

winter 2004

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winter 2004

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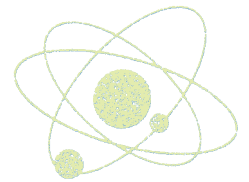
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In the living room of a Joseph Eichler home, a Bertoia Diamond chair and a rug from IKEA team with a Danish modern torchere that provides mood lighting next to the semicircular fireplace. The vintage Herman Miller seating, designed by George Nelson, is covered in Naugahyde, a plus for a family with a young child.



# atomicranch™

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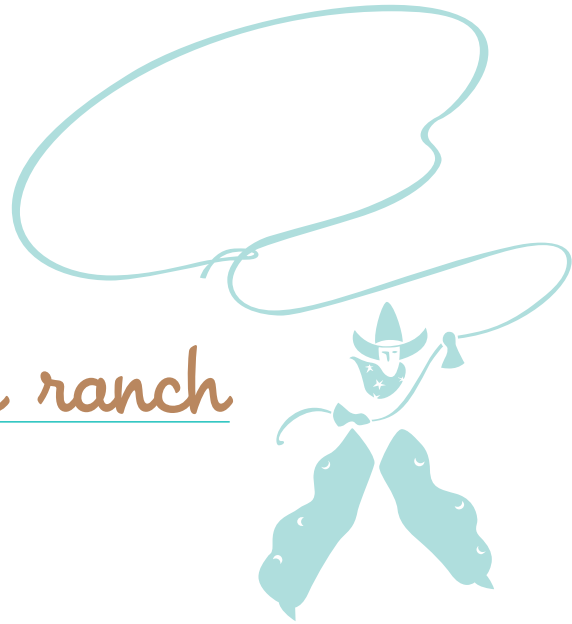
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**THE MAGAZINE FOR THE REST OF US**

## meanwhile... back at the ranch



t

his September the Redlands Conservancy invited Atomic Ranch to a small dinner party hosted by Helen and Troy Kobold at their 1954 Cliff May-designed prefab ranch. Redlands, Calif., is an enlightened city founded in 1888 and was a precursor to Palm Springs—a winter haven for Right and Left Coasters—with a great collection of Victorian mansions and Arts and Crafts-era homes. The Conservancy has been instrumental in helping preserve the rich architectural history of their city, and this night they were coming together to learn more about a style many of them had taken for granted—midcentury ranches.

We learned from Bob Van Roekel, consulting architect on the project, that the Kobolds' home originally was not much more than 1,000 square feet, and after the slab foundation was completed, a single truck brought all the materials that a trained crew would assemble into a finished home (plumbed, wired and heated) in about five days. No wonder May was such a successful designer; his genius lay in working out clever construction details combined with an artist's appreciation for the core tenets of midcentury living: single-level open floor plans and blurring the indoor/outdoor boundaries.

Why did the great midcentury designs fall out of popular favor and why are McMansions now the fervid dream of every reality show contestant? Luckily styles are cyclical and the modest but gracious ranch is experiencing a re-evaluation by a younger generation who sees the ranch as a link to a slightly romanticized and exciting time.

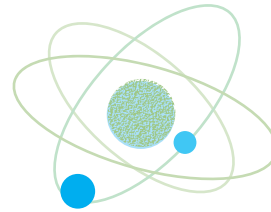
Some members of the dinner group told stories about their grown children collecting items that 20 years ago were cast off as junk. The Kobolds found a set of five Bertoia side chairs with intact Knoll stickers gathering dust in a carpenter's shop; for a couple of hundred dollars the shop owner sold them to Helen and Troy, happy to replace them with \$10 white resin chairs. Another guest told of finding and buying a faded starlet's surplus Noguchi coffee table (she had three). Sometimes it's hard to make the leap and see that slightly old furnishings and homes have value, but that is one of history's continuing lessons.

We will soon share with readers the National Trust for Historic Preservation's efforts to save the "Recent Past." Contrary to widely held belief, it is not necessary for a significant building or neighborhood to reach 50 years of age to be listed in the National Register. But the path to recognition is through the work of grass-roots community groups such as the Redlands Conservancy. Arapahoe Acres in Denver, Colo., was the first postwar subdivision to be listed on the Register, and others across the country are close behind. Atomic Ranch's agenda is plenty full, but the need to promote preservation through recognition, appreciation and education is crucial. Help us spread the word. The community you save might be your own.

*Jim Brown*  
Publisher



Our publisher, dreaming of a Knott's boysenberry pie.



# modernwisdom

\* My wife and I are huge fans of ramblers, and when a friend told us about this magazine we had to sign up. We are currently looking for a '50s-'60s Rambler in Seattle. There were quite a few built in certain areas, but with the tight housing market it's difficult to get one. But we're resolved to keep looking and not settle for a Craftsman or other type.

Thanks again for putting this together. We'll spread the word!

**Patrick & Suzanne**

*via e-mail*

\* I'm 43 years old and grew up mostly in a midcentury brick rancher in a like-minded development in Ellicott City, Md. I'm so moved by midcentury modern design. Your magazine speaks more clearly to that than any other publication I've picked up—if indeed there is another publication like it.

I have a consistent, never-ending love for midcentury autos as well, and enjoyed the couple you featured in front of their Lustron home with the Plymouth Fury. My dad had the Furies I, II and III. All my uncles—and I had many—knew to bring me car keys as a gift and to let me play in their cool Lincolns and Cadillacs. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven!

Here's a suggestion for content: include some personal social commentary on the things that were happening then and how it influenced home design, etc.

**Ric Ryder**

*New York City*

\* We have a ranch house built in 1950 and are looking for a source for the metal edging used on Formica counter-tops. Do you know who would sell this type of product?

**Pam Hamilton**

*via e-mail*

Counter edging is available in three widths in polished or anodized aluminum in 8' lengths from Aubuchon Hardware, [www.aubuchonhardware.com](http://www.aubuchonhardware.com). Also try Linoleum City, Hollywood, Calif., 323•469•0063; and Outwater Plastics, [www.outwater.com](http://www.outwater.com). Pam found what she wanted at Lansing Linoleum in Portland, Ore.,

503•777•3333, [www.lansinglinoleum.com](http://www.lansinglinoleum.com), which carries both the ribbed and vinyl-inset-strip styles.

—ar editor

\* I live in Riverview on the outskirts of Tampa. When I visited your website I was very impressed with what you are doing. It will be very helpful to homeowners living in ranch neighborhoods where there is an interest in revitalizing their subdivisions.

Riverview has managed to avoid development until just recently, when the whole community has caught on and development is now raging full throttle. The new homes being built in subdivision after subdivision are side by side with tracts of neglected ranch homes. Property values in Riverview are surging upward, but these tired little ranch houses are being left behind.

Your magazine offers a vision of an "attainable" (key word!) revitalization that these neighborhoods could embrace, which would allow them to share in the rising property values. If older ranch neighborhoods catch on to the vision you promote and begin to revitalize their properties in the ways you suggest, it would benefit everyone in the community.

Some encouragement for homeowners in ranch subdivisions, together with ideas and suggestions for how to get as many neighbors as possible involved, would be very welcome. Perhaps you can locate a subdivision that has undergone this kind of transition and interview the key people who could explain how they did it, step-by-step.

My husband and I have a little community website for Riverview; please visit us at [www.riverviewonline.com/MB/\\_disc9/000004aa.htm](http://www.riverviewonline.com/MB/_disc9/000004aa.htm). Thanks for a great new magazine!

**Terri Bakas**

*Riverview, Fla.*

Neighborhood preservation issues will be covered as often as possible in our pages. Residents of early-20th-century developments went through this same process in recent years, and we hope that ranch tracts are next. A Cliff May neighborhood in Long Beach, Calif., will be in the summer 2005 issue, and we want to feature

*Congrats* to Caitlin Kimball & Sue Lynn Schramm,  
who filled out survey cards and were selected to receive junk from the AR office closet.

*other areas. If bungalow homeowners' experiences are any indication, education=preservation=climbing property values.—ar editor*

\* The new issue is divine! The photos are fantastic, the articles are fabulous, and I even pay attention to all of the advertising! We especially liked seeing our kitchen/bath lighting dilemma addressed (issue 2, pp 58–59). I've attached a photo so you can see how one of the baths turned out.

**Jennifer Harrison**  
*Anaheim, Calif.*

\* Many thanks for the copy of Atomic Ranch. Your magazine looks great and fills an underserved niche. Personally, I love midcentury modern! Best of luck with this new venture.

**David Sloan, Managing Editor**  
*This Old House Magazine*  
*NYC*

\* My husband and I live in a ranch today and would buy another. As we move toward the golden years we like the one-floor living and see it as insurance for the future.

