

winter 2006

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cover

A modest postwar ranch in Southern California's San Fernando Valley has been decorated as if a western B-movie star still lived there. Thirties, '40s and '50s furniture and accessories include a Coronado couch and chair, a swap-meet coffee table made from a vintage Swedish trunk and inexpensive prints and paintings on the fireplace wall. The punchy poster for an unknown, yet obviously colorful cowboy actor ties it all together.



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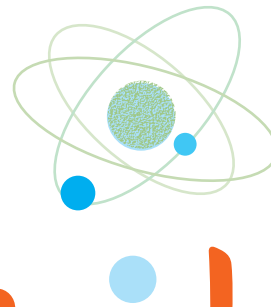
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modernwisdom

Q I have long admired and studied the Farnsworth house and, after reading the article published in Atomic Ranch earlier this year (summer 2006), I felt inspired to finally see it in person.

In June my mother and I traveled nearly 700 miles from east Tennessee to Plano, Ill., for the sole purpose of touring Farnsworth. Sure, we visited other sites, including Oak Park and the Robie House as well as other works by Mies van der Rohe in downtown Chicago. However, Farnsworth was easily the highlight of our trip. In fact, I've taken many architectural tours, including Fallingwater and Kentuck Knob, but feel that none have been as inspiring as Farnsworth. Seeing this amazing architectural icon in person is a must for any enthusiast.

Many thanks to Atomic Ranch for publishing that



article and giving me the last little shove I needed to finally go see this masterpiece. I hope to return to see it in every season!

David Pope

Johnson City, Tenn.

Q I would appreciate seeing an article on midcentury apartment buildings and how readers living in those buildings have created an "Atomic Ranch" inside their unit. My husband Dane and I live in a 1958 formerly sea-foam green stucco apartment building that has

multicolored stonework on the front. Most of the original details and fixtures still exist. Our experienced carpenter, Tom Harris, has been refurbishing our interior for us, including lubricating all the metal parts of our louver windows then securing the panes so they are difficult to remove, as we live on the first floor.

Thanks to you and your staff for putting out an informative and groovy publication.

Christine Swanson

Online



Sandi's Pad

Q I was one of the first happy readers to find your magazine two years ago and I immediately and eagerly shared it with fellow midcentury mod enthusiasts. I became a homeowner, finally, last year and purchased a very modest 1964 ranch tract home in a block of the same. I have truly enjoyed learning about the neighborhood by talking to original owners. The down payment

morewisdom

for the homes in '64 was \$500 and that included the cans of paint for the interior. These houses represented the American dream to blue-collar Portlanders at the time (and still do to some of us). As many of us do, I'm taking it one room at a time and am finding resources quite limited, i.e. appropriate doors, moldings, fencing and mailboxes.

Cheers for such a fantastic publication.

Sandi Vincent

Portland, Ore.



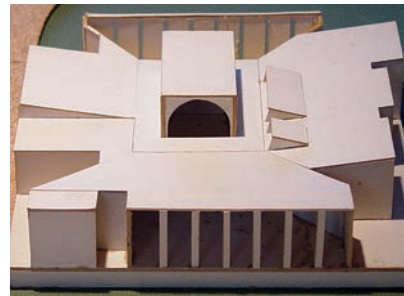
Rejuvenation's Shelton mailbox

We pass along good resources as we discover them, and simultaneously hope to give manufacturers encouragement to stick their toe in the MCM market by showing them just how many consumers could use their products. To address your specific list, our links to door resources (Ranch Dressing in no. 10 and in this issue, page XX), fence ideas (see page XX as well) and mailboxes (try Rejuvenation's Shelton, Ranch-style or mail-slot models, rejuvenation.com) should get you started. On the molding front, Portland's McCoy

Millwork has a few simple, modern moldings, including some they note as appropriate for early ranch houses. And though not on your list, check out the contemporary doorbells at moderndoorbells.com; pretty cool.

—ar editor

Q My partner and I are renovating a butterfly roof midcentury modern home in a small town of about 3,800 people approximately 35 miles south of Atlanta. The house was built in 1963 and was designed by Robert B. Church, III, who went on to become the first dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville before passing away at age 41. We have a full set of construction plans and even received personal



notes between the original owner and the architect. We love the house and hopefully will have the restoration and landscaping completed in about two years.

I've sent in a picture of a model that was done for the house. There was not a lot of this style built in the South, especially in what was then a rural setting; now we are the 'burbs. There are two other examples of modern homes on our street and another elsewhere in town. Our county, Henry County, is usually in the top 10 of the fastest-growing counties in America. I not sure that is something to brag or be sad about.

Gary Joiner

Hampton, Ga.

continued on page 12

even more wisdom

Q My wife and I are happily ensconced in a 1954 ranch home in southwest Portland. The house really comes into its own in the dark winter months when natural light is at a premium. To our surprise, we discovered a heaping pile of architectural plans when we moved in. The architect, Clive Kienle, designed our home plus two other neighboring houses, including one he built for himself. We also found a number of plans dating to 1963 for two additions to our home (including a "T.V. Well" room). The plans were never realized; perhaps someday.

We enjoyed the article on the Beaverton Rummer (no. 11), which we got a chance to peep at on the "Street of Eames" tour. A friend of ours owns another Rummer in Beaverton. It's great to see different variations on a theme.

John & Kelly Skelton

Portland, Ore.

The Street of Eames event the Skeltons mention was a modernist home tour of a half-dozen Portland residences in April 2006, including the "Perfect Fit" Rummer we photographed in August 2005. Check their site, streetofeames.org for info on the upcoming April 14, 2007 event.

Q Do you have any information on the lamp featured on the cover of no. 4, winter 2004? I noted that it's listed as a Danish Modern torchere. I'd like to know where the owner bought it or how I can get a hold of one. Any information gratefully appreciated.

David Smethurst

Online



YLighting's 49" high Rumba P designed by Helena Pouch.

We got plenty of mail about that lamp. The homeowner bought it on eBay, it's unmarked and so far our vintage dealers have been unable to definitively identify a maker. It's one of a pair, and we've seen tri-pod lamps and cone lamps, but not this particular combo before.

Which prompted David to write back: An interesting offshoot is this modern one: ylighting.com/glb-tlr-166300.html. It's not as original, but has pretty good lines.
—ar editor

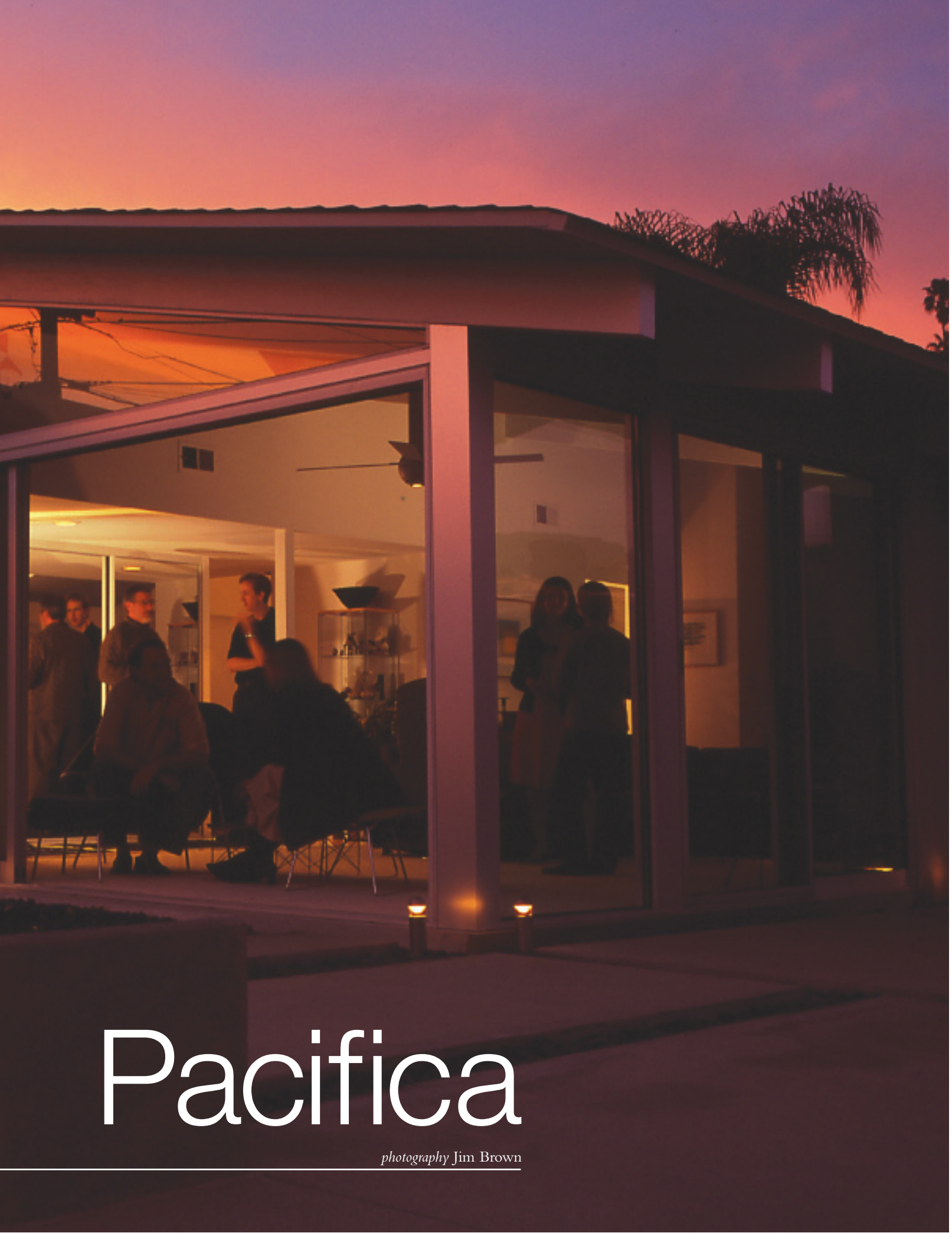
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A photograph of a modern, single-story house at sunset. The sky is a warm orange and yellow. Several palm trees are silhouetted against the sky behind the house. The house has a flat roof and large windows. One window on the right shows a glowing, ribbed lamp inside. In the foreground, there is a low concrete wall and a fire pit with a small fire burning. The overall mood is warm and contemporary.

See
World:

Palmer
& Krisel's

text Josephine Goodwin



Pacifica

photography Jim Brown

“I started to really understand midcentury style when I was in high school and college,” says Cheryl Dine, who lives in a Palmer and Krisel house overlooking Mission Bay in San Diego. “My mom gave me a book with Scandinavian-designed furniture in it, and I thought, ‘Oh, I have to go to Norway and Denmark and see this stuff’—as if it wasn’t here.”

