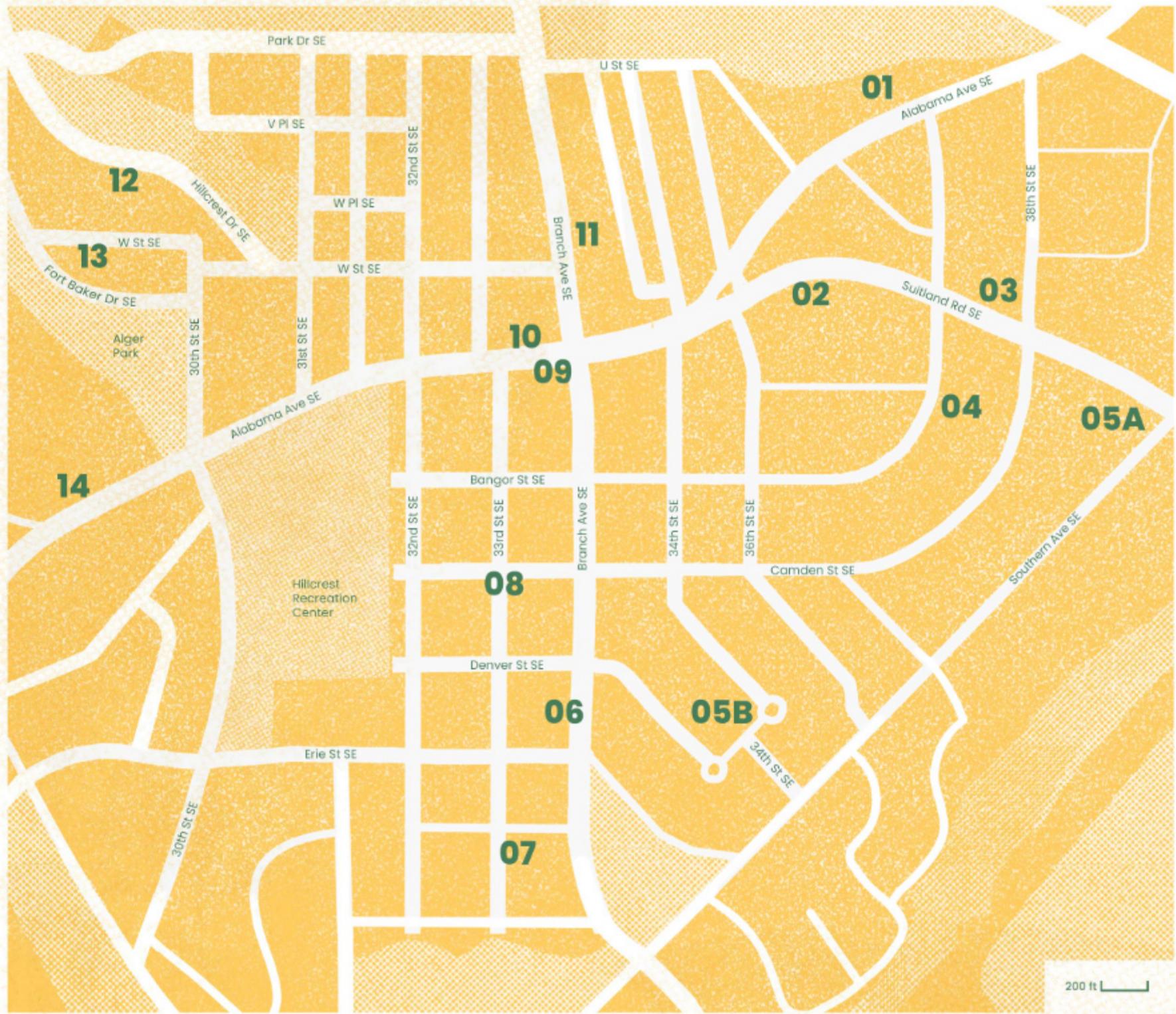
A child in a patterned jacket stands on a balcony, looking out at a forest scene. The scene is framed by large, overlapping geometric shapes in shades of orange and green. The forest scene is a halftone print of a wooded area with a stream.

HILLCREST

Self-Guided Walking Tour and
Neighborhood History Guide

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Note: Many sites on this tour are private residences. Please be respectful and do not trespass.