Out here in the East there is an entirely different kind of ranch house. They are made of brick or siding and can be found just about everywhere. For lack of a better term, I call them colonial ranches because they have the paned, double-hung windows and sometimes other colonial adaptations such as pillars. They are in tracts and along country roads, on farms and in suburban cities. Think Levittown in Long Island or outside Philly, or suburban northern Virginia and the Midwest: there are millions of these houses, still being used and loved. Then there are the Florida atrium-type ranches, very pretty and cool.

I recall there were a lot of modern furnishings used, but having lived through all that I also recall the white French Provincial, the cozy colonial furniture choices, and who can forget all the '60s Mediterranean stuff and flocked wallpaper to name just a few alternatives.

In short, the ranch has held more than the modern



Harrison's newly lit bath

artifacts you showcase, and has other forms than the desert, high-modernist look. It would be great to see something more familiar for those of us who do not live where the cacti grow. And we don't all have views of the desert and the mountains. Often it is of another backyard—let's get real!

Also, for those of us who love our ranches but do not want to make them museum pieces, stories on how to adapt and refurbish to modern needs would be of use. All houses from whatever era can bring joy to current owners, but we do have changing needs. The beauty of the ranch house is that it can adapt so easily.

Looking to more variety, but appreciative of what you are publishing. I like that the ranch house is being recognized—who woulda thunk that?!

**Pat Bandy**  
*Gambrills, Md.*

\* I am delighted with your publication; I feel like I found a club to which I really belong.

I enjoyed the article about the retro Christmas decorations. About seven years ago I paid \$125 for a seven-foot tree and two color wheels; after using it every year, it still looks new. The Happy Tannenbaum Company manufactures new aluminum Christmas trees and color wheels in Minnesota. Unfortunately the seller does not have a website—how retro is that!—but their phone number is 320•240•1035.

**Dale DiStefano**  
*Newport Beach, Calif.*

*Write us at [editor@atomic-ranch.com](mailto:editor@atomic-ranch.com) or send a note to Atomic Ranch, Publishing Office, 917 Summit Drive, South Pasadena, CA 91030. We'll print the good ones.*

# home page

## San Jose, Calif.

When my wife and I purchased our 1959 home in the Fairglen tract three years ago, all of the original Eichler character had been removed. The kitchen had a whitewashed country oak finish, the living room was sponge-painted purple, and gold carriage lanterns adorned the overgrown front yard. We spent three months demolishing and refurbishing the home, bringing back as many of the original Eichler cues as possible while replacing remaining pieces with modern substitutes. We were able to find or reproduce the house colors, mahogany paneling, globe fixtures and the mailbox. Our children, Sydney and Jared, are right at home here.

**Ann & Jerry Escobar**

## Belleair, Fla.

My partner, Andy Taylor, and I recently moved from California and bought a flat-roof '50s modern home here in Florida. We absolutely love it! It is my goal to decorate it nicely enough to one day have it featured in your magazine. We're in a golf course neighborhood with an old Hollywood kind of style—lots of ranch homes and tall palm trees. Ours is one of the few in this neighborhood with a flat roof; it's a very special house to us.

**F. Kip Hill**

## Austin, Texas

Built in 1956, this L-shaped ranch managed to escape the '70s redos that so many in the neighborhood suffered. Located in northeast Austin in the Windsor Park neighborhood, it was originally part of a suburb but is now considered centrally located. It is 1,800 square feet (the two-car garage was turned into a rec room and laundry) with hardwood floors, cedar shingle siding and all original tile in the kitchen and bathrooms. These are contractor houses, and the street behind me has one identical to this. My neighbors have lived in their homes since they were built. It needs a lot of cosmetic help, but I'm working on it!

**Jenny Hart**

Put your home on our fridge; send in a high-resolution photo or sharp snapshot and a couple of sentences about your cool pad for our next issues. See contacts page 3.



San Jose, Calif.



Belleair, Fla.



P

H



Austin, Texas

# cool|stuff

## In Stock

Gregory La Vadera specializes in an underappreciated aspect of architecture—stock plans. Like ranch houses, stock plans have been the stepchildren of the home design field, but his decidedly modern residences look plenty custom. The Deck House has a metal roof, loads of built-in storage in a 72' wall that runs the length of the house, plus a 12' x 18' master bedroom and a generous 18' x 25' living room in its 1,420 square feet. Greg says his open plan design can be built with common materials—it's configured for standard-dimension windows, for instance—by any builder, or can be upgraded. "We want you to be able to build it with vinyl siding and windows and still be able to say, 'That's a cool house.' The whole idea is to transcend ordinary building materials with good design."

Cross ventilation, clerestory windows that emit winter sun and avoid summer's heat, two baths and, oh yeah, a deck—what more could a modernist want? Gregory La Vadera Architect is at [www.lamidesign.com/plans](http://www.lamidesign.com/plans) or ring 856•662•4909.



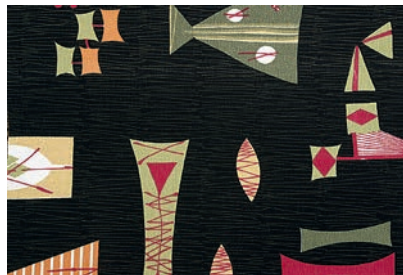
## Geared for Parenthood

Got baby? Then you need cool baby stuff. For new mother Angela Hazouri that was the dilemma: where to find good-looking, well-designed kid accoutrements? Her [www.babygeared.com](http://www.babygeared.com) site has furniture, diaper bags, artwork, toys, strollers and junior dishware, as well as support sites for those who are new to this procreation gig.

The Baby Boomer Too table and chair set by notNeutral is made from environmentally friendly industrial-grade birch plywood; it's sized for children 3 to 6 and requires assembly. The 34" top is water/juice/wet diaper-proof; \$390. Browse her site for your next shower gift or the perfect pint-size shell rocker or modular toddler bed.

### Feeling High Brow?

When you're looking for a mini history lesson on iconic midcentury furniture design, [www.highbrowfurniture.com](http://www.highbrowfurniture.com) isn't a bad place to start. Stan Guffey and Frank Ward's store, Nashville's destination for modern furniture since 1985, specializes in authorized, authentic designs from Herman Miller, Knoll, Cherner Chair, Vessel Architectural Pottery, Kartell and others. The Panton chair, for instance, designed by Verner Panton in 1960, is stackable and comes in five colors; it sells for \$215. Or there's a "classic" version very similar to Herman Miller's original production line made from beefier plastic with a shinier finish; it's \$1,095. The site says that Charles and Ray Eames' "hang-it-all" wall rack (\$119), first introduced in 1953, has solid maple balls on a white steel frame and that the Eameses designed toys and children's furniture as well as their best-known classics. Cool furniture and an education to boot. Pre-To-Post Modern, 2110 Eighth Ave. So., Nashville; 888•329•0219.



### Mod Textiles

A love of fabric and abstract art drove Sondra Borrie to launch Contemporary Cloth, an online store specializing in barkcloth, cottons, linen and upholstery goods. Stock includes both vintage and new designs suitable for table runners, napkins, chair cushions, drapes, bedspreads or maybe a swinging A-line shift for your next retro party. Her Marimekko remnants make great pillow covers or wall hangings. Seen here, Lava Lamp, Mambo and Mod Shapes; prices run \$8–\$10.50 per yard at [www.contemporarycloth.com](http://www.contemporarycloth.com).



# Turning the Mundane into the

The broker showing us this house stood blocking our entry. “I’m just letting you know that I didn’t want to show you this property, but you insisted,” she said. My wife Debra and I walked in, saw the windows and the lake in the back, looked at each other and knew it was just what we wanted.

*text* Guy Lindsay Kohn  
*photography* Peter Pioppo

Guy Kohn designed the low tables in the living room, and the large painting behind the Mood sectional sofa was a collaboration between Guy and son Aaron. Then 6, Aaron created an image he called “Energy Flying Together” on his computer’s Kid Pix program. An interpretation of elements Aaron saw out the windows overlooking the back yard, Guy found it perfect and rendered it in a large-scale oil painting. The bronze sculpture is by Richard Hunt and the carpet from Home Expo.



# *Sublime*





The new kitchen has 22 linear feet of counter space. Without a center island, the cooking area flows into the dining area, making plenty of room for two cooks and two karate-practicing, break-dancing boys. The hardwearing floor is hand-troweled Dex-O-Tex cement, typically used in laboratories and airplane hangars, and all appliances are from G.E. except the Kitchenaid dishwasher. Recessed "eyeball" lights by Lightolier are reflected in Guy's custom exhaust hood.

Most of the houses in Chappaqua, N.Y., are in the million-dollar-and-up range. The schools are great, there is a lake with a beach and a lifeguard in summer, it's close to New York City and transportation, and recently gained some notoriety when former President Bill Clinton and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton moved to town. Our broker sold the Clintons their house; we had the distinction of buying the lowest-priced Chappaqua house sold in 1999.

I am an architect with my own firm, and Debra, a teacher, is a former principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company. We have two children, Spencer, 10, and Aaron, 7. Before we had children, we were very much city people and my office is still in NYC. But when we decided to move out of the city, none of the traditional houses that we saw had the open, loft-like environment that Debra and I both loved. Up until this house, that is.

