

atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS

WINTER 2013



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ranchalicious retreat 14

sacramento streng 62

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contents

features

14 what lies beneath

A fantasy basement makeover in a 19th-century house

28 my favorite space(s): decatur, ga.

Living in a little Lustron—stylishly

34 three acres & a bugatti

Preservation, one Neutra home at a time

54 saarinen's village: a midwestern midcentury monastery

A master architect's college campus

62 bitten by the mc bug

The Zen of '70s Sacramento



14

34



28



winter 2013

departments

4 my 2 cents

6 modern wisdom

24 home page

Ohio, California and New York in a wintry mood

32 atomic gifts

48 keep it up: what tv doesn't tell you about working with a contractor

What to consider when heading into a remodel

72 ranch dressing

Finnish lights, dollhouse furniture and some Croutons for your MC salad

74 events

78 resources

79 coming up in atomic ranch

80 atomic advertisers

62



54

cover

In a 1959 Richard Neutra-designed home in Pennsylvania, a 40' window wall greets visitors as they step from the polished brick entry into the open plan living room. Resurrected from near ruin, the furnishings include a Nakashima chair and an Eames lounge and ottoman by the fireplace, a vintage Hans Wegner coffee table, two upholstered Modernica chairs and a round Hans C. Andersen tripod table. The artwork on the stucco fireplace surround is by Jorge Dumas, and the white ceramic planter in the hall is from Modernica. Story page 34.



my2cents

Driving down a street in our neighborhood recently, I gasped over the empty lot that had replaced a 1948 flat-roof modernist ranch. It was in fine repair, and its owner had spent plenty of money on beautiful landscaping and a white foam roof. We realized that this was the property neighbors had been buzzing about, and one of the reasons for the 'No Lot Splitting!' signs we'd seen on front lawns.

The daughter of the elderly seller had contacted us about marketing the home to midcentury enthusiasts when she listed it last spring. Instead, it was sold in record time to a developer; because it's a double lot, he'll be putting up two homes in its place. (The price for an empty lot in

our area is now apparently \$320,000—the speculator paid twice that plus demolition costs.) At present, our neighborhood has no historic designation, although that wouldn't have stopped the lot splitting.

Portland has a slew of infill 'skinny houses' designed to increase population density and curb suburban sprawl. With the real estate market rebounding, we're seeing a number of modest 1920s homes get the slash-and-burn 'remodel' treatment—one wall is left standing and a multistory, lot-hogging update replaces it. While there is a 35-day moratorium prior to demolition designed for neighbor feedback, another loophole waives that delay if both a demo and a build permit are filed simultaneously. As Liz Lemon would say, "What the what?!"

A few neighborhoods in Portland have achieved historic status—bungalow-era Irvington was listed on the National Register in 2010, for one—but by and large, residents tend to be skeptical about the benefits and alarmist about perceived encroachment on their personal freedoms.

"In Portland there is no protection against demolition or major alterations unless a property has a historic designation, and state law says that you cannot have such a designation without the consent of the property owner," says Val Ballestrem of Portland's Architectural Heritage Center. "The proposed demolition of a designated historic resource ends up being reviewed by the City Council; even if they deny the demolition permit, the property owner can appeal. It's extremely frustrating for those of us who love older buildings."

Our neighborhood's Land Use Committee suggests that individual property owners could instead include conditions of sale, such as no lot splitting or teardowns for 25 years hence. CC&Rs such as this are common in new developments, but each existing owner would need to file his or her own restriction with the county. Citing that historic status takes too long, is too expensive and often faces an uphill battle with homeowners, the committee members say that in this way the future of a given home would have some protection in the near term against developers with a fistful of dollars.

Tearing down a well-built home in good condition may not be illegal, but it *is* a terrible shame. If we can't rely on realtors, departing neighbors and land speculators to value history more than a quick buck, maybe it's time to start protecting our neighborhoods one ranch at a time.

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Jim Brown (2)





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modernwisdom

I've always been a fan of MCM and the architecture of this period, having spent my formative years in a ranch house. We just bought a 1956 ranch near Yellow Springs, Ohio, a hotbed of arts, creativity and great architecture.

Our house is by Pease Homes in Hamilton, Ohio, a company that still exists today. They were one of the



first pioneers of the prefab housing market, and we found a 1956 Pease catalog on eBay with all of the info on their homes, including some really neat drawings of our floor plan, vintage furnishings and such!

The home has been updated but still features the original wood floors, unpainted woodwork/doors and a slate entry. There are tons of windows and a couple of skylights and sky tubes to make it nice and bright.

When a few inches of snow fell the day after

Christmas last year, it was like being in a snow globe. We're enjoying our modern home and life is grand!

Chris & Amy Longo

✱ Just a quick note to say that once I start reading an Atomic Ranch, I can't stop until I finish it entirely. In the Spring 2013 issue I was especially delighted to see an Alfons Bach end table used as a nightstand. In the same house [pages 58–65] was a slat bench that I have as well. I felt like I had won the jackpot!



Stacey Schultz

Then, in your summer issue I had a flashback on that Sunbeam toaster [pages 39 and 42]; it was the best toaster, and I have not found another to compare. And please tell your advertisers I read every single ad; I am so intrigued by it all!

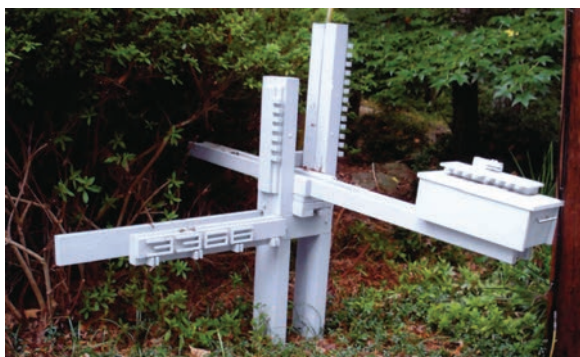
Valorie Hofferkamp

Port Charlotte, Fla.

The table Valorie and the Schultzes both own is part of the Chromium line by Lloyd Manufacturing Co., which produced furniture for beauty shops and residential use.

—ar editor

morewisdom



* Many of our Northcrest neighbors have mailboxes like the Northwoods one featured in the spring edition [page 6]. I thought Atomic Ranch readers would get a kick out of seeing our midcentury modern mailbox with a flat roof that we built in 1974.