Neighborhood Introduction

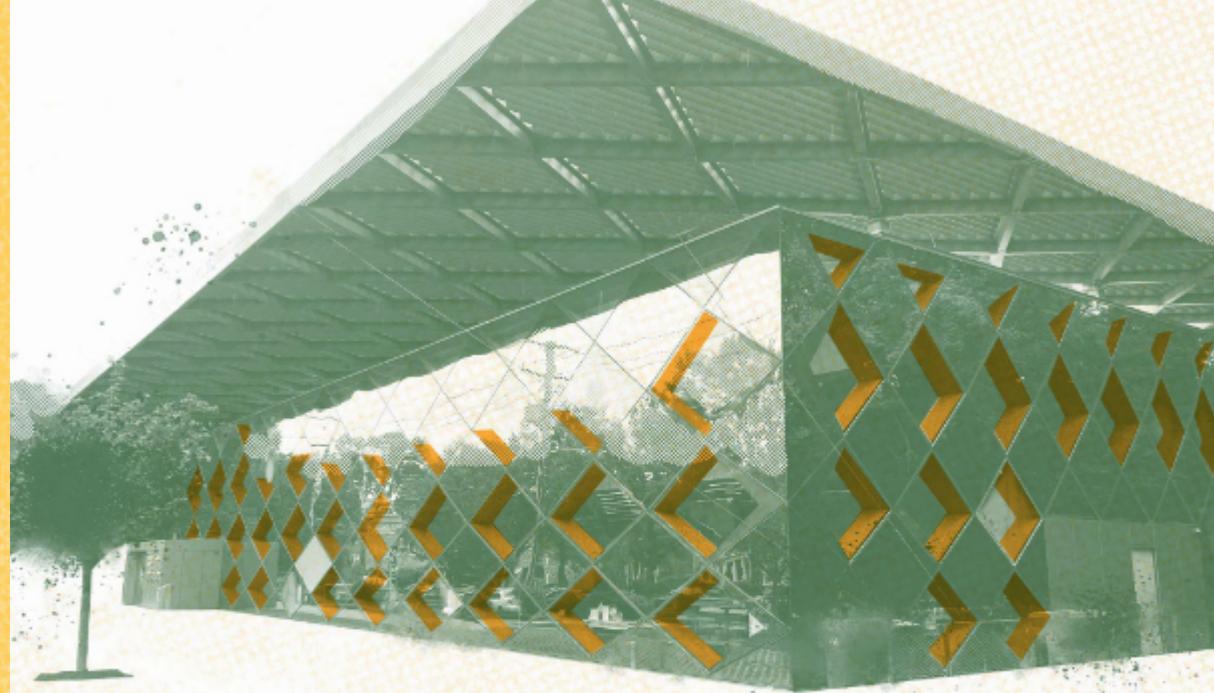
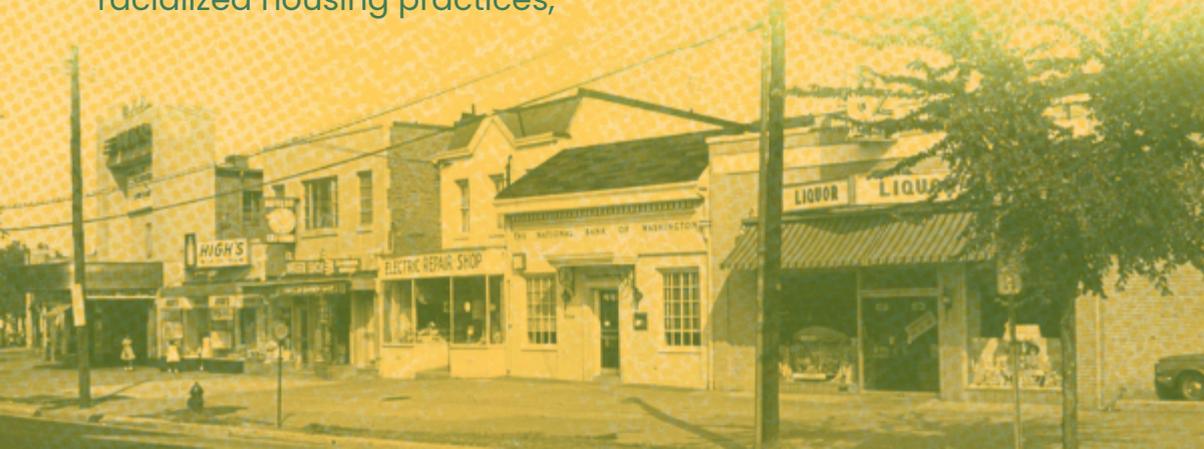
Hillcrest is in the southeast quadrant of Washington, DC, isolated from the hustle of the city. The borders of this Ward 7 community are Pennsylvania Avenue SE, Southern Avenue, Naylor Road, and 28th Street SE, as cited by the Hillcrest Community Civic Association.

