

Gwen: Our next story takes us back to the moment when America added kitchen appliances to its Cold War arsenal. In 1959, two years after the Russian Sputnik had beaten the U.S. in space, the U.S. government mounted an exhibition of American consumer goods in Moscow. A quarrel between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and Vice President Richard Nixon was captured on a new American invention: color TV.

Richard Nixon: There are some instances where you may be ahead of us: for example, in the development of your -- of the thrust of your rockets for the investigation of outer space. There may be some instances, for example, color television, where we're ahead of you. But in order for both of us -- for both of us to benefit -- for both of us to benefit -- you see, you never concede anything.

Gwen: Russian spectators jostled to get into the main attraction: a model American home, supposedly available to every American worker. For Nixon, nothing represented U.S. superiority better than the kitchen, where he showed Khrushchev the gleaming appliances that made life easy for the American housewife. You may be winning the race to outer space, Nixon seemed to be telling Khrushchev, but we are winning the war of the kitchen appliances. It was forever remembered as "the kitchen debate." The designer of that all-American kitchen was a visionary young architect named Andrew Geller. Fresh from his Moscow success, Geller took the model American home and its kitchen one step further, turning it into something called "the Leisurama." Marketed as a second home for the American working class, the Leisurama came fully furnished and could be purchased at Macy's department store. Architect Andrew Geller, now 80, and his grandson, Jake Gorst, of Northport, New York, want to know what became of Geller's Cold-War vision of a place in the sun for the American worker.

Jake Gorst: I'm a filmmaker, and a few years ago I set out to do a documentary about my grandfather, and I found this ad. This whole concept is fantastic; the idea that you could buy a house at Macy's and it would be fully furnished, down to the toothbrush.

Andrew Geller: A friend and client of mine said he took his wife to Macy's to buy a brassiere and we came out with one of your houses.

Gwen: I'm Gwen Wright. I remember that argument between Nixon and Khrushchev. I began college in 1964, and like many young women, I was having my own kitchen debate: whether to be a good housewife or pursue a career. I became an architectural historian and a History Detective, yet I've always been haunted by that image of the ideal stay-at-home '60s housewife. I'm meeting Geller and his grandson Jake in Montauk, New York, at one of the few Leisurama homes still in its original condition. So this was the modern American kitchen that was shown at the Moscow exposition, is that right?

Jake: Very similar to it. This is the all-electric kitchen that was supposed to make life easier for the American housewife.

Gwen: So you told me you have an ad from the time.

Jake: Yeah, here.

Gwen: Oh, wonderful. Leisurama North in Montauk and Leisurama South in Lauderhill. Your key to a new idea for your life of leisure.

Jake: Right on.

Gwen: So tell me what you want me to find out.

Jake: Well, we found plenty of information on Montauk but very little on Lauderhill, Florida, and we -- nobody that went down there to look could actually find the Leisurama houses, so we're wondering what happened to Leisurama in Florida.

Gwen: So you want me to find Leisurama South there in the swamps?

Jake: Yes, yes.

Gwen: This will be an exciting challenge. I look forward to this. Can I take this copy with me?

Jake: Sure, definitely.

Gwen: Jake wants to find the Leisurama homes in Florida for personal reasons, but as an architectural historian I'm drawn to their quest because it shows how modern homes were being marketed as a universal ideal for American families. Uh, are you coming along, too? Guess not. The construction of the interstate system after World War II penetrated new areas of the country with highways. And no other state attracted more vacationers or new residents than Florida. Dredging machines coupled with breakthroughs in air conditioning and mosquito control opened vast new tracts of land for homebuilding. All this allowed developers to sell an affordable vision of tropical splendor. The ad Jake showed me is a classic example of architecture designed for such suburban development. With its carport for dad and kitchen for mom, the sales pitch of a second home captures the spirit of the time, of newly prosperous Americans with clearly defined roles for the sexes. It's a classic modern design, and many of the features of the Leisurama home, like cathedral ceilings and Formica countertops, are still popular. But were Leisurama homes ever built in Florida? Well, here we are in Lauderhill. Excuse me, ma'am. Have you ever heard of some houses I'm trying to find? They were called Leisurama houses.

