

atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS



SUMMER 2011



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New cork floors and furnishings from Modernica, Room & Board and Baker fill the living room of a 1953 Cincinnati ranch. Located in Amberley Village, the brick home has fresh finishes courtesy of its fourth owners, but they've chosen to retain the vintage baths and kitchen. MechoShades on the original metal windows and George on the Split Rail daybed suit the room to a T. Story page 36.

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meanwhile... back at the ranch



here's probably not a lot of crossover between readers of *Hot Rod* and Atomic Ranch, but a recent series of articles (*Hot Rod*, January and February 2011) about my former boss at the photographic department of Petersen Publishing reminded me of his insights about midcentury life. I worked for Bob D'Olivo for about 17 years, but it was after he retired and I was gathering background about the midcentury era that I sat down with him to discuss what it was like to be a returning GI and a postwar homeowner in Southern California.

Bob enlisted when he was just 17 years old and served as a combat aircrewman on Dauntless bombers (similar to the plane George H.W. Bush flew) in the Navy, a position of some status and responsibility. After the war there was little need for those skills, but the surprise was that Seabees (short for Construction Battalions) and ditch diggers all readily found work in the building boom. "With lots of overtime they

made a tremendous amount of money while the rest of us were in the 52/20 club," Bob told me. (That's \$20 in unemployment for 52 weeks.)

As you may have read in our pages previously, the housing industry was first devastated by the Great Depression, then wartime shortages further slowed any growth. In 1944 annual housing starts were at 114,000; one year after the war they jumped to one million and by 1950 they had reached 1,700,000. Bob was part of the 13 million people returning from service, in addition to the countless families yearning for their very own homes after living so long doubled up with relatives.

Houses went up fast all over the country, but that doesn't mean they were shoddily built—this was a work force that took pride in their labor and were certain of their skills. Builders like William Levitt, Joseph Eichler, Henry Doelger, Hamilton Crawford, Cliff May and many others responded to farsighted government programs and local demand to put up the homes

we covet today. I'll grant you that not every one was an architectural gem, but they were built by our fathers and grandfathers, doing their very best work.

This last summer I photographed the 1955 ranch of Jennie and Johnney Hall for our upcoming book. Located in the Wedgewood development of Tulsa, it was part of the 1956 Parade of Homes and has been lovingly restored by the Halls. For design, features and quality of materials, you'd be hard pressed to find a nicer home; they built them to last in those days.

While aviators may have gotten more of the glory, in this case the race went to the tortoise.

Jim Brown, Publisher



June 2010, Tulsa: On location with Johnney and Jennie Hall in the dining room of their 1955 home.

modernwisdom

The article by Allen Cox ("Parking, Breezeway, Window, Wall," Winter 2010) has a gross error that I hope you will correct in the next issue. Mr. Cox has a paragraph on me as the architect for the "House of Tomorrow" in the Las Palmas area of Palm Springs. That is correct. What is incorrect is that "the Krisels made it their personal residence." Here is the correct story on the house:

In the late 1950s and early '60s I was the architect that designed about 90 percent of the Alexander houses in Palm Springs. Bob Alexander wanted a very modern custom home for himself, his wife, Helene, and daughter. He told me what his needs were for design purposes, but said that if Helene were to be involved it would not be a "modern." So we decided that my design for the house would be known as the House of Tomorrow, to be used by the Alexander Construction Company for publicity purposes and to promote the tract houses they were building.

When it was completed, Bob took Helene to see the house. She loved it and asked Bob why they as a family could not have a house just like this one. Bob told Helene that if she really liked this house, she could have it. She accepted and they moved in. The house was featured in *Look* magazine as the Alexander residence showing Bob and Helene using the home. They lived there until their tragic deaths in a private plane accident in Palm Springs in 1965. Elvis Presley did honeymoon there on a rental basis and then purchased it. After Elvis died, the house was sold to the present owner, who now uses it as a tourist attraction. The end of the story is that my wife and I never made it our personal residence.

I am an avid reader of *Atomic Ranch* and truly appreciate your efforts in support of midcentury modern architecture as done by me and others of that era. I am now 86 years old and am enjoying all of the current interest and acceptance of my architectural language done over 50 years ago. Thank you for your past recognition of my work; however, I want to keep the record straight about the facts.

William Krisel, A.I.A.,
architect and landscape architect

Let me first say mea culpa, in that that detail was

added to Allen Cox's piece during the editing process. It seemed to be a nice personal detail that I found online, but alas, proves untrue. Kind of like the "fact" that architect Paul R. Williams designed the iconic theme restaurant at LAX, a misstatement that you'll find in various articles online and off; our apologies for our part in perpetuating the telephone game.

—ar editor

✳ I discovered your magazine only this past holiday season while browsing with an architecture-obsessed friend at a great magazine shop in Vancouver, Canada. I pointed *Atomic Ranch* out to her and we were so impressed that we each purchased copies of your 2010 Winter issue.

The Hot Springs, Ark., home was a real gem. In response to Bob and Susan Oakes' question about painting Roman brick, I prefer unpainted, although their home looks great either way.

Regarding Tuula Perrault's comments about Vancouver not having any great midcentury modern homes, I say Vancouver has tons of great MCM homes. In fact, West Coast modernism flourished here and



West Vancouver has whole subdivisions of fantastic homes. The problem is that metro Vancouver has some of the highest real estate prices in North America, and sadly it is difficult to find midcentury homes in good neighborhoods for under a million dollars.

I live in Abbotsford, about an hour from downtown Vancouver, and here MCM homes can still be had for a fraction of Vancouver prices. I live in a circa 1960

morewisdom

reverse-plan rancher with stunning views in an old area with mature trees. In the photo of my living room, notice the floor to ceiling Roman brick fireplace.

Thanks for the great magazine.

Kevin Yung

* For Bob and Susan Oakes: Nice house; you changed the T shape from white to teak. Have you considered painting the separation between the windows and the roof eaves a dark brown or teak/bronze color? It may make the house look larger and more elegant.

It also seems you have done some landscaping since the original picture. This white wall is a great spot for some fun midcentury graphic plants or bushes. Also, the door could be a strong contrast color, going with the teak, red or rust scheme and drawing attention to your entrance.

Joan Sisserian

Central Pennsylvania

* The Miller House, designed by Eero Saarinen, was donated to the Indianapolis Museum of Art and will be open to the public for tours beginning in May. Alexander Girard designed the interior, and the grounds were landscaped by Dan Kiley. It would make a good feature article for Atomic Ranch.

Dennis Dell

We followed up on Dennis' tip and are discussing a feature on the Columbus, Ind., house. Tour information is available in our Events listings on page 76.

—ar editor

* Thought you might like to know about this new website mentioned in my Michigan History magazine: michiganmodern.org.

Betsy Calhoun

Livonia, Mich.

* Your article about the Georgia historic preservation office registering neighborhoods because they are losing so many good MCM houses in Atlanta hit home to us. We owned three MCMs in Atlanta, and each was torn down after we sold.



The most disheartening was the last, a 1950 Alexander and Rothschild (pictured) that we promised the sellers we would not tear down. But a year later, we had to move out of state and the next buyer was a developer who tore it down to build a McMansion. Then, the economy tanked and it still sits as a vacant lot today. Note that the basement level was all an open carport originally, so that the house appeared to cantilever off the hill.

Phil G.D. Schaefer

Indianapolis, Ind.

* Have you considered making back issues available on CD? I love your magazine, but have only recently begun collecting the issues (as a result of a gift subscription). I would love to keep an archive of all your magazines for future reference—for inspiration when I buy my own mid-mod house—but many of your back issues are no longer available. Do you plan to make that possible anytime in the future?

Jerry Roberson

Washington, D.C.

* Are back issues available on CD? The information contained in them is something that we'd like to be able to pore over. I have become accustomed to being able to look at my favorite publications in digital form, so I naturally thought AR would have it as well.

The book is great, but I like the full content of the magazine. The ads and letters are a huge part of it and represent a wealth of information for folks (clients as well) to explore when shopping for or planning their own project. What about making the PDFs available for

purchase on your website? I hope you'll consider something that allows midcentury fans to appreciate and use AR for the great resource it is!

Luke Deasy

Tujunga, Calif.

We address this periodically in Modern Wisdom; the short answer is we have a really small staff compared to some other magazines and, while we'd love to offer digital editions and archived back issues, they take a back seat to putting out the ink-and-paper version.

We're looking again at the current options (browser-based vs. downloadable files, digital subscriptions vs. digitizing back issues, the feasibility of an iPad or Android developer) and costs (for us and readers). If you care to weigh in, join the thread on the AR Facebook group page or drop an email to editor@atomic-ranch.com.

—ar editor

* As an avid reader for the past few years, I thought I would write you about our custom-built 1957 ranch. After my father passed away in 2005 we decided to renovate his home. My dad had purchased it in 1991



from the original owner, but it wasn't until I contacted Dave LeBlanc, who writes the "Architourist" column for the *Globe & Mail* newspaper in Toronto, that we even knew that we owned a "ranch."

This home is very unique to this area. We live across the border from Port Huron, Mich., in a true ranch: 2,550 square feet, all on one level, in a U-shaped

design with a flagstone patio in the U and an attached garage. We probably did some renos we might not have done now; however, the home was updated with many original features still intact.

I would be interested in contacting MCM owners in Michigan. I have noticed lots of atomic ranches in our travels around the Flint and Detroit suburbs.

Mike Sellon

Samia, Ontario

Dave LeBlanc wrote about the Don Mills neighborhood of Toronto back in Summer 2005. We encourage readers like Mike to join the AR Facebook group to chat about regional MCM on both sides of the border.

