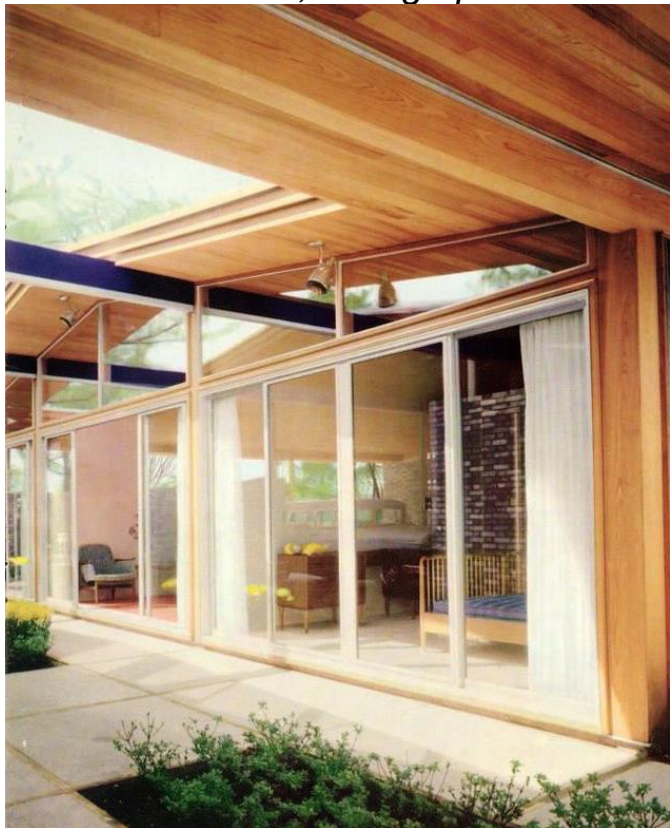


A gracious living room provides for dress-up entertaining in a smart setting. Aluminum accents, black wood columns and serves as trim for wall surfaces of easy-to-clean vinyl plastic. Textured aluminum sheet is mated with natural birch wood to form strikingly colorful partition walls. Carpeting is recessed into the floor for easier cleaning, and rugged vinyl tile hall and trim surfaces bear the brunt of heavy traffic without showing wear.

# Living room



Source, both graphics: Alcoa 1957 brochure



Twin bedrooms, flanking the master bedroom, are equally endowed with storage space. Courtyard walls of limed brick with sculptured house venis shield the bedrooms from the world outside. Ceilings of cypress throughout the home, with its rich grain, never need care of any sort.





## Dining area

In the Alcoa Care-free Home the light, bright dining area is sensibly situated between living and family rooms and still only a step from the central kitchen.

Rich panels of walnut framed by smart yet functional Care-free aluminum provide a tasteful backdrop on one side, while the other is a wall of glass with aluminum sliding doors opening onto the adjacent terrace. Outside, overhead lighting keeps the glass area from becoming a black mirror after nightfall.

There's plenty of light inside, too, from recessed aluminum lighting fixtures.

Source, both graphics: Alcoa 1957 brochure



## the Care-free kitchen

Mother can see and be seen by her family in this bright, efficient kitchen "control center," overlooking both family room and dining area. Equipment and floor plan combine to save steps and lighten chores as well.

Laminated plastic counter tops are just the right height to minimize bending. Range, oven, dishwasher, waste disposal unit and wall-hung refrigerator are all built in and aligned in step-saving sequence to make food preparation easier. There's light galore from aluminum fluorescent fixtures and overhead spots to cover every inch of work space and cabinet interiors, too. And ductless ventilation instantly whisks away every trace of cooking odors. There is a wealth of storage cabinets.



## the Bathrooms

Colorful, spacious twin bathrooms are just a step away from the bedrooms.

Polyethylene diffusers make the entire ceiling a source of light to bathe the room. Wall panels of moistureproof laminated plastic and glass tub enclosure are both framed in aluminum for enduring good looks. Clean-up chores involve no more than the whisk of a damp cloth.

You can download the complete 1957 Alcoa sales brochure for their aluminum Care-Free Home here:

[http://media.oregonlive.com/hg\\_impact/other/Care%20Free%20Home%20compressed%20version.pdf](http://media.oregonlive.com/hg_impact/other/Care%20Free%20Home%20compressed%20version.pdf)

There's also with short Alcoa Care-Free Home pamphlet here:

<https://www.myalcoahome.com/brochures>

A recent renovation of an abandoned Alcoa Care-Free Home in Southfield, Michigan (one of two in Michigan) produced the following beautiful results.



The above photo is the house after renovation. The left photo is a different view from the Alcoa 1957 brochure looking into the same kitchen area. Note the suspended cabinets in the original kitchen.