J.M. Spencer

Doraville, Ga.

* When we moved to Albuquerque, we thought we'd buy an adobe house, but ended up with a fabulous 1959 MCM ranch. The realtor informed us that our house (or at least our atrium) had once been home to Ham, the Astrochimp—first hominid in space!

We bought the house from the original owners, who reportedly had wild parties and took in tenants, including one of Ham's trainers; they had the atrium modified so he could live in it. We think the house has a fabulous history and we are decorating it with a mixture of modern and MCM. Plans are to have the inside done within the next year, and then start work on the yard. Once it's looking nice, we'll send a photo.

Vanessa Svihla

* I thought you might be interested in my daughter's house built in South Africa after she found your book, *Atomic Ranch: Midcentury Interiors*. I then got her a subscription to the magazine, and she and her husband just recently completed the house.

Jessica Byrnes

My mother is just too proud and sends photos of my house all over the place! It's true—I used your fan-



tastic magazines to help design our house in Johannesburg. I kind of see it as a mid-20th-century/Tom Kundig home. I also took a lot of inspiration from the 1941 R.M. Schindler residence for Jose Rodriguez in Glendale, Calif.

Melissa Brown

* I read your magazine faithfully—as if it was the new testament to the New Testament. I'm emailing you in regard to a small and virtually unknown subdivision in the city limits of St. Louis, Mo.

The houses there are subsiding and sinking literally into the ground. I'm not entirely sure what caused the problems, but one of the residents told me that the development was built on the old city landfill that

dates back to the 1800s. He went on to say that the developer filed for bankruptcy shortly after there were problems with the homes, he guessed in the late-1960s to early-'70s.

I first found these homes approximately five years ago, and since then they're only getting worse; several look to be uninhabited now. As a midcentury buyer, seller and picker for vintage stores, I feel that this story needs to be told somehow, someday. It's like this blighted neighborhood has been forgotten or doesn't exist—or no one cares.

You seem to understand as a fellow midcentury patriarch that we can't lose any more of the history or aesthetic of this era.

Matt Lively

✳️ Just ordered your last book with the Alcoa house in it. We have lived across the street from an Alcoa aluminum home in the Arcadian Acres neighborhood since 1980, but I remember reading about this house in the newspaper as a child! It is a beautiful



home and I loved the history, as Alcoa aluminum is manufactured nearby.

There are also some Lustron homes in the area, and I wanted to share a photo from the ranch house directly behind ours. It is not a modern home, but still has the original stainless steel built-in counter with four individual flip-down electric burners. After all these years it still works perfectly!

Nancy McDonald
Evansville, Ind.

✳️ I stumbled across Atomic Ranch at a hair salon several years ago and haven't looked back. Okay, actually, I *have* looked back. Your magazine gives me ideas, information and mostly hope that I can take my 60-year-old home back to its 1953 splendor.

Imagine my surprise to see 'Designs for Domesticity,' in Summer 2013, featuring the Nu-Tone Food Center [page 40]. One of the things that didn't get previously



updated in my house is this complete working set.

My home was considered a big mansion when it was built, and it has many features that are special even by today's standards: large, walk-in, cedar-lined closets; heated tile bathroom floors; and a GE refrigerator/freezer suspended from the ceiling at cabinet level.

morewisdom

I love sending first-time guests to the kitchen to put their bottle of wine in the fridge, only to walk in a few moments later to find them clutching that bottle while turning circles trying to find the refrigerator.

They don't build things like they used to, because the fridge and freezer still work beautifully. I am one of those folks with an if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it mentality.

Sheryll Hanks

Johnson City, Tenn.

✳ Here are some pictures of my friend's kitchen in the Shaker Heights area of Cleveland. His kitchen is all-original and was installed in 1958; it is very cool looking even after 55 years!

I don't think I have ever seen an example of a totally custom, built-in unit like this.

Bob Harman

Savannah



✳ I am an architectural design consultant in Georgia with ties to Michigan. On a recent trip to Battle Creek, my partner and I happened upon a F.L. Wright-inspired midcentury modern ranch for sale. Constructed of wood and stone, the house is approximately 1,974 square feet with an open floor plan and large windows that allow the beauty of the surrounding 1.5-acre landscape to mingle with the wonderful interior design.

Owners Bruno and Joyce Regni loved their home and its original furnishings so much that they refused to modify it, thus preserving the 1950s furnishings in such a grand fashion that it would rival any contemporary house museum. I am in the process of attaining historic photographs and other documents; currently the house, grounds and interior all qualify for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Chip Wright

Athens, Ga.

✳ I have always been an art lover and collector. Since I purchased my new condo, I found a wonderful place called Antique Factory in Chamblee, Ga., where I try to go every Monday. I've found great pieces like my 1960s shag rugs, Lucite table, my two '60s orange chairs with original fabric and two original Platner chairs by Knoll. The painting on the wall is a signed 1976 abstract, and the other hanging is a vintage piece



of fabric. I mix these with an original Art Nouveau mirror and my early 1900s statuary collection. I have also been collecting vases from different glass makers—Blenko, Flygsfors Coquille, Murano Sommerso and various Scandinavian pieces.

Pedro Ayestaran
Atlanta

✱ What a great fall issue! It's nice to see AR stepping up to help fill the void left by *Modernism*. I'm very much looking forward to some 'educational' features (Saarinen and Neutra) in the next issue [pages 34 & 54].

While I never want to risk the well-balanced AR formula, here's an idea if you run low: I'd love to see a mini-feature of vintage interior photos (even B&Ws). It can be hard to find inspiring examples of actual mid-century interiors for reference when making remodel vs. restore decisions.

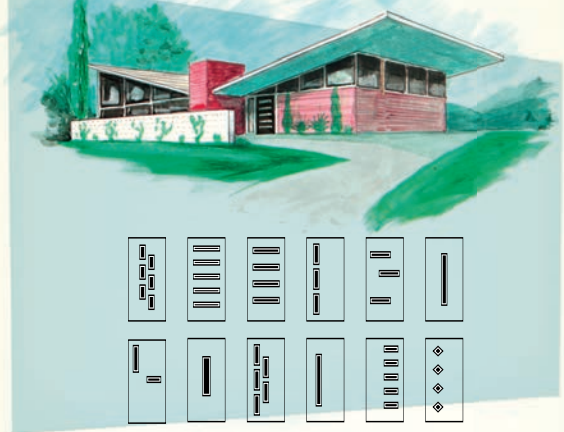
Huge thanks from a long-time subscriber!

