





on its regional planning and natural resources committee for more than four years. She also is president of the Washington Branch of the American Association of University Women.

Home base for it all is the now 100-year-old structure she bought and renovated in 1960.

The house was built by the gas company for its laborers, and legend has it that a shoemaker once had a shop in its corner. Legend also has it that "some illegal activities went on in the house in the 1940's," says Melita, whose story is supported by the strange peep-hole gadget in the door.

The three-story house with the tower was one of the last to be restored in Foggy Bottom. It had "an ugly green roof, to remodel, because it is only 13½-feet wide," she says.

But she added and subtracted windows, designed a modern first-floor kitchen and installed a bathroom on each level. She replaced a Latrobe stove with a brick fireplace, its hearth laid with tile samples. She created storage space by building closets in nooks, crannies and the tower stairwell.

Melita's tower windows still offer street views, but her once splendid vistas across the Potomac are now blocked by the Watergate and The Plaza. Her octagonal terrace, garden and patio did work out as planned. "And the maple tree I grew myself from a seedling is now taller than the house," she says.

She made practical use of the tower, with its fine light and odd shape. On the top floor, the tower room is her studio. Adjacent are a wall-kitchen, bath and her bedroom.

The second-floor of the tower is her office. The rest on that level offers privacy to Melita's 93-year-old mother, Martha, who came here after her husband died.

The ground-floor tower room seemed perfect for the family piano.

Throughout the house, Melita's own oils, drawings and wood sculptures share space with textiles and other folk art collected on her travels. And the Rodecks share their entire home with Sasha, a handsome, 12-year-old black cat and Tippy, the young and starving cat who "wandered in last year and adopted us."

Melita has a desk on all three floors, but books, professional journals and paperwork overflow them all and the bookshelves as well. "I just can't keep up with it all," she says.

it is understandable.

## House With a History

A lot of people in Foggy Bottom were curious when Charlie Norris posted a "For Sale" sign in the front yard at 801 25th Street. The turreted, red-brick 3-story structure at the corner of 25th and H Streets suddenly assumed an air of mystery. Some began calling it the Foggy Bottom "Charles Addams" house, harking back the *New Yorker* cartoonist of weird people living in a spooky Victorian home.

Those who borrowed a key from Charlie and entered cautiously found a shambles — rotted out floors, plaster falling off walls and ceilings, stairways narrow, creaky, and uncertain, and cobwebs everywhere. All three floors were served by a shabby, rusty bathroom squeezed into a former hall bedroom after outdoor facilities were no longer legal.

But a certain charm shone through despite the dreary squalor and the former questionable occupancy. Visitors found the fine tower at the southwest corner commanded an unsurpassed view of the Potomac and the hills of Virginia beyond, looking down H Street. This view can never be interrupted if the Inner Loop cuts under H Street and Virginia Avenue nearby as planned.

It was the view and the tower that caught the fancy of Melita Rodeck, who bought the property. Melita, and the architect, who owns an apartment in Potomac Plaza, is bustling with plans for the restoration of her house with the tower and the view, and the other evening she let us see the blueprints.

The old Charles Addams house under Melita's planning will become Foggy Bottom's own "Octagon House". The big Octagon house is, of course, the American Institute of Architects' National Headquarters, located in Col. Taylor's mansion at 18th and New York Avenue. Historically the shape was popular for baptistries in early Christian architecture. Again there was a vogue for it in the latter nineteenth century.

The tower character will be repeated by a new terrace of octagonal shape and again by an irregular kitchen, which will counterbalance the tower. Finally the top of the tower will be opened with a dormer window giving a full and clear view of the river. A garden and patio will surround the house on three sides. Melita has an intricate landscaping scheme on the drawing board.

The house will be not only a designer's delight but also a first class example of mid-20th century functionalism: bathrooms on every level, abundance of storage, airconditioning.

This is the first time that Melita the architect is working for Melita the client. She confesses to a new insight into the client's unhappy conflict between the reaches of taste and the capabilities of the purse.

Besides her private project, Melita has two other jobs of sizeable proportions on her boards. She is designing Al Wheeler's 18 luxury town houses to begin this month on the new Queen Anne's Lane between 26th Street and Hughes Mews, a million dollar project, and also a large downtown office building which she is doing for a real estate developer.

Melita was born in Milan, Italy, and educated at Vienna Polytechnic. She is a painter and sculptor as well as an architect. Since 1939, when she settled in the

### Looking Back

*This story first appeared in the May, 1960 issue of the Foggy Bottom News.*

United States, she has worked with architectural firms and done architectural work for the Air Force. she set up her independent practice after she moved into Potomac Plaza in 1958, and soon after was joined by her faithful assistant, Bernice Abbott.

Her father is an engineer — he and her mother live in Watertown, N.Y. — and her brother Ernest is in an allied vocation; he is a builder, in Australia.

She remodeled President Eisenhower's hangar at Andrews Air Force Base into a VIP Airport, where Ike meets visiting dignitaries — that's where he met Mr. K last fall. Among other projects, such as schools and hospitals, she helped to design the magnificent new Medical Center for the National Institutes of Health in nearby Maryland.

What she will do with her Octagon House when restoration is complete in July, Melita hasn't decided. She plans either to sell her apartment and live in it — or vice versa. But either way, Octagon House is designed as a home and office combination for a professional, or to be used entirely as living space.

Melita's work in Foggy Bottom has also designing the church hall for St. Stephen's Catholic Church on Pennsylvania Ave. in 1964.



Melita's House

## Foggy Bottom News

The Foggy Bottom News is a publication of the Foggy Bottom Association. All editorial and other assistance is contributed on a volunteer basis by residents of the area.

Editor ..... Kathy Haley 331-7800  
 Advertising-Manager ..... Elizabeth Ann Miller 338-8327  
 Artists ..... Pam Palco, Jackie Cooper, Bill Lattin  
 Circulation ..... John Landgraf, Eleanor Becker  
 All announcements, letters, articles, etc., welcome but must be typed.  
 Send to:

**FOGGY BOTTOM NEWS**  
 c/o West End Library  
 24th & L Sts., N.W.  
 Washington, D.C. 20037

Next Edition's Deadline: March 8

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the writers. Their appearance here constitutes neither an endorsement nor official policy of the Foggy Bottom Association.

### 1979-80 OFFICERS

President ..... John Landgraf  
 Vice President ..... Maureen Holschlag  
 Secretary ..... Jeanne A. ...  
 Treasurer ..... Melvin Og...

### EXECUTIVE BOARD

Eleanor Becker, Robert Charles, Lucille Duprat, Karen Gordon, June I. Anne Lomas, Dorothy Ohliger.



bubble

HERE TODAY THERE TOMORROW

