

## 2018 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

### Stran-Steel House

- **Location:** 2105 Chestnut Ave., Wilmette, Cook County
- **Built:** 1933
- **Architect:** H. Augustus O'Dell and Wirt C. Rowland
- **Current owner:** Developer owned
- **Historic significance:** A rare example of a residence built out of steel and baked iron enamel – unique materials for the time it was constructed. Also one of only two of such homes remaining that were shown at the 1933 World's Fair "Homes of Tomorrow" exhibit.
- **Why it is endangered:** House faces demolition as developer wishes to use the site to build two new homes.



*Credit: Landmarks Illinois*

At the time of its construction, this recently rediscovered 1933 World's Fair house was at the forefront of innovative residential architecture and material advancements. However, it is now facing an uncertain future, as it is in need of someone willing to move the structure in order to preserve this unique example of Machine Age design.

Designed by H. Augustus O'Dell and Wirt C. Rowland for the Stan-Steel Corporation of Detroit, this unusual French Art Deco house helped demonstrate Chicago's role in promoting modern residential architecture in the United States. Designed for the *Homes of Tomorrow* exhibit at the 1933 Century of Progress Fair, Stran-Steel partnered with Good Housekeeping to present an entry that showcased new home design utilizing materials and technology that had not previously been used in residential architecture.

The companies set out to produce a house that was fireproof, pre-fabricated and affordable to the average family. The result was a 1,300-square-foot house, constructed of steel and baked iron enamel that started at \$7,500. The house has four bedrooms, two baths and a large u-shaped outdoor terrace on the second story. It was touted as being "a simple, inexpensive system of steel members...[that could be] erected by [ordinary carpenters with ordinary tools.](#)" Top

companies, eager to advertise their products, provided appliances, fixtures and furnishings for the house.



Credit: Chicago History Museum

While numerous copies of the model were [built around the country](#), recent research confirmed the house located in Wilmette is one of two that stood at the Century of Progress exhibit. The other had been moved to Palos Heights, but was demolished in the 1990s. A developer purchased the Wilmette home with the intention of replacing it with two new houses and was informed by Landmarks Illinois, other groups and village officials afterward of the home's significance. The developer has since offered the home to anyone who can move it from the site.

However, time is of the essence, as the developer intends to start construction on the site this summer.

Landmarks Illinois would prefer a compromise scheme proposed by preservation architect John Eifler that demonstrates the house could be moved to the other side of its lot, allowing the developer to build one new house with a needed zoning variance. However, the Village has completed its approval process for the subdivision of the lot. While the developer is yet to gain final approvals for construction, the village is unwilling to landmark properties without the owner's consent, leaving relocation as the only means for the Stran-Steel House to be saved.

### What you can do:

- Urge the Wilmette Village Board to implement a demolition delay process in its code and to support the Historic Preservation Commission's efforts to survey historic properties in Wilmette and identify significant properties in need of protection.  
<https://www.wilmette.com/village-board/>

### Additional Links:

- "Do You Want To Buy A World's Fair House In Wilmette?" *Wilmette Patch*, February 9, 2018:  
<https://patch.com/illinois/wilmette/do-you-want-buy-worlds-fair-house-wilmette>
- "Architecture sleuths solve mystery of that World's Fair House," *Crain's Chicago Business*, December 19, 2017:  
<http://www.chicagobusiness.com/realestate/20171219/CREDo701/171219874/architecture-sleuths-solve-mystery-of-that-worlds-fair-house>

- Chicago History Museum Record of the Stran-Steel House:  
<https://images.chicagohistory.org/detail/en/9045/1/EN9045-exterior-view-of-good-housekeeping.htm>