Paul Johnson
Walla Walla, Wash.

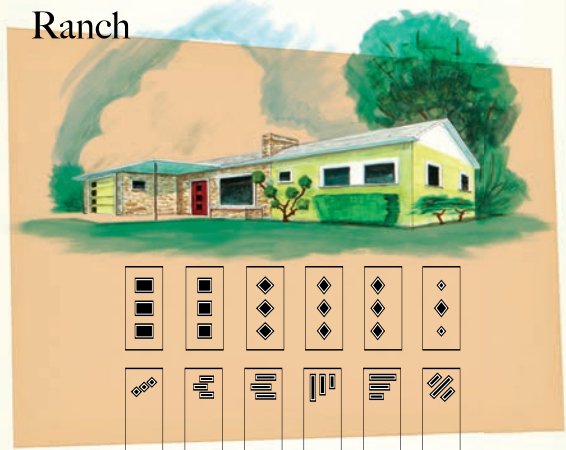
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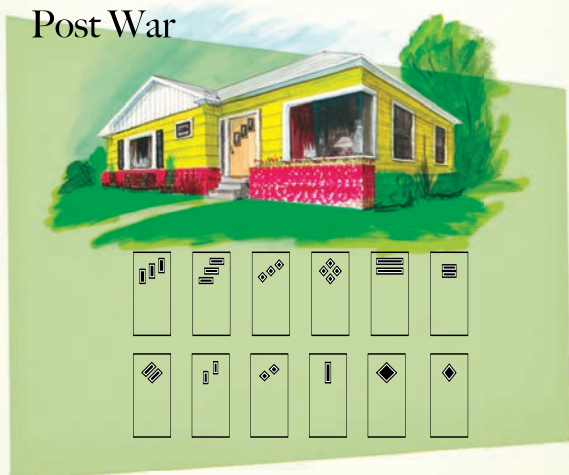
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What Lies Beneath





Our 1891 Victorian, located in Rogers Park, a historic neighborhood on the north side of Chicago, is clearly not a midcentury modern home. But our love for the midcentury aesthetic is evident nonetheless.

The house had been modified over its lifetime, including a late-1920s renovation that introduced many Arts and Crafts elements, so it was no longer architecturally 'pure.' Consequently, we felt some freedom to decorate it according to our passions and interests, rather than having to hew to a strict Victorian style.

In 2005 we bumped out the back of the house to accommodate a main floor kitchen expansion. My partner, Greg, suggested that I employ the newly expanded basement space to fulfill my longtime dream of having a 1950s summer kitchen and a laundry room. I quickly and gleefully agreed.

getting his period

Being the collector and decorator of the household, I enjoy mining the Web for information on furnishings, appliances and decor authentic to the midcentury era. With some determination and luck, I then locate the large and small appliances, furnishings and vintage collectibles that fit the style.

We chose four intense colors popular in the 1950s—red, green, black and yellow—and repeated them throughout the basement kitchen. Since the countertops have such a large visual impact, we punched up the retro look with red laminate and metal edging. Stacked vintage spice tins and boxes sit on top of the deep backsplash, and displays of canned goods provide additional interest. We have plenty of kitchenware collectibles within arms' reach ready for daily use: Pyrex cookware, painted wood-handled cooking utensils and vibrantly colored styrene plastic accessories made by Lustro Ware.

I use home magazines from the late 1940s to early '50s to discover large and small appliances that we want to own. I then comb eBay, Craigslist and local estate sales to find near-perfect models that are in working order, very good condition and complete—as parts can be very difficult to locate. Each painted small appliance receives a specific cleaning and polishing treatment [see sidebar page 17], and for chrome appliances I use Nev-Dull, which degreases, cleans and shines in one step. The end product is an almost perfect midcentury gem, standing proudly on display and even occasionally put into service.

text Dan Dexter

photography Rav Tonsiengsom



Previous spread: Overall, I was going for a look that made it seem as if the cabinets and appliances were originally in an upstairs kitchen and then moved down to the basement in the '50s due to a remodel. The refrigerator/freezer is a 1953 GE, and the Chambers range dates from 1950. The fridge features a butter keeper in the door with a separate thermostat, and a swing-out basket for small items; mine was missing and it took me eight years to find a replacement. Chambers touted their ranges as so well insulated that you could finish cooking a meal with the gas turned off, just using the residual heat. My Lustru Ware pieces include the spice rack, hoop towel rack and two red wall pockets on the side of the yellow KraftMaid cabinet.

The new dinette set features the 'cracked ice' pattern and the table holds a Kenmore toaster, a Sunbeam egg cooker and a Dormeyer percolator, all 1950 models. I've wrapped vintage NOS (new old stock) labels around modern cans displayed on both sides of the adorable serving girl. Her tray holds toothpicks and her skirt is folded napkins.

Opposite, top: Composed of more than 70 chrome-and-black irons manufactured between the late 1930s and the early 1960s, the collection in the upstairs guest bedroom nearly covers an entire wall. The evolutionary miracles showcased within this time span include the Proctor Never-Lift with a spring-loaded fork that keeps the hot soleplate from eventually burning the ironing board cover; another boasts a headlight for ironing in the dark and many have nooks on the soleplate bevel to allow ironing under a button instead of over it.



Tricks of the Trade

Vintage appliances were made to last, and as long as they are in working order, I can do easy electrical repairs, such as replacing frayed or brittle electrical wiring. My cleaning regimen is rather detailed, though. I use CLR to remove lime deposits from interior porcelain, then wash the appliance down with Challenger, a locally made strong degreaser. Next, a rubdown with mild automotive rubbing compound will remove the yellowing of the old enamel paint and any wax build-up that tends to accumulate along the bottom of these appliances. After touching up small paint nicks and scratches with my own custom mix of Rust-Oleum enamel, I finish the job with a hand rubbing of 3M Finesse-it II—a machine polish—and a final coat of Turtle Wax Express Shine. These steps will ensure an easy-to-clean finish that will look great for many years to come.



