

# atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS



FALL 2010



\$6.95 us/can

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- alvar aalto
- custom connecticut
- deluxe cliff may
- prefab ranch

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# fall 2010

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### cover

The kitchen of a California Eichler home was virtually untouched when the current owners bought it. Beyond a new dishwasher and refrigerator, replacement VCT flooring and a leggy worktable and stools from IKEA, the room is preserved as it was in 1965. Note to fans of polished granite and trend-driven remodels: laminate has plenty of staying power and looks thoroughly modern. Story page 14.



# meanwhile... back at the ranch

It can now be revealed (in these pages, at least) that we will produce a new Atomic Ranch book, to be published by Gibbs Smith in 2012. Between our regular duties on the magazine and gearing up for the book, you can say that things have been rather busy here at AR World Headquarters.

As we envision it, the new book will be similar in size and format to our first 2006 effort, *Atomic Ranch: Design Ideas for Stylish Ranch Homes*. But based on our experiences and listening to what midcentury homeowners need, we're working to make this one different and even better. We want to devote an entire chapter to each home, giving much greater depth and understanding of the challenges and successes of the owners, while concentrating on interior design. And we'll mirror the range and diversity we try to present in each issue of the magazine.

You'll find a robust midcentury arc, from traditional/transitional ranch to modified Miesian glass house; in between are architect-designed tracts and industry demonstration projects, with

their modest (and appropriate) makeovers. We hope you will find them all to be inspiring domiciles.

From our beginnings, we've always felt that good ranches were spread all across the country, and the book will also reflect that: I'm traveling to Cincinnati; Dallas; Rochester, N.Y.; Tulsa; Alexandria, Va., and, of course, several cities in California to shoot the images that will accompany Michelle's text.

While I'm very proud of our first book—and it's now in its fourth printing—it presented the frustration of double dipping between the magazine and the book. Homes were repeated and we had to apportion coverage while working to introduce our audience to the wide world of atomic ranches. This new effort will be exclusive—these homes will be

savored only in the book and we'll explain how and why their interiors work, giving you plenty of lessons you can apply to your own homes. We also want to buck the current trend of "mile wide and inch deep" editorial content; each home will get the full space it deserves.

Anyway, that's how this thing that doesn't yet exist is shaping up; we'll see in 2012 if we hit the mark. The final title is still under discussion, but I'm proposing something short and dignified like *Son of Atomic Ranch: It Came From the Recent Past to Show Us How to Live Today*. Pretty snappy, huh?

*Jim Brown*, Publisher



One for the book: Hollin Hills, Va., at the Noelle McAfee/David Armstrong residence.  
Left to right: Nathan Ha, Eric Margry, David, me, Suzanne McLees and Noelle.



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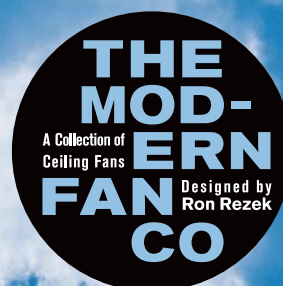
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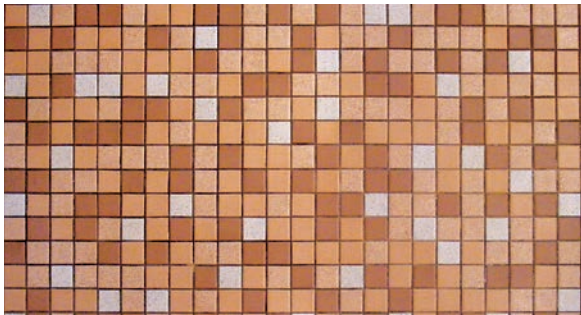


Consciously cool.

[modernfan.com](http://modernfan.com)



# modernwisdom



\* First, we love your magazine. When we moved to Madison last summer, our house intrigued us from just a few photographs on the Internet. We bought our home from the original owners, who commissioned it in the 1950s and completed it in 1960. Very little had been done to the house and I thought you might enjoy seeing some of the little treasures it holds: original tile work, a phone chime, the Talk-A-Phone and awesome original light fixtures.

**Rosita Gonzalez**

*Madison, Wisc.*

\* I've been subscribing for a year now and each new issue is inspiring and a breath of fresh air from all the overblown shelter magazines that target the McMansion homeowner. A quick question: "Working Class Heroes"

[Spring 2010] shows a set of dining chairs beyond the kitchen. I checked the resource guide but haven't found any info on them, such as manufacturer, date of design/fabrication, etc. Do you have any idea about their provenance? I believe I have a set of eight of the same (or similar) chairs.

**Bruce Moore**

*Hancock, N.Y.*

*Homeowners don't always know the details of their vintage furniture, as was the case with the Daveys' Danish modern dining set. Mark Davey reports there are no maker's marks on the chairs and just an "MJ 9525" on the table. It was purchased at Shag in Portland, Ore., and the wood appears to be teak; it has a draw-leaf*



Mark Davey

*feature similar to our own Skovmand & Andersen table. To my eye, the chairs look to be '60s but that may be due to the fabric they're reupholstered with.*

—ar editor

\* I just have to rave over the photos of the landscape on pages 44–45 [Spring 2010, "Tweaking Tradition"]. I am always drawn to the very linear plantings of many MCM homes, but I know that such disciplined geometry won't work on our curved, three-sided lot with two

# morewisdom

fronts (street and lake). This article inspired me to think in a new way about structure, balance and color. I really like the transition from straight lines to curves as the landscape approaches the street, and I'm lusting over the River birch on page 45.

There is a middle ground between lean geometry and a cottage garden. Thank you for showing an amazing, inspiring example that energized me for gardening this spring!

**Margaret Culhane**

*West Milford, N.J.*

\* First of all, I would like to tell you how much your magazine is important for us over here in France. Midcentury modern is not that appreciated, at least not like in the U.S. and Nordic countries in Europe. This is most probably due to the weight of history and an unconditional love for pre-revolution architecture, i.e. before the 18th century. Nevertheless, some unconditional MCM fans like us try to maintain the legacy.



Clearly, your magazine is a great way of preserving architectural and design legacy.

We recently bought a house in Burgundy that looks very much like MCM houses in the U.S. We are so excited to start the renovation with the objective to restore it to what it was in the late '60s when it was initially built. We'd love you and the Atomic Ranch

readers to share their views and advice on how to best achieve this. More pictures can be seen at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/21673626@N06/sets/72157623539526589>.

**Karim Bennaziz-Houmane & Marc Bouyssou**

*Paris*

\* "Here are some house magazines I bought at the airport. This one especially looks like us, I think," said my husband, tossing the mags on my lap. He had just come back to our temporary RV home in Grandview, Wash., from a weekend trip to Portland. This was last December and we had just made the decision to relocate from Glasgow, Ky., and were in the middle of purchasing a split-entrance ranch with a walkout basement.

The house was built in 1974. We loved it immediately when we saw it (although it kind of looks like a school or a jail): dark wood beams, catwalk, wine cellar, sauna, wet bar, atrium space and large office. One potential buyer had allegedly said it would be better to just bulldoze it and start over; one man's trash, another man's treasure.

The mag that my husband referred to was Atomic Ranch and, when I looked at it, I was in tears! "This is us! I've never known that there was anybody else whose taste was like ours! Now I know who I am! I know where I belong!" OK, I've been known to be a bit dramatic, but I meant every word. I immediately ordered all the available back issues as well as the *Design Ideas* book. Today, as we're still settling into our new home, I subscribed. Soon we'll start making a master plan for all the renovations and green upgrades. Atomic Ranch will be there with us every step of the way. Thank you for giving us a community!

**John & Jaana Asriel**

*Ellensburg, Wash.*

*We're hard at work on our second Atomic Ranch coffee-table book, this one focusing on interiors from eight homes in New York, Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio, Virginia and California. Look for that in early 2012 (it takes a while ...)*

—ar editor

# even more wisdom



\* We're fixing up our Prairie Village, Kansas, '56 ranch designed by Conrad Curtis, so I was excited to get my first subscription issue of Atomic Ranch. To my surprise, I saw many familiar elements from our kitchen on the Spring 2010 cover.

**Joe & Michele Boeckholt**



\* Thanks for the Spring 2010 cover shot! This same oven was seen in "Great Balls of Fire"; also, two were in "Pleasantville," but in a b&w scene. Our own 1950s neighborhood was equipped with these standard in white, blue, brown and, of course, pink. This is the one original appliance left in our house from 1957; they don't make 'em like they used to. Keep up the great work!

**JR Huebinger**  
San Antonio

*If it's been a while since you've seen "Pleasantville," the*

*"Pleasantville Kitchen" posting on YouTube is worth four minutes of your life. The Western Holly ovens aren't seen until 3:30 in, but the overload of midcentury kitchen details is astounding.*

—ar editor

\* Your columns about *Arts & Architecture* magazine ["Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch" and "My Two Cents," Spring 2010] brought back some old memories about how I first became acquainted with that magazine and mid-century modern architecture. It was 1960 and I was 11 years old and had an early interest in architecture. My dad and



Phil Reardon in front of a teak Danish modern hutch in his home in Manhattan Beach, Calif.

stepmother were buying new Danish modern furniture at a store in Culver City, Calif., called Thorsen's. They had several copies of *Arts & Architecture* in the store, which I looked at, and that stirred what has become a lifelong interest in mid-century modern architecture. I ended up subscribing to the magazine until it stopped being published a few years later.

Over the next few years, I visited several of the Case Study houses and became very interested in the architecture of Neutra, Killingsworth and many other mid-century architects. It was a stunning time for architecture. I had wanted to become an architect, but life intervened and I became a career firefighter.

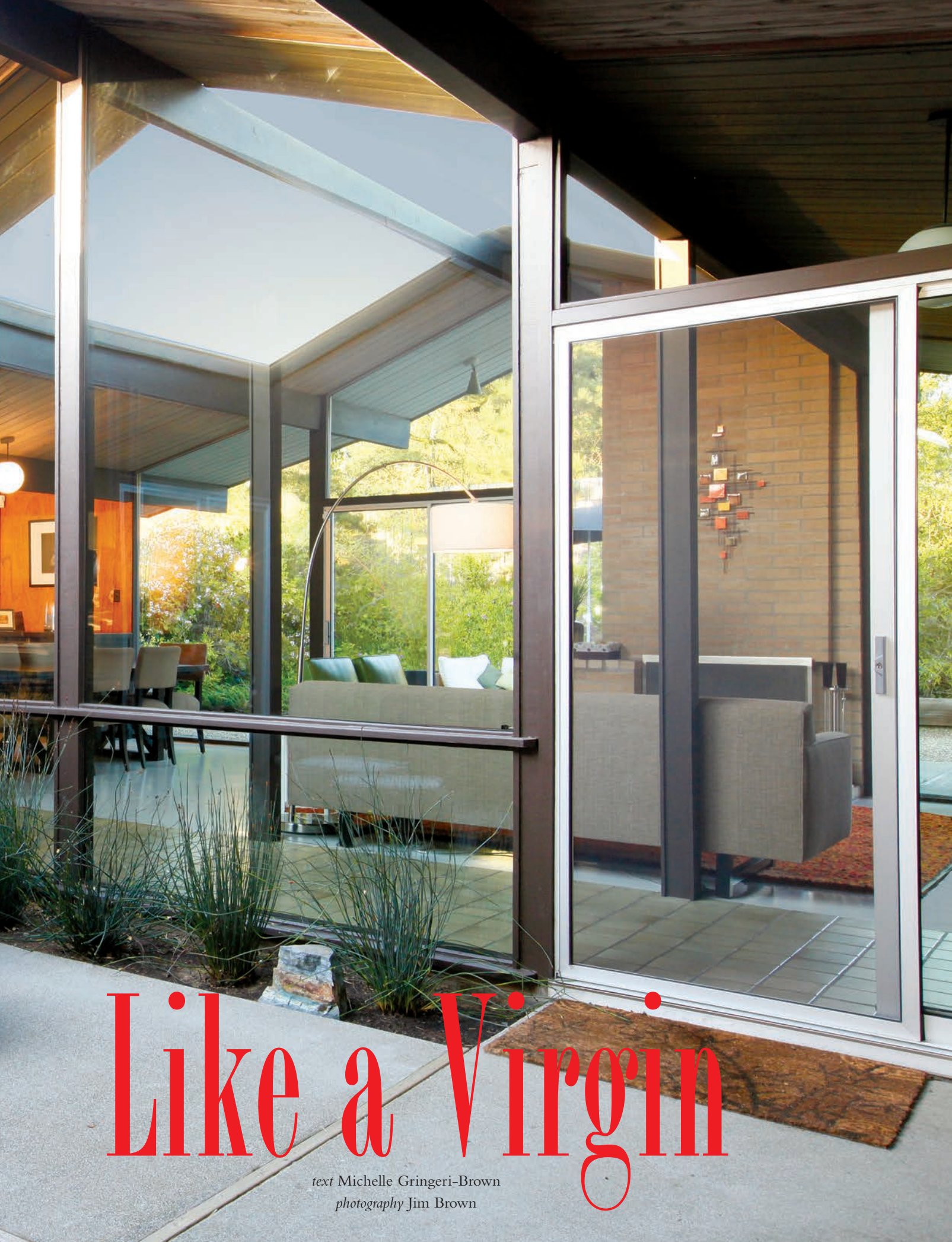
About 20 years ago, I started doing architectural plans for a number of people, mostly remodels plus a couple of custom homes. My wife and I live in a mid-century modern home that was built in 1968. Atomic Ranch has rekindled my love for this design. My dad is now 94 and still has some of the Danish modern furniture he bought at Thorsen's 50 years ago.

