

# arcca

architecture california  
the journal of the american institute of architects  
california council

San Francisco Art Institute  
addition, 1971  
Paffard Keatinge-Clay, architect

# Preserving Modernism

Where's Wurster?

Technical Challenges

## Monuments of our Modern Past

Messages from Mid-Century



AIA Sierra Valley

Models for Contemporary Housing

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**arcCA**, the journal of the American Institute of Architects California Council, is dedicated to exploring ideas, issues, and projects relevant to the practice of architecture in California. **arcCA** focuses quarterly editions on professional practice, the architect in the community, the AIACC Design Awards, and works/sectors.

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## Comment

The purpose of **arcCA**, as our recently revised mission statement declares, is to explore “ideas, issues, and projects relevant to the practice of architecture in California.” Not all ideas we explore are going to be agreeable to everyone. But it has been my experience that you, our readers, are quite capable of taking care of yourselves, of determining where you stand on an issue, and of expressing forcefully but in a dignified way your disagreement with positions presented in the journal. For example, some issues back (04.4, “School Daze”) we published an op-ed piece—we call them “Contentions”—by Raphael Sperry, AIACC member and national president of Architects, Designers and Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR). Mr. Sperry presented ADPSR’s initiative for a boycott of prison design. In a succeeding issue, we published a reader’s spirited critique of that initiative. Together, the two items captured a significant spectrum of opinion. I have not heard of any AIACC members finding themselves brainwashed or otherwise led astray by either the position paper or its critique.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I learned that Mr. Sperry, who had been invited to participate in a panel discussion on “Exploring Prisons as a Design, Ethical, and Social Policy Issue” at this year’s AIA Convention, was prohibited by the AIA from showing two images: one of the exterior of Abu Ghraib prison, the other of prefabricated holding cells being assembled at Guantánamo. The AIA avers that this prohibition is not censorship, that Mr. Sperry was “completely out of bounds” advocating a political position during a continuing education seminar.

Baloney. Mr. Sperry was invited to the discussion precisely because he leads an organization that advocates the position. To ask him to participate without stumping for that position would be like asking Billy Graham to speak at a panel on faith but (please) not to mention Jesus. Meanwhile, there were sessions offered at the Convention on “Design Leadership and Advocacy in the Public Realm,” “Leadership and Advocacy Through Design,” and “Architects as Advocates”; and, while I unfortunately missed Thom Mayne’s keynote, I gather he may have strayed somewhat into political territory.

It may be that Mr. Sperry’s choice of images was hyperbolic; perhaps, had he been allowed to show them, he would have weakened, rather than strengthened, his case. Maybe so, maybe not. Was he being silly or shrewd, compelling or naïve? Who knows? The attendees would know, if they—if you—had been given the chance.

There are two possible motivations for this act of censorship—and censorship it is. It was done either to suppress a political position with which influential people in the Institute disagree; or it was done because somebody at headquarters thinks AIA members are dupes who can’t react thoughtfully and responsibly to another person’s point of view. Either way, it’s a damned shame.

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On a brighter note, as this Comment was going out the door a terrific new book arrived: *NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), by Pierluigi Serraino, Assoc. AIA and member of the **arcCA** editorial board. It would, of course, have been the perfect subject for a book review in this, the “Preserving Modernism” issue, had it left the bindery earlier. As it is, we’ll have to save the review for next time. But look for it; it’s full of *good* surprises.

Tim Culvahouse, FAIA, editor

## Contributors

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The work of **Mark Hart, AIA**, embraces Japanese design principles of long ago, thus providing both meaning and direction. He is the sole proprietor of Satori Architecture and the AIA Sierra Valley Chapter President. He can be reached at satoriarch@comcast.net.

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**Michael Franklin Ross, FAIA**, Chair 2006 AIACC Design Awards Jury, is principal-in-charge of the Los Angeles office of HGA Architects and Engineers. He has served as Chair of the AIA Los Angeles Design Awards and Chair of the AIA California Council Design Awards. In 2007 he will be Chair of the National AIA Committee on Design. He has contributed over seventy-five articles to the architectural press including work for *Architectural Record*, *Progressive Architecture*, *A+U Architecture & Urbanism* as well as for *LA Architect* and **arcCA**. His book *Beyond Metabolism, The New Japanese Architecture*, was published by McGraw-Hill. He can be reached at mross@hga.com.

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**Karen Weise** is the marketing director at Marmol Radziner + Associates and is currently working on a monograph about the firm. Previously she was a research assistant for Professor Edward Tufte at Yale

University, interned at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and received second place in the 2003 Berkeley Prize competition for writing on architecture as a social art. She can be reached at karenw@marmol-radziner.com.

**Paul Welschmeyer, AIA**, is an East Bay native whose professional experience began with Ratcliff Architects in Berkeley and continued with Studios Architecture in San Francisco. His private practice began in 1991. Currently his practice revolves around custom residential and commercial interiors, both of which include a focus on adaptive reuse, historic conservation, and sustainability. He is a Niles resident and was a member of Fremont's Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) from 1991 to 1998. He thanks the staff of the U.C. Berkeley Environmental Design Archives and Richard C. Peters, Professor of Architecture Emeritus, U.C. Berkeley. He can be reached at paul@pwarchitects.biz.

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### Regarding the LA issue, 06.2

I think Barbara Lamprecht, in her piece [06.2] about the Hall of Records, missed a major part of the story here: the context out of which this design emerged. Compare this building to the adjoining Courthouse and the Hall of Administration; THIS is what our project was supposed to look like (complete to the finish we were told to use on the outside)! That we succeeded in getting such a different look is really the story here, something heretofore not covered in any write-ups about this building, which deserves to be mentioned as one of the “stars” of the group which is discussed in the new look of the cultural center of L.A. (Disney, Cathedral, DWP, Music Center).

Read what Tom Hines says in his book about Neutra’s “later works”; he dismisses the Hall of Records as a “bland mediocrity.” He focuses more on the tensions in the N&A partnership than on the remarkable feat of producing a distinctive piece of work for a client not known for imagination.

Dion Neutra, Architect, Los Angeles

As you may know, Los Angeles has often had a lot of trouble finding decent venues for discussion of concerns beyond vanity/aesthetics. In my view, one reason is that there is a vast quantity of activity generated by L.A.’s image-making culture—which we are often caught up in feeding—and it often overruns the far more serious issues of L.A.’s urbanity. **arcCA** LA is a real piece of art and touches on some very serious (and mostly ignored) issues in L.A. I really appreciate your effort and care in setting out the themes and selecting very compelling illustrations and artwork.

David Thurman, AIA, Los Angeles

### The continuing debate regarding UC Merced

We appreciate Henry DuPertuis’s response to the debate about UC Merced that **arcCA** reprinted recently (05.4, “SustainAbility”). It’s good to get the perspective of a native, and we are glad to hear that having a new campus in that community is seen as a plus by him and his friends.

After our article and his letter appeared, both *The New York Times* and *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported that UC Merced’s enrollment is lagging and that enrolled students are deserting it. Its distance from Merced proper was noted as part of the problem, accentuating the isolation of the new and still largely undeveloped campus.

Our half of the debate takes a longer view of UC Merced and the Central Valley. It is literally

true of course that the kind of campus UC is developing at Merced won't fit in the existing center of the town. Other campus models would fit, however, and offer the students and the community something better. Merced isn't Bologna, but it could—still could—reap the benefits of being the university town that anchors this wealthy region.

Our “undervalued resources” phrase is to say that Merced will grow substantially in population, so redevelopment at a higher density is inevitable. What we're asking is where town and gown will end up at mid-century. What we're suggesting is that a strategy that melds their interests will ultimately be better for both of them.

We speculate that a joint strategy that gives some thought to where the Central Valley is headed may favor a different pattern of overall development. Some of the qualities we point to are a more urban character, better regional access, and sharing of facilities whenever possible (to maximize their use and spread their cost). We did not stress the impact of technology on the university in our article, but we imagine that in time it will shrink campus building programs the way it has in the corporate sector, and in the process redefine people's expectations of the university experience. A trend we did mention is the expansion of learning from its traditional boundaries, which we believe will reshape UC Merced's student profile to be more like community colleges today.

One advantage Merced has over many exurban communities is an existing form that can become denser over time without losing its basic character. It could choose to double or triple its population within a defined zone of development, preserving the land around it for agriculture and recreation. A high-speed rail line along Highway 99 would connect that denser community to its region. By mid-century, this will be a useful pattern, one that supports the Central Valley as a more populous but still agriculturally rich region, much like Northern Italy's Emilio-Romano, one of Europe's islands of prosperity.

We're not in love with the industrial feel of the UC Merced Campus, either. It illustrates the fact that “appropriate density” is a hard problem. The University and Merced together need to address it, asking what is desirable for the community and its region in 2050. This is really our point. We think the opening move was the wrong one, but there's still time to correct course and end up with something much better. As for other universities and communities contemplating a similar exercise, realize that you have alternatives.

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# Preserving the Monuments

## of our Modern Past

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Lauren Weiss Bricker, Ph.D.

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*Editor's note: Chuck Wilson, Certified Archivist in the Department of Special Collections at UCLA, has prepared a guide to those archives of mid-century California Modernist architecture that are available on-line. The guide is available on the arcCA website: go to [www.aiacc.org](http://www.aiacc.org), choose "communicate" and then "arcCA online."*

California's evolving historical self-awareness can be attributed, in part, to the fast-growing and controversial effort to preserve works of the "recent past"—works designed and constructed between the years 1945-65. In California, such works are seen as part of the state's cultural patrimony; California designers can justifiably take credit for many of the period's iconic buildings, landscapes, furniture, and other designed objects. Yet, the new interpretation of Modernism visually integrated buildings with their landscapes. Consequently, "seeing" the resulting postwar works at all, much less as historically significant, has been challenging for the general public, as well as for hard-core preservationists.

The individuals leading the charge for the preservation of the recent past are often relative newcomers to the field. In northern California, the local chapter of DOCOMOMO (Documentation and Conservation of Buildings of the Modern Movement), based in San Francisco, is the principal group agitating for preserving Modern works. In southern California, the Los Angeles Conservancy's Modern Committee (Modcom) is a feisty group of preservation advocates. Individual cities with important collections of postwar resources, most notably Palm Springs, have promoted the preservation of their historic Modern buildings and, in the process, have tapped into a new tourist market. In 2004, in response to these concerns, the State Historic Resources Commission formed a statewide committee to focus on the architecture and landscape architecture of historical significance to the Modern era, and the issues peculiar to their preservation.

Some of the difficult issues associated with the preservation of Modern resources can be illustrated by two recent cases. The construction of new condominiums on the site of the Stuart Company (Edward Durrell Stone, architect; Thomas Church, landscape architect; Pasadena, 1958) raises questions about balancing preservation considerations with civic plans, however well intentioned. Even more controversial, efforts to preserve the Lincoln Place Apartments (Ralph Vaughn and Heth Wharton, architects; Venice, 1950-51) have sparked nothing short of class warfare, with

opposite: Stuart Company, photo by Julius Shulman, J. Paul Getty Trust. Used with permission. Julius Shulman Photography Archive, Research Library at the Getty Research Institute.



left: Lincoln Place Apartments, Venice, photo by Luis G. Hoyos, AIA; opposite: Lincoln Place Apartments, aerial imagery courtesy of GlobeXplorer.com.

affluent property owners pitted against low-to-moderate income tenants.

**Integrated Landscape and Architecture:  
Stuart Pharmaceutical Company**

The City of Pasadena is known for its Arts-and-Crafts-period neighborhoods and Beaux-Arts Civic Center, but, during the postwar period, the Pasadena Chamber of Commerce invited manufacturers to establish facilities in the City, particularly if they were associated with scientific research. A number of existing or new firms established facilities in the eastern section of Pasadena, where land was available for larger plants and housing tracts to accommodate the projected influx of new employees. The Stuart Company is, without question, the complex that most fully embodies the concept of the postwar “suburban factory” in Pasadena. It was a pharmaceutical manufacturing and office building, a collaborative effort by architect Edward Durrell Stone and landscape architect Thomas Church, which the AIA named as one of the best buildings of 1958.

Set back approximately 150 feet from East Foothill Boulevard, a main arterial road, the massive building, which occupied about one-quarter of its 9.4-acre site, appears modest and fragile. This effect was achieved by nestling the building into the downwardly sloping site. From the road, the complex reads as a series of low, horizontal elements (exemplifying the type of architecture that is invisible to many). Church designed a landscape of planters, lawn, and a shallow moat; the building hovers above this setting. Stone’s signature cast concrete

block screen spans the width of property, uniting the building facade with a series of parking bays.

The Stuart Company was sold in 1991 to Johnson and Johnson/Merck Pharmaceuticals Co. and was later acquired by a public agency, the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), around 1994. Out of concern for the fate of the building, Pasadena Heritage, the local historic preservation non-profit organization, prepared a National Register nomination for the property, and it was listed in 1994. Unfortunately, the National Register nomination played down the significance of the landscape design. This attitude, landscape historian Charles Birnbaum suggests, is symptomatic of the “invisibility” of modern landscape architecture to many involved with the documentation of historic sites.

In 2000, the City completed its East Pasadena Specific Plan, in preparation for construction near the new Gold Line light rail service linking Pasadena with downtown Los Angeles, which opened in 2005. (Originally, the MTA intended to construct a transit station on the site of the Stuart Company, but then limited their construction to a parking structure located between the building and the 210 Freeway.) One of the commendable goals of the Plan is the promotion of Transit Oriented Development (TOD), and, more specifically, mixed-use or residential development. The Plan calls for 400 housing units to be constructed within the general area that includes the Stuart Company site, with the proviso that the “preservation of the most significant portions of the Stu-

art Company building and its landscape [are] mandatory.” The Plan anticipated that portions of the Stuart Company might be lost in order to allow area for new construction. This conjecture (and sanction) has been realized with the demolition of the rear fifty percent of the original building in 2005.

A private developer came forward with a project to develop 188 one- to three-bedroom and loft units, with parking for 296 vehicles. Currently under construction are three stories of housing above a raised parking lot on the site of the demolished portion of the Stuart Company. Additionally, two stories of housing are being constructed around the east side of the property, framing an existing pool area. The project, as reflected in approved documents, is sensitive in its treatment of the front portions of the buildings. Similarly, the landscape treatment for the planters and other areas visible from Foothill Boulevard appears to be carefully assessed. However, the new construction bears little relation to Stone’s highly significant architecture in either its composition or detailing. Also problematic is the treatment of the pool area. In the new project, the pool remains, but the bathhouse and the surrounding landscape architecture have been replaced by new vegetation. A large, molded plywood shade pavilion—an extremely important sculptural element of the exterior design—has been removed and relocated to a city park; unfortunately, the plywood panels have been replaced with concrete shells. The new landscape features reflect a southern California Medi-



terranean landscape tradition rather than a response to Church's Modern aesthetic.

