

atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS



WINTER 2010



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cover

An HGTV show stepped in to help the owners pull together their living room look. The modest-sized room, in a midcentury house in Albany, Calif., was repainted and furnished with pieces from Room & Board, cb2 and EQ3. Their IKEA storage units were repurposed as wall-mounted credenzas, but the couple still needed an assist from designer Karen McAloon to make it all work. Story page 56.



meanwhile... back at the ranch

People often ask how we find feature homes and, for the book we're working on, it was a combination of outreach—enthusiast groups, past contacts, our Facebook friends (dozens and dozens of responses)—and also sifting through daily emails from proud homeowners. Gathering the possibilities was relatively easy, but culling was arduous. In addition to geographic diversity, a range of styles and enough strong rooms to support a chapter, homeowners had to be willing to devote considerable time and effort to present and talk knowingly about their house.

Extensive scouting photos helped us develop detailed shot lists, but it was with some trepidation that I set out to photograph places we hadn't actually visited. Happy to say, there were no heart-sinking surprises, no Oh-my-God-what-have-I-walked-into? moments. On the contrary, I was always impressed with the preparations and hospitality of each owner: spic and span homes, custom-made duvets, just-washed windows (always a big deal in a ranch), even new carpet and vinyl tile at one home awaited my arrival.

Food was a big part of every trip, and there were nice dinners with fellow enthusiasts in Cincinnati and



Dinner at 'Nada' with members of cf3 (Cincinnati Form Follows Function).
Left to right: Me, Arlen & Susan Rissover and Lou Batsch.

Hollin Hills, and lunch at Elmer's BBQ in Tulsa. I was even introduced to Manchego cheese and membrillo (quince paste) at an Argentinean household in San Mateo. One homeowner took my low-cholesterol needs into account and prepared a killer lentil dish, only to rightfully chide me when I admitted to grabbing an incredible cheeseburger at a Five Guys when blowing through Alexandria, Va., in a rainstorm. ("So much for Mr. Low-Fat," she said. In my defense, I only had a few fries and didn't even touch the peanuts.) But the lowlight gastronomically was the Denny's breakfast in Garland, Texas, where it was just one other patron, a retired codger downing a Grand Slam and reading the local obituaries, and me, with a sad bowl of oatmeal. Maybe I was atoning for that burger.

One thing people asked me on the road was to name the great midcentury neighborhoods I've visited; I sometimes got the impression that they felt their area was not worthy. My experience indicates those feelings of insignificance are misplaced, because I've had the opportunity to actually see first-hand my oft-repeated mantra that good ranches are everywhere. Whether it was driving through the White Rock Lake development in Dallas, touring Lortondale in Tulsa, or a quick spin through Cincinnati's Amberley Village, it deepened my appreciation of our basic concept. While one should admire and visit the famous bastions of mid-century (Palm Springs and Chicago, anyone?) be proud of where you live and the history of your region's builders and architects. There are wonderful examples in your own back yard.

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USA: \$19.95 1 yr / \$36.95 2 yrs

CAN: \$27.95 1 yr / \$49.95 2 yrs

Outside USA/CAN: \$55.95 1 yr

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Printed by American Web

Distributed by Comag Marketing Group LLC

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◀ Designed by
Jorge Pensi



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modernwisdom

I don't normally take the time to write to magazine editors, despite having many opinions about the shelter magazines I have subscribed to over the past 30 years, but now I feel compelled. Atomic Ranch is by far my favorite of all time, not only because MCM is my fave style, but also because AR is unpretentious, with a very friendly, personal approach to the stories and photography. I enjoy that it has a down-to-earth appearance, professional but not so polished as to feel artificial and distant. And, thank you for not being too focused on one part of the U.S. and including a little Canadian info/perspective in the magazine now and then.

Your columns and features are informative, varied,



The Paimio Sanatorium chair and a reconstruction of the Rautatalo Cafe in the Aalto Museum.



interesting and often amusing. I love the fun and engaging fridge pics pages with homeowners' stories, your cleverly titled "Ranch Dressing" with its educational revelations and everything in between. Is there anything not to like?

On a final note, the Alvar Aalto story (Fall 2010) was of particular interest to me, firstly because of my Finnish roots and secondly because my husband and I just visited the Aalto museum while vacationing in Finland this summer. I'm including a couple of photos taken at the museum that I thought might interest readers. Despite having read about Aalto over the years, there were things about him that I learned from Timothy Sullivan's article. Well done!

We live in Maple Ridge, part of metro Vancouver, which has a population of two million. Despite being such a large city, there is a dreadful lack of attractive MCM homes here. They are either not available, not in the right neighborhood, too expensive or need too much work; as a lover of the style it is frustrating. We own a new home and have decorated it with mid-century decor and furniture, but when we retire, we hope to build a new MCM-style home.

Tuula Perrault

British Columbia, Canada



* I am the owner of the "Ferris Bueller" house (actually Cameron's house from "FBDO") in Highland Park. Before the movie was shot there, the home was known as the purest form of Miesian architecture in the Chicago area.

I have a ton of photos that could be used in support

morewisdom

of a story about the property, which was originally designed and built in 1953 by Mies protégé James Speyer. In 1975, to house my father's car collection, Mies student David Haid designed and built the pavilion that hangs over the ravine.

It was a lot of fun growing up in the house. My parents were plugged into the Chicago Bauhaus movement. Dad was an important textile designer whose designs were used by all of the architectural firms, and Mom was an interior designer. In the '50s, most modern houses in the area were Frank Lloyd Wright homes, so our Miesian box offended some of the old guard.

My dad was a jazz trombonist who played with a band formed at Northwestern University. My folks often gave elaborate parties that were attended by local celebrities and visiting actors from theatre district shows. Hugh Hefner was a regular guest and my folks helped him with start-up money for the magazine.

Lots of stories, lots of angles; if I don't tell them, they're lost.

Rob Rose

Highland Park, Ill.

Beyond fan boy questions like, Did they really drive a Ferrari through that window? and the realization that the movie was released 24 years ago and everyone is now middle aged, we'd love to hear more.

—ar editor



* My wife, Tessa, and I were in search of a midcentury



modern home here in Utah, but every one we found was way out of our price range. Then we discovered Westshire, a neighborhood that was developed for those who had an eye for style. This unique neighborhood consists of roughly 175 houses, all designed by Ronald Molen. The homes were built in the late 1960s and were featured in *Better Homes & Gardens* in the 1970s.

My wife and I are in our 20s and hope more young couples catch the mid-mod movement and move into Westshire to help preserve the architecture and style.

Our first issue (Summer 2010) just came, and we are in love with AR! Thank you for entertaining our minds and eyes.

Chris Linford

West Valley City, Utah

Demerits for the Dwell on your coffee table, but otherwise, nice looking interior!

—ar editor

* I'm a long-time subscriber, and while traveling



through Wisconsin, came upon this amazing structure! You might wish to do an article on it—and who knows— perhaps a wealthy reader/investor might visit buythegobbler.com and make The Gobbler their own!

Pam Turlow

Elmhurst, Ill.

✱ In 2006, my wife and I bought a 1956 midcentury home in Brookhaven, an area in north Atlanta where I was raised. Like most homes of this age, this one had been remuddled here and there. We knew we wanted to revive it to as close to period correct as possible, but at the time there were just not many resources available, especially here in Atlanta. Thankfully Atomic Ranch had come to be, and we started with Issue no. 8 and have since collected almost all the back issues.

Our big dilemma was the Roman brick—we just

could not get it to work with any of the options we tried. We did have a stroke of luck when a neighbor cleaned out a storage building and threw away a large pile of solid teak paneling. After removing the vinyl siding and putting this up, I thought we would have a winner but the brick still held it back. Finally, on the fourth anniversary of our closing, I pulled the trigger, literally, and painted the brick.

So far (we've been taking honest votes from neighbors and friends) it's been 10-to-1 in favor. We are still working on the trim, but for now it's very close to



where we want it.

Many thanks for your great publication; it's been an excellent source of info and inspiration.

Bob and Susan Oakes

Bob's subject line was "In defense of painting brick," and I live in a Roman brick home, so I'll shut up. Readers, any comments or trim advice for Bob?

—ar editor

✱ I'm sitting at my favorite Starbucks, reading the

even more wisdom

Summer 2010 issue that just arrived and loved your editorial page. I used to subscribe to *Echoes/Modernism* magazine; I cancelled my subscription and then subscribed to AR, now going on several years. Your magazine is more down to earth, real life and relevant.

I'm in a cool ranch built in 1953, and I will never allow it to be redecorated in any way that strays from its roots. We purchased it 20-plus years ago when we were in our 30s, with an eye to aging in place.

Abby Neumann

* I wanted to share an unlikely source for new pendant light fixtures. During a visit to Menards (a Midwest home improvement chain), I found great midcentury-style fixtures in three shapes and sizes, with a fantastic price of only \$29.99 each! The finish is listed as oxide bronze, but they are actually satin black with painted gold interiors in person. They are available through special order at Menards' website for those who can't visit a store: <http://shop.menards.com/main/lights-fans/indoor-lights/pendant/metal-shade-8inch-pendant/p-1374723.htm?cid=7498>

Nathan Wilber

* Seeing my letter in your magazine (Summer 2010, page 6) reminded me that I'd asked my dad for information on Central Washington University's midcentury architecture. He just sent me a few images that I am sure are way too late.

CWU made a push to hire architects with progressive modernist ideas. One of the first ventures into this mindset was a new athletic facility built in 1959 now named Nicholson Pavillion. Its unique architecture, designed by Ralph Burkhard, used a system that supported the roof with cables suspended from large cement stanchions, resembling grasshopper legs.