**Mike Reardon**  
Fallbrook, Calif.

Write us at [editor@atomic-ranch.com](mailto: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.

Homeowners new to MCM  
find a meeting of the minds in  
a pristine Eichler





# Like a Virgin

*text Michelle Gringeri-Brown  
photography Jim Brown*

**The Ngs** are perhaps a typical youngish American couple: Calvin is a graphic designer in the Bay Area, and Kimberly is staying at home with their baby son, Jaden. When they tired of sharing condo walls with neighbors, the pair began the hunt for a house with a) a fireplace and b) a back yard. What sounds like pretty flexible parameters was complicated by two different aesthetics.

"I like a more classic style and Cal is more of a modernist," says Kimberly, 39, a former human resources manager. "We were trying to find a happy medium for both of us. The outdoors/in and the indoors/out scenes that run through Eichlers is what really got us."

"Given the fact that we were Eichler virgins, we bought books, joined the Eichler Network and went on any tours we could find," Calvin, 42, explains. They discovered most homes on the market had been inelegantly updated and, after a year and a half of searching, figured they were facing a major remodel. But then an untouched 1965 house popped up.





The furnishings show restraint—just what this home calls for. In the dining area, the dark wood of the Crate & Barrel table and chairs echoes the beams overhead, while the beautiful grain and color of the mahogany paneling adds both interest and warmth. The original globe lamp over the table, the subtle curve of the upholstered chair backs and even the champagne glass in the poster are round shapes that break up the linear grid.

Since the architectural frame is dramatic and neutral in tone, bringing pops of color in through the shag area rug, the green vintage Howell chairs and the framed artwork in the dining room makes it interesting without becoming busy. Anchoring the couch on the posts and arranging the other furniture on a grid facing the fireplace continues the home's linear theme. Ceramic tile demarcates the loggia, the main entry from the atrium that was paved with aggregate in earlier Eichler models.

## You're so fine and you're mine

Located in Sequoyah Hills, a smaller, later development of Joseph Eichler's in Oakland, the house is one of fewer than 50 designed by Claude Oakland, A. Quincy Jones and Frederick E. Emmons. Styles include double A-frames, flat roofs and the Ngs' pagoda model. One of their neighbors, an African American original owner, told Calvin she bought because the tract was among the few that didn't have racially exclusive deed restrictions back then.

"This home was vacant for seven years before the son of the original owner decided to put it on the market. We went to the open house and totally fell in love with it," he recalls. "It was the most original Eichler we'd seen. The only obvious areas that needed fixing were the old

asbestos floor tiles, the front and side doors, and two dry-rotted beams in the atrium." (The seller also disclosed that the radiant heating system wasn't functional; see 'Crap: My Floor is Leaking!' on page 20.)

The list of intact original details was long: kitchen appliances, including a never-used oven, dishwasher and waffle maker; all light fixtures and rocker-style switches; bathroom tile, fixtures and cabinetry; grass cloth-covered closet doors; sliding garage doors; and an untouched fireplace. The 1,655-square-foot home even came with its Eichler manual and brochures, a plan of the development and the original rotary phone.

"When we first got into the house, we were leaning more toward the purist side," Kimberly says. "But as we've lived here, we talk about upgrades or other things that it would be nice to do. If we'd found an Eichler that had been totally messed with, we could go ahead and trick out a kitchen or make a crazy, awesome bath. Our bathrooms are in great shape, but there are times when you wish the vanities were a little higher so you don't have to bend down two feet to wash your face. But because it's so original, we just can't do it—it would ruin the integrity of the home."

Most of the furnishings have straight lines, like the Stow & Davis credenza, but then the Ngs break it up with a Big Dipper Arc lamp from cb2 (previous page), the round Chiasso floral clock patterned after Nelson's Sunflower design, and the curves of the vases and white cb2 table lamp. The Andre sofa is from Room and Board, the shag rug is from cb2 and the vintage coffee table was sourced at Retro@Home in Emeryville.





In the office, color comes into play with a green accent wall behind the Infinite Storage Solutions units. Similar in scale to midcentury wall units, this modern version handles books, lightweight computing and items best stored out of view, although the Ngs make even their paperback books look artful with color blocking. A vintage armchair and ottoman, and modular carpeting from FLOR continue the green theme. Notice the milk-chocolate-color solar shade at the window: when pulled down, it's just another block of neutral color; otherwise it virtually disappears into a slim roll at the top of the window. A simple woven-back dining chair at the computer station and a floor lamp with a paper shade are repeated stylistically in the couple's bedroom down the hall (next spread).

The front and rear yards have been relandscaped since our photo shoot. This view of the back yard shows the new block retaining wall, cement paver paths, redwood deck and young plantings of *Carex pansa* or California meadow sedge.



### Touched for the very first time

Since the house was 95% original and the Ngs restrained the urge to tear out 45-year-old elements to make the house “theirs,” they focused on thoughtful improvements and furnishings. With heating bills running as high as \$450 a month, they decided to replace the windows and sliding glass doors with Blombergs, the closest in style to the original Arcadia units the house was built with. They also installed new water-wise Toto toilets and faucets in the baths and kitchen.

A contractor was hired for the heavy lifting but the Ngs ran into reliability and follow-through issues. Things got heated enough that they had to switch contractors part-way through the renovation. Kimberly, who functioned as

### Crap: My Floor is Leaking!

Eichler homes were built on cement slabs with radiant floor heating, an efficient, silent and economical system that’s popular again. Copper tubing circulates hot water, which heats rooms from the bottom up without the need for the metal ducting and wall outlets common to forced-air systems. Since these houses have no attics or crawlspaces, this was a great solution, but slabs settle and crack with time.

When radiant pipes develop pinhole leaks or splits at stress points, the seeping water can wreak havoc in both the heating system itself and on flooring or nearby electrical outlets. Since an average system holds between five and 20 gallons of water, and the closed loop replenishes water loss at the boiler, even a small leak can mean that your system is silently being done in by rust and corrosion.

The Ngs’ home turned out to have three leaks. A specialist in this type of system, Anderson Radiant Heating, found and fixed them without resorting to exploratory jack hammering. The company injects helium gas into the tubing system and uses a helium spectrograph to “sniff out” the molecule concentration at the leaks. They then confined their slab penetration to the leaking tube area, which is repaired with a silver-brazed joint. Their website pegs the average cost for leak repair on an Eichler as between \$1,250 and \$2,500.

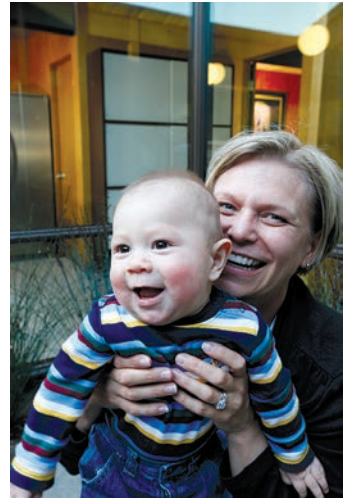
“Anderson stated that these leaks were probably there from the inception, and that the original homeowner may have never had a properly working heating system,” Calvin Ng says.

In the nursery, the couple has meshed contemporary and mid-century particularly well. The graphic black and white infant furniture seems like it would be right at home in the kitchen or dining room, and a vintage pole lamp and Danish modern armchair can move to other rooms or anchor the decor even when their son is a teenager. An Eichler-orange accent wall is repeated in the round IKEA throw rugs, the fabric of the blanket and box spring cover, and even in the sweetly proportioned mobile from Julie Firth over the crib. By choosing sophisticated colors now, it doesn’t scream “baby’s room” and can easily be refreshed by removing the wall decals or repainting.

There are three bedrooms and two baths in the home; in keeping with the era, bedrooms and closets are compact. The master bedroom has a more luxe, Asian theme, achieved with contemporary furnishings. Using their existing Zola platform bed from Design Within Reach, two tall, matching black nightstands and a padded bench, framed vintage advertisements are the focal point.

The new toilet and sink faucet look at home in the otherwise original bath. It has the same VCT tile and sliding door storage as in the kitchen. The medicine cabinet, vanity lighting and even the towel bar do their jobs without any unnecessary frills.





project manager, strongly advises others to thoroughly pursue references and set up a timetable for deliverables and expectations. And don't forget the little things: "I just assumed automatically that contractors would clean up after themselves," she says, followed by a knowing laugh. "I wish we could have done all of the work ourselves, but we're not that talented."

Continuity of materials in their home is all-important: the buckled asbestos floor tiles were replaced with speckled white Armstrong vinyl composite tile, a close match to the original flooring and economical, too. The VCT runs from the kitchen into the dining room, through the living room and even into the three bedrooms, making the open floor plan flow. All rooms were painted, and the posts, beams and window frames are the same color inside and out, an important detail in a home with walls of glass.

### **[Still] shiny and new**

It's unlikely that most of us will find a home whose oven had never been used like this one, but there are great lessons in the modest kitchen. Postwar, laminate counters were hugely popular in modernist homes, and it's still an excellent choice. The material comes in myriad colors and patterns and is extremely affordable; judging from the Ngs' Eichler, it's plenty durable, too. Hot pots can be set on the built-in wood cutting board near the cooktop, or on the stainless steel IKEA worktable. Still, Kimberly has those what-if days.

"I'm a classically trained chef, so dealing with a 1965 kitchen is a bit of a challenge," she laughs. "We would love to have gas, and I'm on the fence because one of the electric burners is out; repair shops don't want to even come out to try to service it. And the ventilation is not the best, so you can forget about doing anything seared or blackened. There are times when I'm cursing the kitchen.

"We've done some research on replacement appliances, and Thermador makes a gas cooktop that's the same shape and a good aesthetic," she adds. "But since there are cabinets right above it, we'd have to think about some flashing or ventilation."

### **Living in a material world**

For his part, it was important to Calvin to replace the big-box front door and lock set with stylistically appropriate ones, along with new midcentury house numbers. "It didn't look like an Eichler without it," he says. When it came to the furnishings, that's when the couple's differences were most evident.

"My personal style is modern—Frank Gehry, Philippe Starck—but Kimberly has a very different style. When we're deciding on a piece, we have to both agree. It's very hard—that's why it takes us a while," Calvin comments.

"If it wasn't this house, I'd say I'm more of a Crate & Barrel, Pottery Barn-type of gal," Kimberly adds. "I like

comfy, big, overstuffed couches but I'm not cluttery; I'm very clean-lined. The house totally dictates what our aesthetics are now. We each have veto power, but you'd think something as simple as a side table would be easy as pie. It's taken us months and months to find the perfect one—a Noguchi Cyclone table."

Furnishing an entire house, including a nursery, was a tall order, one they didn't want to blow. "Midcentury modern furniture is square by nature," Kimberly says. "Our living room was starting to feel very boxy—we needed something more organic and free-flowing. Val Ibarrolasa at Retro@Home came in to give us an interior design layout so the living room and dining room would work together. She had some great ideas on pieces and a suggested furniture floor plan."

The house has continued to evolve since we photographed it, with the couple adding and moving furniture, and investing in new landscaping front and back. Even though it's tempting to drool over the killer kitchen or boutique hotel bath in the latest shelter magazine, the Ngs know they found a jewel that many MCM enthusiasts would snap up in a heartbeat.

"On a weekly basis I say how much I love this house," Kimberly says. "If we were ever to move, it would be into another Eichler."