Cheryl, a graphic designer, and her husband, Marty, a golf-course consultant, have just come off a two-year exterior renovation where they relandscaped, replaced every door and window and replastered the exterior of the house. They bought their home almost 10 years ago.

Neighbors Darren and Elise Bradley have also recently finished a major remodel that netted them an expanded kitchen and master bath, a pool in the backyard and an updated front facade. The scientist (her) and aerospace manager (him) bought their 1960, 1,600-square-foot post-and-beam home two years ago and are among the younger residents of the Leonard Drogin–built tract.

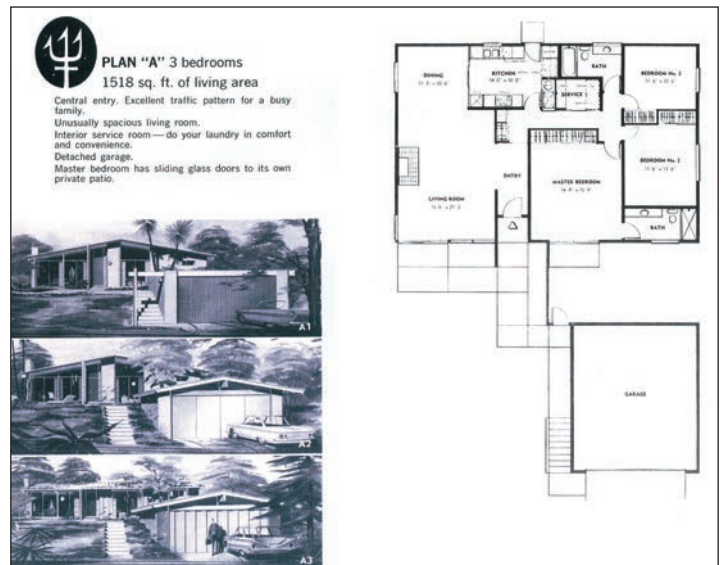
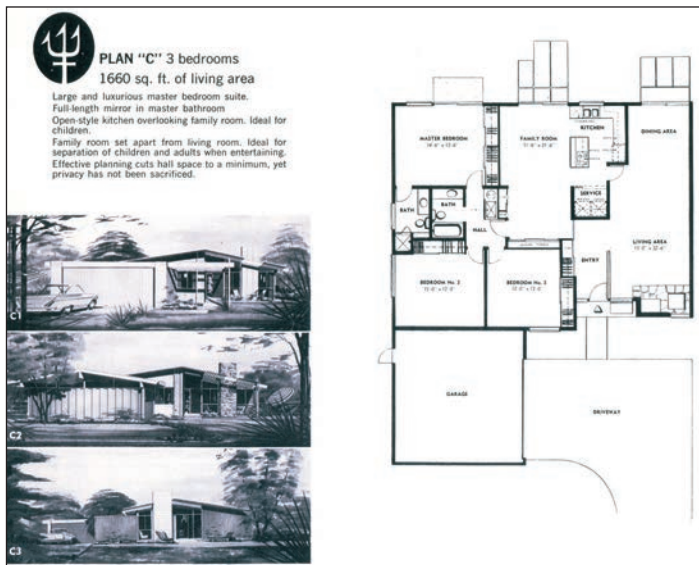
“Marty and Cheryl are the social directors of the neighborhood,” Darren says. “As

soon as we moved in and they saw what we were doing with the house, they figured, ‘Ah—kindred spirits!’ and left a note on the door.”

A third couple, Lynn Reizer, a filming coordinator, and husband Rex Heftman, are two more of the handful of residents who love the Pacifica tract’s modern architecture, a decided minority in an area where most people buy for the view and location. Rex bought his P&K some 20 years ago, pre Lynn; when he moved in, he was the young kid on the block.

“I knew from Eichler but not from P&K,” Rex, a graphic designer, says. “To see that there was an architectural house in San Diego County and that it was for sale, much less that I could afford it, was unbelievable. I was assuming I’d buy an ugly house—what else is there? But I drove up in the car with my realtor friend and said, ‘I’ll take it.’ When he asked if I didn’t want to get out of the car, I said, ‘No; it’s mine.’ ”





Pacifica and Palmer and Krisel

William Krisel is known for the Alexander homes in Palm Springs that he and partner Dan Palmer designed beginning in the mid-'50s. Today, the butterfly, flat and folded-plate rooflines of the Twin Palms and other tracts epitomize midcentury modernism. But perhaps his most well known icon is the Alexanders' own *Life* "House of Tomorrow," also dubbed Elvis' Honeymoon Hideaway. One year, of the 10 largest builders in America, seven of them were Palmer and Krisel clients, Bill Krisel says today, estimating he's been responsible for designing 40,000 living units.

"Drogin built in 10 or 12 different locations using my designs," says Krisel. "Alexander homes were done at an earlier date; they were basically second homes and the ones in San Diego were full-time. The Pacifica and Palm Springs houses are the same in that they're both post and beam, but the Palm Springs ones are much more daring or interesting in their exterior designs.

"Leonard Drogin knew about my houses in Palm Springs and thought they were a little too much for people in San Diego, that they need to have a house that looked like a house," he explains. "The strange thing is, a competitor of Drogin's engaged me to do the Alexander-type house in University City and quite a few other areas of San Diego County, and they sold quite well. Drogin didn't want to go that far, so all of the Pacifica houses are front- or side-gable models.

"Unfortunately, in most of these houses that front on the street, the biggest element is the garage or carport. You need to change the garages so that people don't think the houses are exactly the same. I have the ability to visualize all of the possibilities—you can turn it this way, you can change the roof slope or add a high or low section. All of these ideas have to be restricted by cost; I have to have ideas that are practical and fit within the budget. When you work with builders and developers, their main forte is, What's the bottom line? My objective is how good a design I can do."

The Dines are launching a website about the Pacifica tract, sharing some of Krisel's mar-

The Dines and Bradleys live in "C" plan homes, while Heftman and Reizer are in an "A".



keting materials and area history in order to educate fellow homeowners on the significance of the style. "We want to show what the spirit of the architecture was when they were originally conceived, but I don't cast myself as the arbiter of good taste," Marty says.

"Of course there are the people who roll in and decide, 'Oh, gosh; this house is a bag of crap. I have to have a big, giant stucco block.' They turn them into a Spanish McMansion or a Little Tuscany. All we can do is give people knowledge about what's here and why it was done," he offers. "Hopefully that will inspire some of them."





The fireplace in Darren & Elise's home is still in the original location, as compared to the open wall of windows at Cheryl & Marty's house (next page). In the foreground is a white 1960 Thayer Coggin couch covered in Knoll fabric and behind it are a Design Within Reach shelf system and two Marcel Breuer Wassily chairs. The black tufted couch is also vintage, and the clamshell chair is from Club 8. Flooring is 18" square travertine tile.

Facing, The new IKEA kitchen at the Bradleys' house feels like an outdoor space thanks to the Jeld-Wen WindowMaster sliders that open the room to the pool patio. The globe pendants are original and the sconces from IKEA.

Young Bucks

The Bradleys took their stylistic cues for their P&K remodel from homes they'd seen in Palm Springs, as well as the Eichler playbook. "We returned it to the color palette that was used in the neighborhood originally: beams were typically dark chocolate brown with sage green or beige board and batten," says Darren. "To give us additional privacy without needing curtains, we used Mistlite panels of textured glass for a fence—a similar design cue to Eichlers."

In their floor plan, the kitchen and den were open to each other, but there was a wall between the living/dining area and the kitchen. They removed the wall, annexed some of the den for the kitchen and the remainder for a new second bath, and added a glass slider wall leading from the kitchen to the pool patio. The original second bathroom was absorbed into an expanded master bath.

Elise, who is an accomplished cook, enjoys the new 13' x 16' kitchen, with its mix of high-end and budget finishes and fixtures: Miele appliances, white lacquer cabinetry and gray countertops from IKEA, Hansgrohe faucets and travertine floors. The couple hired Hector and Pamela Magnus of Architects Magnus to help gel their vision.

"The budget limited the amount of structural modifications. Existing openings were made taller, clerestory windows were added over existing doors and only a small portion of the



The Philippe Starck for Kartell settee and chairs were found on eBay and Craigslist.com, while the Saaren-like table is from IKEA.



rear wall had to be retrofitted for seismic loads,” says Hector Magnus. “Darren and Elise were great at researching and making decisions on products and materials that allowed them to keep within a relative distance of their budget. When clients suggest cost-savings items, I don’t pause at all. I believe if a strong design direction is developed, materials—cabinets in this example—can be substituted in an effort to meet a budget without hurting the design or function of architecture.”

Social D

“For months and months we went to different architectural sites and modern houses in Los Angeles and San Diego, taking pictures and admiring different design schemes,” says Marty Dine about figuring out what to do with their exposed, hilly lot.

“What we had was a slope with weeds, volunteer palm trees and Brazilian pepper trees, all ill-maintained. Over time, we stripped all that off while we were figuring out what we wanted to do. Neither one of us are gardeners; the landscape is more architecture to us.”



Their house is a model “C,” the same as the Bradley home, but flopped. Prior to their purchase, POs had razed the original stone fireplace and relocated an enclosed fire-box to the side of the house to open up the view. Guy West, an architect friend of theirs, help coalesce their ideas and took things further than the Dines would have on their own. The plan that emerged included a retaining wall that steps down the slope; an aggregate driveway; a new concrete bench, planter box, fire pit, stairs and walkways; and an aluminum trellis that casts architectural shadows on the cement. They also changed out all of their windows and had the exterior coated with smooth plaster.

“The project just kind of grew; we were going to redo the landscape, then we said let’s do the concrete, let’s restucco and do all the windows. We’re thrilled with it, but it wasn’t the best way to go about it; you’re supposed to have a budget and stick to it,” Cheryl laughs.

“I did say I’d love to be outside and be warm; what can we do about that? I liked everything Marty and Guy were proposing, but when the money factor hit, I had to get talked into things. I was the one who had to hold them back—still, they went out of control. But if I didn’t like something I nixed it.”



In Marty & Cheryl’s dining area, Series 7 stacking chairs found at Divan in La Jolla surround a vintage Noguchi dining table from Boomerang for Modern.

Facing, the Dines bought their green Bird chair and blue Womb chair from Knoll in 2000, and the two low Eames wire-base tables are from Boomerang for Modern. One of three Higgins glass mobiles hangs over the Nelson cigar bubble lamp. “You just don’t see these colors anywhere else; they’re really vibrant and beautiful. Our house is a very colorful place; it feels happy and makes me feel good,” Marty Dine says.