—ar editor

* Have you guys ever done an article on any of the Ju-Nel homes in Dallas? You probably know about them, but if not, here is their website to check out: ju-nelhomes.com.



I bought one around this time last year and have fallen in love with it and all that is midcentury modern; it's very addicting. Would love to see something on these homes, but I'm sure you get this kind of request all the time. I've attached a picture just in case you need a reason to come to Dallas and give me some ideas. Love the magazine; keep up the good work, guys and girls.

Richard Montgomery

*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 Speckman House:

if

the Speckman House in Saint Paul is a midcentury diamond in the rough, then the landscape used to be, quite literally, the rough. “There was no clarity to the front yard,” says Shane Coen, the landscape architect whose firm transformed the grounds in 2007. “Nothing about it had anything to do with the architecture. You couldn’t even see the house.”

The home sits at the end of a long driveway in a strange little un-gridded, sidewalk-free corner of Minnesota’s capital city. When Coen+Partners came to the project, the front yard was a mass of overgrown shrubs and trees. Behind the house, a steep slope was choked with invasive species and totally unusable. “It just sloped away to never-never land,” remembers Coen.

The house is named for architect James Speckman, who was an early proponent of so-called California Modernism in Minnesota. It was completed in 1956—one of the earliest examples of its type in the state—and features an open main-level floor plan, floor-to-ceiling windows constituting the entire front and rear facades, and wide overhanging eaves.

Coen removed just about everything from the property, rebuilt the back yard as a series of terraces and used rigid geometry to better reflect the home’s interior layout. The Speckman landscape’s most prominent feature is a 105’ long Cor-Ten steel wall. It frames views out across the terraces and the



text Adam Regn Arvidson

photography Paul Crosby



Simply
Spectacular



perfectly manicured front lawn. Between the house and the wall is a bosque of crabapples, which is mirrored by another of white birch in the front yard. A low concrete wall runs parallel to the windows in the front, enclosing a small courtyard, and other concrete walls support the terraces in the back.

True to its modern pedigree, the house deliberately tries to bring the landscape into the living room, something that works quite well in California but comes with a few challenges in Minnesota. The free flow between indoors and out through open walls is only possible here during a month or two in spring and fall when temperatures are moderate—and that's when the bugs can be at their worst. So Coen had to make the connection visually rather than physically, and a key aspect of this is the elevations of the outdoor terraces.

The uppermost terrace, clad in custom, bright white concrete pavers with embedded recycled glass (which looks, appropriately, a bit like snow in

Seen from two vantages, an unoriginal screen porch was removed next to the house. In its place is the bosque of crabapple trees, three rows of three just like the birches in the front yard, with crushed aggregate underfoot that extends the mass of the house into the landscape.





The geometry of the home's floor plan extends into the landscape through the use of straight pathways, bold walls and rectangular terraces and patios. "When people see the landscape, besides loving it, they think it was original to the home," says owner John Soranno.

summer), is at the same elevation as the living room floor. This allows the eye to continue across a consistent ground-plane, effectively extending the interior floor out beyond the glass and the eaves. The owner, John Soranno, founder of a well-loved Minnesota chain of Neapolitan-style pizza joints, feels this terrace is the crux of the design. "Everyone who has seen that transition," he says, "comments on how it completes the house."

The middle terrace, sitting perhaps five feet lower, is home to a rectangular swimming pool, surrounded by the same white pavers. The lowest level is a narrow strip of lawn.

Off to the side, perched between the upper and lower terraces, is a stately oak; and at the very end of the Cor-Ten wall, where it reaches its highest point, is another group of smaller oaks. All of these trees were there before the redesign but were hidden in the overgrown scrub. Now they are landmarks, accentuating the landscape when Soranno is actually outside, or when he's looking out on the winter landscape from the comfort of the living room.

This is a high-end project. Though Coen and Soranno won't divulge actual construction costs, suffice it to say that a pool, a 105' steel wall, and exten-



- | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| A | lawn | K | barberry gardens/iconic white oak |
| B | whitespire birch bosque | L | lower ipe pool deck |
| C | concrete unit paver walks/terraces | M | juniper slope |
| D | concrete wall | N | woodland prairie restoration |
| E | driveway | O | northern pin oak bosque |
| F | hetz columnar juniper hedge | P | lower lawn |
| G | concrete wall | Q | glass tile clad pool |
| H | 105' cor-ten wall | R | apple espalier |
| I | east garden/crushed aggregate | S | stainless steel spa/ipe deck |
| J | golden raindrops malus bosque | T | upper terrace/entertaining |





sive terracing doesn't fit everyone's budget. There are principles here, though, that any owner of a modern hidden gem can use.

Coen, in many of his projects, tends to subtract rather than add. He pares down a landscape to its essence, which, in many ways, was exactly what midcentury architects were doing with their houses. Rather than try to find the perfect grouping and species of plants, modern owners might be better served by focusing on the geometry of the site and the house.

Stairways can break the transition between indoors and out that modern designers strove for. At the Speckman House, though there are stairs between the outdoor terraces, there is not even a single step between the uppermost terrace and the interior of the home.

And then there are the design details, which can be incorporated into any budget. Coen made sure the pool filtration intakes were along the house-side of the water, so they're invisible from the upper terrace and living room (placed on the opposite side, they would stare back at the house and mar the view).

Purple-hued barberry is planted en masse next to the driveway retaining wall and on the edge of the upper terrace overlooking the pool, and a mature white oak stands near the Cor-Ten wall. Extensive lighting, both inside and out, plays a large role in the project.



By clearing away
the rough,
the designers exposed
a modern jewel.



In this winter view, the linearity and transparency of the site plan—and the home—is amplified. Columnar junipers, shown on right, wrapped in burlap for the winter, will eventually form privacy hedges on both sides of the lot.



The long Cor-Ten wall has no exposed hardware, a tricky detail that ensures a smooth, monolithic plane and references the long glass and wood lines of the house. For his efforts, Coen has received both national and state awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Coen+Partners took a no-holds-barred approach to the Speckman House's existing landscape, which had been conglomerated over time by previous owners hoping to fix the mistakes of previous owners. By clearing away the rough—the scraggly evergreens, the invasive buckthorn and the haphazardly pruned shrub beds—the designers exposed a modern jewel. That's landscape Modernism that anyone could consider. ✿

Adam Regn Arvidson is a landscape architect and freelance writer in Minneapolis. He is founder of Treeline, a design and writing consultancy at treeline.biz. Coen+Partners has offices in Minneapolis and New York City; enjoy their work at coenpartners.com.

nick of time

Paul R. Williams

if you know the name 'Paul R. Williams,' it's likely for his 1930s to '50s homes for the rich and famous—Frank Sinatra, Dave Chasen, Tyrone Power and others. Or you might be thinking of Paul Williams, the blond singer-songwriter of such hits as “Rainy Days and Mondays” and Kermit the Frog’s “Rainbow Connection.”

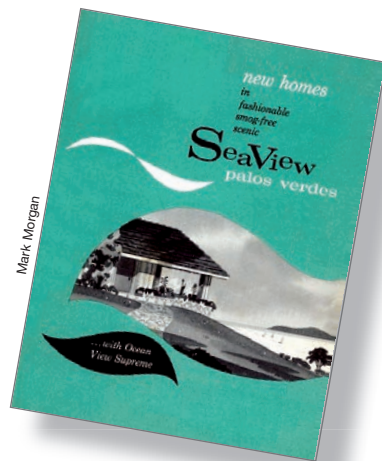
But this Williams is the respected architect who designed St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, the La Concha Motel and the Guardian Angel Cathedral in Las Vegas, along with schools, airports, automobile showrooms, courthouses and other commercial buildings. Less well known are the midcentury tracts and custom homes for mere mor-

tals that helped fuel his 60-year career. The Paul R. Williams Project, a joint venture of the University of Memphis and the Memphis chapter of the American Institute of Architects, is working to publicize his achievements to a wider audience.

Orphaned at age 4, Williams pursued an architecture degree when the profession was almost exclusively white, becoming the first documented African American member of the AIA in 1923. By the time he retired 50 years later, he had designed more than 3,000 buildings, including Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz’s 4,400-square-foot ranch house in Palm Springs. Williams also partnered with A. Quincy Jones on modernist designs for the desert town’s Tennis Club and Town & Country Center, but his more modest homes are equally noteworthy.



Jim Brown (2)



The middle school in Marina del Ray, Calif., is a Williams design from 1960. Thanks to research by the school's staff, it was recently repainted in period-appropriate colors and is under consideration for National Register nomination. Bottom and opposite: SeaView homes in Rancho Palos Verdes.

SeaView

"Williams had the ability to utilize and synthesize his experience and skill from the designs of his larger noted houses for the Hollywood elite to the smaller, efficient modernist houses of the postwar era," comments Brad Grant, an associate dean and professor at Howard University. "He seemed to have hundreds of ideas for small, modern tract home designs and published pattern books during the mid-'40s. He felt that beautiful, integrated neighborhoods with beautiful, affordable homes utilizing the latest technology is how we should live, and designed the suburban homes to that utopian idea."

Targeted to veterans who qualified for government-backed loans, the 1960 SeaView tract in the hills of Southern



Courtesy of University of Memphis and Chris Fitzgerald, 2010





Jim Brown (3)

California's Rancho Palos Verdes has million dollar ocean views. The 190-unit development utilized nine different floor plans and 41 exterior treatments, lending plenty of variety to the ranches, which originally sold for \$34,000 to \$43,700.

Mark Morgan, a resident since 1999, lives in a Monte Carlo model with a flat roof, decorative block wall and large overhangs. "We have a very original PRW home with a dramatic floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace, cool original bathroom light fixtures, built-in sliding shoji screens between the living and dining room, and two patios for indoor/outdoor living," he says.