For the wall mosaic, I arranged the ashtrays in the desired pattern on a piece of craft paper cut to the wall dimensions and spread on the floor. Once happy with the composition, I traced each shape onto the paper and hung the pattern on the wall with painter's tape. My idea was to mount individual ashtrays using a clear button tied to each end of a small length of fishing line and then glue the buttons to the back of the ceramic piece. Using trial and error to determine the right location for each glue spot (since every ashtray hangs differently based on the weight and shape), I held a piece over its tracing while pulling the fishing line taut with a nail. This told me where to drive the nail to maintain the desired angle and location of each ashtray once the paper pattern was removed.

Easy!



motor city mood

We completed our most recent makeover in 2012, which entailed renovating the basement area adjacent to the '50s kitchen. This project harkened back to the suburban Detroit ranch home that my parents purchased in 1972 when I was 10 years old. Because our basement ceilings are very low—less than seven feet—and the windows are at eye level and nearly touch the ceiling, we thought the space could easily replicate the feeling of that 1952 ranch that my family and I loved. The entire project

took eight months to complete, from demolition of the old space down to the studs and raw cement floor, to hanging the curtains I made from vintage bark cloth found at a local antique store.

The space was challenging, since 3" pipes for the radiators ran through it just above eye level. Replacing them with 1" copper pipes hugging the upstairs floor joists netted additional headroom. Cellulose foam insulation applied between the studs prior to drywall made the basement warm and dry, and more light now comes in



Haeger, a popular pottery manufacturer in the 1950s, made many of the vintage ashtrays we have on display, along with the sgraffito pieces on the coffee table. A red upholstered rocker and a new Bertioia-inspired bar stool are some of the non-Heywood-Wakefield furniture in the lounge. I made the curtain between the bar shelves and the seating area from aluminum C-channel and silver ball chain. I perfed the channel in a 'W' pattern using a drill press, then hung 12" sections of chain interspersed with ball chain joiners for a scattered pattern effect.

through larger awning windows. Each new window is dressed with curtains and 2" metal blinds with contrasting fabric tapes that were typical of the early 1950s.

Since wallpaper was commonly used in MCM living spaces, I searched for new old-stock papers on the Internet. The Imperial brand wall covering I selected was manufactured in 1953 and features tropical leaves in green and red on a taupe background. This served as the inspiration for other colors used throughout the space, including a long wall that was painted the dark-

est shade of green in the wallpaper.

We used modern vinyl composite tile in the adjacent kitchen, so we continued with the same Armstrong Excelon Imperial tile. This line of VCT comes in a vast array of colors and closely replicates the flecked patterns and hues of linoleum or asphalt tiles seen in vintage magazines. After playing with several tile patterns, we opted for a classic checkerboard, often found in midcentury basements of the Midwest: red and taupe for the living area, green and taupe for the bedroom.



In the bedroom, the main water supply and shutoff valve are located on the foundation wall.

My contractor suggested installing a half-height false wall with a hidden access panel behind the bed, which created a useful 8" shelf on top. I added LED uplights that illuminate the Asian-theme paint-by-numbers artwork and the Royal Copley vases and figurines. The

Heywood-Wakefield vanity bench also works as an ottoman in the lounge.





hey wakefield

Our Heywood-Wakefield furniture is from the early 1950s and has been sourced on eBay and Craigslist over the past six years. The sofa and chairs were reupholstered locally with a period-appropriate boucle fabric I found years ago. The case goods were redone in the champagne stain by H-W refinishers located in Maryland and Michigan. We love the Modern line of Hey-Wake; it is iconic midcentury but also timeless and so easy to maintain.

All artwork and accessories are vintage. The bedroom took on an Asian theme beginning with the bark-cloth cur-

tains chosen for the room. For the living area, we wanted to use midcentury boomerang- and amoeba-shaped ceramic ashtrays as a decorative element, but they take up a lot of table space and are impractical in a nonsmoking household. It occurred to me that I could instead fashion them into a wall mosaic [see sidebar page 17] that would echo the color and pattern of the leaves in the wallpaper. We really like the effect of this unconventional wall decoration and often hear reactions from visitors along the lines of, "I remember my aunt having an ashtray just like that one!"



Our main-floor kitchen evokes an Arts and Crafts room that was updated sometime after the World War II, using cabinetry and decorative items that draw attention away from the modern conveniences of black granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. The space was designed around our six-burner 1948 O'Keefe & Merritt range. Looking for a way to display my large collection of mid-century chrome and white countertop appliances—mixers, toasters, percolators and blenders—the expanse of windows facing the back yard provided just the right space. A large shelf bisects the upper sash of the windows for the bigger appliances, and another runs above the window molding and houses small appliances that fit below our 9' ceilings.

The downstairs space has ultimately become our favorite place for weekend breakfasts, seasonal canning and even doing laundry. We have entertained many guests in this area, and children especially enjoy selecting a 10 cent Coke from our refurbished 1957 Vendo 81 machine while playing early rock-and-roll 45s on our Seeburg jukebox. ⚛

Dan Dexter is a CFO for a regional software consulting company and enjoys driving old cars and collecting all things midcentury. Greg Beckett is an information security analyst for an academic medical center who enjoys cooking and singing in a community chorus in his spare time. Rav Tonsiengsom is a technology architect by day and a photographer and digital arts enthusiast when he is not busy writing code at night; his site is photos.ravport.com.

Resources page 78

home page



Upper Arlington, Ohio

Our home, built in 1961, was a featured 'Idea Home' for our Columbus suburb development. We bought it in 1975 as the second owners and have done two additions and numerous renovations over the years, but have always attempted to be faithful to its midcentury modern roots. Some of the important elements include a slate floor entryway, large casement windows (now double pane), a massive masonry fireplace, tongue-and-groove ceilings, a large skylight in the master bath and an open floor plan. It truly is a rambling ranch with 2,700-plus square feet located on a corner lot across the street from a park.

Randy & Carol Headley

Yucca Valley, Calif.

This photo was shot on a winter day outside our 1961 ranch house, located near the Joshua Tree National Park entrance. We have just finished a much-needed exterior face-lift, and inside we have redone two bedrooms and baths using a combination of concrete and bamboo floors and IKEA cabinetry. The concrete continues into the living room and meets an amazing rock wall fireplace, which was the original detail that sold us both. Vintage furnishings accent the inside of the house very well, while the minimal-maintenance landscaping is filled with Joshua trees, yuccas and ocotillo cacti.

Kyle & Jacklyn Cunningham

Camillus, N.Y.

