

atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS



SPRING 2007

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cover

The den off the kitchen in this 1964 Eichler has a new Congoleum floor and reconditioned lauan mahogany paneling. The V-leg daybed and storage units are from Modernica's Case Study line, and the black and white Mini Wire Tables are made by Modernica as well. Two Shag (Josh Agle) lithographs and a retro-style hanging lamp add a punch of color and humor to the mix.



atomic ranch®

MIDCENTURY MARVELS

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meanwhile... back at the ranch



Is there a connection between saving the planet and living in a midcentury ranch? Allow me to twist a coming calamity into a self-serving editorial. I recently viewed "An Inconvenient Truth," Al Gore's excellent presentation on global warming and the necessity for change if we want to save our planet for future generations.

Despite mountains of discouraging scientific evidence that we are nearing a dangerous tipping point, Gore is able to impart a feeling of hope and encouragement that there is still time to change our habits and ways of doing business. He leaves us with the message that small positive changes by many individuals can cumulatively have a profound benefit to the environment. I'm sure some people will object to the sidetracks the former vice president takes in recalling his childhood and family history, but they just make me long for what could have been politically. I think Gore has found a higher calling, away from electoral politics and toward a global environmental advocacy for the good of all.

At the risk of sounding like an incredibly self-serving Johnny-come-lately, I realize that our core message—that ranch homes and neighborhoods are worth saving—is also an environmentally sound policy. Some would list the shortcomings of original ranches: they can consume a lot of land for a single-family residence; single-pane sliding glass doors and jalousie windows are energy inefficient; and older homes can be poorly insulated and waste heating/cooling energy. But they also have inherent strengths: ranches are usually modest in size and by necessity efficiently use space. Most obviously, the energy and resources needed to create the house have already been spent, and they are now in a coasting mode.

I recently spoke with Tristan Roberts, senior editor of *Environmental Building News* (buildinggreen.com), and he gave me some facts to buttress my opinions. "According to the U.S. Green Building Council, U.S. carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels can be divided into three sectors, with buildings topping the list at 38 percent of all contributions, compared with transportation at 33 percent and industry at 29 percent.

"Further, most of a building's carbon emissions in its entire life occur during the construction phase. Therefore, retaining an existing building makes a lot of sense. Also, when you tear down a building, that trash has to go to a landfill."

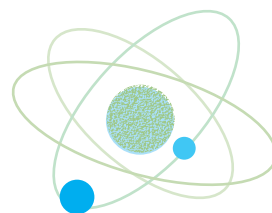
Clearly, residential building and demolition is just a portion of that 38 percent, but its impact is not insignificant. If a modest ranch is an example of efficiency of materials and square footage, then our favorite whipping boy, the McMansion, represents gross waste of materials and floor space. An article by Arroll Gellner in the *San Francisco Chronicle* referenced U.S. Census Bureau statistics, noting that the size of the average American house more than doubled between 1950 and 1999, while the size of the

average American household has shrunk from 3.3 to 2.6 people.

Bigger houses and fewer people don't make much sense to me. As ranch dwellers we are ahead of the game since we appreciate the original materials of our homes and work to improve the efficiency of energy consuming systems. As Gore emphasizes, little things can do a lot: insulate, recycle, buy locally grown foods, walk instead of drive and many others (climatecrisis.net/takeaction or treehugger.com). If you're blessed with a back yard, plant an appropriate tree; the last time I checked, that was still a good thing to do. Who knew that you could help the planet and beautify your house all at the same time?

Jim Brown
Publisher





modernwisdom

✱ Thank you so much for the great story about the three Pacifica P&K houses in San Diego. The Q&A with me was 100 percent accurate, and I do appreciate it. The three homeowners all called to tell me about the article last month, but I had to wait until Hennessey + Ingalls in Santa Monica got their delivery of the winter 2006 issue [to see it]. I rushed over and bought two copies and was thrilled to read it. You are doing a great job informing those interested in midcentury modern ranch homes.

Bill Krisel

A.I.A., architect and landscape architect

✱ My partner and I purchased our first home together here in Portland, a ranch home built in 1966. We absolutely love the open floor plan and how spacious it feels. Even though it's only 1,547 square feet, it's a fantastic home for entertaining. Situated in Argay Terrace,



we are absolutely surrounded by ranch-style homes from the '60s and feel as though we've stepped back in time; it's wonderful!

I have to say this home is an interior designer's dream—well at least for me, anyway. The home fits our personalities and lifestyle like a glove, and we both are eager to renovate, restore and furnish the home with a '60s-inspired look. Recently, we tackled the guest bathroom, which had been poorly renovated a few years prior to our purchase and desperately needed an overhaul. We wanted to keep the original vanity and pink

bathtub, the ceiling fan and the vanity light that were true to the home, but the rest needed to go away. We've had a wonderful time and are pleased with how our tile choices, paint colors, fixtures and the fun design we did with Marmoleum flooring turned out. From your magazine we were able to come up with all sorts of resources to help in the remodel and now, almost complete, we are very happy with the results and ready to tackle the next project.

Some of our sources for the house were: Susan Jablon Mosaics; Rejuvenation (they have some awesome lighting that we purchased for the dining, entry and front porch); Room and Board (great quality stuff; check out the sectional I want desperately for the living room: the Jasper sofa); Moon Shine Lamp and Shades (I love our living room floor lamp and side lamp); and Design Within Reach.

Brian Gabbard

Portland, Ore.

✱ Way cool magazine and articles that are outstanding! We moved from our last house when we found our ranch and fell in love with it from the first look. We live across the water from Seattle and need help with



finding out more about our house—who built it, which architect/builder would it most resemble, etc. The original portion of the house was built in 1955 with an addition in '66. They stayed with the big eaves and the

morewisdom

look, but other than that we know nothing.

Most of the ideas we get for the restoration (aside from the massive plumbing and wiring projects) are from your magazine and the suppliers you use.

Keep up the great work.

Steven McGarr

Port Orchard, Wash.

OK, here's the scoop on finding out about your home's history: most houses aren't immediately identifiable unless you live in a tract of Eichlers or Drummonds, or another known developer/builder. The solo or infill homes are tougher and ID-ing them involves going to whatever passes as a city building department in your neck of the woods. You're looking for original building permits, which may contain info such as the architect or builder, but might just reveal whomever applied for the permit, possibly an original owner or developer. Then, as now, most homes weren't architect designed.

If you've seen the fall 2006 issue, the article on builders' catalogs gives you a small glimmer of how many companies were out there. Google "midcentury house plans" or look on eBay, and you'll see what I mean. Your house has classic elements—board and batten exterior, shallow gable roof, what looks like post and beam construction, and angled posts on the porch—but doesn't point to any one builder I can identify. Research takes time and effort and may or may not lead to anything substantive. A quicker route might be to post a picture on one of lottaliving.com's chatboards; one of the many architecture/midcentury fans out there may have some info for you.

—ar editor

* I have been a subscriber since issue no. 1 and I have never been so excited to receive a magazine in my mailbox as I am every time Atomic Ranch shows up.

My husband and I moved into a fun 1962 ranch home on New Year's Day 2003. We bought it from a couple who only had it a few years and flipped it to

make money in the crazy housing market here. They bought it from the original owner who hand built this tiki bar around 1964. It is beautifully put together; you can tell love went into it.

Well, between the knotty pine kitchen with original Formica counters, a funky 10-bulb ceiling fixture in the living room and this gorgeous bar, we had to have the house. The realtor actually apologized for the fact it had not been renovated; I was thrilled.



I would love to see articles about tiki culture and other houses like mine. Thanks for putting out such an awesome and informative magazine!

Cheri Embree

San Diego, Calif.

* I have been a subscriber from close to the very beginning and have always enjoyed it very much. Being more of a purist I don't always agree with the way some of the homeowners furnish or alter their homes, but usually I see the architectural or cultural significance of your choices to publish them. That is why I was so perplexed and disappointed in the fall 2006 article "On the Edge of Modernism."

I can understand that a lot of people want to update and/or improve their midcentury ranch houses to accommodate today's lifestyle changes, but the owners of this Phoenix ranch house totally destroyed all features and characteristics of a ranch house. No one would have a

even more wisdom

clue that this house started life as a ranch if they were not told. [It] now looks like a new contemporary you would expect to see in *Elle Décor*, *House & Garden* or *Metropolitan Home*. That is not what I expect or want to see in Atomic Ranch. I have several friends who also subscribe to your magazine and they have expressed the same feeling. I hope that in the future you reconsider publishing this type of remodel in the magazine.

Malcolm Perry

Online

✱ I purchased a copy of your book last week and have thoroughly enjoyed it. Hope it gets more people to refurbish or even build more of these great houses instead of the disgusting McMansions they are building now.

Keep up the good work!

Doug Nicoli

Vancouver, Wash.

Our publisher, Gibbs Smith, is offering a 10 percent discount on Atomic Ranch: Design Ideas for Stylish Ranch Homes; give them a jingle at 800.835.4993, or order through our website, atomic-ranch.com.

—ar editor

✱ While visiting my family in Kansas City, I went in search of the Lustron house that I had read was to be converted into a museum. From all appearances, this gray one listed in my AIA guidebook is still a residence. It looks to be in primo condition and is indeed all smooth and shiny like an enamel porcelain bathtub. I was brazen enough to knock on the door, hoping I would be invited in, but no one was home except a barking dog. It is in a lovely older neighborhood with a Frank Lloyd Wright house and the Thomas Hart Benton residence around the corner. I would buy it in a second—except I already have a steel house. Please do a Lustron follow-up article some time—they are fascinating!

Brian McGuire

Palm Springs, Calif.



For those who missed our Lustron article in no. 2, these kit homes were an early prefab experiment utilizing porcelain-clad steel components that never needed painting. Interest in these distinctive homes has grown in recent years and various websites are devoted to them, including recentpast.org/types/resident/lustron/index.html, which includes links to a Lustron vacation house in New York and a state-by-state home tour. McGuire's own Donald Wexler steel house in Palm Springs will be featured in an upcoming issue.

—ar editor

✱ Howdy, Atomic Ranchers: Do you think you could do an article on modern bed and breakfasts around the country? Every one I see seems to be a gaudy Victorian style; I only found one in Houston that was even in the ballpark: modernbb.com.

Maybe with the help of readers you could track down a few more or even give someone the idea to transform their residence.