In 1961, Central hired another daring Seattle architect, Frederick Forde Bassetti, for Bouillon Hall, a new library building. Bassetti's progressive design was very geometric and used a new preformed roof built from V-shaped concrete troughs. The front was covered in a facade of hexagonal honeycombs and the entrance featured a foyer with multicolored ceiling panels. The



Bouillon Hall



Nicholson Pavillion

offices and hallways were originally filled with period art and furniture, which has slowly deteriorated, been replaced or disappeared altogether.

My grandfather, Charles Wright, was one of the first teachers to be housed in Bouillon Hall as the director for audio-visual services. Both he and my father were smitten by the new building, and although my father's true love is the Victorian era, he passed the appreciation and acknowledgement of the architects' achieve-

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



The custom headboard by Dallas interior designer Jason Jones was added to the original furnishings in the master bedroom, which include the dressers, bench, nightstand and the orange Dunbar slipper chair, one of a pair.

Sometimes
having
too much of
a good thing
can be really,
really great.

Hot Springs tonight

Arkansas' Hot Springs—both the city and the geological feature—has a storied past. First claimed for France in 1673 and later part of the Louisiana Purchase, the town is the only one situated inside a national park. That the park was first set aside by Congress in 1832, 40 years before Yellowstone, and that its website announces there was a government-run VD clinic there for 25 years gives you an idea of the rich social tapestry of the area.

For generations, the thermal springs drew indigenous peoples to its healing waters before being “discovered” by Hernando de Soto in 1541. Between the 1900s and the 1960s, the resort teemed with plenty of bath-houses, illegal gambling, boozing and general raising of heck—this is the genteel South, after all. Local legend claims Lucky Luciano, Al Capone and

text Bromley Davenport

photography Nancy Nolan



A Gregg Coker painting hangs above a Henredon foldout bar in the living room, with its pickled wood wall treatment. The two orange chairs are Harvey Propper and were part of the Joers estate.

Right; two pieces of the white brocade sectional in a living room vignette, along with another painting by Coker and the new blue ceiling that reflects the color of the nearby pool.

Bugsy Segal among the bad boys who came to enjoy the town's pleasures, and The Gangster Museum of America on Central Avenue celebrates those days. Oh, and one last notable: President Clinton grew up in a Tudor revival home there and graduated from Hot Springs High School. Their mascot? A Trojan.

About the same time Bill Clinton moved to town with his mother and stepfather, prosperous businessman Peter Dierks Joers built a house that would eventually join Bathhouse Row, Butchie's Drive-In and more than 70 other Hot Springs buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. The scion of a family lumber business that at one time owned 1.8 million acres of timber, three sawmills, paper and wall-board plants, and two railroads, Joers was in his mid-30s when he commissioned the house in 1955.

Designed by E.A. "Sib" Sibley and constructed by Dallas builder Hal Anderson, the boomerang-shaped ranch house sits on a little over six acres. Detailed records



The copper hoods over the cooktop and grill are custom pieces by Scandinavian Art Metal, a Pasadena, Calif., company, while the sawed-finish limestone came from Austin. Counters are yellow laminate with metal edges. The kitchen floor has been changed from the vinyl seen here to green and cream Marmoleum tiles.

In addition to double ovens, there are two Westinghouse warming drawers in the expansive kitchen.

The center doorknob set off with decorative molding is a detail that begins at the front door and is repeated in the kitchen, baths and on interior doors. "We have a thing for centered doorknobs; our last home had the same hardware," Len Pitcock says. "We keep hearing that we should pray they never break because they're impossible to repair or replace, but so far we've never had any issues."





show it cost \$138,000 to build, plus \$10,000 for the pool—the latter more than the price of the land. It was Joers' home until his death in 2006; in 2007 two native Arkansans, Kathleen and Len Pitcock, made it theirs.

"We struggled with whether or not to buy this house for quite some time," says Len, a government lobbyist. Like many a house purchase, it began with a tantalizing view online and an urging by his wife to "just take a look." They were living in a perfectly nice ranch house in Little Rock, some 50 miles away, and looking for lakefront property, if anything.

Lots of people talk about the visceral reactions they have when first seeing their dream home, but for the Pitcocks it was a smell—in a good way. "You could tell it was big and that people hadn't been living there," says Kathleen, about walking into the house the first time.

"Like a library," Len prompts. "Everything was nice, but a little worn," she says about the furnishings, which she loved. "I was sick thinking I couldn't have it."

The house sat on the market for eight months, during which time they visited three times. Kathleen would dream about it and wonder if it had sold. "I'd think about what I'd do with it, then we go, That's crazy; we can't do that!"

"For me it was the living room," Len recalls. "Without question it's the most impressive room in the house. That had to do with some of the furniture and the south wall, which is limestone, and the thick oak cornice with its built-in recessed lighting that goes around the whole room. Ninety percent of the furniture that's in it today was there when we first walked in."

Their 1957 ranch in Little Rock was 2,000 square feet; this one was close to 6,000 counting the guesthouse, and the couple has just one child, 9-year-old Rogers. In addition to the kitchen, dining and living rooms, there are five bedrooms, maid's quarters, a utility room with an extra refrigerator, a breakfast room and a den with fossilized limestone walls. "There are six and a half bathrooms, all with perfect tile: yellow on gray, gray on yellow, turquoise and white," Kathleen, a lawyer, explains. Many of the rooms have sliding glass doors that open onto the pool

The dining room has beautiful green terrazzo floors, bamboo wall covering and custom Dunbar furnishings. "The limestone table base goes clear through the floor to the sub-basement," Len Pitcock says. The artwork is by Gregg Coker and the drapes came with the house, as did the Murano glass on the table.

The custom Dunbar cabinet was patterned on one the Joerses saw in a magazine.





patio.

The original owners split the year between their home in Sarasota, Fla., and Hot Springs; Len reasons that the Joers children were primarily in boarding school by the time the family moved in. "In some of the back kids' bedrooms, the built-in drawers really aren't even broken in," he says. "What made the house so unique was that, not only did Mr. Joers build it first-class in 1955, it was pretty avant-garde for Hot Springs."

In addition to the furnishings that they made part of the purchase, the Pitcocks fell heir to a dozen files on the home's construction. Correspondence with suppliers, magazine clippings showing fixtures, the electrical schematics, manuals for all of the appliances and even an article showing a buffet just like the one in the dining room attests to Joers' perfectionist nature.

The property also came with some 300 trees, 100 of which are dogwoods that turn the acreage into a wooded park in the spring. Since they moved in, the Pitcocks lost 25 trees to hurricane winds, but they say you can't even tell. They also were blessed with the talents of a long-time gardener of Mr. Joers', Frank Babb, known as "Mr. Frank," now in his 80s. "His institutional knowledge is a godsend," Len says.

Their renovation projects have been few and the couple's determination to preserve the house rock solid. The foyer, breakfast room and a couple of ceilings were painted, and the custom wool rugs were cleaned. A headboard was added in the master bedroom and the U-shaped sofa in the living room separated into four sections. But that's about it.

The couple brushed up on Dunbar furniture when they discovered the dining room suite was custom made by the company. A "Long John" walnut bench with bentwood legs was in the den, and Kathleen's research found one with a hinged cushion in a vintage book. "I was proud because I went back to the '50s catalog and had it made to the right dimensions," she says.

"We're trying hard to keep the 1955 feel to the house with 2010 products," Len says. Visitors have implored them not to change the nature of the house, and they fully agree. "We have no plans to do anything radical." 🍷

A resident of Little Rock, Nancy Nolan is an alumna of the Art Institute of Atlanta who shoots fashion, food, design and portraiture for a variety of magazines. Her books include The Candlelit Home and Candlelit Christmas.



Because of Joers' lumber connection, top-grade woods were selected for the interior, including red oak, ash, cherry, walnut and the curly pine seen here in the breakfast room. The contemporary table from Tommy Farrell and Target chairs moved with the Pitcocks from their last ranch. The oversize globe came with the house and the bowl is from Pier One.

The den has a shallow mirrored bar with shutters that's built into the Cordova shell limestone-clad wall. The curvy couch is a recent purchase from Deco & Dolls in Hot Springs.

In one of the magnificent like-new baths, the gray Crane sinks have integral faucets and the built-in chrome cubbies hold toothbrushes and the like, keeping the counters pristine.



home page



Wilton Manors, Fla.

My 1958 duplex is a fine example of the most successful, modern, multifamily housing type of the mid-20th century. I fell in love with its clean horizontal lines, low-pitched Bermuda hip roof and decorative cupola. The two-bedroom, one-bath apartments have cool terrazzo flooring throughout and wide, overhanging eaves. The building is painted coral pink, and my tenants and I really enjoy this duplex for its midcentury design and tropical setting.

Robert Mendola

Newton, Mass.

Our 1955 MCM was designed by Nathaniel Saltonstall, a pioneer in contemporary architecture here. The house has its original kitchen with turquoise laminate and custom cabinets, pocket doors and tongue-and-groove ceilings throughout. We purchased the house in 1993 from the original owners and still use the curved couch and Paul McCobb desk that were included in the sale. Since then we have collected '50s furnishings to fit the era of the house—not an easy thing in New England, where Capes, Colonials and traditional furniture dominate!

Nancy Weibust & Tom Schmeisser

Anaheim, Calif.