My house is located on a half-acre lot, part of a development of MCM homes called 'Pioneer Farms.' Built in 1956 and depicted on the original plans as a 'California Ranch,' it received two additions some time in the 1970s that nearly doubled its size. Since I have owned it, renovations have involved the baths and the galley-style kitchen, a 640-square-foot brick patio and new floor tile. Its original features include interior Arcadia sliding glass doors and an indoor gas grill. For the landscaping, I utilized only area-grown, hardy plants due to the harsh Syracuse winters.

David Leun

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.



Upper Arlington, Ohio



Yucca Valley, Calif.



P

H



Camillus, N.Y.

my favorite space(s)



photography Andrea Fremiotti



Our 1949 Lustron, with its steel walls and slab floors, feels cool in all seasons. To boost the warmth, in addition to the requisite vintage MCM items, my husband, Andrea Fremiotti, and I adorn our prefab lair with family heirlooms and handcrafted accents. I write about the handmade movement and have a shop in midtown Atlanta, while Andrea is a photographer who owns a digital services boutique in Brooklyn; the gray paneling in our Lustron has become a handy backdrop for his work.

We competed with a developer to buy the 950-square-foot ranch in 2005 when it went on the market at a low price. We weren't particularly interested in modular construction and had never heard of Lustrons, the rare remnants of a post-World War II housing experiment. (The Lustron Corporation produced about 2,500 rolled-steel homes in an airplane-manufacturing plant in Columbus, Ohio. Seven were assembled in metro Atlanta,

Both the gray walls and white ceiling panels are porcelain-clad steel, which makes hanging things a real challenge. We use three techniques: block magnets on the wall, hooks with picture wire screwed into the foam crown molding (installed by a previous owner!) or heavy-duty magnetic hooks on the ceiling. Andrea took the aerial photos on either side of the mirrored bookcase on a trip to Honolulu.

On the wall to the left of the couch is a Drexel credenza, with a collage above that I made for my 2005 book, *Abode à la Mode*. The vintage lamps and objects have trickled in from Etsy, eBay and local shops, and the shape of the credenza pulls echoes the motif in the area rug. I'm very drawn to stretched-out hourglass and dog-bone shapes; I buy them over and over again.



My friend Sarah Lodato made the table runner from '60s fabric and sewed the curtains in both rooms. The salt-and-pepper shakers and Danish candlesticks were found on Etsy, and the ceramic bowl was an anniversary gift from my mother-in-law. The Sputnik chandelier was a Craigslist bargain, and a Joan Savo abstract hangs near the cocktail cabinet.



Looking from the dining area to the living room, the prints are by Emma Lawrenson, a contemporary English artist whose works are carried at my shop. Above, right: We receive a lot of MCM gifts from friends and the sock darners and orange pitcher belonged to Andrea's grandmother. I don't know anything about the linked vases, except that they're



very fragile: We've broken the connectors several times already. The mod kitty is from Carla Ek, an Etsy crafter who's using her grandmother's 1964 Duncan 'Modern Cat' molds to make figurines in people's favorite colors. Left: I commissioned these crocheted succulents for an olive-colored vintage planter.

most since destroyed.) With shiny 2' x 2' porcelain-clad exterior tiles, it stands out among the Craftsmen bungalows and traditional brick ranches on our street.

After moving in, we sold most of the furniture from our former loft because it was too large. The editor in me relished the opportunity to start over in a home that has such a specific style and challenging floor plan. I tweak often, ruthlessly donating pieces that don't work, and research for months before deciding on something new. I even bring a ruler and notes to the thrift store when selecting books for the living room's built-in shelves.

Other than scale, our biggest decorating challenge has been balancing masculine and feminine: Andrea likes boxy, and I prefer curvy. In the living room, we started with the Heywood-Wakefield side tables in original wheat finish. They sandwich a manly tufted sofa from Design Within Reach. I chose the Grasshopper chair and ottoman from Modernica to be my girly perch. (Funny thing, though, is that I always stretch out on the sofa, and Andrea hogs the chair.)

The orange chair was calling out for complementary color, so next came the green geometric curtains—hung from heavy-duty magnets—and shaggy rug designed by Verde Home in Atlanta to fit within the window pop out. The

amber-tiled coffee table is from Danish Modern L.A., while the Drexel credenza (I'm crazy about those hour-glass pulls!) is one of the only pieces we kept from our loft.

In the adjoining dining room, I pulled the color palette from a Joan Savo abstract painting purchased in Palm Springs. Our table is a Hey-Wake five-legger that's missing its leaf—but there's no room to expand it anyway. I re-covered the original gold fabric on the dog-bone chairs with turquoise. While we didn't find a period blond corner cabinet, this petite Danish teak piece smartly holds my vintage cocktail supplies.

We're proud of the personal style we've developed in a home that was literally molded for the masses. Our rust-tinged ranch presents plenty of challenges, but the thought of leaving makes us ache. For now, to paraphrase the children's book, this nest is best. And given the fresh wave of devotion we feel every time we change a picture or pillow in our favorite rooms, we may just be able to stay forever. ✨

Jeanée Ledoux
Decatur, Ga.

Resources page 78, and see page 75 for a Lustron exhibition in Ohio.

atomicgifts

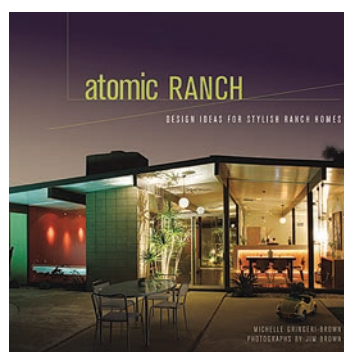
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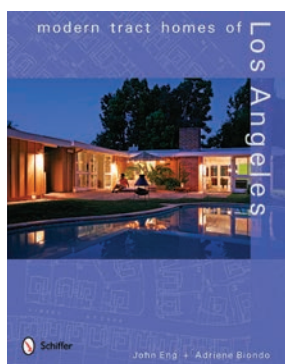
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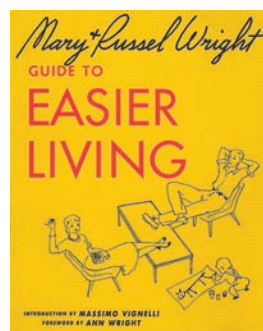
Palm Springs Mid-Century Modern