The majority of homes are largely original, Morgan notes, but the current trend for remodeling makes him fear that the tract will lose its uniqueness and integrity. "Eventually, if this trend continues there will be few of the original homes and the remaining ones will not be in an architecturally cohesive neighborhood. I've contacted the California Office of Historic

Preservation (COHP), and they are supportive and asked that I submit a brief," he says. "At that point, a COHP preservation officer would visit SeaView and have a neighborhood meeting to talk with residents and answer any questions."

Morgan's efforts to start with local historic status were rebuffed; the city council says it has no manpower or budget for historic designation issues and, since California's Mills Act reduces property taxes on designated homes, that would negatively impact city coffers. For now he's tabled the idea until the economy improves.

Berkley Square

"Paul R. Williams designed housing developments for people in various economic circumstances throughout Southern California, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico, but few of these have been researched or even definitively located,"



Interiors of SeaView homes share midcentury details with both custom and affordable Williams houses of the era: rock walls, open floor plans, hardwood floors, shoji screens and a low ranch profile.



notes Leslie Luebbers, director of the Art Museum of the University of Memphis, the site of a Williams retrospective in 2010. "He was a believer in the notion that home ownership was a giant step toward personal independence, and this inspired him to design for low-income families. But he also recognized in the late 1930s that suburbs were the future of housing for everyone."

About a mile and a half from downtown Las Vegas, Berkley Square Historic District, a neighborhood of 148 homes listed on the National Register in 2009, is one such development. Designed by Williams in 1949, the tract was the first in Nevada to be built by and for African Americans.

As recently as the '40s, most FHA-financed developments prohibited African American homeowners, making available housing in West Las Vegas a rare commodity. Two different models of modest two-bedroom ranch homes with attached



Berkley Square's inclusion in the National Register underscores the importance of preserving examples of all strata of our architectural fabric for future generations.



Courtesy University of Memphis and David Horan, 2010 (2)

carports represented an appreciable step forward in living conditions for the city's black community, but it took four years of negotiation with government officials before Berkley Square became a reality in 1954.

"Las Vegas embraces its wealth of midcentury modern ranch houses, as well as its atomic history," Reno architectural historian Mella Rothwell Harmon comments. "Having a Paul Revere Williams-designed subdivision built during a period when de facto racial segregation was practiced in Las Vegas demonstrates both the power of the architect and the power of design to transcend such social ills."

Ritts/Kohl Residence

At the other end of the spectrum were commissions such as the Los Angeles County Courthouse, numerous campus buildings at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and the redesign of the Cocomanut Grove nightclub at the Ambassador Hotel. About this same time, Williams designed a ranch-style vacation residence in Chautauqua, N.Y. Built for the Ritts family of Tulsa in 1949, the current owners have kept the historic salmon pink exterior color.

The sloping lot has a series of pavilions that step down an incline overlooking Chautauqua Lake, but from the street you just see the bedroom wing, two-car garage and an entry with pierced concrete block walls. Once you step inside the front door, the view looks down to a living room with a stone accent wall or out to one of several patios around the pool. On another level is the kitchen, or up the curving stairs past clerestory windows is the guest room. The open floor plan and emphasis on indoor/outdoor living is midcentury archi-

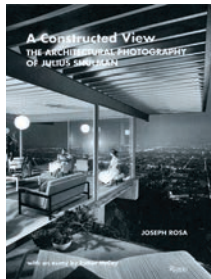


ture filtered through the site constraints and Williams' design aesthetic.

Whether it was in a working class or a more luxurious setting, as *Ebony* magazine noted in 1948, Williams was known for "the total utilization of every square foot of floor space to make more convenient, comfortable and cheaper homes." In the first six months sales at the SeaView tract totaled \$500,000, 95% of those being from veterans. While the price and the buyer may have changed considerably, the appeal of the architecture is the same today.

"We were so happy when we moved into our SeaView home," homeowner Morgan noted in an email. "It reminds me of vacationing in Palm Springs as a child in the '60s and '70s. We love the house and are planning on restoring it to preserve the Williams style." ✨

atomicbooks &backs



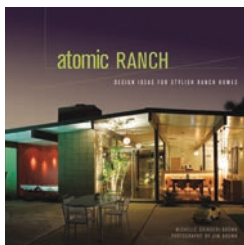
A Constructed View: The Architectural Photography of Julius Shulman

A great overview of iconic and less-seen images from midcentury's most celebrated photographer, plus colorful anecdotes about his relationships with modernism's biggest names. Joseph Rosa, color & b&w photos, 224 pp., hardcover, \$40



Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb

The quirky exteriors of Westlake, the 'ticky-tacky' neighborhood in the Bay Area made famous in song, covered by resident designer Rob Keil. Color & b&w photos, 144 pp., hardcover, \$35



Atomic Ranch: Design Ideas for Stylish Ranch Homes

AR's first coffee-table book has plenty of inspiring homes from early issues. Resources, preservation, history of the style, decorating on a dime—it's got it all. Gringeri-Brown/Brown, color photos, 192 pp., hardcover, \$39.95



Saarinen

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



Forgotten Modern: California Houses 1940-1970

California modernist homes by Alexander, Eichler, Neutra, Fickett, Cody and more are captured in great photographs by Alan Weintraub. Alan Hess, color photos, 280 pp., hardcover, \$39.95

Back Issues—\$6.95 while they last ...



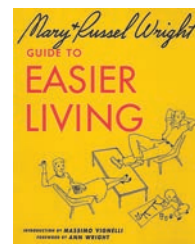
no. 27 Fall 2010



no. 28 Winter 2010



no. 29 Spring 2011



Guide to Easier Living

A vintage book all about the modernist living espoused by Russel and Mary Wright and his designs, including American Modern dishware. Wright, b&w illus., 202 pp., softcover, \$18.95



Silver Palaces

Restored Airstream, Shasta and Curtis Wright travel trailers in all their glory, inside and out, make you want to buy or rent one and hit the road. Douglas Keister, color photos, 160 pp., softcover, \$24.95

Order books, back issues and gear at atomic-ranch.com

home**page**

Greenville, S.C.

We are the second owners of our home, which was built in 1955. We found it on the second day of the listing and, while waiting for the trust to decide on transferring the property, we learned that two other interested parties were inclined to bulldoze the house and rebuild. The kitchen had to be totally replaced and reoriented to embrace the view of the nine-acre lake in the back yard, several windows were relocated, in the den beautiful knotty pine was stripped of whitewash, and five aluminum storage buildings were hauled from the property. The floor-to-ceiling windows now frame a magnificent view.

Kimberley and Frank Poole

Saint Petersburg, Fla.

My house was featured in the *Saint Petersburg Times* newspaper when it was part of a Florida native plant garden tour. I purchased the 1958 midcentury home seven years ago with a tip from a good friend who lives next door. As soon as I walked in, I instantly knew I wanted it. It needed some updating and maintenance, as it had been a winter-only occupied home for 32 years. The oven is original—the couple did not cook—and light floods into the house because of its southern exposure. The majority of the flooring is beautifully restored terrazzo with flagstone in the entry foyer. Atomic Ranch makes me love my midcentury home even more!

Richard Beaupre

New Orleans, La.

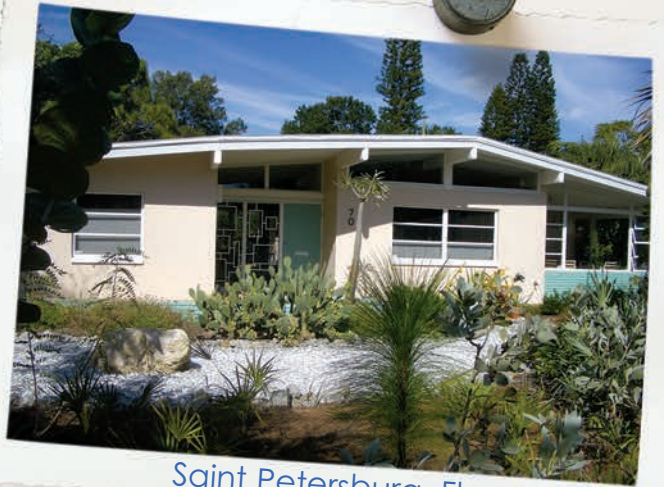
My 1957 MCM home is just one of many that were built in the 1950s and '60s overlooking Lake Pontchartrain. I purchased it from the original owner in pristine condition. It has original furnishings from the era, and all of the classic features such as terrazzo floors, wood paneling, custom cabinets and original wall coverings. While Hurricane Katrina destroyed several similarly classic MCM homes in the neighborhood, mine luckily survived untouched.

Steven Lane

We can always use 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.



Greenville, S.C.



Saint Petersburg, Fla.