Because the design is neither fish nor fowl, the interior had the spatial insensitivity of a contractor spec home. In addition, tall, unkempt hedges had grown in the back, blocking the beautiful view of the woods and the lake. Built by a contractor in 1952, the house is transitional between the more familiar ranch style and the purely experimental modern Case Study houses that were built after World War II. Basically the house hadn't changed in 47 years.

So began our journey. For the next three years, we personally did about 90 percent of the construction, landscaping and decorating. Part of this was an ego thing: architects should know how to build what they design, in my view. But we also did our own work to save money. With a little help



from a couple of professional tradesmen—major plumbing, specialty epoxy concrete flooring and tilework—we created a beautiful, serene house that is remarkably cozy.

For this project we used both custom items—tables I designed, a new fireplace, a one-of-a-kind stove hood—and off-the-shelf or reworked elements. The latter included kitchen and bedroom cabinetry from IKEA, cedar decking and a skylight from Home Depot, a new stainless steel face for our existing dishwasher, carpet from Home Expo, and patched and refinished hardwood floors.

## The scope of our renovation included:

- Replacing lighting, phone and electrical systems
- Removing ceiling fans, wood paneling, shelves, valances and brackets
- Repairing and painting walls, ceilings, beams and trim
- Refinishing aluminum sliding glass doors with steel wool
- Gutting the kitchen and roughly doubling its size by removing a dividing wall and blocking an entry door
- Installing new stainless steel appliances and a glass-tile wall in the kitchen
- Repainting the exterior
- Removing window-mounted air conditioners and building replacement windows
- Turning the basement into a playroom, laundry, TV room, office and new bath—almost doubling the livable area of the house
- Landscaping front and rear



A Le Klint plastic light hangs over the Kohns' Saarinen table and chairs in the dining area. Home Depot cedar decking is visible through the grid of floor-to-ceiling windows and the sliding glass door.



A new door, paint scheme and restrained landscaping transformed the front facade of the house. Autumn leaves don't hurt, either.

The boys' bedrooms were spruced up with bright coats of paint—they both picked their own colors—but in general we didn't do a lot to their rooms. Two closets in the hallway were eliminated, giving us wall space to display photographs.

## Some additional details:

### Rebuilding the fireplace

The existing brick fireplace had terrible grout joints, and the grilles on both sides of the fireplace, designed to recirculate warm air, didn't work. We discovered that the furnace and hot water heater flues had been leaking dangerous fumes through the grilles for years. We rebuilt the fireplace using concrete pavers, the same firebox and the original slate on the raised hearth, which acts as another sitting area in our living room.

### IKEA cabinetry

We took IKEA kitchen cabinets and customized them to look more modern, building aluminum frames and legs. We also installed industrial-style shelves inside and stainless steel backsplashes above them. The counters are plastic laminate—easy to clean, durable and inexpensive. In the master bedroom we selected an IKEA frosted-glass and aluminum "Pax" closet system.



### Trapezoidal skylight

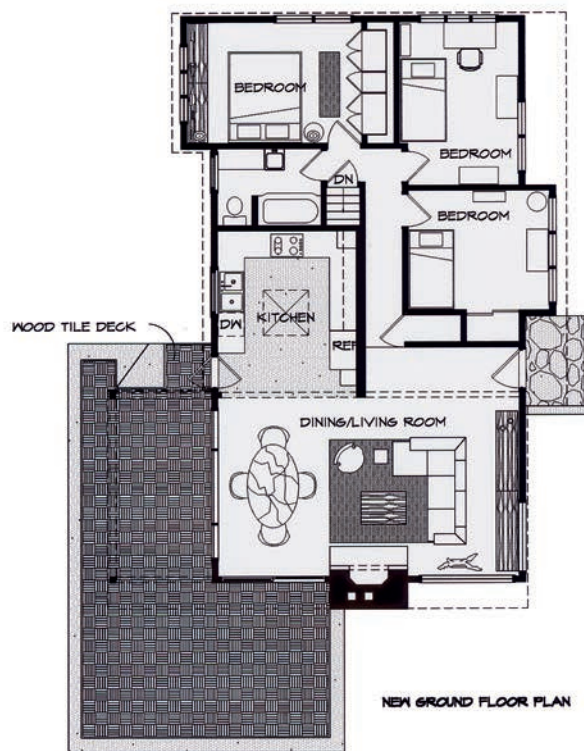
I've always admired the skylights of Le Corbusier, and although ours faces south, the top tapers to a small opening so it never allows too much direct hot sunlight in. On a night with a full moon, it lights up the whole kitchen.

### Kitchen exhaust hood

My idea for a simple, elegant hood was impacted by our limited budget: the commercial models that came closest ran \$5,000–\$6,000 as did bids from professional metal fabrication shops I'd used in the past. So I took the drawings to a commercial kitchen fabricator who made the stainless steel tube for \$130, then a glass shop cut 1/2"-thick tempered glass with a hole in the middle for \$125. The fan, mini halogen light and miscellaneous hardware ran another \$125. I reframed the ceiling joists, hooked up the electricity, closed the roof and—voilà!—a functional piece of sculpture for under \$400.

### Deck covering

The existing concrete patio was cracked, stained and generally ugly. To rip it out and redo it would have been cost prohibitive, so our next idea was to cover it with something. Needing to tie the exterior to the interior, I settled on a wood basket-weave pattern; making it affordable was key. I found the solution at Home Depot: cedar duck-board tiles for use in saunas and closets. I glued them





A vintage marble table holds one of a pair of lamps from IKEA beside a bed from Door Store. Upgrades in the bedroom include replacing mirrored closet doors with built-in units from IKEA and installing grass-cloth wallpaper.

down using high-strength flexible masonry adhesive on the rubber strips that connect the wood slats, and that flexibility allowed the 11" square tiles to conform to the uneven surface of the patio. The first time it rained we experienced an amazing additional aspect of the deck: it's musical, like rain falling on a xylophone.

### Landscaping

When we first moved in I bought what turned out to be a cheap, underpowered chainsaw. Before long, I was laboring just to cut through the view-blocking hedges. One thing you shouldn't do is force a chainsaw to cut and when a branch I was pushing on released and smacked me in the face, I gained some nice stitches. I read a little more about the tool, bought a much more powerful model, and the hedge was history. After clearing three large dumpsters of dead trees, logs and the hedges, we replanted the front and rear lawns, and put in new rho-

dodendrons, a cut-leaf maple and other shrubs in front, and installed lights in the woods in back.

Recently we refinanced the house and it was reappraised. The value is now double what it was three years ago. That in itself has been satisfying, but the real satisfaction has been revealing and amplifying the potential of a house many people would have considered a teardown, and in the process creating a wonderful, relaxed home that fits our personalities and lifestyle.

As great as our home is now, I'm not sure we would have bought the house without the lake. In the summer Debra and the kids use it every day and, for me, there is nothing better after a hot day in the city to come home and take a nice refreshing swim in the lake. It feels like heaven on earth—corny, but true. ✨

Resources page 67



# Laser Vision

Jon and Gayle Jarrett got more than they bargained for when they bought their '60s modernist home in Orange, Calif. Although they weren't immediately infatuated with the flat-roof residence, it did turn out to come with a bit of a pedigree.

An Eichler house with a center atrium, the four bedroom E-111 model was designed by architects Robert Anshen and Stephen Allen, the firm that worked on Joseph Eichler's own home and got the builder started on his forward-looking tract houses. In 1950 Anshen and Allen's first 51 units for Eichler—Sunnyvale Manor on the San Francisco peninsula—sold out in two weeks and were widely praised.

*text Michelle Gringeri-Brown*

*photography Jim Brown*

Gayle Jarrett and Ivy read in the atrium, while Jon stands at the new counter dividing the kitchen from the multipurpose room. The bedroom wing is to the right and the living and dining rooms to the left of the kitchen. The chair in the foreground was made by Jon's father, Ron.



The hanging lamps, above and opposite page, are George Nelson reproductions from Modernica, and the Herman Miller seating, also by Nelson, was an eBay find. "I love the organic freeform look of Danish modern. The house is so straight lined and perpendicular that it needs organic forms to break that up," says homeowner Jon Jarrett. "Plus, Naugahyde is great with a 4-year-old when the Kool-Aid hits."

Admirers of Frank Lloyd Wright's work, the two architects had launched their firm in 1940, and the multi-office company continues to work on international commissions today, years after their deaths.

The Jarretts tracked down the blueprints of their home to help envision what it once was—and could be again—and now have a tasteful, easy-living home for themselves and their 4-year-old daughter, Ivy. But we're getting ahead of ourselves here; first came months of sheer fun.