If you've wondered what you'd see on a driving tour of Palm Springs, this book delivers. Covering both iconic homes and typical modernist tracts in b&w and color photos, Dolly Faibyshev keeps the text super minimal in her picture book of the desert city today. Hardcover, 112 pp., \$30



Trailerama

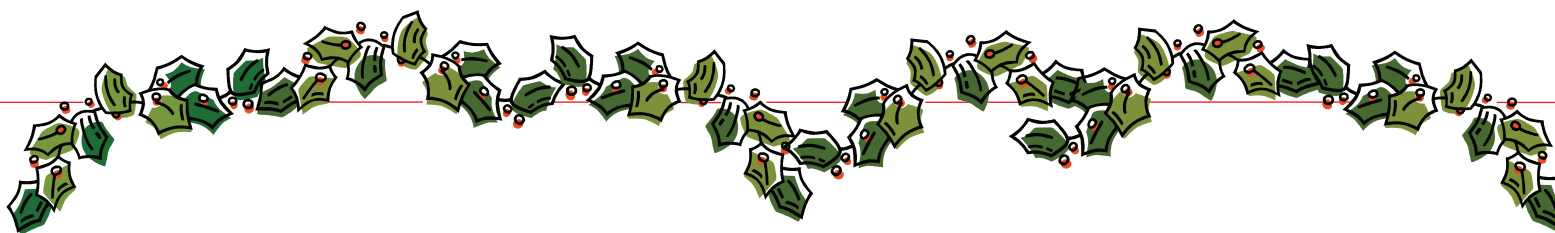
If you like midcentury Americana, this appealing travel trailer book delivers with its vintage ads, illustrations, family snapshots, Hollywood stills, postcards, toys and more on the topic. But you don't have to be a trailer enthusiast to enjoy its picture-book charms, and Phil Noyes' tongue-in-cheek text makes for lite reading. Hardcover, 192 pp., \$30



Guide to Easier Living

Russel and Mary Wright personified modern design, and this reprinted vintage book shares their approach to informal living. The floor plans and advice about household chores and setting the dining table—with American Modern dinnerware of course—still resonate today. Softcover, b&w illus., 202 pp., \$19

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Three Acres & a Bugatti



text John Houser
photography Jim Brown

The master bedroom in this Richard Neutra home has furnishings from Modernica, artwork by Merrick Hansel, a low-pile wool carpet and a fantastic view of the pool and expansive grounds.



In 2007, my partner, George Acosta, and I moved to Philadelphia from Los Angeles for my work. Over the years, we loved escaping to Palm Springs, where we appreciated the midcentury modern architecture and the relaxing desert lifestyle. Many visits included a slow drive by our dream residence—The Kaufmann House on Vista Chino.

One night George was browsing the Internet looking at real estate for sale. He called out, “You have to see this house; it’s a Neutra in Philadelphia!” I could hardly believe him and responded, “I don’t want to look because you will convince us to buy it.”

The next day we were at the property with our real estate agent. Known as the Hassrick House, it was

marketed as “Renovate the Neutra-designed home or tear it down.” Vacant for a number of years, it had fallen into heavy disrepair, like something out of *Grey Gardens*. Doors were unlocked and windows open. All sorts of animals were living inside. Regardless, when we first walked up to it we looked at each other and both said, “We are buying this house.”

The asking price was very high for Philadelphia, especially considering the condition. While on an out of town trip, we made an offer, but it was rejected and we then contemplated a full-price counter. The thought of this home as a missed opportunity is what really motivated our decision, so we made financial arrangements for the purchase.



A four-bedroom, two-bath, 3,300-square-foot home originally, additions have tacked on 2,200 more square feet of living space. It took months and a large crew just to cut away the overgrown vines and weeds that had overtaken the entire property, which includes a bamboo forest. "Wild animals come and go as they please—most with little regard for us even when we are only separated by a pane of glass," says owner John Hauser.

The master bedroom epitomizes the beauty of Neutra's architecture. Note the stainless steel fascia board and the Jens Risom armchair and ottoman.

When we returned to Philadelphia we drove by on our way home from the airport. The For Sale sign was gone and all the doors had been secured with bolts and padlocks. Panicking, we called our agent, who discovered that the house had been foreclosed upon and was now owned by a local bank; the price had also been drastically reduced. After a roller coaster of obstacles, the home became ours. In fall 2008, we began the daunting task of bringing it back to life.

While researching the history, we found that Richard Neutra's project manager was Thaddeus Longstreth. He managed many of Neutra's projects, mainly those on the East Coast, but also the Palm Springs Kaufmann House and our new home. Longstreth's files at the University of

Pennsylvania's Architectural Archives included floor plans, notes and photos of all the projects that he had worked on. We were able to procure copies of the original blueprints and about 200 photographs. They also allowed us to wear white gloves and personally view all of the file contents—an amazing experience. In addition, the archives at UCLA provided us with copies of original correspondence between Neutra, Longstreth and the Hassricks. Those 100-plus letters reveal a conversation that covers all of the home's details written in a wonderfully vintage tone. These became incredibly valuable resources for guiding us during our sympathetic restoration.

There has not been much written about the Hassrick

New cork flooring runs throughout the open plan living/dining/kitchen, as well as much of the rest of the home, as it did originally. All of the glass is still single pane, and tongue-and-groove cedar, luan panels or stucco finishes the ceilings. A Bantam sofa, Split-Rail lounge chairs and Herman Miller Eames shell chairs team with two vintage Hans Wegner tables. The tambour-front Danish credenza sits where a George Nakashima wall-hung model once was, now with a former homeowner.





comingup



- ◀ He hearts his Seattle rambler
- ▶ Furnishing on a budget in Chicago
- ▼ An Eichler gets the Kaufmann treatment



Plus, our 10th Anniversary issue, with updates on favorite past homes and a modern facade face-lift ...



House, and what does exist online is not very clear and can be somewhat negative. The story as we have researched it is this:

In 1956 Kenneth and Barbara Hassrick hired Richard Neutra to build a modern home for the young newlywed couple. The Hassricks had read an article about Neutra in an issue of *Time* that featured his picture on the cover [August 15, 1949]. We understand, but cannot confirm, that the house was a wedding gift from Barbara's wealthy parents. It was constructed on the grounds of the family's expansive Philadelphia estate in East Falls, an area known as the childhood home of Grace Kelly.