Like much of early Washington County, this area was once dotted with plantations using enslaved laborers to grow cash crops. After the Civil War, wealthy politicians recognized the area's potential and bought up land to sell to residential development contractors. Colonel Arthur E. Randle took over the planning for Washington Heights, establishing Hillcrest and surrounding communities.

The neighborhood initially attracted young, white families. After a 1948 Supreme Court decision outlawing racialized housing practices,

Black families sought out the neighborhood for its prestige. However, the integration of the neighborhood was slow at first, with the first Black residents recorded in the early 1960s. By the late 1960s, the demographics reached a tipping point, after the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. spurred uprisings throughout the city. Hillcrest's upper northwest counterpart, Crestwood or the "Gold Coast" inspired the nickname the "Silver Coast" in reference to its Black, professional class and lavish architecture.

The route displayed in this booklet was created prioritizing the walking path experience. For a chronological exploration of Hillcrest history through the map, read in the following order: Sites 02; 10; 05A, 05B; 08; 03; 04; 07; 09; 11; 12; 06; 13; 14; 01.



01 Francis A. Gregory Neighborhood Library

3660 Alabama Avenue SE

The Francis A. Gregory Neighborhood Library originally opened in 1961 as the Fort Davis Branch Library. It sits on land formerly part of the Civil War era fortification system. In 1985, it was renamed after Francis Gregory, the first Black president of the DC Library Board of Trustees.

A graduate of Dunbar High School, Gregory spearheaded efforts to create training opportunities for unemployed and underemployed Washingtonians throughout

the 20th century. After his tenure as principal at Armstrong Technical High School, Gregory became the assistant superintendent for industrial and adult education in 1951. In 1961, he became the second-highest ranking Black official in the Department of Labor.

The new Francis A. Gregory Library opened in 2012, designed by David Adjaye. Adjaye is known for his work designing the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

02

Marion Barry House

3607 Suitland Road SE

When elected Mayor in 1979, Marion Barry and his third wife, Effi, moved to Hillcrest; spurring a second wave of African American homebuyers to flock to the neighborhood. Their move into Hillcrest solidified the neighborhood's reputation as

DC's "Silver Coast." This designation mirrors the middle and upper-middle class enclaves bordering 16th Street NW known as the "Gold Coast." This home was developed in 1970 by the Curtis Family, who owned the Curtis Brothers Furniture Store.



03

Stephanson/Chavous Mid-Century Modern Homes

3720 Suitland Road SE

This mid-century modern gem by Jack C. Cohen, FAIA (1924 – 2011) of Cohen, Haft & Associates was commissioned by beloved DC baker James Stephanson, a Greek immigrant. A DC institution, Stephanson's Bakery was located at the south end of the Souza Bridge on Pennsylvania Avenue SE from

1928 until 1962. Stephanson was incentivized into retirement when the cloverleaf approach to I-295 threatened to displace the bakery. Shortly after Mr. Stephanson's death in the late 1970s, this home was purchased from the family by then DC Councilman Kevin Chavous.



04

Nonesuch Plantation

Mary (Young) Denman House

3703 Bangor Street SE

“Nonesuch” manor was part of George Washington Young’s estate, the largest in the area with enslaved laborers living onsite. The Manor was left as an antebellum relic at the center of the Summit Park subdivision but was demolished

by the 1940s. Still standing nearby is the 1850-1860 home Young built as a wedding present for his daughter Mary Young Denman. The home remains a private residence and the oldest dwelling in present-day Hillcrest.

05A & 05B

Curtis Family Compound

Owners of Curtis Brothers Furniture Store

05A - Suitland Road & Southern Avenue SE

05B - 3390 Highview Terrace SE

The two homes at this corner (Site 05A) belonged to the Curtis Brothers Furniture family. Curtis Brothers Furniture was located in Anacostia on Nichols Avenue SE. Once among the largest retail furniture chains on the East Coast, “The Big Chair” still stands in front of their former flagship store in Historic Anacostia.

The Curtis brothers ventured into real estate, developing several homes in Hillcrest, including on Suitland Road SE and West Over Drive SE. One notable home, built in 1953 on Highview Terrace SE for a grandson, remains in his widow’s family. The Curtis descendants continue to develop buildings in the area.

06

Mayor Vincent Gray House

2619 Branch Avenue SE

This impressive Mediterranean-style house has been the home of former Mayor Vincent Gray since the 1990s, helping solidify Hillcrest as a desirable, middle-class Black enclave. It was designed in 1948 by Earl Von Reichenbach who was considered to be the most

prolific architect in the area. From Center Hall Colonials to modest Cape Cods and mid-century ramblers, Von Reichenbach's work can be seen across Hillcrest and the nearby hillside neighborhoods (Dupont Park, Penn-Branch, Randle Highlands).