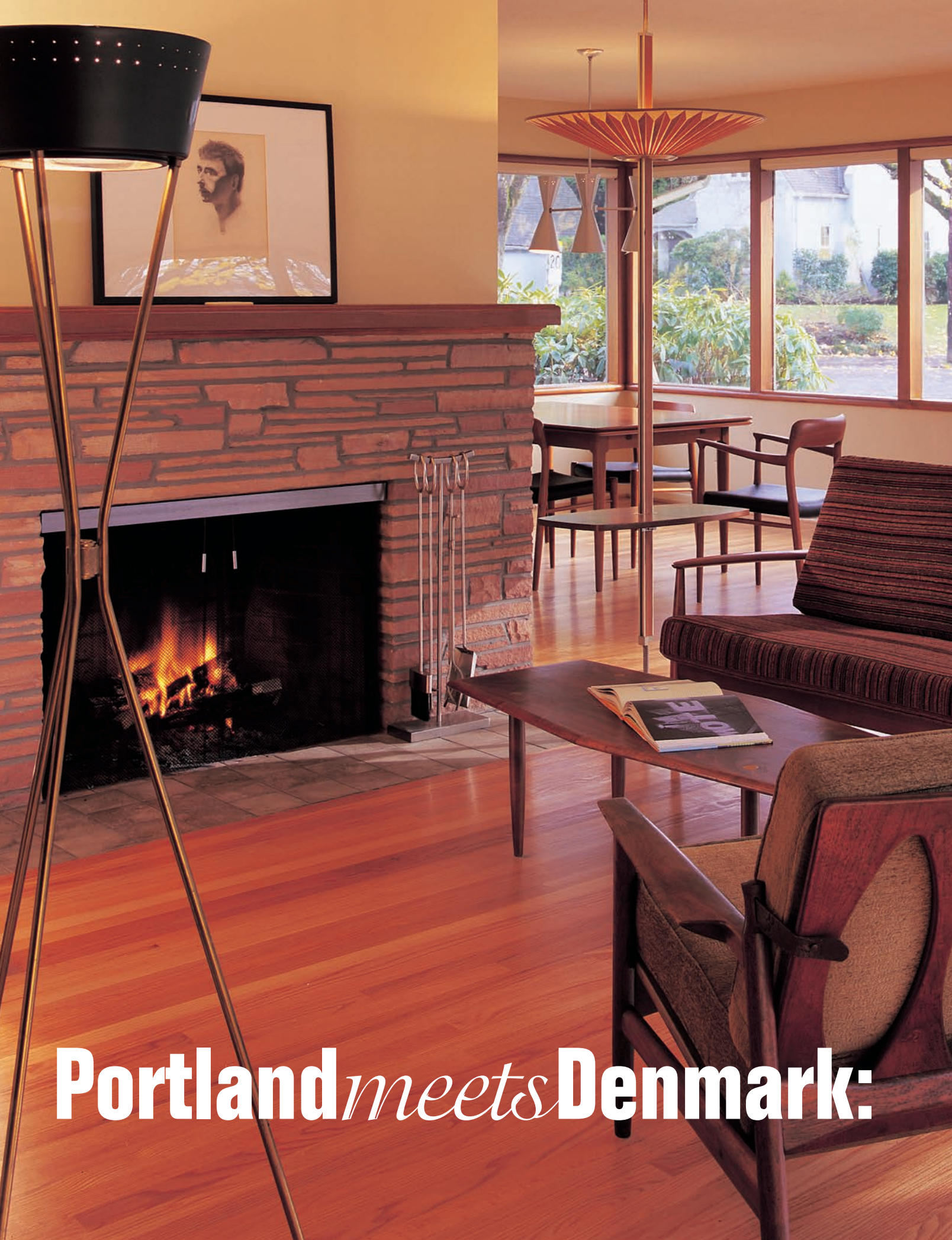
Your mag rules!

Chris Ellinger

Portland, Ore.



Write us at editor@atomic-ranch.com or send a note to Atomic Ranch, Publishing Office, 3125 SE Rex St., Portland, OR 97202. We'll print the good ones.



Portland *meets* **Denmark:**



*M*attress on the floor, acetate on the windows, schlepping clothes to the Laundromat, ah—the joys of moving. After 20 years in our last home in Southern California, prepping for its sale and weeding out extraneous possessions was an arduous three-month process. But here we were in glorious Portland, eager for our cooler, kinder climate. Trouble was, the temp was 90-plus and indoors, even more stifling; welcome to Oregon.

Our new 1952 brick ranch house is in SE Portland's Eastmoreland neighborhood, roughly 10 square blocks of '20s Tudor Revivals, Cape Cods, Dutch Colonials and the occasional postwar ranch infill like ours, mostly on corner lots. We loved the location near Reed College, the homey tree-lined streets and the plus of finding a traditional ranch recently buffed up for resale sans granite kitchen and big-box bath.

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography Jim Brown

The living/dining room has all-vintage furnishings, including a reupholstered Selig chair with oval cutouts and a circa-1950 Gerald Thurston tripod floor lamp from Atomic Warehouse in the foreground. The stone fireplace surround is original, but the sellers painted the pink mortar gray and installed a new tile hearth. The two coffee tables are unmarked Danish modern pieces and the flashy Lightolier tension pole lamp has an integral walnut table. The walls are Whip by Devine Color.

AR's *own* Ranch

Blast from the Past

One day, a knock on the door turned out to be Ray and Mary Niehaus, the longtime owners dropping by to say hello. They'd sold the previous summer to someone in the neighborhood on the first day the house was listed and had been keeping tabs on her renovations. "The buyer said she always walked past taking her son to Duniway School and she really admired the house," Ray said. They had been perplexed that the new owner didn't want to know the quirky details—what the second light switch in the coat closet was for and why it was a good idea to have a stopper in the bar sink when you ran the dishwasher.

But they seemed happy to meet us and relieved to find we thought the three-bedroom, two-bath house was just great. From them we learned that the lot was a Victory Garden during World War II and that it was first owned by Anna and Harry Rubenstein, while the buff brick house next door housed sister-in-law Sophie Rubenstein. The Niehauses bought the home in 1973 for a hair under \$37,000, raised their three children and lived here for 35 years before moving to a retirement complex.

They told us that they both had grown up in SE Portland in a "humble, humble part of town" in Mary's words. "One of my boyfriends and I came to visit a home in Eastmoreland and my eyes got this big," Mary said, remembering her high school days. "I never thought I could live in such a beautiful area; a lot of people felt that way when we lived here. We fell in love with this house."

"We were in hog heaven," Ray, a retired teacher, added with a laugh.

Both were in their 40s when they bought from the 70-something Rubensteins, just like the Niehauses today. "Anna Rubenstein had drapes that were psychedelic with great big flowers," Mary said with a laugh. "I thought they were just awful. They couldn't understand why we didn't buy their furniture."

"They had a big wool rug and a glass partition between the living room and dining room, like the glass block near the front door; we wanted the room open so we removed it," Ray explained. Over the years, the Niehauses worked hard to take care of the house and we inherited a solid structure with beautiful oak floors and a meticulously penciled chart ID-ing the circuit breakers down in the basement.





Streamlined Modern

The person who bought the Niehauses' home did a refresh and relist on the property, the third house she's renovated in the neighborhood. We heard she considered putting on a second story, but thankfully instead took a more conservative approach. The house was tastefully painted inside and out using some of Devine Color's hues, new linoleum was put in the kitchen and laundry room, and the hardwood floors given a coat of satin urethane. Most of the original kitchen cabinets were replaced with new bungalow-esque MDF doors and boxes, and reproduction Arts and Crafts light fixtures installed throughout.

Downstairs, what sounds like a great kitschy bar is no more. "The kids loved the party room; we had a pool table down there for a while and a ping-pong table. It was darling and so inviting," Mary said. "Our son wanted the bar but the buyer requested that it stay."



In the not-strictly-period-correct kitchen, the reproduction bungalow-era cabinets and display shelves meld pre- and postwar aesthetics. To the left of the sink, a Heartland Legacy dishwasher virtually matches the cabinet fronts and an ecologically smart Marmoleum floor is pretty spunky. OK, OK, the jadeite green refrigerator from our bungalow days is a Muller Moebel, available through themagazine.info.

Opposite, bottom, the same view with period cabinetry, shot in the '70s.

A knotty pine paneled bedroom escaped the paintbrush and the bathroom and kitchen thankfully retained the original tile counters. Mostly, it seems as if owner no. 3 stripped away the traditional touches the Niehauses enjoyed and revealed the clean-lined architecture, albeit in a bungalow aesthetic.

From all appearances, the ranch appeared to be move-in ready, and we congratulated ourselves on having found a home that wouldn't require months of rehabbing to make it livable. Moving from 900 miles away and needing to get another issue of the magazine out the door soon after arriving meant little down time, plus, at our ages, neither of us had the appetite for a full-bore DIY project.

Of course, there were the usual nuisances: the dryer vent sealed inside the wall, shower valves leaking into the garage, long lead times and expensive quotes for needed electric and plumbing fixes, but certainly nothing like the major projects we often feature in AR. The relatively minor repairs did give us additional insight



into the solid construction of the house, which included sheet lath, a 1 1/2-inch-thick, double layer precursor to standard drywall and decoratively textured ceilings with nary a crack after 50 years.

A couple of changes we made in the kitchen allowed us to fit our quirky existing appliances into the layout. Where Mary's old stove stood, our jadeite green Muller refrigerator squeezed in with 1/4" to spare around the new cabinets, and our reconditioned cobalt blue O'Keefe & Merritt stove likewise just barely slid into the designated refrigerator slot. Of course this required moving the gas line, which took two days, a city permit, an inspection and a bunch of money. Because the linoleum pattern chosen by the sellers was a weird color that didn't really complement the original green tile counters or our appliances, I indulged my inner diva by opting for a tomato red Marmoleum floor.

Divesting ourselves of inexpensive quasi-bungalow furnishings meant starting a new interior design chapter. Oh goody; we get to go shopping.

The vintage O'Keefe & Merritt stove was re-porcelained in cobalt blue by Sav-on Appliances in Burbank, Calif. The wall light is an "Otis" from Rejuvenation.



Dig the Details

So it's not an Eichler or a Rummer or an Alexander, but our traditional hip-roof, vaguely Prairie-esque ranch with its stunning windows is plenty hip. Here are some of the things we think make it great:



Interesting vintage pieces like the wall sconces repurposed as hall-way lighting and the "maybe a Castiglioni"-designed Flos flying saucer lamp in the bedroom.

Glass block framing the front door and inset into the kitchen backsplash is another rectilinear building material that complements the Roman (not French as we reported earlier) brick and wood siding while it lets in more gray Pacific Northwest light.

Switching out the seller's generic decorative knobs for pulls like those still on the garage cupboards, available at most hardware stores for less than \$1, while also splurging on buttery-smooth reproduction saucer knobs at \$6 a pop.

Add to the existing: the varnished knotty pine paneling virtually screamed "Cowboy Kitsch," hence these custom cafe curtains by Whipstitch in Portland.

Portland Pickings

Vintage, contemporary, midcentury reissues or modern riffs on MCM design? We were under the gun to find things to sit on/sleep on/eat off of right away. While we admire the high-end collections we often shoot, that approach didn't fit our timeline or checkbook. And at our house, the "ick" factor creeps in when it comes to vintage upholstery.

A long teak coffee table and a vanity stand purchased at the 2006 Palm Springs Modernism show got us started with what turned out to be a good style fit: Danish modern. We both liked the sculptural lines, and the exposed frames had practical applications as well. Being primarily oiled teak, the finishes could be renewed, the yuck factor was low and our indoor cat was disinclined to sharpen her claws on the wood surfaces. Call it interior design by Betsy.