As for Calvin, there's pride in doing right by their home and making a stand for the future. "Eichlers are beginning to be lost pieces of art, and someday may be lost forever if no one preserves these gems." 🍷

Resources page 87





The major takeaway of the kitchen is the quiet color palette and the rhythmic grid of the cabinetry, windows, appliances and minimal furniture. Materials are consistent, and the natural wood of the ceiling, window frame and oven surround add warmth. By choosing a leggy worktable instead of a solid island, the space looks roomy and the scale is appropriate. Again, a couple of curves—the globe lights and the IKEA bar stools—keep the kitchen from being too cold and rectilinear. The Ngs chose a new dishwasher and refrigerator from Electrolux that coordinate with the finishes on the original appliances.

The Thermador wall oven and cook top are still performing remarkably well, but since parts are no longer available, it will take a repairman familiar with older appliances and the patience to track down used parts when something else goes wrong. The original cabinets have sliding doors, as does the built-in storage unit between the dining room and kitchen where Calvin and Jaden stand. The modest size of the kitchen is augmented with a mahogany paneled walk-in pantry (off camera near fridge), complete with an auto-on light fixture triggered by opening the door.



# atomicbooks



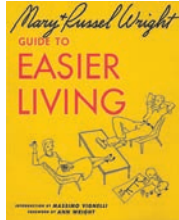
## Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb

Westlake, the quintessential postwar neighborhood in the Bay Area, gets the glamour treatment in this attractive hardcover book looking at the "boxes made of ticky-tacky." Built on tight suburban lots, the neighborhood and its unique architecture is inspiring. Rob Keil, color and b&w vintage photos, 144 pp. \$35.00



## The Vintage Home

A small hardback from the UK offers a European approach to modern interior design with a wider variety of looks than usual. Antiques? Check. Modern icons? Double check. Meld the two in a fresh way? You betcha! Great inspiration for loft, apartment and modern homemakers of all stripes. Judith Wilson, color photos, 144 pp., \$19.95



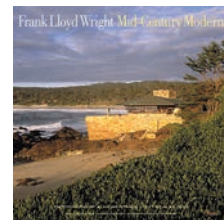
## Guide to Easier Living

This reprinted vintage book addresses modern living Wright-style, from organizing household chores to streamlining the dining table. Of particular interest are the sections on contemporary floor plans and Russel and Mary Wright's philosophy of informal living. A great look at the couple behind American Modern. Wright, softcover, b&w illus., 202 pp., \$18.95



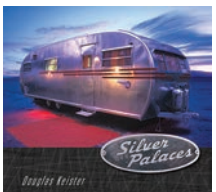
## Ranch Houses: Living the California Dream

A photography-driven book thanks to Joe Fletcher's images, the writing style is casual, accessible and brief after the 20-page historical introduction. In addition to 14 midcentury homes, it expands your ranch vocabulary to include the 1800s and six recent interpretations. David Weingarten & Lucia Howard, hardcover, 240 pp., \$50



## Frank Lloyd Wright Mid-Century Modern

This volume takes you inside homes rarely open to the public, focusing on Wright's late career after his Prairie School oeuvre. Visit Fallingwater, the Seth Peterson cottage, Usonian houses and other moderns, along with less-well-known designs like the Marshall Erdman prefabs. Alan Hess, hardcover, color photos, 336 pp., \$55



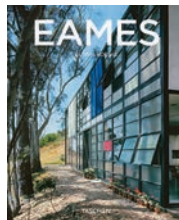
## Silver Palaces

Airstream, Curtis Wright and Shasta aluminum travel trailers and their diminutive interiors, as well as vintage vehicles that might pull them—from a 1965 Plymouth Sport Fury to a 1937 LaSalle Sport Coupe—get the star treatment in this fun softcover book. Douglas Keister, 160 pp., \$24.95



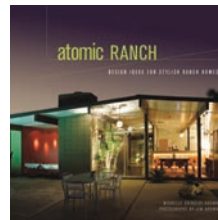
## Saarinen

This small gem introduces you to Eero Saarinen's architecture—the St. Louis arch, TWA terminal, Case Study House #9 and many more—his Tulip and Womb chairs, and his design history and collaborations with Charles Eames. Pierluigi Serraino, softcover, 96 pp., \$14



## Charles & Ray Eames

Covering Charles and Ray Eames in 96 pages is a challenge, but this small softcover book is a great intro to the couple's career. From their Case Study houses, plywood experiments and Aluminum Group furniture to exhibitions like "Mathematica" and their film series, including "Powers of Ten," this volume will whet your appetite for more. Gloria Koenig, color and b&w photos, \$14



## Atomic Ranch: Design Ideas for Stylish Ranch Homes

AR's first coffee-table book has plenty of inspiring homes from our early issues to get you going on those projects. From retro interiors to coolly modernist family homes, plus resources, preservation stories, history of the style and decorating on a dime—it's got it all. Oh, and it's autographed by Michelle Gringeri-Brown and Jim Brown. Color photos, 192 pp., \$39.95

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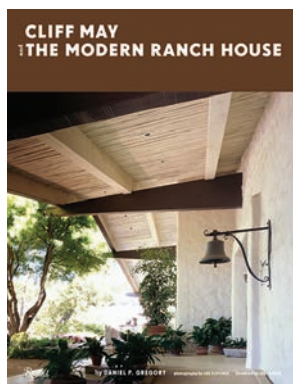


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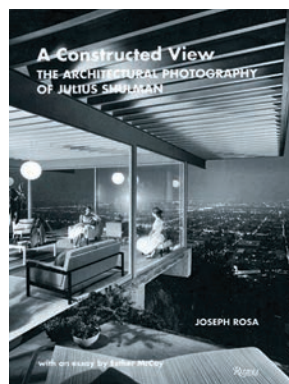
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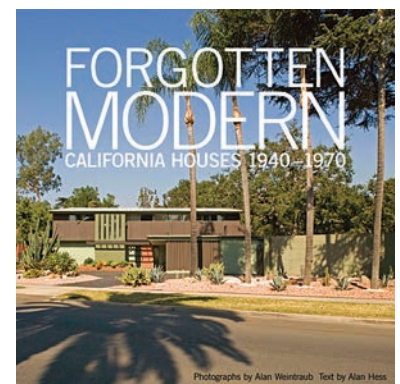
**Cliff May and the Modern Ranch House**

An oversize book exploring the builder's mainstream modern houses through b&w archival shots and contemporary color photography of the Long Beach Ranchos tract. His large custom homes, including coverage of this issue's Ojai residence (pages 58–66), Mandalay and the Mondavi compound, showcase May's innate sense of human-scale living. Daniel Gregory, hardcover, 256 pp., \$60



**A Constructed View: The Architectural Photography of Julius Shulman**

Renowned for his coverage of the Case Study homes, this hardcover book includes the architecture of Neutra, Koenig, Lautner, Saarinen, Aia, Eames and many more. Biographical material and colorful anecdotes about his relationships with modernism's biggest names bring the late photographer's persona home. Joseph Rosa, color & b&w photos, 224 pp., \$50



**Forgotten Modern: California Houses 1940–1970**

Tour some lesser-known California modernist homes, from Claremont to the Bay Area, in this hardcover coffee-table book, nicely photographed by Alan Weintraub. Homes by Alexander, Eichler, Neutra, Fickett and Cody are explored, along with the work of Mark Mills and Foster Rhodes Jackson. Alan Hess, 280 pp, \$39.95



London, Ky.



Chicago, Ill.



Lakewood, Calif.





# home page

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## London, Ky.

Our Bedford Stone ranch was built in 1960 and contains many original features, including Miami [louver] windows, original Scheirich kitchen cabinets, pocket doors, recessed light fixtures, 9' ceilings, hardwood floors and a built-in ironing board in the laundry room. The craftsmanship of our home is just amazing, as the floor joists are supported with steel beams. Your magazine converted my wife and me from diehard Arts and Crafts fans to midmod maniacs. Thanks for bringing much deserved attention to the ranch home!

**Michael & Rebecca Fields**

## Chicago, Ill.

We are the second residents of our small, 1953 MCM ranch. We have spent the last two years renovating parts of the home that had been neglected for many years, including the kitchen, which was a gut rehab. Some of the many features we love: The full wall of windows out to the massive back yard, the floor-to-ceiling fireplace, the wood ceiling and gorgeous beams that have not been painted, the concrete foyer and kitchen floor, and the funky, retro bar where I'm sure there were many smoky, wild parties in the '50s!

**Ann Korff**

## Lakewood, Calif.

Our house is a little 1950s, 815 sf stucco box that was in poor condition when we bought it four years ago. Since it was a blank canvas, we used our love of MCM design as the primary style influence on our remodel. Because my husband and I did the entire remodel on our own, it took more than two fun years of evenings and weekends, and included a complete redo of the landscaping. In the back yard we installed a Modern-shed home office and built a 22'-long deck and pergola to connect it to the back of the house, which becomes our outdoor living room in the summertime.

**Kristen James & Mike Dunn**

We're running low on homes for 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 5.

Alvar Aalto (1898-1976)



Courtesy, Fiskars

# modern masters

for your  
ranch:

**Alvar Aalto**

*text Timothy Sullivan  
photography courtesy Artek*

**W**hen was the last time that you purchased a piece of furniture using currency engraved with a portrait of its designer? If you had visited Finland before its adoption of the Euro, you could have done just that. The designer in question would have been none other than Alvar Aalto, thought of as the “father of modernism” within his native country, and more widely as one of the greatest architects of the 20th century.

Aalto created a distinctly Finnish brand of modernism, designing furniture during the 1930s that continued to

Courtesy, Fiskars

Opposite: The Savoy vase is still manufactured today by Iittala, and is available in many different shapes, sizes and colors.

The Paimio Armchair 41 (1932), which is still produced, lends itself to a recumbent posture that Aalto thought would help tuberculosis patients to breathe more easily.

Introduced at the 1937 Paris World's Fair, Aalto's tea trolley has large wheels that make it versatile and easy to maneuver in a house.

remain popular on both sides of the Atlantic well into the atomic era. So esteemed was he that, during his heyday, Finnair would delay flights until he had boarded. Not one for excessive modesty, it has been said that Aalto would direct his driver to circle the airport to delay his arrivals. When you qualify for currency portraiture, you have apparently earned the right to be fashionably late.

It was not always that way for Aalto. Born and raised in central Finland, he grew up in a solidly middle-class home. His father was a land surveyor and his mother, who died when Alvar was a child, ran a post office. After graduating from high school, Aalto moved to the city to continue his education, graduating from the Helsinki University of Technology with a degree in architecture in 1921. After a short stint in Sweden, he returned to his hometown, where he met and married another young architect, Aino Marsio. The couple opened their own architectural practice and worked together until Aino's untimely death in 1949.

The young Aalto was in the right place at the right time. Finland had declared independence from Russia only a few years before he graduated from college. The decades that followed presented many opportunities for bright,





Courtesy, TTKK Wikimedia Commons

Above: Aalto's 1958 House of Culture in Helsinki built during his "red brick" period.

During the 1940s, Aalto came to America as a visiting professor at MIT, where he designed the student dormitory Baker House. Its curvilinear form permits most rooms a view of the Charles River.

Aalto's ubiquitous 60 stool dates from 1933 and is among his most well known designs. It is versatile as a chair or side table, and with only three bentwood legs, can be easily stacked.



Courtesy, Daderot, Wikimedia Commons

young architects to take on commissions that would help the country build its national identity. During the 1920s, Aalto took advantage of the situation and participated in a number of architectural competitions. These contests led to prominent commissions in Finland and later in America.

The Aaltos eventually moved to Turku, on the coast of southwest Finland, where they maintained close ties to the Continent and the new International style of architecture practiced by the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier. The move would ultimately have a profound influence upon Aalto, who transitioned his architectural style from Nordic classicism to European modernism, characterized by the naturalistic forms and warm materials indigenous to Finland.

Among Aalto's early modernist projects was the Paimio Sanatorium for tuberculosis patients. He wanted to design a building that would help patients recover, and so his innovation was a cheery building with features conducive to recovery and health. These included sinks designed for silent and splash-less usage, and the birch Paimio Armchair, which he hoped would help patients to breathe more easily during their hours of rest. It was made using wood-bending techniques that Aalto invented and even patented. The chair bears a resemblance to Marcel Breuer's famous Wassily Chair, and shows how Aalto translated European design into a humane modernism with a distinctly Finnish vernacular, using native materials.