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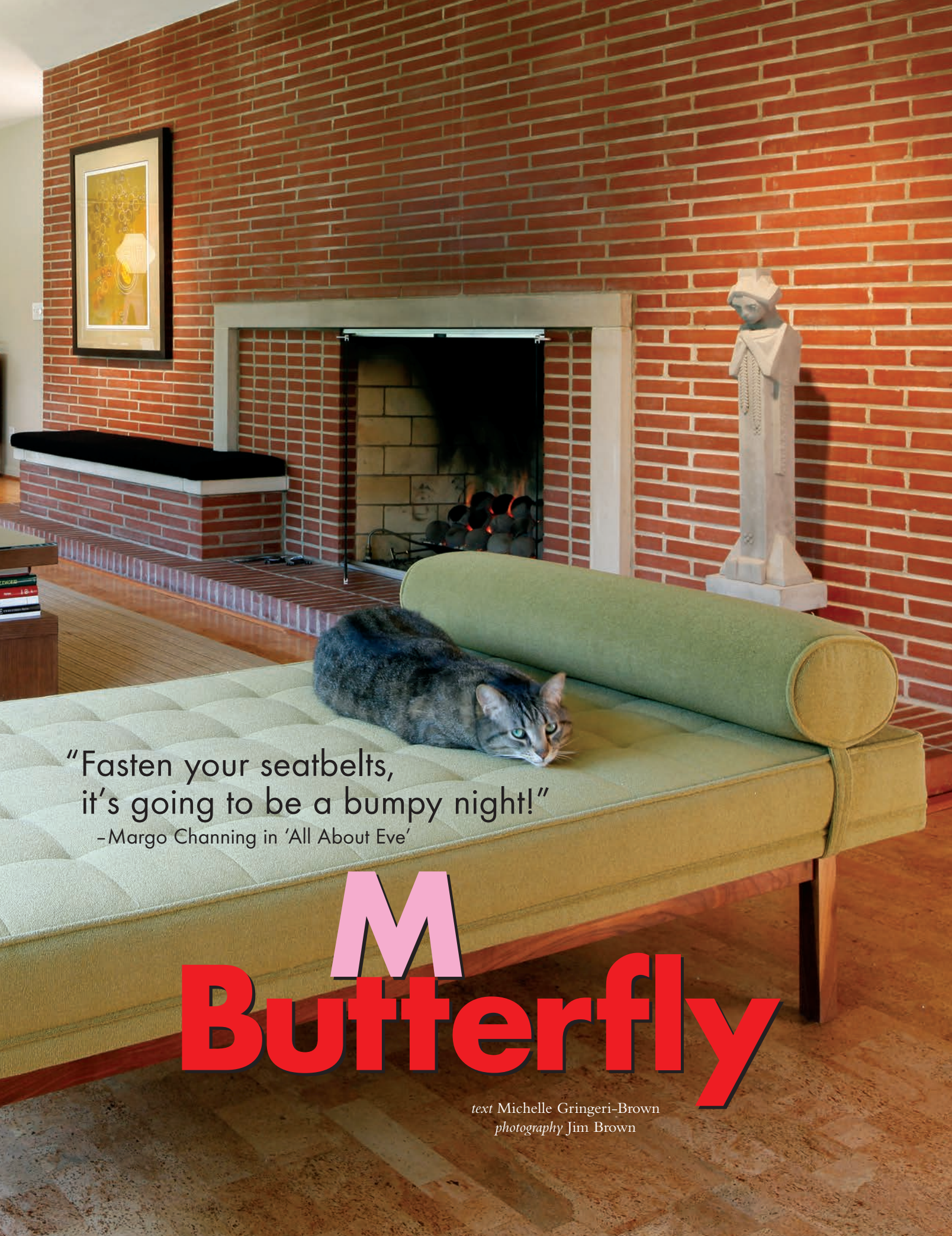
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New Orleans, La.

An Eileen Gray E.1027 side table sits at the end of the daybed, and a Frank Lloyd Wright garden sprite and a framed Charley Harper print are displayed on the fireplace wall. The bench is a decommissioned planter that needs a new galvanized liner, one of several projects on the to-do list. Cats George (pictured) and Gracie found the cork flooring to be a prime scratching post.



A photograph of a living room featuring a large red brick fireplace. A green tufted sofa is positioned in front of the fireplace, and a tabby cat is lying on it. To the left of the fireplace is a black mantel and a framed abstract painting. To the right is a white statue of a woman. The floor is made of light-colored stone tiles.

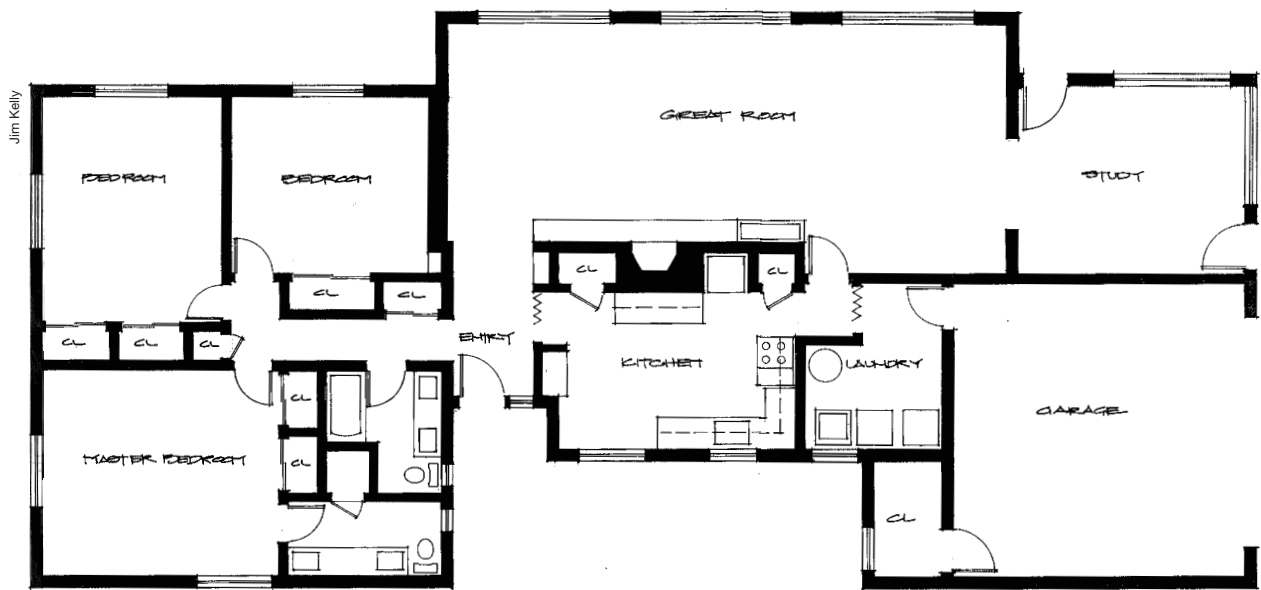
"Fasten your seatbelts,
it's going to be a bumpy night!"

-Margo Channing in 'All About Eve'

M Butterfly

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography Jim Brown





When Jim Kelly and Rick Kay bought their Cincinnati ranch, the seller dropped the tantalizing tidbit that the kitchen was in “All About Eve.” They of course went out and bought a DVD of the 1950 film classic about the triumph of personality and a sharp tongue over con-ning youth and beauty. Paused on the TV screen was a veritable twin of their own midcentury kitchen.

“There is George Sanders and Bette Davis as Margo Channing standing in our kitchen,” says Kelly, a store designer for Macy’s. “When that film was made, these kitchen cabinets were certainly available—and maybe even a popular choice.”

The largely original kitchen was just one of the selling points for the couple when they toured the house in a pastoral area known as Amberley Village. Ranches there are slab on grade, mostly of brick construction and ranging from roughly 2,500 to 4,000 square feet. “The neighborhood was developed by influential Jewish community leaders, and their children have inherited the homes,” Kelly, 51, says. “There was always a respect for nature, fine art and good architecture. We have seven temples here.”

The pair had renovated a 900-square-foot bungalow and were looking for more room. Several months before finding their current house, they’d found a Spanish Revival-style home, but the inspection process revealed significant problems and they backed out of the deal. Ranches weren’t particularly their focus, since most had oak-trimmed white laminate or raised-panel kitchen cabinetry and other dubious upgrades they’d have to redo. The fact that this butterfly roofed custom home sat on an acre lot actually gave them pause—who would have time for all that yard maintenance?

“When we stepped into the living/dining area, the first thing Jim said was, ‘This one’s not screwed up!’ I couldn’t see what he could see, but I could tell it was a special house,” recounts Kay, 44. The 1953-built residence has three bedrooms and two baths in 2,400 square feet.

Previous spread: In the open plan living/dining room, the green daybed and chocolate upholstered chairs are Modernica’s Split Rail line, while the couch is from Room & Board. The coffee table and the rugs are Baker, and the pear-shaped Nelson bubble lamps over the dining table are from Modernica as well. A ‘60s Bally’s poster by Bernard Villemot injects additional color into the dining area.

The seller's taste ran to bouncy colors—orange, pink and aqua—but those were minor concerns since the two baths and the kitchen were untouched. “Here, the bones were of such good quality, all we needed to do was upgrade the finishes,” Kelly remarks.

Since buying in 2002, they’ve met the original owner, Lois Friedman, who lived there for more than 40 years. She told them that her former husband and the builder designed the house without an architect after being inspired by the butterfly roofs the couple saw in Palm Springs in the early ’50s.

The home had a traditional side-gable shingle roof in front and an aged rubber membrane in back. At the V where the two applications met, leaking issues led to a new roof the day after our shoot. Kelly and Kay have also upgraded the mechanical systems, replaced ’60s shag carpet with a floating cork floor in the living/dining room and study, and repainted the interior in what they jokingly admit is three shades of beige.

“The scenario was the bigger the room, the lighter the color, the smaller the room, the deeper,” Kelly explains. “There is one color that’s not beige: the master bedroom is more of a Wedgewood blue. It was Rick’s idea to coordinate it with the adjoining bathroom tile.”

Although Kay is a tax manager and Kelly the designer—style and substance, Kay quips—they still have to agree on projects and furnishings. “I make presentations all

A Barbara Barry for Baker buffet holds a lamp also by Baker, as well as a Frank Lloyd Wright Dana Sumac vase, a cast-resin planter and grandma’s candlesticks.

The wall sculpture is by Tom Mitchell; homeowner Jim Kelly says he’s seen the Phoenix artist’s work on “Mad Men.”