We hit all of the Portland vintage stores we could and found the most pieces at Hawthorne Vintage. EBay and online stores were other good sources for both furniture—a loveseat, nightstands, a wrought iron chair—and lighting. There were some long-distance surprises, though: items either damaged in transit or misrepresented on offer, or not quite right for the application, like a great purple Poul Henningsen PH5 lamp that is woefully inadequate to actually illuminate a room.

We chose a few new items as well: in the bedroom, a Case Study Metal V-Leg bed by Modernica through Design Within



A Paul McCobb Planner Group cabinet from Winchendon is three separate components—a low bench plus two storage boxes. The dealer at Portland Modern commented that the early ring pulls make it more desirable, while the pegboard sliding doors have been refinished.

The Danish teak couch bought on eBay has a metal label from John Stuart Inc., Grand Rapids/New York, which The Furniture Society blog says began importing France & Daverkosen furniture in 1951 or '52. The seller thought the designer might have been Peter Hvidt or Greta Jalke—or maybe not.

The reupholstered chair was attributed to Greta Grossman on eBay, but our collector buddies have additional suggestions: "It has more characteristics of Dorothy Schindele than Grossman, but I think it is Tropi-Cal. So much of that early California Case Study Modern bent iron rod stuff is hard to identify positively, as many companies took stylistic liberties with so many of the designs," Denver dealer Nick Horvath says. "The chair very well could be Grossman as it does exhibit characteristics of her design. It also is very much like a Tony Paul design," Houston collector Don Emmite suggests.



Two from Portland's Hawthorne Vintage: the dining table is marked Skovmand & Andersen, while the chairs are JL Moller, a style still in production today.

The Lamino chair, designed by Yngve Ekstrom in 1955 for Swedese Mobler, comes in laminated beech, oak, cherry, walnut, or in this vintage example, oak and teak. It is still available new from various online retailers.





A mix of now and then in the bedroom: the Nelson bubble lamps and Modernica bed are new, while the Danish modern nightstands and Dansk ice buckets designed by Jens Quistgaard, now used as trash containers, are vintage. Window coverings from The Shade Shop.

An interpretation of a classic George Nelson platform bench is this new Mod Slat Table by Jetsetretro Design.

**our indoor cat was disinclined
to sharpen her claws on the wood surfaces.**
Call it interior design by Betsy

ACO Mobler is stamped on the back mahogany panel of the Danish modern teak buffet that houses electronics. When converting the vintage units for cord management, we saved the original backs so the pieces could be restored in the future. And yes, our publisher is a Richard Thompson freak.

Resources page 95

Reach and Nelson bubble lamps from YLighting; Otis wall light fixtures in the bathroom and kitchen, a Jantzen ceiling lamp in brushed nickel, and cabinet pulls and knobs, all from Rejuvenation.

Although some of the vintage pieces we found seemed pretty affordable, of course a few needed a further investment to make them aesthetically pleasing. Except for the original fabric on the Danish Modern couch and the black vinyl seats on the dining room chairs, all of the pieces needed reupholstering if only to harmonize. Sit On It in Portland was recommended as knowing their way around midcentury lines, so we took two chairs in, as well as a pricey leather upholstery kit from Denmark for the sexy Lamino chair we'd purchased at Hawthorne Vintage. A random comment on a blog tipped us that this chair was still being manufactured and upholstery could be ordered through Arkitektura In Situ in San Francisco.

Still on the pending list is a new frame for the giant wall mirror in the bath and full-bore Western stuff for Jim's home office to complement the cowboy curtains, knotty pine walls and vintage Steelcase desk. We also need a doorbell, and are strongly leaning toward something from Knock Doorbells (see Cool Stuff page 72), and we'll try to practice what we preach and take our time with any accent wall colors and additional artwork.

This house has opened our eyes to a new palette and living a bit differently than in our tiny, dark bungalow. It's like learning a new language—maybe pig Latin, but a new skill nonetheless. 🐷



ranchdressing

House parts ...
midcentury collectibles ...
the inside scoop on
what's what
and where to get it



Q: Any idea where I can find door hardware like this?

Charles Sergewick

A: The site that Charles sent a link to, eureka.modern.com/door_hardware_vintage_schlage_west_lok.htm, leads to Tim Wetzel of Eureka Modern, who first popped up on the topic of low voltage lighting systems. He offers a wealth of info on MCM door knobs and escutcheons and sent these photos to illustrate both his own answer and additional details from Erich Volkstorf.

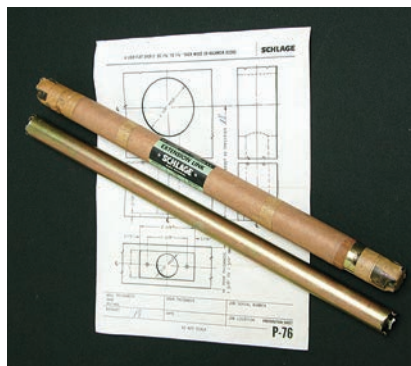
Doorknobs, like every other detail of home design, changed with the times and a number of trendy styles were popular in the midcentury era. Knobs themselves were generally tastefully simple and detail free. The more decorative part was the escutcheon—the plate that dresses the doorknob shaft where it enters the door. Some were restrained, simple geometric shapes, like squares and circles, but oversized for drama. The most flamboyant ones were variations on

the starburst shape. Some of these were integrated into the latch set, as on the iconic Schlage Astra, but add-on decorative bezels were quite popular and a much more affordable way to dress up a door.



Schlage Astra assembly

Most of these fancy escutcheons were much larger than traditional parts and presented a special problem: the backset distance (measurement from door edge to doorknob center) needed to be longer than the standard dimension. To accommodate this, special latch extensions were needed. In most cases the extension was just a few inches. For a brief time, center-mounted doorknobs were the peak of door



A long latch extension needed for center-mount knobs.



Tim putting the finishing touches on his front door.

fashion, necessitating long extensions (about half the door width). While not exactly the most logical or easily used position for a doorknob, the center knob doors made for a striking feature that is prized today as a historical detail of the era.

I have a 42" door with a center knob that never fails to evoke a smile from visitors. I used a Schlage Orbit with Westlok 8-point escutcheon on the exterior and a Schlage chrome 4-point compass escutcheon on the interior—very, very flashy. I had intended to use an Astra, but liked the Westlok even better.

Finding fancy midcentury door hardware today is very difficult. Best bet is to search the stock of used building materials recyclers who sell doors.

Tim Wetzel

And from Erich:

The square Schlage-type escutcheon that can be mounted as a diamond or square is usually not a problem to find. Though no longer made, I can usually find them from salvage and replate them (most are in rough shape, having been used outside). There



were two sizes, to the best of my knowledge. They were stamped from brass, and then plated or polished depending on the specifications.

The star pattern I've also seen, though less commonly. Again, no longer made. Unless it has been definitely confirmed, a stainless escutcheon is probably brushed chrome over zinc. The latter metal, or an alloy thereof called "pot metal," was used extensively, as it molds well. Brass was and is expensive. Aluminum was used, but doesn't take plating easily and threads in it are weak.

Having used door latches with long extensions, my educated guess is that they fell out of favor for several reasons. First, they were difficult to install, requiring precision. Second, because of the length of the linkage and the friction associated with that, their operation feels heavy. Add an orbit that can't be grasped easily, and it's hard to turn the knob. Finally, putting the knob in the center of the door is uncomfortable for most people, partly because they're just not used to it, and maybe because there is something in our historical psyche that says door latches are located close to where the door opens.

That said, if Charles lets me know exactly what he's looking for, I can probably find what he needs.

Erich Volkstorf, Modernist Resource
info@modernistresource.com

continued on page 30

ranchdressing

Q: I purchased what I think is a Danish modern armchair at an estate sale. I'm having trouble locating a source for the bands that support the back and bottom cushions. I was hoping someone who reads your magazine might be able to help. I would like to restore it to original condition.

Cory Larson



A: We have those same plastic encased continuous-spring supports on our Danish Modern couch (see page 21), but have yet to find a resource among our contacts. Any leads for Cory?



The E4-NK

croutons

On page 12 of no. 12 you recommend Rejuvenation's Shelton mailbox. I'd like to direct readers to a couple of additional choices: The Ecco model no. E4-NK in brushed satin nickel by Fuoriserie (ecco-products.com) and the Metropolis series, by Architectural Mailboxes (architecturalmailboxes.com; retails for approximately \$125).

Another reader inquired about fencing (page 68). Please note the wide variety of bamboo privacy screens (as well as other great products) available at symphonyproducts.com. Elsewhere in the issue, I recall mention of cool doorbell pushbuttons. For my money, the most eye-catching is Spore's illuminated De-Light series, available with a number of LED colors and metal finishes such as architectural bronze and satin or polished aluminum (unicahome.com and others).

Rich Mintz



Metropolis

*Need a renovation resource or wondering if that flea market find is anything?
Send your questions and photos to editor@atomic-ranch.com and we'll run them past our experts.*

Collecting:





Midcentury Modern Art Glass

There is nothing sexier than midcentury modern design. And when you think of art glass and midcentury, a whole plethora of images comes to mind: the sensual lines, the curvaceous movement, the bold and bossy colors. Pieces by companies like Val Saint-Lambert, Blenko and Chalet were both functional and affordable. At the other end of the scale, Italian studios such as Venini and Seguso focused on the “art” in art glass, and vintage pieces can cost as much as a new car.

When first considering art glass collecting, people often think Italian, since they were the masters of the medium from early centuries on. However, North America and parts of Europe were producing some amazing designs from the 1940s to the '70s.

The postwar period saw a blossoming of creativity when economies stifled by WWII suddenly became buoyant, and the art and design fields thrived with newfound consumerism. People craved and embraced fresh ideas and the opportunity to surround themselves with stylish design and decor. Home and furniture design, as well as fashion and the decorative arts, were all areas that pushed the boundaries of modernism. Bright colors, bold patterns and shapes were the rage.

text Brian Imeson

photography John Gaucher Images

Clearly Collectible

So where to start when collecting? To begin with, buy what you like. A good piece of art glass, just like a painting or a piece of furniture, should first and foremost speak to you. Blown art glass from this period could be bold, bright, in your face, wild in design, organic in shape and form, abstract and modern—or subtle, subdued and all about calm movement and color, a feel typical of Scandinavian work.

Lead crystal amplifies color, provides incredible clarity and, because the glass studios were working with a higher lead content back in the '40s and '50s, the pieces are heavy. These three characteristics are important when scrutinizing a find.

Several studios signed and marked their work, either with hand-scribed signatures, acid stamps or, in most cases, labels. However, people often removed labels, so it is usually a well-cared-for piece from a collector that still maintains its label. Signatures and labels not only identify the studio, but as companies changed label shapes and colors periodically, this helps date a



Previous pages, examples of Italian studio sculptural vessels in green and blue sommerso technique. The red and uranium Flavio Poli-designed dish is very rare. (For glass terminology, see sidebar on page 41.)

Above, from left, a brown Czech vase by Skrdlovice is an early 1950s piece, while the Archimede Seguso-designed tall brown and red sommerso vase and navy sommerso decanter both hail from the late 1940s.