Aalto was not only inspired by the materials of his native land, but by its historic fashions as well. In 1936–1937, Aalto teamed up with his wife to develop the well-known





Savoy Vase, so-called because it was produced as part of a suite for Helsinki's Savoy Restaurant. Its strikingly modernist appearance belies its initial inspiration, the traditional dress of women from the Sami culture of northern Finland. The vase, which has remained popular to this day and is produced by Iittala, was not, however, a financial success for Aalto, as the copyright was owned by the company as part of a design competition.

In addition to commercial buildings, he also designed influential residences. His most famous house, the Villa Mairea, was done for industrialists Harry and Maire Gullichsen, who were friends and supporters. Among its furnishings was the Tea Trolley 900, which Aalto had first exhibited at the 1937 Paris World's Fair. With a practical tile top, wicker basket and oversized wheels, it used Aalto's characteristic bentwood technology to achieve a modernist take on a traditional design. The same might be said of the Armchair 400, which reinvented the upholstered lounge chair by cantilevering the seat and back on two bent birch wood arms.

Aalto's image may have passed from usage in European currency, but his furniture and decorative accessories have left a lasting legacy and are more popular than ever. The company he founded to manufacture his furniture, Artek, still faithfully handcrafts Aalto's designs, and his glassware is widely available through Iittala.

*Timothy Sullivan is a Boston-based art historian interested in midcentury furniture and decorative arts.*



The Armchair 400 was introduced at the 1936 Milan Triennale. It is often upholstered in a zebra print, as seen in the table of contents.

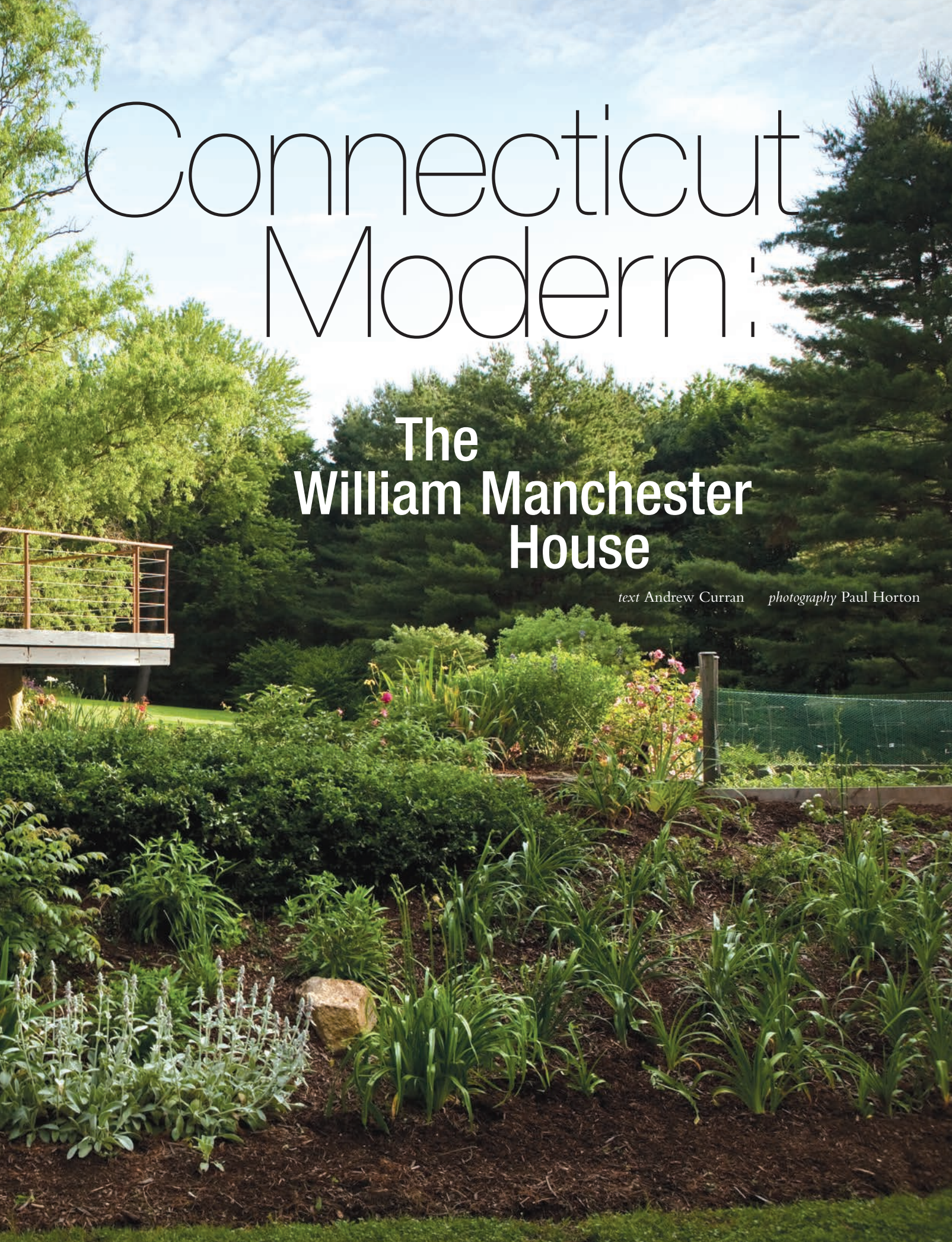
Above: The four-piece Aalto flower set, seen from above, comes in white and clear glass. His authorized designs sell for between \$60 and \$5,100 online.



# Connecticut Modern:

## The William Manchester House

*text* Andrew Curran    *photography* Paul Horton





Well before understanding just what midcentury modern really meant, my wife and I had long coveted the William Manchester house in Middletown, Conn. This sprawling example of '60s modernism came on the market four years ago while Jen and I were packing for a year's sabbatical in France. One week before leaving, we toured the house and were told that the property had been generously donated to the university where I teach. Like other interested parties, we were instructed to put our names in an envelope for a September lottery. We were settling into our new lives in France when we received word that our names had been drawn. Jen, God bless her, came back to the U.S. by herself and engineered the purchase and move while I stayed in Paris with our two kids.

### **Literary Provenance**

The Manchester house is well known in Middletown, as much for its style as for its story. While most people under 50 may not remember William Manchester, the author became a huge celebrity in the mid-'60s after being hired by the Kennedy family to write an account of JFK's presidency and assassination. Upon reading the finished manuscript, however, the Kennedys initially tried to stop publication, at one time by threatening to sue the author. Manchester finally resolved his well-publicized differences with both Robert and Jacqueline in 1967. That same year, his Pulitzer-prize winning *The Death of a President* appeared to great acclaim. With the exception of a small fee, Manchester donated all proceeds from the book's sales to the new Kennedy library. The check that he received from the serialization of the book in *Look* magazine, however, made Manchester financially independent. It also financed the construction of his dream house.

Manchester hired a good friend and fellow Wesleyan faculty member, John Martin, to design the house. Martin was both a professor and practicing architect in the area for a decade, designing a number of modernist houses for local doctors, lawyers and professors. He also was responsible for several modernist public buildings in the area, including a pharmacy, several banks, a college fraternity and even the Middletown police station.

Manchester's house was apparently the first property for which Martin had carte blanche. The house itself, which is built on and into a hill, has more than 4,000 square feet of living space, including five bedrooms, a pottery studio and a big, open daylight basement that now serves as our martial arts studio. The most historically interesting room is the virtually windowless, cork-floored office that clearly reflected Manchester's siege mentality in 1967. Pursued by television crews and newspapers, he had become an unwilling celebrity; the bunker-like office space Martin designed was the perfect refuge.

### **Distinctive Elements**

The signature feature of the house, however, is the living room's four-sided clerestory within a clerestory, which frames and hovers above the expansive floating ceiling. The light play in this room is nothing short of remarkable, particularly after a rain when the sun's rays bounce off the roof puddles and back onto the ceiling.

Martin incorporated other innovations into his design as well. Orienting the house's glass-dominated south side to take advantage of the sun, the architect called for a series of passive solar eaves that jut out of the back facade. From a distance, this makes the residence look more like Han Solo's Millennium Falcon spaceship than a house.



The exterior of the John Martin–designed home combines elements of Sea Ranch, indoor/outdoor living and a bunker-like garage facade. The Currans, seen dining (left) with friends, chose contemporary furniture for the expansive deck and Adirondack rockers overlooking the driveway and entry. Previous spread: the deck railing is kept as transparent as possible with steel cable stringers similar to those at the Oregon prefab home on page 53.





The signature feature  
of the house  
is the living room's four-sided  
**clerestory**  
within a clerestory

In the open plan living/dining room, we see Martin's unusual floating ceiling/clerestory treatment, with ceiling heights between nine and 14 feet. White walls are warmed by the original parquet flooring and built-in bookcases, as well as a custom sapele wood and steel credenza made by Andrew's brother, Bill Curran; a painting by Judy Ingemann hangs on the wall behind it.

Opposite: In the kitchen, original cabinets were refinished and a Hakatai tile backsplash and EOS solid surface counters installed. Maple flooring was put down here and in the rest of the 450-square-foot space, which includes a dining table and room for vintage armchairs in front of a modern wood-burning stove (see table of contents). New Design Within Reach pendant lamps hang over the snack bar, which replaced a built-in credenza and desk area; cork covers the upper portion of the wall by the door, which also holds one of several heat pumps that brought winter heating bills down to a mere \$400 a month.



Some of these midcentury advances had become liabilities by the time we bought the house in 2006, however. In addition to the fact that holes in some of the eaves had allowed a huge brown bat colony to set up shop, the radiant ceiling heat—which still worked well—consumed massive amounts of electricity; the first winter our heating bills were \$1,600, \$1,700 and \$1,750. Clearly, our initial task after taking possession of the house was to replace this system, which we did with efficient Mitsubishi heat pumps. At the same time we undertook this HVAC changeover, we also began an era-sensitive renovation of many of the home's spaces on our university salaries. Our idea was to restore the house to a more energy efficient version of its glorious 1968 self.

### Surface Treatment

The 450-square-foot eat-in kitchen area involved the most work. In addition to the fact that the nicely engineered wood cabinets had suffered during their 40 years of life, the yellowed drop ceiling in the kitchen area now read to the 2006 eye as an old sushi bar. Even sadder, the kitchen's psychedelic bowling-ball blue "Summer of Love" kitchen counters—which were legendary among the university faculty—were coming apart at the seams.

Transforming the kitchen involved a lot of our own labor: we scraped, sanded and refinished all the cabinets and replaced worn-out hardware. We also put in maple floors as well as new appliances and EOS solid surface counters. We replaced the original wood-burning stove in this area with a much more efficient Danish-made Scan. To furnish the kitchen area, we decided to combine midcentury furniture with contemporary pieces that are compatible with the clean lines and functionality of the era.



before



This page: The couch and loveseat belonged to the William Manchester family, while the Danish modern chairs and teak coffee table were found at estate sales; the arc floor lamp dates from Jen Curran's college dorm days. The bath was modernized with a new Toto sink, Grohe faucet and EOS counters. Opposite: Bill Curran Design made the recovered-oak table with tapered laser-cut steel legs; woven-seat vintage J.L. Moller chairs surround it, and a \$25 floor lamp and "Three Graces" by Francky Criquet are near the door to the kitchen.





Very much like the kitchen, whose roomy galley-style configuration corresponded perfectly to the way that we like to cook, Martin's design of the master bath was really logical. Even though the old tub, sink and tiles had seen better days, the layout was perfect; renovating was simply a matter of replacing the plumbing fixtures and adding radiant heated floors. The hardest part was actually removing the tub; once this was done, our handyman friend, Mike, put in a new Kohler shower base and doors, and Hakatai tiles.

The living room posed a different sort of challenge. Once we had resealed the flagstone and refinished the parquet floors, we realized that the scale of this big room (30' x 22') simply dwarfed the furniture that came from our low-ceiling 1957 ranch. This was apparent to everyone who came into this space. In fact, when William Manchester's daughter came to visit the first year after we moved in, she commented that the living room looked naked without the four-seat Danish couch and loveseat that was bought for the house in 1968. In an incredible gesture of generosity, she offered these two couches to us the following week.

My brother, Bill, who is a designer and furniture maker in Philadelphia, has been similarly bighearted. In addition to giving us a 10' table made from reclaimed oak from an Amish barn for a housewarming present, he has also provided a hallway table, the coffee tables in the kitchen area and a sapele credenza for our living room.

Living in this house has been terrific for our entire family. In addition to the fact that our kids are now finding out about the famous people featured in Manchester's bestselling biographies (the Kennedys, Churchill, MacArthur), we feel extremely grateful to be the caretakers of an example of what we believe to be the most fascinating trend in 20th-century domestic architecture.