Crotchet Club

A vintage Alvar Aalto table in the dining area and 20-year-old Italian leather armchairs and a couch in the living room of Rex & Lynn's home. The Aalto stool near the couch sets off this Rex reverie: "You can have six Aalto stools, and you would have plenty of furniture for a family of three, no matter how big your house is. If you need to climb up you can step on one, or you can sit on one and eat off the other one. If you have a door that keeps blowing in the wind, you can prop it open or closed with the stool. They're a little bit rough on sleeping, I'll grant you that."

Rex and Lynn's home is a different P&K, a model "A." He's added a studio for his graphic design business, but the rest of the layout, including the kitchen with its pocket doors and the unpainted tongue-and-groove ceiling, is original. Windows were replaced in 1994 and, due to a settling problem brought on by leaking hot water pipes in the slab, the living room has a replacement self-leveling cement floor from the same material they use in broadcast studios, then topped with cork.

The pair met over Rex's hobby of renting out the house for commercial photo shoots, but Lynn finds she doesn't have the stamina to see their own place used as a set. "I'm not a very good homeowner [for a shoot]," she says. "The last time there was a job here, within 10 minutes the sliders were popped out and all of the furniture was in the front yard; I could not get out of here quickly enough."

The house is very energy efficient and smartly designed, Rex attests. He jokes that he's been kicked off the Eichler online forum for his replies to homeowner complaints about hot and cold MCM houses: "Open a window; get a sweater" sums up his high-tech approach. He contends that people who install expensive foam roofs could leave the heater on year-round for far less money.

Rex didn't opt for double-pane windows, either. His installer explained that the temperature differential isn't great enough in California to warrant double glazing—or at least in this benevolent coastal climate. "The overhangs are well designed; they shade the house in the summer and let the sun in during the winter for passive heating. If you open and close windows, the house stays nice almost year round. The other times, we put on a sweater," he says.

Rex has lots to say on the current popularity of MCM: "Modern design isn't a style, it's a process. The passion for midcentury will follow a curve and could peak at anytime, but the fundamental ideas will prevail.

"If you define modern design by its superstars—it's Eames, therefore it has to be modern design; if it's modern design, therefore it must look like Eames—that would be style. The fact that the eaves on the house are a certain size—not because I think it looks nice or it follows the Golden Proportion or because it was on another house that I liked—but because it's right for that house, that's modern design."

"I'm always happy to see someone move in who bought a Pacifica house for what it is and not for what they could turn it into," Lynn interjects. Rex counters that he doesn't expect insensitive upgrades to disappear anytime soon and that the dominant trend of mansionization will continue for the foreseeable future.

"People want to live like the Sun King; wouldn't a carriage lantern made out of what looks like gold be a start at least? Most people are very, very happy with that," he grouses. "Modernized modern won't happen that much."

"It's not going to happen until you see places like Home Depot and Lowe's carrying a line of modern," volleys Lynn. "We have a house in the neighborhood where they tried to turn a midcentury modern into a Craftsman. It's rather hideous."

"It's drummed into people what they should aspire to. If you're not at all interested in design or architecture, you're going to buy what's being sold," says Darren Bradley. "[Today's housing] is like everything else—supersized—but a lot of people are going to come to realize that you don't need a 5,000-square-foot house for two or three people and that it's probably more trouble than it's worth when you consider upkeep.

"When friends who live in those kinds of homes come see



our place, they're shocked when we tell them how small it is because it doesn't feel that way. They're amazed to hear the houses are 1,500 or 1,600 square feet; if you ask them to guess, they'll say 2,500. If the home is designed well, you don't need a lot of space, because they have multiple functions.

"We're trying to get preservation status of some sort and enough of us to have critical mass when it comes to design directives," Bradley continues. "But first, we want to build awareness for this community and style of architecture, to encourage other homeowners and people who appreciate the architecture to consider moving here." **D**

Left to right, compare the Bradleys' house with its Mistlite glass privacy screen and original chimney in place to the Dines' flopped model with its flat-roof garage. The Reizer/Heftman home has the ultimate in low-care ground cover and graphically designed plantings.



Q&A with Bill K

William Krisel's career has a strong coda that the 81-year-old architect probably didn't anticipate. A wild, highly graphic landscape design he did for one of his restored 1950s Alexander homes in Palm Springs was covered in a 2006 issue of *Metropolis*, and Maxx Livingstone Midcentury Modern Homes has teamed with him to build current versions of the 1956 butterfly Twin Palms houses, with other designs and projects in the pipeline. We chatted with Mr. Krisel from his home in Brentwood this summer.



Q: What do you think of the acclaim you're experiencing for your 50-year-old designs?

A: It's so amazing and delicious. When we were doing these houses, you didn't give it a second thought, you were just doing architecture. The homes were very successful, and [for years] I'd run into people who'd say, I have one; I just love it.

Then there was the period where taste went from modern to

what I call Cinderella—where you have the little holes in the walls for windows, and shutters and picket fences. People felt secure in a more traditional house, and modern houses looked like gas stations. In Palm Springs, where these houses became icons, people are grabbing them and wanting to fully restore them. I get questions like What was the color of the front door?

In San Diego, little groups are calling me who have discovered they're living in one of my designs. I hear all kinds of nice stories—how people's lives have changed because they've lived in one, and how much more they became aware of indoor/outdoor [connections] and of light [play] during the different parts of the day. And now, to have people praising





them and saying how great they are even 40, 50 years later [is wonderful].

The 1,625-square-foot Maxx Livingstone home bucks current trends for mega-size custom homes, and other Krisel designs for Alexander, including the folded plate, gable, flat and long gable roofs, are planned to be available as prefabricated modular units down the road. The butterfly model has exposed aggregate concrete floors, aluminum windows and sliding doors, an R-38 rated roof, a tankless water heater and three bedrooms and two baths. Custom features include a pool, a guest room/office "casita" and a desert landscape designed by Krisel.



Q: How do the new Maxx Livingstone homes compare with your original designs?

A: The Palm Springs Twin Palms houses have simply been brought up to present code. From the exterior, there is no difference, except where there were carports, there are now garages. In the originals, each house had a little 5' x 5' interior atrium, and we're using that space for the enlarged master bath. We have [met] all of the energy requirements with the roof insulation and the double glass and all of the items the code requires for Title 24. And we have all of the structural upgrades. In those days, you could put two things together by putting a nail through it; today you have to have a much stronger connection.

But living in them, you'd see hardly any differences. When we did the houses for the Alexanders, all of the kitchens were closed. People who had second homes had help to do the dishes and whatnot, and when they got through with dinner, they didn't want the kitchen open to the living room. The new one is an open kitchen with a food-bar counter. Today, the housewife wants to be part of the conversation, so we opened up the kitchens. X

Modern Garden



a clean & simple approach

text Bromley Davenport
photography Dana Granoski

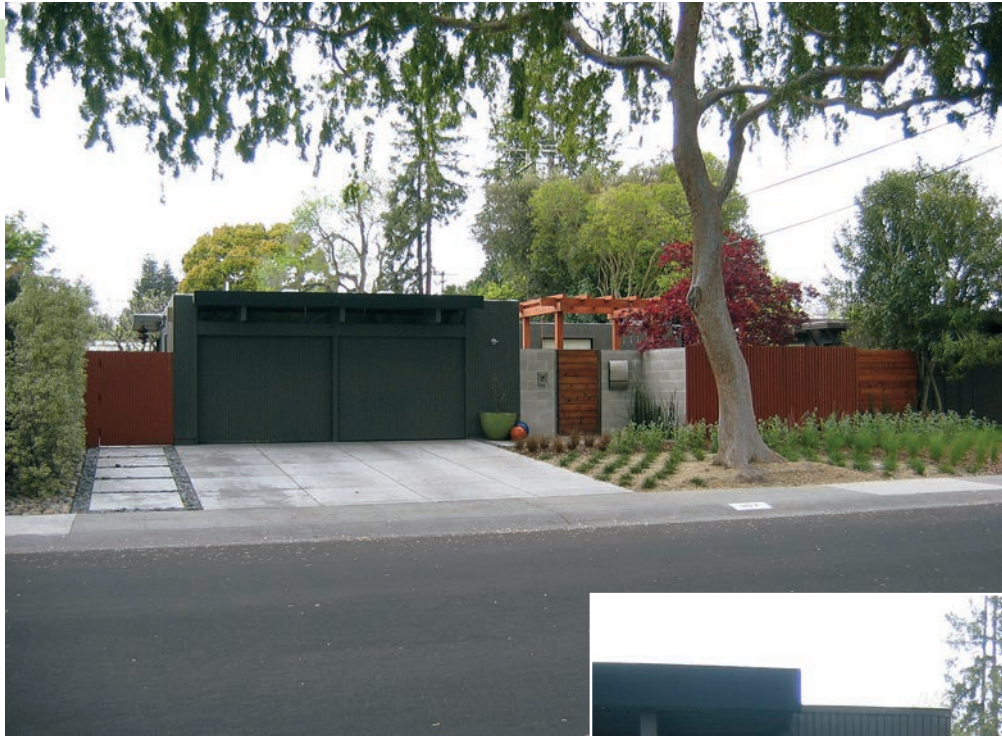
The “Triple El” neighborhood

(so-called because of its street names beginning with “El”) is on the fringes of the Green Gables tract of Palo Alto, Calif., one of two Eichler enclaves named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2005. There, original owners and second- and third-generation buyers mingle in the modernist development. Fifty years after being built, traditional landscaping—junipers, lawns, oleanders, roses and decorative rock—is the norm. But one household was looking for something different.

“Our 1,440-square-foot Eichler is modest by today’s standards,” says Dana Granoski, a graphic/industrial designer who’s transitioned to stay-at-home mom. “As our kids have grown, we’ve looked for ways to open up our living space without altering the interior footprint. Last year we remodeled the front yard and our quality of life has improved greatly with the addition of what is essentially an outdoor living room, play space and garden.”

Granoski admits to not having a green thumb and wanted low-maintenance, water-thrifty plantings, plus a design that could stand up to the punishment dished out by her kids, Maia and Max, and their playmates. Husband Nick and she also wanted more privacy and shade and didn’t want to send existing plants and hardscape to the landfill.