Opposite, a rare Seguso Vetri d'arte charcoal modernist lamp was made in the late 1940s. Artist Flavio Poli designed the green geode dish and orange sommerso uranium vase for Seguso.





The Swedish studio Flygsfors is known for its organic vessels, including these designed by Paul Kedelv between 1952 and 1963.



piece. Items can range in price from the garage sale find of the century for a mere pittance, to several thousand for more serious pieces by well-known studios and designers.

In the 1980s and '90s, it was common to find art glass by studios such as Chalet, Pilgrim and Blenko—predominantly North American studios—in garage sales and flea markets as people purged old-style decorative arts. These pieces were produced and sold in relatively high numbers and thus were typical in most American households. Although excellent in quality, with styles changing, often they could be found for a few dollars. European art glass from the same time period often got lumped in under the banner of “old stuff,” and I have found pieces by Venini and Seguso in bargain bins. Just another piece of old glass to the seller but a treasure worth thousands to the savvy collector.

The majority of early Italian art glass pieces were seldom signed, and since labels were removed in most cases, identifying which studio or artist designed the work can be a daunting task. There are several good art glass books with price guides, most notably those written by Leslie Pina, which will assist in recognizing the various techniques of say, Seguso, Barovier, Cenedese or Venini. These volumes are invaluable tools for identification, including the work of various artists and designers, such as Flavio Poli for Seguso or Antonio Da Ros for Cenedese, as each made their mark with specific techniques and designs as they pushed boundaries to produce unique and distinctive pieces.

Across the Pond

Most Scandinavian studios such as Flygsfors, Holmegaard, Orrefors, Kosta, Maastricht and Stromberg signed, dated and numbered their work, thus making identification simple. Scandinavian art glass design is easily recognized, like their furniture, by the clean, timeless lines and colors. These pieces work extremely well in a variety of interiors because of their elegant simplicity. Certain pieces by artists like Vicke Lindstrand for Kosta, Per Lutken for Holmegaard and Paul Kedelv for Flygsfors are highly collectable and sought-after works.

Kosta pieces by Linstrand can go for several hundred to thousands of dollars. His techniques, such as the internal detailing and trailing of colors, are very collectible. Some designs, like Kosta's “Träd i dimma” (translation: trees in the mist) designs of heavy-walled vessels internally decorated with black-brown trees and autumnal colored leaves, sell for \$2,000–\$4,000. Edward Hald's work for Orrefors, including the Fishgraal vases, often fetch into the thousands, and Ravenna bowls designed by Sven Palmqvist for Orrefors sell for \$3,000–\$5,000 each.

Czechoslovakian postwar work was exceptional as well. Their art glass studios were creating very modern forms, such as solid-cased vases and vessels internally decorated with spiraling colors and bubbles twisting together. External features included multidirectional ribbing that created wild optical effects, or polishing and faceting to create “windows” to peer inside at the details encased. Studios such as Skrdlovice and Exbor, and designers like Pavel Hlava produced stunning examples of the fine Czech quality that collectors have come to recognize.

North Americano

In the '50s and '60s, American studios produced blown, cased and pressed glass in a variety of styles. Blenko, Pilgrim, Viking and Bischoff, to name a few, were some of the companies turning out colorful and daring pieces. Many of their designers showed direct influence from Scandinavian and Italian designers of the period. These pieces can be found in garage sales, flea markets, antique shops and your grandmother's basement.

This North American work is now coming into its own. Until recently it has not enjoyed the popularity or maintained the collectibility of European art glass, although the quality can be just as good. Chalet crystal for example, had radical shapes. The pulling and stretching of these forms caused them to become a bit more dated looking, thus its availability at garage sales. European work, on the other hand, maintained a much more timeless look that only contributes to its collectibility.

In the late '50s, the Canadian government sponsored Italian glass artists to come over and kick-start the industry in Canada, giving birth to Chalet, Chantilly Lorraine and Canada Art Studio. Their work was definitely influenced by the Italian origins, but later it became bolder and much more abstract in design. Pieces were often brightly colored, with long sweeping tentacles of glass reaching out to grab you. Today Chalet's Splash series, in which pieces look like water frozen in mid-splash, are highly collectable, particularly in the purple-blue periwinkle tone.

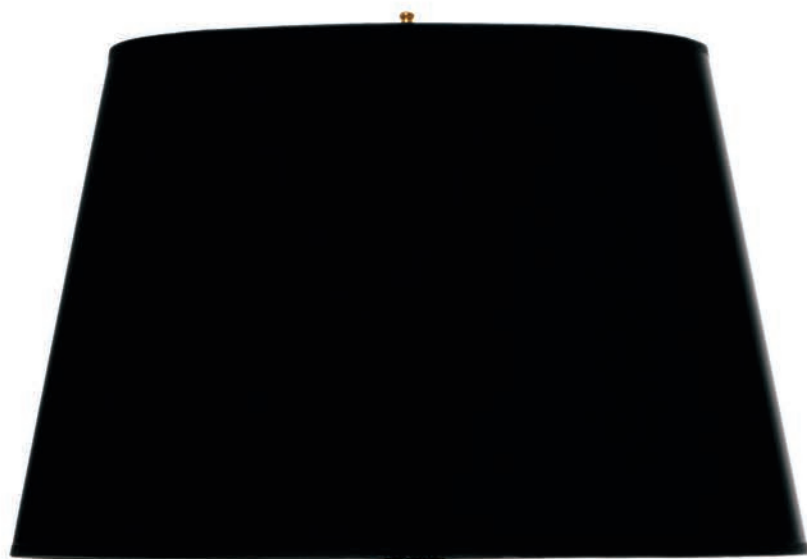
Ready to jump in? Midcentury art glass studios produced a wide and fascinating range of excellent quality work that was organic in design, fluid with sensual movement and came in spectacular colors. If you are not already hooked on the medium, you will be soon. Once you acquire your first piece, it's a slippery slope and highly addictive to say the least. You will never hit a garage sale or flea market again without being on the lookout for a treasure from the '50s encased forever in glass. Enjoy!

Brian Imeson is an avid collector of midcentury modern art glass and curator of Circa Vintage Art Glass in Calgary, Alberta; circa5060.ca

From left, a Flavio Poli organic *sommerso* vase and an Alberelli-designed decanter, both for Seguso Vetri d'arte in the mid 1950s. The Antonio Da Rossi tube vase with *sommerso* bubble for Cenedese is from the same period.

Opposite, a Belgian studio lamp by Val Saint-Lambert dates from the early 1950s, while the orange and blue sculptural vessels by Chalet of Canada were created in the '60s.





Get the bug

Learn more with *Blenko: Cool 50s & 60s Glass* by Leslie Pina, \$39.95 hardcover, available through the Atomic Bookstore (page 76, atomic-ranch.com.) And check our vintage-MCM advertisers, many of whom deal in art glass, including Chartreuse, Modlife, Out of Vogue and The Purple Moon.

A Glass Act

When it comes to glass, “blown” means hand blown in studios. “Cased” is also blown, but refers to the casing of internal layers of colors typically called “sommerso” in Italian work. The more layers of color, the more difficult it is to make and the more collectible. “Pressed” glass, in contrast, was pressed into molds, typically by machine. “Molded” glass was usually hand blown but pushed or blown into molds to maintain shape consistency.

In my years of collecting, I have had the opportunity to educate myself about the art form, era and genre, and have turned my passion for midcentury art glass into a business. I have found some excellent pieces, and have made some errors, which is all part of the learning curve.

A high point: I recently had the opportunity to obtain several excellent original Seguso pieces dated from the

mid-’40s to the early ’50s. The collection came from Venice and had been in storage for more than 50 years. The estate was sold to a collector in Germany, who then offered the pieces to me. They include decanters, lamps, vases and vessels—the best of the best. They are rare by virtue of the scale of the pieces and the unique and unusual color combinations. A once in a lifetime find!

But then there’s my biggest mistake—turning down pieces early in my collecting years when I was unsure of the items due to inexperience, most notably an early Art Deco Val Saint-Lambert vase, exquisitely cut in detail, reflecting the period style. A striking red and clear combination, I later saw it sell at auction for \$15,000. It was offered to me by a person clearing out an estate sale for \$400; sigh ...



Los Angeles, Calif.



Webster Groves, Mo.



Atlanta, Ga.



homepage

Los Angeles, Calif.

My house was built in the latter part of 1968, and was designed by John Cory, who had his offices in Pasadena. It is a modern home, floor-to-ceiling glass and views, with the original concept of a pavilion resting on 16 48" square columns. Rooms are formed by coffered ceilings and, typical of the period, limited materials were used: plaster and rough-cut redwood. The house is in its original condition except for updated appliances, granite countertops in the kitchen and the old tile removed and white French limestone put down.

Paul Siman

Webster Groves, Mo.

Our 1952 ranch, located in the Ridgewood subdivision outside St. Louis, sits among dozens of similar homes with the same floor plan. Designed by local developer Burton Duenke, they differ only in how they are oriented to the street. Ours came with the garage option rather than a carport. *Better Homes and Gardens* called these homes "an achievement in small house planning" and featured one as their Five Star Home in January 1953. Original features include redwood siding, sliding pocket doors, floor-to-ceiling windows, a stone fireplace, prefabricated closets doubling as partitions and vaulted ceilings in every room.

Nathan & Hannah Wilber

Atlanta, Ga.

Located in a subdivision that was sensitively established in 1959 in an already existing wooded area, my custom home was constructed in 1961. I am the fourth owner, and the house has been unaltered in any way except for the new kitchen that replaced the original 25 years ago. It has honest, functional and structurally integral building construction and components, while Atlanta remains a city mired in traditional faux trim and dishonest use of materials. Unfortunately, it is also in an area where existing homes and tree canopy are being demolished to build big-box traditional McMansions.

Michael Stanley

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.

of two minds

Can a microbiologist and a Barbie collector
find true happiness
in a five-bedroom Eichler?

What if they have five cats and a Chihuahua with a 'tude?

“Remember those weird houses that were so '50s? Let's go look at them,” Lori Goodman-Szorenyi proposed to husband George Szorenyi one day in 2002. “We thought they'd be really cheap,” she remembers.

The couple had lived in Old Town Orange, a Southern California neighborhood filled with quaint bungalows, back in the late '80s and amused themselves by driving through the nearby Eichler Fairmeadows tract, which had a fair number of rundown eyesores back then. By the 2002 jaunt, Lori and George were living in a condo and weren't in the market for a house. But we all know how that can play out ...

“I called Stephanie [Raffel, a local realtor who specializes in Eichlers] and she said there was a waiting list,” George remembers. “I thought, Who would want these homes? They're such a specialty buy.”

“We had no idea!” Lori interjects excitedly. “Usually I don't like what's mainstream, so I didn't want your traditional house. I don't like Mediterraneans or any of the typical California styles, and I love wood. It took us a while to get our 1964 Eichler.”