07

Lewis Giles House

African American Architects of Note

2804 33rd Street SE

This 1938 home is one of several in Hillcrest by architect Lewis Wentworth Giles. Starting as a draftsman for Black architect Isaiah T. Hatton, Giles worked on the Industrial Bank building and the Whitelaw Hotel on U Street and in the Shaw neighborhoods. His work includes the Eastland Gardens apartments and the dance pavilion at Suburban Gardens amusement park in Deanwood in northeast DC,

where he maintained his offices.

Hillcrest, and other historically segregated neighborhoods across the city, contains many examples of houses designed by Black architects who themselves would not have been permitted to live in those homes. Designs by Romulus Cornelius Archer, DC's second licensed Black architect, can also be found in Hillcrest.



08

A.F. Thelander House

2501 33rd Street SE

This house was once thought to be a Sears “kit home,” meaning all the timber and bricks were numbered and delivered to the building site. This was believable lore, given the house’s location in the section of Hillcrest first developed in the mid-1920s, where developers “seeded” blocks with homes by Sears, Montgomerly Ward, and Aladin and Lewis.

However, historical records show that this is actually the third design by Adolph Thelander, an architect on the cusp of a prolific career in the DC region. In addition to designing much of Arlington’s “Country Club Hills” development, Thelander is credited with over 4,000 single family structures, churches, and public buildings in Arlington during the 1930s as the county emerged as a suburb of the nation’s capital.



09

Lutheran Church of the Holy Comforter

3319 Alabama Avenue SE

Originally the site of an elaborate 1928 Tudor-style house, the modest Holy Comforter structure has been a center of community organizing since 1957 under long-time Pastor Franklin Senger (d. 2018). Senger, along with Harry Kaplan of

Penn Branch, started “Southeast Neighbors” in 1964. Modeled after the better-known Neighbors, Inc. in upper northwest DC’s Shepherd Park neighborhood, Southeast Neighbors worked to stem “white flight” in this area of southeast DC.

10

Dr. Eppard House by J.J. Baldwin

3304 Alabama Avenue SE

With numerous works in the National Register of Historic Places, James J. Baldwin is one example of the prominent architects represented in Hillcrest, including this 1940 Colonial Revival home. Baldwin's Cherokee County Courthouse in North Carolina is among the South's best examples of Beaux-Arts style. In the 1940s and 1950s, this was home to Dr. George Irving Eppard, wife Louise, and their six children. In 1947, the Eppards transferred 15 acres to Prince George's County, which became Fairmont Heights High School, one of Maryland's first modern schools for African Americans.