## the good, the bad and the ugly

"We weren't completely thrilled with the house, to tell you the truth," Jon admits, "but we had sold our previous home and were living in a condo while waiting for an Eichler to come on the market. There are waiting lists for these homes, so you'd better be ready to jump if there's an open house."

On a quiet cul-de-sac in the Fairhaven tract, the residence had aluminum siding covering the original thin-line grooved siding. "It also had torched sod and concrete stump-patterned stepping stones leading to the front door that had to go," Jon says.

Coupled with the plastic lattice installed above the atrium, drip irrigation draped across the beams for watering hanging plants, sand-textured paint in several rooms, faux-oak baseboards, industrial carpeting glued to the cement slab, artificial ivy stapled to the post-and-beam structure in the bathroom and a big-box kitchen, the house felt like a runner-up prize to others they'd bid on and lost. But white elephant or no, its 2,036 square feet was all theirs.



Ivy at the hallway sink with its original sliding door storage; clever construction details on the Herman Miller modular seating units; Jon Jarrett's newly fabricated front door escutcheon.

"It took two or three years for us to successfully bid on a house," Gayle says about their 2002 purchase. "People thought this one needed a lot of work and when we got it we went, 'Oh, no!' Which was followed by, 'Let's find the vision and just do it.' "

## down and dirty

Jon, a machinist in the aerospace field, and Gayle, who works in the surf/skate apparel industry, had cut their renovation teeth on their first house, a 1940s home in Costa Mesa. This second restoration promised to be more daunting in its scope.

"One of the first things I wanted to do was pull off the cladding, which I thought would be easy," Jon says. "But the aluminum would fail around the big, heavy roofing nails they'd used to install it. A worker and I had to use claw hammers to remove all of those; the original siding underneath was pretty worked."

The Jarretts ordered 36 sheets of the unique-to-Eichlers "thin-line" siding from Northern California at about \$80 a sheet plus shipping. Contractor Randy Clerico, who has done other such siding projects in Eichler tracts, removed and replaced one sheet at a time and fabricated the corner caps that cover the butt joints where two sheets meet.

Inside the couple pulled up the glued-down carpeting and evaluated the original Philippine mahogany paneling. They were faced with two dilemmas: should they go with cork, linoleum, bamboo or terrazzo floors or stick with the Pergo that had been installed in the hall and multipurpose room off the kitchen; and refinish or replace the wall paneling?

"It's tricky: what lengths do you want to go to to save the original stuff?"





The new mahogany wall between the dining and living rooms with its display niches.

Opposite, a simple human trashcan sits near the pantry storage unit. "We have to live with our modern furniture," Jon Jarrett says of their vintage pieces. "The Saarinen set has fleabites along the rim of the table from kids twirling the chairs, and there are scuff marks on the tulip chairs where our daughter runs her My Little Pony up and down; you can't fault a kid for trying to have fun with your stuff. We don't want to be uptight modernists."

Jon asks rhetorically. Concluding that the primed and painted paneling was unsalvageable, the couple chose 1/4" Honduran mahogany, pricey at around \$40 per sheet. "Lots of places stock the Luan variety, but I wasn't happy with the quality," he says. "I stood a few Honduran ones up and saw that the grain pattern was really pretty and was going to look sharp." He finished the panels with orange flake shellac cut with alcohol, a wipe-on wipe-off process, then knocked back the sheen by sanding lightly with a Scotch-Brite pad in lieu of steel wool.

As for the nasty sand-texture paint: "It was one of those bad ideas from a home improvement program that shows a quick way to beautify your home. I'm a big fan of beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but in the green dining room it looked like guacamole had been hurled on the walls. We had to pay a guy good money to scrape it off with a heat gun and a spatula. It was a lot of effort to unwind all of this stuff," Jon says.

"Most Eichler buyers are looking for something as untouched as possible, so realtors who tell sellers to spruce things up just to sell are doing a disservice," Gayle adds.

## now we're cookin'

The original kitchen of the home had been replaced with a home-improvement-center special—raised-panel oak cabinets, brass pulls, faux red brick vinyl floor. They recycled the existing cupboards to buyers who thought the style was just grand and gutted the room entirely. Inspiration for the Jarretts' new galley kitchen was based on the prototypical steel



Eichler X-100 kitchen and their Anshen and Allen blueprints, which gave dimensions, appliance locations and countertop heights.

"Getting the kitchen back was really pivotal to the feel of the house," Jon says. "The kitchen is the epicenter—it's where a lot of social activity takes place. I wanted Formica countertops and cabinets, that whole midcentury look."

The couple drew up plans and found a great cabinet guy, Joe Estrada, to help them realize their '60s pipe dream. Trouble was, Joe was so popular that their installation was delayed by two months, giving them the classic dishwashing-in-the-bathroom, microwaving-in-the-dining-room experience. The Jarretts selected affordable Frigidaire appliances, including a cooktop with coils instead of hidden heating elements, which complemented the vintage look of the countertops; an 18" Frigidaire dishwasher was just the right size for the space next to the sink.

Jon machined the round cabinet finger hole pulls slightly larger than the standard ones you can buy, because "they have more pop," and the toe kick is edged in a matching aluminum-look veneer. The pulls are sort of a visual joke, as the cabinet doors don't actually slide but spring open to the touch on hidden hinges. The side of the peninsula that faces the multipurpose room mixes Formica with grass cloth inserts for visual interest.

"The X-100 kitchen is very similar to ours except we don't have the table," Gayle says of the low, pivoting breakfast table at the end of the cooktop peninsula in some Eichlers. "Jon designed both a metal-top and a Formica-top table in our plans, but at the last minute we didn't put it on because we

The original kitchen  
of the home had  
been replaced with a  
home-improvement-center special



these homes  
draw creative people,  
people who yearn for what  
we remember growing up

felt it would close off the kitchen too much.” A Saarinen tulip table and chairs in the open multipurpose room is where the family eats while they await the perfect dining room set.

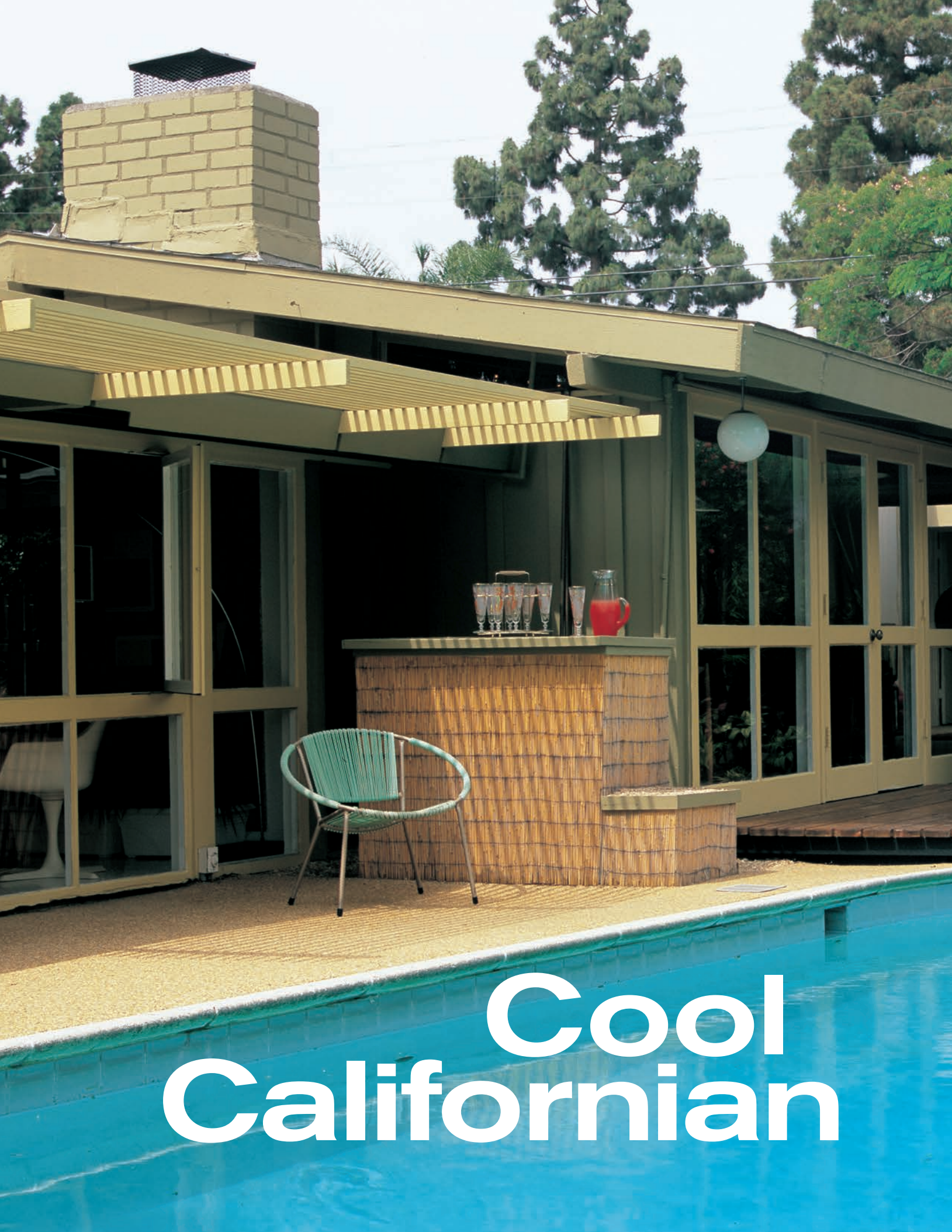
In that future dining room, the Jarretts opened up the wall with a clerestory treatment of display niches that allows the living and dining spaces to share light and keeps the dining side from being claustrophobic. Despite having a full wall of glass, the dining room is relatively narrow and has doors to the garage, water heater and living room on two walls, a design flaw that Gayle learned made their Eichler model less popular initially.