The couple is still searching for the perfect dining table; this one is a door on legs from Ironmonger that first functioned as Kelly’s desk. The vintage chairs have been refinished, recaned and reupholstered, and the drum shade table lamp is a late-’80s Nessen piece. Where two oversized midcentury accent lamps sit against the far wall, previous owners had a large built-in that housed a card table and folding chairs.



the time to Rick,” Kelly laughs. “Do you approve it or not?”

“That’s mostly because of the budget,” says Kay, whose father, Richard, has helped with numerous improvements around the house. “It’s been an education; I didn’t know this style very well.”

Their personal aesthetic is akin to a midcentury W Hotel, Kelly offers. “My thought process when choosing the furniture and making the color palette improvements was to focus on, if I lived in this house in 1953, what would I have wanted to introduce that would have been iconic to that time period? Things that would have been very upscale and contemporary.”

In the 20’ x 70’ open plan living and dining room, that translates to newly made pieces from Modernica, Room & Board and Baker, with vintage confined to the dining chairs and accent lamps. The master bedroom is similar: the bed is from Crate & Barrel, while the dresser is an estate sale find and lighting is from FLOS and Modernica.

One of the rooms they haven’t touched is the kitchen, with its metal cabinetry and laminate counters; the aqua walls are a bit much for Kelly. “My goal is to pull up the floor—it’s Congoleum sheet goods right now,” he says. “I’d like to upgrade the counters to stainless steel or relaminate with metal edge binding. And calm down the color a little to a light blue and maybe a black floor.”





Kay, however, isn't yet convinced and is happy to work around the vintage quirks: the stove burner that's on the fritz, the cracked glass cupboard door that they've yet to be able to match, the disposer that needs babying. "I adjusted to the GE electric stove after having gas; now I can't imagine anything else there," he says. "Mrs. Friedman told us she held four bat mitzvahs here; there's been a lot of cooking on that stove."

The pair love the colors of their highly detailed original baths and plan to keep them as-is, too. Luckily, they'd been well maintained by the three previous owners, though the dripping Crane faucets presented some challenges. "We've heard that Crane is reissuing some replacement parts," says Kay. "The Cincinnati Frank Lloyd Wright houses all use Crane fixtures and the owner of one recommended a handyman who understands these things. The first two plumbers we had wanted to tear them out."

Kelly and Kay belong to the local modernist group, cf3, founded by Cincinnati Realtor Susan Rissover, another Amberley Village resident. "We're learning respect for these homes from her and to not take something and throw it in the garbage," Kelly says. "Susan's been great with talking about where to go forward from here—no, don't rip out the metal windows, things like that."

"I have admired that house for the last 30 years from the outside," Rissover says. "I just knew that it had to be spectacular inside, even though the front was so unassuming and certainly not in-your-face modern. When I finally did see the house, I was definitely not disappointed. The great room/living room is fantastic, but for me, the real standout features are the untouched midcentury kitchen and baths. It's just a little bit of kitsch and a lot of way cool. Thank goodness the previous owners of

Opposite page: Blue boomerang-patterned counters, metal cabinets with built-in illumination and a recessed light that looks like an old-fashioned ice cube tray (over the sink) are some of the gems in the kitchen. Although the Magic Chef dishwasher isn't original, the black control panel is the same width as the drawers, which helps it look like it belongs. Details include a wall unit near the mixer that dispenses paper towels, aluminum foil and the like, and two Charley Harper bird trays, part of the Todd Oldham for La-Z-Boy line; Oldham is a major collector of the Cincinnati artist's work.

The round dinette table came from Rick Kay's grandparents, and the chairs were bought at Pottery Barn about 15 years ago. The maple folding doors between the kitchen and entry hall are newer Pella models that came with the home.





The gray and black bath is off the master bedroom, while the peach and salmon one is near the front door. They both have 4" square field tile on the walls and intricate patterns on the floors—the latter more often seen in earlier-era bungalows. The laminate counters, colored metal-rim sinks and Crane faucets are all vintage, as are the saucer pulls and backplates. "Most homes of this age with their original bathrooms have been neglected," says Kelly. "If the foundation moves and tile cracks, the colors are no longer available and replacements don't match. I'm not against new kitchens or bathrooms, but it's a little excessive how people feel the need to renovate so often."



the house lived through 'dated' to arrive at 'retro'!"

"We haven't had the teardown phenomenon here, but the last big farm in the area sold and became a McMansion development," Kay explains. "If you drive a block down our street, it becomes an 'estate' tract: the smallest house is probably 4,000 square feet and I'm sure there are some that are 10,000 or 15,000."

"The thing the club struggles with is that a number of the big midcentury homes are in Indian Hills, the highest of high-end real estate," he continues. "People will spend \$900,000 on a house just for the lot and tear it down. Cf3 is trying to help educate people so hopefully not all of these will end up being demolished."

"These are homes by renowned architects of their time," adds Kelly. "We recently visited one of Wright's later homes, his largest Usonian; it is very fortunate that it's been bought by an Italian company that uses it as their retreat house. The Wright Foundation wanted to buy it and open it for tours, but the community wouldn't change the zoning to allow that. It took somebody from another country to appreciate it."

"We're a small clique but we have a strong voice," he continues. "There is a resurgence of appreciation for this kind of architecture in our city, and for modern design as well. It's young kids, and people who grew up in houses like these, and empty nesters wanting to downsize; this architecture resonates with them. When they go on the market, these houses go very quickly. I think it's a good sign." ☼

Susan Rissover's home will be featured in Atomic Ranch's second coffee-table book, due out in 2012. Resources page 77.

Not too far from a hotel suite, the master bedroom has an upholstered Crate & Barrel bed with Karastan woven stripe carpeting underfoot. The design for the two Hans Wegner Round chairs was first introduced in 1949 and gained fame on the set of the Kennedy/Nixon debate in 1960. On the vintage dresser is a Glo-Ball from FLOS, and on the floor is a Modernica Cigar Lotus lamp. The orange Roman shades on the windows came with the house; the owners made them work by picking up the color in the pillows and the framed prints from Room & Board. That's George again.



Two tales of travel trailers lovingly transformed,



Anything But Spartan

text Lisa Sarenduc

photography Amadeus Leitner

In 2006 I began researching Spartan travel trailers, considered top of the line in their day, with aerodynamic aluminum bodies and deco styling. They were first built by Spartan Aircraft in 1945 when its owner, Jean Paul Getty, turned his attention and facilities to the great need for affordable housing by postwar families. Since I have a small group of short-term lodgings on 2.5 acres of land at my home in Santa Fe, I thought a restored Spartan travel trailer would be a wonderful addition to the mix.

A 1948 Spartan Mansion (30' long x 8' wide) in decent shape at a reasonable price was found by a trailer renovator and installed in my back yard. Walking through it, I saw those beautiful curved birch panels and was ecstatic over what was now mine. I was also profoundly affected by the humbleness of the times, as

one painstaking detail at a time.



reflected in this travel trailer: small kitchen, small sink, tiny bathroom, everything simple and taut, just enough and nothing extra, an ethic that matters to me very much. I began to look for the person with whom I could easily collaborate on the restoration and who had the necessary skills for such an undertaking.

Three years later, I found him. A mushroom farmer/part-time carpenter named Danny Rhodes had tackled various projects at my house. His meticulous, detailed engineer's mind, his passion for figuring out things, along with his exquisite furniture-making abilities and his immense ease at collaborating on projects with me made him the perfect choice.

Following consultations with vintage trailer renovators, it became clear that the Spartan had to be taken down to the metal and completely rebuilt. It was obvious which parts were original and which were altered or replaced over 60 years; it was our intention to use every original aspect of the Spartan that was intact and restorable. It was also a passionate goal of mine that the rebuilt Spartan be as green and energy-efficient as possible.

The three crumbling layers of linoleum and rotted sub-floor had to go, and the birch wall and ceiling panels were sufficiently water damaged, delaminated or covered with



A Flatiron sofa, small vintage appliances and a flat-screen TV and DVD player in the living room portion of the Spartan. Full Swing Textiles makes gorgeous vintage-inspired fabrics on heavy cotton barkcloth; "Club Babaloo" was used for the front curtains and sofa pillows, while solid garnet barkcloth became the curtain door and window coverings for the bedroom—a fine counterpoint to all the gleaming birch. The bullet lights are from Hip Haven.



Bit by bit the Spartan came back

The Vesta stove came with the Spartan, though it's not the original Dixie model; most of the kitchen elements are vintage as well.

The industrial-looking stainless steel bath, with its combined shower/sink area.

The roll-down windows in the bedroom are original, a 1941 Ford truck apparatus as it turns out, while the green wall sconces are from Rejuvenation.



fake brick veneer that they had to be completely replaced, using the old ones as sectional templates. Crumbling “Kimsul” paper insulation between the aluminum shell and the birch interior panels had to be removed and replaced with contemporary insulation, which thankfully eliminated the mustiness that permeated the whole space.

The kitchen was fundamentally sound but was removed for re-gluing and strengthening where needed, plus sanding down prior to refinishing. The aluminum bathroom, reworked and corroded beyond repair, was cut in half for removal and taken to a metal fabrication shop to use as a template for a new stainless steel one—with an additional 6" in length scrounged from the bedroom. A bank of cabinets and a dresser in the middle section opposite the kitchen was rebuilt with the same footprint and a slightly different allocation of space, using the original cabinet doors. And everything was rewired and replumbed, salvaging every original fluorescent light fixture and intact plumbing pipe.

During this demo phase Danny repeatedly marveled at how well the Spartan was built, such as the drawers having dovetail joints and the high quality of the plywood compared to much of what is sold today. He also realized that the entire shell merely sat on the floor frame, and had the brilliant idea of raising the height of the interior by two inches, being himself 6'2" and nearly touching the ceiling.