A large Chinese elm next to the sidewalk is laced to showoff its branch structure, and a red Japanese maple is now the star of the interior courtyard. Flagstone from an awkward front path was reused in the updated patio, breaking up the neutral expanses of concrete, Mexican pebbles and decomposed granite. Bamboo and grasses, including Mexican feather and blue oat, were moved from the back yard and combined with grass-look-alike sedge in front of a new privacy fence. Said fence/wall is built from cinder blocks and leftover Eichler



after



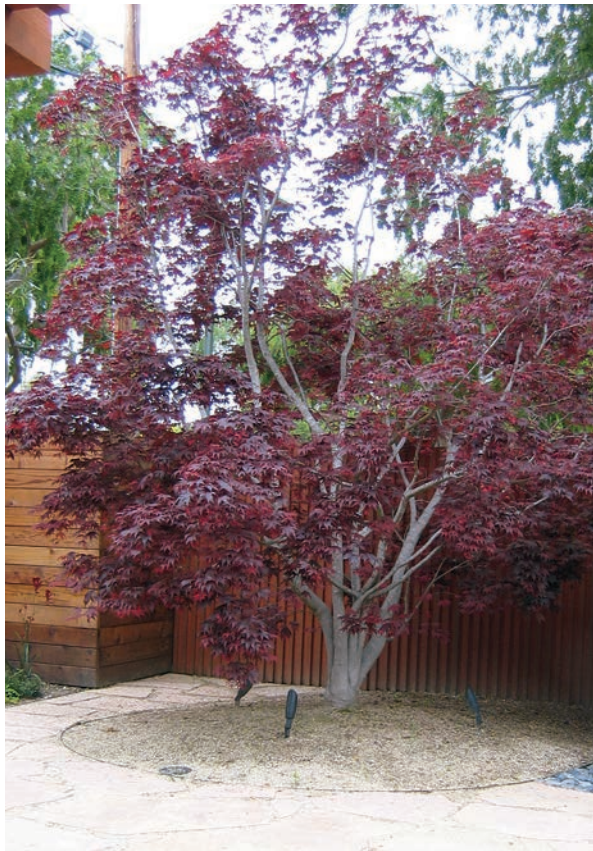
before



siding, with a gate and another section made of stained horizontal redwood.

The walkway to the front door is lined with Nandina, or heavenly bamboo, and decorative ceramic globes add color both inside and outside the entry gate. Granoski designed the new garden on the computer using Illustrator, and consulted with the staff of the Elizabeth Gamble Garden, a Palo Alto horticultural foundation, and Special Gardens in Redwood City on appropriate plants that caught her eye. She bartered with Special Gardens for the hardscape, trellis fabrication and plant installations, and the whole area was fitted for drip irrigation.

One element that elicits comments is the sturdy trellis that gets draped with an 8' x 20' piece of fabric from a sail-making shop, providing summer shade for the patio and front bedroom. In the winter it comes down to bring more sun into the space. To incorporate kid-size fun into the garden, swings





In a sunny area of the courtyard, the kids have a butterfly garden and grow vegetables and such tactile plants as lamb's ear and kangaroo paws. The chairs are from Smith & Hawken.



before



In the green pot by the gate is a Harry Lauder's walking stick, a highly architectural shrub grown for its contorted limbs, and near the metal mailbox is a bed of horsetail.



can be hung from the trellis or removed for adult get-togethers. A section of the perimeter wall is surfaced with chalkboard paint, which Granoski says functions as a magnet for the neighborhood, with artists from four-year-old Max to teenagers expressing themselves in chalk.

"When we open all the doors and windows in the house, it is a truly seamless indoor-outdoor experience," she says. "Researching and discovering new materials—like the decomposed granite we saw at the Sunset headquarters in Menlo Park—as well as working on a large scale was great fun. But the best reward comes when almost every morning the kids run outside to swing in their pjs and Nick and I have coffee in our outdoor living room." | 1

Resources page 87

Atomic Ranch Goes Outside

Coming from a perennials-filled bungalow garden in Southern California to a midcentury ranch in the Pacific Northwest, we have our own landscaping hurdles in front of us. We decided to break from tradition and not make it a DIY project. Our challenges:



Do we clear the palette, edit the existing or simply add to what we've inherited?

A raised retaining wall next to the sidewalk is lined with decades' old red azaleas that look great in the spring for several weeks, but otherwise form a four-foot hedge. A weeping Japanese maple next to the driveway, and foundation plantings—more azaleas, rhododendrons and a big, fat yew—ringing the house, plus a sizable expanse of lawn make up the existing yard. The sellers lined the front walk with baby boxwoods that will definitely go to a new home.

On a corner lot, this house has literally no backyard. How can we carve out areas for dining, barbecuing and relaxing without erecting a six-foot privacy wall?



Would a Modernist approach, like at the Dines' Palmer & Krisel home in San Diego, be appropriate?

Although grilling on the driveway is always classy, we're hoping for a kitchen-convenient spot for a small dining table and barbeque. The backdoor stoop is a natural, but there's little to block the line of sight from the corner bus stop. And where can we sit and relax with a glass of wine without feeling like we're on center stage?

Should we look to the past for our design clues or do something unabashedly modern? What plants are suitable for our climate and yet complementary to the architecture of our 1952 brick ranch house?

Surrounded by mostly 1920s through '40s homes, the neighborhood has few midcentury appropriate gardens to inspire us. "If you want to know what people were planting in this neighborhood 50 years ago, just look around," says Shiloh Halsey of The Portland Yardbirds, the company we're working with on the redesign. "Azaleas, Japanese maples and rhododendrons were popular."

Is a minimalist Asian approach the way to go? Would the neighborhood, this house or we be comfortable with a stridently modern garden? As for duplicating a vintage garden, was the typical midcentury suburban plot all that interestingly landscaped?

Watch for an article next year on the trials and tribulations of our garden makeover. And just as soon as it's looking settled in, we'll walk you through our new landscape and see if any of our ideas would help in your next outdoor project. 0



How about this junipers-a-go-go landscape at a nearby Portland ranch?





Giddy

**They don't
call 'em ranch houses
fer nothin'**

"I wanted a

that looks like a B-movie actor from Republic Pictures might have bought it," says David Izenman about his Sherman Oaks, Calif. ranch. "That's how I wanted to furnish it: it didn't have to be strictly cowboy, it could be '30s, '40s and '50s things that somebody in the movie industry might have had at the time."

Izenman's 1950s ranch is the eighth house he's bought and renovated in the past 12 years. The longest he's stayed was four years, and the shortest, nine months. A Spanish duplex, a 1912 Craftsman, a 2,500-square-foot midcentury modern and a 1940 Bermuda Colonial are among the eclectic styles that previously caught the eye of this hairdresser. His realtor brother thought the 1,250-square-foot ranch was a step down from the last house, but Izenman could see past the vanilla interior.

"When I bought it, every inch was painted over, carpeted over and tiled over. There was way too much Tuesday Morning going on here," he says. "I more or less brought it back to close to the way it looked when it was built in 1950."

"My last house was a bland, traditional ranch house, but I did my bedroom in fun Roy Rogers cowboy stuff. That's the one room I loved the most and the room that people would comment on." That over-the-top western theme set the tone for house numero ocho.

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography Jim Brown



rhinestone chaps

Izenman's photographer father worked for various studios such as Desilu and, when he accompanied his dad to work, seeing Hollywood history up close wowed him. "As a kid, being on the sets of 'Petticoat Junction' and 'The Beverly Hillbillies,' I remember the magic of it all."

From his mother came the decorating gene, perhaps, though he says her aesthetic was very Akron [a '60s import merchandiser]. "I have one glass clown left," he says of his midcentury design inheritance. "I won't put it out but I can't get rid of it either."

The family vacationed in Las Vegas in the 1950s and '60s, staying at the El Rancho Vegas or the Frontier, two western-themed family hotels. "To this day, I still have a memory of what the lobbies looked like; that was part of my inspiration for this house—Vegas-y cowboy," he says.

"I like the remodeling process, though it's hard, it's exhausting. It's like having a baby: once you're finished with it, you forget about the pain and enjoy the outcome so much. At this house I didn't think about what other people liked. I wanted to do something that I liked, all the way across the board.

"For the most part, I've needed to finish projects before moving in," he further explains. "I've had as much as four weeks; on this house I had nine days."

During that week-plus, ceilings and cabinets were sandblasted and skylights and lighting systems installed. Ceiling beams were defrocked of their drywall, and the existing bamboo floors in the living and dining room, the tile in the kitchen and bath, and carpeting elsewhere were replaced with \$16,000 of prefinished distressed chestnut floors. Izenman knew there was original brick underneath the bookshelves and Masonite panels around the fireplace, so he ripped the later-built elements out. When he then discovered that an additional three rows of brick had been added to the fireplace surround to make it look more modern, that was removed as well.

French doors leading to the patio replaced windows in the living and dining room, and they were framed with beefy, notched moldings similar to the originals. "I do the hardest job—writing the checks," he wisecracks. "I have a contractor and subs that I've used over the years; they really drop everything when it's time for me to use them. I've given them so much business over the years and we like each other, so I always get great work and





This 1950s three-bedroom, two-bath ranch house is in touch with its rustic western roots. Colorful textiles on the Coronado couch, hearth pillows and '50s chairs give the almost window-less living room a homey cabin feel, and inexpensive framed vintage prints and sheet music add plenty of personality. The mantel-top pottery is Roseville and the buffet looks like Heywood-Wakefield channeling Tom Mix.



people who show up.”

show kitchen

The kitchen he inherited dated from the '70s, with indigo-blue cabinetry, tile counters and backlit soffits. The latter came down to make room for pottery and collectible displays, and the even the MDF cupboard doors were sandblasted into rusticity. Reproduction iron hinges helped tie the kitchen to the western aesthetic, and Izenman plans to replace a vinyl greenhouse window and change out the countertops to red “cracked ice” laminate with chrome edging.



Clavos, decorative nail heads, march along the top of the cabinetry, and wrought iron hinges and pulls dress up the '70s cupboards. The view from the unearthed rustic breakfast bar is through the living/dining room, out the new French doors and into the garage-turned-hair-salon.

He found the aqua Western Holly wall oven on eBay for \$25 and wants to replace the PO's cooktop with a vintage model. His refrigerator is a 1939 Westinghouse with a restored exterior and all-metal interior that still works great.

Archeology in the kitchen revealed that the breakfast bar had white ceramic tile laid over granite, with the original notched-pine bar lurking underneath. The previous owner had widened it so it could hold more stuff he figures, but "it is what it is: it's supposed to be a wonderful, notched-out, clunky wood breakfast bar that works for the house," Izenman says.

If you wonder about cooking grease clinging to those rough-textured cabinets and fun collectibles, fear not: he cheerfully cops to just warming up take-out food, making coffee, "and if I really



want to become industrious, I'll toast a bagel."

western union

Although the hair salon Izenman designed in the garage is a contemporary aesthetic, the rest of the home looks like it was a blast to furnish.