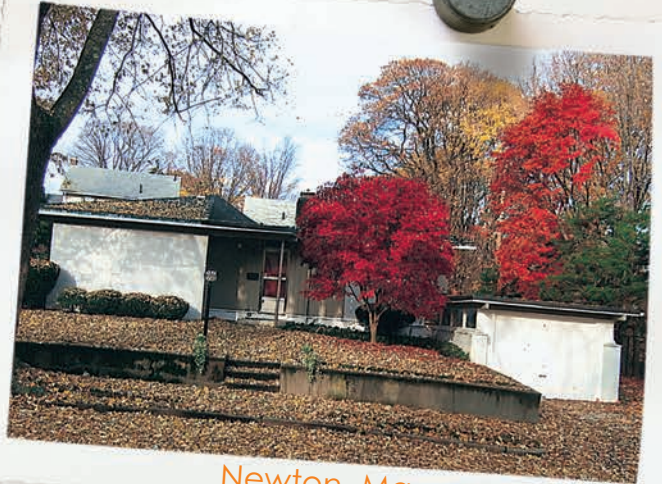
Built in 1951, in what we now call the Minimal Traditional style, this one-story gem was constructed in Anaheim's most exclusive '40s and '50s residential area. Typical of the style, the front entrance is off center and the asymmetrical house loosely incorporates Colonial forms with the modern preference for as little ornamentation and decorative detailing as possible. Today it is recognized as a historic structure within the newly established Hoskins Historic District.

Trudy Hernandez

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 9.



Wilton Manors, Fla.

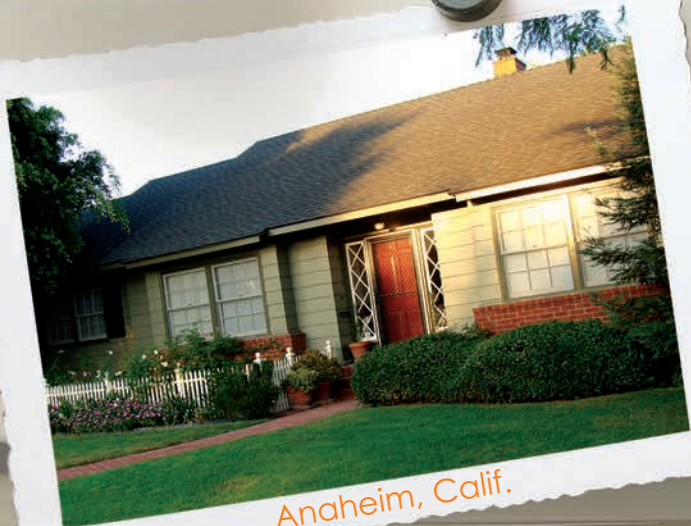


Newton, Mass.



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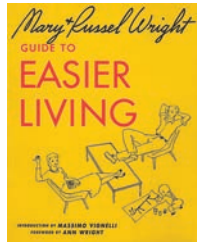
Anaheim, Calif.

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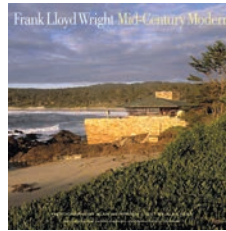
Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb

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



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



Frank Lloyd Wright: Mid-Century Modern

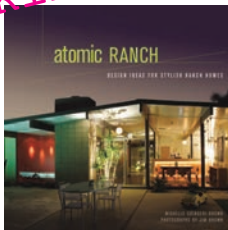
This volume takes you inside homes rarely open to the public, focusing on Wright's late career after his Prairie School oeuvre. Visit Fallingwater, the Seth Peterson cottage, Usonian houses and other moderns, along with less-well-known designs like the Marshall Erdman prefabs. Alan Hess, hardcover, color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



Cliff May and the Modern Ranch House

Cliff May was one of the most successful promoters of the ranch house and the California indoor-outdoor lifestyle. Color and b&w photographs explore the builder's mainstream modern homes and large custom designs, like the Ojai residence in our Fall 2010 issue and his own home, Mandalay. Daniel Gregory, hardcover, 256 pp., \$60

Available
on Kindle!



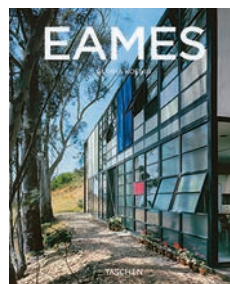
Atomic Ranch: Design Ideas for Stylish Ranch Homes

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



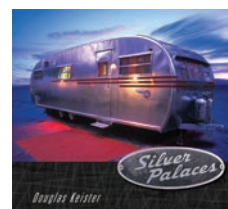
Saarinen

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 Serrano, 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



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

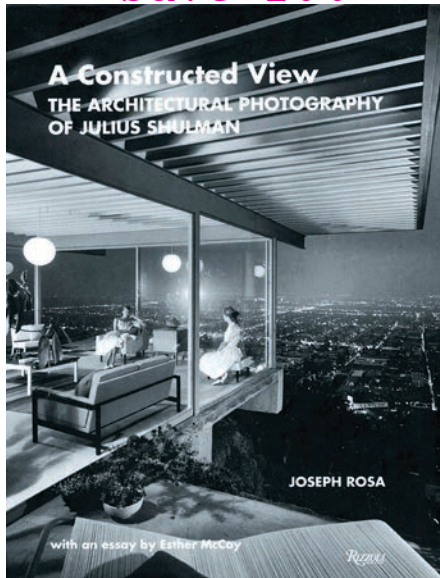


Forgotten Modern: California Houses 1940-1970

California modernist homes, from Claremont to the Bay Area, are captured in great photographs by Alan Weintraub in this coffee-table book. Architecture by Alexander, Eichler, Neutra, Fickett and Cody is featured, along with the work of Mark Mills and Foster Rhodes Jackson. Alan Hess, hardcover, 280 pp., \$39.95

&backs&more

Save 20%



A Constructed View: The Architectural Photography of Julius Shulman

Worth a space on your bookshelf for the sheer variety alone, this hardcover book captures what made Julius Shulman midcentury's most celebrated photographer. The Guggenheim, Lautner's Chemosphere House, Frey House II, Taliesin West and a half-dozen Case Study Houses are included, and sections of the text explain the details behind a given print or assignment. Spanning the 1930s through the '80s, you'll enjoy seeing the Eameses perched on low stools in their home, and Shulman with mentor Richard Neutra. In one pairing, the late, great Maslon house is shot austere per Neutra's art direction, then again as Shulman envisioned it—a warm family home. Biographical material, colorful anecdotes about his relationships with modernism's biggest names and insight into his framing and set dressing bring the late photographer's persona home. Joseph Rosa, color & b&w photos, 224 pp., ~~\$50~~ On sale, \$40!

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2011 calendars and more



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parking, breezeway, window, wall

text Allen Cox

photography courtesy Palm Springs Bureau of Tourism

Midcentury architecture maven Robert Imber is adept at opening new worlds for the layperson and enlightening even the most seasoned modernist. He operates Palm Springs Modern Tours, introducing this small city's midcentury treasures during an entertaining, info-packed tour. Three hours with Imber is a whirlwind sample of the work of some heavyweight architects: Neutra, Frey, Krisel, Wexler and others. The homes on the tour are private residences, so views from the street must suffice, but Imber's descriptions and historical perspective fill in the blanks—enough to make me want much more.

Imber meets me on an iconic corner in downtown Palm Springs—Palm Canyon Drive and Tahquitz—looking as though he just stepped out of a Sinatra film in a smart fedora and plaid blazer. For a touch of desert glamour, a well-attended ceremony to place a sidewalk star for gossip columnist Rona Barrett is in progress at our rendezvous point. Crowds and distractions aside, Imber captures my attention by pointing out four significant buildings on the corner where we're standing, one representing each decade from the 1920s to the 1950s: the 1923 Oasis Hotel site, 1936's La Plaza (a precursor to the modern shopping mall), the 1940 Bauhaus-style Welwood Murray Memorial Library and a 1953 modernist office building currently housing a Starbucks on the ground level.

After this time-machine introduction to the subject at hand, we stroll to Imber's van to begin our 35-mile maze of back streets and canyon drives where the real gems are tucked away. "By the 1920s Palm Springs had become a posh, Hollywood playground with Spanish Colonial architecture," Imber says. "Then it started to lure some very forward-thinking midcentury minds."

The midcentury minds Imber is referring to were groundbreaking architects who couldn't resist a landscape defined by stark forms and shifting colors on the desert floor and nearby San Jacinto Mountains. This environment inspired innovative experiments that merged the natural with the



An Alexander-built "Swiss Miss" model is among Palm Springs' most distinctive midcentury architecture.

"Palm Springs is an



Clockwise from left: The 1965 Frey & Chambers Tramway Gas Station; the 1946 Richard Neutra Kaufmann House behind its privacy wall; William Krisel's House of Tomorrow; an interior view of Frey House II with its monolithic boulder; the Palm Springs Art Museum designed by E. Stewart Williams in 1976.



David Glomb (2) Courtesy Palm Springs Art Museum



architectural museum
on par
with any place in the world.”



MOD PALM SPRINGS

Book a modernism tour: Robert Linber, Palm Springs Modern Tours, 760.318.6118, psmodernours@aol.com

Visit the museum: A modernist structure designed by E. Stewart Williams, the Palm Springs Art Museum often hosts modernist exhibits, retrospectives and lectures; psmuseum.org.

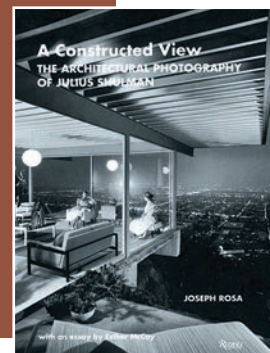
Attend Modernism Week: Each February, interest in modernism heats up dur-

ing the annual Palm Springs Modernism Week; modernismweek.com

Midcentury vacation rentals: Contact Palm Springs Rental Agency, 800.875.0885, palm-springsrentals.com or Orbit In and The Hideaway Hotels, 760.323.3585, orbitin.com

Find out more:
VisitPalmSprings.com

Visit some of the top modernist



manmade in both form and function. The result was a burst of design originality on a scale found in few other places, leaving us today with a world-class modern architecture destination.

