

# Meet Greta, Blonde Builder of Suburbs

By Roslyn Rosen  
 EIGHT years ago Greta Lederer was a suburban housewife. Today she is something of a legend on Chicago's north shore. She has built \$10,000,000 worth of houses. I've lived in one five years and can testify she does a good job.

Greta is a tall, handsome blonde in her forties who was Miss Detroit of 1930, a model, a showgirl, and winner of a movie contract. But that's far behind her. Today she drives from job to job in a plush yellow auto and is known among bankers and real estate men as a sharp trader.

She's a serene looking woman whose far from serene, a demon for work and a mass of contradictions.

It all started with the first home Greta had built for her family. A reputable north shore firm did a traditional job for her—expensive, luxurious French provincial. She never lived in it.

"Let's say I considered it unimaginative," Greta explains. "About that time I answered an ad for a dining room set. I walked into a house that was truly French provincial. I knew this was the kind of house I wanted. I sold my new house, and bought an old one on Chestnut street in Winnetka, and found a carpenter to remodel the place."

A few years and a few houses later, Greta went to Arizona for her daughter's health. The building bug had begun to bite. She built Arizona's first modern design apartment house in Tuscon. She returned home and built her first three homes on Bob-o-link road in Highland Park, an area that had sewer trouble. The architect had some radical ideas, among them a conviction that the drain tile was not necessary around buildings.

During a heavy rain, all three houses were flooded and the floors ruined. Men worked all night and the next day to clean up the mess. While all this was going on, Greta said: "I was scared stiff. I stayed in my house and cried until it was over."

Now Greta runs her business with confidence. She consistently builds houses worth up to \$75,000 for the

market, as well as custom built homes.

When she likes a plan she repeats it with variations. She favors split levels and "open" feeling. Her living rooms and kitchens often have double height ceilings, balconies looking down into living rooms and living rooms into playrooms. Kitchens with fireplaces opening into dining areas into patios.

Her houses unmistakably bear her stamp—multiple paneled high windows, a profusion of levels, breezeways patios, soft feminine colors—beige, coffee, peach. Her houses have simple modern lines, yet are a bit modified.

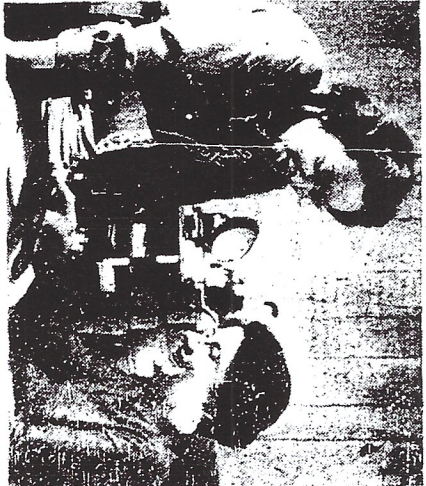
She has built up entire communities—Strawberry Hill Westwood Acres, and Skokie Ridge.

I spent some time on the job with her. In a field where our family took walks a few months ago, about a dozen houses were in various stages of construction. A suburb was being born.

Greta looked very lady like on the job, with her beige coat, middle-high heels, and slim ankles that wobbled a bit as she walked planks into unfinished buildings. She is well organized in her fashion quietly giving orders, making notes, pushing the touches that will help to sell her houses.

Not long ago Greta stepped in a hole on the job and wrenched her back. She was rushed to the hospital, her arms and legs temporarily paralyzed. While prone on her back in the Highland Park hospital she sold homes to two doctors and a piece of land in Highland Park to 16 other doctors who have built a medical center on it.

Greta recently bought an island of land near Eden highway on which she plans to toss off a motel and a shopping center. It started out as a "little shopping center," but Greta can't do things in a small way.



Greta Lederer, north shore builder, checks a construction detail with her secretary, Loretta De Barry.



Houses with a design that is distinctively her own form a backdrop for Mrs. Lederer as she steps into her car to check on another of her many building projects.