#### **Property Values and Class Warfare: Preserving Lincoln Place**

The beach community of Venice, California (distinguished by canals and arcaded buildings that refer to its Italian ancestor) prides itself on being one of the “funkiest towns of America,” home to “artists and visionaries, musicians, entertainers, weightlifters, and many others.” The existence of affordable rental housing is necessary to support these lifestyles. Yet, the soaring value of coastal real estate has made it difficult to maintain reasonably priced housing in Venice. Lincoln Place Apartments is the battleground where these competing social and economic values are playing out. This postwar garden apartment complex was originally comprised of 795 one- and two-bedroom apartment units in fifty-two buildings, sited on thirty-eight landscaped acres of prime real estate.

The case for the historic significance of Lincoln Place Apartments rests on its association with the history and aesthetics of postwar garden apartment development. Lincoln Place was privately developed with the assistance of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) Section 608 Mortgage Insurance. (Section 608 was a 1942 addition to Title VI of the National Housing Act of 1934, intended to increase the number of rental units for defense workers.) Funding for this program increased exponentially after the close of World War II, in an effort to alleviate the critical national housing shortage. More than 400,000 apartment units

As in earlier episodes, the concept of a landscaped, low-density housing development was thought to be conducive to the creation of a harmonious community.

were built with Section 608 funding, in which rents were kept low.

The FHA published a series of brochures illustrating guidelines for the layout of housing complexes and individual unit plans. It recommended housing blocks framing landscaped courtyards and advocated low to medium density for the entire site, with segregation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and buildings designed to convey architectural unity but avoid monotony. As in earlier episodes, the concept of a landscaped, low-density housing development was thought to be conducive to the creation of a harmonious community. At Lincoln Place, such a community was created and thrived for more than fifty years. The project was considered a model of what could be accomplished within the limitations imposed by the FHA; later recipients of FHA mortgage insurance were sent to Lincoln Place for inspiration.

The current owners (and they have changed over the last few years) have demolished seven of the original buildings and evicted all but fifty households of senior and disabled tenants. An early scheme proposed to demolish the site and construct 708 condominiums and 144 affordable units. After protracted discussions and, more recently, mediation sessions, many of the original units (as many as 450 to 500) may be retained; however, the number of new units has not been settled, nor has the fate of the evicted tenants. Whatever the ultimate outcome, a thriving community of middle- to lower-income residents has been destroyed.

The impact of the Lincoln Place issue is not limited to Venice, Los Angeles, or even California. Its repercussions have been felt in our nation's capital. The case has been used to challenge state and national historical preservation laws. Attempts to list the property at a local level—as a Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Monument—failed. The State's Historic Resources Commission and the Historic Preservation Officer found the property eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (February 2003), but the National Register staff, in Washington, D.C., returned the nomination with a request for additional information. Subsequently, the State Commission has found it eligible twice for the California Register of Historical Resources. (The first time, the Commission's vote was challenged on technical grounds.)

While individual Modern houses may be highly valued, there is still much work to do in getting Modern commercial, industrial, and multi-family complexes recognized as worthy of preservation efforts, especially when increasingly dense urban areas are in search of developable properties. Both public agencies and private developers need to be educated—and when that fails, preservationists must be unafraid to use the legal tools available to them. ●



# The State Historical

## Resources Commission

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Luis G. Hoyos, AIA

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The majority of architects are not involved with the practice of historic preservation and are not familiar with the regulations that can serve to protect historic architecture and landscapes. However, as California continues to develop, architects are increasingly likely to be asked to modify or demolish historic properties. Knowledge of the historic preservation process can no longer be confined to a few specialists; it must become a necessary part of every architect's professional expertise.

The State Historical Resources Commission is central to preservation practice in the State. The Commission forms preservation policy for California and acts as gatekeeper for the listing of properties to the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources. The benefits of listing, along with the purely honorific, include safeguards under our environmental laws that would make modification or demolition of the resource more difficult. A listed building allows commercial property owners to capture the preservation tax credit, which has proven to be an effective financial incentive. However, as a listing can slow down or impede demolition and development, affecting property values and property rights, rulings are often controversial; hence, the Commission's acts are not always perceived to be beneficial by all.

### The Commission

The authority of the Commission comes from the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which mandated the formation of the Office of Historic Preservation and the appointment of the State Historic Preservation Officer. The statutes are embedded in the Public Resources Code. The form of the modern Commission was shaped in 1984, when the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP), itself founded in 1975, formed its first Commission. It is composed of nine appointed individuals who serve four-year terms. Five members must be from professional disciplines: history, prehistoric archaeology, architectural history, and architecture. Additional members cover the areas of folklife and ethnic history, and two members are from the public and may be

opposite: Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla,  
Louis I. Kahn, architect, 1959-66. photography by Luis G. Hoyos,  
AIA.



above: Aerial view of Santa Anita Racetrack property; Arcadia. Mall shown at left bottom. (Image: Google Earth).

appointed by the Governor to cover particular areas of interest.

The chair of the Commission runs the quarterly meetings, in which the Commission hears nominations to the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources, as well as other landmark programs. The chair makes sure the meetings are procedurally correct, in essence ensuring that there is fairness in the process. The commissioners (as a group) cannot have private discussions, due to state public meetings regulations, and they arrive at the meeting not knowing how their counterparts will vote. This makes for interesting discussions, as the chair tries to guide the group through the thicket of arguments for and against the listing of the resource. As the Commission is fairly professionalized, the discussions involving an archaeological site or a building or landscape can be quite detailed. Commissioners often change their mind in the course of deliberations, and split votes are quite common.

Nominations are received by the staff, which then issue staff reports recommending listing or denial of listing. Given the size and population of California, the state does not have a good track record for the number of nominations and listings in the registers as compared to other states. However, the Commission has been able to list buildings and sites that are

reflective of the remarkable diversity of cultures in our state.

The “easy” nominations usually involve a local preservation group that prepares a reasonable nomination that qualifies under one of the four criteria for listing: associative value to events (A) or persons (B), design or construction value (C), and information value (D). In this manner, we are able to list the vast majority of the nominations that come into OHP, such as historic houses, churches, office buildings, and burial sites.

The buildings and sites that are active development projects are considerably more difficult. In these cases, a finding of eligibility inevitably slows down a project, as additional oversight is necessary, but it does not by itself prohibit the demolition of a building or site.

Sometimes developers actually use the Commission to try to stop competing developments. A case in point is the Santa Anita Racetrack (1934 and thereafter, by Gordon Kaufman and others), which had been a WWII Japanese internment camp. The developer of a retail complex on a neighboring site wrote a nomination for the racetrack, essentially to block a larger retail complex from building on it. The Commission heard the nomination and voted to list the racetrack over the owner’s objections, recognizing the need to understand aspects of our past that illuminate the history

of the minority groups that make up significant portions of our population. Such actions are, however, in some sense an abuse of an otherwise honorable process.

Another significant and problematic case is the Salk Institute for Biological Studies (1959-66) by Louis I. Kahn, inarguably one of the most important California buildings of the twentieth century. The Salk was in the process of expanding, having already built a very controversial addition (the East Building) by Anshen and Allen in 1995. The neighborhood community raised issues about the limits of the new development, largely focusing on views and traffic. The Commission, however, was concerned about the preservation of the setting of this architectural monument.

All parties agreed the Salk should be listed. The controversy was over the precise boundaries of the resource, as the Salk insisted that an earlier proposed boundary of 100 feet around the major laboratory building was enough to safeguard the integrity of the site. The Commission was split over whether to go along with this, propose a larger adjusted boundary, or simply require the full property line as the resource boundary.

After several unsuccessful motions proposing alternative boundaries failed, the Commission voted to hear the matter at a later date and ultimately voted for the full bound-



above left: Santa Anita Race Track, Arcadia, 1934. photography by Luis G. Hoyos, AIA.

above right: Paseo de los Pobladores. County of Los Angeles Mall. Cornell Bridges and Troller, Landscape Architects, 1966. photography by Luis G. Hoyos, AIA.

ary, against the owner's wishes. The vote was understandable, given the institution's track record and the outpouring of support from major institutions and practitioners worldwide. The Commission determined that properties as important as the Salk need to be protected, period.

#### The Commission's Committees

The Commission can influence preservation policy in other ways than the listing of properties. One avenue is the formation of committees that are tasked with specific work in the areas that the Commission and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) think are important. The committees are composed of historians, academics, governmental officials, and preservation consultants who volunteer their time.

The Commission has seven active committees. For example, we have a legislative issues committee to track what's going on in the Assembly and Senate, especially in these times of increased attacks on preservation by so-called property rights groups. Beyond that, the chair has the freedom to select a particular topic or area of interest and appoint a committee to study it, which can be quite useful in advancing the cause of preservation. Two of the recent committees are the Committee on the Resources of the Modern Age, formed

by the prior chairperson, Dr. Lauren Weiss Bricker (see "Preserving the Monuments of our Modern Past," this issue of *arcCA*), and the Cultural Landscapes Committee, formed by the author.

As the Commission contributes to and edits the Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, California's policy blueprint, these committees can draw attention to particular resources, increasing their visibility and awareness on the part of the public. The most recent plan contains new sections on Cultural Landscapes, Heritage Tourism, and, importantly, a section on the Recent Past. This last section highlights the architectural contributions of the post-war period, in which California is unmatched in terms of number and quality of resources.

The Commission also serves as an information clearinghouse, connecting preservation organizations statewide and nationwide. Acute budgetary constraints limit the range of activities and programs OHP can run; the Commission and its committees get around the budgetary constraints by partnering with institutions such as the California Preservation Foundation and the Western Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, as well as universities and municipalities.

#### The Outlook

The reality in California is quite grim. The

forces of development and greed, property values, and property rights continue to gain strength, and even progressive plans by presumably enlightened developers can pose significant threats to preservation.

A currently unfolding case is the Grand Avenue Plan on Bunker Hill in Los Angeles. The ambitious plan proposes to reimagine Grand Avenue as a cultural and entertainment boulevard by building a number of structures, including a high-rise by Frank Gehry. While we can all applaud the choice of designer, preservationists have cause for concern regarding a little-discussed part of the plan that would tear down the County Courthouse (1958) and possibly the County Hall of Administration (1960) both by Associated Architects—Stanton Stockwell; Paul Williams; Adrian Wilson; and Austin Field and Fry—and re-design the central mall space (officially known as the Paseo de los Pobladores, 1966), by the landscape firm of Cornell, Bridges and Troller.

In order to properly shape this and other projects, continued education about the value of history and the practice of preservation, both in our schools and in the architecture profession, is as vital as the vigilance of the Commission. ●





# P(e)rese(ve)r<sup>V</sup>ing - Modernism

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Eric R. Keune, AIA

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Paffard Keatinge-Clay's ambitious but numerically modest architectural output is located primarily in the Bay Area, an ostensibly liberal, intellectual microclimate that has never been able to bring itself to embrace Modern architecture with the gusto of our neighbors in the southern portion of the state. The buildings were constructed mostly between the early 1960s and mid-1970s. Unsurprisingly, they have suffered a broad, if predictable, spectrum of neglect. What is surprising is how many of these works have persevered relatively intact over the approximately forty years since their making.

Having spent the last several years researching his work and visiting the buildings that still exist, I can offer a brief study of a cross section of preservation strategies, almost all accidental, across a realm which is both geographically and temporally finite. What is it about these works that merits preservation, and what has allowed them to survive (or not) to the present?

## PKC

Practicing architecture in San Francisco from 1960 until 1975, Paffard Keatinge-Clay left behind a legacy of architectural work in the Bay Area—some realized, others for which only paper documentation exists. The buildings are indices of a career marked in equal measure by synthesis and ambition and characterized by a series of apprenticeships with major architectural figures active between late 1940 and early 1960: Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Keatinge-Clay also shared an association with a host of other notable designers, including Myron Goldsmith, Mies van der Rohe, Sigfried Gideon, Richard Neutra, Charles and Ray Eames, Erno Goldfinger, and Rafael Soriano.

Born near Stonehenge in England, Keatinge-Clay grew up in the town of Teffont. He received his education from the Architectural Association in London, dual majoring in Architecture and Structural Engineering. His professional career began in Goldfinger's London office,

below: San Francisco State University Student Union,  
photography by Julius Shulman

opposite: San Francisco State University Student Union, today,  
photography by Jung Moo Lee





above: Great Western Savings and Loan, photography by Eric R. Keune

while he was still a student.

Keatinge-Clay worked for approximately one year in the studio of famed French architect Le Corbusier at 7 Rue de Sevres in Paris in 1948. While there, his work focused primarily on the Unite d'Habitation in Marseilles and on the plan for the town of Saint Die. After graduating, Keatinge-Clay left Europe, traveled across America, and apprenticed for a year at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin studios in both Wisconsin and Arizona.

In the early 1950s, Keatinge-Clay moved to Chicago, where he worked at the Chicago offices of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill on the Inland Steel and Harris Bank and Trust Buildings with Bruce Graham and Walter Netsch. He later transferred to the San Francisco office of SOM, where he executed the Great Western Savings and Loan Building in Gardena, California. It was from here, in 1961, that he left the firm and began his own office.

During the fourteen-year period from 1961 to 1975, Keatinge-Clay produced several buildings, many of which remain today. The most well-known and documented of these projects is a large-scale addition to the San Francisco Art Institute. Finally, in what would turn out to be both the most ambitious and professionally tumultuous project of his career,

he was selected to design the Student Union building at San Francisco State University. Difficulties, both technical and legal, resulted in his eventual departure from the U.S. to Canada, followed by an exodus through North Africa sometime in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He lives today in Malaga, Spain, and practices as a sculptor.

#### Works/Strategies

The following buildings still exist today, and most can be visited at will. What follows are some thoughts about the nature of what changes have taken place and what they mean to the intellectual intent of the built work.

#### Great Western Savings and Loan - Sympathetic Program/ Apathetic Stewardship

The Great Western Savings and Loan was intended as a prototype branch bank, which would be rolled out across the state (and later the country) as this local bank expanded throughout the '60s and '70s. The prototype was, however, prohibitively expensive, by virtue of its ambitious structural tectonics, which necessitated a continuous, seventy-two-hour pour of concrete to produce the signature roof. The building's carefully executed, exposed architectural concrete has been painted throughout

the exterior. The interior concrete of the roof remains exposed as intended, but the floor plan has been radically revised to include the ballistic resistant glazing assemblies characteristic of most branch banks in underserved, urban environments.

With minor exceptions, including the infilling of the drive-through teller windows and the addition of a supplemental vault, the building *parti* and massing remain legible. The painting of the exterior surfaces is a theme that will be regrettably repeated.

#### Northridge Medical Arts Building - Erasure of Identity = Palimpsest of Presence

The Northridge Medical Arts Building was (technically, still is) a small medical office building adjacent to the Northridge campus of California State University and coincidentally located a few feet from the epicenter of the 1994 Northridge earthquake. Julius Shulman documented the building photographically in 1964.