## the bunker-like office space

Martin designed was  
the perfect  
refuge



Courtesy Wesleyan University Special Collections (2)

William Manchester, seen in a publicity shot and at home in his office fortress. The office today is considerably tidier, and has traded the Winston Churchill photo and a manual typewriter for two Macs. Other than painting the paneling and bookshelves, the space looks much the same and suits the academic needs of the Currans. Opposite page: Three other Martin homes in the Middletown area.

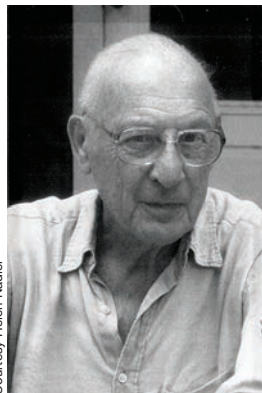


Resources page 87

## The Architect

Although born in New York, John Martin spent the first two decades of his life in Great Britain. Drafted by the U.S. Army and stationed in Germany after World War II, Martin was lured home by the GI Bill in the late 1940s. After studying architecture at Cornell, he settled in Middletown in 1957, where he began designing modernist homes and public buildings for more than 40 years.

While most of Martin's commercial buildings have been refaced or razed, a diverse group of his houses remains in this part of the Connecticut River Valley. The Martin homes pictured here testify to what was an evolving modernist aesthetic. During the late 1950s, he designed custom single-level ranch houses that were crafted to fit into specific natural environments. In the 1960s, Martin began drawing



Courtesy Helen Nadler

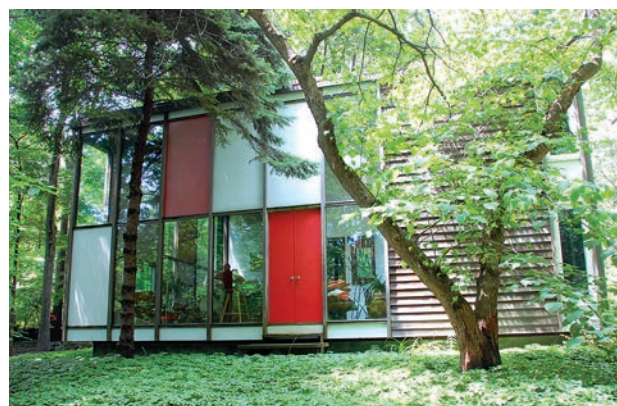
more challenging modernist structures that incorporated huge rooms, innovative light play, passive solar construction and unconventional exteriors that generally hid the sine quo non of American life—cars and garages—from the street view.

While the exteriors and the interior layouts of his houses are actually quite dissimilar, Martin owners immediately recognize a series of common themes once they step inside: flagstone hallways, redwood decking, cedar trim and huge windows oriented to look out on distinctive natural features. According to the architects that Martin trained, each residence can be explained by the way he dealt with his clients; he refused to talk about the building

## Manchester hired a good friend and fellow faculty member, **John Martin**, to design the house

of a house until he completely understood the way in which its owners would live in it.

Although people often told Martin that his homes reminded them of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect was reported to shrug off such comparisons. In a 1995 *New York Times* article about a house he had designed for a longtime friend who had become handicapped, Martin proclaimed himself to be an unrepentant modernist in an era that was embracing the postmodern. Whatever his aesthetic—he loved Le Corbusier and Maya Lin's Vietnam memorial—Martin interjected a needed dose of modernism into a region filled with colonial houses. Little wonder, then, that the owners of Martin houses have begun to seek each other out to talk about a man whom many of them did not know, but who seemed to anticipate their every need. ♦



Andy Curran (3)

Andy Curran is a professor at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn. His wife, Jen, who also works at the university, is an arts marketing specialist. Paul Horton, a commercial photographer based in Middletown, photographs people and still lifes in the studio and on location for a variety of clients. He has recently become interested in architectural photography and documentary filmmaking.





# Guns & Roses

The  
not so pretty  
underbelly  
of the modern  
**prefab.**  
**experience**

*text* Bromley Davenport

*photography* Jim Brown

T

ed and Nicole Helprin were in the market for a second home on the Oregon coast when they decided on a 1,400-square-foot prefab from Alchemy Architects in St. Paul, Minn. The weeHouse, as the line is known, fit their sensibilities, and the idea of having it built quickly indoors, out of the elements, was very appealing.

"We both loved the idea of prefab, and Alchemy's vision and design background and aesthetic were very important," says Nicole, a communications director for a large technology firm. "We heard prefab was cheaper, faster and better designed, but that's not why we chose it. I was pregnant with our second child and wanted something without a thousand options but still custom. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to create something I liked [as much as this] if we just went out on our own with an architect."

The couple flew to San Francisco to kick the tires on an actual weeHouse at a conference there and liked what they saw. The heavily treed lot that they found in the small town of Oceanside had a 15' height limitation on structures, so the almost flat roof, ranch-style module was a good fit for the site.

"It was really important to us to build a house that could withstand the weather," says Ted, a marketing executive who was laid off in the 2009 downturn. "A lot of people locally tried to dissuade us from doing prefab because it's new and they weren't sure if it would work. We're in a 100-mile-an-hour wind zone, plus it's an earthquake zone and the salt water here is famous for flying uphill—it's not just rain coming down. A local builder said there's just no way people in some manufactured home facility, or Minnesota architects, could design something that would withstand the rigors of the Oregon coast."

The weeHouse modules are 14' wide, and the couple looked at L-shaped conformations before settling on two 50' long units oriented face to face with an extensive

window wall facing the ocean view. The open plan living/dining/kitchen and the kids' bedroom make up the front module, while the rear one comprises a master bedroom and bath, a back entry hall, a third bedroom and second full bath.

Despite local naysayers, of which there were plenty, the Helprins signed a contract in September 2007 for a projected delivery date of April to May 2008. A construction loan was arranged through a Minnesota lender that had financed other weeHouses, and the back and forth design process wrapped up in December. Nicole entertained fantasies of spending her maternity leave furnishing the house.

The Alchemy website contrasts their six- to nine-month process to a year or longer timeline for a stick-built custom home, and they position their smaller, quality-conscious homes as better for the planet and an antidote to super-sized housing. Based on local advice, Ted worked extensively with Alchemy on custom exterior treatments that would best address the weather concerns, and a factory in California was selected to do the fabrication.

That's when the shite hit the industrial-size blades.

For eight months, the construction site sat with just a foundation and a Porta-Potty to impress the neighbors. The projected May delivery slipped to July, then September. Forbidden to contact the fabricator directly, the Helprins were told that Oregon building inspectors, who had

to fly down to California to sign off on electrical and plumbing, were holding up the process. In reality, at the framing and rough-in plumbing stage, their house had drawn to a screeching halt and the builder was going out of business.

"I went from dream client to Whaaaaat!!!!!" says Nicole. Cooler heads (Ted) were called in to negotiate with Alchemy on where to go from here, as Nicole was too distraught to deal with it.

"My goal in life is to accurately set the expectations of the various stakeholders of the projects I'm working on,





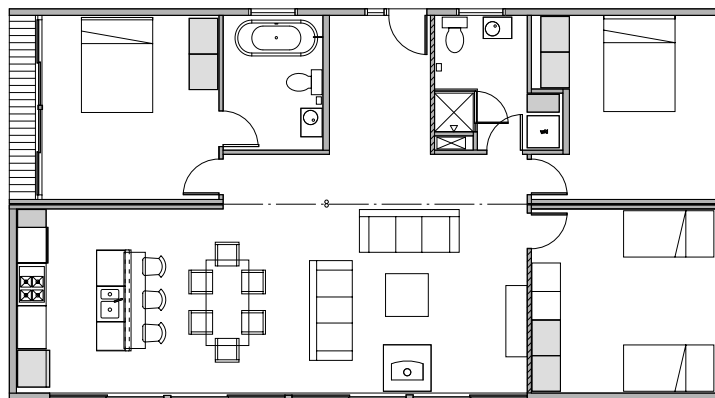
even if that means bringing bad news,” Ted says. “I told Alchemy, ‘You know how upset you are with the factory? That’s how upset we are with you.’ But we wanted to keep it in perspective and not burn bridges.”

Meanwhile, at every hiccup in the schedule, the Helprins’ contractor would offer to build them the same house for less money. But they were skeptical.

“Contractors out here are pretty provincial,” Ted says. “They don’t read *Dwell*. Ours said [about the design], ‘It’s a double wide.’ But ultimately, Alchemy really stepped up; they made it right at great expense [to themselves].”

Another manufacturer was found, Stratford Building Corp. in Idaho, and in seven weeks they delivered a semi-finished home. Some expectations had to be adjusted, though. The first builder was to have included siding and paint, while the Stratford bid did not, increasing the punch list for the local contractor. Options for the bamboo flooring and wall panels changed, roof overhangs were added and the couple rethought their custom kitchen cabinetry selection. But they were back in business.

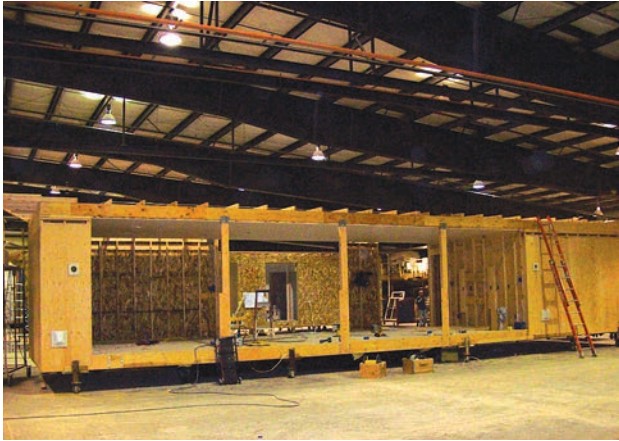
In February 2009, almost a year and a half after jumping on the prefab bandwagon, the Helprins’ weeHouse arrived. “A 40-ton crane lifted it up through howling wind and rain, and a corner of the protective plastic caught the



Courtesy Alchemy Architects

Previous spread: Metal posts mark where the two modules join to create the open plan living/dining/kitchen space. A Lopi wood-burning stove, coastal-grade Andersen windows and bamboo floors are some of the options the Helprins chose. Above: Bosch and Fisher & Paykel appliances and IKEA cabinetry are seen in the kitchen. Because it’s a weekend house, Nicole passed on built-in storage in the rear entry area between the two bathrooms in favor of more open space.

Left to right: One of the modules under construction at Stratford Building Corp. After being trucked from Idaho, the first unit is craned onto the one-story basement foundation. Due to the climate, tar paper was spec'd by the local contractor in lieu of Tyvek. Front and rear overhangs were hinged and folded back on the roof due to width restrictions, and rain screen, Ipe decks and stairs, utility hook-ups, appliance installation and some interior finishes were part of the "button-up" process.



Courtesy Alchemy Architects



Ted Helprin

## Alchemy Architects' Scott Ervin on the Firing Line

**Q:** *What are some of the custom details of this weeHouse?*

**A:** We added a deck looking out to the beach and a tuck-under carport to keep the car out of view. We added 3' overhangs to help manage the weather, as well as detailing the siding as a rain screen—a double wall that uses an outer layer to keep out the rain and an inner layer to provide thermal insulation. We also used a special paint that gives a living patina that evolves over time rather than degrading over time. It's a zero maintenance solution with a 50-year warranty.

**Q:** *The firm emphasizes sustainability; how does 'building green' play into the prefab process?*

**A:** We focus on building as efficiently as possible: the greenest square foot is the one you don't build. We use sustainable materials when it makes sense—financially and based on availability. Right now we're planning a weeZERO house for Moab, Utah, that will produce as much energy as it uses. We're using passive solar, rainwater collection and photovoltaic cells, as they turned out to be more economical in the long run for that location. And we try to make the best use of regional labor by partnering with local factories and skilled onsite labor to get the most out of our clients' buck.

**Q:** *Prefab has been tried before, but it seems like whether it was an entire house or modular sections, the experiments fizzled; how is today any different?*

**A:** I don't know if I'd say 'fizzled.' All of the prefab evangelists before our time pushed the rock a little closer to the top of the hill. And while their companies may not have been economically successful, the ideas are as strong as ever.

Our task as architects is less about making the technology work and more about adding a unified permitting strategy and a better way for banks to access the value of houses in general. Today, even without tapping into the economies of scale we consistently see 15%–20% savings over custom site work; for architect-designed houses that is still pretty good.