Jon has applied his talents to re-creating Eichler-specific parts for his home, including sheets of thin-line siding for a new fence, and a missing front-door escutcheon machined out of a 3/4” solid aluminum billet, a detail whose dimensions he took off of a neighbor’s door.

Speaking of the neighbors, that has been another big plus for the Jarretts. “I can’t say enough about the people who live in this neighborhood,” Gayle says. “It draws creative people, people who yearn for what we remember growing up: kids out playing, people out talking to each other, knowing your neighbor.

“The whole aura of the homes is that Joseph Eichler was a man who had sort of a wild thought for his time. Even the older people who live here are very creative. For a family like us, this is the best housing choice we could have made. From the neighborhood and the neighbors to the actual layout and design of the home, to have room for Ivy and animals to run around and still be able to see them, it’s been the best.” 🪑

Resources page 67



# Cool Californian



Ken Klawitter and Anthony Edwards always lived in homes with great views—whether they were of the surf or city lights. But when they found this 1953 house in the section of Long Beach, Calif., called the Ranchos, they crafted their own views of a modernist retreat.

*text* Bromley Davenport

*photography* Jim Brown



In the lanai game room, which was enclosed years ago, the homeowners play Risk or some of their other 37 board games with friends at their Burke tulip table and chairs. "It's not a Saarinen, but now Burke is becoming collectible, too," Ken Klawitter says.

"Durability, Beauty, Good Taste" enthused the brochure that introduced the "Californian" to would-be homeowners looking for their part of the postwar housing pie. "This is the home whose functional design and rustic, ranchlike flavor invite you to relax and enjoy life. Yet whose floor-to-ceiling windows, exciting uses of translucent glass, indirect lighting and decorator color schemes offer the informal luxury of today's best. You'll be carefree and happy in Lakewood Rancho Estates."

Available in 36 different elevations in both three- and four-bedroom models, the development merged the talents of designer Cliff May, architect Chris Choate and builder Ross Cortese, who presold the tract before building a single home (see "Cliff May Goes Prefab" page 42). Due to shifting city boundaries, the Ranchos, as they're informally known, are now in Long Beach not Lakewood.

When Edwards, who works in the financial arena, and Klawitter found their four-bedroom "lanai" model, the fence surrounding the pool was falling down, the whole house needed painting and heavy drapes made it a dark dungeon. It had a Dutch door at the front entrance, which had been relocated from the floor plan's original location. Previous owners had added on two additional bedrooms at the back and bumped the kitchen out five feet.

"I kept fantasizing about going in and taking down the curtains," Klawitter, a community college teacher, says. "Two days before escrow closed I got in and started pulling them down. The light just came flooding in."

The previous residents' gold-veined mirror squares, painted brick fireplace and frightening wall-to-wall carpet didn't deter the partners from their vision: finding





Ken Klawitter stands near a signature May element: a translucent glass panel that partitioned the kitchen from the living room. The wide doorway was likely the original front door, and the room seen in the background was once an outdoor lanai. Above, the lamp is a recent purchase from vintage shop Futures Collide.

affordable, inventive ways to create a clean, modern—but not austere—environment to come home to.

“Going in I was thinking about consistency and a color palette, design rules, but it didn’t happen that way,” Klawitter says.

Once the offending mirrors and carpet had been removed, he and Edwards decided to have the beamed ceiling and the fireplace sandblasted. The downside of that choice was that the wood and brick surfaces have had their texture permanently changed by the process; the upside was they avoided months of stripping and refinishing. “I love wood floors, so I thought if we had a wood ceiling, it’s kind of that same effect,” Klawitter says.

A pony (or partial) wall and a counter separated the kitchen and the small dining room from the living room. When the pair demoed one of the walls, a surprise awaited them: it contained a chase for plumbing and electrical systems. Edwards came through with a good solution, though: box in the mechanical area and install diner-like U-shaped banquette seating on top with two stainless steel restaurant tables for flexible entertaining.

In the master bedroom, turning a wall with two small original windows into a full expanse of glass transformed the room. Now, exterior doors on opposite sides of the room make the space into an open-air pavilion and it’s only a half dozen steps from the bed to a peaceful Zen garden or the pool. An important detail was reusing the existing vintage windows along with a door original to another Cliff May home in their tract. This made the remodeled room architecturally coherent with the rest of the house.

“We’d see doors and windows on the street that people were throwing away when they were doing improvements,” Klawitter says. “People would say, ‘Go ahead and take them.’ They were excited about getting new windows and doors and we were excited about getting their old ones. These are tract homes and they have the exact same size specifications.”

The pair also replaced sliders in their game room with another pair of recycled Ranchos doors and kept the original tubs in the two baths but installed new toilets, sinks and tile. Then came the best part: furnishing the rooms.

“It was fun to go looking for this stuff when we got the house; it’s still easy to find,” Klawitter says. “You can really go overboard, though. I think this house looks better with fewer things, so we purposely left walls blank. In the lanai room, we tried out various paintings and at one point I painted this stripey graphic, but the main wall looks better blank.”

Their furnishings include thrift store and flea market finds as well as a globe and Jens Risom chair from Modernica in Los Angeles. The living room’s generic Danish





## CLIFF MAY GOES PREFAB

Sensitive to the culture and lifestyle of Southern California, Cliff May's innovation and design style made the ranch home an icon for suburban living across America.

With his first house in 1932, May's aesthetic carried several familiar trademarks that would be identified throughout his career: unpretentious low-slung appearance, open floor plans, easy flow between indoors and outdoors, courtyard patios, post-and-beam construction and redwood board-and-batten siding.

Just after World War II, May and partner Chris Choate grabbed builders' attention with a series of small ranch homes suitable for suburban lots. *Sunset* magazine lauded Cliff May's work and collaborated with him on the book

*Sunset Western Ranch Houses* in 1946.

Three years later May and Choate designed an inexpensive L-shape rancher with a carport, designed for a city lot. It was a huge success, showcased on the cover of *Better Homes and Gardens* and *House Beautiful*.

The "City Lot" ranch house served as a prototype for 17 different models, ranging from 600 to 1,700 square feet. To make them affordable, May and Choate turned to prefabrication, creating a Tinkertoy-like kit to allow builders to quickly bring the California dream to more than 18,000 middle-class buyers in a span of just five years.

The kit, which included precut posts and beams and pre-assembled wall and window panels, was delivered by truck and built in three weeks. Following his first subdivision of prefab homes in Cupertino in 1952, May hired several



manufacturers around the country to produce components.

Nicknamed the “Magazine Cover Home,” advertisements boasted of May’s home designs for Hollywood stars like Gregory Peck and Olivia de Havilland. Promotional efforts included building a ranch house on the rooftop of W. & J. Sloane’s Beverly Hills store. As California’s best-selling home in 1953, tracts were built in Long Beach, Lakewood, Vista, Bakersfield, Castro Valley, Portola Valley and Chico. Later subdivisions popped up in Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona and Texas.

The “Cover Home” featured exposed post-and-beam framing, low-pitch roofs with glass-end gables, wood casement windows and walls of glass, and redwood board-and-batten siding. Arizona and Texas models used brick exteriors as well. Open interiors used drywall on walls and ceilings, black asphalt tile flooring and modular kitchen cabinets in either birch or walnut, topped with Formica counters. Rooms were lit with copper cone-shaped sconces and the interior

doors were slab mahogany or birch. While most homes used radiant heat, warmer climates like Long Beach used forced air to heat and cool.

Long Beach-area builder Ron Cortese sold out his 800-house tract before laying a single foundation. His demand was greater than the parts manufacturer could provide and he was allowed to build conventional walls and open beam ceilings.

By the end of 1955, Cliff May’s prefab homes were across the West, but demand for larger homes grew greater than what one truck could deliver to a work site. With the postwar housing boom slowing, Cliff May shifted his efforts back to designing and building custom homes. —Joe Barthlow

Freelance writer and designer Joe Barthlow is based in Eugene, Ore. With a passion for midcentury modern history, he is an avid collector of period home magazines, marketing materials and rare architecture books. He is currently restoring a 1955 Cliff May-designed home with his wife, Tina, and beagle, Reuben.