At an unknown point in the last five to ten years, perhaps following the earthquake, the building was completely stripped of its characteristic façades, the floor plates were extended out into the area of the *brise soleil*, and the whole building was reclad.



above left: Ender, photography by Eric R. Keune

middle: Tamalpais Pavilion (before) photography by Paffard Keatinge-Clay

above right: Tamalpais Pavilion (after), photography by Eric R. Keune

The building is virtually unidentifiable today, Keatinge-Clay's authorship verifiable only by the Corbusian handrails in the egress stairs and the steeply angled elevator machine room on the roof. Presumably, demolition of the signature elements of the building's architecture were too difficult and/or structurally impossible; thus one might imagine the possibility of the canopy and a cast in-place egress graphic lurking somewhere within a peach stucco-clad confection.

#### Tamalpais Pavilion - Obfuscation by Accretion

This small, *beton brut*, Miesian structure was the architect's own house and a showcase for post-tensioned concrete engineering. A series of subsequent owners has inflicted almost every indignity to the structure that can be imagined without demolishing it, and yet the clarity of the original idea can still be heard, if only in a whisper. The potential exists for the building to be returned to a state more in keeping with the ideas underpinning its conception, but the contemporary economics of real estate in Mill Valley argue strongly against modest houses, no matter how dramatically sited.

#### San Francisco Art Institute - Considered Intervention

This building, which put Keatinge-Clay on

the map, underwent extensive new master planning, a series of code compliance renovations, and modest additions within and around Keatinge-Clay's addition in the early 1990s. The vast majority of these operations occur within the loft-like environment of the studio box. As such, the flexibility of the building architecture accommodates these changes without great difficulty. The overall building remains much as it was the day it opened in 1971, a bright and vibrant location in the city. The most problematic addition is a computer lab in the space beneath the auditorium cantilever, which changes significantly the spatial understanding of the terrace level, while at the same time infilling clerestory glazing that admitted light into the painting studios below.

#### French Medical Center - Erosion

A three building master plan between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues at Geary Street in San Francisco resulted in two completed buildings: one, the descendant of Corbusian housing typologies, the other a descendant of a Miesian office building. Both were rendered in exposed concrete. Like the Great Western Savings and Loan, these buildings have been painted and had their windows tinted. The residential building is pending an imminent renovation.

#### Camino Alto Medical Center - Stasis by apathy

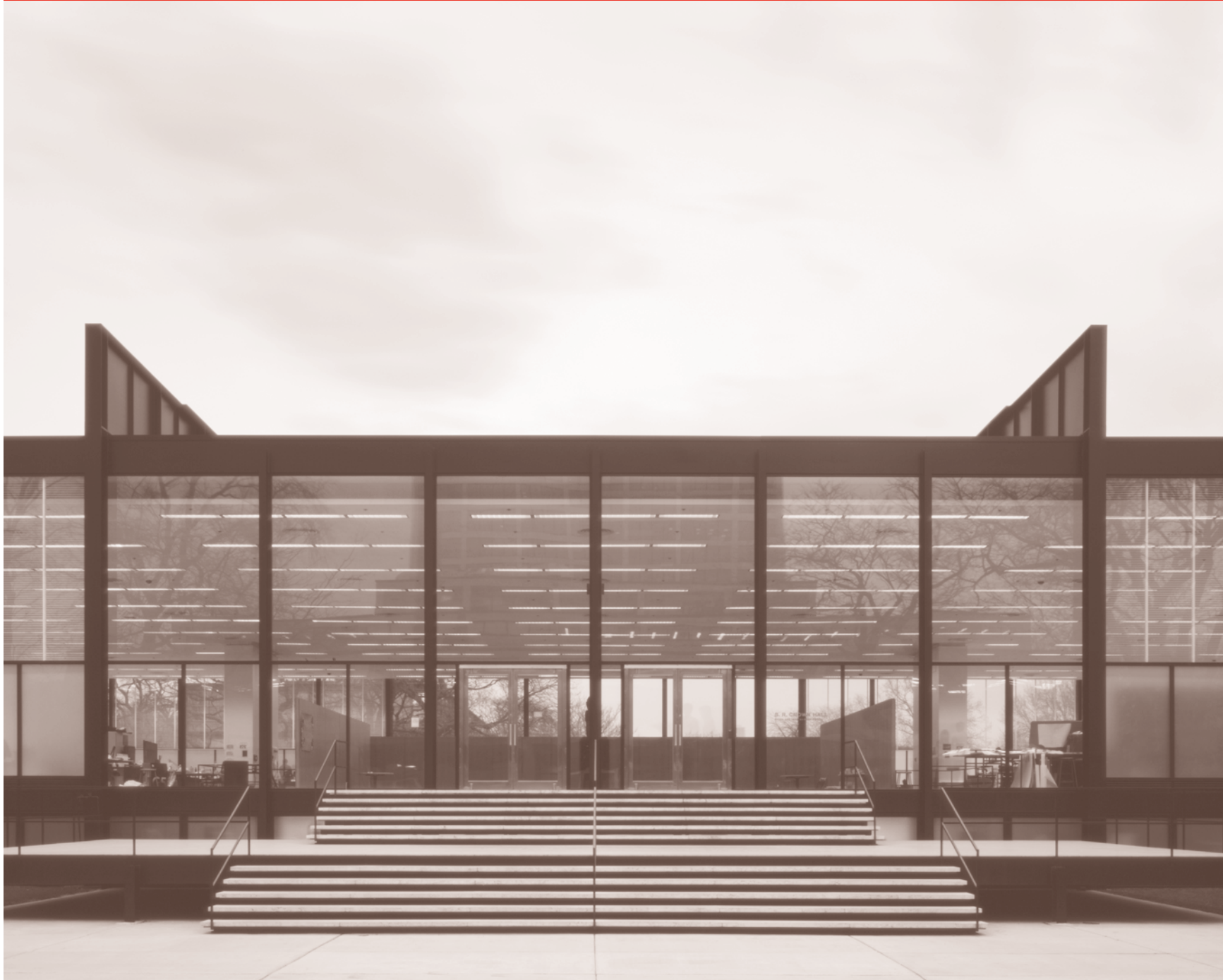
#### Ender Medical Building - Stasis by obscurity

Both of these buildings are modest office projects that are contemporaries of the Northridge building. Unlike Northridge, however, they remain virtually unchanged, due in large measure to the anonymity of both their location and the reticence of their architectural language. While the condition of these two buildings is notable for its purity, their architectural humility speaks only softly of the pedigree of their author.

#### San Francisco State University Student Union

#### - Missed Opportunities

SFSU recently completed a significant third floor addition to Keatinge-Clay's final building at the center of the campus. The authors of the addition were careful to graft an identifiable, architecturally "distinct" intervention to the rooftop level; the addition, however, seems to be characterized by a vocabulary whose inflection and timbre speak more to a high school in Diamond Bar than to a unique work of American architecture synthesizing a Wrightian plan with Corbusian elevations. A new plaza on the quadrangle side provides an organized, if modest, place for public gathering. ●



# The Technical Challenges

## of Preserving Modern Buildings

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Andrew Wolfram, AIA

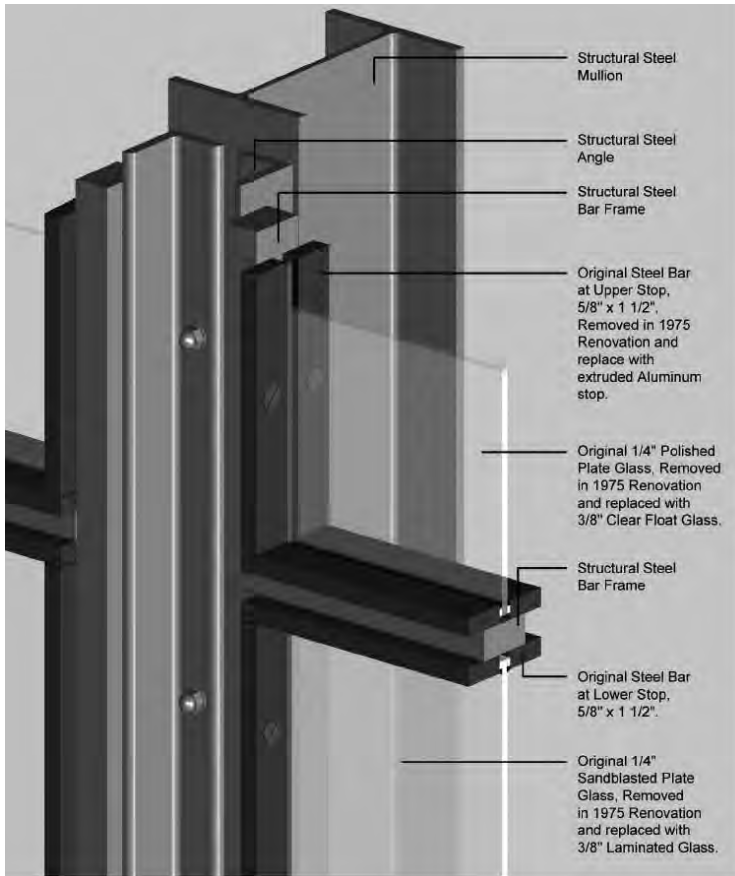
The very qualities that make the best Modern buildings and landscapes worth preserving are also those that make the process challenging and the outcome sometimes less than satisfactory. Tremendous transparency, a minimalist approach to detailing, experimental technologies, and program-driven design define some of the best modern architecture, but these concepts are often the ones most affected by changing use, concerns about security and access, new technologies, code requirements, and social patterns. While the Modern period includes a very diverse body of work by those practicing in many regions and over a long span of time, an understanding of these identifiable themes must be integrated into the restoration, rehabilitation, or adaptive reuse of almost any Modern building. A closer look at the fate of two significant and innovative buildings from the mid-1950s highlights these specific challenges and illustrates varying approaches by architects and owners in dealing with the legacy of important Modern buildings.

Blurring the boundaries between inside and outside through transparency, the use of extensive glazing, and carrying similar materials and details from the inside to the outside were seen by architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Paul Rudolph as ways to design for a modern lifestyle that embraced informality, a greater connection to the outdoors, and a more democratic approach to institutional buildings. Solid and imposing masonry edifices no longer conveyed the appropriate message for civic buildings, which instead were designed to be open and transparent. Maintaining this transparency and openness in a society obsessed with security and worried about energy costs is not easily solved without a real commitment to a preservation ethic and an appreciation for the design intent.

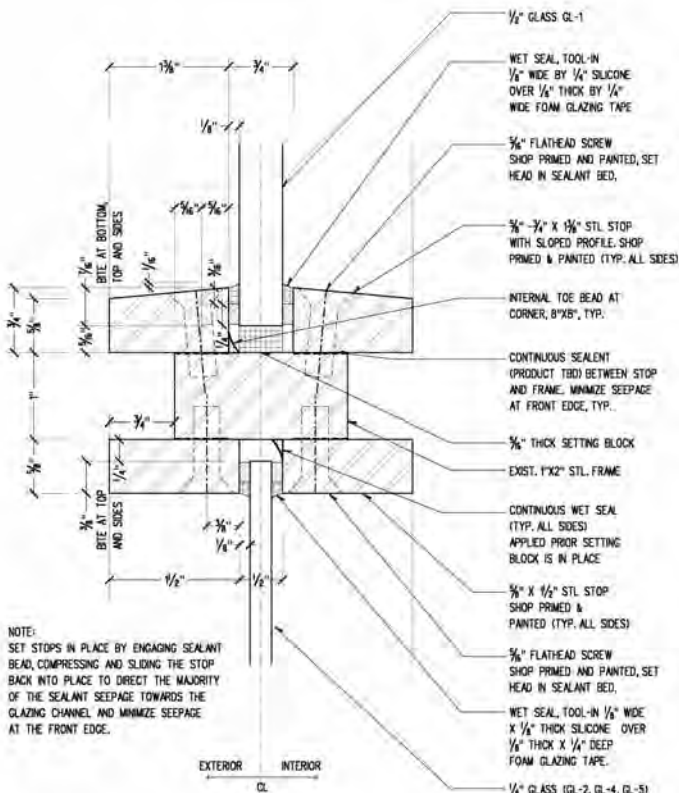
### **Crown Hall**

Mies van der Rohe's Crown Hall in Chicago, completed in 1956 to serve as the IIT School of Architecture, is one of the iconic buildings of the Modern Movement. A large, long-span, glazed pavil-

opposite: Mies van der Rohe, Crown Hall, IIT, Chicago.  
Photo by Todd Eberle.



Crown Hall, glazing stop, original (above) and new (below). Drawings courtesy of Krueck & Sexton



ion hovering over the ground plane, its structural elements are its main defining features. Over the years, its appearance and condition have suffered due to poor maintenance, as well as Mies's use of many experimental technologies—he pushed the envelope of tolerances in order to achieve the greatest effect from the fewest, smallest, and thinnest members. When IIT, with preservation architects Gunny Harboe and architects Krueck and Sexton, undertook a comprehensive restoration of the building in 2005, the rehabilitation of many architectural elements, which in any other building would not seem so important, required intense and careful scrutiny. Mies had used 1/4" glass for the building's enormous windows, many of which had broken over the years, and the remaining panes moved in the wind. Current codes require much thicker panes, but the thicker the glass, the greener the color becomes. The lower panes were originally designed by Mies to be sandblasted annealed glass, but safety glass is now required, and it's not typically possible to sandblast tempered glass; and laminated or etched glass has a different appearance in sunlight. Nevertheless, by working closely with glass manufacturers, the architects obtained sufficiently non-green clear glass and sandblasted tempered glass to maintain Mies's original vision. Had the owner desired a less expensive and more rapid solution, the effect of using a different type of glazing would have severely altered the feeling inside the building and compromised its appearance from the outside.

Minimalist detailing, characteristic of much Modern architecture, is taken to the extreme in Mies's design of Crown Hall. Even a small change can have a big impact when the details are so spare, crisp, and controlled, and the sense of proportion so important. Architects designing a rehabilitation or adaptive reuse of a Modern building need to evaluate and understand the original intent of each detail, so they don't inadvertently make changes that can completely alter a composition. One of the impacts of modifying the type of glass at Crown Hall was that the original stop design was no longer adequate to hold the thicker and heavier panes. So, while a thicker stop was accepted as inevitable, off-the-shelf components have an angled top, which was seen as incongruous in Mies's right-angled composition. In the end, an expensive custom stop was designed that closely resembled Mies's original and could support the new, thicker glass.

Many modern architects used innovative and experimental technologies in order to realize their design intent and to give the appearance of lightness and thinness. Innovative mechanical solutions were often incorporated into the building systems, including sophisticated methods of natural ventilation. Often the understanding of how these systems operate is lost over time, and they are not maintained. Mies incorporated operable vents into the top and bottom of the window system to allow cool air to flow in and hot air to flow out. Clogged by rust from the unmaintained steel structural system and by ivy growing on the outside, the vents had not worked for many years, leading many to believe that Mies had designed a completely sealed box requiring constant air conditioning. The restoration has allowed these vents to once again operate in

their original manner. Understanding how and why the architect used certain technologies is critical to being able to rehabilitate such features.