**Q:** *Doesn't that make prefabs just another type of expensive custom housing?*

**A:** In most cases we don't see any economies of scale kick in until we're duplicating more than 10 units. I think the biggest problem facing the future of prefab has been—and so far continues to be—financing. The formulas that lenders use to determine 'values' are traditionally driven entirely at price per square foot.

That's similar to being turned down for a car loan on a Porsche because of its 'small' back seat. As lenders become more familiar with architect-designed prefab construction that offers a higher build quality and lower long-term operating costs, along with sustainable flexible building practices, we'll see a change.

**Q:** *What's the future: stick-built or modular?*

**A:** Both—absolutely. Let's hope we never enter into a one-size-fits-all mentality. Boring! There will always be opportunities for complete site-built construction, but at Alchemy we'll continue to realize the efficiency of preassembled parts and how they can change a budget dynamic in new construction. Just ask any builder when they last hand-framed trusses. When it makes sense to be prefabricated, we're happy to utilize the technology. I do believe that in the future, we'll all see more and more of the structure delivered as prefabricated pieces.

What looks like a rusting metal exterior is a special iron-filament paint on Hardie Board siding that starts out black, then turns bright yellow when sprayed with saline and ages to a dark orange patina.



Ted Helprin



**"My advice is to find a contractor  
with an open mind  
who will try  
something new and geek out  
a little bit on modern architecture."** —*Ted Helprin*



wind like a spinnaker," Ted recalls. "Eight guys were hanging on to ropes, trying to keep the house from swinging into the neighbors' house or the trees. It was blimp wrangling."

For all of their concerns about building in a controlled environment, the house sat out in the elements while the rain screen siding, exterior paint, overhangs and gutters were finished off. There was also a Holy Crap! moment when the contractor realized the electrical and plumbing hookups were in the wrong corner of the house and would need to be moved.

Would they do it all again, knowing what they know now? "When design blogs feature prefab, it seems attainable and you just think how cool it is," Nicole says. "But, there is a huge population of people who are disappointed in prefab—it's too expensive—and they don't even know the true costs."

She does think that weeHouse owners have a lot they could offer Alchemy. "They probably don't know that the fridge hits the window [in our design] and there are little things that could be further tweaked. If they're repeating design ideas, they should be desperately harvesting feedback," she says.

"Overall I love the house and liked working with Alchemy. There were times when I was frustrated, but in the end,





The kids' bedroom is large enough to accommodate bunk beds for multifamily stays in the future, the master has a pocket balcony for morning coffee, and there's a third guest bedroom as well (see floor plan page 51). The guest bath, with its glass-walled shower, has the same Kohler and Duravit fixtures as the master bath, and both are paneled in bamboo floor to ceiling. Details, such as can vs. recessed lighting, electrical outlet placement and towel bars are all worked through during the design phase. "It was like building the best dollhouse you can ever imagine," says Nicole Helprin.

they came through and delivered what they promised. I got the house that I wanted, but it took a little bit longer and it cost a little bit more; but I think those issues would have come up with a site-built house as well."

"People have this idea of prefab as these beautiful, little modern homes that are designed within an inch of their lives a thousand times over," Ted adds. "But every single one is different and they're figuring out things as they go. Our goal was not to build the cheapest house we could; if that's your goal, don't do prefab."

"For ease, speed and quality design we knew we'd have to spend a little more," he continues. "At the end of the day, we got quality design; it wasn't particularly easy, but the design part was fun. The speed is where it really fell flat. The idea of doing site work as the modules are being built in the factory is a best-case scenario. We saw that work, eventually, but it didn't work the first time. That wasn't Alchemy's fault and it wasn't prefab's fault; it was the exact same thing that's been happening to builders all over America."

"But we love the home and, frankly, Alchemy treated us really well." 🐼

*The Oceanside weeHouse is available for rental at [oceansideprefab.com](http://oceansideprefab.com). Visit other prefabs at [weehouse.com](http://weehouse.com)*



# nick of time

## Tucson, Ariz.

*photography Paul Hart*



*it* took three years and lots of patience, but a grant writer and a retired police detective are responsible for getting a condo complex on the National Register of Historic Places.

Tucson's Villa Catalina co-op apartments, which range from 1,000 to 3,000 square feet, were built between 1957 and 1961. The 79 open-plan homes have balconies or patios that face a central courtyard with two kidney-shaped pools, built-in barbeques and the quintessential midcentury amenity, shuffleboard courts.

Paul Hart, retired from the New Jersey police force, and his wife, Janet, the aforementioned grant writer, made the

case that the Villa's special attributes include its association with prominent California developer Lionel Mayell, and showed that it is an outstanding example of a modern, low-rise postwar garden apartment.

"Villa Catalina had no historic standing when we began this process," Paul says. "Identifying the criteria on which to support a nomination is a key factor; all else is in support of the stated criteria. [Be prepared to] seek out local educators and/or architectural professionals with an interest in historic preservation—in our case this came in the form of free advice and guidance—pay attention to detail, stay focused



on the criteria you're attempting to support and, where necessary, seek professional assistance. Anyone interested in pursuing a listing on the National Register should be committed to the undertaking—it won't happen quickly."

The Harts ultimately hired a consultant who crafted the final 35-page application, which singles out the decorative-block courtyard walls, balcony railings, aluminum sliding glass doors, steel casement windows, slab entry doors and indoor/outdoor living spaces as noteworthy architectural elements. Considerable text is devoted to the developer's career and the historical context of garden

apartments, with citations running to three pages.

"Our experience with the various municipal, county, state and federal agencies involved was very positive," Paul reports. "I think our skill sets helped us in putting the pieces together during the preliminary part of the process and allowed us to identify where more focused professional assistance was required. All this led to a successful nomination on its first review."

*Visit virtually and download the NRHP nomination at [villacatalina.org](http://villacatalina.org).*



# Midcentury



**If you watched “Sideways,” the 2004 movie** with Paul Giamotti and Thomas Haden Church, you’ve seen the Santa Ynez Valley in its tawdry close-up. The winery road trip had plenty of quotable moments—“If anyone orders merlot, I’m leaving. I am not drinking any fucking merlot!”—and caused sales of that varietal to plummet while anointing pinot noir the next “It” wine. The film has spawned “Sideways” wine clubs, and movie location and winery tours—the “Twilight” phenomenon of its time, albeit for a boozier, older audience.

Near the towns of Solvang (Giamotti and Haden Church terrorized a golf foursome there) and

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*text* Michelle Gringeri-Brown

*photography* Gregory Christman et al

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# An Architect’s Riff on a Custom Ranch

# Roots:

### Before



Buellton (home to the Hitching Post restaurant where Giamotti's love interest, Virginia Madsen, waitressed) is a far classier area, Alisal Ranch. Historically a working ranch and now a luxurious 10,000-acre dude resort, its hills are dotted with live oak and sycamore, and horses and cattle still graze there. Some 40 years ago, a development of 60 homes went up, mostly builder houses, but one, an expansive Cliff May dating from 1968, was built for the owner of Pea Soup Andersen's, a nearby kitschy restaurant and tourist destination.

The fourth owner of the 4,600-square-foot home, Santa Barbara architect Barry Berkus, found it structurally intact but in need of some TLC. Although he'd built or remodeled five or six personal residences in his nearly 50-year career, Berkus wasn't put off that May was a designer and not a licensed architect. The classic single-





The kitchen now has a pass-through to the dining room, which has a table that seats 14 or more. "The house lives very well for two people: the room at the center functions with different seating arrangements that are fairly intimate within the larger room," homeowner Barry Berkus comments. "The volume's not too tall; it's correctly proportioned—May was good at that."

Photography by Jim Bartsch

"The structure is very evident and the glazing tucks itself behind that, almost like a high rise," the architect/owner says. While the home has double glazing in a few areas, he didn't consider changing out all of the windows. "That would have been a tremendous effort. The house does adapt to the cycles of energy in the valley by air movement, shading and the filtering of light. The most important thing to me is the indoor-outdoor relationship of the great room to the pool. You can sit in the Knoll chairs and look at the mountains and the deer on the lawn. It's such a tranquil place that you know you're in another world."

Photography by Jim Bartsch

"As an architect, **it's fun**  
**exploring other people's work**  
—trying to understand  
why they created what they did."





level home resonated fully with his own early training.

"At USC [School of Architecture] I studied with Buff, Straub and Hensman, who were post-and-beam architects," Berkus says, "and we had Bruce Goff and Frank Lloyd Wright come to talk to us. It was a period of time that was great for anybody who had modern bones.

"My practice started by taking a brown bag lunch and sitting and talking to Cliff May and John Lautner on their construction sites. We were hands-on because we were in the field when the Case Study houses were being built by Pierre Koenig and John Entenza, and all that."

Although Berkus' two firms— B3 Architects and Berkus Design Studio—are responsible for more than 600,000 residences as well as resorts, land planning and commercial and institutional work—and plenty of them are of *Architectural Digest* scale—he says his interests are still down to earth and sustainability is important to him.

"I liked the idea of a ranch—the fact Cliff May was able to evolve the ranch house into something that was relatively contemporary, but still had the character of ranch houses that surrounded courtyards and engulfed landscapes. They gave you the ability to move from inside to outside with ease.

"Early in my career I wanted to make a house more than shelter," he explains. "I was interested in giving people

The renovation involved rebuilding the roof for a higher R-rating so the homeowners use less radiant heating. Now, the roof sandwich consists of grape stakes, hardboard, soft insulation, plywood, rigid insulation, another layer of plywood, then shingles.

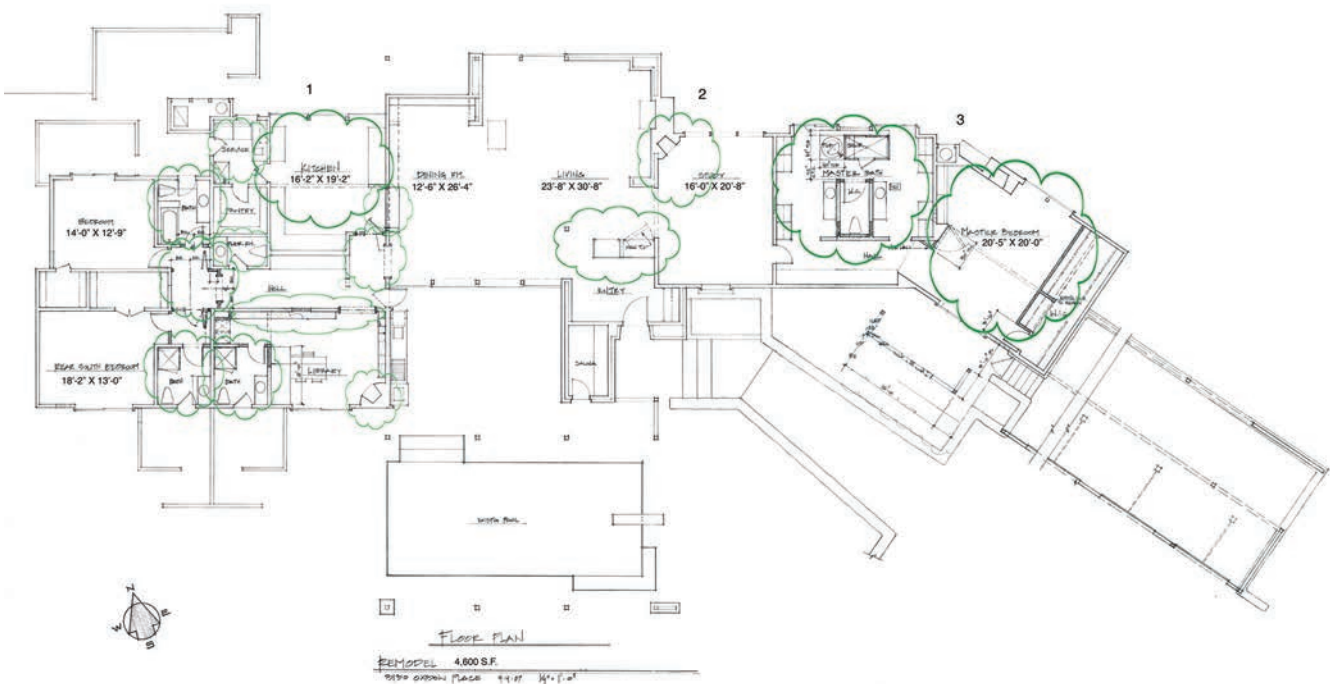
"The main idea that the house opens to the gardens and is essentially a transparent form of living in the garden is the most important thing to me," Berkus says. "If you have an older house like this, you have to accept that you're going to have more convection, you're going to live colder or warmer because it's single glazed."