According to Sidney Williams, curator of architecture and design at the Palm Springs Art Museum, “Civic leaders and property owners in the '80s began to recognize the artistic and cultural value of the city's midcentury buildings. The extensive restoration of Richard Neutra's Kaufmann House in the '90s was the first real boost to a modernist preservation movement that took off. Today, with the growth of cultural tourism, the focus is on historic preservation.”

RICHARD NEUTRA

A herald of modernism, Neutra's 1946 International Style work, Kaufmann House, plays with many revolutionary ideas and techniques. “His stark lines and pure geometric design complement the desert landscape,” Imber explains. “For Neutra, it was all about feeling better through architecture.”

As I survey the handsome desert landscaping, the monolithic stone facade and upper-floor outdoor room obscured by fin-shaped panels, I am struck by the uncompromising elegance of this famous home. Imber describes what's beyond the facade: innovations such as sliding glass walls that bring the outdoors in, and adjustable panels that shield outdoor rooms against the harsh climate. These attributes work together to merge home and nature on a visual and a functional level.

Below: The open floor plan of Gary and Joan Gand's Swiss Miss Alexander, first featured in Spring 2006; one of Donald Wexler's modular steel houses, which date to 1961–62. Opposite: Two Alexander homes demonstrating the parking-breezeway-window-wall progression across the front facade.



THE ALEXANDERS

In the 1950s and '60s, developer George Alexander and his son, Robert, built roughly 2,500 homes in Palm Springs, most in four basic floor plans. Although their mission was to appeal to a mass market, each house is remarkably distinctive.

“Parking, breezeway, window, wall,” Imber repeats as he points to one Alexander house after another. “Those four elements are always present, in that order, but roof line, facade materials and landscaping give each house a unique look and personality.”

Alexander homes have other elements in common as well, such as post-and-beam construction, pony wall partitions, open floor plans, built-in ornamental screens and decorative wall cutouts. These were relatively affordable and distinctive houses intended to usher buyers into the future in style.

Fifteen other Alexander homes in the city sport an A-frame chalet motif. “These are the Swiss Miss houses,” Imber explains as we pause in front of a chalet-roofed model that is noticeably larger than the firm's tract homes. Today, whether tract, Swiss Miss or otherwise, faithfully renovated Alexander homes are some of Palm Springs' most desirable properties.

ALBERT FREY

Imber points to a house above us on the side of a rocky cliff. “That was architect Albert Frey's private home,” he says. “Now it's the property of the Palm Springs Art Museum and is rarely open to visitors.”

The house, known as Frey House II, appears to have been hurled against a mountainside. This rectangular perch, completed in 1964, is impaled by a slanted, elephant-sized boulder protruding through the back of the house, serving as a natural divider between living room and bedroom.

“Frey was a prolific architect in Palm Springs,” Imber explains. Another of his designs on Imber's tour is the Tramway Gas Station with its soaring triangular roof—in 1965 truly a gas



Jim Brown



station of the future and today the city's visitors' center.

WILLIAM KRISEL

An imposing swept-wing roof line and circular overhanging facade put a distinctive Palm Springs home in a 1962 issue of *Look* magazine as the "House of Tomorrow." Krikel actually designed several commercial and civic buildings in Palm Springs and more than 30,000 homes throughout his career, many of them for the Alexanders. Far from a tract home, the House of Tomorrow was Krikel's futuristic vision of modern living and the Krikel's made it their personal residence.

"Today, people know this house as the Honeymoon Hideaway," Imber points out. "Elvis and Priscilla Presley spent their honeymoon there."

DONALD WEXLER

Seven smart steel and glass homes in a somewhat neglected Palm Springs neighborhood were also on the tour. According to Imber, these early-1960s Wexler-designed

houses, built by Alexander Construction Company and U.S. Steel, were an experiment using steel as an alternative to traditional home construction materials.

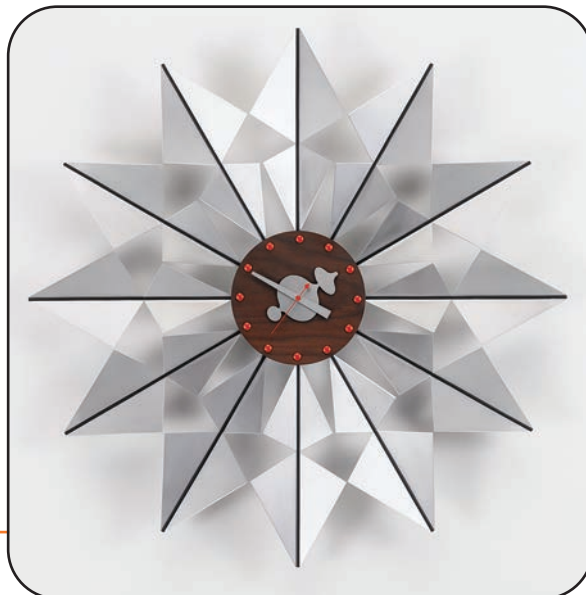
"Given mass-production facilities, a steel house could be prefabricated, shipped and assembled within a matter of days," says curator Williams of the Palm Springs Art Museum. "An increase in the price of steel halted plans to build 35 of these homes, but the experiment was far from a failure." Today, innovative architects concerned about sustainability are continuing Wexler's legacy of using steel as a home construction material.

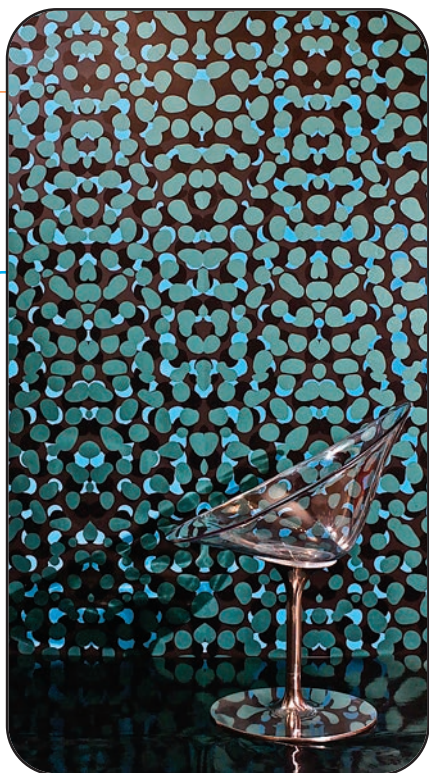
These few architects and structures are just the highlights of the three-hour tour, and the stops along the way barely graze the surface of the city's modernist structures. According to Imber, a growing interest in midcentury architecture and historic preservation has pumped new blood into Palm Springs tourism. He's passionate about his city's legacy, and after taking his tour, I understand why. Imber is right when he proclaims, "Palm Springs is an architectural

cool|stuff



If you love the George Nelson Ball clock—but find it a bit too ubiquitous, look no further, as Vitra has reissued some of his lesser-seen clocks. The metal and wood Flock of Butterflies (below) and walnut Polygon (above) are as fresh today as they were in '61. And of course there's always the showstopper Sunflower, which can count as wall art and a clock. Ceramic table models start at \$280, wall clocks \$300 and up; available at nest-living.com





Tropicalismo is a new line of Brazilian-inspired wallpapers from Lenny Kravitz. Yes, that Lenny Kravitz. The bright colors and shapes aren't exclusively tropical (though there are a few), but more notable for their bold design and clean lines. Available from Flavor Paper at \$150 per 15' roll; **flavorleague.com**



Built-in design, minus the elusive contractor. The Zurich is a one-piece bed with nightstands, just perfect to slide into that alcove and trick everyone into thinking you had it custom made. Drawers are walnut or solid oak; queen starts at \$6,178, depending on fabric selection. **Vioski.com** for showrooms and further info.



Martini & Se in a MintJulep State

Welcome to genteel Lexington, Ky., home to long lines of thoroughbred and basketball champions, manners as decadent and Southern as the food, and traditions that flow like smooth bourbon. Even its grass is pedigreed. In the Bluegrass State, midcentury modern design seems as misplaced as Tennessee whiskey.

Enter my husband, Matt, and me. Eight months after a first date sharing sushi and shooting the Saarinen breeze, our wedding invitations were mailed with Eames postage stamps. Could we find our midcentury dream home in our home state?

Champagne Wishes

Surfing through listings one night, Matt discovered a house described as a “true contemporary Usonian design” built in 1959. Outrageously out of our price range, but for us, a must-see; on a rainy afternoon, we sat in the driveway and simply stared.

Clad in Bedford stone and wood siding, this long, gray box with a flat roof was an atomic anomaly amidst stately Colonials. Vacant for the year it had been on the market, it was overgrown and dejected.

Inside, the neglect continued, with filthy gray carpet, faded pink paint and entire walls paneled with mirrors—most alarmingly in the master bedroom. One bathroom sported a peeling dolphin border; Winnie the Pooh battled for bedroom space with Sponge Bob. In the backyard, a dilapidated fence and wild yuccas strangled a slimy pool with broken tiles. The rest of the horrors I’ve blocked from my memory.

Yet the bones were breathtaking. This trilevel showcased walls of exposed Bedford stone (a veneer of Indiana limestone) and wormy cypress. Skylights lined the upper-level hallway, punctuated the master bedroom and illuminated an indoor fountain in the great room. And what a great room: A soaring space with an amazing, double tongue-and-groove Michigan spruce ceiling. It opened to a long dining area with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the back yard.

The home’s centerpiece was a tall, double-sided stone fireplace, which allowed a view through the great room hearth to the lower-level study. Another fireplace opening was in the loft overlooking the great room. In the spirit of true midcentury glamour, the loft contained a built-in seating lounge, and the home’s largest bathroom was a pink-tiled 1950s time machine.



text Laura Ross

photography Mike Sunseri & Matt Ross



One of
McDonald's career goals
was to make well?
designed
homes affordable

Dazed, we left that day with two burning questions: What martian had designed this spacecraft and dropped it in Lexington? And how could we make it ours? Somehow, we found the answers.