They found one with a beautiful backyard but it was trashed. [A short skirmish ensues where George remembers they didn't buy it because it needed too much work; Lori's recollection is they didn't buy it because it was already in escrow.] “There was no question, this was the one,” Lori says. “The A-frame by Jones and Emmons was the model I had fallen in love with.”

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography Jim Brown



Previous page, pardon our nudie pinup: among the multitude of Barbies are Silkstone (second row from top) and vintage repro Barbies (third row from top), all part of the adult collection doll world. The white Nelson-look marshmallow couch is a knockoff bought on eBay some years ago for the magnificent sum of \$469.

This double-A-frame modernist ranch is remarkably similar to the Portland Rummer featured in no. 11 (page 70), right down to its entry atrium, garage/carport combo and panels of obscure glass flanking the front door. This Orange, Calif., home designed by Jones and Emmons and built by Joseph Eichler is in the same tract as the flat-roof Eichler on the cover of no. 11.

You Say Tomato and I Say Potato

"I grew up in Budapest in a house built in 1820; I like new homes," George, a microbiologist who defected to the U.S. in 1983, says stoutly. "I would love a house like this but brand new, without all of the problems that come with an old house—plumbing, termites, roof leaks."

The flat portions of their roof leak subtly around the air conditioning vents and George has fixed them as best he can. Some houses in the neighborhood have foam roofs, but George has heard they are a fire hazard and Lori thinks you couldn't hear the rain through one—which is vital to her well being. Other minor issues include the four times the concrete slab in the bedroom was jackhammered in search of an elusive water leak, but so far no problems have surfaced with their radiant heated floor.

The house still has its single pane windows. "It gets cold!" Lori exclaims. "If you didn't have the radiant heat, I don't know how you could keep your house warm. People like to come here when it's cold because they know it's going to be nice and warm—then again, I set it at 75."

George grew up surrounded by furniture from the '20s. "To me it was all just old, crappy stuff. I always liked modern, new stuff," he says. Lori, naturally, feels differently.

"When we were younger I loved vintage things from garage sales and thrift stores; he absolutely hates that stuff," she says. "Every time I'd bring something home he'd get really upset. I still love it, but George is happier with new, so it's a good compromise that some of the [MCM] things are back in production and you can get exactly what you want and it's brand new and fresh."

Among their iconic furnishings are a few pieces that George doesn't "get"—specifically the fiberglass shell rocking chair and the prices many of these items command. "Some people buy the old ones for almost the same price; it's the same stuff," he says in wonderment.





next to a vintage-look
 candy apple red Northstar refrigerator,
 a long window
 replaced overhead cabinets



Above, from the hallway leading to what was designed to be a children's bedroom wing, the view of the kitchen and multipurpose room shows the hardworking three-height peninsula, which houses a breakfast table, cooktop, snack bar, wall oven and low storage for pots and pans. The fan is from Hampton Bay.

Opposite page, the black and white fiberglass Case Study chairs and stools are from Modernica and the Northstar fridge from Elmira Stove Works.

The Thermador cooktop and oven are original and fully functional for daily cooking.



"No, more—much more!" Lori corrects. Although she is the force behind 99 percent of their interior decor, luckily, they're drawn to the same things and go shopping together. "The way I look at it, as long as I'm spending the same amount of money, we might as well get the new stuff," George says.

"We've always had modern," Lori explains. "But as we've gotten older we upgraded."

"From IKEA to Modernica and that design thing, what is it?" George contributes.

"Design Within Reach," Lori supplies with a laugh. "A lot of it is actually from Highbrow Furniture in Nashville," she says. "I really like them."

Black, White, Black, White, Red

The couple inherited plain white laminate counters and white cabinet doors in the kitchen. "I just thought it needed the black and white and black and white [rhythm] though I was nervous to do it," Lori says. Their '60s cooktop and oven are in top form after Thermador came out to do maintenance, install new burners and replace a missing handle. Speckled laminate counters, a vintage-look candy apple red Northstar refrigerator and a long window that replaced overhead cabinets near the sink all work in the context of the house.

Opposite, the thrift store credenza was refinished by a family member, and so gets the OK to join the couple's new furnishings, including an Eames plywood chair. A Jackson Pollock print hangs on the wall.

Sunlight streams in from the atrium to highlight the original aggregate entryway and the Mark Goetz couch in dark cherry. A Noguchi coffee table, Eames La Chaise, George Nelson spindle clock and a 3Square Design storage unit from Mod Livin' in Denver are all new.

Before moving in, the pea-green-with-orange-door exterior was repainted, dirty gray carpeting removed, bedrooms painted and Lori oiled the mahogany paneling herself. She chose cork for the master bedroom floor and Pergo in the living and dining rooms. Why Pergo we ask?

"We had it in our previous house; it's easy to put down and always looks good. With all of our pets, we can't have carpeting," she answers. In the kitchen and adjoining multipurpose room, she opted for Congoleum, but says the dealer kept questioning that she really wanted that for a residence.

"I am an Eichler purist," Lori asserts. "Their features are timeless and cannot be improved upon. Today's 'modern' kitchen will look dated in five to 10 years, but you can modernize your home with new materials for floors and counters or new appliances without compromising the integrity of the original design."





Girly Glamour to the Nth Degree

When people come to visit for the first time, they invariably ask to see a certain bedroom. “A girlfriend of mine had five or six Barbies, so I thought, I can still have Barbies; I don’t care if I’m an adult,” Lori says in explaining the hundreds, or maybe it’s thousands of Barbies and Barbie accessories she’s collected in the past 10 years. Silkstone Barbies, Barbies of the World, vintage Barbies, American Girl vintage repro Barbies, Asian Barbies, Barbie cases, houses, cars, boats, campers, pools and dozens and dozens of cunning little outfits she’s sewn herself.

One favorite piece is the New York Loft, which actually is a Tuesday Taylor dollhouse, but Tuesday seems to be down with having a glamorous, busty roommate. And look at this perfect Barbie Dream Kitchen, Lori says, explaining to this Barbie-clueless visitor that it consists of a table and chairs, washing machine, sink, refrigerator and oven—all in eye-popping pink plastic. She also has pretty groovy Mattel Modern Furniture, but laments with just one bedroom to hold her collection, she’s unable to display the larger things like cardboard ’60s Barbie houses properly.

A “de-boxer,” Lori proudly says she’s thrown a couple of

“I am an
Eichler purist,”
Lori asserts.
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be improved upon.”

The dining room table and chairs are some of the few pieces of vintage furniture in the home. An Eames lounge chair and ottoman and Noguchi cyclone side table sit near the fireplace and the "Smokin' Kills" painting by Todd Goldman. Other household art includes prints by Rothko, Pollock and Shag.





George and Lori with the vivacious Pickles in their entry atrium.

A friend found the Heywood-Wakefield twin beds going for \$150 for the pair at a local swap meet. Crafty George tied the frames together and put a California king mattress on sideways “We did the twin bed thing for a while,” says Lori. “It looked so cute, but it was too Mary Tyler Moore/Dick Van Dyke. George really didn’t like that.” Yussel, a Singapura, takes his rightful place in the master suite.



seems somewhat amused by her fascination with collecting, but surprisingly has hung with her for about half an hour at one of the Barbie shows she periodically attends.

Unlike some furniture or accessory collectors, Lori doesn’t sell or trade up. “I’d have to need a new kidney to think about selling them,” she laughs.

Outside of the Barbie inner sanctum, there are still some tasks awaiting the couple’s attention. Pool resurfacing and decking and a master bath renovation are in the offing, as are closets. (Lori’s clothes collection has annexed one of the smaller bedrooms off the atrium.)

“You’re never done. You can always find a project,” she says. “We’re here for life—unless we move to New York and find a huge Manhattan loft with floor to ceiling windows. Maybe some day ...” 🍷

Resources page 95



Lucky Shamrock

After living in a frame bungalow, Bret and Charissa Kane wanted their next home to be a space-age ranch house in Central Florida. Five years ago, the couple hunted for months before a realtor showed them the house of their dreams.

"It was very difficult to convey to realtors that we wanted a ranch house with a midcentury modern feel and terrazzo floors," recalls Bret. "After we mentioned 'The Jetsons,' the realtor understood what we were looking for."

The Kanes were stoked when looking at a certain house in the Dover Shores area. "Modern design in Orlando is not quite as iconic as the Eichler neighborhoods you find in California," he says. "However, when we pulled up the curved driveway leading to the space-age carport, we knew we were home."

"The moment we walked into the house, we could see the quality, not to mention a little bit of terrazzo floor showing underneath the wall-to-wall carpet," he continues. "We went crazy over the kitchen. It was absolutely in mint condition."

"The kitchen is visible as soon as you walk into the house," Charissa explains. "It was so perfect, shiny and pink. It made me want to get an apron and bake something."

The next day, the Kanes submitted an offer but were outbid. "Another couple placed a higher bid," says Bret, "but they talked about ripping out the kitchen when they were there. The owners took our bid



text Sandra Carr

photography Katie Ball





“the kitchen
made me want to get
an apron
and bake something”



because they didn't want to see it ripped out. That was karma.”

After moving into their 1,700-square-foot 1957 ranch with their German shepherd, Marty, the couple came across the original deed and blueprints as well as a 1957 *Parade of Homes* brochure in a drawer. They learned that the street they lived on was in a show-house area, and that their home was called the “Shamrock.” The Kanes also discovered that they are the fourth owners.

Original homeowners John and Daisy Harrell relocated to Orlando, Fla., from Baltimore when John accepted an electronic engineer position with the Glen O. Martin Company, later to become Lockheed Martin. “We were living in a motel when he got transferred down here and my mom and dad were looking for a place to live,” recalls John Harrell, their son. “The house was already built on the Parade of Homes street. They liked the house and it was in the same area as where their Baltimore friends lived, so they bought it.”

The family fell in love with the layout. “The inside was set up for entertaining,” John reflects. “The family room opened up to the living room and the dining room was part of the living room.” Or as the brochure gushed, “The lovely dining area and marvelous kitchen are perfectly located for entertaining with a minimum of disturbance in the sleeping areas. Whether you are a person seeking the quiet comfort of seclusion or the stimulus of entertaining company, the Shamrock is the answer to your needs.”

The home showcased futuristic push-button light switches, silent-flushing commodes, a dishwasher and a garbage disposal—appliances and gadgets that were part of upscale, modern living. Still, the Harrells made a few changes before moving in.

“The builder had originally built a brick planter that separated the entrance from the dining room. They asked [him] to take that out



the couple
came across a 1957
Parade of Homes brochure
in a drawer



the Shamrock layout included practical characteristics



and [substitute] something out of wood,” says John. The final result was a room divider with shelving. The Kanes retrieved the unit from the garage and moved it to the family room where it now displays their tiki mug collection.

In central Florida, slanted roofs were the rage. Retired builder Elwood E. Waller III of E.E. Waller & Son recalls several reasons why that was the case. “We didn’t have snowstorms too often down here,” he laughs. “Consequently, a low-pitched roof would suffice. That way, you could use a common rafter or joist, one 2 x 8 or two 2 x 10 pieces of wood, instead of having to use the trusses that you see on higher-pitched roofs today.”