When kitchen renovation bids came in at \$20,000, the owners instead opted for some lower-cost choices: Formica counters, mid-range appliances, linoleum floors and working with existing elements. They kept the original yellow Western-Holly wall oven and replaced the '80s cabinet door centers with glass to update the appearance.






Modern pieces have a “populist, ranchy feel—it’s not that expensive and it’s comfortable,” Klawitter attests. An angled floor lamp with a flared glass shade and an enamel vase are from Futures Collide in Pomona. Their bed and night tables are popular models from IKEA.

“ebay is a great way to get reasonable art,” Klawitter volunteers. “Just type in ‘abstract painting’ and you can get things for \$50. Art from the ’50s and ’60s is affordable and it looks good in these houses; it has that patina of age.”

With the drywall dust just barely off the furniture, the pair were outbid on a 1920s house in L.A., and three months after our photo shoot they were thinking of putting the house up for sale and moving back to Los Angeles. Edwards’ skill in dealing with contractors, negotiating prices and making sure the project gets done, coupled with Klawitter’s vision of what a house can become, means the two are likely looking at careers as serial renovators.

Although they love other styles, too, perhaps another May, Alexander, Eichler or Streng is in their future. “There’s a certain kind of appeal to modernist houses,” Edwards says. “They have clean lines, simplicity, subtlety. More of a personality, really, than the typical curb appeal of other homes.”

Exactly. 

Hungry for more? We’ll be featuring additional Cliff May homes in upcoming issues, as well as the challenges that face a neighborhood in transition.

# Driveway *Dreams*

Some of the  
greatest automotive designs  
that never made it  
to the suburbs

**I**t seems slightly paradoxical that we look back to the 1950s with nostalgia, for it was arguably as forward looking an era as any in the 20th century. Styles in everything from home furnishings to clothing to automobiles reflected this optimistic trend, with confident color combinations, bold new shapes and previously undiscovered materials, all pointing the way toward a sunny future.

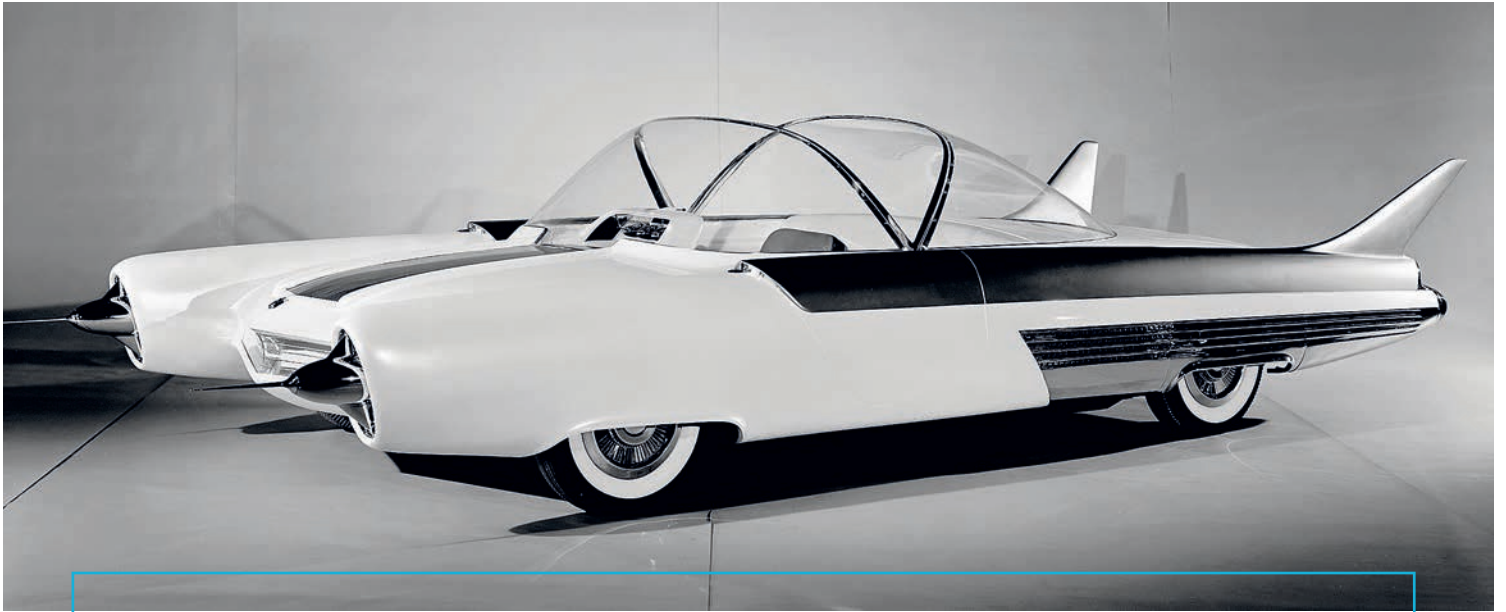
Taking their cue from a public hungry for the next new thing, the styling studios in Detroit launched a series of “dream cars.” These not only allowed car buyers to speculate on the future, but also occasionally hinted at upcoming styling directions or developing technologies. Many of these dream cars were pure flights of fancy, designed simply as marketing tools. Plenty were just body mockups—they never turned a wheel under their own power—and the advanced technologies they boasted were theoretical. No matter. Like so much else in America in the '50s, an overwhelming sky's-the-limit optimism pervaded the automobile industry, and auto show goers left knowing that even if the technology didn't exist yet, it might soon.



## *1952 Lincoln Continental Nineteen Fifty X*

Lincoln's first-ever dream car was missing all of the jet-ace-sci-fi techno-bobbles that so many other show cars claimed to have; this one didn't even pretend. Instead, Ford concentrated purely on style, as well as some radical mechanical ideas for '52, including a high-compression engine that required high-octane fuel.

As it turns out, its very conventionality made this one of the most truly future-predicting vehicles on these pages, as styling cues stemming from this dream car decorated suburban streets throughout the '50s and beyond. The front fenders, from the hooded headlights to the shape of the wheel arch, ended up on 1956-57 Lincolns; the power-bulge hood with chromed scoop was a styling feature of the '58 Ford line; the plex roof (though not retractable) was seen on the '55-56 Ford Crown Victoria; the rear quarters, from the skirted wheel openings to the slender mini-fins to the single taillights meant to ape rocket exhaust, appeared on the 1961-63 Ford Thunderbird, a full decade after the Nineteen Fifty X hit the show circuit.