Channeling Howard Roark

The martian was an architect named John Randal McDonald. Less well known than his MCM contemporaries, the career of this Yale-trained Wisconsin native spanned more than half a century before his death in 2003. His designs, which included recreational and commercial buildings as well as homes, were known for streamlined simplicity and the use of natural materials. From Wisconsin to Florida and the Virgin Islands, his work entailed commissions for celebrities Perry Como and James Garner.

For us, what stands out about McDonald's architecture is his reputation as a "poor man's Frank Lloyd Wright." One of his career goals was to make well-designed homes affordable for the working class. In the mid-'50s, he





published several designs in *New Homes Guide*, hoping innovative marketing would bring architecture within the average person's reach.

We certainly benefited. Conversations with a University of Kentucky architecture professor revealed that our home's design was purchased from a plan magazine. Neighborhood lore claims the original owners built it because they were looking for the "most far out thing." Unfortunately, they soon decided that A-frames were the most far out thing, and moved on to build one of those. Our house went through several renovations and owners, the most notable a notorious Lexington attorney who, according to a 1970s newspaper article, outfitted the great room with a custom-built velvet sofa and the pool deck with—what else?—Astroturf. The house, he said, was his "year-round fun place."

Dream Weaver

With help from family, friends and professionals when needed, we have worked to bring the fun back (minus

The Rosses are considering painting the house a slightly darker shade of gray or perhaps Cherokee red. Their unique window boxes have been planted with grasses and New Guinea impatiens, which require a watering wand and long hose. The front bed, previously overgrown with yuccas, Siberian cypress and weeds, took 50 bags of mulch and the yucca are still fighting to make a comeback. Matt and Laura are discussing a redesign of this area, as they feel the existing bed is too large and oddly shaped.

Like a Frank Lloyd Wright design, a low entrance hall opens to the soaring great room. Stairs near the green painting take you down to a study, large family room, guest bedroom and half bath, while the steps going up lead to the TV lounge, other bedrooms and baths. The print above the fireplace by Todd White is called "Drink of Her Choice," and the fan is Velo by Modern Fan Co.

In the corner behind the IKEA Tylosand sofa, the wall fountain awaits renovation, one of several projects on the to-do list. Designed to have water trickle down the stairstep stones into a recirculating pond, the jury is out on how best to get it up and running again. A reupholstered "Mr. Chair" designed by George Mulhauser for Plycraft, a vintage arc floor lamp, two Bertoia wire chairs and one of a pair of chrome and glass side tables are among the mid-century pieces the couple has collected. The late-1800s walnut 'press' against the stone wall complements the tone of the original wood ceilings and walls, as well as the arms on the lounge chair; all are set off by the light bamboo flooring, which replaced worn carpeting over a subfloor. An area rug from FLOR called "Be My Neighbor" fully embraces Google Earth suburbia.

Courtesy FLOR



the Astroturf). My aunt and uncle installed gleaming bamboo floors that complement the stone and wood of the main level. White walls now showcase the architecture and our local art collection. The mirrors came down, as did the rotting fences surrounding the pool and yard. The pool has been retiled and repainted, and the yuccas replaced with pavers and four tons of obsidian rock that Matt and I laid ourselves. Electrical and plumbing overhauls were necessary, as was a new coating on the built-up roof.

The fun part was decorating. Family antiques and IKEA basics mix remarkably well with our growing midcentury furniture collection. Many treasures, including the pair of Bertoia chairs in the great room, came from Scout



Antiques, a local shop brimming with MCM finds.

It is still a work in progress. On our to-do list are retiling the indoor fountain, repairing the fantastic clerestory windows, painting the exterior and renovating the kitchen. This last project is controversial: Some are horrified by the 1950s appliances and cabinet pulls resembling '57 Chevy hood emblems. Others are horrified that we might remove them. Torn between function and preservation, we do promise no cherry or granite in this kitchen's future.

The listing ad called our home a "unique opportunity," which was perhaps code for "hopeless misfit." But for us, it truly continues to be an opportunity of, well, atomic proportions. Only other MCM lovers know these are the grandest proportions of all. 🍷

Matt and Laura Ross are attorneys who share their new home with three black cats (for good luck) and one French bulldog (for good laughs). If their renovation efforts allowed time for hobbies, they would enjoy traveling, reading and expanding their midcentury furniture and art collection.

Interested in the rich man's FLW? We recommend Frank Lloyd Wright Mid-Century Modern by Alan Hess, available at atomic-ranch.com. View more of John McDonald's work at pwp2.com/jrm and wrightinwisconsin.org/WrightAndLike/2008.

Resources, page 85

In an intimate loft room overlooking the open-plan space, the couple watches TV and relaxes. The sofa and white media storage unit are from IKEA, while the amoeba-shaped coffee table and red Kartel 4875 chair are flea market finds. The red art glass came from Matt's grandmother, and the chrome and white globe table lamp is vintage as well. Because their chimney sweep told them they have venting issues, the Rosses would like to install a gas fireplace insert down the road, and they are also planning to replace the wood half wall with steel railing.

The master bedroom has one of the home's four skylights over the bed, making it a great place to view the stars or rainstorms. Mirrors have been replaced with drywall and the room painted gray. The hardwood floors were refinished and Crate & Barrel wall sconces selected as reading lamps.

Series 7-esque chairs and a contemporary table share the dining room space with a Heywood-Wakefield cabinet by the window wall and a rustic cupboard that belonged to Laura's grandmother. The rockin' '50s barstools were found at a flea market sans ID.



the Business they call Show

Taking its style cues from 'The Incredibles' and HGTV, a modest house on a hill gets a Hollywood makeover.





*text Michelle Gringeri-Brown
photography Jim Brown*



"I was living in a bungalow at the time, and little did I know that seeing two years of those references was making me absolutely fall in love with midcentury. The minute I saw this house, I was like, Wow! There was potential written all over it—nobody else could see that."

"We pulled up to the house, Gina got out and I sat in the car with Sammy," Steve recounted. "Twenty minutes later, she came down the stairs saying she really liked it. I



The before snapshot of the back slope shows outdoor living was confined to the center courtyard.

The Malewiczses were able to triple their usable space with the changes AFLA Landscape Design suggested to the yard.



“We hired a **color consultant**
who picked the exterior as well as the kitchen colors,
and she nailed it.”



went in and liked it, too; it had a really nice flow and private feeling to it. Gina and I don't see what's there, we see what could be.”

A 90-year-old had lived there most recently, and the interior was swaddled with thick shag carpeting and heavy '60s curtains on all of the windows. The U-shaped house had a center courtyard—a big plus in the couple's estimation—but poor drainage had caused the aggregate pavers to sink and tilt up at various angles—it was a death trap for small children, in Steve's words. “I told Steve we'd have to complete the outdoors if we bought the house because it was so small,” Gina said.

Buy it they did.

As promised, they made renovating the courtyard a top priority. The couple found a landscape designer they loved—Andreas Flache—for the site design and hardscape, and an installation contractor, Abraham Magaña, to implement it in stages as funds allowed. The courtyard and back yard now include a waterfall pond, new cement patios with both 1'x1' and 3'x3' squares, a smooth

stucco seating wall and a terraced hill with steps and a path expanding the usable square footage of the lot. Edibles including blueberries and apple and lemon trees were incorporated into the new plantings, and Lombardy poplars were put in right away so they could get growing to provide privacy from the uphill neighbor.

The front yard was reworked as well. Original block retaining walls and aggregate steps were augmented with additional hardscaping that matches the finishes in the backyard installation and lead to a newly accessible side yard. Decks planned for the back corner of the rear yard and the roof of the garage were designed but unbuilt at the time of our photo shoot.

The exterior was repainted from its “Band-aid-pink-with-brown-trim—yuck!” scheme (Gina's words) to a gray-green with graphite trim and a red door. “We hired a color consultant, Cass Morris, who picked the exterior as well as the kitchen colors,” she continued. “We could not have done that alone, and she nailed it. The graphite trim was her call and we love it!”

Opposite: In a few years, flowering cherry trees will afford some buffering from the street, which has the tight lots and close neighboring houses typical of the Bay Area.



The backyard Lombardy poplars were starting to screen the patio from the uphill house when we shot Sammy and Lucy at play. Like in an Eichler, the central courtyard and fenced yard offer a safe place for play in a semi-urban neighborhood.



They didn't love, love, love the kitchen quite so much.

"I loved the look of the wood cabinets and the copper hardware. I loved the Hotpoint robin's-egg-blue appliances. But living in the space, you couldn't see the beautiful view from the kitchen and the back of it was so dark that we never wanted to be in there," Gina explained about the vintage kitchen they replaced. The wall between the living room and the kitchen gained a new opening, they moved the stove and found a recipient for the original cabinets on Craigslist who came to help Steve carefully remove them.

Gina went to a local cabinet shop and had a quick \$100 layout done, which they liked, but "it seemed if we were going to have them do a modern design, it would up the price tag," she said. "And all of the stock things at Home Depot just felt too country to me. We checked with a bunch of friends about the quality of IKEA, and they were all really happy with it. Even a seven-year-old one still looked great. We were sold."

In addition to the new kitchen, which has upper cabinets just around the refrigerator to maximize the light coming in the windows, the couple put on a new roof and

changed out the non-tempered glass windows, including some louvers that a designer friend begged Gina to retain. The electrical service was upgraded, dry rot remediated and bamboo floors installed in the living room. Instead of Marmoleum in the kitchen, which wasn't in the budget, Morris suggested paint-grade plywood, which was filled, sanded, given a base color then sprinkled with garage epoxy paint chips and sealed with polyurethane.