#### **Riverview High School**

Completed in 1958, shortly after Crown Hall, Paul Rudolph's Riverview High School in Sarasota, Florida, was also designed to open up to the landscape. In Rudolph's composition, two-story classroom blocks and separate gymnasium, auditorium, and administrative buildings are gathered around an open courtyard. The buildings' steel and glass skeletons allow for extensive views to the surrounding pine forests, and the pavilion-like quality of the campus provides ample opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. Carefully located floating concrete sunshades dominate the façade and exterior walkways, in order to protect glazed surfaces from direct sun, and were designed in conjunction with a complex natural ventilation system. Blaming concerns about security and the poor physical and environmental condition of the buildings, the School Board has recently decided that they will demolish and replace this outstanding work of architecture.

Rudolph's desire for a campus of buildings that are open and connected to the outdoors is at odds with the school's desire to control security and access. The natural ventilation system was never well understood and was replaced with a poorly functioning air conditioning system. When many of the concrete sunshades exhibited deterioration due to the thin and experimental quality of the concrete, the school decided to remove them, thereby overtaxing the building's mechanical systems and obliterating Rudolph's concept for climate and solar control. Finally, Rudolph's very specific design for each of the program elements does not allow for easy adaptation without a great deal of creative thinking.

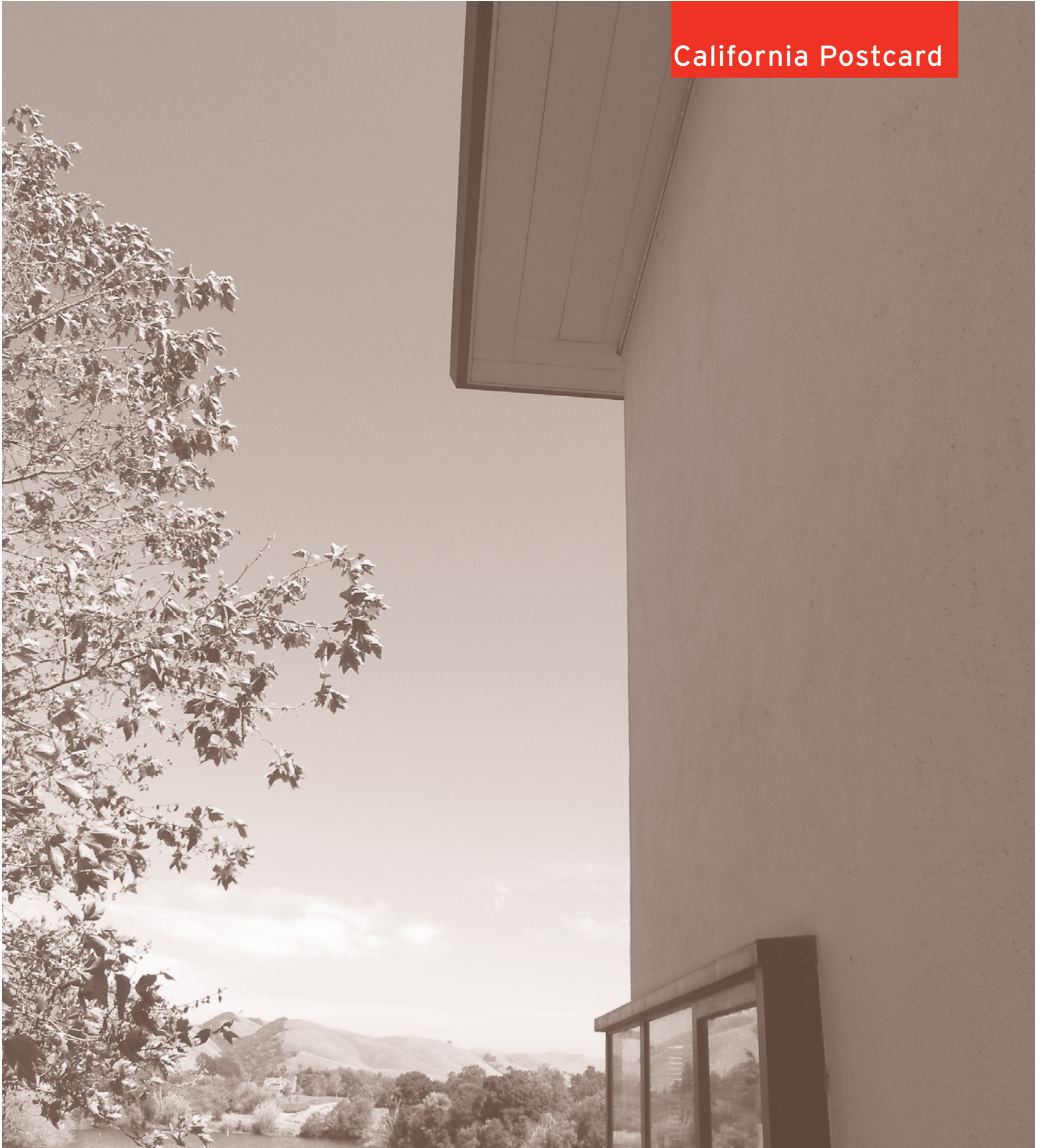
Unfortunately, the School Board has chosen to reject the Rudolph design and has not even attempted to solve these problems, many of which are of their own making. A more creative and sensitive approach would be to search for creative solutions to address each of the technical and program issues and figure out a way to rehabilitate the school and also restore the elements, which worked well in its original configuration, while designing new elements to solve the current programmatic problems.

#### **The Challenge of the Integrated Whole**

One of the most difficult aspects of rehabilitating a Modern building is that often the architect's original concept is a highly detailed composition that serves a very specific purpose. Each element contributes to the aesthetic whole and functions together. But as building programs and technologies change, adapting parts of this total unity can greatly affect the character of the design. Either the new program needs to compromise in order to accept the over-arching significance of the original design concept, or some change that may obscure or modify the original design intent is inevitable. Being respectful of the innovative and experimental quality of the original design will typically lead to the best and most creative solution.

The restoration of Crown Hall and the decision to demolish the Riverview School are opposite approaches to addressing the technical difficulties of preserving significant Modern buildings. At Crown Hall, IIT took an almost museum-like approach to the restoration, understanding that each individual element contributed to the complete design, and that no item was too small to warrant careful study and understanding of Mies's original thinking. At the Riverview School, the School Board decided that it would be easier to start from scratch with what will likely be a conventional and unmemorable replacement building than to try creatively to address the programmatic and technical challenges of rehabilitating a significant Modern building and updating it for today's needs. ●

California Postcard





# Where's Wurster?

Three Buildings in Niles, California, 1940 - 1944

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Paul Welchsmeyer, AIA

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No kidding! His work can be as elusive as Waldo: To preserve it, you have to find it. For fifteen years, I drove by this building, always wondering, aware of rumors that there may be others—but with no proof.

This historic mystery hadn't crossed my mind for some time, but when the City of Fremont (of which the Town of Niles is a part) became interested in demolishing the building, I felt it was time to know.

First, a comment about preservation—or do I mean conservation? Preservation implies financial assistance from sources other than the property owner (i.e. the public), to preserve a building and its use the “way it was”—even when the original use of the building no longer relates to present day needs. Preservation projects are few, but there are a lot of buildings ready for a second life, so we create new uses for them while retaining the shell: adaptive reuse, or “conservation.” Considering the works of Wurster, the architect may have preferred conservation to preservation, himself.

It is best, we think, to know our grandparents before we bury them: who they were, their beliefs, passions, accomplishments, and loves. But what if it is not one's time to be buried? And what if no one remembers who you were? With “historic” architecture, such forgetfulness rarely occurs. But when it comes to Modernism, beware. Inflammatory words are muttered every day: “It's not Victorian; it's not Spanish; I do not like it; I think it's ugly; how can it be historic?” Well, it's Modern.

## The Hunt

If this mystery building had any local historic value, the city didn't want to hear about it. But for my part, a simple visit to the Cal Berkeley Environmental Design Archives was all it took. The assistant curator said the research would be easy, since the cataloging of the Wurster, Bernardi

opposite: View from Grau residence to Grau Pond, 2006,  
photography by Paul Welchsmeyer



left: View of Grau Pond, circa 1950. Courtesy of Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley  
 right: Dr. Grau Medical Office Building, 1941

& Emmons (WBE) collections was recently completed.

“What’s the name of the town?”

“Niles.”

“Let’s see what’s in the database.”

Bingo!

1. Dr. Eugene Grau Residence, 1941
2. Dr. Eugene Grau, Medical Office, 1941
3. Schuckl Plant No. 1, 1944

I had all the information needed to prove, to whomever was interested, that there were, in fact, three(!) Wurster buildings in Niles—one of which the city wanted to demolish: the Dr. Grau Medical Office Building.

#### Would Anyone Listen?

Knowing that cities sometimes seem like machines of unaccountable madness, I called a city council member to discuss the “find” over a cup of coffee—hoping a little newfound history and pride could have a positive effect on stopping the demolition plans. Not surprisingly, the council member had never heard of William Wurster, but when I mentioned *Sunset* magazine and California outdoor living . . . the

door opened: a grand smile appeared. Connections were made with the Cal Berkeley College of Environmental Design, the dean at MIT. Wurster’s achievements were discussed, and the council member was enlightened.

Now, the need to demolish this Wurster building was related to plans for a new fire station. The perplexing part was the selected site. Niles has at least five empty lots large enough to accommodate the new neighborhood fire station, and these other sites were actually better situated to serve the community.

The public design meetings on the new Niles fire station were well attended: three to four meetings over a few months, with approximately sixty attendees at each session. Yet, although the community requested repeatedly that the fire and planning departments look at the other empty lots in town, the same project would appear at the next meeting, on the same lot, with no additional research, and no good reason. What was going on?

It all became clear to me during the council meeting in which the city staff presented the site selection and their community out-

reach process. After the public input was over, during the council’s deliberation, I joined members of the fire department at the back of the council chamber.

“Why are you so hell-bent to build where no one wants you to, and destroy this building?” I asked. Silence. Then, a sincere gaze—and a whispered answer: “It is not us!” An inconspicuous gesture toward the city council said everything.

So, whom do you trust, whom can you talk to? Thank goodness for CEQA.

#### Remember . . . It’s Modern!

To be clear, all of the debate around the new fire station did not focus on the Wurster building. Remember, it’s Modern, and many within the community were stupefied that it could be considered historic. But after the city publicly had become aware that it had potential historic significance, CEQA required an evaluation. Three months later, San Francisco architectural historians Page and Turnbull, Inc. delivered their findings.

It was red-hot historic, and in addition to



Dr. Grau Medical Office Building, photography by Paul Welchsmeyer Architects

confirming the significance of William Wurster, the report also brought to light the role of his client. Dr. Grau (1901-1971) was not only a prominent leader in the Nilcs community, but also a company doctor for the Pacific States Steel Mill, and a member of the University of California Art Council, the Stanford Alumni Association, and the Alameda-Contra Costa County Medical Society. His office building was basically a one-man hospital, as it was the only medical facility between Oakland and San Jose, and could be considered the predecessor to the Washington Hospital system in Fremont.

His wife, Ethel (1905-1988), was the daughter of Manuel Valencia (1856-1935), a tonalist landscape painter from San Francisco. Her uncle was General Gabriel Valencia, the administrator at the San Francisco Presidio. Ethel studied art at the California School of Fine Arts and the California College of Arts and Crafts, became known for her watercolors, and exhibited her work at the Oakland Museum, the San Francisco Art Association, and the De Young Museum. The city council changed its story.

#### What's It Worth?

What had happened? Who now suffers and who gains? Has something been preserved, conserved, or worse? And does the general public actually care?

In this case, what would it mean to the property owner when his building was identified as "historic"? The city walked—who else would?

At the onset of this discovery, and acutely aware of the pitfalls of owning a historical structure, I took the time to get to know the building's owner. I explained the history. I didn't get much of a reaction. He wondered what all the fuss was about and actually didn't know any more than anyone else had. He wouldn't mind selling it to the City, he admitted, at a fair market price!

Then one day he called me. "Paul, I've been on the Internet for the past three hours—it's amazing," he gushed. "It didn't sink in when you told me, but I can't believe it—I just can't believe it! I know who this guy was. I remember . . . all that outdoor living stuff. I own a Redwood Bob building, I actually own a Redwood Bob!"

Well, "Redwood Bill," actually. But pride comes in many forms. And that is worth preserving. ●

*Editor's note: the full 2005 Historic Resource Evaluation of the Office of Dr. Grau, by Page & Turnbull, Inc., is available at [www.fremont.gov](http://www.fremont.gov); type "Grau Historical Resource Evaluation" in the search box.*



Preserving

# Schindler

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Judith Sheine

There are special problems in preserving the modernist architecture of R.M. Schindler (1887-1953), who worked outside the conventions of flat-roofed white boxes. Schindler was born and educated in Vienna, where he was taught by Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos. The young architect went to Chicago in 1914, began working for Frank Lloyd Wright in 1918, and came to Southern California in Wright's employ in 1920, to supervise construction of Aline Barnsdall's Hollyhock House. Schindler quickly established both his practice and his own style of architecture in Southern California with his house on Kings Road, built in 1922, a house identified by architectural historian Kathryn Smith as the first modern house. He called his style "Space Architecture"; it was characterized by very individualized designs, closely tied to their sites, that blurred the distinction between interior and exterior spaces and brought natural light into complex interiors through a manipulation of the section and experimental roof forms. Schindler himself sharply contrasted his work with that of International Style practitioners such as Richard Neutra. Although his early buildings—particularly his concrete experiments—were widely published, as his work diverged from the Modernist norm, Schindler was marginalized by critics and increasingly ignored by the press.

So, how does this history impact the preservation of Schindler's work? When an architect's reputation suffers, his built works are less likely to be valued, maintained, and preserved. Los Angeles should be one of the best places in the U.S. for the preservation of Modernism; its benign climate, history of tolerance of different styles of architecture, and legacy of Modern houses make it Modernism's natural home. Yet even here most homeowners prefer traditional styles, and, while Modern residential architecture finally seems to be acquiring mass appeal, and Schindler's recently improved reputation (in the last two decades his work has been the subject of numerous publications and a retrospective organized by MoCA) has increased the value of his work, most of his houses are small, eccentric, and designed very specifically for their original cli-

opposite: Hiler House and Studio, Los Angeles, 1941,  
photo by Judith Sheine



left: Rodakiewicz House, Beverly Hills, 1937; right: Goodwin House, Studio City, 1940-1941; photos by Judith Sheine

ents, making them appeal to a smaller market.

Perhaps the best-known, recently demolished Schindler project is the Wolfe House (1928) on Catalina Island, which was torn down in 2001. One attempt to purchase and demolish the building had been thwarted by the intervention of Society of Architectural Historians members who threatened to sue, but the new owner was issued a demolition permit by the city of Catalina, and the house was gone before anybody in a position to stop it could notice. But the problem of preserving the Wolfe House existed long before rising real estate values made the land more valuable than the house, an increasingly common problem in California. For decades, the owner of the Wolfe House had neglected to maintain it; it had looked like a ruin long before its demolition. It wasn't clear if the house could be restored in any way that did not involve a near-complete rebuilding.