My main job was to source replacement parts online. Danny would come into the house and hand me some-

and then finished every inch of the interior woodwork with three coats of Safecoat Polyureseal gloss finish.

As far as furnishing and decorating the Spartan, I began with my favorite colors, red, purple and a soft green. First came the floor—Marmoleum black-and-cream checkerboard tiles installed on the diagonal. I found the retro couch online, beautifully made by Rehab Vintage in Los Angeles, and was immediately and strongly attracted to its bus-station sensibilities. Importantly, it was big enough to sleep a third person as needed. After I chose a wonderful plum-colored vinyl and was assured that the couch would fit through the narrow 2' doorway, it became the jumping-off point for all the rest. Danny made a beautiful mahogany Heywood-Wakefield-style coffee table to go in front of the couch, instead of the original folding dining table we considered reproducing. I then found a patterned wool rug that looked period-appropriate, and the living room was complete.

I spent a number of months searching for vintage kitchen paraphernalia, finding what I wanted (essentially what I grew up with, being one year older than the Spartan) piece by piece: Revere Ware pots and pans, Pyrex mixing bowls and casseroles, and vintage dishes, silverware and glasses. I also managed to find small 1940s appliances, all functional and with beautiful deco styling, including a Toastmaster toaster, Osterizer beehive blender, and a classic radio, fan and iron.

Addressing my ecological principles, the linoleum floor tiles are made of natural and compostable materials (linseed oil, pine rosins, wood flours), and the glue used is non-toxic. The refrigerator, a small retro model made by the Italian company Smeg, is energy efficient and happened to

be the only one that fit through the small doorway—with 1/2" to spare! The bathroom and kitchen share an on-demand water heater, and the toilet is a small composting model made for boats. All water exits through a simple gray water system that directly waters trees in the back yard. And recently we converted to a 16-panel solar tracking system for the electrical needs of the compound.

This renovation project was a year-long labor of love and a task much greater and richer than I imagined on many levels; it could never have happened without my friend Danny Rhodes. I now have the great fortune to live close by this venerable beauty and to share it with those who might want to step back in time and come stay a while.

Lisa Sarenduc's accommodations are at suitabledigs.com; other resources page 77. Photographer Amadeus Leitner, who finds inspiration in the dramatic light of the desert southwest, holds a bachelor's degree in arts and architecture; see more work at amadeusleitner.com.

together in its original footprint

thing, saying, “We need six of these.” I would ask him what it was and what it was used for; he invariably didn't know what it was called but would describe its function, and my search would begin. It's quite interesting to look for a thing you don't know the name of: I'd type in what I thought it should be called, and eventually—an hour, a week, a month later—I would find out what the thing was actually called and where to get it.

Bit by bit the Spartan came back together in its original footprint, made new by Danny's endless abilities and deep commitment to the project. The metal people showed up with the two halves of the new bathroom, nervous about the project because they had never before used airplane rivets (found, miraculously, at our local hardware store). They did a perfect job and were very proud of their contribution to our project. After that installation, I refinished all of the old doors, cleaned up the original latches and hinges, continued to find needed products, and sanded

Ambassador of Cool



text & photography Jen Zahigian



The cabinet above the futon is one of the few original components that remained almost completely untouched. It originally housed the Airstream's Motorola stereo system, but now conceals two new speakers. The walnut veneer doors dictated our use of walnut throughout the rest of the new construction, with the exception of the bathroom. Sixty-eight was the last year before Airstream switched to rounded-corner windows, which allowed us to use modern aluminum-frame windows designed for a conventional building.

Opposite: The desk drawer near the kitchen appliances contains a built-in laptop or iPod connection, which has audio/video inputs that link to the JBL 5.1 surround-sound system above the couch.



My husband, Josh Ganshorn, and I have a small design and construction company called Able+Baker Design. Josh likes to build custom stuff and can design and fabricate just about anything at our shop in Ventura, Calif. Our Airstream adventure began when we received a phone call asking if we'd be interested in turning a 1968 Airstream Ambassador into a functional studio and social space. Of course we would!

Soon after, we were on the road to Las Vegas, N.M., to pick up the Airstream and tow it back to California. The



trailer had been purchased sight unseen by our client; we were given an address, and told to ask for Butch. Despite the fact that it had been sitting in a yard for several years, the Airstream was in pretty good shape and we made it back to California without catastrophe.

Five minutes away from our residence at the time was the Alameda Naval Air Station, home of the USS Hornet Aircraft Carrier. The Hornet has the distinction of being the ship that picked up the returning astronauts from the Apollo 11 moon landing. There, on permanent display, is the Airstream Mobile Quarantine Facility, a custom-built 1968 Airstream, the same year as our client's. It was fascinating to see how similar the amenities were in the NASA Airstream: same sink, cabinets, curtains, toilet and color scheme, plus a few things we didn't have, like airplane seats and a conference table. Pretty cool.

One of the few requests that our client made was to open up the original floor plan. Although the existing kitchen was one of the Airstream's most impressive features, we knew it was not what he needed. Other than that, he trusted Josh's vision and gave him carte blanche on all design decisions.

The next few weeks were consumed by the tedious parts of the job—the stuff that takes the most time, but is the least interesting (plumbing, leak repairs, caulking, hole fixes, rivets, clean-up, etc.). Because most of the interior was in decent condition, we demoed it carefully. With the help of Craigslist, all of the original parts we pulled out

found a home with other Airstream owners.

The trailer arrived with four dilapidated jalousie windows. After looking into replacements, Josh realized we might vastly improve the function with custom, dual-glazed, insulated windows. We added a new Carrier air conditioning unit as well, because summers get hot in Fresno, where our client lives. There's also halogen lighting throughout and maple veneer flooring.

Other creative design details include:

Electrical: Josh took the original 12v "Airstream Control Panel" and diverted two of the circuits to a 110v subpanel that operates any new circuits, as well as providing power for a 220v on-demand water heater. By doing this, he was able to use all of the existing wiring, but operate typical household appliances and lighting. Because we knew the trailer would be parked for the foreseeable future, Josh had the advantage of wiring directly to a permanent electrical panel. However, in the event that our client did want to travel somewhere someday, he left some of the original systems in place so that the trailer can be towed or plugged into an RV park and still have a working refrigerator.

Cabinets: One of the design challenges was to make use of the wheel wells, which could not be removed and took up valuable floor space. Josh resolved this by concealing them in built-in cabinetry and seating. Because of the wheel-well depth, the bottom drawer and shelves are shallow, but still useful. A tall closet cabinet literally rounds the corner with small, elegantly curved walnut

Metal Fever

We searched our archives for some tasty trailers from past features; enjoy!

doors, while integrated door pulls were used throughout.

Kitchen: Such an intimate space seems like the perfect candidate for a microwave, but we just don't like the way it makes food taste. Instead, we installed a small convection oven, a fridge with a separate freezer and an electric teapot. We also managed a little built-in storage for food and wine, and the Formica countertop has plenty of room to prepare food or spread out art supplies.

Pocket Door: With the sci-fi/RV theme in mind, Josh created an oval pocket door with a large Plexiglass window that separates the bathroom from the rest of the space while still admitting valuable light. The original door was pretty narrow, and there were a couple of obstructions prohibiting greater door width. Josh redesigned the frame with some cool curves, and the result is a 4" wider opening in the top half, which makes it ergonomic for those of us with arms. One side of the pocket door is walnut, and the other is maple, which matches the bathroom finishes.

Automated Futon: When it came time to replace the original foldout sofa, we didn't think our budget would accommodate designing completely new bed-frame hardware, and none of the few available options were satisfactory. The logical idea seemed to be some kind of futon, but most require side or rear access; with our layout, that wasn't an option.

A relative owns a big garage door company and, when visiting his warehouse, it occurred to us that this might be the answer to the sofa hardware problem. Josh created a prototype using a modified garage door opener; the operation was surprisingly powerful, yet smooth and quiet. In the sofa position the frame takes up very little space and, as it opens into a bed, it cantilevers over the lower framework and bookshelf storage is revealed.

Interior Paint Scheme: We wanted to combine simple, almost clinical colors with a detailed paint scheme across the walls and ceiling. This paint job was quite an effort in masking, and we used no-V.O.C. paint.

Built-in Globe: This is our favorite part, and people always ask where Josh got the idea. We found this vintage globe with metallic blue water and a limited color scheme. He added the red location arrow and miniature Airstream, which remains stationary while the globe spins. We tell people it's a "hemispherical GPS."

The project was a big endeavor, beginning with a crash course in Airstream culture and history. Today, with the trailer installed at our client's home, Josh says that the opportunity to design and build such an exotic piece was a gift in itself. And he hopes to have the opportunity to redesign another Airstream someday. ✨

You can see Able+Baker's work at ableandbakerdesign.com.



Jim Brown (5)

A 1948 Glider has a beautiful two-tone exterior and a relatively spacious living room, kitchen and bedroom. Owned by David Izenman, it has a Dixie range, Sanitary refrigerator, a kerosene heater and loads of textile collectibles.



Above and right: intrigued with the mobile suite idea, but not wanting to rehab a vintage trailer? Airstream's current International line comes in six different floor plans ranging from 16 to 28 feet, with a 23-footer going for about \$60,000. The Signature series interiors include polished aluminum, Wenge laminate and modern fixtures.

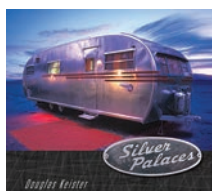


Courtesy Airstream (2)



Left: A 1965 Airstream was given a makeover by Ron and Gia Emory for a pool cabana.

Below: Kathy and Paul Day, who live in a Cliff May, rehabbed a 1963 "canned ham" Shasta in 2004. Paul spent two weeks stripping and polishing the exterior; note the jalousie windows still in place.