Ah, the living room.

Being in "The Industry" and media friendly, Gina submitted their living room as a candidate for "Find Your Style," an HGTV show where designer Karen McAloon helps you, well, find your style. The drill seems to be that the homeowners furnish and decorate a room, then McAloon comes in and critiques the arrangement and offers some alternatives, which the homeowners accept (usually) or reject on camera. At the point the Malewiczses sent in scouting shots, the living room was furnished with a projection TV, a cushy brown leather couch and a turquoise vinyl armchair from their last house.

"Karen gives homeowners cutesy names for their style—'bohemian contemporary,' say—and it's supposed to be a surprise on the show. For us, she said, 'You picked



Sammy, Lucy and parents in their redone kitchen, now the heart of the house. Before the TV-show-driven living room makeover, the blue accent wall continued from the kitchen into the main room, which is visible through the new opening behind Gina. The island has a step-down table on one end, an idea Gina got from original Eichlers, she said. The kids can do crafts there without having to clean up before the family dines at the butcher-block island.

The sink and all of the appliances are housed in an L-shaped laminate counter that wraps the room; the cabinets, counters, open shelving and sink are all from IKEA. One regret was the choice of an electric range, a recommendation of an indoor air consultant who advised against gas due to Gina's and Sammy's asthma.

Other than changing out artwork to some Roy Lichtenstein prints over the couch and photos flanking the flat screen TV, the living room looks as it did under the tutelage of “Find Your Style” designer Karen McAloon. Two IKEA cabinets were repurposed to hang on the wall horizontally, and the HGTV carpenter fashioned a new support leg and rehung the doors so they hinged on the side.

For the shopping portion of the show, the Malewiczses chose two red Mollie chairs and the Cast floor lamp from EQ3, along with a Jasper couch from Room & Board. They combined these with a black & white flower-motif area rug and two chunky black leather ottomans they already owned.

McAloon praised their choices, but thought that the existing ottomans didn’t work; she had the show’s crew tempt them with a gray Jackson daybed, also from Room & Board, placed in front of the vista wall. And instead of the smaller rug they chose, how about an abstract one in the same colorway from cb2? Removing the ottomans made room for a coffee table; Gina first swooned over a round Eames molded plywood model, but she and Steve ultimately concluded that the larger rectangular Offi Scando table worked better and matched the IKEA cabinets.

Designer McAloon noted that soot stains and a mineral deposit marred the facade of the fireplace, and that the grout and cement block were slightly different colors. She recommended a light gray exterior concrete stain to mask those flaws while still showing the texture of the original materials. The massed wood in the firebox was her decorative suggestion for the warmer months of the year.



your style when you picked this house. You can’t do anything but midcentury modern,’ ” Gina reported. “She came up with the idea to do a red lacquer wall; she kept saying things like, ‘This is going to be sexy!’ I got really excited, thinking it sounded really hot—particularly to have it done by professionals instead of us experimenting.”

Unfortunately, the painting contractor wasn’t able to implement the red lacquer for some reason, so the Malewiczses ended up with just a semi-gloss wall. “The designer was disappointed but we were under a time constraint,” Gina says. “They had to edit out all of the previous references to ‘lacquer’ before they aired the segment.”

Some of the decorative items the show suggested, like a \$500 vase and \$300 pillow, were sent back as impractical for a household with now two kids under five, but it was overall a good experience, they say. “Personally, I

didn’t want to do it, but it was free stuff,” said Steve, who does compensation for a department store chain. “They were really nice, and Karen was a great designer. She listened to us and steered us into what she thought worked really well, and we agreed with her.”

As we wound up the interview, Steve had a reveal of his own: they were moving to Cincinnati for a new position he’d been offered and the house was now for sale. “We’re going to try to find a midcentury modern home or a 1950s rancher, and go through the same process we did here—again.”

“I had heard ‘good design can change lives’ but I thought it was baloney,” added Gina. “But I tell you, once we moved in, it did change our lives.”

For details on the Malewiczses’ color palette, see Resources, page 85. Site plan and before photo courtesy AFLA Landscape Design.



Elm Grove, Wisconsin



text and photography Jesse Robinson



m

y wife, Laura, and I had a nice life in Chicago. We loved living in the city and swore that under no circumstances would we move to the suburbs; once our son, Julian, was born, that resolve was tested. Between trying to leave the house with a screaming kid strapped in the back of the car, only to realize the driveway was blocked by trucks making deliveries to the restaurant across the alley, and the wandering homeless man yelling obscenities in the park, my wife suggested that we move north to Milwaukee, her birthplace. With great public schools, amazing grandparents and affordable housing, it didn't take long before we started looking for a home.

We must have seen more than 40 houses before finding our current home. I still remember being struck by the Roman brick and simple, unadorned details, which appealed to my sensibility as an architect. By the second step inside the house, I knew that we would buy it.

A 1956 tri-level built in the quiet township of Elm Grove, 12 miles west of downtown Milwaukee, it had an enormous slate fireplace, wood beams and ceilings, and an open floor plan. I looked down to find a gorgeous wood floor, the likes of which I had never seen before—its multi-width oak and darker pegs gave the effect of a whimsical sheet music-like pattern. Laura and I looked at each other like two kids in a candy store.

My wife raced upstairs to the two bedrooms, which featured original Pella awning windows that formed an almost-invisible corner. I ran downstairs to the family room with the same window configuration and sliding glass doors leading to the back patio. I couldn't contain my excitement and thought surely what I was looking at was better than what she was seeing at that moment. I yelled, "Honey, you have to come down here, now!" She was admiring an equally impressive view of lush, unfenced backyards. We high-fived as we passed each other on the stairs, off to view the room

that the other had just seen. We yelled "Oh my God!" in unison, wishing we were in the same room to share the experience together. The house was perfect and in a little over a month, it was ours.

After the purchase, our immediate problem was filling its 2,200 square feet. Our three-flat in Chicago was only 900 square feet, and the furnishings from it barely made a dent in this place. We needed more furniture.

The choice of style was a no-brainer: we love classic designer furniture from the 1950s, and now we finally had the perfect house for it. Unfortunately, our pocket-book would not allow us to fully furnish our home with pieces from Herman Miller, Knoll and other well-known manufacturers.

The inaugural pieces we decided on were the Eames lounge chair and ottoman and a Noguchi coffee table. We were fortunate to get a large discount through my father-in-law, an interior designer, and in the end Laura's parents gave us the Eames pieces as a house-warming gift. Four new IKEA couches and side tables fill out the living room and family room—the latter the

"This place is so you!" is the most-quoted comment we hear.

dedicated spot for watching television.

Lamps were a surprisingly big-ticket item we hadn't anticipated. The house has very few overhead lights, just pendants in the kitchen and dining room. We replaced the awful kitchen chandelier with a simple white globe. In the dining room, instead of our dream Poul Henningsen Artichoke lamp, we bought and assembled the affordable Norm 69 lamp by Simon Karkov. It provides a strikingly similar effect for much less money.

Ambient light is an issue for us. The wood ceilings add richness and warmth, but they absorb a lot of



light. At night the subtle glow is perfect for entertaining, but frustrating when trying to read a book or magazine. A previous owner tried to combat this by hanging six halogen fixtures on suspended low-voltage wires running across the house. Although I'm not a fan of this inexpensive IKEA fixture, I can't imagine living in the house without the light that it provides. Replacing it will be costly, and we've decided to live with it until we can come up with a lighting strategy that is more in concert with the original midcentury design intent.

Fortunately, the house was almost fully original and didn't need much renovation, but we quickly realized the master bedroom closet required a ceiling. The back wall stops at a beam, so there is a 12" opening across the length of the closet that's open to the guest bedroom. This allowed us to hear, word-for-word, what our guests were saying in their room as we lay in bed.

Building a sound barrier proved to be a design opportunity as well. My thought was to add a gypsum board ceiling with sound attenuation blankets inside and fluorescents to light the dark closet. This would give us the

Opposite: The three-sided slate fireplace greeted us as we first stepped inside the house. The IKEA couches, side tables and lamps fill in the large living room, with our Cadillac pieces—the Noguchi coffee table and Eames lounge chair and ottoman—doing the heavy lifting. The awning windows under the fixed panes provide fabulous cross ventilation in the summer.

In the kitchen and breakfast bar area you can see the dreaded but functional IKEA low-voltage track light as well as twin bullet lamp fixtures. We love the unpainted wood on the ceilings, walls and cabinetry but do pay for it with the ambient light level.



Our Norm 69 lamp—you assemble its 69 pieces yourself—stands in for the expensive Artichoke fixture in the dining room.



In this view of the open plan area, the kitchen is to the left of camera and the doorway on the right leads to the master bedroom; up the stairs are two more bedrooms and a bath. Labeled the “play-room” on the original drawings, our two children use the space just that way and it’s Grand Central Station during a party.



chance to add some cove lighting above the new ceiling for the guest bedroom.

Being relatively new to the Milwaukee area, I turned to my in-laws for help in finding a good contractor. They knew the right man for the job: Ellwood, a handyman with an almost mythical family stature. The story goes that he was smart, loved opera and was a lawyer by trade, but preferred working with his hands. He could fix everything, including the 1950s American pickup truck he drove. Sometimes it took more than a year to receive a bill after a job—money didn’t seem to

be something he particularly cared about.

Ellwood was tall and thin, with a mysterious grin and hexagonal glasses. His demeanor and dress were less that of a handyman and more of a college professor: he wore pleated cotton pants, a plaid oxford shirt and a cardigan. He showed a great appreciation for the house and seemed more interested in exploring and asking questions than about the actual job.