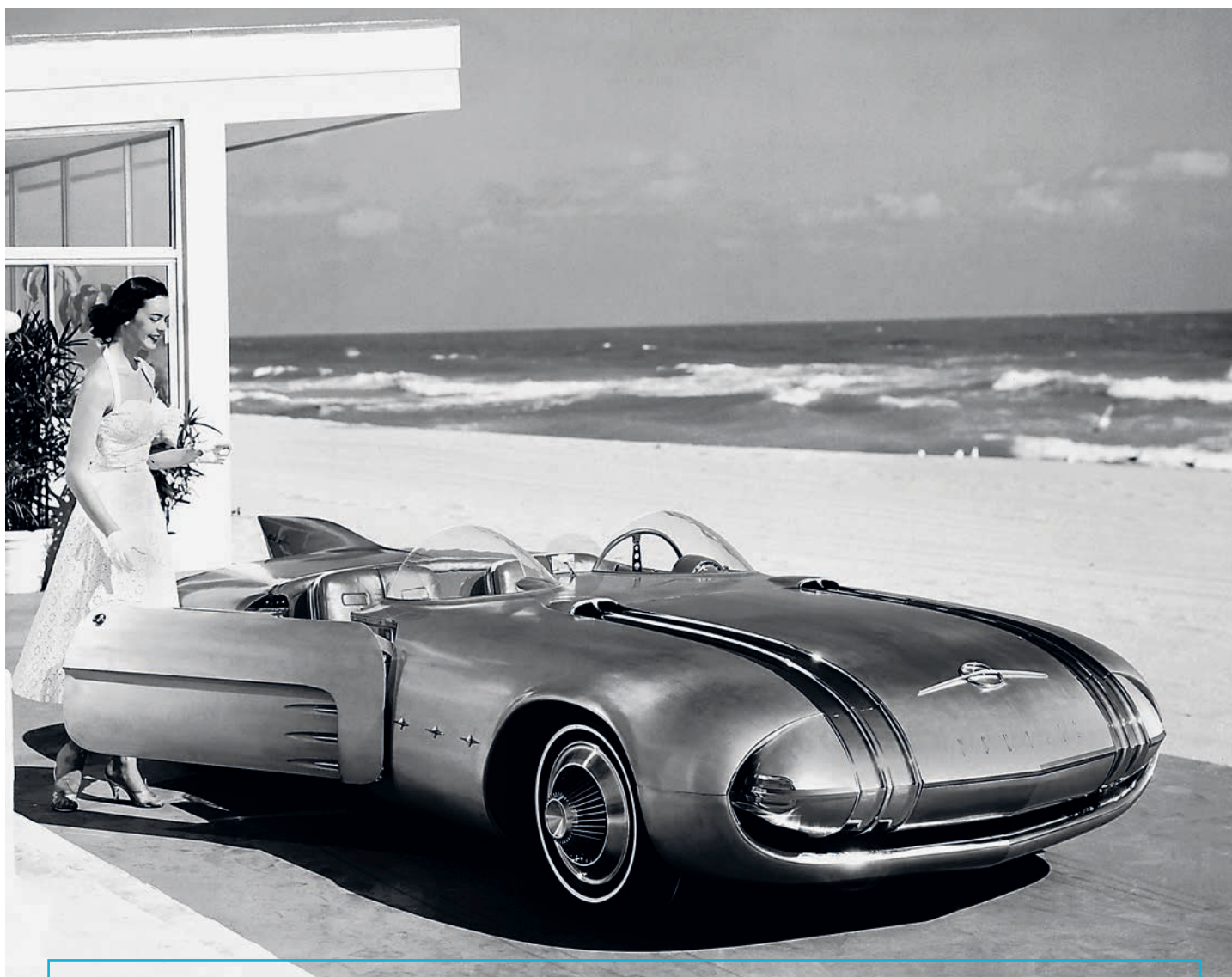


## *1954 Ford FX Atmos*

Ford's FX Atmos took the first steps toward an aircraft-cribbed, rocket-styled nuclear-powered future, informing an entire generation on what the day after tomorrow would resemble. It had no engine and didn't even pretend to be a running vehicle. It was years before the other car companies caught up to the sheer fantasy that the Atmos generated.

The needle-esque twin antennae, positioned where the headlights would ordinarily be, a handgrip control in lieu of a steering wheel, a bubble canopy, vertical tailfins at heretofore unseen heights, and center twin jet-style exhaust all pre-saged the rocket themes that would come to predominate the American dream car scene for the rest of the decade.





## *1956 Pontiac Club de Mer*

Compare Pontiac's Club de Mer with Ford's FX Atmos and GM's Firebird III (next page). Set the three in chronological order and you see a natural evolution through time: the body is more compact than the Ford's, yet chunkier than the Firebird. At the same time, Club de Mer's fiberglass body lines are taut, with the wheels pushed out toward the edges; the door strakes and front fender emblems are positively mild compared to the add-on styling devices employed by the other two. The least pure-fantasy vehicle of the three, yet at the same time it is all the more exciting because of what seemed like a very real possibility of production in the near future.

## *1957 Chrysler Dart*

Chrysler's clean "forward look" style, mostly devoid of chrome and featuring nicely integrated fins in the rear quarters, caused a sensation in '57. In the name of aerodynamics as well as style, they designed a pointy nose and other aerodynamic aids on the aptly named Dart, including a full bellypan that ran the length of the undercarriage. The goal was to build a vehicle suitable to reach 200 mph; a modified, production-based, fuel-injected, 400 hp Mopar would be just the power plant to get it there.



## *1959 GM Firebird III*

GM's Firebird series of 1950s dream cars were a near-literal translation from the world of jet aircraft. Each had a single rear dorsal fin and a Plexiglas bubble canopy covering the cockpit; even a conventional steering wheel and pedals were discarded in favor of a central-mounted aircraft-type yoke used to steer, accelerate and brake from either side of the cockpit. The power train was a gas-turbine engine, a concept that kept many a Detroit engineering lab busy.


The 1954 Firebird dream car caused a sensation; the second, in 1956, was a more serious investigation into putting something futuristic in America's driveways. But jet-age styling reached its automotive zenith with this 1959 model. Sporting a total of seven fins, wings and trim tabs, no other factory-produced show car, then or since, would ever top the III's sheer exuberance.

## 1959 Ford Levicar

Though cars that rolled on three, two or even one wheel were shown throughout the decade, in 1959 Ford displayed three vehicles that featured no wheels at all. Rather, each model would hover a fraction of an inch above the ground thanks to three “levapads” mounted on bearings to keep them level with the ever-shifting driving surface. Small holes on the pads shot air at 15 psi and allowed the vehicle to levitate. A turbojet or a gas turbine engine were the popular options for forward propulsion, but none of the models ever worked. Unsurprisingly, nothing ever came of this series of vehicles, save for the use of the Mach 1 name on Mustangs a decade later.



Some of the seeds of ideas planted back in the '50s are just now coming to fruition. While the midcentury automotive designer dreamed of an age beyond internal combustion, today we are experimenting with fuel cells, electric power and other alternative power sources in our vehicles. Automated highways, which take the drive out of the driving experience, are now in the experimental stage at test areas around the Southwest. The shapes of these dream cars may

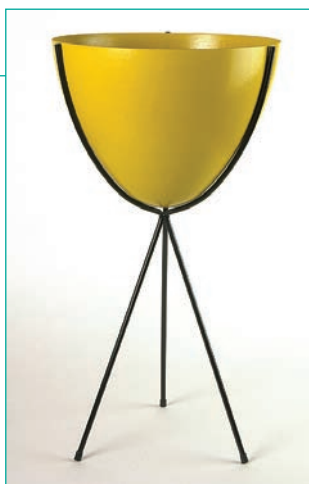
seem quaint and out-of-date now, but the engineers mostly got their high-tech dreams right. It just took a little longer than we'd hoped to get there. Such was the power of their dreams—and ours. 

Jeff Koch is West Coast associate editor for *Hemmings Motor News*, and has written for more than a dozen other automotive titles. He lives in Los Angeles with his 8,000 1:64 scale die cast cars and a mildly annoyed wife.

# more cool | stuff

## Plant This

Here's a bullet you wouldn't mind taking: Kelley Sandidge of Hip Haven in Austin sells Retro Bullet Planters that were a staple in stylish homes 50 years ago. Made from reinforced compression-molded Fiberglass resting on black, chrome, brass and galvanized finish stands, the planters come in three sizes—16", 23" and 29 1/2". The egg-yellow one would look great with striped New Zealand flax in it or maybe some tasteful papyrus in a low red number. Check out the 12 colors online at [www.hiphaven.com](http://www.hiphaven.com).



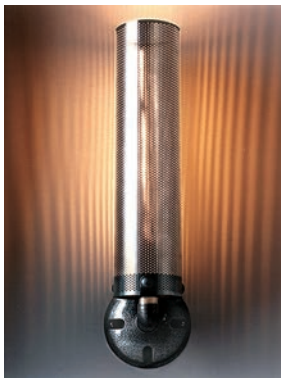
## Sweet Fried Goodness

D'oh! Homer may have trouble distinguishing between the real sweet treats and these note cards, but paper has some nutritional qualities, right? Inspired by the "Simpsons" patriarch's love for the glazed, jelly-filled confections, Tweet Projects has come up with this series of two-dozen assorted variety images. From pretty sprinkles or confetti-covered snacks, to a rather desolate night shot of a local donut shop, the cards all inspire one feeling: hunger. Available from [www.tweetprojects.com](http://www.tweetprojects.com), Exit 9 in NYC, Saffron in Chicago and Skylight Books in L.A., they retail for \$21—well worth the carb binge that's sure to follow.



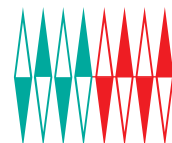
### Line 'Em Up

Tired of the sad choices in shelf liner available at your local hardware or grocery store? What, bad faux-wood, sweet flowers or '80s attempts at Pollock's paint splatter weren't what you were looking for? Neither were we. Now what about real cork, brushed steel or matte copper? Exactly. Duck brand Easy Liners have come to the rescue for the modern or midcentury kitchen and bath. Available for \$5.99-\$9.98 nationwide; see [www.duckproducts.com](http://www.duckproducts.com) for details, store locations and amazingly bizarre tales of uses for duct tape on animals.



### House Lights

Paul Merwin's background in stage, screen and club lighting prepared him well for his current career as the founder of Fabulux Inc. His ceiling, wall and floor lamps are a bit different than other midcentury homages. The custom-order styles range from a conical Mono-Bullet Sconce for \$210 to an unabashedly industrial looking Field Bounce ceiling light priced at \$850, plus 25 others. Visit his virtual showroom at [www.fabuluxinc.com](http://www.fabuluxinc.com); 718•625•7661.



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# help! for your

## the issues:

We bought an intact 1950s ranch in Denver and have decided to treat it as a restoration since I'm an urban planning student and have a strong restoration bias. It is a pleasure to keep features such as the copper kitchen cabinets, mahogany paneled ceilings, huge windows and candy-colored tile bathrooms. The problem is that I can't restore certain items, so I'm writing to ask for advice.