And neglect is not the only way to doom a house; excessive remodeling, often thought by current owners to "improve" the property, can alter the original nearly beyond recognition and practicable restoration, as has been the case with the Rodakiewicz House (Los Angeles, 1937). Even lesser alterations can be

problematic; the second owner of the Skolnik House (Los Angeles, 1950-52) ripped out or painted over built-in furniture critical to the spatial scheme and added new glazed openings, making restoration challenging for the current owners.

Schindler continually experimented with forms, materials, and construction methods, and nearly always acted as his own contractor, allowing him to build his modern houses more cheaply than other architects could, which helped to keep his modest practice going continually through the Depression. However, inexpensive construction makes regular maintenance more critical, and Schindler's complex sections and roof forms led to the opportunity for multiple leaks. Some experimental materials either failed or performed in less than satisfactory ways. The Insulite (a material made from cane) panels used on the exterior of a cabin in Wrightwood (1924) that Schindler designed for the Lovells (the owners of his far better known house in Newport Beach, 1926), took on water and disintegrated in heavy rains. Similarly, the excessive lime content in the sand used in the concrete of the Pueblo Ribera Court in La Jolla (1924) caused the walls to erode and leak. The archi-

tect experimented with translucent corrugated fiberglass in the late 1940s; he had the roof panels at the Tischler house (Los Angeles, 1949-50) dyed a dark custom shade of blue in an attempt to prevent too much heat build-up, but even after the trees had grown to shade the house, Adolph Tischler had to cover half the translucent surfaces with plywood to make the house livable.

What is the best way to deal with these problems? How much can be changed without ruining the aesthetic intent? In the case of the Tischler House, Schindler's goal of creating "a feeling of color throughout the atmosphere" continues to be realized; the house is still suffused with blue light. But even good intentions can go awry. I designed Schindler-like built-in plywood furniture for the Rodriguez House (Glendale, 1940-42), following some rough Schindler sketches, that I now think simply confuse Schindler with Sheine. In the case of recent reproductions of Schindler's folding chairs designed for the Gordon House (Los Angeles, 1950), an attempt to strengthen them by increasing the thickness of the half-inch plywood changed the proportions too much, making the furniture look heavy. Details matter, even when those details lead to mainte-



left: Harris house, Los Angeles, 1942; right: Skolnik House, Los Angeles, 1950-1953; photos by Judith Sheine

nance headaches. Thickening the profile of Schindler's very thin, late roofs (constructed of rolled roofing laid over two inch wood decking), even to reduce leaks or add insulation, has to be considered very carefully.

Schindler was very interested in color and employed a series of natural palettes, using colors he felt were appropriate to the site and setting. He did not favor primary colors or pastels, noting that in nature bright colors were reserved for short-lived phenomena such as flowers and rainbows. Instead, he used a variety of colors, including ochres and yellowish greens, pinkish browns, deep reddish purples, and intense blue-greens, seldom favored by other Modern architects. Many owners and even serious architects find it hard to accept that Schindler really used these colors or did so by choice (they speculate that the colors must have been forced on him by the original clients). They frequently substitute white or their own color preferences, even when faced with the evidence of Schindler's original intentions in colors found after scraping off layers of paint. The recent restoration of the Wolff House (Los Angeles, 1938), displaying a yellow ochre and a deep pink, may shock some observers, but in the unique sunlight of Southern

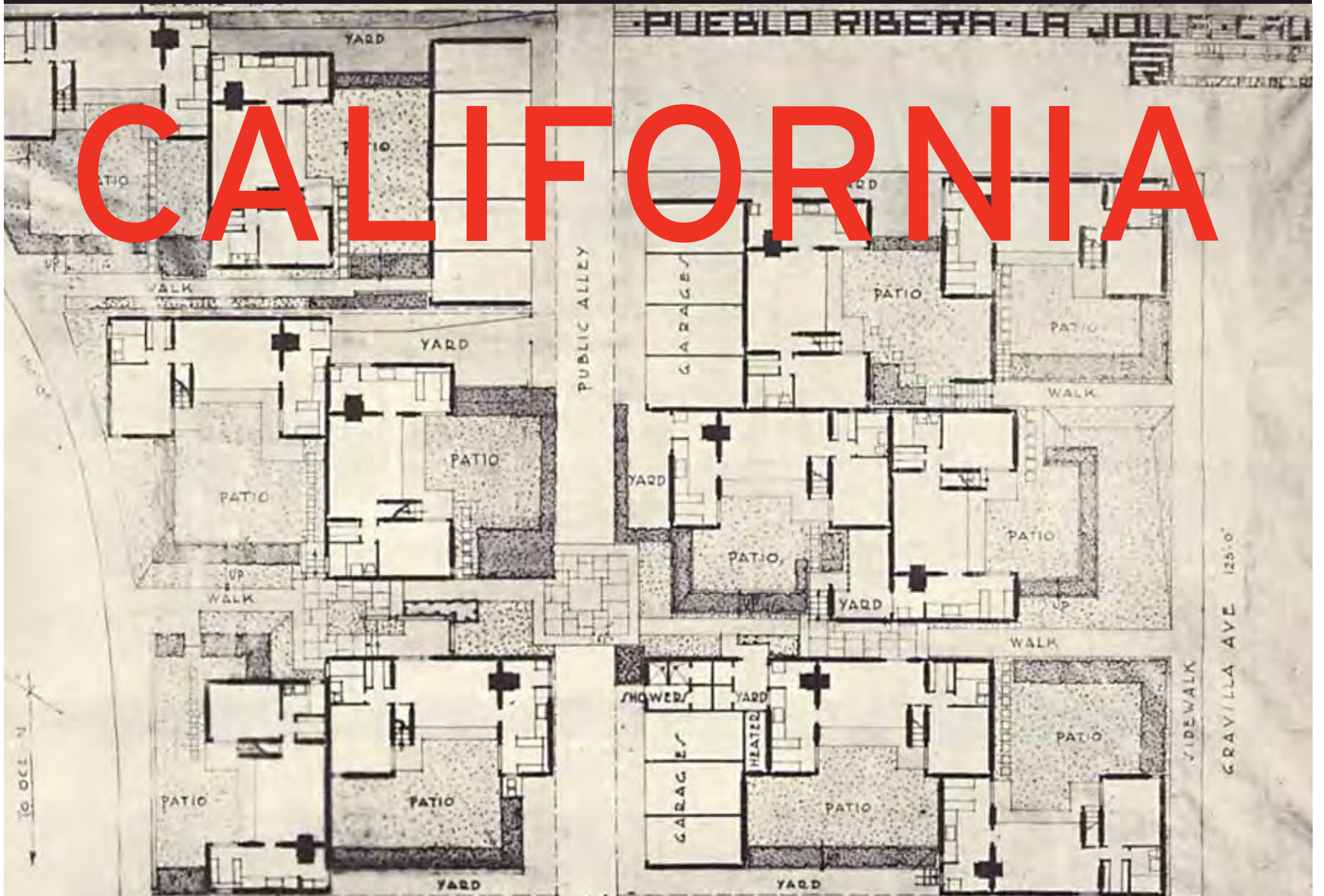
California the colors demonstrate Schindler's vision of the house fitting into its setting.

Similarly, Schindler did not paint his plywood built-in furniture and wall panels; he stained them, allowing their natural grain to show through. Many of the surviving surfaces have been heavily painted over, and stripping the paint and restaining is a laborious and expensive process. Nevertheless, the current owner of the Bubeshko Apartments (Los Angeles, 1938, 1941), who bought the property from the original owner, spent the time and money to strip the plywood on the extensive built-ins, allowing the stained plywood volumes to contrast with the painted plaster surfaces, revealing the richness of Schindler's original spatial intentions.

For architecture, context is critical, and particularly for the architecture of Schindler, in which siting, views, and natural light were integral to the building's design and conception. At Schindler's own house and studio on Kings Road, the context has changed radically. Irving Gill's seminal Dodge House (1914-16), on the other side of the street, was torn down in 1970, and few single-family houses remain. While a four-story apartment building to the north of the Schindler House has long towered over the

one-story structure with its lightweight rooftop sleeping baskets, at least it does not block the sunlight for the house and its outdoor spaces. The apartments currently under construction to the south, replacing a 1920s single-family house, will block much of the light to the property, particularly in the winter, significantly altering one of the most distinctive features of the house: an extensive use of different types of glazing, including clerestory windows, that have allowed light from four directions into all four studio spaces. While Schindler, one of the most experimental Modern architects of his time, who reinvented his own architecture again and again during his career, clearly embraced change, it is hard not to believe that he would have been displeased by this development. Had the new building responded more sensitively to Schindler's design principles, perhaps a more sympathetic design would have resulted. The presence of the Schindler House, if only for its open space, represents a significant asset to the developer next door. Wouldn't it be fair if the special qualities of the house Schindler created could be valued in the same way? ●

# CALIFORNIA





# Modernism:

Models for Contemporary Housing

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Paul Adamson, AIA

The recent Modernist revival has reached popular consciousness. Television ads regularly feature Modern homes as backdrops for companies pitching new cars, pain pills, and phone services. The mid-century style has even made inroads into commercial developer housing. Is this merely a marketing trend, playing on the nostalgia of late baby-boomers, or is there something more essential at work here? Developers have typically sought to make their product attractive by employing vernacular elements to foster associations with familiar notions of home. Vernacular elements may be purely appliqué, such as face brick and half-timber, or formal elements, such as porches and dormers. Mid-century design has a vernacular of its own, although given the relatively minimal vocabulary of Modernism, its identifiable elements tend to be formal rather than purely decorative; broad expanses of glass and deep overhanging eaves are the product of indoor-outdoor planning, essential responses to lifestyle and climate. Popular shelter magazines have proselytized this theme, echoing the philosophy of mid-century Modernist designers who argued that style is not the issue: The design, they claimed, serves to support the functional activities of the occupants, and expression is the byproduct of rational problem solving.

Exemplary recent developments in such hotbeds of Modern revival as Palm Springs offer convincing evidence that these concepts are appreciated and, indeed, popularly embraced. That these concepts have been adopted in sizable developments—the July 2005 *Architectural Record* features two Palm Springs tracts of forty-eight units each and a forty-six-unit development in Phoenix—demonstrate that recent Modernist projects have broached not only the issues of style and form, but planning principles as well. The apparent commercial success of these projects suggests they may well become models for future housing developments at a time when population growth and land values are booming, particularly in the West. What's more, the architects for these housing projects—Will Bruder in Phoenix and the L.A.-based DesignARC for the Palm Springs projects—subscribe to specific mid-century design models. This suggests not only that

opposite: R. M. Schindler, Pueblo Ribera Courts, plan, courtesy of Architecture and Design Collection, University Art Museum, UC Santa Barbara.



left and center: R.M. Schindler, Pueblo Ribera Courts, La Jolla; right: Greenwood Common, Berkeley. Photos courtesy of the author.

Modernist design sells, but, more importantly, that its fundamentals remain viable. As newer projects are commissioned for much needed, moderately-priced housing on diminishing and increasingly precious land stock, design precedents that suit the climate and lifestyle of the West are increasingly valuable resources for designers.

The models cited in the published examples above are from the familiar canon of California Modernists: Rudolph Schindler, co-founder, with Richard Neutra, of California's European-inspired Modernist vernacular, and A. Quincy Jones, the long-time USC Dean, an inheritor of the style and long-time Eichler architect. The specific Palm Springs design precedents are not as predictable. The Schindler-inspired development, 48@Baristo, drew from the beautiful but somewhat obscure Pueblo Ribera project, a vacation complex in a state of decay since its construction in the mid-twenties near the coast in La Jolla.

Schindler, long considered second best to the more famous Neutra, has more recently received his due through a number of scholarly efforts, including the 1997 William Stout reprint of David Gebhard's 1980 book, *Schindler*, which had been available for years only as a brittle paperback. Neutra and Schindler's work was rooted in the fundamental tenets of European Modernism: economy of means,

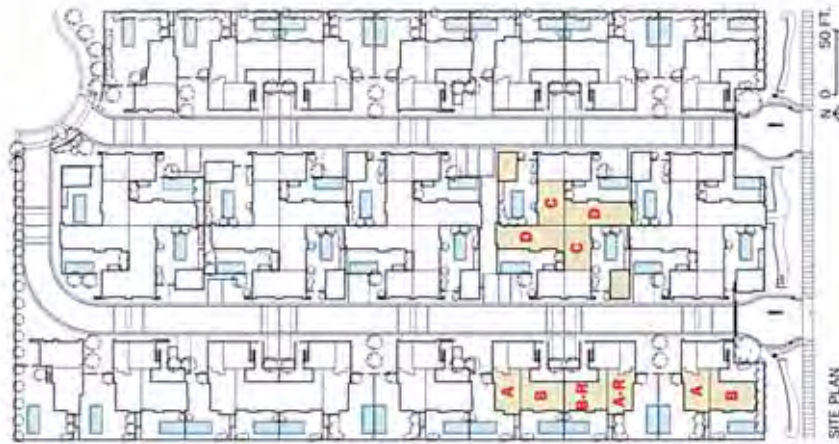
attention to health, and the ambitious use of modern building techniques. They brought a broad world view that encouraged others, including those who would design mass housing, such as the Eichler architects, to follow a design method marked by formal rigor but one that nonetheless reflected regional traditions.

The revival of mid-century Modernism is encouraging, because it acknowledges necessary economies and reflects regional values. A wholesale adaptation of mid-century technique is difficult; material choices are restricted by rising costs, construction technology is largely limited to conventional practice, and land values cramp the potential for indoor/outdoor planning. Nonetheless, much of the best design work by the leaders of California Modernism was imbued with formal inventiveness and social purpose, and the products, both intentional and happenstance, have left us models worthy of renewed study when aiming for higher density developments that retain essential regional and modern characteristics.

Schindler's Pueblo Ribera Courts, completed in 1923, although small (there are a dozen units), is a valuable example for reasons both practical and spiritual. At the scale of the site, the ingenious arrangement of C-shaped units, placed in connected pairs with party walls, ensured privacy for all the residents, despite their proximity. A single driveway

bisects the layout, and two garages are tucked behind units on either side, concentrating the area for vehicular use. Access to individual units is by way of walking paths. These techniques, handled here with particular care and efficiency, are familiar and have been replicated elsewhere. What gives the complex its special magic is the degree to which Schindler has exploited the potential living spaces on each tiny lot. Each unit has three distinct types of living space: indoors, enclosed court, and roof terrace; each, as architectural historian Esther McCoy has pointed out, communicating naturally with the others. McCoy further notes that Schindler exercised strict economies of means in construction to support the most commodity from these minimum dwellings, creating light-filled living rooms opening onto private gardens and rooftop terraces with ocean views. The design fulfills Modernist ideals of inventiveness and economy while enriching the resident's tangible experience of this archetypal Californian setting. Here, McCoy notes, Schindler has captured spaces that allow the owners to indulge in what he called "the vital luxuries of life."