Woman on street: Leisurama?

Gwen: Yeah.

Woman on street: No, I've never heard about Leisurama houses.

Gwen: Hey, can I ask you guys a question?

Young men: Leisurama homes? No, I wasn't even born then. I never knew there was a Leisurama -- that's the word?

Gwen: Yeah, that was the word.

Young man: It was like...I never heard of houses before.

Gwen: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

All: You're welcome.

Gwen: Bye-bye! Well, it was worth a try. There are over 20,000 houses in Lauderhill, and finding those Leisuramas is going to be impossible without more information. Let's go to city hall and see what we can find out. Hi, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Richard Kaplan: Hi, Gwen.

Gwen: The Mayor of Lauderhill, Richard Kaplan, has never heard of Leisurama homes either. But he agrees to let me look at the land records from the 1960s. I'm finding lots of building permits and floor plans, but none of them for the Leisurama model. Next, newspaper articles sent over by the Broward County Library. Castro. Chuck roast, 45 cents a pound. Lots of stories about the Soviets. Lots of bathing beauties. This is the kind of work a Leisurama housewife would never do. A-ha! Here's an article about Herbert Sadkin. Andrew Geller told me that Sadkin was the developer who hired him to design the Moscow kitchen and the Leisurama home. In this photo, you can see him standing behind Nixon and Khrushchev. After Moscow, Sadkin and his young architect set their sights on Florida. He is described as building a \$60-million city in Broward County to be called Lauderhill. So it seems likely that Leisuramas were built here, but are any of them still standing? Fantastic! Look at this ad! "The greatest advance in housing since the invention of bricks. Leisurama homes at Lauderhill decorated and furnished for you by Macy's, New York." And on the bottom you can see this tiny map, so now I know where to go look. Well, that tiny map turns out to include about 5,000 houses, so I'm going to need some help. My friend, Allan Schulman, who teaches architecture at the University of Miami, has agreed to meet us, along with some students, to help us comb the original subdivision for Leisurama homes. Here are the basic components... I showed them the key features of the design: a sloped overhanging roof, small picture window, carport, front door set back a bit... And divided up the territory. Rebecca, if you'd take this top quadrant on the left, and then Allan, take this.

Allan: Let's go find a house.

Gwen: Good luck!

Rebecca: Thank you.

Gwen: Thank you. Bye-bye.

Female student: This one is a good candidate.

Rebecca: Could be a Leisurama house.

Allan: Has all the same components, really, um, of the Geller house, but it's arranged kind of differently.

Female student: The pitch of the roof doesn't look very steep as in this rendering.

Rebecca: The proportions are a little bit incorrect.

Allan: The carport is detached from the house instead of located under the same roof. It's a Lauderhill home, but probably not the Leisurama.

Gwen: Well, we found some similar models, but no Leisuramas. I have to track down over 20 people connected with Herbert Sadkin, the developer of Lauderhill in the 1960s. And I've left messages for three of Sadkin's children, who still live down here. I'm beginning to wonder if Leisurama homes were ever built in Lauderhill. It's not easy being a History Detective. Once in a while I think about my choices, and how different my life might have been. Hello, hello. I'm sorry. Who is this? That was Marty Sadkin, the son of the developer.

Marty Sadkin: You must be Gwen.

Gwen: Yes, I am. I'm meeting him at his home, a few minutes' drive from Lauderhill. Marty shows me a 1959 ad for Lauderhill homes, based entirely on images of the Moscow exhibition.

Marty Sadkin: When he built this house, as this article says here, it says it in Russian and then it has the translation up here, the Russians didn't believe it. They said this is all propaganda. A typical American can't live -- the average worker in the United States can't live in a house like this. This has got to be only for the super-rich who live in the United States.