Built in the International Style, the house was very typical of Neutra's work in the '50s and '60s. Although the front is intentionally unpretentious and simple, upon entering you are immediately struck by the living room's 40' glass wall that opens to the outdoors. The Hassricks requested the use of salmon-colored Bethayers concrete block; as far as we know, this is the only house Neutra ever built using this color. Tongue-and-groove ceilings, a fireplace pulled forward from the wall, and a kitchen open to the living room are other typical Neutra

elements and signature features of this home.

The Hassricks had definite opinions on what they wanted, which ultimately included a second workshop for Ken, a metal artist, and a garage (the original house had a double carport) for two Bugattis. [Those were a 1937 Type 57 Ventoux coupe and a Type 57C drophead coupe for you automotive enthusiasts.—ed] Neutra designed a garage with sleeping space above, and soon after, local architect Irwin Stein was engaged to build a 900-square-foot, gable-roof workshop/studio. Although some have criticized this addition, it is part of the home's history and was intentionally positioned so that it is not visible from the front elevation.

In completing interior work on the house, the Hassricks hired George Nakashima to build a floating credenza and sliding panels to partially close the kitchen off from the living room; Neutra reportedly didn't care for the panels. There is also a wooden sculpture above the door that we have been told was carved and installed by Nakashima himself. It is surprising that in the years that the house was unlocked, with doors wide open, the Nakashima panels were never stolen.



Today, the kitchen is similar to the original, with its suspended upper cabinets and laminate counters and doors. A Kenmore Elite cooktop is now opposite the sink in a niche clad with subway-tile—reminiscent of the brick-floored entry hall and structural pink concrete block—and the Viking fridge, Bosch dishwasher and Maytag oven were all purchased at Sears. When the couple bought the home, they found some of the original base cabinets had been turned into a peninsula and the counters were mosaic tile. “Archival photos were the key to being able to put things back together and are still the best tool for guiding any future restorations,” says homeowner John Houser.

The sliding Nakashima panels are stored on the base cabinets when they’re not screening the view between the dining area and the kitchen counters. The cabinetry was sanded and refinished, the damaged luan ceiling replaced, and the doors and counters received new white laminate.



Two steps up is a formal dining room that, prior to the Stein addition, served as Ken Hassrick's studio, complete with a garage door. The desk area, with its original wall sconce, was falling apart and the stairs were covered with blue and green ceramic tile before the eight-month restoration began. Where the original blueprint cites the monkey cage, George Acosta constructed a built-in couch.

Both baths were redone with fixtures from Kohler and Grohe, restored and custom cabinetry, and Heath tile on the walls and showers.



The hallway, with vintage Pella accordion closet doors and a fixed-glass transom, leads to the former playroom, which had been combined with a bedroom into one large room in the past. "The house was carefully dismantled—saving every salvageable piece—repaired where needed and put back together using as many original pieces as possible," explains Houser. "The blueprints and original photos were meticulously studied to uncover how cabinetry, lighting, walls, etc., had been moved or removed."



The Record Shows



The Thaddeus Longstreth archives contain letters he sent to Richard Neutra in October 1959 showing two different designs for the garage addition: a single story and a two-story variation. Neutra wrote back that he had reviewed the sketches and agreed with the Hassricks' reasoning behind the request. Evidently, the two-story configuration won the day (above, left).

Irwin Stein, architect of the later large studio addition (below, right), also designed a concrete block home for his brother up the street and still lives nearby. "Neutra was well known at the time,"

Stein recalls. "He had done the Gettysburg Cyclorama and other East Coast [works]. The Hassrick House appealed to Louis Kahn: He brought students to the house during construction to look at it because it had a service core and a formalist character.

"Unfortunately, some of the nice things that Neutra could do in California, he had a lot of trouble with here. Those lovely steel-framed sliding glass doors went to hell here rusting—they're just not for this climate. And the flat roofs are a problem, they leak a lot of the time."

—Michelle Gringeri-Brown



John Hauser is an executive with Urban Outfitters. He and George Acosta were hands-on with the project, from research and demo to flooring, tile installation, painting, woodworking, landscaping and interior décor; their renovation continues. For more on Philadelphia modernism and Stein's work, we recommend issues No. 38 and 39, available at atomic-ranch.com, as well as the archives at modernhomesphiladelphia.com.



Two of the Hassrick children have stopped by, and the Sawyers, who owned the home up until 2001, have also come to visit. Everyone is thankful to see the house getting back to its original glory, and we have heard some amazing stories from the past.

For instance, I kept seeing the word ‘cage’ on the floor plans and finally learned from the family that it was designed to house their pet monkey, Rosebud, a kinkajou. And during the 1960 Kennedy election, the power went out, so they opened the large glass doors and drove the car into the living room to listen to the news on the radio. Then there are stories of wild parties in the ‘60s and ‘70s, and about the phallic shape of the pool.

Richard Neutra designed four houses in the Philadelphia area. The Hassrick House had been on the endangered properties list since 2007 and came very close to being demolished. In 2008 it was officially designated historic by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and is now protected. It was because of the Preservation Alliance and their involvement that we were able to acquire this home and, in doing so, prevent

Now returned to its original size, the playroom-turned-guest-suite is furnished with a vintage Florence Knoll marble-topped table and a Parallel Bar sofa. Next to it are Skagen nesting tables, a Nelson Bubble lamp overhead and two vintage French armchairs by an unknown designer. Through the window you can glimpse the workshop addition, with cement block columns added by a previous owner. Future projects include replacing damaged sliding glass doors and unoriginal windows, as well as the artist’s studio.

another unfortunate demolition story.

Today, the house and surrounding property maintain a uniquely warm, natural aesthetic—or as the Hassricks put it, “gemütlich,” agreeably pleasant. In an initial letter to Neutra the couple requested that the house “work efficiently, pleasure the eye, comfort the soul and warm the heart.” Even though there was a time when it sat forgotten, quiet and waiting, the house is very much alive again.

We are so fortunate to call it home. ✿

Resources page 78

keepitup

What TV Doesn't Tell You About Working With a Contractor



Thumbing through fabulous magazine photos has got you thinking: If you take out that wall added in the 1980s, put those clerestory windows back the way they originally were and ditch the over-detailed, faux-colonial cabinets in the kitchen, you'll be well on your way to restoring your own ranch home. But life is busy and living without a kitchen for months will be tough, so maybe it would be best to hire a contractor. After all, home improvement television contractors do jobs like this in an hour. How hard could it possibly be?