In addition to the ceiling in the closet and the three T5 2,400K fluorescent fixtures that create a warm glow behind the bedroom beam, Ellwood brought power to a kitchen cabinet and installed a fixture over the dark stovetop. While installing one of the fixtures, he noticed that it was damaged; instead of our returning it, he took it home and came back the next day with it working. I imagined Ellwood under a single beam of light at his workbench, spectacles perched upon his head, soldering our fixture with a Puccini opera playing on his "hi-fi" in the background.

Living in this house through the four seasons has giving us an even better appreciation of its qualities. In the summer, we open the awning windows and centrally located skylights, marveling at the natural cooling breezes. When we host Christmas, we build a roaring fire in the massive three-sided fireplace, which can be seen from the living room, dining room and kitchen chopping block—a picture-perfect scene.

In fact, our daughter, Nola, was born in the living room and had her first exam on the Eames ottoman. "This place is so you!" is the most-quoted comment we hear when a new friend or acquaintance walks into the house for the first time. Indeed, the home has become an extension of our family and the backdrop of our lives. 📷

Jesse Robinson is an architect with a degree from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Laura Robinson is a licensed aesthetician with a fine art degree in painting from the School of Art Institute of Chicago.



ranchdressing

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

q: I was so happy to buy my 1960s sectional at an estate sale—until I discovered that my great deal was not so great since it will cost me about \$2,000 to have it reupholstered. Even though the frame and cushions are in good shape, the faux velvet, floral blue/brown fabric that the original owners had it redone with in the early '70s is not something I want to keep.



Do you know of any trade schools that have an upholstery course? I don't want to take the class, I want to find a student who can do the work. Either the couch gets reupholstered in a simple, solid, MCM-type fabric or it gets hauled off to the thrift store; I

can't stand to look at the floral pattern much longer!

Coletta Makiling

a: *Vintage pieces often require a significant investment, something we have become unused to. AR has a lounge chair that required a \$1,000 leather kit, and readers often mention having larger pieces in storage for years before springing for upholstery. IMO, we as a consumer nation have grown accustomed to simply discarding that inexpensive chair when the cushions break down or the upholstery becomes stained, and buying another mass-produced new one. Older pieces with sturdy frames like yours might be recovered three or four times in their life cycle; if your cushions are still sound as you say, that's a big help for your budget.*

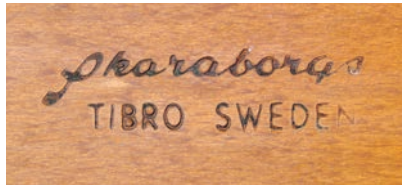
q: I bought this beautiful desk at an auction in Wheaton, Ill., and I'm wondering if you can help me identify the designer or maker. I have searched all over the Internet, but have not found anything similar. The writing surface slides forward to reveal the hidden storage cubbies. I know it was made in Sweden because of the stamp in the side of the drawer.

Thanks in advance for any help!

Jennifer Diaz

a: *Denmark native Claus Mercer, whose home was on the cover of Fall 2009, sent this reply: "The stamp means 'town of Skaraborg, county of Tibro and country of Sweden'—very little to identify the maker. A lot of smaller furniture makers used the name of their town as a generic label and made items similar to well-known designer pieces.*

"My grandfather was the president of our local carpenter/cabinetmakers' co-op when I was a child, and my parents received a mahogany dining room set that everybody for the past 50 years thought to be a Wegner test design. It was actually done by a small furniture maker in very limited numbers. The 'HW' stamp under



the seat turned out to really be 'MH' for Hedensted Moebler Snekeri, the local furniture maker in Hedensted."

q: My husband bought this "Jetsons chair" at our local Goodwill for \$19.99. The chair is not labeled, but it has bent plywood arms, which is my favorite part. Can you help us with some information?

Another item my husband brought home is this hanging light. He is a contractor, and an older couple was getting rid of it, so they let him have it. The top and bottom are frosted glass and the frame is woven metal. It originally came with an oval pulley to raise and lower it, but the pulley system could not be brought back to life. The lamp also has no marks but I love it!

Rena Wheatley



a wonderful and striking fixture. While I can't identify this particular design, these sorts of folded-metal

fixtures seem to be an early- to mid-1960s phenomenon. Prescolite offered a very similar pendant in a series of probably imported fixtures in 1962. Howard Miller

was selling Metalites by George Nelson Associates in 1964, and Lightolier also worked in the folded-metal technique; no doubt many others did as well. The distinctive pull-down handle, reminiscent of some on Emerson-Imperial fixtures, is an important detail that should ring a bell for somebody out there. Pull-downs, with their mid-cord pulley capsules, peaked in popularity between 1955 and 1965. Most fixtures of the period, if marked, would have a decal or sticker in the canopy, so that's always the first place to look. This light may well have been imported from Scandinavia."

Perhaps a reader can add to our comments on the lounge chair, which is similar to the Mr. (or MR) Chair in the Rosses' home on page 52. Designed by George Mulhauser for Plycraft, it has more finessed, graceful lines in both the arms and the cushion than your reupholstered bargain chair, which probably dates from the '60s. Plycraft made a rather notorious Eames lounge chair knockoff, some of which are mislabeled "Mr. Chair" online, but if you sift through your search engine results, you'll notice both Plycraft models have different bases than the one on your chair. Twenty bucks is a great price for a chair you love and find comfortable.



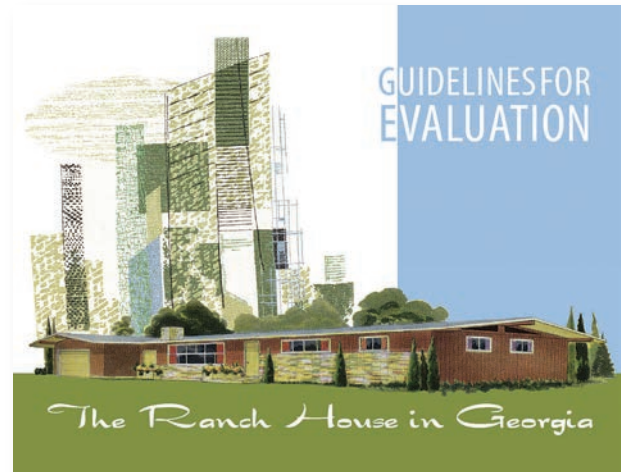
Need a renovation resource or wondering if that flea market find is anything? Send your questions and photos to editor@atomic-ranch.com and we'll run them past our experts.

nick of time

Georgia

the historic preservation division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (which goes by the acronym GASHPO) has embraced postwar preservation in a big way. A ranch house, a modernist postwar home and two mid-century neighborhoods were among the successful nominations to the National Register in 2009–10.

"Our motivation came from watching ranch houses being lost at alarming rates, sometimes wholesale as entire subdivisions were bought out for redevelopment, sometimes piecemeal through highway widening and other developments, sometimes incrementally through individual tear-downs," Richard Cloues, the deputy state historic preserva-



tion officer says. "Further motivation came from the realization that the ranch house is found in every community and every corner of Georgia; no other historic house has this kind of presence in our state."

Among the nominees was the Collier Heights Historic District, a suburban tract developed between 1941 and 1979, which targeted Atlanta's middle- and upper-class blacks. There are 1,700 homes, which include ranches,



Collier Heights Historic District





split-levels and what GASHPO calls midcentury “American Small Houses”—known as Cape Cods, Colonial Revivals and cottages elsewhere.

The once-segregated neighborhood’s midcentury architecture remains exceptionally intact. Most homes have attached carports or garages and are wood framed with brick veneer, a recurring vernacular theme. The National Trust nomination was prepared by graduate students in the Heritage Preservation Program at Georgia State, and includes both modest and large, rambling homes.

The Cecil and Hermione Alexander House, also in Atlanta, joined the Register in 2010. A striking, round brick home with both flat and folded-plate roofs, it dates from 1957 and was pretty avant-garde in its day. Cecil Alexander, a Yale and



Cecil and Hermione Alexander House



Fairway Oaks-Greenview



Harvard-trained architect who studied under Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, built the home for his family.

In the very center is a slate-floored courtyard with an accordion roof, triangular clerestories and a round skylight. Around it are the pie-shaped kitchen, bedrooms, playroom and entry hall; the north-facing living and dining rooms have walls of glass looking onto the wooded lot. The Georgia State grad students, who also prepared this nomination, made the case that the home was the work of a master architect and is among the most important examples of modern architecture in Georgia.

The Fairway Oaks-Greenview neighborhoods in Savannah also got the national nod. Notable for its use of

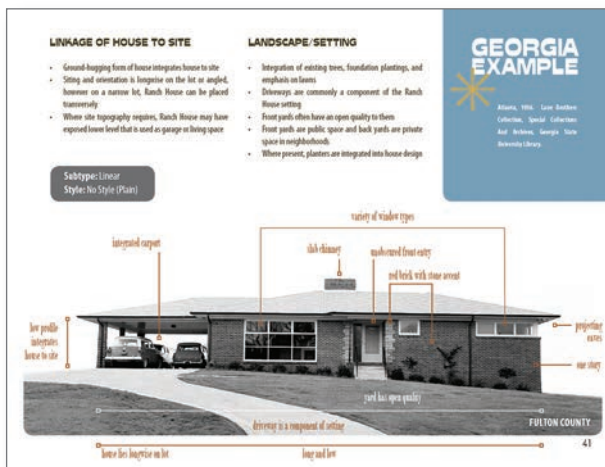
curvilinear streets with cul-de-sacs, its country-club lifestyle was targeted at upper-middle-class whites. Two thirds of the homes are ranches, many of which include salvaged Savannah gray brick, a historic local material used in rebuilding the city after the fire of 1820.

The Fairway Oaks tract was developed between 1950 and '57, while Greenview followed in 1956 through the '60s. Greenview is smaller—39 lots to Fairway Oaks' 175—and its homes are larger and more architecturally elaborate, with designs by Carl Helfrich Jr., John LeBey and Juan Bertoto, as well as Sarasota School disciple Mark Hampton.