Enjoy more vintage gems in Silver Palaces, Doug Keister's photographic ode to travel trailers at atomic-ranch.com; see page 32.



Building Community

—One House (and Party) at a Time

It all started with a flyer on our doorstep in the autumn of 2009 indicating our house was of interest to the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation for a home tour. My wife and I had just purchased a Donald Wexler-designed house in the El Rancho Vista Estates neighborhood and were ecstatic that it could potentially be pushed into the limelight. Little did we know that this event would so positively turn the neighborhood into a community.



text Erik Rosenow

photography Ashley and Erik Rosenow



The El Rancho Vista Estates sign was built several years ago with neighborhood donations.

The backyard of the author's home, with pool and tiki bar at the ready.



bermuda





All Things Wexler

Wexler is well known in the Palm Springs area, and was recently featured in the documentary “Journeyman Architect: The Life and Work of Donald Wexler.” Midcentury modern fans make pilgrimages to his seven Alexander Company steel houses, and he is celebrated for his custom homes and commercial work, including the Palm Springs International Airport.

The Preservation Foundation was proposing a weekend to honor Wexler’s 84th birthday. The documentary would be shown in conjunction with home tours, swanky parties in Wexler-designed buildings, and a tribute journal outlining the architect’s work. Initially, the tour was to include celebrity houses (Dinah Shore’s and Kirk Douglas’ one-time residences), Wexler’s original family home and three in our tract. Tour organizers were overwhelmed with the interest and, in the end, nine homes in the El Rancho tract were featured on the tour.

Above: This Bermuda model has its swimming pool on the front of the house, where high hedges add privacy.

Opposite: two Bermudas with varying roof lines that lend variety to the tract.

This home was one featured on the Wexler Weekend tour.

More than 200 participants visited El Rancho Vista Estates and saw interior design reflecting the personalities of the homeowners. Styles ranged from kitschy retro to stark minimalism to bohemian chic with original art on the walls. Our own home is a mix of midcentury thrift store finds, modern reproductions of vintage designs and contemporary pieces from IKEA and others. Our walls are filled with art, including Shag prints, black and white Hollywood photography and framed Frank Sinatra LPs.



History Unearthed

Until Wexler Weekend, El Rancho had been a virtually unknown enclave of homes when compared to the William Krisel-designed Alexander developments of Twin Palms, Vista Las Palmas and Racquet Club Estates. This is partially because our neighborhood is northeast of the airport, a bit on the outskirts of town. Even Wexler himself seemed to lose track of this tract once his other projects were gaining renown in Palm Springs.

The homes were built in 1959–1960 by developer Roy Fey. The sales brochure promised “fun in the sun” with the El Rancho neighborhood. Large 100’ x 100’ view lots, complete with “curbs, sidewalks and gutters” were a selling point; added bonuses were insulation, air conditioning and optional pools, all a must in desert heat that can hit 120° by August.

Wexler designed three floor plans, all roughly 1,400

Three Capri models, including a butterfly roof version, opposite, top, with a green midcentury door.

square feet and all exotically named—the Bermuda, Casablanca and Capri. The homes had three bedrooms and two baths, patios that are separate from the back yard and open carports. Four-bedroom, three-bathroom versions, mostly in the Capri model, were available as upgrades. The houses are notable for their facades and privacy walls built of solid and patterned concrete block. Since the sales brochure promised that “each home has been painstakingly oriented on its lot to welcome winter sun and shun summer heat,” a variety of rooflines, including gabled, single- and double-butterfly, and flat were employed, giving the neighborhood a customized feel.



capri





casablanca





Rebirth of Style

Designed for both desert living as well as vacation homes, the neighborhood was in disrepair and decline by the 1990s. It was around 2000 that Eric Nash, an artist, put in an offer on a Casablanca model sight unseen. He and his partner, Mark Rose, an interior designer, were shocked that they could find a home designed by a credible architect for an incredible price—in the low- to mid-\$100,000s. Quickly, they replaced the beige and blue color scheme with a coat of white paint.

Initially residents were perplexed. “Everybody thought we were totally insane,” says Nash. “‘Who are these crazy people from Chicago painting their house?’ ” Yet slowly neighbors began to take pride in their homes and to make much needed, yet simple repairs and invest in paint jobs.

Over the next decade, 20 to 30 homes were tastefully flipped by contractors, stripping away 1970s and ‘80s decor and bringing back the vintage feel. Prices soared, with some houses reaching the mid-\$700,000s. (Out of some 70 total homes, only two have been remodeled beyond recognition: one has a false adobe front, while the second is referred to as the “ski lodge” or “mine shaft,”

Above: This Casablanca home has one of the more dramatic color schemes and a liberal usage of Wexler’s signature decorative block.

Opposite, top: Eric Nash and Mark Rose bought their Casablanca sight unseen in 2000 and started the neighborhood revival with their white paint job.

Opposite, bottom: Casablanca models feature a side yard with a pool, like this striking one with a wall of yellow decorative block; it was featured on the Wexler Weekend tour.

due to its outdoor wood paneling, an oddity in the desert.)

Since the wane of flipping and the mortgage crisis, more full-time residents who are fans of the style are taking advantage of stabilized prices and moving in. In 2009–2010, prices ranged from \$350,000 to \$450,000 for a redone Wexler. Paul Kaplan, a Realtor who specializes in midcentury homes and is himself a resident of the neighborhood, has noted the changes.

“There’s much more permanence in El Rancho Vista Estates, with homeowners taking a vested interest in the

Right and bottom right, two Capri models, including a closeup of the author's patio with ocotillo in spring bloom.

Nine months ago, this Bermuda model was in foreclosure. Now it is owned by Steven Turley and Vincent Sassone, who plan to finish the landscaping in coming months.





This view down Avenida Fey Norte shows Mount San Jacinto towering in the background.

neighborhood, getting to know their neighbors and taking part in forming a neighborhood association to help improve their environment," he says. "There are many wonderful midcentury neighborhoods in Palm Springs. What makes this special is its size—we're like our own little island. I think it has more of an intimate and unique neighborhood feel in comparison to other areas."

Neighborly Outreach

Steven Turley, an architect, and his partner, filmmaker Vincent Sassone, bought a Bermuda model that needed mostly cosmetic work. Their home had suffered none of the bad remodeling jobs that many midcentury homes are plagued with; it simply needed a new lease on life.

"Our exterior paint job was our Christmas gift to the neighborhood," Turley says. By simply replacing the mélange of brown, orange, yellow, green and more, a new chapter was written for the home. Now a striking white, grey and turquoise scheme, the homeowners intend to slowly bring the home back to its full glory. To date they have returned the garage to its original carport configuration and plan to create an indoor/outdoor bar. Their home has hosted several cocktail parties in recent months and inspired other neighbors to throw impromptu gatherings.

While parties seem to be synonymous with the Palm Springs lifestyle, there had been a lack of community in the neighborhood. Those living next door to one another for decades had not even met. This has begun to change

due to Wexler Weekend, where neighbors with architecture and design interests in common met for the first time. Friendships were made, business connections were created, and yes, further socializing has begun to flow. Donald Wexler even attended one party, with owners flocking to have him autograph the photos they brought of their homes.

As the neighborhood begins to bond, one wonders if 50 years ago Wexler envisioned that there would be a strong sense of community built around his architecture. Perhaps the architect and developer literally created El Rancho in 1960, but the current community has coalesced through its appreciation for architecture and design.

Kaplan probably sums it up best. "I have gotten to know more people in the four months that I've lived here than anywhere else that I've lived in Palm Springs. Being a child of the 1960s myself, El Rancho Vista Estates really reminds me of where I grew up—a place where you knew your neighbors, socialized with them and felt like you were part of a community." ✨

In 2010 Ashley and Erik Rosenow successfully petitioned the city to make El Rancho Vista Estates the 26th officially recognized Palm Springs neighborhood. As chairman of the neighborhood organization, Erik is helping fellow residents navigate safety and code concerns with the city, develop a contractor referral list and expand social functions. Special thanks to Paul Kaplan of the Modern Real Estate Group and to filmmakers Vincent Sassone and Steven Turley for their contributions to this article.



Bay Village, Ohio



Whittier, Calif.



Portland, Ore.





homepage

Bay Village, Ohio

Eight years ago we moved into our 1957 California contemporary ranch, one of approximately 100 Donald Scholz-designed homes in Dover Bay Estates. Scholz made extensive use of floor-to-ceiling glass to bring the outdoor California lifestyle to the Midwest, as well as prefabricated wall panels that were constructed at factories and delivered by semi trailer to the sites. We have filled ours with Bertoia, Paul McCobb, DUX, butterfly chairs and Heywood-Wakefield furniture. The homes in Dover Bay are still mostly original, except for newer siding, which attests that the ranches, split-levels and lower-level walkouts like ours have withstood the test of time.

Dan & Sherry Cica

Whittier, Calif.

Being a midcentury aficionado looking for my first home, I knew that I wouldn't be happy living in a house that was not midcentury, with its indoor-outdoor way of life. I stumbled upon an unassuming Palmer & Krisel-designed tract in the neighboring area of Friendly Hills here in Whittier, known for large custom homes. I knew this was the perfect house for me, overlooking that all four bedrooms and the living area had either wallpaper or stucco treatment, and that the original sash windows were covered up. I saw the potential and restored the house with modernist sensibilities. I now know what true pride of ownership means!

Eric Diaz

Portland, Ore.

Six years ago we purchased a 1964 midcentury modern ranch in the suburbs of Portland. She had been defaced by country wallpaper, '80s gold lights and hideous shrubs the size of most trees. We spent the first three years of Saturdays painting, hammering and rejuvenating this gem. Underneath pink carpet was 1,000 square feet of gorgeous golden oak flooring. The original owners moved into the house and carpeted right over the top of the wood floors! We've done our best to keep the house true to the period, minus the word "groovy." She's a blend of modern and midcentury and a wonderful place to call home.