In the Bay Area, a number of community plans on various scales provide inspiration for reproduction. Joseph Eichler's subdivisions are continually celebrated for their community values—planning strategies that antici-



Packed together with density comparable to Pueblo Ribera, the DesignARC development in Palm Springs likewise manages to overcome cheek-by-jowl circumstances to provide commodious living rooms interlocked with private outdoor spaces, this time supplemented with the unexpected vital luxury of a plunge pool for each unit. For more on this project, a 2006 AIACC Design Award winner, see page 78.

pated PUD concepts. In the Berkeley hills, Greenwood Common is an accidental model of near ideal suburban form. Planned by William Wurster, the development consists of half a dozen homes by notable Modernists including Harwell Harris, Ernest Kump, and Schindler. The original plan called for a seventh home to fit between the others, creating a more or less solid cluster of private residences, unrelated to one another except for their common styles. However, the final piece was never filled in, and thankfully. It became a shared open space, a lawn with trees, big enough for picnics or games of touch football. A path leading from the green through a space between two of the houses allows a stunning Bay view. Even without this gorgeous setting, one can easily imagine the complex at twice the density as a reproducible module for new development, where a recurring theme is the profound desire for community. Greenwood Common suggests that interconnectedness, of social group and within a region, can be created by straightforward formal arrangements. With careful proportioning, the combination of closely spaced units and shared open space can foster familiarity and security.

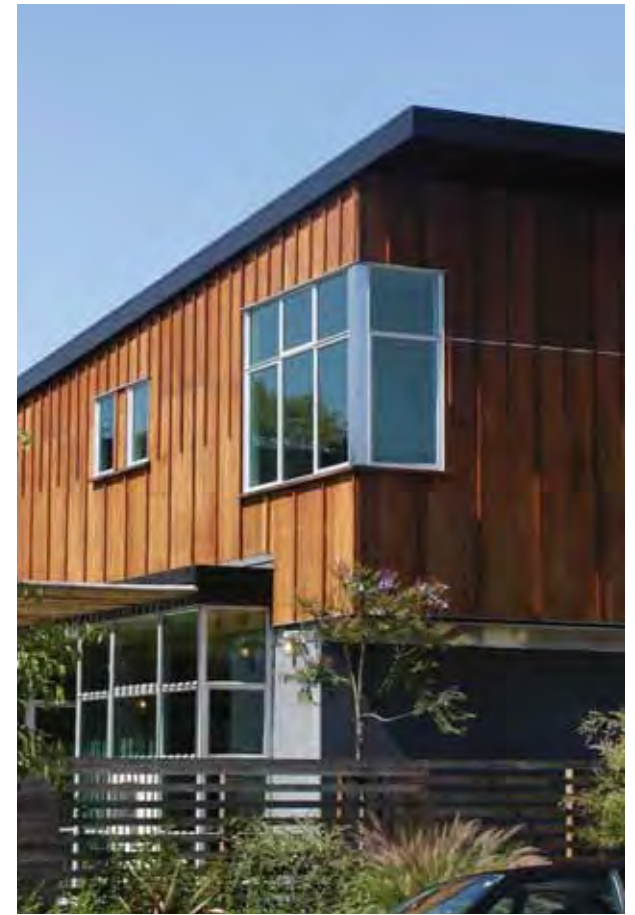
Today, California is entering a period of extensive population growth. Planners anticipate an additional fifteen million residents in the next thirty years. Many of the new citi-

zens will be middle class or working class, and affordable housing stock will be imperative. The revival of interest in Modernist housing seems fortuitous, if it also inspires renewed interest in the Modern Movement's core values, which originated to address the housing needs of urban workers.

California Modernism flourished in the mid-century during a profound need for entry-level homes. The benign climate and lack of social tradition engendered a unique vernacular. Planning models, although often limited to small, one-off clusters, still provide meaningful expression and utility. America's larger scale planning strategies from this period tended to prescribe forms derived from the automobile's promise of an ever-stretching exurban expansion. Driven in equal parts by cold war fears and the implied moral purity of rural living, academics and leading practitioners alike envisioned a decentralized populace supported by small-scale industry and agriculture. Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City wove suburban and urban building typologies into a continuous fabric of regional agriculture and parklands. Ludwig Hilberseimer, Professor of Urban Planning at IIT postwar, imagined replacing the nation's core cities with a regional pattern of small industrial parks and strips of cul-de-sac residential plats slung on either side of the snaking tendrils of a vast intercon-

nected nationwide highway network, a vision that now seems remarkably prescient.

Recently, there has been a convergence of opinion among planners, developers, and academics that future growth can best be managed with more traditional urban forms. The key concept is connected space, which means neighborhoods with services and stores within walking distance of home. It also implies connectivity among social strata and age groups. Upwardly mobile families seek separate residences, while new immigrants, retirees, and singles need townhouses and apartments. Planners are responding to the diversity of housing needs with village precedents. Others are proposing reviving down-at-the-heels existing town centers and restoring transit routes ripped out during the car-centric 1950s. The scale of expected growth will require continued greenfield development, as well. Somewhere between New Urbanist ideals and Ludwig Hilberseimer's new regional pattern lies a viable future course. California's Modern legacy will almost certainly provide lessons for contemporary designers and planners. Additionally, I expect, we shall need to look back, as our predecessors did, to the sources of Modernism in Europe for typologies that can accommodate the emerging needs, high densities, diversity of residents, and multiple functions implied by our expanding culture. ●



## Under the Radar

### Adeline Cottages, Oakland



A complex of four small houses at 61st and Adeline in Oakland takes advantage of an unusual provision of the city's zoning code, which allows "mini-lots" as small as 2,500 square feet in the R40 zone. Developed, designed, and constructed by Wilson Associates, the original idea was for a group of condominiums with shared open space, but the "mini-lot" provision allowed subdivision into four freehold lots averaging 2,700 square feet.

The simple, repeated plan of the 1,400 square foot cottages opens to a side yard, maximizing the connection between the living area and the outdoors. The plan is rotated to provide privacy and take advantage of views. To avoid the usual slab on-grade experience of being a slight 2" above the grass, the slab is 18" thick, simply poured on-grade without the necessity of soil exporting or compaction. This method is fast and raises the house without having to use a T foundation with wood joists. The wood-clad upper floor, comprising two bedrooms and two baths, is rendered as if it were the cottage itself, raised up to shelter the



open living space below.

The location of the ensemble of cottages at the convergence of two oblique major streets turns a geometrically simple composition into a lively interplay of volumes seen in changing perspective.

Wilson Associates, made up of architect Peter Wilson; his brother Tony, a builder/attorney; and sister Sara, administrator, began their develop/design/build enterprise in 1986 with Market Hall, in the Rockridge district of Oakland. This mixed-use development, innovative for its time, is inspired by the European food hall experience of shopping daily for fresh ingredients purchased from individual purveyors. It combines owner-operated retail food shops and restaurants at street level with professional offices above. Peter Wilson emphasizes the advantages of the develop/design/build model, not only for building equity toward what, for many architects, is an elusive goal—retirement—but also because it allows true design control throughout the project. Witness, for example, their decision to rotate one

of the Adeline Cottages 180 degrees to capture an unanticipated view—after the foundation was in place. ●

#### Project Team Listing

**Owner:** Wilson Associates

**Architect:** Peter Wilson, AIA

**Associate Architect:** Jim Arjala, AIA, Arjala Architecture

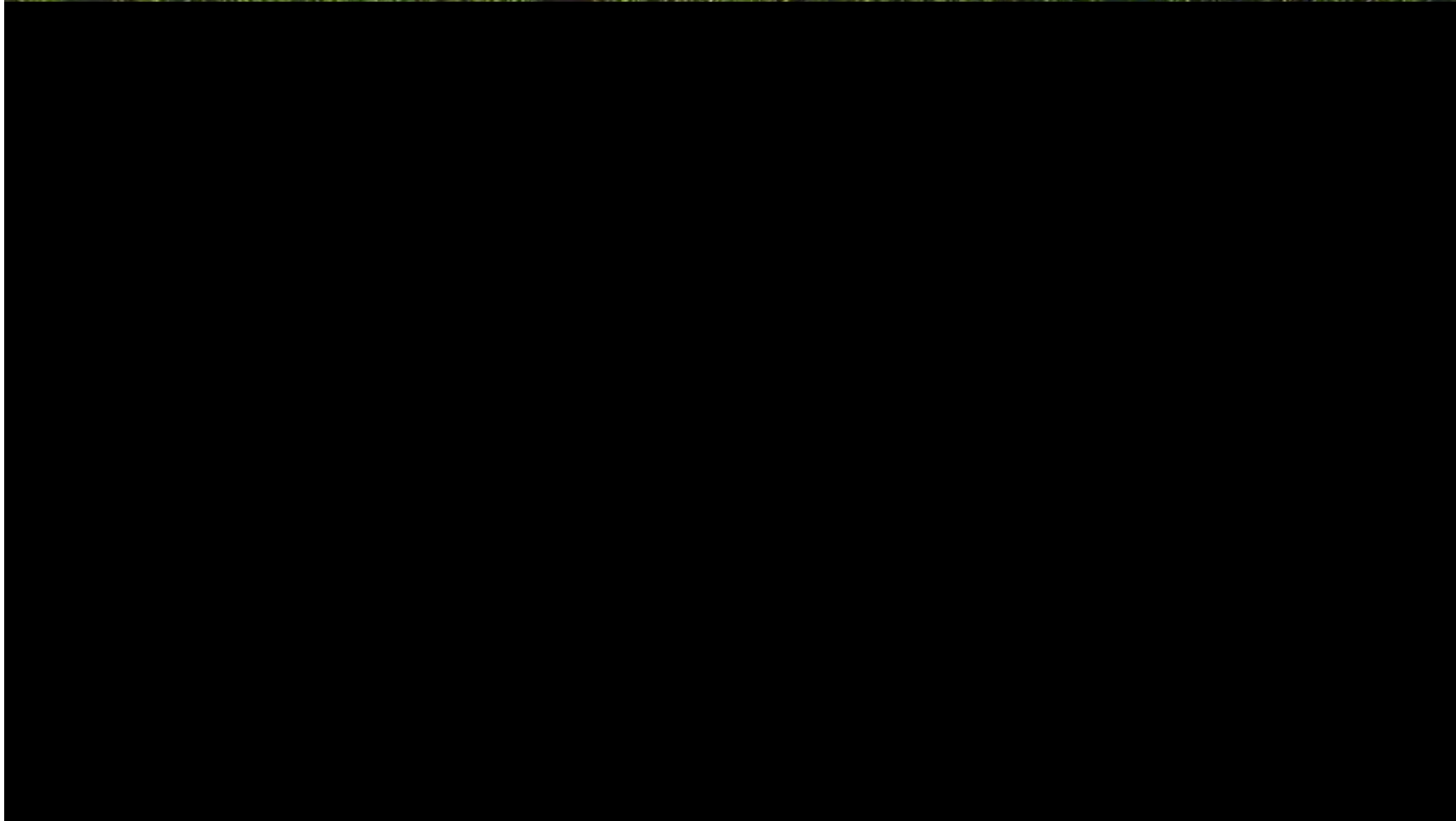
**Structural Engineer:** Jason Campbell, JEC Structural Consulting

**Soils Engineer:** Allen Gruen, Earth Mechanics Consulting Engineers

**Surveyor:** Chris Bailey, Bates and Bailey Surveyors



Photographs by Peter Wilson, AIA



Component Feature:

## Relevance: AIA Sierra Valley

Christina Frankel, AIA, and Mark Hart, AIA

Relevance is the guiding theme of the AIA Sierra Valley (AIASV), located in the center of Northern California. How does such a small, unstaffed chapter stay relevant while surrounded by some of the largest AIA chapters in California? And how does a small professional chapter stay relevant in our community?

The AIASV has always struggled with a large geographical area (22,701 square miles) in seven counties, with only about sixty members, including associate, emeritus, and affiliate members. The AIASV is one of the last few unstaffed chapters: There are only six in California. Our chapter is surrounded by the AIA Central Valley to the north, with 715 members; and, to the west, by the AIA East Bay, with 590 members, and AIA San Francisco, with 1,935 members.

As an unstaffed chapter, the AIASV does not have the advantages of a chapter office, or the luxury of any devoted staff to take care of business. We receive our mail through a P.O. Box, and all our administrative responsibilities, including correspondence, meeting minutes, phone calls, website development, and event planning, are handled by one of ten board members.

The chapter is governed by a board in which the director succeeds to president and then AIACC representative, with each board member typically serving seven years. Such a large time commitment causes burnout. We have “recycled” some board members for up to three terms.

The question of relevance arises: Why not join forces with the neighboring staffed chapters and abandon the effort that is draining the enthusiasm for all who want to participate? That can be answered in one word: Regionalism. Surrounding chapters cannot deal directly with the community issues that affect our chapter.

### The Need for Smart Growth

Most of the Sierra Valley Chapter counties will experience a population explosion in the next few years. From an economic standpoint, such growth will bring much needed work for the architec-



opposite: Active farming on the northern edge of Stockton.

Photo courtesy of Christina Frankel, AIA

LPA Sacramento, Inc.

above: Area of AIASV Chapter shaded.

Map courtesy of Matt Dalforno, LPA Sacramento, Inc.



top: Dean DeCarli Waterfront Square, Stockton, by DCA. A central downtown plaza marks the connection between the city and the Delta Deep Water Channel, and brings together the new movie theater, government building, and restored landmark Stockton Hotel. Courtesy of DCA, rendering by Brian Canevari

bottom: 10th Street Place, Modesto, designed by LPA Sacramento Inc., space planning and interiors by Pacific Design Associates. A cornerstone development, housing County offices in a two-block redevelopment area in downtown Modesto, it includes a theater, parking structure, and another multi-story office building. Courtesy of LPA Sacramento, Inc.

tural community. But, as chapter members, we also serve as trustees of the land. This growth will diminish the nation's food pantry.

California is the nation's top agricultural producer; 2004 cash receipts represented 13.2 percent of the U.S. total and were more than Texas and Iowa (the second and third leading states) combined. Within our chapter area, we have approximately 1.5 million people, with most cities having a population of less than 100,000. The counties within the chapter are ranked nationally as follows: no. 5 in production of grapes; no. 3, 5 and 6 in production of tomatoes; no. 1, 4, and 8 in production of peaches; no. 8 and 9 in production of poultry; and no. 9 in production of plums and prunes.

The inevitable growth in our area is at the sacrifice of prime agricultural land: When the land is depleted, so is its ability to feed a nation. The obvious answer to this problem is the definition of smart growth: high density. Build densely and save the farmland.

Mark Hart, president of the AIA Sierra Valley Chapter, thinks the Central Valley's ongoing population increase is a major issue.

"The increase is challenging each affected community's ability to keep pace with housing needs, strained infrastructure, and declining transportation efficiency," he says. "Solutions such as higher density housing to revitalize inner-city areas and high-speed rail service are in order."

"Recycled" board member and past president Cooper Kessel, AIA, who lives out of the agricultural zone, believes that growth can be managed: "New growth in central/northern California should be in the foothills to preserve the state's agriculturally productive Central Valley."

The population growth is not necessarily resulting in more trained professionals capable of solving such issues, Hart said. In fact, the number of new architects has declined in recent years. "Consequently, unstaffed AIA chapters struggle just to stay alive. Human resources are badly needed, and, unfortunately, no immediate solution is available."