The fourth successful nomination is the Joseph and Mary



Joseph and Mary Jane League House



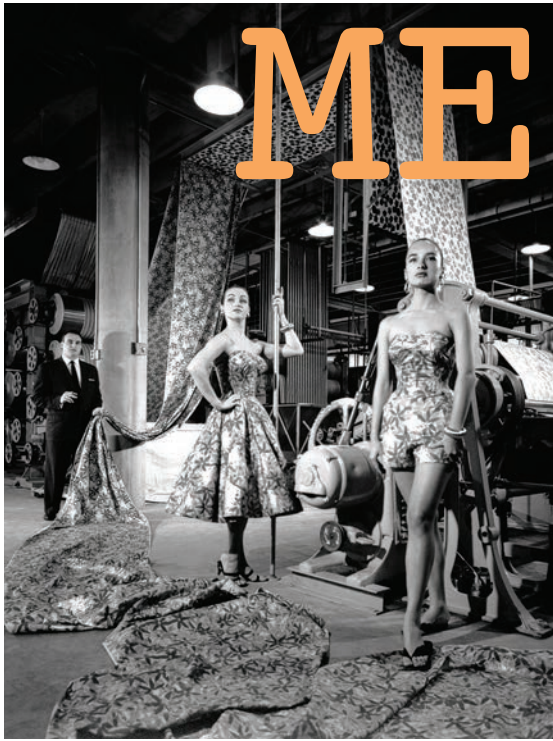
Jane League House, the first individual Georgia ranch to be listed. The Leagues still reside in their Macon home, an H-shaped design with integrated patios and walls of glass. Built in 1950, it was featured in national architecture publications, due in part to having been designed by a woman, Jean League Newton. Newton trained under Gropius at Harvard in the mid-'40s and designed the house for her brother and sister-in-law.

The front of the H consists of the entry, living room, carport and a front porch; four bedrooms are in the back wing. The connector between the two contains the dining area, kitchen, bath and utility room. Newton oversaw a bedroom addition in 1962 and a kitchen remodel in 1974.

GASHPO, in concert with three other Georgia groups, has also produced stunningly thorough guidelines to their ranch house archetypes. While some materials and styles are regional, it offers a wealth of examples for homeowners wanting to know more about what makes a ranch a ranch, as well as organizers who're grappling with the minutiae of evaluating a home or district for local, state or national designation. The 137-page document is 31M, but worth the download time.

Photos by James R. Lockhart, Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources; style guidelines at gashpo.org/content/displaycontent.asp?txtDocument=434

Midcentury MELTING POT



Manufacturing diversity in postwar Hawaii

text Bromley Davenport

photography courtesy Arab American National Museum

Above: Alfred Shaheen and two Hawaiian models in the factory with equipment he designed himself. Opposite: Shaheen marketed his clothing to tourists at lunch-hour fashion shows at island hotels.



Alfred Shaheen may be a familiar name if you collect vintage Hawaiian shirts, grew up on Oahu or are a diehard Elvis fan. But for the rest of us, he's the man who put aloha wear on the map.

When Shaheen returned from World War II service, he expanded the family garment business to include design, manufacturing and retailing. Instead of importing fabric from the mainland like everyone else, he founded Surf 'n Sand Hand Prints in a Quonset hut on the outskirts of Honolulu. From four seamstresses working out of his family's home in 1948 to producing 60,000 yards of fabric monthly by 1952 and ultimately building a \$8 million factory and showroom complex four years later, Shaheen's success was impressive.

What came to be known as his "City of Craftsmen" included artists, printers, silk screeners, seamstresses, finishers and models of every extraction—Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese and more. As a Lebanese American, Shaheen embraced multiculturalism and found inspiration in the native designs of the South Pacific, Asia and Hawaii. Shaheen's of Honolulu, Kilani and Burma Gold Hand Prints were among his labels, and he created Hawaiian shirts, sarongs and sundresses for sale far



beyond the islands for some 40 years.

The opening Elvis reference was to the Shaheen shirt the singer wore on the album cover of “Blue Hawaii”; Tom Selleck wore one on “Magnum P.I.” as did Jack Lord on “Hawaii Five-0.” Shaheen died in 2008, but his daughter, Camille Shaheen-Tunberg, maintains a website, alfredshaheen.com, which has images, more history and links to current products that employ his designs, including melamine dishes, indoor and outdoor fabrics, and Seascape lamps.

Shaheen-Tunberg began collecting her father’s wares in the ‘90s, focusing on women’s clothing, as even then prices for men’s Hawaiian shirts were astronomical—a large size rayon shirt in a rare print and color way, in unfaded, mint condition, might bring as much as \$5,000 today. “Collectors love to wear their vintage clothing,” she says, “and since people are much larger today, a size 28” waist in a woman’s dress is the Holy Grail. When I started collecting, sarongs and sundresses were \$35 to \$40; today you’ll pay up to \$700 or \$800.”

If you’re in the Michigan area, “Hawaii’s Alfred Shaheen: Fabric to Fashion,” a retrospective exhibition of his work, runs through March 13, 2011, at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn; details are at arabamericanmuseum.org or 313.582.2266. [🔗](#)



atomic events

December 4–5 San Francisco

Deco the Halls: Art Deco and Modernism Sale

A new producer is at the helm of this midcentury, deco, pop and modern show at the Concourse Exhibition Center, 8th and Brannan streets. artdecosale.com

Through January 9 San Angelo, Texas

Good Design: Stories from Herman Miller

This exhibition at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts showcases the creative process behind iconic furnishings such as the Nelson Marshmallow Sofa and the Eames LCW through drawings, prototypes, photographs and oral histories. samfa.org

January 29–May 29 Palm Springs

Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler

Donald Wexler's career included homes, condos, banks, schools and office parks built from the late '40s through the '70s. The exhibition at the Palm Springs Art Museum presents drawings, photographs and models, including a full-scale sectional steel model of his Palm Springs prefab steel houses. psmuseum.org

February 17–27 Palm Springs

Modernism Week

The festivities include home and neighborhood tours, lectures, films, parties and special exhibits. Scheduled for 2011 are lectures by Karim Rashid, Mayer Rus and Charles Phoenix, tours of Frey House II and Sinatra's Twin Palms Estate, a travel trailer show, a Braniff Airlines uniform exhibition and a film on Lucienne and Robin Day. Check details at modernismweek.com.

February 18–21 Palm Springs

Palm Springs Modernism Show & Sale

The four-day show at the Palm Springs Convention Center features 80 dealers in modernist furniture, collectibles and artwork. Visit palmspringsmodernism.com for the latest updates.

February 26–27 Cincinnati

20th Century Cincinnati

Queen City Shows returns to the Sharonville Convention Center for their annual midcentury event. Fifty dealers specializing in furnishings, lighting, art, textiles, pottery, art glass and vintage clothing from "investment quality to fun and funky." Show hours are 11:00–5:00, with a preview on Saturday; a special exhibit will feature vintage signs from Cincinnati's Sign Museum. 20thcenturycincinnati.com

Through March 13 Dearborn, Mich.

Hawaii's Alfred Shaheen: Fabric to Fashion

The career of the man who helped move Hawaiian shirts from vacation souvenir to fashion status is celebrated in an exhibition at the Arab American National Museum. Shaheen's early garments are highly collectible (see "Midcentury Melting Pot," page 82), and the show includes examples of textiles and aloha wear, along with archival photos and advertising. arabamericanmuseum.org

March 19 Decatur, Ga.

Decatur Old House Fair

The care and feeding of postwar ranches is the topic of this event, which includes workshops, lectures and home furnishings. decaturoldhousefair.com

April 8–10 Dallas

Dallas Design Fair/Art Fair

A MCM building near the Dallas Museum of Art and the Nasher Sculpture Center is the site for the first annual design fair featuring furniture, lighting and decorative arts dealers in conjunction with the third Dallas fine art fair. Go to dallasartfair.com.

April 22–24 Southfield, Mich.

The Michigan Modernism Exposition

Twentieth-century design exposition and sale with 50 exhibitors at the Southfield Municipal Complex; michiganmodernism.com.

resources

hot springs tonight, pp. 18–27

Breakfast room table:

tommyfarrellcustomfurniture.com ✕ Paintings: Gregg Coker, Craighead Green Gallery, craigheadgreen.com

martini style in a mint julep state, pp. 48–53

Vintage furnishings: Scout Antiques & More, Lexington, Ky., 859.288.5200

the business they call show, pp. 56–65

Landscape: Andreas Flache, AFLA Landscape Design, Berkeley, aflalandscape.com ✕ Abraham Magaña, A. Magaña Landscape, Antioch, Calif., 925.706.7333, abrahammagana@sbcglobal.net

✕ Color consultant: Cass Morris, cassmorris.com

✕ Furnishings: Jackson daybed and Jasper couch, roomandboard.com ✕ Mollie chair and Cast floor lamp, eq3.com ✕ Coffee table, OFFI Scando, designpublic.com ✕ White side table, City Slicker, cb2.com ✕ Zephyr area rug, cb2.com ✕ Benjamin Moore paint colors: Front exterior, Storm Cloud Gray #2140-40 ✕ Retaining walls, Sharkskin #2139-30 ✕ Trim and interior beams, Graphite #1603 ✕ Front door, Heritage Red #E-25 ✕ Rear courtyard walls, Camouflage #2143-40 ✕ Interior white walls, Super White #I-02 in Regal matte with ceramic fibers ✕ Red living room wall, Caliente AF-290 ✕ Blue kitchen wall, #1666 ✕ Orange kitchen wall, Tropical Orange #2170-20 ✕ Epoxy paint chips: various sites such as carguygarage.com/cochforepgaf.html

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