A Coronado sofa and chair from the '40s were bought at Pasadena's Rose Bowl swap meet, as well as a \$100 western-inspired side table with brass nail heads. Other armchairs, including an early '50s rocker were picked up at garage sales and reupholstered. The swap meet coffee table is part of an old Swedish trunk, and a blond buffet has definite Heywood-Wakefield tendencies.

An Art Deco table and chest and Murano glass boudoir lamps have been stirred into the mix, along with oversize Hollywood movie posters. Izenman says he loves the colors and design. "For years I have been surrounded by sterile white sheets, towels and walls; now I want color."

Over the dining table is a wagon wheel chandelier dating from 1938, and in the kitchen, Bauerware, vintage thermoses and what he calls "Mexicana" line the cabinet tops. A restored slot machine is a nod to those Vegas family vacations, and the living room fireplace wall holds steer horns, Arts and Crafts Roseville pottery, western-themed oils and prints, and an iron crucifix, which "is an anomaly since I'm a good Jewish boy, but I like it because it gives the house a mission look. The scale of '30s and '40 furniture is good in this house and it's the style that was meant to be in here," he adds.







A classic rail fence bisects a small lawn and flowerbed in front of this Studio City ranchette. The homeowner suspects it may be a Cliff May model due to the fireplace and beam details, as well as the way the garage and house join at more than a 90-degree angle.

Izenman's 20' 1948 Glider travel trailer sits in the front yard between trips. The birch-wood interior has linoleum flooring, an apartment-size Dixie range, a Sanitary refrigerator complete with mini freezer section, a kerosene heater and even a back door in the bedroom section. The Glider company motto, "Graceful as a Bird in Flight," is emblazoned on the side.





Not one to play it safe, Izenman is still pragmatic enough to think about resale. “Bottom line is, what a buyer wouldn’t get in square footage in this house, they’d get in charm,” he says.

“Dianne Keaton’s latest house in *Architectural Digest* was a combination of Spanish and Craftsman, and I loved the way it looks. Things like that inspire me to do what I like and not worry if people are going to like it. Clients have walked into my house, and when they see the raw, sandblasted wood and the unpainted brick, they say, ‘I can’t wait to see what you’re going to do with it,’ ” he says with a grin.

“I tell people I feel like Gene Autry living here but I look more like Andy Devine.” ★

Intrigued by Izenman’s collection? Check out our advertisers’ wares: western genre movie posters at Posteritati, posteratati.com and Russel Wright pottery at Planet Oranj, planetoranj.com.

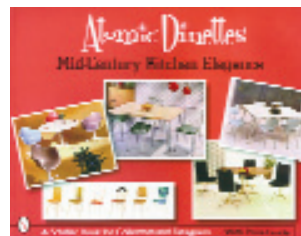
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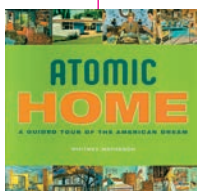
Atomic Dinettes
by Donna Baker
\$33.45

You know the classic '50s vinyl dinette sets, but have you seen the Danish, Mediterranean, wrought iron and Early American styles in this collectors' book? Catalog photos wonderfully showcase both the dinettes and their kitschy midcentury photo sets.



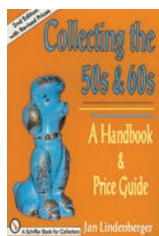
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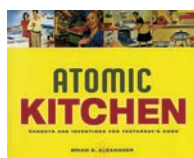
Modern Furniture Designs: 1950s–1980s
by Klaus-Jürgen Sembach
\$64.45

You say you're a purist and prefer "important" furnishings? This hefty book explores the iconic (Wegner and Jacobsen) as well as the more esoteric (Gibbard and Gutmann) in its b&w photos. Broken down by type—chairs, tables, storage units and more—the author describes the historical context while comparing the contrasting aesthetics of masters like Finn Juhl and Verner Panton.



Danish Modern and Beyond: Scandinavian Inspired Furniture from Heywood-Wakefield
Vintage catalog and advertising images of H-W's '50s and '60s furniture with current market values.
\$33.45

Atomic Kitchen
Tour the midcentury kitchen and its accoutrements through advertising images from the '50s.
\$22.95



Fifties Furniture
Selective works of Eames, Nelson, Bertola, Platner, Noguchi, Saarinen and many more; a great introduction to collecting.
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Over-the-top rooms from Armstrong, but a great peek at interior details from the '50s.
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Heywood-Wakefield Blond:
Depression to '50s
by Leslie Pina
\$33.45

A definitive volume on H-W's birch modern line, as well as their streamline pieces from the 1930s. Vintage photos cover upholstered pieces, tables, chairs and casegoods, giving production years, dimensions, proper names and current values. An educated buyer is a smart buyer ...



Lamps of the 50s & 60s
A collector's guide to wild lighting of the era, from space-age designs to figurals and lava lamps.
\$19.95

cool|stuff

Rekindle That Flame

Why doesn't someone make a simple, affordable fireplace that would fit into my MCM remodel? Wait—they do. Available with a brushed stainless steel firebox liner and optional cast-stone or stainless steel surround, the unit starts via remote control and comes with ceramic beach stones and embers to surround the gas burner. It can be installed in a corner and, best of all, isn't hermetically sealed behind glass. There's also an electric version for that faux-fire '50s look. Suggested retail starts at \$2,900. Europeanhome.com; 781.662-1110.



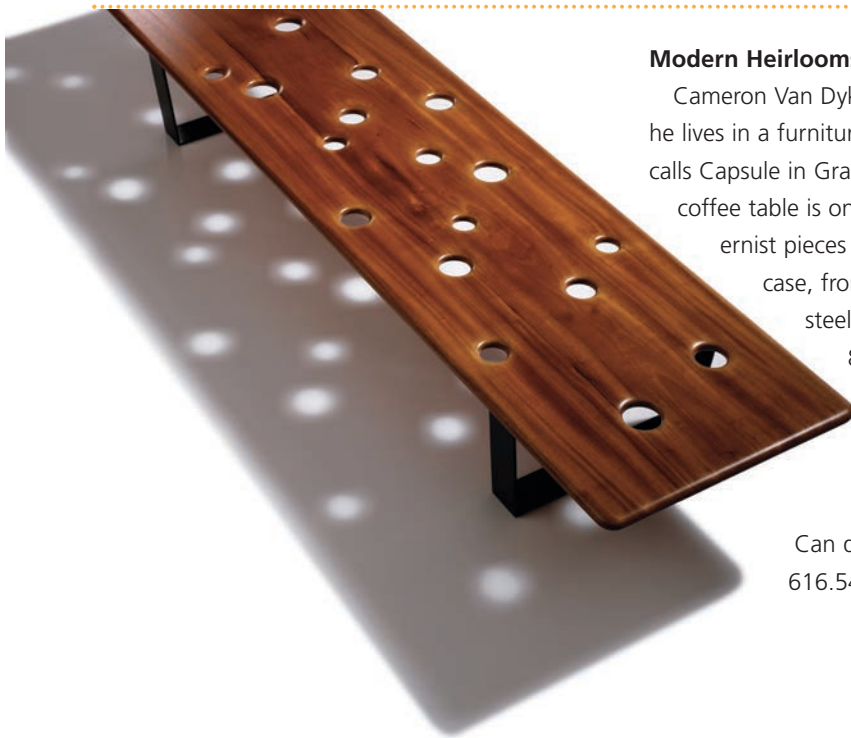
The Other Wright

You probably know him for his dinnerware, but Russel Wright also designed American Modern furniture, Macy's best-selling line during the 1930s. Patrick Dickson of Consolidated Design & Mfg. has the blessing of Wright's daughter, Annie, to re-create the designs today. The 30" high x 39" long x 10" wide bookcase (\$589) can be stacked, while the five-drawer chest has Heywood Wakefield-esque pulls (\$1,665). Made of solid maple with modern lacquer finishes, each is branded as an authentic piece. American-modern.net; 818.766.8889.



Metal master

Steve Cambronne is not afraid of being called a colorful character. His 3-D steel wall sculptures can be custom painted in shades that complement your retro living room or poolside patio in an almost infinite combination. The examples shown here measure almost three feet long, but smaller designs, including bar signs (\$89 and up) and name placards, are available, too. Stevecambronne.com; 608.355.0973.



Modern Heirlooms

Cameron Van Dyke loves his work so much he lives in a furniture showroom, a place he calls Capsule in Grand Rapids, Mich. His FiZz coffee table is one of a couple of modernist pieces he builds to order, in this case, from solid mahogany and steel. It measures 12" high x 82" long x 21" wide and runs around \$1,500 plus shipping. Need something bigger or in a different wood? Can do. Cameronvandyke.com; 616.540.5324.



London Calling

“Why don’t we have grass
like everybody else?”
asked four-year-old Zoe Kerhoulas
back in 2003.

Her parents, Jacqueline Crosby and George Kerhoulas, were living in an industrial loft in London, Ontario, and their spacious 300-square-foot backyard was paved with AstroTurf. The couple looked at one another and sighed because the staid local architecture did nothing for them.

“We had absolutely no interest in living in a traditional two-story, center-hall home with a white picket fence and a matted-hair collie,” Kerhoulas says. As a commercial real estate broker at a large firm, he figured he’d have 150 fellow residential agents he could tap for leads on a modern home, but it was slim pickings. “This is a very traditional Edwardian town architecturally. There’s very little modern even now.” But the couple eventually struck pay dirt (emphasis on dirt) with a home in the Old South part of town.

The lead turned out to be a 1955 custom ranch house near Highland Golf Course, coincidentally owned by a friend from high school. In significant disrepair after 10 years of renters, Kerhoulas took a tour sans his busy surgeon wife.

“It was quite a dump,” he says plainly. “No landscaping or grounds upkeep had occurred in many years. The windows and roof were leaking, the electrical and plumbing systems were substandard and the plaster was cracked and falling off in chunks. Luckily the ‘50s lighting was either intact or in the basement.”

The Old South neighborhood, with its views of downtown London’s office towers, is seeing land value purchases in the \$500,000 to \$750,000 range. Some buyers are razing existing homes to build new, modern houses—something Kerhoulas finds to be exciting and a good sign for the area. Although the heavily treed streets are lovely, the house under consideration was not, and Crosby was less than smitten.

“The first time Jackie went inside the house she wasn’t sold,” Kerhoulas says, although he’d pitched the residence with great enthusiasm. “We agree on almost everything, so I thought she was going to be really excited. But she walked in and I got this ‘Oh, no’ face.”