Among the challenges the AIASV chapter faces are these:

- Our chapter wants "smart growth," but how does that occur when the farmer can make more money selling the farmland to a developer than farming it? Cities are growing based on the dollar, thus making long-range commitments to developers for thousands of homes beyond their city boundaries, in exchange for built infrastructure now.
- Our chapter wants high density, but how does that occur when it is more expensive to build high density than create sprawl on farmland? How many high-rise housing projects do you see in an alfalfa field? Cities within our chapter have routinely rezoned high-density land for developers in favor of low-density, single-family homes.
- Our chapter wants to relieve traffic congestion, but how does that occur when our cities are twenty miles or more apart, separated by farmland, a significant percentage of residents commute to jobs outside of their city, and tens of thousands commute to jobs outside the chapter?



While the AIASV chapter needs to be involved in regional decisions, members share a longstanding, grassroots commitment to their communities, as demonstrated below:

- Mike Pratt, AIA: City of Modesto Planning Commission for nine years; Fire Department Long Range Planning Committee; City of Modesto Board of Zoning Adjustment for three years; Citizens Redevelopment Advisory Committee for five years, Citizens Housing and Community Development Committee.
- Tim Dearborn, AIA: City of Stockton's Cultural Heritage Board for three years; Residential Revival Subcommittee for Midtown Advisory Group (Stockton) for two years.
- Bob Degrasse, AIA: Howard Training Center for five years.
- Ron Beasley, AIA: Advisory Council of the Salvation Army.
- Mike Navarro, AIA: Stanislaus County YMCA Board for six years; Citizens Redevelopment Advisory Committee for fourteen years; Stanislaus County Planning Commission for two years; City of Modesto Board of Zoning Adjustments for three years; Building Standards Commission Advisory Committee on Health Care for five years; Hospital Building Safety Board.
- Jim Rende, AIA: Tuolumne County Board of Appeals for two years.
- Don Phillips, AIA: Board Member of North San Joaquin Valley Health Systems Agency for two years; Class Member of Leadership Modesto for two years; Board Member of Steering Committee for Leadership Modesto for two years; Chairman of Leadership Modesto for two years; Board of Trustees Member of McHenry Mansion Foundation for six years.
- Bob Machado, AIA: Founder of Sponsors of Musical Enrichment.
- Ted Brandvold, AIA: City of Modesto Board of Zoning Adjustment for two years; City of Modesto Planning Commission for one year.
- Thom Torvend, AIA: Modesto Landmark Preservation Commission for five years.

- Our chapter wants transportation hubs, but how does that occur when transportation within most cities is limited to a small bus service, and the major cities within our chapter are linked by two major freeways?

Chapter members often complain that other people ultimately make decisions affecting the chapter area. These others argue that we as architects, within our small chapter and small communities, are not broad based enough to understand the “big picture.” Policy makers, from state government, transportation organizations, surrounding county and city governments, and sometimes even within the AIACC itself, all have opinions about growth, but our chapter members are rarely involved.

Our chapter not only lacks a physical address but also a representative body. We do have the experience and intelligence to make decisions, but we lack power as a single voice. Thus we miss the ability to be involved in, invited to, or even made aware of the discussion: We become irrelevant in our own backyard.

#### Transportation and Redevelopment

Our chapter's growth does have bright spots. In 1999, the AIACC and the Great Valley Project in Sacramento sponsored an international competition titled “Housing the Next 10 Million,” to see what the future holds for housing within the Central Valley. The AIASV chapter involvement with the competition was limited, but the contest started the dialogue for area growth.

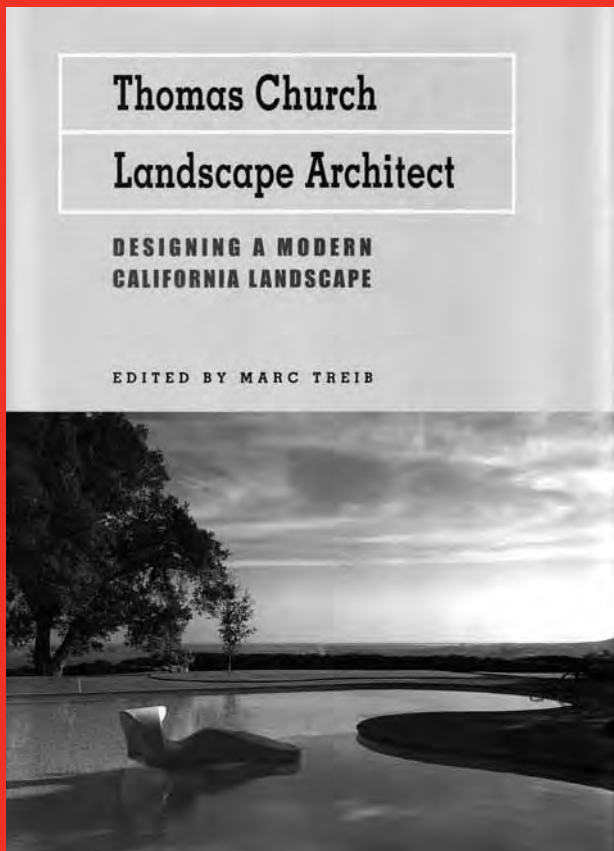
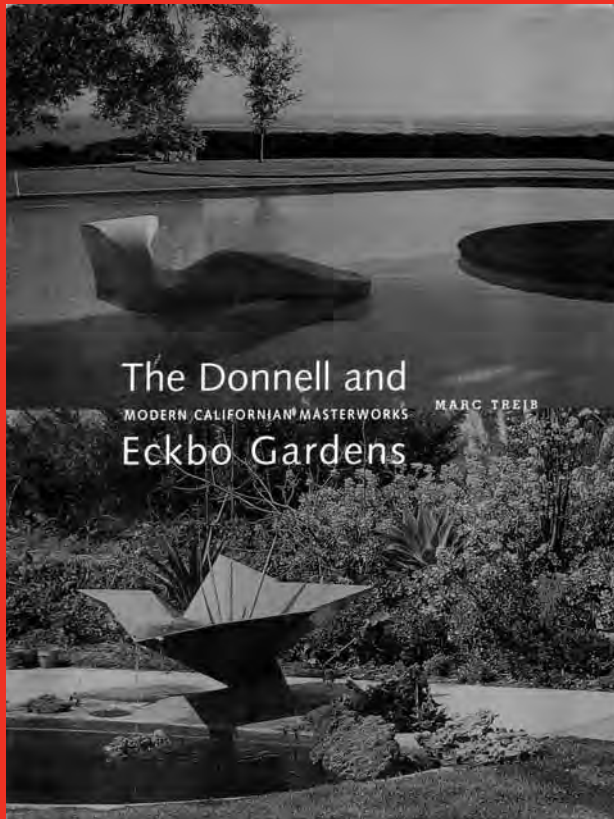
A crucial component to smart growth is planned transportation. A commuter ACE train travels from Stockton through Tracy to San Jose, taking valley residents to their jobs in the Bay Area. The jobs are out of the chapter, and the train does not serve as transportation within the chapter. But a successful transportation spine has been established. And in the true spirit of infill development, both Stockton and Modesto, the two major cities within our chapter with 200,000-plus population, are seeing significant redevelopment of their downtowns, utilizing existing land, and spending money on infrastructure and density that will serve their growing communities. DCA in Stockton and Pacific Design Associates in Modesto, two architectural firms in the Chapter, were influential contributors to the design for redevelopment in their respective cities.

#### The Need for Regional Involvement

We all agree in the AIASV Chapter that a grand vision is necessary for the foreseeable growth in our area. Our members approach the management of growth by practicing good design in their communities and staying involved with public and private agencies in their cities. Our growth demands the attention of outsiders. We are losing not only our farmland but that of the nation.

If every city around our chapter increased their density by 15 percent (the average growth of the valley), and made the housing affordable to the city's working class, there would not be such a dramatic population explosion in our chapter, and the nation's farmland would be safe. But until that happens, the AIASV members need to find a seat at that all-important table to make the “big” decisions about growth in our own communities.

The AIASV Board will stand strong and stay relevant to support unstaffed chapters in the AIACC leadership. The AIASV Chapter will continue to “recycle members” if necessary to remain a relevant organization uniquely representative and distinct from the surrounding AIA chapters. AIASV members will continue to be relevant in community organizations, trying to impart wisdom in small doses, as the nodes of the Chapter's cities grow closer together. ●



## Book Review

### Messages from Mid-Century:

*The Donnell and Eckbo Gardens*  
by Marc Treib

San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2005.

and

*Thomas Church, Landscape Architect*  
edited by Marc Treib

San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2004.

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Jane Wolff

Gardens have a long tradition as images of paradise: they represent a perfect world in miniature. *The Donnell and Eckbo Gardens* and *Thomas Church, Landscape Architect* examine the transposition of that idea to a place that, for many, already seemed like Nirvana: California in the middle of the twentieth century. The state's mythic status was in large part the product of its landscape. Its physical beauty and mild climate were unique in the United States, and its abundant natural resources supported an intense version of the American dream of boundless prosperity. Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area experienced enormous population growth in the years during and after the Second World War, and the development of single-family housing on a vast scale posed a new question about paradise: How could it be found in the backyard of a middle-class suburban house?

The school of garden design that emerged in post-war California has not been thoroughly explored by historians, and *The Donnell and Eckbo Gardens* and *Thomas Church, Landscape Architect* take important steps toward describing and explaining some of the most significant projects of the period. Both books make use of primary-source photographs, drawings, and publications from the University of California's archives. These images are accompanied by historical essays and, in many cases, by extensive and beautiful photographs of the gardens today. *The Donnell and Eckbo Gardens* examines the two most iconic designs of the era, Thomas Church's Donnell garden and Garrett Eckbo's Alcoa Forecast garden. *Thomas Church, Landscape Architect* places the Donnell garden in

the context of the designer's long and varied career.

Neither the Alcoa Forecast garden nor the Donnell garden was a typical middle-class undertaking. Each project was designed by one of the most prominent landscape architects in the nation. The Forecast Garden belonged to a series of showcase projects commissioned by Alcoa in an effort to develop new markets for aluminum. Eckbo designed and built the garden on the site of his Los Angeles house; his charge was to demonstrate how stock aluminum parts could be used to create an ideal outdoor environment. The Donnell garden was designed for a wealthy Sonoma County rancher, an heir to the Marathon Oil fortune. Yet, even though the circumstances of their creation were exceptional, both gardens provided powerful sources of imagery for *Everyman*. The Donnell Garden was featured on the cover of *House Beautiful*, and the Forecast Garden was documented in a short film broadcast during a weekly ABC television program sponsored by Alcoa. The projects also influenced other designers: each was widely documented in professional and trade journals and in books about garden design.

*The Donnell and Eckbo Gardens* is structured as two separate essays; each piece presents thorough documentation about the design, construction, and inhabitation of one of the gardens. What's striking (and what the book doesn't address directly) are the differences in sensibility between the two projects: they embedded similar ideas about program—low maintenance, high use, and flexibility—in radically different visions of a modernist paradise. The Forecast garden, enclosed on a suburban lot, had an immediate relationship to the family house; Eckbo designed aluminum sunshades to ameliorate heat gain indoors and to create a shady loggia between the building and the garden. The garden's image and character rested on its use of a new material, aluminum, to create distinct, figured spaces: Its rhetoric said that a garden could be the locus of contemporary technology. The Donnell garden was located in the countryside and physically separated from the house it served. The project's primary strategy was the construction of a visual relationship between its immediate location and the distant landscape of San Pablo Bay: The garden was a distillation and representation of its geographical context.

The Donnell garden was Thomas Church's most famous project, but it was not the only one to exert influence on a large audience. Church was a prolific and long-lived designer, and *Thomas Church, Landscape Architect*, a collection of essays by different authors, documents and analyzes the range of his efforts. Dorothee Imbert's contribution describes Church's early career and examines how his education, travels, and working alliances with Bay Area modernists shaped his sensibility. Marc Treib provides a comprehensive review of Church's mature design work, which included a wide variety of private gardens and some institutional commissions, and Waverly Lowell and Kelcy Shepherd lay out the contents of Berkeley's Church archives.

Two of the book's essayists deal explicitly with Church's influence on popular ideas about garden design. Daniel Gregory describes Church's

relationship to *Sunset*, which published his designs and his writing and commissioned him to design its headquarters. Diane Harris, who discusses Church's writing for *House Beautiful* and his enormously popular manuals of garden design, *Gardens are for People* and *Your Private World*, takes the most provocative stand in the book. The only essayist to suggest that Church's cheerful, relaxed presentation of his ideas about garden design should not be taken at face value, Harris argues that his nonchalant tone masks a subtext: Design is best left to professionals, and fools who wander in alone suffer the consequences.

*Thomas Church, Landscape Architect* is a valuable resource for future scholars: it provides the kind of comprehensive documentation that raises additional questions. Harris's willingness to look behind Church's pronouncements could be profitably extended in other directions. Church often said that his garden designs were driven by program and by the desire to make pleasant places for human use, but the emphatically formalist character of all of the gardens represented in the book make those comments seem disingenuous. Treib and his contributors mention the effortless rightness of Church's compositions, but they don't explain what criteria determine rightness. Several of the essays emphasize the difference between Church's biomorphic and Euclidean design vocabularies, but a careful study of what structures the gardens would probably reveal that both kinds of shapes are mobilized in the service of similar strategies. The next step toward understanding Church as a designer might be analytical studies of the gardens that look for underlying relationships of scale, proportion, orientation, organization, and choreography.

It's harder to be optimistic about life in California than it was when Thomas Church and Garrett Eckbo did their seminal work: the place is fraught with problems. Despite that, their projects are full of relevant lessons: that new technology means new opportunities for expression; that gardens can express deep ideas about the places we inhabit; and, most of all, that part of our job is to create public consciousness about the power of design to enrich everyday experience. ●



# Restoration as Education

Effects on a Contemporary Practice

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Chris Shanley and Karen Weise

Modernist restoration projects surely teach us about the design typologies of the modernist aesthetic—of indoor/outdoor interactions and open plans, of ample fenestration and expressive structures. Yet in the incredibly intimate process of preservation, our firm has also glimpsed the process, experimentation, people, and ideals of Modernism. These intangible lessons influence the spirit and direction of our office as we pursue the aesthetics that Modernists expounded.

Originally started by Leo Marmol and Ron Radziner in 1989, Marmol Radziner + Associates is one of the few design-build firms headed by architects. The firm has since grown to nearly sixty architectural and seventy construction staff, on a mix of projects, including Modern restorations, new residential projects, and commercial spaces. Thoughtful and careful Modern restoration projects—demanding innovative design, detailed research, and exacting construction standards—provide the bedrock for the firm’s practice. In working on a diverse collection of Modern structures, by architects ranging from Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler to Frank Lloyd Wright, John Lautner, and others, we have uncovered a master builder sensibility: a holistic design approach that aspires to integrate the multiple disciplines of landscape, architecture, interior design, custom furniture, and architectural metalwork into a unified expression, while maintaining full control for successful execution during the construction.