As a member of the Homebuilders Association of Central Florida, Waller had an opportunity to build the Shamrock home as well as other houses featured in the 1957 *Parade of Homes*. Bringing designer Hailey Smith’s drawings to life, the Shamrock layout included practical characteristics that were popular in 1950s ranch-style homes. “The traffic pattern was open, which seemed to be what people wanted in those days,” Waller remembers. “[But] it was separated from a noise standpoint.”

However, there were some limitations to the modern living offered in the Shamrock home. “It had jalousie windows in the family room, [which] were notorious for leaking air and just not being very efficient,” says John Harrell. Since then, the windows have been replaced and central air and heat installed.



that were popular in 1950s ranch-style homes





“when
we pulled up
to the space-age carport,
we knew
we were home”



After selling in 1993, Harrell would reminisce about his old family homestead. For this story, he and his wife, Sharon, had the opportunity to visit the home again for the first time in 12 years. “I was blown away by the decorations and the remodeling,” he says. “It’s just beautiful. I wish my folks would have thought of some of this stuff when I was living here.”

The Kanes left the kitchen and the bathrooms as-is, but removed carpeting and had the terrazzo floors restored. “I always loved the terrazzo,” John remembers. “I was very disappointed when my parents put in carpeting. I think terrazzo is very pretty, especially when it’s all shined up. The Kanes have done a great job with it.”

The couple also made their own imprint on the home. Bret built a modern-looking white shelving unit that separates the family and living room spaces and houses knick-knacks and books. “The way he has incorporated the shelving has made it homier. Just a warmer atmosphere and better for entertaining,” John enthuses.

When it comes to additional remodeling, Charissa wants to preserve the home’s look. “Somehow, it has survived 1970s wallpaper and Home Depot upgrades,” she says. “Who am I to take out the original Formica countertops or salmon-pink bathroom tile? I honestly feel that I need to protect it.”

Bret feels equally paternal and agonizes over adding personal touches. “Both times that we were in a market for a home, we were appalled at how many great 1950s houses have been ruined by handyman renovations with absolutely no nod to the intrinsic style. So, finding this mint ranch house with great architectural lines was a real treat.” 🏡

Sandra Carr began her writing career as a medical producer for WCPX Channel 6 and was the associate producer for Orlando CityBeat.com, an entertainment website. Photographer Katie Ball is also a writer and avid supporter of the Orlando music scene; her first published book is Any Cool Music.

Mr. Ralph's



Nine years before
“The Graduate,”
Ralph Wilson was high
on plastic, too.

Neighborhood



was Ralph Waldo Emerson who wrote that to succeed in life might be “to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch.” Continuing this kind of thinking, could we consider that a house qualifies as well? To have left a home preserved as a moment frozen in time—a house that shows us where we were, where we came from—this is the job of a historic site and the Wilson House is a historic house like no other.

Although one could hardly tell from the street, the interior of the Wilson House in Temple, Texas, shatters one’s expectations of what a historic home should be. There is no heavy wooden furniture with scrolling foliage at the knees and lions’ paws at the feet. Missing is the silk damask wall covering and the colonial kitchen. Instead, one is greeted with a still life of tropical colors: lemon, orange, petal pink, turquoise, jade green. You have just entered the youngest residence on the National Register of Historic Places, the honor roll of the top historic sites across America.

This house represents two important moments in time: the first, 1958–59 when the house was built; the second, 1998 when, in a ground-breaking moment, the committee from the National Trust for Historic Preservation unanimously voted to award the house national significance for its pioneering use of materials. No other structure had ever been included in this list for its use of materials or at an age of less than 50 years. Today, the academic work executed in preserving the house stands as a precedent that has since been cited in subsequent 20th-century residential site nominations, including Arapaho Acres in Denver, the first postwar neighborhood to be added to the National Register.

In 1958, Ralph Wilson, owner of Ralph Wilson Plastics, decided that it was time to produce a showcase for the products of his fledgling company. His was the youngest and the smallest of 18 contemporary U.S. laminate manufacturers at the time. Although “Mr. Ralph,” as he was known, was a wealthy man, he was also

frugal. The house would serve several functions simultaneously. First and foremost it was to be Wilson's private residence, built in the modern style per the taste of his third wife, Dorothy. Designed by Bonnie McInnich, Wilson's daughter and the first director of design for the company, from the beginning it was intended to be a showcase highlighting new uses for laminate.

The home was also to be photographed and those images disseminated through advertisements, brochures and magazines. Wilson insisted that the interior be surfaced with various grades of plastic laminate so he could observe the effects of humidity, time and wear. He adhered to a business philosophy that put the needs of customers first, and the house was to serve as a hospitality center where he would entertain customers. To this day, Wilsonart International continues to use the house in much the same way, bringing by groups of customers who delight in the colorful walk back in time.

Imagine being in a room of super-serious architectural and cultural preservationists while they were thoroughly examining the documentation of some of the most prestigious cites in the state of Texas—Galveston buildings that survived the hurricane of 1906, the site of the first black college in Texas and the iconic Rothko Chapel in Houston. Then imagine a pumpkin orange, gold flecked, plastic laminate surfaced kitchen flashing on the screen. The com-

The house received a preservation award from the National Trust for the extensive restoration project.



mittee laughed uncontrollably. This was not what they considered “historic.”

It looked similar to the rooms they or their parents grew up in. But the dissertation presented to the National Trust described the house as “the origin of the everyday” and successfully made the argument that the house was the first well-known application of so many details that today we consider mundane.

However, in the final years of the 1950s, these details were revolutionary and could only have been made possible by a brave upstart company and the ingenuity of Wilson. In 1958 Ralph Wilson Plastics had to be innovative any way they could, and the house stands as evidence that innovation, as well as a strong relationship with the customer, could make the difference.

Today we are so familiar with rolled-edge laminate countertops that we can scarcely imagine it being invented. But the post-formed edge is one of the great technological advances in the history of the material. Both the cabinets and the counters in the house were built in collaboration with Beauty-Top, an existing customer and a leading supplier of cabinetry to the barber and beauty shop industry. The kitchen and bathroom rolled-edge countertops in the Wilson house are the earliest known existing examples. As with any new invention, it does not look exactly like it does today, as these edges were

The view from the dining area into the kitchen shows a Nelson gate-leg table with a Venini glass lamp overhead.



The seamless laminate inlay technique seen in the living room was developed for the dinette industry by Wilson's company.

While none of the furniture is original, the Eames lounge and LCW chairs are at home, as are pieces by Jens Risom, Hans Wegner, Harry Bertoia and George Nelson.

In the pink guest bath, the sink is accessible from both sides of the vanity.





formed and then added to the horizontal counter piece. If you look closely, you can see a mitered seam much as one would with traditional woodworking. Early laminators were skilled woodworkers and they took their cues from that tradition.

The cabinetry in the house is also exceptional. Made largely of solid wood, each plane is surfaced in laminate so a door, for example, would have six pieces of laminate adhered to the front, back and all four edges. Even the drawers and shelves are lined in plastic laminate.

The Wilson House used very little drywall. In the kitchen, bathrooms, great room, laundry room and garage, the only existing drywall is on the ceiling. All of the walls are surfaced with an innovative grooved-panel system that is hooked onto the structural 2 x 4s. The end result accomplishes what paint only dreams of: the ultimate in color, finish and cleanability. This panel system, like the post-formed edge and all-laminate-surfaced cabinets, would become the norm about 10 years after the house was completed. Other exceptional details include the accent wall in the great room—the company's first example of what today is known as inlay laminate—and the all-laminate shower surround, which did not go into production until more than 30 years later.

Wilsonart International purchased the house in 1997 from Wilson's widow, Sunny, wife number four. The official reason was that the house would be used as storage for the corporate archives and as a place to entertain visitors. But there was a general feeling in the company that it was simply the right thing to do. As a design historian and laminate specialist, I worked to restore the house from a 1966 Victorian-inspired remodel and return it to its 1959 grandeur.

Over the past eight years, the house has been visited by thousands of people, both customers and employees of Wilsonart, as well as members of the general public who have read about the house in publications ranging from *Time* magazine and *The New York Times* to *Old House Journal* and *Preservation*. It has been mentioned often that people are delighted to discover that the house is not “plastic-y” at all, but quiet, warm and inviting. It has even been said that the house almost seems to smile at you. This seems fitting, because after all, it is a happy place that continues to speak well of both the company and the product. 🍷

Grace Jeffers is a New York-based design historian and materials specialist who works as a consultant for Wilsonart International.

COOL|stuff



Tres Chick

If “ick” is the operative word after a visit to your local cutesy baby furniture store, consider ducduc’s various lines of modern kid gear. You’ll be tempted to order an Austin three-drawer dresser/cum changing table (\$1,495) for your dining room and unembarrassed to include a Sam play table with chalkboard top in the family room. The company embraces environmentally sensitive manufacturing so you can feel good about supporting them. For stores, see ducducny.com.

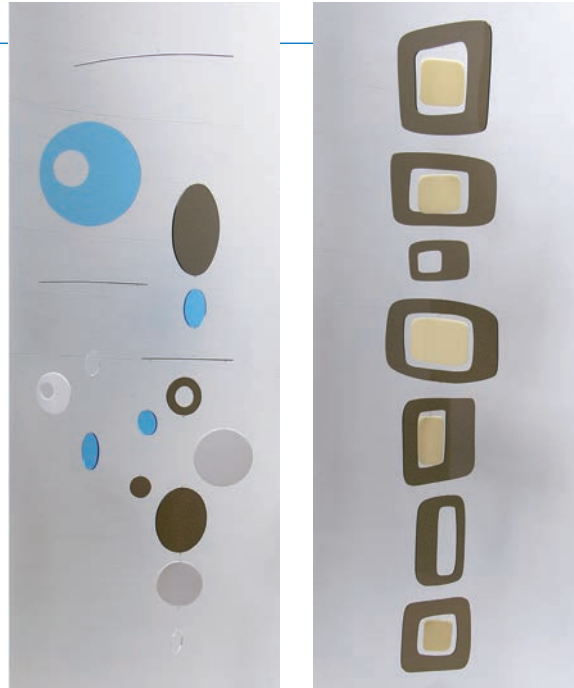
Put Some Ding in Your Dong

Tim Wetzel of Knock Doorbells is a geek for what was once a stylish focal point in the entryway of midcentury homes—the doorbell chime. He offers a number of restored classics, newly constructed chimes and restoration services. The NOVO chime (\$375 and up) captures the character of vintage models that use long tubular bells to make the chiming sound, while we’re drooling over the ever-changing rehabbed ones on his site. Shown are a vintage Nutone Champion in off-white, and left to right, a Rittenhouse designed by Russel Wright, a Miami-Carey, another Rittenhouse and the spanking-new NOVO. Get lost at knockdoorbells.com, 707.445.1966.



