

StLouis

at home

The Makeover Issue



MATERNITY HOSPITAL

Maternity Hospital is an Art Deco building based on an old wing of Jamaica Hospital Medical Center in Queens, N.Y.

St. Louis as Seen on TV

The architecture and locations cited in the TV series *Masters of Sex* compelled one St. Louisan to investigate further. BY TOBY WEISS

"Oh, yeah, [the study] moved, all right—to a cathouse on Third and Sutter."

With this line from prostitute Betty DiMello on the Showtime series *Masters of Sex*, I became fascinated with distinguishing the TV St. Louis from the real St. Louis. I began to track down or debunk the places referenced in the series.

Maps show that St. Louis has a Sutter Avenue and a Third Street, but they never meet. The series writers made up the intersection, but the book that the series is based on, *Masters of Sex* by Thomas Maier—the biography of pioneering St. Louis sex researchers Dr. William Masters and Virginia Johnson—confirms that Masters did do research at a Central West End brothel, under immunity from city police. So exactly where was it?

Maier's engrossing book is the catalyst for crafting engaging episodes, but the real facts of the researchers' lives don't move in an episodic rhythm, so many liberties are taken. An example of this sort of artistic license: the TV Masters' infertility woes in 1956 don't quite jibe with the real Masters having two children by 1953.

And there are many outright fabrications. It's a visual treat to gaze upon William and Libby Masters' stunning midcentury modern ranch home by the fictitious architect "Eine," but in real life, they lived in a traditional two-story Dutch Colonial in Ladue. (It is true that they slept in separate beds.) The producers made a savvy creative decision to put them in a *Mad Men*-esque home—and the good news is, in real life, Masters and Johnson did eventually live in a fabulous atomic ranch house in Ladue after they were married in 1971.

The series' creators are unfamiliar with our historic architecture because they have yet to come to St. Louis. (Maybe they'll come to bone up before the second season begins filming?) This unfamiliarity is why the show has an abundance of homes with wood siding when we're a brick city, and why the TV Maternity Hospital is a stucco Art Deco building, while the real one is not. But the show does an amazing job of replicating Washington University, which is portrayed by the former Guggenheim estate, Sands Point Preserve, in Port Washington, N.Y.

TV

Reality

St. Louis Maternity Hospital

The 1926 Maternity Hospital remains inside the Barnes-Jewish Hospital complex. Masters' office was on the third floor.



Reality

Homes of William Masters

Left: Dr. William and Libby Masters lived in this two-story 1934 Cape Cod in Ladue.

Below: Dr. Masters and Virginia Johnson moved to this midcentury modern Ladue home after they were married in 1971.



TV

Dr. William and Libby Masters live in a midcentury modern ranch designed by "Eine." This house is actually located in Huntington, N.Y.



Reality

When the first season begins, Johnson is shown living in a two-family flat. In real life, she lived with her husband, George, in a Clayton bungalow. After their 1956 divorce, she remained in the house with their two children until about 1962, when she moved just two houses down on the same street. Both of these homes have been replaced by condos built in the late '90s.

A little research quickly revealed that the series' Rialto movie theater, Gardell's nightclub, and gay hustler favorite Commodore Hotel are fictitious St. Louis places. But that CWE brothel was real, and it remains my elusive butterfly of love. When I meet the local who can tell me that secret location, you'll be the next to know.



TV

Johnson lives in a two-story two-family flat whose location is unidentified.

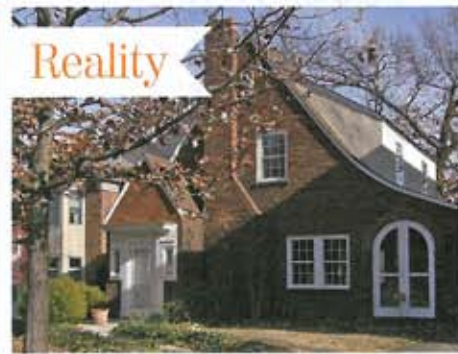


Reality

Homes of Virginia Johnson

Left: She lived in this Ladue ranch from 1967 until she married Masters in 1971.

Right: This 1925 Clayton brick bungalow is similar to Johnson's homes from the mid-'50s to 1967. Johnson's first home was just to the left, where a modern condo building now stands.



Reality