Despite the variations in building aesthetics and philosophies of these mid-century architects, their work shares common ideas central to Modern architecture. These include building and site integration, connection between interior and exterior spaces, and straightforward material expression. Beyond these ideals, their prolific work created research and development in environmental design, sustainability, lighting, and building technologies. This generation of architects sparked a creative momentum during the middle of the last century that continues to inspire the architectural and building industries today. We are witnessing this continuity in the development of sustainable technologies and prefabricated structures.

opposite: Marmol Radziner + Associates, Desert House,  
photo by Benny Chan.



left: R. M. Schindler, Elliot House, photo by Benny Chan; center, John Lautner, Garcia House, photo by Marmol Radziner + Associates; right: Richard Neutra, Kaufmann House, photo by David Glomb.

Modern restoration projects provide living architectural history for our staff to visualize and comprehend Modern ideals, from the broadest design strokes down to the final construction details. Whether it's understanding Neutra's integration of building and site, Schindler's playful juxtaposition of form and material, or Lautner's dynamic expression of structure and material space, this exposure to a high level of design and craftsmanship challenges our staff to become more innovative architects and builders.

#### Concepts Made Tangible

Through the restoration projects, we learn in intimate detail the struggle these architects encountered, following their successes and failures in our efforts to revive these historic structures. The restoration of Richard Neutra's lighting design for the Kaufmann House in Palm Springs provides an example of the learning process. Archival information for the project includes pages of lighting studies and drawings for custom-designed fixtures. Fifty years later, we studied his notes to understand the purpose of the custom fixtures. Our analysis led to the construction of several mock-ups of Neutra's custom light fixtures to be field tested in the house prior to final production. The fully restored lighting system shows Neutra's sensitivity in using lighting to emphasize the color, materiality, lightness, and transparency of his structures. His thoughtful integration of both natural and artificial lighting enhances the critical relationship between

interior and exterior space. Today, we strive to employ Neutra's lighting sensibilities in our new work by balancing the quality and placement of artificial lighting with areas of natural light to enhance the spatial relationships between indoors and out.

#### Material Discipline

We have also seen how these architects experimented with new building materials and construction methods. From Neutra's unorthodox use of waxed cork tile on the surfaces of the Kaufmann House bathrooms to Schindler's use of simple, construction grade plywood for the cabinetry of the Elliot House in Silver Lake, we see a stunning use of ordinary materials in unexpected ways. In restoration projects, we often face the task of replicating applications of unique historical materials that no longer exist. As a benefit of our design-build practice, we have in-house millwork and metal shops that allow us to produce material mock-ups to recreate and perfect historical techniques or to test alternatives.

We apply the methodology of mock-up production from our restoration projects to our material research for new projects, in which we evaluate a particular construction method or finishing technique and make necessary adjustments before construction. Following in the inquisitive wake of these architects, we look to experiment with new materials and methods for assembling them, trying to visualize the material qualities of a building from the overall concept down to the execution

of the details. We use material mock-ups to develop many of the finish components of the buildings, such as custom designed furniture, cabinetry, stone walls, door hardware, and steel casement windows and doors, but the process has been beneficial in evaluating structural detail components as well.

#### Structural Economy

Yet innovation sometimes comes at a cost. In today's building context, it is increasingly challenging to create elegant, Modern structures within the parameters of a restrictive and regulation-laden building industry. Achieving the beauty of the Modern aesthetic—with its large expanses of glass, open plan design, and thin, flat roof structures—requires atypical, and usually more expensive, building systems. In seismically active California, the Modern building typically utilizes structural steel coupled with complex foundation systems to allow for large open spans—something we encounter in both our restoration work and new construction. While minimizing interior walls and employing full-height glass allows for a healthy interaction between interior and exterior spaces, these well-intended design solutions often result in structural systems that cost more than conventional wood framing. In the restoration of Modern buildings, we face the tedious task of knitting structural upgrades into confined, historically sensitive spaces with the goal of never altering their appearance. Doing so requires evaluating several viable structural solutions that must satisfy the aes-



left: Kaufmann House, photo by David Glomb; center and right, Thornton Ladd, Hilltop Studio, photos by Benny Chan

thetic, structural, and cost requirements of the project. These structural evaluations equip our architectural and construction staff with a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the structural and spatial systems of the building. Similar structural investigation guides critical design choices from the interplay between the building and site to the detailed integration of a glazing system.

#### Rationalizing the Detail

In addition to complex structural systems, Modern buildings often require exacting precision in the construction process. This precision results in increased construction costs and longer construction schedules in all of the trades, from the structural steel fabricator down to the cabinetmaker. The construction of Modern structures requires architects to work out in great detail how building materials and systems are integrated. True to our Modern influence, we often prefer flush conditions that demand the alignment of a variety of materials installed by different tradesmen. Yet our builder sensibility knows we must reserve these details for essential design elements, as the costs of constructing with tight tolerances do not always justify the aesthetic ends. Instead, we examine alternative detail methods or simplify the material palette in order to stay within a project's budget. We are constantly challenging our design-build staff to be innovative and responsible in balancing design ideals with the reality of today's building methods and construction costs.

#### The Human Factor and Design-Build

In restoration work, however, we choose not to face these challenges alone. We value the engaging dialogue we have with the original clients, builders, fabricators, and architectural photographers, learning the stories behind these historic structures. Through these conversations, we get an intimate view into the collaborative decision-making that took place during the original construction. These engaging discussions, unlike the historic, highly polished publications of a building, reveal a more realistic and, at times, flawed process of construction and architect-client relationship. The stories bring an emotional content that enriches the sometimes stark precision of Modern architecture. We have found this collaborative process to be the most accurate way of obtaining the exacting historical data that no longer exists in archival form.

This experience tracing the histories of exemplary Modern buildings reinforces our commitment to design-build. By establishing a positive cooperative environment in which client, architect, and construction staff work together, the building design becomes stronger, and the project team more effectively manages design and construction issues. This collaboration also lends itself to innovative thinking by both the architecture and construction staff.

#### Broadening the Benefit

As we work on both restorations and new site-built projects, we become ever more enamored with the indoor/outdoor lifestyle characteristic

of Modernism and ever more interested in finding a way to make this experience available to more people. At the same time, we see not only that Modern site-built homes are significant financial investments, but also that their conception demands incredibly intense personal involvement by the owner. For many people, these financial and time demands are simply overwhelming.

Like Walter Gropius, Charles Eames, and others Modernists, we have turned to the promise of prefabrication to bring Modernism to more people. Prefabrication can eliminate much of the burden of custom, site-built homes by focusing on fundamental design typologies of the Modern home, with open plans that connect indoor and outdoor spaces. By simplifying the material palette and standardizing details and structural systems, prefabricated homes allow the designer to focus on highlighting the essential beauty of the site and surrounding landscape. Maximizing the work done in the factory rather than on the job site affords greater control over details during fabrication, a trait we greatly value in our Modern restorations. We hope that our venture into prefab will bring us closer to achieving the ideals that we so admire in our Modern predecessors.

Our restoration projects have given us personal interactions with people and buildings that have taught us much: design details and material innovations, structural demands and close collaborations, design/build integration and Modernism for all. ●

## ... and Counting

### 8 pioneering modern California architects not named Schindler

*Northern California*

Beverley David Thorne

Rowan Maiden

Albert Henry Hill

Don R. Knorr

*Southern California*

Bill Cody

E. Stewart Williams

Sim Bruce Richards

John Rex

<http://library.cca.edu>

### 15 buildings that have won AIA California Council's 25 Year Award

St. Francis Square, San Francisco / Marquis and Stoller

Marin County Civic Center, San Rafael /

Frank Lloyd Wright

Ghirardelli Square, San Francisco / Wurster Bernardi and Emmons

Sea Ranch, Northern California / Moore Lyndon

Turnbull Whitaker

Oakland Coliseum and Arena, Oakland / Skidmore

Owings & Merrill

Eames House, Pacific Palisades / Charles and

Ray Eames

UC Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley / Mario Ciampi

Kappe Residence, Pacific Palisades / Raymond Kappe

Crown Zellerbach Building, San Francisco / Skidmore

Owings & Merrill

V.C. Morris Gift Shop, San Francisco / Frank Lloyd Wright

Kaufmann House, Palm Springs / Richard Neutra

Case Study House 21, Los Angeles / Pierre Koenig

Eichler Homes, throughout California / Anshen + Allen

Kresge College, UC Santa Cruz / Moore Lyndon

Turnbull Whitaker

Art Center, Pasadena / Craig Ellwood & Associates

[www.aiaacc.org](http://www.aiaacc.org)

### 4 California buildings that have won AIA National's 25 Year Award

Baldwin Hills Village, Los Angeles / Reginald Johnson, WM&A, Clarence Stein.

Eames House, Pacific Palisades / Charles and Ray Eames.

Sea Ranch, Northern California / Moore Lyndon Turnbull Whitaker.

Salk Institute, La Jolla / Louis Kahn.

[www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org)

### California Modern building on the National Trust's 2005 World's Most Endangered Sites List

Ennis-Brown House, Los Angeles / Frank Lloyd Wright

[www.nationaltrust.org](http://www.nationaltrust.org)

### 4 California preservation organizations with Modernism agendas

Los Angeles Conservancy's Modern Committee  
Los Angeles

[www.modcom.org](http://www.modcom.org)

Preservation Action Council of San Jose

San Jose

[www.preservation.org](http://www.preservation.org)

California Preservation Foundation

San Francisco

[www.californiapreservation.org](http://www.californiapreservation.org)

DOCOMOMO

Northern California

[www.docomomo-us.org](http://www.docomomo-us.org)

### What DOCOMOMO stands for

DOcumentation and COnservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighborhoods of the MOdern MOvement.

[www.docomomo-us.org](http://www.docomomo-us.org)

### Big box versus modern icon

IBM Building 25 in San Jose, designed by John Bolles, FAIA, in the late '50s, is the subject of a California Preservation Foundation lawsuit against Lowe's, which

## David Meckel, FAIA

plans to demolish the structure. Bolles is also the architect for Candlestick Park and the AIACC's first president (1946). All outgoing AIACC board members receive the John S. Bolles, FAIA, Fellowship in his honor. [www.mercurynews.com](http://www.mercurynews.com)

### 3 books on California Modernism written by AIACC practitioner members

*NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism*  
Chronicle Books 2006

Pierluigi Serraino (Anshen + Allen Architects)

*Eichler: Modernism Rebuilds the American Dream*

Gibbs Smith 2002

Paul Adamson (Hornberger + Worstell Architects)

*Pafford Keatinge-Clay: Modern Architecture / Modern Masters*

Actar 2006

Eric Keune (Skidmore Owings & Merrill)

[www.stoutbooks.com](http://www.stoutbooks.com)

### 2 licensed architects who are also realtors specializing in California Modernism

Brian Linder / The Value of Architecture

Keller Williams Realty

[www.tvoa.net](http://www.tvoa.net)

Erik Lerner / Real Estate Architects

Mossler Deasy & Doe

[www.realestatearchitects.com](http://www.realestatearchitects.com)

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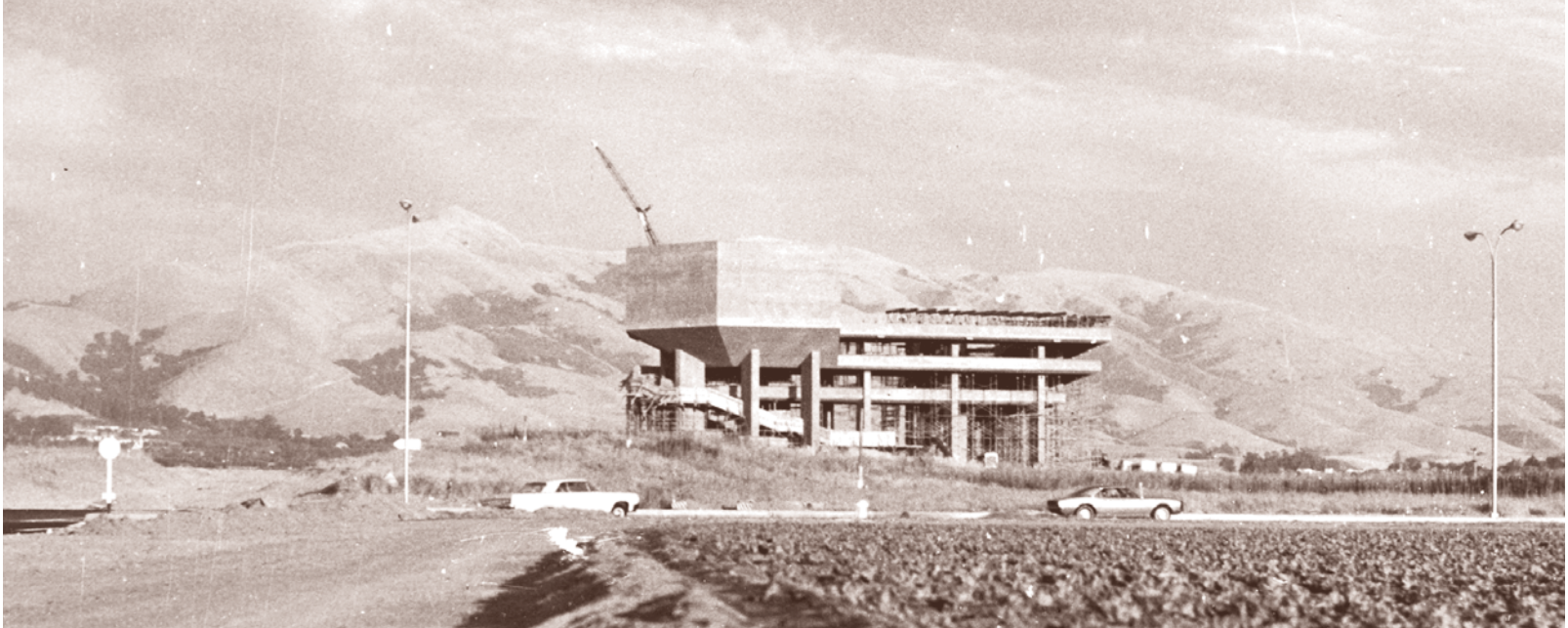
### Modern subscribers

*Dwell*, the San Francisco based magazine whose byline is *At Home in the Modern World*, has a circulation of over 269,000 readers. By comparison, *Metropolis* has a circulation of only 45,000.

<http://library.cca.edu>



## Coda



### You Decide

Robert Mittelstadt, Fremont City Hall, 1966-2004. Above, going up, photo courtesy of Museum of Local History, Fremont. Below, coming down, photo by Don Dillon, mayor of Fremont when the building was designed and constructed.

This building . . .

- . . . was an icon of its time. Its loss is abhorrent.
- . . . was distinctive if imperfect. Its loss saddens.
- . . . had served its purpose. All things must pass.
- . . . should never have been built. Good riddance.
- . . . never existed. The material world is illusion.
- . . . \_\_\_\_\_ . ●