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography George Kerhoulas

before



after





before



Zoe and Kyri Kerhoulas in their newly renovated courtyard.

It took the tenants moving out their stuff and seeing the expansive, empty room dimensions to convince her. Kerhoulas' sister also came through for a look and dryly said, "You're brave." An eight-month renovation followed.

"What we did was a bare bones restoration of the house, which is sometimes more expensive than building new. We spend more on the restoration than on the purchase—much more," Kerhoulas comments.

The 2,800-square-foot home was expanded to 3,300 by enclosing a breezeway and a portion of the garage for a new family room, guest room and bath. The master bedroom and bath grew as well, and a three-car garage was added where a carport once stood. Its entry was rotated 90 degrees so the garage door wasn't the defining feature of arriving at the house. Carpeting was ripped up and the original slate floors were extended to a third of the house, with maple flooring in the rest. Some 80 windows were replaced and the plumbing upgraded.

An unusual interior courtyard was refaced with flagstone and 1950s Roman brick “mined” from the garage and breezeway provided two skids of material for the new garage facade and low entry wall. In a “what the hell” move, Kerhoulas and Crosby’s love of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian homes prompted a switch from the existing vertical siding to horizontal board and batten.

“The Roman brick’s size and color are hard to match so we wanted to use as much as possible from the original house,” contractor Mark Vaandering of Millennium Construction & Design explains. “We utilized it in the areas that gave the most impact and used the horizontal lines of board and batten siding to blend with the original. We had the battens custom milled to match the existing and used 12” James Hardi planks for the new siding.”

Crosby and Kerhoulas had considered building new until architect friend John Nicholson convinced them it didn’t make fiscal sense. Turning his hand to the ranch house, he worked with the original drawings to refine the couple’s ideas and make sure Vaandering had clear directions on nuances such as the various level changes in the house.

“What really made this project different was having a client (and friend) search out this type of house to fulfill an oft-discussed and long-standing dream of living in this style,” says Nicholson, a principal at Malhotra Nicholson Architects Inc. “George and Jackie were fun to work with since they made so much out of the search for project components, and understood that enough was enough when it came to looking at the good bones of this courtyard house.”

“John really helped us clear our thoughts on what we were going to do on this restoration,” Kerhoulas says. “We picked Millennium Construction for their experience restoring

The garage entry was
rotated 90 degrees so the garage door
wasn’t the defining feature
of arriving at the house





before

after



granite counters show off Kerhoulas' 30s-'50s Crosley radio collection

old homes and their reputation for detail. They were fantastic. Every day we went over decisions that needed to be made and I told them to call me with any questions. We started in July and moved in in February, only running 10 percent over budget.”

The kitchen was one place where they decided to stick with original components, although the end result doesn't look remotely like a vintage kitchen. Metal Youngstown cabinets were still in good condition, save the one under the sink, so they decided to tart them up.

“One of the things that was challenging on this project was reusing the original kitchen cabinets,” Vaandering says. “We had to find someone willing to paint them; being metal cabinets, we ended up going to an auto body place that painted them

Nissan Ultima Green 2005.” To replace the damaged sink unit, Millennium constructed a matching MDF cabinet that the body shop coated with high-gloss red. Stainless steel appliances and polished dark green granite counters

show off Kerhoulas' 30s-'50s Crosley radio collection.

In the spirit of simplicity, Kerhoulas voted to remove the window moldings. “It was rather difficult to install new windows and have the drywall finish flush to the windows. We did not have enough of a return to finish them off easily,” Vaandering recalls. “Some of the trades thought we were crazy doing some of the things we did.

But we had done unconventional things before [on other jobs] so they did it anyway; I think the end result speaks for itself."

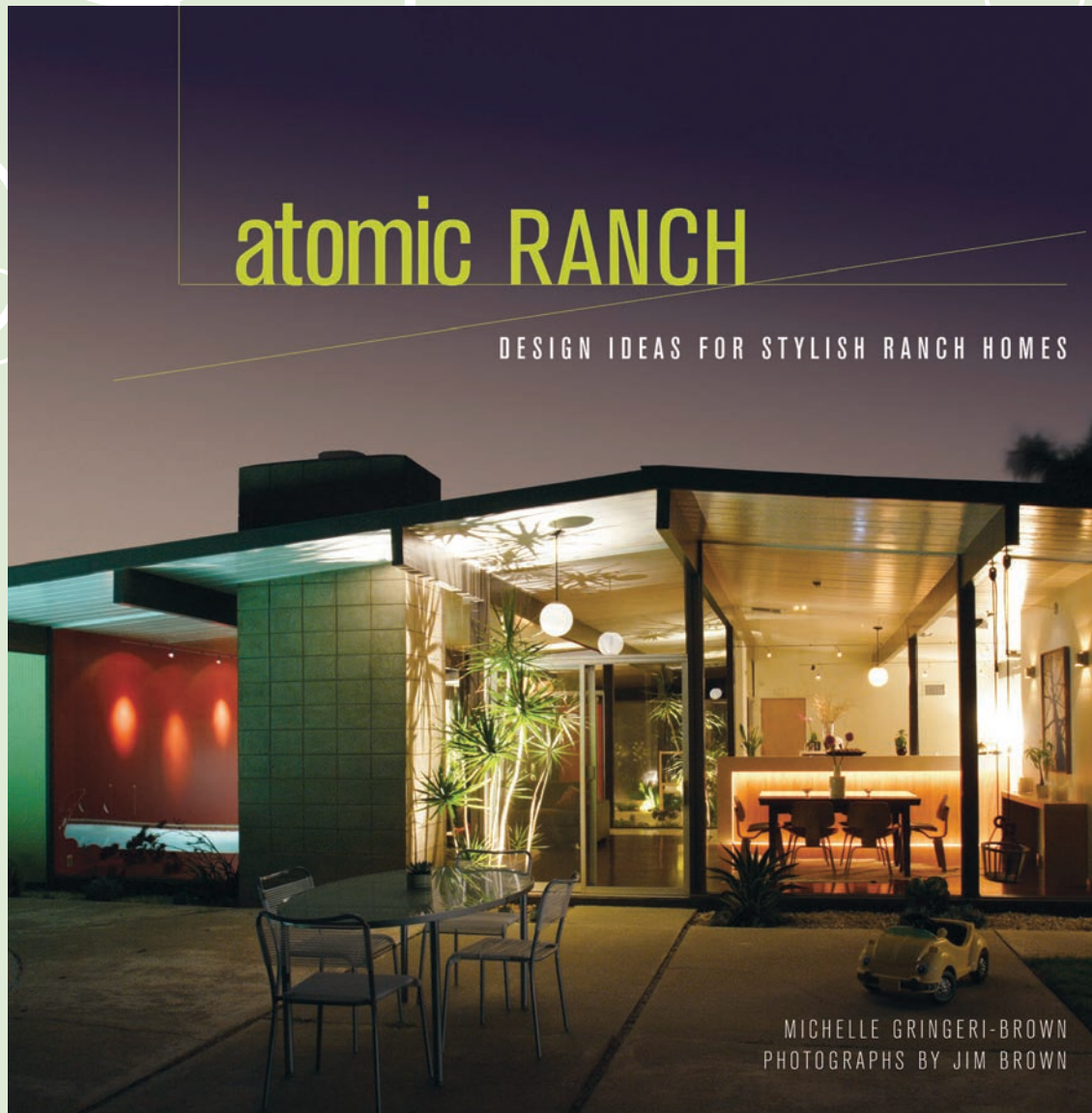
Architect Nicholson's assessment of the remodel result is equally laudatory: "I think the house has been enriched; it has certainly been refreshed. It touches the ground more gently, and subtle changes like batten placement seem to have helped the house texturally. As the landscape settles in, it will be an even more pleasant retreat."

For a family who tired of a tiny outdoor space and the 44 steps in their New York-style loft, the midcentury ranch is a blessing. The kids love to hang out in the sheltered courtyard, playing in the pond and searching for the resident frog, or explore the half-acre yard. "When you buy your first house at 45 and end up in a neighborhood like this, there's probably no reason to ever move," Kerhoulas enthuses. "I like the idea of being 90 feet from your kids when you want to be and still being inside the house."

His hat is off to the vision of the original owners, who owned a local jewelry store chain. "They were hip people for this city; it's definitely a very unique house for London, Ontario. There may be many of these in other cities, especially in the United States' Midwest, but we know there's no other one like it here." m



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Jennifer Williams, who wrote us about losing her Slidell, La., home and most of its furnishings to Hurricane Katrina (no. 9 Modern Wisdom), sent us an update.

"As a token of appreciation for the lost magazines you so generously sent me, I wanted to show you the free plug I provided for you guys in the *Louisiana Homes & Gardens* article that was recently done on my house. I am glad the magazine title is so legible in the bedroom shot; I'm hoping it will attract new readers to AR.

"Sad to say most of the things in the photos were soaked under four feet of water and have been long since picked up from the front curb by a bulldozer. However, our new renovation of our 1987 contemporary is almost complete and the decor will consist of a whole new color scheme, of course all retro inspired. I have already ordered my Poul Henningsen replica artichoke lamp to go over the new IKEA dining table!

"Keep up the great work, don't change a thing and keep featuring those homes that inspire people like me way down in Louisiana."



PRETTY SPACEY:

Collecting Midcentury Toys



THE 1950S AND '60S USHERED IN AN AGE

of forward-thinking design that turned such everyday items as homes, cars, appliances and furniture into pieces of futuristic art. But for all their fins and flair, they couldn't hold a candle to the outrageous forms of the era's space toys.

Made of plastic, tin and steel, with an aesthetic that remains exciting even today, these toys provided children with the props they needed to imagine a world far from the threats of communists, atomic bombs and war. They spoke of adventures on other planets, innovative technology and the sort of fun that can only exist just over the future's horizon.

Today, robots, ray guns and space vehicles have become wonderful collectors' items. More than just playthings, time has transformed them into works of art that connect us to the past and remind us of a future that never quite happened.

text Brian Stillman

photography Marion Misilim



RAY GUNS

The first mass-marketed space toys landed on store shelves in 1934, when Daisy released the XZ-31 Buck Rogers Rocket Pistol. A huge hit, the pressed-steel space weapon inspired a price war between New York retail giants Macy's and Gimbel's, both undercutting the other in an effort to attract customers. As one store sold out, the other jacked its prices up.