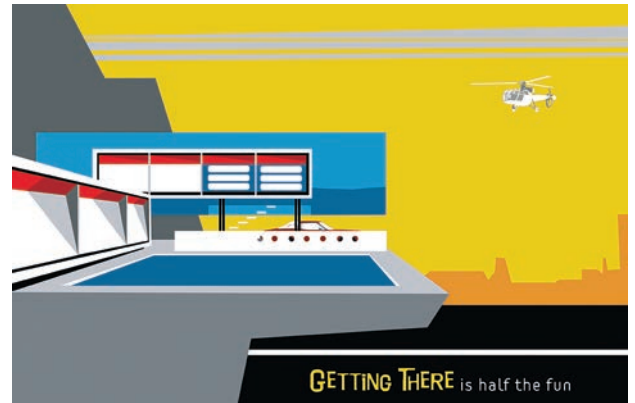
Pretty Spatial

A far cry from the construction-paper-and-coat-hanger mobiles we made as kids, Spin Designs' Michelle Berlin and Dee Dee Ploog put a fresh, well, spin on movable art. Using steel rods, colored acrylics, and boomerang and wood-grain laminates, the pair turn out eight hanging sculptures with prices beginning at \$72. Like the look but don't have a corner to hang one in? Browse their "Dangle" body sculpture at sister business Spin Jewelry. Visit spindesignsonline.com to view both or call 503.235.5644.



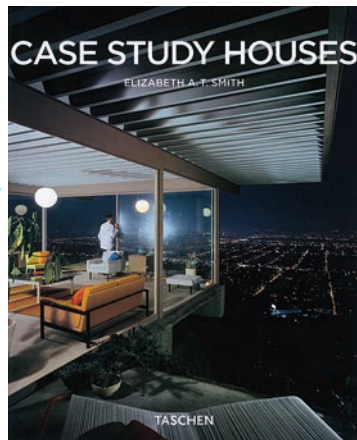
Supersonic Art

Ex-pat artist Michael Murphy is based in the UK, but channels Palm Springs, Case Study houses and midcentury travel in a big way. "Airplane graveyards, underground silos, atomic deserts, hovering metal ships, mutated men and insects, the Road Runner, deserted landscapes and buildings are all ingredients that are, if not seen, then between the lines of all the images," he says. Each roughly 16" x 20" giclee limited-edition print is signed and numbered, and prices begin at \$450; supersonic.designinblue.com. 



atomicbooks

new!



Case Study Houses
by Elizabeth A.T. Smith

A concise introduction to the Case Study House program launched by *Arts & Architecture* in 1945, which tried to bring low-cost modern architecture prototypes to the coming post-war building boom. In addition to Pierre Koenig's iconic Stahl House, 34 other projects are covered through Julius Shulman's vintage photos as well as floor plans, elevations, models of unbuilt designs and contemporary color photos. Nice additions are the Beadle and Dailey apartments in Phoenix and the MCM furniture IDs for some of the photos. Softcover, 96 pp. \$16.45

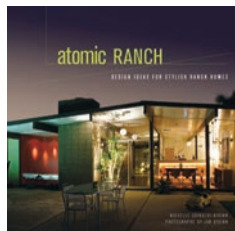
new!



Eames
by Gloria Koenig

From the highly readable bios to stills from "Powers of Ten," this small softcover book is an overview of the designs and talents of both Charles and Ray Eames. Taking a chronological approach, highlights include two Case Study houses, early plywood experiments, their numerous plastic chairs, the Aluminum Group line and exhibitions such as "Mathematica" and the Ovoid Theater at the 1964 World's Fair. A blend of their personal and professional lives, Koenig (widow of Pierre Koenig) ably explains the lasting appeal of this iconic couple and their work. 96 pp. \$16.45

Architecture



Atomic Ranch:
Design Ideas for
Stylish Ranch Homes

From modern to transitional, collecting to landscaping, 35 great houses to inspire you. Includes fresh looks at homes from our early sold-out issues. In hardcover from your favorite magazine publishers! Michelle Gringeri-Brown & Jim Brown, 192 pp. \$43.95



Saarinen

new! Another in the same series as *Eames* and *Case Study Houses*, this softcover book focuses primarily on Eero Saarinen's architecture—Dulles International Airport, the TWA Terminal, Case Study House #9, North Christian Church and many more—while touching on the Womb and Tulip chair designs. Pierluigi Serraino, 96 pp. \$16.45



Little Boxes:
The Architecture
of a Classic
Midcentury Suburb

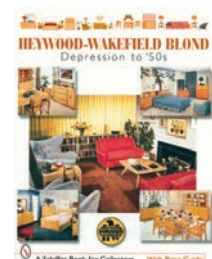
new! Westlake, the quintessential post-war neighborhood in the Bay Area, gets the glamour treatment in this attractive hardcover book looking at the "boxes made of ticky-tacky." Rob Keil, 144 pp. \$38.50 (See review page 92.)

Collecting



Blenko:
Cool 50s & 60s
Glass

A hardcover book with beautiful examples of 1930s–1990s Blenko pieces with current values, period advertising and a 1960 catalog reproduction. Leslie Pina, 208 pp. \$43.95



Heywood-Wakefield Blond:
Depression to '50s

A definitive softcover volume on H-W's birch modern and streamline '30s pieces with vintage photos of upholstered pieces, tables, chairs and case goods; includes current values. Leslie Pina, 248 pp. \$33.45



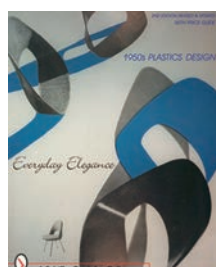
Decorative Art 60s
editors Charlotte & Peter Fiell

A veritable cornucopia of '60s interior design products in a big, fat softcover book, it's chockfull of vintage color and b&w shots. A short introduction printed in English, German and French sets the stage for '60s international design, then the book dives into architecture—from an open-plan box in Japan to Neutra's Singleton house in Beverly Hills and dozens of examples from the UK, Switzerland, Germany and more. Other chapters address interiors and furniture, textiles and wallpaper, glass, lighting, tableware and ceramics. Since the images come from the pages of the *Decorative Art* yearbooks, some photos are small and grainy, and captions and accompanying original text can be brief. But the main appeal of this title is the sheer volume of material between its covers and the opportunity to see how midcentury design was translated across the world. 575 pp. \$22.95



The Golden Age of Advertising—the 60s
editor Jim Heimann

If you're a fan of pop culture, you'll love this look at the '60s through the rose-colored glasses of nicely reproduced American advertising. Wisely beginning with alcohol and tobacco ads (Woody Allen crawling out of a giant conch shell for Smirnoff), the automotive chapter is full of nostalgic rides: V-dubs, fastback Marlin Ramblers, Cheryl Tiegs on a Honda scooter, Thunderbird roadsters. Business and industry ("Atomic electric power is here; a peacetime dream come true"), consumer products (portable hairdryers, Peter Max clocks), furniture and appliances, travel, food and beverages, fashion and beauty (paper dresses, pointy Maidenform bras) and entertainment are all explored in depth. And yes, that wonderful hair-don't on the cover is a Kanekalon wig. Hardcover, 352 pp. \$22.95



1950s Plastics Design

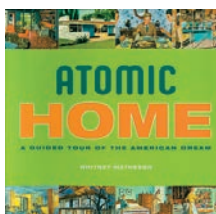
Melamine dinnerware, Formica counters, Naugahyde furniture and all manner of housewares are covered in this informative softcover book on postwar plastics marketing. Holly Wahlberg, 112 pp. \$22.95



Fifties Furniture

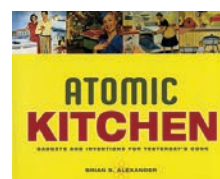
Selective works of Eames, Nelson, Bertoia, Platner, Noguchi, Saarinen and many more; a great introduction to collecting MCM furnishings. Leslie Pina; hardcover, 240 pp. \$43.95

Blasts From the Past



Atomic Home

Fifties homes as presented in period advertising; great for researching stylistic details like bathroom fixtures, lighting and paint colors. Whitney Matheson; softcover, 176 pp. \$22.95



Atomic Kitchen

Tour the midcentury kitchen and its accoutrements through advertising images from the '50s. Very fun! Brian Alexander; softcover, 176 pp. \$22.95



Inspiring 1950s Interiors

Over-the-top rooms from Armstrong Flooring advertising, but a great peek at interior details from the '50s. 176 pp. \$33.45

Order or find out more about these titles online at atomic-ranch.com or call 503.771.4171.

Modern

for my partner and me, collecting has been an evolving process. When Jim and I met more than 20 years ago, I was accumulating Art Deco pieces, Roseville Pottery and beginning my Russel Wright collection. Jim, on the other hand, didn't collect anything. But once I introduced him to the things I was interested in, he was hooked. Today, that Russel Wright collection includes several lines of dinnerware as well as tablecloths, glassware, stainless flatware, Bauer art pottery, "Oceana" woodenware and Wright's spun aluminum designs.

It was only natural that our home would evolve in the same manner. As our collection of midcentury modern furniture and decorative arts began to grow, so did the need for a larger space in which to show it.

text Don Emmite

images Hester + Hardaway Photographers



Evolution





Artwork in the dining room includes a Frederick Weinberg wire sculpture of two fencers and a painting by Wade Chandler hung in the middle of the CSS unit. The decorative glass on display is mostly Blenko and the pottery is Russel Wright.

Opposite, Iroquois Casual China by Russel Wright in the very rare turquoise/aqua color was only made for about a year and a half in the mid-'60s. (Online prices at press time range from \$90 for a cup and saucer to \$1,900 for a teapot with lid.)

We had been quite content living in our 1931 two-bedroom house in the Montrose area of Houston. That is, until we purchased a vintage Heywood Wakefield dining room set and room divider from its original owner. Suddenly our little cottage didn't quite work anymore. Added to this was my collection of vintage American home appliances—mixers, vacuum cleaners and toasters from the 1930s to 1960s—which was starting to expand rapidly.

Help came our way when a Realtor friend passed along a listing that had just come on the market. The house wasn't all that impressive at first glance. It didn't have an architectural pedigree and it was located outside my beloved midtown area with its diversity and convenient location. On the positive side, it exhibited good modern lines, expansive areas of terrazzo and oak flooring, great natural light and big rooms. And it was in original condition, right down to the atomic barkcloth draperies in the bedrooms and Henry Dreyfuss "Tap-Lite" push-button light switches on the wall. The fact that it was unaltered offered us a fresh palette for our collection and it was a great example of a midcentury ranch house. After careful consideration, weighing the negatives and positives, we made the decision to jump in feet first. And I am glad we did.



The former Heywood-Wakefield
dining room set has since given way
to an Eames rosewood dining table and
Aluminum Group chairs





In the entry, above a George Nelson storage cabinet is a 1961 painting by E. Wild. Stepping into the living room, an upholstered Bertioia Diamond chair and Eames DCW sit next to the wall of original windows, and an Art Deco cart, perhaps made as late as 1951, is parked behind the Eames Sofa Compact.

Opposite, in addition to the Knoll couch and chair, the comfortable den has a Nelson Catenary Group bench and a custom-made area rug. Saarinen wood-veneer-top coffee tables similar to this vintage walnut one are still available from Knoll.