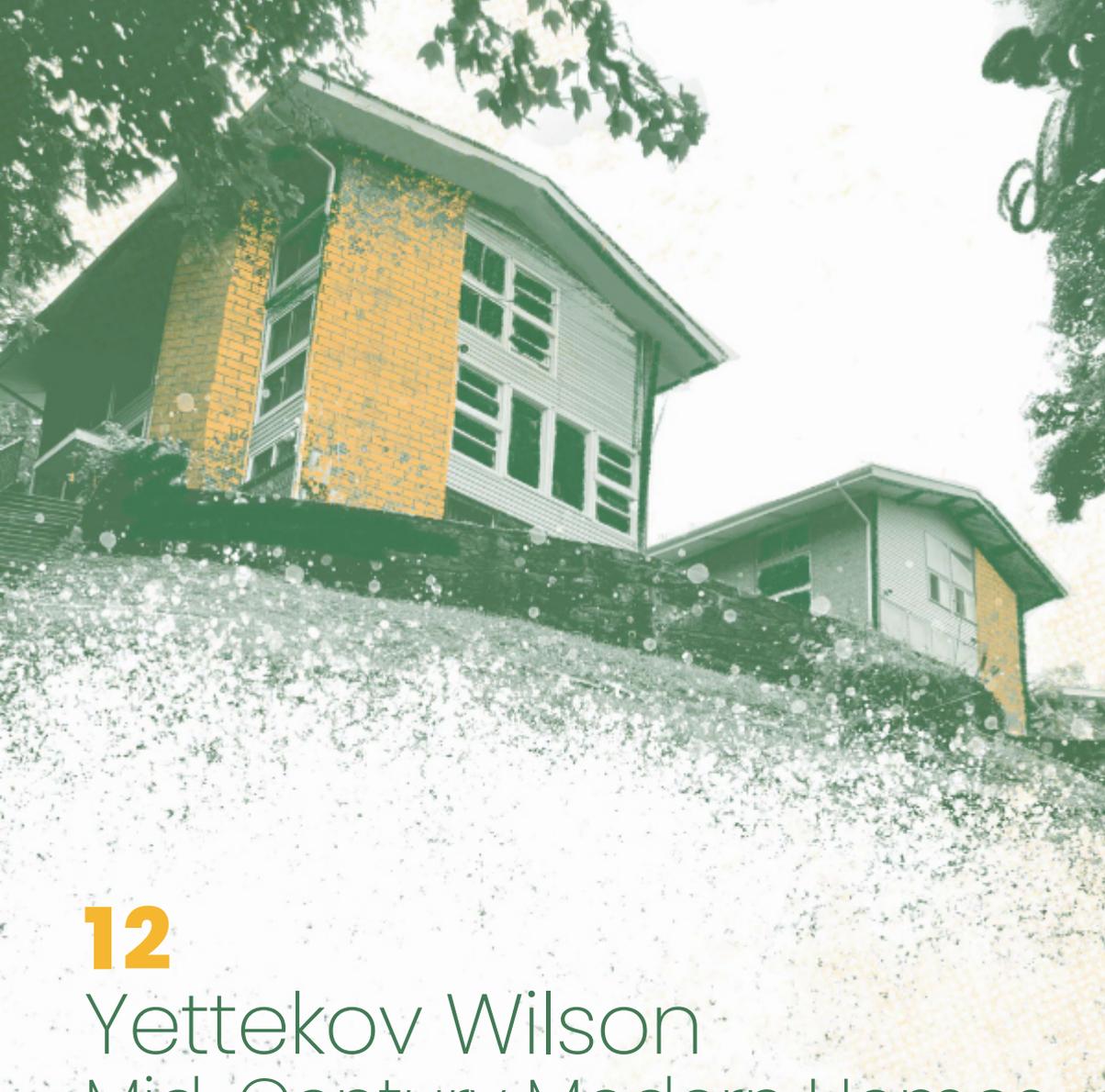
11

Dr. Lewis A. Gebhard House

2142 Branch Avenue SE

Designed by architect Thomas A. Jones in 1934, this Colonial Revival-style house was home to Dr. Lewis A. Gebhard (d. 2018) who was the former superintendent of the Naval Research Lab. Gebhard himself was a pioneer in the development of radio and radar

technology that was critical to U.S. success in WWII. Deeply involved in the construction of his home, Dr. Gebhard kept meticulous notes, receipts, and records of the home's construction and energy usage. The current owners retain this documentation to this day.



12

Yettekov Wilson Mid-Century Modern Homes

African American Architects of Note

2901-2927 Hillcrest Drive SE

A pioneering Black architect with Cohen-Haft Associates, Yettekov Wilson is responsible for nine mid-century modern gems perched high above Hillcrest Drive. An Alpha Phi Alpha, Wilson served as president of the Howard University chapter of the

American Institute of Architects circa 1954-1955. Wilson's other work includes houses in North Portal Estates, a neighborhood known for its fine mid-century modern homes in upper northwest Washington, DC along 16th Street NW.



13

Earley Art Deco House

also Overlook Inn site and Civil War-era Fort Baker

2911 W Street SE

This house by John Joseph Earley was named by historian James M. Goode (1939-2019) to be among DC's 100 most architecturally significant residences in his book *Capital Houses*. A pioneer of exposed aggregate concrete construction, Early is also credited with Meridian Hill/ Malcolm X Park, Dumbarton Bridge, and the original 1941 National Airport Terminal. Dr. Martin S. Fealy commissioned this home in 1935. Fealy, the Capitol Hill drugstore owner, also developed the 1100 block of Pennsylvania Avenue SE (Frager's Hardware).

Fort Baker Drive was the front approach to the fabled Overlook Inn (1894-1900) located on the W Street plateau, next to the remains of Fort Baker. Designed by Appleton P. Clark, Jr., the resort was a premier destination of Washington elite into the early 20th century. The inn hired teams of horse-drawn carriages to parade DC's high society across town to enjoy its fine cuisine and city views.



14

Skyland Town Center

Mixed-use retail and residential

Alabama Avenue & Marion Barry Boulevard SE

The neighborhood's revitalized retail core, the mixed-use site is today anchored by a supermarket, coffee shop, and a growing number of restaurants and shops. As of summer 2025,

the Crest Apartments will soon be joined by Phase Three of the development, to include a park and townhouses with an unparalleled view of The Mall and downtown.

Acknowledgements

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For more information and details about the project's efforts, please contact info@dchistory.org

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