Photography by Jim Bartsch (above)

**Before**



Tile was a real challenge on this job: ceramic floor tile ran throughout the house, and although it wasn't original and was in some disrepair, it would have greatly expanded the scope of the remodel to replace it. The crew salvaged tiles from areas where it would be covered by new structures to patch other portions. "We spent hours per individual tile, so as not to break one, and handled them as if they were gold," explains general contractor Randy Barnes. "We patched every spot needed, and had two tiles left over." The glass, mosaic and custom tiles used on the kitchen backsplash, fireplace surround and in the baths were all different thicknesses, but needed to be flush with the surrounding walls. "Every tile material change had a different thickness of mortar behind it and all were hand done by Conception Tile," Barnes recounts. "We had to figure the transitions out down to each grout joint—all at 1,000 m.p.h. because of the tight schedule."



space that was sculptured in a way that would bring forward excitement and dignity from living in something more than just a box. I spent a lot of time on that, then moved on to modules and improving the efficiency of how we build things. I did a lot of research on anything that had been built in a factory since the turn of the [20th] century. We did early modular work under Richard Nixon and George Romney, the first Smart House and a show house for the copper industry with 12 different active and passive systems.”

For his own Solvang residence, he focused on stripping away some of the later stylistic changes and addressing modifications that had compromised the structural integrity. Plumbing, wiring, lighting, deferred maintenance and refining how the house functioned were all part of the project.

“The house needed to be revisited: the baths opened directly to the bedrooms without any doors, and the doorways were two feet wide, so it wasn’t accessible for anyone in an ADA situation,” says Berkus, who advocates for

life-cycle design. “We left the baths intact except for adding interesting tile patterns to bring in more color.” Openings between rooms were widened and doors added, while in the generous master bathroom they replaced a sunken Roman bathtub with a Japanese soaking tub and a glass-enclosed shower. The existing cabinetry was retained, as throughout the house they tried to reuse as many elements as possible.

“The kitchen had a breakfast nook, a small island and a lot of patterned tile that I think was probably not something May would have loved, but was likely the owner’s choice,” Berkus explains. “The kitchen lacked a visual connection with the great elements of the house—the overhangs and shelter over the pool, and the views across to the fireplace. We opened one section of wall between the dining room and kitchen, using rough-sawn timber jambs and headers [like the originals]. I really tried to stand in his shoes and ask what May would do today.”

The slab’s radiant heating system was tuned up and





Drafting space, flat files and video conferencing allow Berkus to work remotely with his Santa Barbara offices. Two red Verner Panton Cone chairs and artwork by other renowned architects tie it to the rest of the open floor plan.

## Before



Hallways are treated as gallery space, like this area leading to the master bedroom, seen in the before shot as well.

recharged: the master bath was repiped, a new boiler installed and a coating applied within the original copper water lines so any pitted areas would be filled. The former 16' x 20' music room between the master bedroom and the living room became an architect's studio, complete with T-1 lines to allow video conferencing.


In what must have been a tedious undertaking, the distinctive ceilings and outdoor overhangs were repaired and repainted. "May filtered the skylights in this house with grape stakes, almost like a lattice," Berkus says. "It's phenomenally important because of the heat gain; by doing this, he was able to [handle] the light so there's not a direct movement of sun through the center of the house and there's not a lot of super heating. You can have temperatures over 100° part of the year, but he oriented the house so you have northerly ocean winds that come through the canyons about noon every day. [It isn't air conditioned but] you can open the glazing on the north and south and move air through the house."

When asked if Cliff May's custom houses or his tracts of smaller modern homes were his greatest strength, Berkus replies, "I hope somebody asks that question about me

some time in the future. Both were very important to him. He was able to express himself in the larger houses like Mondavi, the ones in Switzerland and Australia and such, but I think he also got great enjoyment bringing to the people design and a house that was more than just shelter. Eichler did the same thing. They made people focus on the idea that architecture was important to live with."

*Gregory Christman is an architect and architectural photographer who writes that the insight gained by designing three dimensional environments gives him a unique vision into what makes a two dimensional image capture the essence of a building. This article also included photography by Jim Bartsch, whose work has appeared in Architectural Digest, Elle Décor, Town and Country and numerous other magazines.*

Before images courtesy Barry Berkus; resources page 87

To learn more about May and the Berkus home, we recommend Cliff May and the Modern Ranch House; see page 25 or [atomic-ranch.com](http://atomic-ranch.com). 

**In 1955**, construction was aggressively underway on Lakewood Village, a housing development in Sunnyvale, Calif. There was no lake and there were no woods, but perhaps the San Francisco Bay and the valley's fine orchards would suffice. The plan called for 2,500 single-story ranch-style homes, a shopping center, several schools, a church and a park. Sunnyvale was in the midst of a severe housing shortage and Lakewood Village would cater to the needs of both civilians and military personnel working at nearby Moffett Field.

The developer of Lakewood Village, Alec Lee Branden, had two fundamental goals when planning the project: affordability and function. To save money and expedite construction, homes were built on concrete slabs with open floor plans and tar and gravel roofs. Most residences were sold without fences and with minimal landscaping. Unlike some of his peers in the construction business, however, Branden insisted that his homes come standard with two full baths, two wall furnaces and a 1- or 2-car garage.

*it takes*

### **Neighboring charms**

While Lakewood Village homes were modest in overall design, they were not lacking in flair. Branden prided himself on his use of architects; as a result, the tract offered some 20 unique home designs. Traditional models like the "Nassau" had exterior brick detailing, while more contemporary plans, such as the "Biscayne," came with a large picture window. Regardless of the particular model, all Lakewood Village residences featured clerestory windows and exposed-beam ceilings.

Later-build homes incorporated a rather groovy feature—a two-way fireplace open to both the living and dining rooms. One early resident told me the unique fireplace was a major selling point. Another, however, offered up an interesting, if entertaining, dilemma: "When you opened up the front door, ashes blew into the dining room; when you opened up the back door, the ashes flew into the living room."

The earliest Lakewood Village homes were priced in the range of \$11,000 to \$15,000, and veterans did not need a down payment. Homebuyers could opt to purchase their own appliances or wrap the latest and greatest amenities into their monthly mortgage payment. Not surprisingly, houses were often sold (and sometimes moved into) before construction was completed. As one resident described it, "We moved in here without electricity!"

It was not long before Lakewood Village was a thriving community, with bake and rummage



text & photography Heather David

# a village



sales, block parties and a monthly newsletter called *The Villager*, launched in 1958. The Lakewood Village Residents' Association oversaw neighborhood picnics, a holiday lighting contest and a lively Christmas parade, as well as ensuring the construction of a community fire station and blocking the development of a slaughterhouse.

### **Building the future**

Lakewood Village ended up with some 1,600 homes, not the 2,500 originally planned. One reason for the decrease was the LVRA's insistence on a second park for its residents. And who was Branden to argue? He was off building other communities around Northern California, attempting to bring the American Dream to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. In the late 1950s, at the peak of its productivity, Branden Construction Company was producing an average of 25 homes per day.



*Lakewood Village has that non-quantifiable,*



A three-time recipient of the American Builder Award from the National Homebuilders Convention in Chicago, Branden had constructed more than 10,000 homes in California before his death in 1972, at the age of 51. In addition to Lakewood Village, the San Francisco Bay area had Branden to thank for Brentwood Village in Newark, Palma Ceia Village in Hayward, Peralta Village in Fremont and Tropicana Village in San Jose. Following Branden's untimely passing, many of his communities began to show signs of neglect. Homebuyer tastes has changed; some folks opted to move to larger homes and renters started to replace them.

Today, Lakewood Village is one of Branden's best-kept housing developments. It is also one of the most affordable places to live in the Silicon Valley. Compare, for example, a Sunnyvale Eichler, mere minutes away, to a Branden Lakewood Village contemporary model. Both are modest midcentury ranch homes, offering the benefits of open floor plans, considerable natural light and blurred boundaries between



*perhaps invaluable benefit of community*



A  
2,500-home  
community  
where home  
investments are  
sure to pay  
generous  
dividends



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## *Lakewood Village Now & Then*

**Sarah Daugherty**

*50-year resident*

I purchased my Lakewood Village home in May of 1959 and moved in on the 4th of July. The house was a three-bedroom, two-bath with kitchen and dining room and two-car garage. The kitchen had a hanging cabinet over the counter that you could access from either the dining room or the kitchen. There was a picture window in the front of the house on one side of the front door, and a small, narrow window on the other side.

Our section of the Village was built for a squadron of navy personnel that had been stationed in Hawaii and had gotten orders to return to Moffett Field. Not all of the houses were finished when the first group arrived, but Branden soon had a house for everyone. When we moved into our home, there were pear orchards all around us. We had a dairy and a little store that sold milk and other groceries. There was a drugstore with a post office in the back, and a five and dime store, kind of like a 7-Eleven, I guess.

We were so excited to have found our home, and we immediately felt like we were part of a community. The school was only a couple of blocks from the house and the kids could walk to and from without too much worry about something happening to them. We had wonderful neighbors and we were all about the same age, so we had a lot in common. There were always kids playing in front yards and on the sidewalks, and the Village was close enough to downtown Sunnyvale that you could walk if you had a need for something that you could not get in our little shopping area. The school would have movies on Saturdays that the kids could attend for a nominal charge; again, they could go alone or with a friend and we didn't have to worry. We made a lot of lifetime friends that we still see and hear from today.

indoor and outdoor spaces. The Eichler can run two to three times the cost of a Lakewood Village home. The comparison is not to suggest that the two homes are the same in overall design and quality, but it does point out that they both offer quite similar features.

In addition to affordability, Lakewood Village has that non-quantifiable, perhaps invaluable benefit of community. In 1991, after a nearly 20-year absence, the Lakewood Village neighborhood association was reformed and the newsletter reinstated. Some of the community's earliest traditions were revived and continue to this day, including the annual picnic, the Christmas parade and the widely publicized holiday lighting contest. The LVRA's Social Committee, however, was replaced with its modern equivalent: a website. This is, after all, Silicon Valley. ✨

*For more information on Lakewood Village, visit [lvna.net](http://lvna.net) or [svmodern.com](http://svmodern.com).*

*Heather David is a cultural historian, freelance writer and advocate for the preservation of midcentury architecture. She is the author of numerous articles and *Mid-Century by the Bay*, a book on San Francisco in the '50s and '60s, available at [calmodbooks.com](http://calmodbooks.com). Her sincere thanks to Brian Smithson, Judy Fernandez, Sarah Daugherty, Diane Lizardo and all of the other "Villagers" who made this article possible.*

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## **Diane Lizardo**

### *new resident*

When we began looking for a house, my husband and I were trying to find something affordable and not in need of too much work, but that's a tall order in this area. Our realtor and I looked at approximately 50 homes in our price range. They were about 800 to 900 square feet, with two bedrooms, one bath, no closets, no garage, very little yard and a lot of work to be done. They were in neighborhoods that included duplexes and apartment buildings, with narrow, cluttered streets. After a couple of months, we felt as though we were going to have to settle for less.

But one day, as we drove through a Sunnyvale neighborhood, I noticed the streets were very wide, there were no apartment buildings or duplexes and children were out playing in their yards. A large park runs through the entire neighborhood, where people jog, walk, bike and take their dogs; I was seeing community.

The house we pulled up to was bank-owned and had been empty for more than a year. It had wonderful trapezoid windows on the front of the house and a two-car garage. These things gave me hope, but I was not going to get excited yet; I was almost afraid to see the inside. When the door opened, the first thing I saw was a huge brick fireplace that divided the living room from the kitchen/dining room. The home was built with an open concept and had exposed beams; it was lovely. Although the carpets and windows needed to be replaced and it definitely needed some paint, the house was in great shape. Three large bedrooms with big closets in each, a linen closet (a luxury I had not had for years), two full bathrooms, plenty of windows, a sizable kitchen with an L-shaped counter/breakfast nook—wow! Every room had those wonderful exposed beams and the home was very spacious at 1,150 square feet. After seeing the yard, it was all I could do to contain myself: plenty of room for our dog, a patio area, a big yard to host barbecues and room to garden.

Since moving in, I find it hard to leave to go to work. I just want to stay and enjoy my home all day.

# cool|stuff



Inspired by nature and made by hand, Andersen Studio's slip-cast ceramics are affordable pieces of midcentury nostalgia. Brenda and Weston Andersen were part of the urban design movement in the '50s, and Weston studied under ceramicist Eva Zeisel; today their children continue the tradition. Influenced by the wildlife of Maine, the mostly bird-focused collection also includes bowls—for those sick of Tweets. Find one-off pieces and a variety of wildlife starting at \$32 (as well as seconds at half price) at [andersenstudio.com](http://andersenstudio.com).