Bolstering the Livability

Construction on the house was completed in January 1960, right in line with the dawning of a new America and the space age. The house is located in a deed-restricted neighborhood full of sprawling late '50s and early '60s ranch houses—a good thing because in Houston there are no zoning laws to protect neighborhoods from commercial intrusion. A few homes are architecturally significant but most were designed and constructed by anonymous builders who wanted to build something a little different. While the neighborhood isn't cutting edge, it isn't cookie cutter either; it's comfortable and livable and convenient.

Right away we knew some changes had to be made. The first task was to deal with the overwhelming amount of birch paneling in the den, breakfast room and kitchen. Our solution was to have the grooves in the paneling filled in, then the surface taped, floated and sanded. The paneling was sealed with Kilz; this allowed grass cloth, a popular wall covering used in the 1950s, to be applied directly on top. This route was the best choice economically because we didn't have to deal with removing the paneling and installing Sheetrock, which would have altered the door and window trim depth and the baseboards. We kept the original nubby draperies with copper Lurex woven through them and

the natural birch lighted cornice over a large sliding glass patio door.

I designed a new television storage cabinet and wet bar area in the den adjoining the kitchen. Doors conceal audio/video components flanking the television. Covered with vintage grill cloth retrieved from an old radio/television repair shop, the doors look like large hi-fi speakers. The center section appears to be drawers when it's closed to conceal the TV. Two Knoll Bertoa barstools belly up to the bar.

In the kitchen, the cabinets were refaced with full overlay doors and new hardware. Inspired by our large collection of sherbet pink, sugar white and charcoal gray Russel Wright Iroquois china, we had the cabinet's exteriors painted charcoal and the insides a soft pink to complement the dinnerware. White laminate countertops, a 2" x 2" tile backsplash and a complete Nutone built-in food center completes the look.

We chose vintage pink GE appliances, circa 1959. The wall ovens are original to the house, and this particular GE model has doors that can be removed for cleaning. We found some pink doors that a neighbor was going to discard and exchanged them for the brown doors that were originally on our oven. But the refrigerator is the best story of all: A friend who lives in Nassau Bay near Johnson Space Center was out for an evening walk and spied a pink fridge in a garage. She thought of us





The view from the kitchen into the den, with a Saarinen Womb chair sitting near the original brick fireplace, shows off new laminate counters and charcoal gray cabinet doors, and vintage appliances.

Opposite, the newly designed counter dividing the kitchen from the den houses a TV, audio/video equipment, wet bar and decorative shelves. The grass cloth wall covering coordinates with the repolished terrazzo floors. Under the vintage Nelson clock is a General Electric Rotisserie Oven circa 1958.

immediately. Short story, the guy gave it to us if we would haul it away. It has been part of our kitchens for 11 years and works beautifully.

Pulling up the original white '60s low-pile shag carpet revealed beautiful hardwoods as fresh as the day they were installed. The terrazzo portion of the floors had to be reground to remove years of wax and dirt and, by doing so, the original brilliance was restored. Other than vacuuming and a damp mop every once in a while, the floors are trouble free.

Curating the Collection

Our modern furniture collection focuses on classics by Herman Miller and Knoll. The living room is anchored by George Nelson's Comprehensive Storage System (CSS). Sharing the space is a black Eames sofa compact, the classic 670 rosewood Eames lounge and 671 ottoman, along with a dowel leg swivel PKW chair sitting at a Greta Magnusson Grossman desk.

The original brilliance
was restored to
the terrazzo floors





In the expansive master bedroom, Heywood-Wakefield wheat-finish pieces include a coffee table and a hard to find room divider produced in small numbers in the 1950s. The very early Knoll chairs, similar to Jen Risom's work, were designed by Abel Sorenson in 1945.

Opposite, the view from the breezeway with its louvered privacy doors shows a GE Partio Cart and vintage '50s Russell Woodard outdoor furniture.

A Bertoia wire chair, an early Eames DCW (Dining Chair Wood) by Evans Products and a Milo Baughman storage cabinet finish off the room.

The dining room is flooded with north light via narrow full-length windows. It took days for us to strip off a coating of black film installed by the previous owners. The former Heywood Wakefield dining room set has since given way to an Eames rosewood dining table and Aluminum Group chairs with more CSS serving our storage and serving needs.

In the den, an early Florence Knoll sofa and chair, flanked by matching Knoll T-angle tables, serve as everyday seating. Two Saarinen Womb chairs and walnut pedestal tables are complemented by Martz lamps and a Paul Maxwell 1956 cityscape hanging over the sofa.

The master bedroom is outfitted with Heywood Wakefield, while the guest bedroom is furnished with Paul McCobb. (These two areas will soon have their carpet removed.) A third bedroom serves as a home office with more CSS lining the walls. This is where many examples from my vintage appliance collection, including pieces from such famous names as Henry Dreyfuss and Raymond Loewy sit alongside items from less well known designers.

I've been collecting home appliances for 25 years, and if I can't attribute a design readily, I do patent design searches until I can. For me, these everyday appliances take on the appearance of sculpture. I love their crafts-

Throwing a Party-O!

The "Partio Cart" was designed by General Electric's staff designer Renor S. Faidy in 1959 and marketed in 1960. That same year, the product made its television debut on Bill Cullen's popular game show, "The Price is Right." This robotic-looking appliance features a turquoise drop-in range on one end and an electric rotisserie and charcoal grill on the other end. Add to that two butcher-block flip-up countertops, and you have an outdoor kitchen complete with a turquoise and white umbrella. The cooking unit operated



on 220 volts and was connected via a long heavy-duty cord.

Always attempting to chart new territory, GE was hoping consumers would combine the use of electricity with conventional outdoor cooking, since this ritual was becoming more popular in suburban living. Priced at \$560 in 1960, the Partio Cart was out of reach for most Americans. An ad from *House Beautiful* confirms the affluent target audience as it shows a "garden party" attended by men wearing jackets and ascots and women in high heels and pearls.

Quirky and fun, this appliance confirms the optimism surging through America at the time. —DE





manship and the fact that they were made during America's golden age of industrial design. And I really don't have a problem displaying an Electrolux Model 30 vacuum cleaner on the CSS. I'd like to think by doing so I've elevated this often ignored area of industrial design to a status equal to the furniture and decorative arts of the midcentury period.

Our house serves its purpose well by quietly providing the venue we were seeking. As with all collectors, though, we are anticipating that next step in the modern architectural evolution. By then, maybe we will have evolved so much that we will pare down our collection to the bare essentials to let the architecture take center stage. I wouldn't count on it, though. 🐉

Learn more about collecting midcentury pieces with titles from the Atomic Bookstore (page 76, atomic-ranch.com), including *Heywood-Wakefield Blond*, and *Fifties Furniture*.

Don Emmite is a Houston designer and consultant who collects, researches and documents American industrial design spanning the years 1935–1965. Jim Power is most intrigued by the engineering of their vintage collectibles and keeps them up and running. Photographers Paul Hester and Lisa Hardaway's latest book is Historic Texas Courthouses.

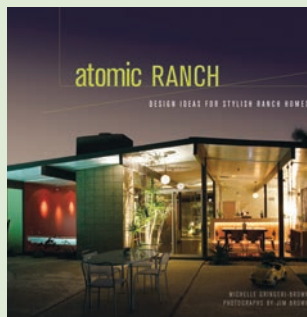
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AR readers who still possess a fairly intact memory may recall Rob Keil's story, "Westlake: San Francisco's Midcentury Modern Suburb," which appeared in our Fall 2005 issue. Keil has expanded that piece in *Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb*. A labor of love, he receives author, photographer and designer credit, and while countless communities self-publish some pretty deadly tomes to their own particular slice of American heaven, this is a real book, attractively produced and relevant to anyone interested in the modest but stylish homes built for the postwar housing market.

Westlake, a subdivision in Daly City, which in turn is a suburb of San Francisco, was developed and built by Henry Doelger in 1947 and would eventually encompass more than 10,000 homes and apartments for middle-income families. "The idea of writing a book never really came to mind until I moved into Westlake in 2001," Keil says. "I was remodeling the fireplace when I found an empty pack of Philip Morris cigarettes, still fresh with the smell of tobacco 45 years after someone on the construction crew dropped it behind the Sheetrock. That made me see in a very concrete way that these homes were built by someone and that the neighborhood had a history."

That history included the song "Little Boxes" by Malvina Reynolds with the well-known "ticky-tacky" line. "I began to realize that Westlake was not just pivotal to San Francisco's history, but that it was one of the largest and earliest planned postwar communities in the

nation. Knowing that these homes were made fun of for so many years, I wanted to set the record straight and give this underappreciated neighborhood its due," he says.

Keil has added more of everything that made his article interesting: more vintage b&w images of the actual construction, great staged PR photos of Doelger and other big shots, floor plans, maps, ads and color photos from mainstream magazines. His own collection of contemporary exteriors delineates the architectural details of these little, gem-like houses.

There are more interviews with the people who worked with Doelger and insight and analysis on how and why this affluent self-made man—he took delivery of his third yacht in Monaco—also succeeded in bringing good design and stylish living to ordinary people. Doelger was not without his failings: his vanity was expressed in five toupees, each one successively longer for each day of the workweek. However, by all accounts related in this book, he was honest, built a superior product and cared for the welfare of his fellow residents, living for many years in the community he built.

The book speaks to an issue facing communities across the U.S.: can postwar neighborhoods really be considered historic when they are so ubiquitous? "Unless you go behind the scenes and see the thought and planning, it's very easy to dismiss these houses as cheap and irrelevant," Keil acknowledges. "Most of the homeowners I talked to who moved here in the 1950s saw them as their ticket to middle-class afflu-



ence. Many were GIs and first-time buyers, and these modest little houses gave them the chance to move up the socioeconomic ladder.

"I think that architects and architecture critics of the day—and some even now—don't like to admit that tract homes like those in Westlake have much value. But like the Volkswagen Beetle or the Tupperware container proved, design doesn't have to be one-of-a-kind, expensive or exclusive to be good."

Keil says that preservation efforts in Westlake are on the upswing. "There are a number of people who are restoring and improving their homes in period-appropriate ways, and I hope they will eventually form a preservation group of some sort. I'm giving some thought to a preservation section on the book's website [littleboxesbook.com] that will have reference photos and resources for those who want to restore their homes, or at least preserve some semblance of their original character.

"I also hope that eventually someone will seek a listing for Westlake in the National Register of Historic Places. A number of Eichler subdivisions nearby have gained this

status through the hard work of neighborhood activists and architecture buffs. Westlake is easily worthy of inclusion based on its historical significance as one of the earliest and largest postwar suburbs, not to mention its architectural character. Besides, how many suburbs can say they inspired an internationally known song?"

While the majority of Westlake residences do not look like a typical ranch home, Keil's book goes right to the heart of the builder/entrepreneurs who transformed tract housing in America. Intelligent and efficient designs that varied several basic floor plans to avoid monotony, streamlined fabrication and assembly, and a genuine concern for quality of life—these are the characteristics that help explain why we are again fascinated with these homes today.



Little Boxes and issue 7 available at atomic-ranch.com.

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