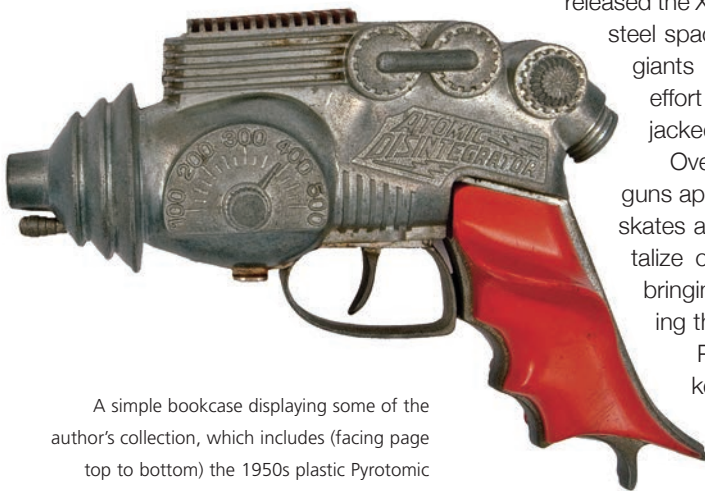
Over the next few years, a number of different Buck Rogers guns appeared, along with licensed rockets, chemistry sets, roller skates and anything else manufacturers could dream up to capitalize on the character's success. Flash Gordon also landed, bringing with him his own line of equally successful toys, including the Marx Flash Gordon Siren Gun.

Pressed steel and die-cast metal guns dominated the market through the end of the '40s, when a revolutionary material called plastic allowed manufacturers to create even more fantastic designs. By the 1950s, guns came in a variety of bizarre shapes, encrusted with rings, fins, fluting and knobs. Bright candy colors were the norm, but many toys were also produced in metallic silver, copper and gold.

One of the most impressive guns of the period was the Pyrotomic Disintegrator. Available in either copper/silver, or red/yellow/blue, the toy's iconic styling makes it a must-own for many collectors. Unfortunately, brittle plastic and cheap construction ensured that few survived the last 50 years. Consequently, they're exceedingly rare and extremely expensive.

Other popular and often more economically priced ray guns include the mighty Hubley Atomic Disintegrator, two pounds of sculpted metal that looks like something out of an old "Weird Science" comic book. Or consider the diminutive Renwal Planet Jet, with its abstract design, and a rocket that moves back and forth with the pull of the trigger, or the Nu-Age Smoke gun, a study in industrial design that uses rocket-shaped matches to blow smoke rings. Another, the streamline Space Patrol Rocket Dart gun, has darts with room for secret messages.

From the subtle to the sublime, these pieces of cold-war sculpture capture



A simple bookcase displaying some of the author's collection, which includes (facing page top to bottom) the 1950s plastic Pyrotomic Disintegrator, an Atomic Disintegrator die cast metal cap gun by Hubley and a futuristic Planet Jet water pistol from Renwal. Previous page, Billy Blastoff, a tin friction toy from the collection of Lidia Boiso, was made by Masudaya in 1960.

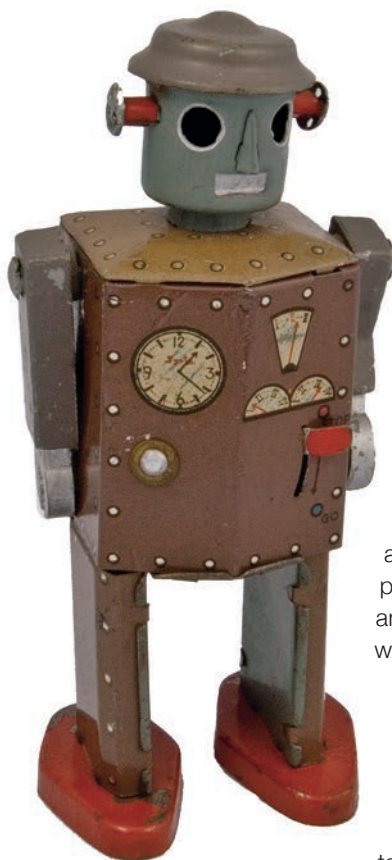


By the 1950s,
guns came in a variety of bizarre shapes,
encrusted with rings,
fins, fluting and knobs.



By showing some restraint, the robots on display complement the author's midcentury furnishings.

Facing page, top, the Japanese-made tin wind-up Atomic Robot Man dates from 1949, while the battery-operated 1958 Alps Door Robot walks and has a rotating dome and head piece that lights up.



both the innocence of childhood imagination and the lingering fears of a generation venturing into an unknown and possibly sinister future. Colorful, fanciful, but with the promise of lethal intent, these toys are studies in contradiction and, as such, embody the very essence of the times from which they come.

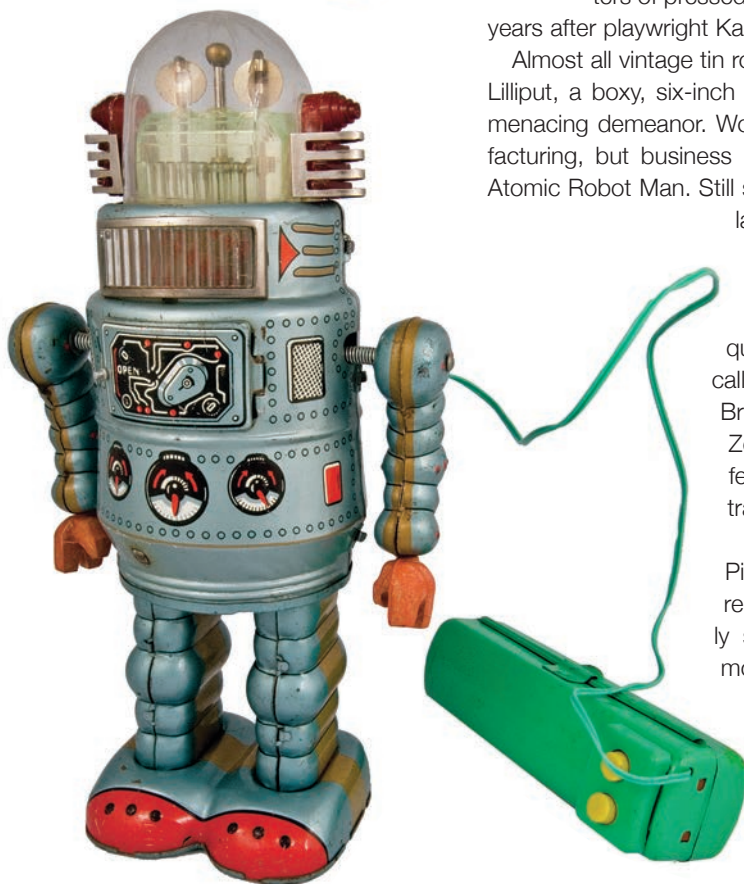
ROBOTS

From "Forbidden Planet's" Robby to "Iron Giant," robots never fail to capture one's imagination. Japanese toy companies, known in the first half of the 20th century as masters of pressed tin toys, picked up on this as early as 1938, 17 years after playwright Karel Capek first coined the term "robot."

Almost all vintage tin robots came from Japan, including the very first: Lilliput, a boxy, six-inch affair with Arm & Hammer–yellow paint and a menacing demeanor. World War II put a stop to Japan's tin toy manufacturing, but business picked up again in 1949, with the release of Atomic Robot Man. Still small and primitive, it was nonetheless a popular toy that continued to sell through the '50s.

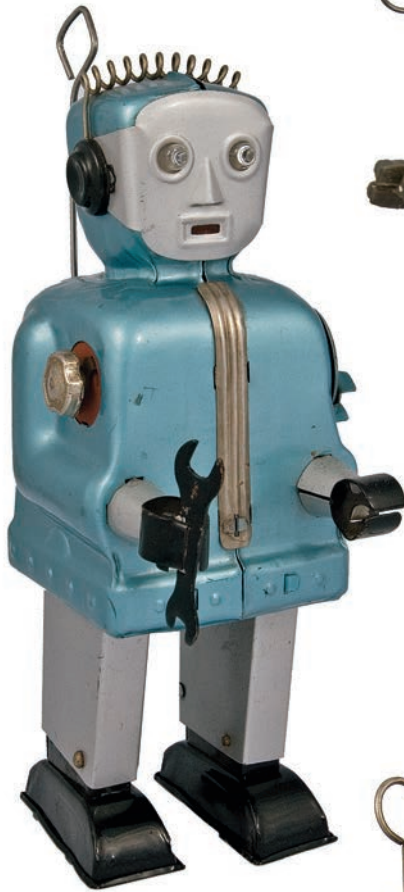
Tin robots became more complex with each passing year. The German toy company Strenco released the ST-1, and the Japanese quickly picked up on the design. A company called Alps put out Mr. Robot the Mechanical Brain, while competitor Nomura watched their Zoomers waddle off the assembly line. Both toys feature chrome accents reminiscent of cars and trains of the era.

When "Forbidden Planet" (starring Walter Pidgeon and a very young Leslie Nielsen) was released in 1956, Japanese manufacturers quickly sought to capitalize on the popularity of the movie's star, Robby the Robot, even though MGM never licensed the character. Nomura produced the first such toy, a battery-operated piece called Mechanized Robot. This 12" classic walks along with spinning scanner rings, jumping head pistons and bright lights.



*Each robot provides
a view into the
future via visionaries of the past.*





Counterclockwise from top, Nomura's 1956 Mechanized Robot was one of many based on Robby from *Forbidden Planet*; Zoomer, also made by Nomura in 1956, walks and his eyes light up; the 1962 Yoshiya Chief Robot Man has "bump and go" action, space sound effects, a light-up dome and ahead that turns.

Other Robby-like robots include Nomura's Piston Action Robot and Robby Space Patrol; Yoshiya's Planet Robot, Moon Robot, Roby Robot and Jupiter Robot; Alps' perfunctorily-named Robot (known as the "Door Robot" among collectors due to a small hatch in the toy's chest); and an endless stream of toy cars, tractors and tanks, all featuring the "*Forbidden Planet*" star in the driver's seat. An inclined collector can easily fill his or her shelves with only Robby toys—and indeed,

some have done so.

Toy companies continually tried to integrate new and exciting mechanisms into their products. Yonezawa's Smoking Spaceman walks and blows smoke, while the company's Talking Robot speaks via a small record in its chest. Many robots, like the Television Spaceman, have moving images in their torsos. Masudaya's Radicon, one of a very rare group of toys known to collectors as the Gang of Five, was the world's first remote control robot.

Tin toy robots are often lithographed with abstract designs that hearken back to the Modernist and Cubist aesthetics that dominated so much art of the period. Even the simpler toys sport coiled wires, antennas, radar dishes, scanner rings and other accoutrements that today scream "'50s" the way, in the '50s, they screamed "The Future."