*Source of these three renovated Southfield, Michigan house photos:  
Curbed Detroit, 26 June 2018. See link below.*



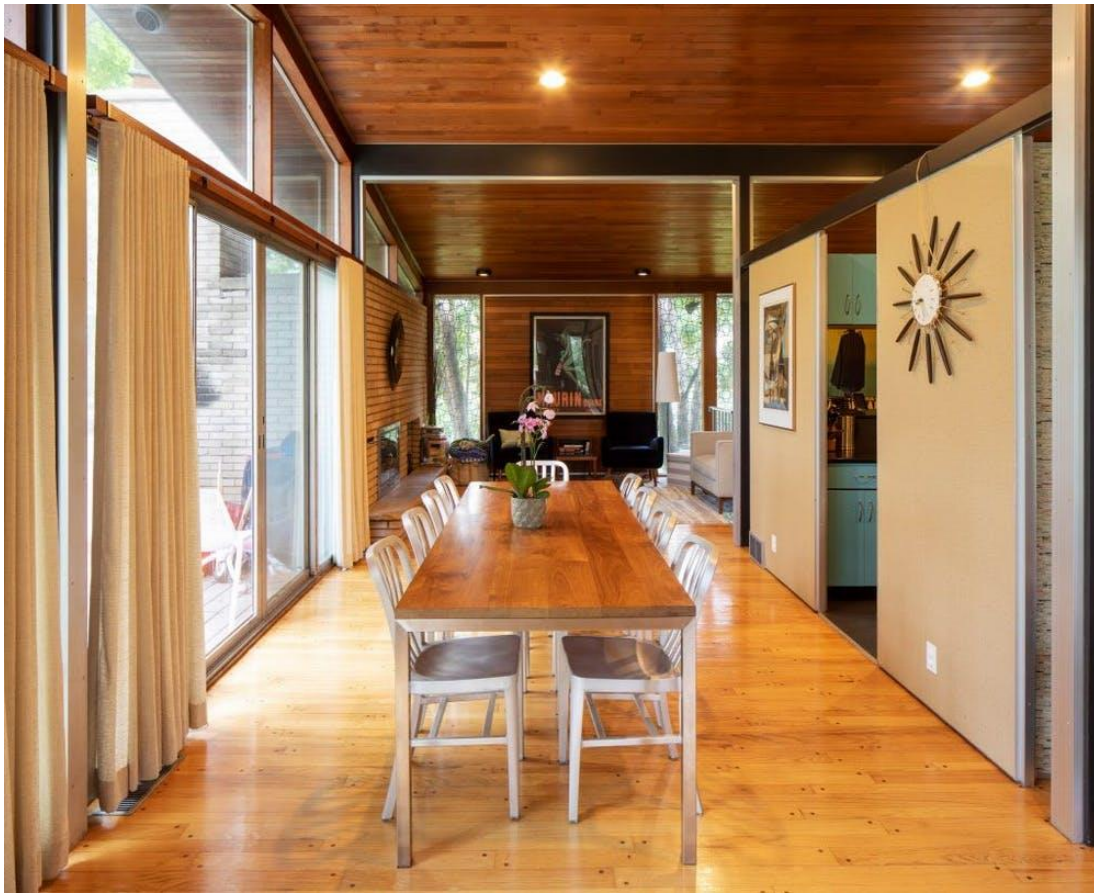
A recent renovation of Minnesota's only Alcoa Care-Free Home, in St. Louis Park, also produced beautiful results, as shown in the following photos. This house is extensively covered in Larry Millet's book, *"Minnesota Modern: Architecture and Life at Midcentury."*



Source of these six renovated St. Louis Park house photos:  
Ben Clasen, via Star Tribune, 9 Oct 2018. See link below.











The only New York Alcoa Care-Free Home, in Brighton (near Rochester), joined the National Register of Historic Places in 2010 (#16000061). You'll find information on this house on the "My Alcoa Care Free Home" website here: <https://www.myalcoahome.com>



*The Alcoa Care-Free Home in Brighton, NY.*  
Source: <https://www.myalcoahome.com>



**For more information, see the following resources:**

- Kim Palmer, “Minnesota's only Alcoa 'Care-Free' aluminum home is '50s time capsule,” good article with many photos, Star Tribune, 9 October 2018:  
<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-s-only-alcoa-care-free-aluminum-home-is-50s-time-capsule/495296991/#9>
- “A young couple carefully restores a midcentury Alcoa aluminum home,” good article about restoration with many photos, Curbed Detroit, 26 June 2018,  
<https://detroit.curbed.com/2018/6/22/17492322/midcentury-alcoa-aluminum-home-restore-michigan>
- Anthony Paletta, “The midcentury aluminum homes that would have changed U.S. suburbs,” Curbed, 10 May 2017:  
<https://www.curbed.com/2017/5/10/15341704/midcentury-homes-alcoa-care-free-aluminum>
- Larry Millett, “Minnesota Modern: Architecture and Life at Midcentury,” University Of Minnesota Press, November 2015, ISBN-13: 978-0816683291
- “Charles Goodman – Alcoa Care Free Home (1957),” excellent article with many photos, Mid-Century Michigan, 1 November 2013: <https://midcenturymichigan.com/2013/11/01/charles-goodman-alcoa-care-free-home-1957/>
- “Alcoa Care-Free Homes,” excellent review article with many photos, Midcenturia, 2012:  
<http://www.midcenturia.com/2012/08/in-january-of-1957-aluminum-company-of.html>
- Alcoa Aluminum House article, “Exciting New Way to Build With Aluminum,” in Better Home & Gardens, October 1957 on flickr:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/22021175@N02/sets/72157626209907249/with/4303813736/>