Like the look of vintage sofas but not in love with the lack of actual comfort? Check out the Goetz sofa from Herman Miller, one of tons of home furnishings carried by [Yliving.com](http://Yliving.com). With the exposed plywood shell, it's a nod to vintage, but with an added bonus—it's also deep enough to lie down on and less likely to invite cat claws. You've got hundreds of possible combinations with five wood veneers to choose from and dozens of different fabric and leather options. While you're there, browse their wares, from big-buck items to gadgets.





# ranchdressing

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



**Q:** About a year ago I purchased this Cherner-style chair at a local antique shop; there is no label or maker's mark that I can find. Although I understand this is not an uncommon chair, in my research on the Internet I have not been able to find a Cherner chair that has what appears to be a metal brace attached to the back.

At first I thought it was a repair, but cannot see any evidence of damage to that area, plus the metal brace looks custom-made. The brace is only on the front but the brass screws go all the way through the back and are secured with brass nuts. Could it be a prototype because it was thought that the chair would not be strong enough without a brace? There is also a small brass piece around the bottom of each leg that attaches underneath with a screw. Structurally it is in great shape, just some condition issues mainly with the finish; from all I can tell

it is a vintage piece. I'd appreciate any information you may have about it.

**Pat Lynch**

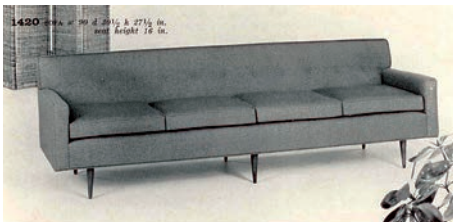
**A:** *We have heard conflicting buzz about the wasp waists of these vintage chairs—both that they're a bit fragile, and that they have additional layers of plywood that make them stiff and strong. Benjamin Cherner, president of The Cherner Chair Company, sent this "Eyes Wide Shut" reply: "Your chair appears to be an authentic Cherner chair designed by my father and made by the Plycraft Corporation sometime around 1970. The post-production addition of the unusually crafted brass brace, with its 27 machine screws, along with the chewed up right front leg, seem to indicate that the original chair was modified by a mid-20th-century fetishistic furniture cult for ceremonial purposes."*

**Q:** My husband came across this wonderful sofa while riding his bike home from work. The owner was hauling it out of his house to take it to the dump; that's when it made its way into our home. The upholstery is original and in near-mint condition, and it has wooden legs and a heavy, rib-like skeleton. We haven't been able to locate any manufacturer info, but were wondering if your team might have any input on the designer or manufacturer and what it might be worth.

**Ali Smith**

**A:** *This from designer Guy Hill at Thayer Coggin: "This is a great find! The sofa was designed by Milo Baughman and it was built by Thayer Coggin. I found this catalog page for style #1420 that dates from the late '50s to the early '60s."*

*As for the value, vintage production furniture tends to be affordable because many pieces were made, sometimes over several decades—great for those of us*



with more taste than money. Alex Cooper Auctioneers, of Washington, D.C., and Maryland, had estimates of \$300 to \$500 for several Baughman sofas back in March 2008.

**Q:** A few years ago I bought this great little coffee table at a yard sale in Pittsburgh for under \$5. It's in desperate need of refinishing, but you can still see that the pie-shaped wood (or veneer) inserts have been book-matched to highlight the beautiful grain pattern. The legs are glossy black with brass feet, and the bottom has been stenciled "FROM WARSAW FURN. MFG. CO. WARSAW KY." The number "730" has been stamped into the wood and also written in crayon, and another number, "5-54," is stamped in the wood, too.

The shape and angle of the legs make me think atomic era, but despite all the clues, my Google searches have been fruitless. Do you have any information about this table?

**Kary Myers**

**A:** Based on the snippets about the company we found online, it sounds as if the Warsaw Furniture Manufacturing Company was founded in 1902 by O.A. Bogardus and was in business through the 1980s. A former employee confirmed that the factory is gone, and an owner of a Warsaw card table mentions the beautiful inlay on her item, also. The company likely made various styles of furniture as trends went in and out of popularity.

The form of your table makes me think it was made when designs like the 1946 Eames plywood coffee table from Herman Miller had become popular, but used



# more ranchdressing



Courtesy Herman Miller

veneered wood and applied legs that would appeal to a broad range of buyers. You can also imagine that this same top could have come with other styles of legs and been at home in a traditional environment. This somewhat cobbled together approach allowed a manufacturer to produce a modern product without completely reinventing their traditional wheel.

**Q:** Can you identify this coat rack? We have two of them, purchased in the early '90s from an office furniture warehouse. Neither Knoll nor Herman Miller recognized it several years ago when we inquired with them.

**Tom Carson**

**A:** Appraiser Lisanne Dickson of Treadway/Toomey replies: "The coat rack definitely has an institutional look, but the weird combination of molded wood (early MCM) and chrome (late MCM) is sort of humorous and appealing all at once. I don't know what it is; I get the feeling



that people would like it, but that it wouldn't sell for much, due to the institutional limitations."

**Q:** I've picked up several of these pieces over the years, and have no idea what their pedigree is. There are no markings, and I can't find them by searching eBay or Google. Any thoughts on who made them?

**Dan Langdon**

**A:** Marci Holcomb, of Sputnik Housewares, replies: "We come across these quite a bit while out thrifting and often mistake them for Belgian Descoware if they



are tucked under something, or until we pick one up. These are not cast iron and are very light, most likely a covered tin like graniteware. I have seen them in green and orange but never with a label or stamp. I assume they had some sort of glued-on paper label and were made in the USA during the 1960s. Here is a listing on Etsy I found showing one with a wrought iron warming stand. [etsy.com/listing/46371217/vintage1960s-burnt-orange-enamel-pot](https://www.etsy.com/listing/46371217/vintage1960s-burnt-orange-enamel-pot)

I wish I knew more!

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

# coming up



A lumberman's dream ranch in Arkansas

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# atomic events



Above: Left, artist Wes Wilson, 1967, and right, Bonnie MacLean, 1967, both Collection of Houston Freeburg, wolfgangsvault.com

## Through September 12 **Toledo**

### **The Psychedelic '60s: Posters from the Rock Era**

A yellow 1971 VW convertible punctuates the Toledo Museum of Art's exhibition of 150 posters celebrating concerts by Jimi Hendrix, Cream, Joan Baez, the Byrds, Led Zeppelin, Muddy Waters, the Grateful Dead and many others. Artists include Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse, Alton Kelly, Victor Moscoso, Bonnie MacLean, David Singer and Lee Conklin; make sure to wear some flowers in your hair and a white shirt to fully enjoy the black light portion of the show. toledomuseum.org

## September 16–19 **San Francisco**

### **20th Century Modernism Show & Sale**

Dolphin Fairs brings 50 vintage dealers to the Herbst Pavilion at Fort Mason Center. Lectures and a Thursday night gala to benefit the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. sf20.net

## Through September 19 **Washington, D.C.**

### **Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg**

Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs may be among the most famous names in front of Ginsberg's camera, but the exhibition includes numerous glimpses of the poet's life and cohorts in the '50s, '60s and beyond.

Close to 80 prints are on display in the National Gallery of Art's West Building; nga.gov

## September 25–January 8, 2011 **Memphis**

### **Paul R. Williams, Architect: The Power of Example**

Many of the architect's best-known projects were luxury homes designed for celebrities and commercial buildings, but he also created modest postwar tract homes in Southern California and Las Vegas. Explore the work of the first black architect admitted to the AIA and his game-changing success story. At the Art Museum of the University of Memphis; paulwilliamsproject.org



## October 2

### **Vancouver, B.C.**

### **Mid-Century Modern Residential Bus Tour**

Board a bus to tour the interiors of five modernist homes and enjoy a reception at the last house during this 1–6 p.m. event sponsored by The Vancouver Heritage Foundation. Info at

vancouverheritagefoundation.org

## October 7–10 **Dallas**

### **Dallas Design Fair**

Forty dealers in 20th and 21st century furniture, lighting, collectibles, decorative arts and jewelry at the Fashion Industry Gallery in the Arts District. The location is a mid-century modern building, and the Thursday preview benefits Dallas Contemporary. dallasdesignfair.com

## October 15–17 **NYC**

### **The Modern Show**

Collectibles and furniture spanning Arts & Crafts to MCM at a venue opposite the Empire State Building, 7 W. 34th Street at Fifth Avenue. stellashows.com

**Through October 17 Chicago**  
**Alexander Calder and Contemporary Art:**  
**Form, Balance, Joy**

The Museum of Contemporary Art/Chicago's in-depth Calder holdings, which include mobiles, stabiles and other pieces, are the core of this exhibition featuring works from seven artists influenced by his modernist art forms. [mcachicago.org](http://mcachicago.org)

**Through October 24 Long Island City, N.Y.**  
**Noguchi ReINstalled**

Housed in 13 galleries within a converted factory building surrounded by a sculpture garden, Isamu Noguchi's works include pieces rendered in metal, stone, wood and clay, as well as models for public projects and gardens, dance sets and Akari Light Sculptures. [noguchi.org/exhibitions.html#futureexhibitions](http://noguchi.org/exhibitions.html#futureexhibitions)

**October 27-30 Austin**  
**National Preservation Conference**

Smart growth, backyard energy development, the "Next American City" and the "Next American Landscape" are among the topics at the 2010 National Trust for Historic Preservation event. Join architects, governmental planners and fellow preservationists at interactive educational sessions and field studies to see how others in the national community are solving problems in their regions. Details and registration at [nthpconference.org](http://nthpconference.org).



**November 12-15 NYC**  
**Modernism + Art20**

Sanford Smith's fall event at the Park Avenue Armory again combines two formerly separate shows featuring museum-quality furnishings and

Bush form by Henry Bertoia  
Courtesy Lost City Arts



Wendell Castle music stand  
Courtesy Moderne

accessible artwork from international dealers. Lighting, collectibles and furniture spanning Arts and Crafts to contemporary designs are on offer, along with paintings, sculpture, prints and photography. Details at [sanfordsmith.com](http://sanfordsmith.com)

**Through January 2, 2011 Washington, D.C.**  
**In the Tower: Mark Rothko**

Learn about the artist's mid-'60s black-form paintings in this exhibition in the National Gallery of Art's East Building. Watch a film about his life and career arc, from figural abstracts to soft color blocks to the black-on-black works in Houston's 1971 Rothko Chapel that explored the properties and mysteries of light. [nga.gov](http://nga.gov) has a link to the film as well.

**February 4-6, 2011 Miami**  
**Miami Modernism Show & Sale**

Check [miamimodernism.net](http://miamimodernism.net) for the latest on location and details for this 20th century design show.

**February 18-21, 2011 Palm Springs**  
**Palm Springs Modernism Show & Sale**

The four-day show at the Palm Springs Convention Center features 75 or more dealers in modernist furniture, collectibles and artwork. Visit [palm Springsmodernism.com](http://palm Springsmodernism.com) for the latest updates.

**February 18-27, 2011 Palm Springs**  
**Modernism Week**

The expanded week and a half of festivities includes home and neighborhood tours, lectures, films, parties and special exhibits; check details at [modernismweek.com](http://modernismweek.com).

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San Jose, 408.540.8320, [mscapedesign.com](http://mscapedesign.com)

✗ Mark Campbell, Garden of Eden, 510.889.9105, [gardenofedenlandscapes.com](http://gardenofedenlandscapes.com)

## connecticut modern, pp. 36–45

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## midcentury roots, pp. 58–66

Architect: Barry Berkus, Berkus Design Studio, Santa Barbara, Calif., 805.966.1547, [berkusdesignstudio.com](http://berkusdesignstudio.com) ✗ General contractor: Randall Barnes, Signal Construction, [signalconstruction.com](http://signalconstruction.com) ✗ Kitchen: Cabinetry, Ingalls Kitchen and Bath, [ingalls-usa.com](http://ingalls-usa.com) ✗ Counters, Super Thasos white marble, Era Stone, [erastone.com](http://erastone.com) ✗ Tile: Supplier, NS Ceramic, [nsceramic.com](http://nsceramic.com) ✗ Installation, Conception Tile, [conceptiontile.com](http://conceptiontile.com) ✗ Radiant floor heating: Rusher Air Conditioning, [rusherair.com](http://rusherair.com)

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