

Lustron – The House America’s Been Waiting For

FILM SYNOPSIS



It’s a story that could have been ripped from today’s headlines—just replace “Enron” with “Lustron” and add 50 years.

When Michigan film producers, Bill Kubota, Ed Moore and Bill Ferehawk discovered documents that revealed the conspiracy behind the collapse of what in 1950 was being called “the General Motors of housing”, they knew they had another “Preston Tucker” story but on a far more devastating scale.

For the first time, this crucial moment in history is explored. The one-hour documentary, *Lustron – The House America’s Been Waiting For*, tells the story of Chicago inventor Carl Strandlund

and his crusade to revolutionize homebuilding by mass-producing steel houses—100 each day—on an assembly line.

At the end of World War Two, 12-million war veterans returned to a housing crisis. Some slept in grain silos, old streetcars and chicken coops. President Harry Truman seized the opportunity to force builders and suppliers to concentrate solely on affordable housing instead of racetracks and resort hotels.

The answer: prefabricated housing—a new industry that would supersede the auto industry and provide a better standard of living to every American family. Leading architects like Frank Lloyd Wright and Buckminster Fuller threw themselves at the problem.

Every effort failed but one. It took an industrial genius from Chicago, a gambler obsessed with the odds, to pull it off. Charming and relentlessly enthusiastic Strandlund won over congressmen, bureaucrats and even President Truman. He negotiated landmark labor agreements with national trade unions that saw housing as America’s great new industry. Armed with 37 million tax dollars, Carl Strandlund risked everything he had to mass-produce the American Dream—a dream made of porcelain-enameled steel called the Lustron home.



Carl Strandlund

“For many groups, the idea of mass-producing the world’s biggest commodity—a house—was an extremely tempting and provocative idea,” asserts producer and architect, **Bill Ferehawk**. “Lustron could have been the silver bullet that solved the social and economic problems faced by Truman.”

Porcelain-enameled steel, the same resistant finish found on bathtubs and appliances, covered all surfaces of the Lustron house. Strandlund planned to roll them off auto-style assembly lines into suburban neighborhoods across the country. In the Midwest, the South and Northeast, Lustron houses were popping up at the rate of one house every four days. The social and economic implications were enormous. Then, at the threshold of success, came an untold tragedy at the hands of devious conspirators connected to the White House.



Specially designed trucks delivered the Lustrons.

“It is difficult to avoid comparing *Lustron* with Coppola’s movie, *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*,” remarks Lustron producer **Ed Moore**. “Strandlund and Tucker both made the better mousetrap and both were toppled by politics and corruption in Washington.”

Perhaps producer **Bill Kubota** sums it up best, “Ultimately I guess that’s why we’re telling this story. Because we need to be constantly reminded that corruption and greed don’t go away when the headlines do.”

To learn more about Lustron log on to www.lustron.org.

Lustron: *Fact Sheet*



- July 1947: Carl Strandlund and Lustron Corporation receive their first government loan for \$15.5 million.
- Between 1948 and 1950, Lustron Corp. erected more than 2,500 homes east of the Rocky Mountains.



- By June 1950, Lustron owes the federal government \$37.5 million in taxpayer money when it is declared bankrupt and auctioned off for pennies on the dollar.
- Carl Strandlund dies on December 24, 1974.
- February 2002: KDN Videoworks, Inc. from Madison Heights, Michigan, partners with WOSU.TV (PBS) in Columbus, Ohio.



- The producers receive a grant from Chicago's prestigious Graham Foundation.
- *Lustron – The House America's Been Waiting For* premieres in Columbus in November 2002.



- The Graham Foundation screened *Lustron* to an overflowing crowd in March 2003.
- March 2003: WorldFest – Houston, awarded the Platinum Remi, Research & Writing.
- April 2003: Received Ohio Valley Emmy Award for Documentary
- July 2003: Awarded Cine Golden Eagle

L U S T R O N : P R O D U C T I O N T E A M

Bill Kubota is a founding partner of KDN Videoworks in Detroit. He has received numerous awards for television news producing and has earned the reputation as one of the Midwest's most respected television news producers and video photographers. His work has appeared on such programs as NBC Dateline, ABC World News Tonight and PBS Frontline.



In 1988, Bill founded KDN with the intention to produce documentary projects. It took seven years to realize that dream but KDN launched its first documentary project: *Lustron – The House America's Been Waiting For*, winner of the 2003 Emmy award and will be nationally broadcast on PBS in November 2003. Bill's latest endeavor is a documentary about a Japanese-American war hero. It is entitled *Most Honorable Son – Ben Kuroki's Amazing War Story*.

You can email Bill at bill.kubota@kdnvideo.com.

Awards & Grants: Cine Golden Eagle
Emmy Award – Ohio Valley Region
WordFest Houston – Platinum Award
ITVA Silver Reel
RTNDA Documentary Award
MI/Associated Press Award
MI/UPI Award
Detroit Press Club Award
Graham Foundation grant recipient

Bill Ferehawk is part of the Emmy award winning team that researched, produced and wrote *Lustron - The House America's Been Waiting For*, and is currently researching another documentary focusing on urban renewal and community development corporations.



Bill is also professionally trained as an architect with a strong background in process driven architecture, community development and affordable housing issues. He is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley and Yale School of Architecture.

Bill lives in Los Angeles and enjoys playing the ukulele with his five year old son and two year old daughter.

You can email Bill at Ferehawk@aol.com.

Awards & Grants: Cine Golden Eagle
Emmy Award – Ohio Valley Region
WordFest Houston – Platinum Award
Two-time Graham Foundation grant recipient

Ed Moore is part of the team that created the Emmy award-winning documentary, *Lustron – The House America's Been Waiting For* to be aired nationally on PBS in Fall 2003.



Currently Ed is producing and writing a socio-medical documentary called *A Matter of Time* about CJD, a human variation of mad cow disease. Other projects include another historical documentary with Bill Kubota, *Most Honorable Son*. He also produces regularly for ABC News, CBS News and The Discovery & The Learning Channels.

Ed earned his BSJ at West Virginia University in 1990 and his MA from the University of Michigan in 1994 and receives far too many requests for alumni contributions.

You can email Ed at ed.moore@kdnvideo.com.

Awards & Grants: Cine Golden Eagle
Emmy Award – Ohio Valley Region
WordFest Houston – Platinum Award
Graham Foundation grant recipient
West Virginia University Top Scholar Award