Most vintage tin robots cost anywhere from several hundred dollars to many thousands. Thankfully, for the budget-minded collector, companies produce reproductions and new, retro-modern toys. Some of the biggest include Papa San, Schylling, Osaka Tin Toy Institute, Strauss Toys and Ha Ha. Many of the reproductions look just like the originals, while the newer toys sometimes seem to pick up right where the old manufacturers left off.

Each robot provides a view into the future via visionaries of the past. Some are quaintly simple,

others remarkably complex. Either way, these toys provide powerful examples of the way art and engineering can combine to inspire the imagination.

SPACE TOYS

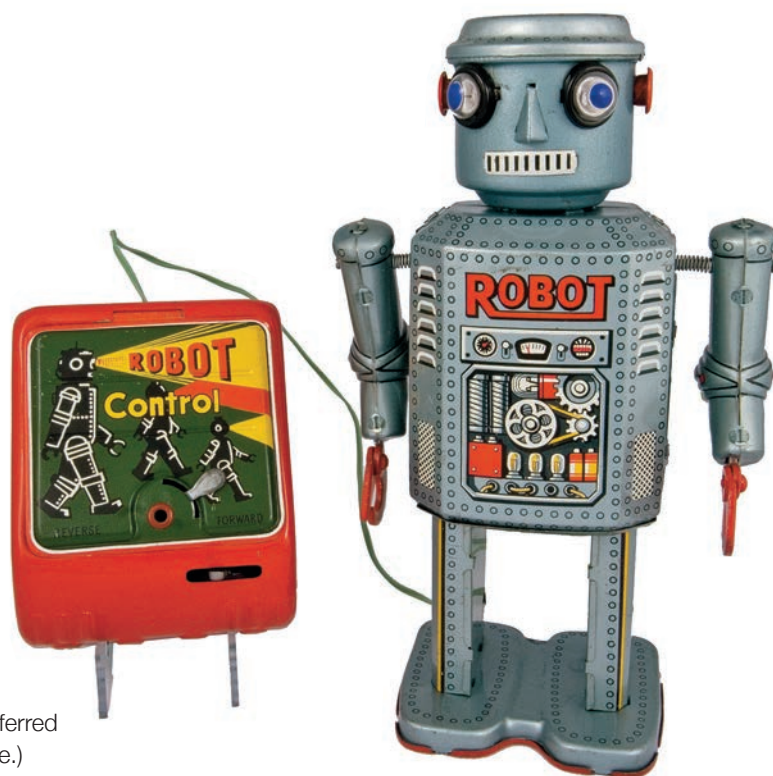
As varied in design and function as vintage tin robots might be, nothing compares to those pieces known collectively as “space toys.” (Even though these are all space toys, robots and ray guns are generally referred to as such, leaving “space toys” to cover everything else.)

Space themes—lithographed stars, planets, moons, comets and astronauts—appear on toy cars, tractors, tanks, boats, jeeps and planes, which often sport myriad domes, cannons, radar dishes, tank treads, wheels and skids. Lights flash, and most of the toys made enough noise to delight children—and drive parents to drink.

Flying saucers were a staple of most toy companies and came in a wide variety of sizes and in as many different variations on the saucer shape as possible. Besides the usual actions found on most space toys, some, like Masudaya’s Space Patrol, would also often feature holes that blew air and supported Styrofoam balls that floated like satellites.

Cars were a popular theme, and a number were produced that happily sat robots and astronauts behind the wheel of period vehicles. Popular examples include Nomura’s “Robby in Studebaker,” and their R-10 Space Patrol car, which finds a dapper astronaut zipping along in a Volkswagen Beetle. (Many toys had the “Space Patrol” name, though they had no connection to each other, or to the 1950s TV show of the same name.)

However, few objects are identified so closely with midcentury



The classic R-35 Robot was made by Modern Toys in 1955, while the Masudaya 1960 X-15 Space Patrol Saucer from the collection of Steve Jaspen has outstanding graphics.





Top to bottom, the Ichiko Space Patrol Car from the collection of Lidia Boiso artfully melds futurism with behemoth '50s auto styling; two friction toys from the collection of Steve Jaspen, a Rocket Space Ship and an X1 were made in the 1950s by Masudaya; the Rocket 54 can stand on its red tail or blast across the room on the friction plastic wheels.

futuristic design as the cigar-shaped rocket. With its curved body, swept-back fins and sharply pointed nosecone, rockets seemed to replace ocean vessels as symbols of man's desire to explore.

Japanese manufacturers produced dozens of different styles of rockets, from tall and skinny to short and bulging and everything in between. The king of them all is the rare and wonderful X-7. Beautifully lithographed and two feet long, it dominates any toy collection. At more than \$15,000, however, few are lucky enough to own one.

Many space toys, however, cost much less than that, and fantastic collections can easily be built. Also, companies like Rocket USA and Schylling both make modern rockets that heavily mine yesterday's aesthetic.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

By the late '60s and early '70s, advances in technology and space travel, as well as shifts in pop culture, helped end what many consider to be the golden age of space toys.

Most robots, ray guns and space vehicles were relegated to the attic or, worse, the garbage dump. It would be another three decades before collectors, driven

by childhood memories, would help elevate these toys to the lofty status they hold today. Now, with the continued popularity of midcentury design and pop culture, new generations of collectors keep discovering these playful treasures. 🍆



When not sifting through eBay auctions in pursuit of robots and ray guns, Brian Stillman writes for numerous pop culture, music and technology magazines. His first book, *Words of Wonder*, a collection of interviews with 15 science fiction authors, is due out by the end of 2006.

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

Space toy collectors often spend tens of thousands of dollars filling their shelves and cabinets. However, people who just want to spice up their vintage modern home or show off their love of classic science fiction can do so without reaching deep into their pockets. Smart shopping, as well as an active reproduction and retro toy market, guarantees that there's something for everyone.

Before rushing onto eBay and bidding away the college fund, do some research to discover what's out there, and what inspires you. A healthy dose of knowledge will also help offer some protection: as an informed collector, you'll be able to tell when a toy is common or scarce, or know if it's missing parts, allowing you decide just how much you want to pay.

Perhaps the most expansive source for information is an online forum called **Alphadrome** (dane-field.com/alpha), run by collector Brian Hayes. Hundreds of active members discuss toys, offer advice and post pictures, making it as much a community as it is a reference site. Those interested in ray guns should surf over to the appropriately named **Toy Ray Gun** (toyraygun.com). Initially launched by author and collector Gene Metcalf, it's now run by Justin Pinchot, who provides photos and descriptions of almost every space gun known today.

A lot can be learned about both vintage and modern toys by browsing online dealers' sites. Toy Ray Gun also offers a healthy selection of toys for sale, as do **Ozzies' Robots** (ozziebots.com), **Zoomer Toys** (zoomertoys.com), **Mark Bergin Toys** (bergintoys.com), **Cyber Toyz** (cybertoyz.com), **Robot Island** (robotisland.com) and **Guy Antique** (guyantique.com).

Collectors often create websites that showcase their collections, and these become excellent reference sources. Check out **Mechanized Robot** (mechanizedrobot.com), the **Robot Hut** (robot-hut.robotnut.com) and **Robotnut** (robotnut.com). If you'd rather sit with a book than stare at a screen, pick up *Future Toys*, by Antoni Emchowiec; *Ray Gun* by Gene Metcalf; Mark S. Young's *Blast Off*; and *1000 Robots and Other Tin Toys* by T. Kitahara.

And for those who'd like to see some toys in person, there's even the **Toy Robot Museum** in Adamstown, Pa. Owned and operated by Joe Knedlhans, the museum holds thousands of vintage and new toy robots, and features hands-on exhibits, an extensive research library and a fun gift shop. —B.S.



coming up in **atomic**ranch



Houston house museum



"Barbie's" Eichler

Retro Orlando



where'd you get that?

see world: palmer & krisel's pacifica pp. 16-27

Website: pacificamodern.com (1/1/07 launch) 🍷

BRADLEY HOME: Architects: Hector & Pamela Magnus, Architects Magnus, San Diego, 619.293.7240, architectsmagnus.com 🍷 **Windows:** WindowMaster by Jeld-Wen, jeld-wen.com 🍷

Privacy fence panels: Mistlite, available through glass shops 🍷 **Kitchen resources:** Cabinets & counters: IKEA, ikea.com 🍷 **Faucet:** Hansgrohe, hansgrohe-usa.com 🍷 **Appliances:** Miele, mieleusa.com 🍷

Outdoor seating & table: Ploof line by Kartell, available through hivemodern.com and other midcentury shops 🍷 **Saarinens-look table,** IKEA, ikea.com 🍷 **DINE HOME:** Architect: Guy West, San Diego, 619.838.4326 🍷 **Plaster contractor:** Larry Apodaca, Apodaca Plastering, Carlsbad, Calif., 760.434.3778 🍷 **Windows:** Fleetwood, fleetwoodusa.com; also WindowMaster, see above 🍷

Cement Contractor: Progressive Concrete, Escondido, Calif., 760.747.6100, decorativeconcreteinc.com 🍷

Landscape install: Tyler Bilik, Green Gardens Landscape & Design, Pacific Beach, Calif., 858.483.8803 🍷 **Aluminum arbor:** Basile Studio, San Diego, 619.234.2400, basilestudio.com 🍷

Furnishings: Boomerang for Modern, San Diego, 619.239.2040, boomerangformodern.com; Divan Furnishing Studio, La Jolla, Calif., 858.551.0405 🍷

HEFTMANN/REIZER HOME: Contractor: Kirk Welton, K Welton Construction, Palo Alto, 650.493.4140, kwelton.com 🍷 **Additional info on Willam Krisel:** metropolismag.com/cda/story.php?artid=2224 🍷 maxxlivingstone.com

modern garden, pp. 35-39

Landscape install: Special Gardens, Redwood City, Calif., 650.364.2499

giddyap, pp. 46-55

Sandblasting: Safeway Sandblasting, Culver City, Calif., 323.870.6188 🍷 **Painting contractor:** 20th Century Painting, Los Angeles 🍷 **Electrical contractor:** Dean Eddy, Eddy Electric, CITY, PHONE 🍷 **Flooring:** Floors by Rudolfo, CITY, PHONE

london calling, pp 60-65

Architect: John Nicholson, Malhotra Nicholson Architects 🍷 **Contractor:** Mark Vaandering, Millennium Construction & Design, London, Ont., 519.850.7830, lhba.on.ca/millennium.htm 🍷 **Kitchen:** Viking stove & hood: vikingrange.com

pretty spacey: collecting midcentury toys, pp 75-83

Additional info: Toy Robot Museum, Adamstown, Pa., 717.484.0809