The Comers

Show us yours; 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.

ranchdressing

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

q: Although I have a mostly traditional style home, I love incorporating midcentury pieces. I saw this chair at the local thrift store and picked it up for \$10. I love the design, but it needs some work; as you can see, one rod is missing in back and the seat foam is nearly dust. Before I decide whether to fix it up myself or have a professional refinish and reupholster it, I wanted to see if you could help me establish its maker and value.

Jean Ault



a: Peter Maunu replies, "Your chair was designed in 1953 by Helge Sibast for George Tanier. I would call it sort of a modernist spindle-backed Windsor scissor chair. The craftsmanship is excellent and the proportions are perfectly resolved. It is yet another example of great Danish design by someone who was clearly capable and in the same league as the likes of Hans Wegner, Poul Hundevad, Greta Jalk, etc."



"The chair was fabricated in either oak or teak with an upholstered seat; yours appears to be made of teak. Auction records are not easy to find for the work of Mr. Sibast (yes, Helge is the masculine form, Helga the feminine in Danish), but I would estimate it's worth between \$500 and \$800 in good original condition. Finding someone who can match the missing spindle would be key. If you decide that you need new foam, please try and keep the upholstery; it appears to be the original nubby fabric and is very nice. Ten dollars for this lovely chair is beyond a recession buster—it's a steal!"

q: I live 20 miles from Zeeland, Mich., home of Herman Miller and birthplace of the Eames chair. Recently, I came across this chair at a flea market. It is clearly handmade: the cutout on the chair back is irregular and looks to be done with a hand-held jigsaw, and



it's glue constructed without nails. It is plywood, but old—the wood has a beautiful dark patina that comes with age. It

is also quite small, as if made for a child, but strong enough for me to sit in and is by far the most sculptural chair I have ever seen, amateur or otherwise.

I know the Eameses made some 30 or 40 prototypes, and they were small like this piece. It is clearly old, it has a surface like an Eames leg splint and similar curved plywood. Do I have a piece by an amateur who could design like a genius? I paid \$75, and it had come into the shop the day before, so I think I got a good one.

Jim Linderman

a: *The photos seem to show flat plywood pieces with curved edges, as opposed to steam-bent surfaces like the Eameses' plywood experiments, but your email indicates otherwise. The Eames Office didn't reply to our query, so we'll throw this one open to readers. What do you think? A rare three-legged prototype by a future design genius? A trade school project from an anonymous craftsman? A nicely made, one-of-a-kind chair that answers the question "What's bigger than a bunch of bananas?"*

q: I recently bought these swivel barstools at a local consignment store. They are in almost perfect condition, but unfortunately have no tags or numbers anywhere. The upholstery is vibrant and the texture is a lot like the '60s. I can feel that the padding on the arms is probably latex, a little hard and possibly crumbling, but you would never know from looking at it. And the chrome is excellent. I'm wondering if anyone knows who made these; I am thinking possibly Knoll but could be wrong. Also, the swivel mechanism is very stiff; could it be greased or should I just leave it?

Miya Stigler

a: *Former MCM shop owner Angelo Madrigale replies: "While the bases have a style similar to the upholstered seating Saarinen produced for Knoll, these date from much later and are no-name, I think. Typically*



these were seen in a drab brown vinyl, and were a mid-'80s production. The brown vinyl was super thin and looked a million times worse than the blue fabric shown here, which is actually pretty cool. Many families I knew growing up had these in their rec rooms. I would defi-

more ranchdressing

nitely oil them if they're squeaky, or even use WD40; that should be all you need. Enjoy them and don't worry about abusing them!

q: I've been trying to identify a pair of chairs and end tables my grandparents bought in the Boston area in the 1950s. There are no tags or markings. I'd be grateful for any thoughts your editors or readers might have.

Moishe Pupik



a: Peter Maunu's musings: "These two chairs are extremely elegant! My first thought was that they had to be Paul McCobb; they have similar splayed legs and the cubic form pointed in that direction. After further research, however, I could not definitively attribute them

to McCobb, and they also could be Ed Wormley, but again, I couldn't find this exact design. The scale and refinement also remind me a little of Gio Ponti, the great Italian architect and designer. In this case, however, it doesn't really matter—they are



so well designed that they will always be of value.

"As for the table, it is a design that I could not find in any resource material. It appears to have a white laminate top with a wood checkerboard pattern in the center. The placement of the square legs all the way to the corners recalls some of Wormley's designs and is influenced by the classic Parsons table. The wood with laminate, however, probably puts it in the Danish category. My guess is it is a well-crafted, anonymous Danish table from the '60s."

q: I have been searching for a cityscape painting worthy of being on the set of "Mad Men." I found this 49" x 25" oil painting on fiberboard, with the signature of "C. Balogh '62." I can't find any information on the artist, but it looks like a commercial painting to be hung over a sofa or a credenza. Is it in the league of "Mad Men"?

Dennis Dell



a: We didn't find any info on your artist, either, but perhaps another reader has a lead for you. I'm sure a set dresser for the show would be happy to hang it on Don's wall.

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.

atomic events

Through 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. This exhibition at the Palm Springs Art Museum presents drawings, photographs and models, including a full-scale sectional steel model of his Palm Springs prefab metal houses. psmuseum.org

June 9–12 Ft. Lauderdale

The Hukilau

Tiki, tiki, tiki all the time. An Elvis-movie themed room crawl, a 'Rumposium' from cocktail connoisseur Jeff 'Beachbum' Berry, a talk by Phillip Roberts on his Waikiki



book and an Oceanic art gallery are just the tip of the kitsch iceberg. Thehukilau.com has details.

June 24–25 Fort Wayne, Ind.

Home and Garden Tour

The National Register-listed Indian Village neighborhood is the site of June 25th's tour of almost a dozen homes, including MCM and period Revivals from the



'20s and '30s. Modest ranches, Cape Cods, Tudor Revivals and Colonials line the curving tree-lined streets of the development. The previous day, Atomic Ranch publisher Jim Brown will give a presentation on ranch-style homes at the Southwest Conservation Club in Fort Wayne at 7 p.m. More info at archfw.org or 260.426.5117.

Through July 3 Boston

Modernist Photography 1910–1950

Works from Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Paul Strand and others is on exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts; mfa.org

August 18–21 San Diego

Tiki Oasis

Dust off your sombrero, pull on your poncho and slip on your hirachi sandals for a South of the Border-style tiki party; details at tikioasis.com.

August 26–28 Denver

Denver Modernism Show



Dozens of vendors selling retro, modern and mid-century classics at the National Western Complex Expo Hall. Special guest Charles Phoenix, plus "Mad Men" makeup makeovers, a tiki lounge, vintage car show, Airstream

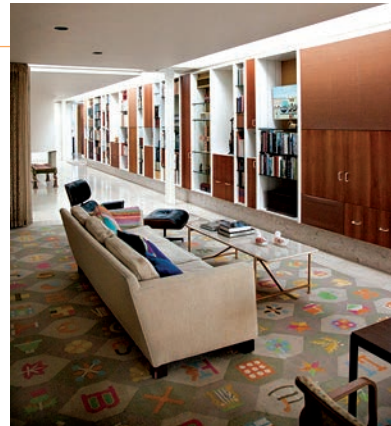
display, lectures and a Miss Modernism pageant.
denvermodernism.com

September 16–18 San Francisco
20th Century Modernism Show & Sale

Fifty vintage dealers at the Fort Mason Center, plus a preview party on Thursday and a lecture on the studio crafts movement in Marin on Friday. sf20.net

October 15 Vancouver, B.C.
Mid-Century Modern Residential Bus Tour

See the interiors of five significant modernist homes on this annual 1–6 p.m. tour.
vancouverheritagefoundation.org



Ongoing Columbus, Ind.
Miller House and Garden

A 1952 home designed by Eero Saarinen, with landscape by Daniel Kiley and interiors by Alexander Girard, opened for tours this summer. Now a house museum managed by the Indianapolis Museum of Art, tickets are available online at imamuseum.org/art/collections/miller-house.

resources

m butterfly, pg. 36–45

Cincinnati websites: Cincinnati Form Follows Function, cf3.org ✗ Susan Rissover, Cincinnati Modern, cincinnatimodern.com ✗ Furnishings: Wegner Round chair, danish-furniture.com/designers/hans-wegner/#hans-wegner-the-chair ✗ Bubble lamps, daybed & side chairs, modernica.net ✗ Couch & Eileen Gray side table, roomandboard.com ✗ Barbara Barry collection for Baker, kohlerinteriors.com/baker/1_1_1_0_coll_bbc.jsp ✗ Glo-Ball, ylighting.com ✗ Art: charleyharperartstudio.com

anything but spartan, pg. 48–51

✗ Restorer: Danny Rhodes, rhodesenterprisesllc@gmail.com, 505.920.5985 ✗ Metal fabrication: Southwest Metal Products, swmp.net ✗ Smeg refrigerator: ajmadison.com ✗ Sink & faucet: IKEA Boholmen and Edsvik, ikea.com/us ✗ Industrial exposed shower: www.us.kohler.com/onlinecatalog/detail.jsp?prod_num=7254 ✗ Marine composting toilet: airheadtoilet.com ✗ Marmoleum flooring: forboflooringna.com ✗ Flatiron sofa: rehabvintage.net ✗ Bullet lights: hiphaven.com ✗ Fabrics: fullswingtextiles.com ✗ Safecoat Polyureseal BP, gloss: afmsafecoat.com

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