*Susan Livingston*

### Kitchen Conundrums

**Q:** Our kitchen cabinets are either maple or birch; how were they originally finished, with shellac, varnish or polyurethane? And how should they be refinished?

**A:** Circa 1950s cabinetry was finished with a variety of materials. Varnish was most likely, but polyurethane—then heralded as “liquid plastic”—was also possible. If it is vital to discover the actual original material, I suggest taking a door off of the cabinetry and taking it to the oldest mom-and-pop paint store in town (we've all got one). There should be an expert on hand who can tell you what the original material was if you want to choose that same route. Another consideration for period correctness is that varnish was applied with a brush 50 years ago, as the day of airless sprayers was still quite a ways off. In making a final consideration of how to finish your cabinetry, choose a material that will look correct alongside the rest of the house and kitchen. In other words, ensure that the refinish matches the level of the rest of the restoration process. If you are renewing all nearby surfaces, it is more appropriate to strip the cabinetry all of the way down and reapply a new finish. Conversely, if the other elements in the kitchen are going to remain unchanged, it is worthwhile taking a lighter approach, cleaning and applying finish only where it is needed to keep the vintage look. Lastly, as a rule,

with birch and maple, natural oil-based finishes like varnish and shellac will imbue an orange or honey-like hue while polyurethane and other manmade materials will allow the wood to remain closer to the prefinished color. Keep this in mind when making your decision.



**Q:** We have a Coppertone sink that needs refinishing. I can't find Coppertone paint, nor can I find a professional who can promise a job done in less than three months. Is there a source for Coppertone fixtures, or how can old ones be cleaned?

**A:** Unfortunately, the classic Coppertone color has not quite caught on with mainstream restoration specialists, nor do I suspect that it will. It is one of those color choices from our past that is so dated that only we true lovers of the period will ever appreciate it. I would recommend trying some local used appliance and fixture yards for possibilities. Finding someone who will be able to accurately match the Coppertone porcelain

sink in a refinishing material might be a tough search as well. Appliances and fixtures from the period are generally porcelain, so are hearty enough to take most of today's grease-cutting cleansers. However, when applying a cleanser to a painted surface, be very careful: Even some of the standard cleaners we use today can permanently etch

# midcentury marvel

from Bryan Forward

painted surfaces, or even worse, strip the screen-printed numbers and letters right off of your appliance knobs. The general rule for cleaning kitchen appliances should be, begin with very hot water and soap, then gradually try cleaners such as Simple Green before moving up to more heavy-duty stuff.

## What About Windows?

**Q:** Our windows are metal framed. I understand that Frank Lloyd Wright preferred metal-frame windows because they let in the most light, but our family room only has windows on one side and the three others are solid walls.

**A:** Light can be brought into the room in a few different ways. The installation of a new window on another exterior wall is the most obvious, but unfortunately the most expensive solution. A few period-correct solutions might be:



• Installing transom windows (panes of glass inset into the top of the wall about a foot from the ceiling) on a non-load bearing wall that is adjacent to a room that also has natural light. The sharing of the ceiling will make both rooms seem bigger and will allow the shared light to brighten both areas.

• Paint the window wall a color that is sympathetic to the most dominant color viewed looking outside. Then, paint the opposite wall yellow or bright white, which can reflect some of the available light back into the room.

• Paint the window wall a color that is sympathetic to the most dominant color viewed looking outside. Then, paint the opposite wall yellow or bright white, which can reflect some of the available light back into the room.

• Install a large enough mirror on the wall opposite the window to allow the window to be “duplicated” across from the real one. This was an effective tool used by renowned

architect Richard Neutra to extend space and eliminate darkness; it’s an effective and cost-saving way to increase natural light.

**Q:** Our house has corner windows; how can we put in more of these?

**A:** Corner window retrofitting in an old house can provide quite a few structural hurdles that will be costly. Corners are naturally where there is substantial strength in a building. The tying of two planes combined with the need to support the corner of a roof structure becomes substantially altered when inserting a window into the space. The walls will have to be reengineered to accommodate the glazing, resulting in substantial construction to allow for the opening. One of the ways midcentury architects compensated for corner windows was with the use of metal poles or columns, both in the corner of the window and on the exterior to support the roof structure. An “outrigger” consisting of a beam that rests on a vertical support column away from the structure was another clever and attractive way to combine indoors and out in corner windows. Consult a licensed structural engineer who can calculate the required framing retrofitting when considering corner windows. Aside from being a part of the local building permit process, the amount of construction will depend on the size of the window and will help you to make your decision.



*Got a question for our experts? Write us at [editor@atomicranch.com](mailto:editor@atomicranch.com) or Atomic Ranch, Publishing Office, 917 Summit Drive, South Pasadena, CA 91030. Send some pix!*

Bryan Forward is the principal of Forward Design Group, a consulting company specializing in interior, exterior and landscaping design in the midcentury modern aesthetic. Contact him at [www.forwarddesigngroup.com](http://www.forwarddesigngroup.com) or 760•533•1950.



# JOLLY RANCHERS

Charles Phoenix

Who hasn't sat through a relative's or friend's long, dull, painful vacation slide show? "Kitsch-Culture" humorist Charles Phoenix revels in that medium, crafting a career out of his fascination with all things midcentury. He entertains weekend audiences at Hollywood's Egyptian Theater with a retro slide show tour of Southern California, using some of the 500,000 Kodachrome thrift-store images he began collecting in 1992. He also conducts tours of downtown Los Angeles as seen through a Disneyland prism: Autopia = the 110 Freeway, Frontierland = Clifton's Brookdale Cafeteria, etc.

Phoenix has translated some of the best shots into several books, including *Southern Californialand: Midcentury Culture in Kodachrome*, his latest. The text focuses on details about the images—bowling history courtesy of the Eichleresque Covina Bowl shot in 1956, Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower stepping out of a 1960 limo in Palm Springs while neighbors peer over the hedge. But it's the images that drive the title. Of surprisingly high quality, the photos show early Disneyland, the Luer "Quality Meat" rocket, the Brown Derby and the Big Do-Nut DriveIn, as well as the amusingly mundane—a couple entertaining friends in their breakfast nook, an adults-only pool party in 1957, Christmas morning in Downey, Calif., complete with cotton batting snow and tinfoil icicles.

Phoenix grew up in a 1955 custom-built house in Ontario, Calif., where his mother still lives. "It's a very typical ranch: it has a weathervane, used-brick fireplace, shutters, diamond-pane windows, a shake roof," he says. When doing research for his first book, he found an early photo of his house illustrating Ontario as a "City of Beautiful Homes."

Phoenix's mother's taste ran to 1960s Early American: maple furniture, ruffled lampshades—Ethan Allen was her favorite place to shop. "It was pretty yummy," he agrees. His current apartment has eclectic vintage furnishings, but "In my dreams, my new décor is high maple, 'Rural Revival' Early American. I love freeform atomic shapes, but I've been doing that [look] for 25 years and the Western ranch look is much fresher to me now."

What exactly is that? "The number one most important thing for a Rural Revival Ranch is the spinning wheel," Phoenix explains. "Then a butter churn and a spittoon and the old phone that's now a planter. And a big braided rug."

From adolescence on, Phoenix says he's rarely bought anything new, from clothes to furniture to cars. His current rides are a "Barney Fife" 1960 Ford Fairlane 500 in aqua bought from the original owner, and a yellow 1960 Mercury Montclair convertible with 36,000 miles.

"My prime era is the late '50s. I love the color palettes, the quality of the goods, the materials they were made out of—everything was heavy-duty, bulletproof, more luxurious then. I find the vintage stuff superior to new things and just feel more creative in the realm of vintage."

Resources page 67



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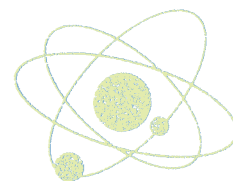


Outside your midcentury

Rustic ranch



Collecting bug hits big time



## where'd you **get that?**

### turning the mundane into the sublime pp. 18–24

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### laser vision pp. 26–32

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🍷 Honduran plywood, Forest Plywood Sales, La Mirada, Calif.; 714•523•1721 🍷 Custom orders for Eichler-style door escutcheon, knob, latch bolt and keys (\$125), and small orders of Eichler thin-line siding through Jon Jarrett, Thinkmat@aol.com

### cool californian pp. 36–45

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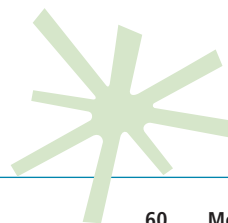
### cool stuff pp. 58

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### jolly rancher pp. 61

Charles Phoenix's books include *Southern California in the '50s*; *Fabulous Las Vegas in the '50s*; *Leis*, *Luau* and *Alohas*; *Cruising the Pomona Valley*; and *God Bless Americana*. For info, go to [www.godblessamericana.com](http://www.godblessamericana.com) and [www.angelcitypress.com](http://www.angelcitypress.com)

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