Gwen: Richard Nixon used the kitchen debate to sell the world capitalism. Herbert Sadkin used it to sell houses in Florida. So, the ad for Lauderhill, but all the pictures are from Moscow.

Marty: Exactly. Because he was proud of the house. My dad always preached to me: to sell the house, you have to sell the woman first, most important thing. Closets and kitchen, even though the husband may be paying for it, the one who really made the decision, you had to design it for them. If they liked it, they were buying the house.

Gwen: Well, let me show you the ad that Andrew Geller gave me that shows Leisurama North and Leisurama South at Lauderhill. Does this look familiar to you?

Marty: It does look a little familiar. And when we first moved here in '64 and we lived in a house very similar to this one. Whether it's the same one --

Gwen: Oh, good!

Marty: Whether it's the same one or not, I can't tell you.

Gwen: Well, where was that house, Marty? It was in Lauderhill?

Marty: It was in Lauderhill, and it was a couple of houses away from -- after my dad's passing they named the community center after my dad, which is now called the Sadkin Community Center.

Gwen: I think I've seen that on the maps.

Marty: It's right -- it's right on that block right in there.

Gwen: And what's the street?

Marty: You know, I don't remember. It was maybe 16th street or 18th street or something.

Gwen: That I can go look up. Wouldn't that be wonderful if you lived in a Leisurama house?

Marty: It could be possible. I really don't remember, but you could be right.

Gwen: Well, it wasn't on 16th or 18th street, as Marty thought. But here's the Sadkin Community Center, way down on 42nd Way. I can see how he could have missed this little area. It's cut off from the rest of the subdivision. Look, here's the pond I saw in my dream. Maybe it's a sign that I'm getting closer. Wait a minute! There's the roof, there's the recessed door, and that's still very much the same windows. Well, it has a garage, but that could have originally been a carport. I need to see the kitchen to know whether this is really

a Leisurama. Hello?

Chester Gould: Hello.

Gwen: Hi, my name's Gwen Wright. Inside I meet Chester Gould, an investor who just recently bought the house because of the quality of its design.

Chester: I've been a real estate investor for 15 years. I've never seen anything like this. It was like mystery rooms and all kinds of closet space and the unique design of it.

Gwen: Would you mind if I looked around for a little bit?

Chester: Not at all.

Gwen: What I found next gave me the answer to Andrew and Jake's question. First, I thanked them for sending me on this fascinating journey into '60s architecture. Then I told them about the house I found. It certainly looked like a Leisurama, but I couldn't be sure, until I saw the kitchen. This is the kitchen from the famous kitchen debate. It's virtually identical to what it was at that time. The same placement of this counter, perhaps even the same Formica from that time. I think those cabinets are original, and it may be that the stove's almost that old. And what's interesting is that I have pictures that will look very familiar to you both, right?

Jake: Wow!

Andrew: There it is.

Gwen: Very little changed, right?

Jake: Wow!

Andrew: That's it.

Gwen: And the carport has now been closed in. And there's the kitchen.

Jake: Wow!

Andrew: Brings back good memories.

Jake: I'm very excited that you actually found it. I -- I'm happy.

Gwen: That's great. A contractor made the point about this being a model for affordable housing in the 21st century. You must feel very proud of this, that your house is a model...

Andrew: It's good to hear you say it. It's amazing. At the risk of sounding a little silly, it makes me feel young.

Gwen: Oh, that's lovely. I'm a History Detective and a professor, and I'm also a mom and a wife. Seems our investigation has gotten someone else thinking, too.



**Episode 10, 2005: Leisurama,
Northport, New York**

Leisurama lady: I -- I think you have a really cool job.

Gwen: Thanks.

Leisurama lady: I've decided to leave home.

Gwen: Good for you. That's great.

Leisurama lady: All I need is a job. I'm willing to start at the bottom.

Gwen: Can you drive?

Leisurama lady: Yes.

Gwen: Great. I'm exhausted.

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