OK—no one actually believes that a home can be transformed in one hour, or even one month, for that

A 1950 Portland, Ore., ranch is receiving new finishes in the open plan kitchen/dining/living room, including poured terrazzo floors, for which Lackey Construction's crew is prepping the car decking. By hiring a contractor who implements a recycling program, the job site is organized, there's no drop box in the street and, by Brad Lackey's estimation, 10,000 pounds of material is diverted annually from the landfill.

matter. Television is entertainment and real renovations require considerable forethought, research and planning. Working with a professional contractor is always a good bet to ensure superior results, but there are risks as well. Here is my advice to help you make the best of your relationship with your contractor.

text Ralph Lembcke
photography Kevin McConnell

Get a permit

Your municipality probably requires you to get a building permit for most remodeling work. While seen by some as a pain and/or a tax grab, a building permit is actually your best insurance for making sure the work gets done properly; not getting one may also be illegal. Building inspectors will check to make sure everything conforms to current codes, which helps ensure your safety, the structural sufficiency of the building and maximum resale value for your home. Recently, I was involved with a project where the contractor made a framing error. The building inspector caught it, we negotiated an amicable solution and a potential long-term structural problem was avoided.

Plan ahead

Nowhere is Murphy's Law more in force than during a restoration. Many earlier construction deficiencies and problems are hidden and only uncovered when the work begins. That translates to 'unanticipated extras' in contractor talk, especially when it comes to the estimated cost. We don't anticipate dying prematurely, but smart people carry life insurance just in case. A contingency fund is like an insurance policy for your project. Make sure you set aside an additional 10 percent to cover unexpected situations, but don't tell your contractor about it.

Put it in writing

Contracts are not guarantees, but a properly written one will clearly establish the rights and obligations you and your contractor have to each other. A good primary contract document will clearly indicate full names and addresses of both parties, the price (including all applicable taxes), agreed-to method of payment, anticipated starting and completion dates, as well as other terms and conditions. A payment schedule tied to completion milestones is your best bet. However, if you are working with an architect, he or she will help you verify incremental payment requests from your contractor. If the



Stacey Schultz

A more typical homeowner project site may be messier to live through but can get the job done, too.

job is small, consider payment upon completion of the work. Avoid deposits if possible; reputable contractors will have sufficient working capital and credit limits to float material purchases until the first payment is due.

Sweat the small stuff

For better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, you will be living with your contractor, the crew and the subcontractors for the entirety of your remodel. If things like putting the toilet seat down are an issue for you, remember that you may wander bleary-eyed into your kitchen one morning to be greeted by several dust-covered tradespeople sitting at your table drinking coffee. Discuss details in advance: what time work can commence in the morning and whether or not your bathroom and kitchen facilities will be available for the crew's use. It is important to establish parameters at the beginning so that everyone is clear as to what is an acceptable use of space.

Parking may be another issue. Will your driveway be

keepitup

encumbered by a waste bin, full of trade vans or blocked by delivery vehicles? It's worth discussing. What about temporary use of utilities like water and power? Expect a spike in those bills—they're not called power tools for nothing. Daily and final cleanup should also be discussed with the contractor. The jobsite should be left in a broom-swept and safe condition at the end of each workday. Final vacuuming, dusting, washing and glass

policy, or notify your insurance company of the work. A premium increase is a small price to pay should one of the plumbers accidentally set the joists on fire while sweating copper pipes, or an unexpected storm whips your new framing into toothpicks. Also, make sure that your contractor carries an adequate amount of liability and workers' compensation insurance in the event of a job-site accident or liability claim.



Lead carpenter Grant Kasten is sanding high spots to receive AC plywood underlayment (the 'A' side is sanded and smooth) for the terrazzo. The bag on the sander captures almost all of the dust, making a protective face mask unnecessary.

cleaning should also be considered. However, if you are willing to undertake this work yourself, you may save some money.

More insurance

An often overlooked issue is the matter of insuring the work. The contractor may reasonably assume that you carry home insurance and if the work suffers a catastrophe, your homeowner's policy will cover it. Not necessarily so. Either ask the contractor to carry a builder's risk

Call before you dig, dig?

Contractors usually cover getting underground utility service locates (power, water, gas, cable) before digging for additions or renovations, but not all services are locatable. Private phone lines, underground sprinkler systems and power supplies to sheds or garages will not be covered by locate services. Neither will the radiant heating pipes in your Eichler home. If you know of any hidden condition or suspect that there

are hidden services, be sure to let your contractor know in advance, in writing.

These few bits of advice may help ensure that you and your contractor remain on good terms long after your home appears in the pages of Atomic Ranch. ✨

Ralph Lembcke is a midcentury modern enthusiast, a contractor and a professor at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario, where he teaches various courses in the construction and architectural programs.

Send your maintenance and remodeling queries and photos for our authorities' review, along with solutions that others may benefit from, to editor@atomic-ranch.com.



I grew up in Fort Wayne, Ind., a midsize, Midwestern city with many lovely qualities, but not necessarily known as a mecca for modernism. However, it *is* home to a community conceived by one of the icons of 20th-century design.

As a girl, I knew it as ‘The Sem’—a campus just outside of town that trained Lutheran ministers. My parents had friends on the faculty who lived in on-campus housing. I loved visiting because it was like I had stepped into a TV rerun—very *Brady Bunch* or *I Dream of Jeannie*. There were staircases you could look right through, entire walls of windows and dresser drawers built right into the bedroom walls. “The buildings were designed by the guy who designed the St. Louis Arch,” the grownups would tell us.

Above: The chapel as viewed from across the manmade lake, with the original library immediately to its right and the bell tower on the left. The library was expanded recently by the Fort Wayne construction firm that built the campus buildings in the ‘50s. Right: A view of a group of dormitories with the president’s house in the background. While smaller than a dormitory structure, the style and roof pitch of the house is the same as all of the other campus buildings.



a midwestern
midcentury
monastery

text Beth Behrendt
photography Bill DeSalvo

Saarinen's *village*



To this day, art schools and architecture students from around

Right: In the periodical section of the library students are "studying" (catching up with the sports section) while relaxing in period chairs. The fixtures and furnishings were believed to be selected or approved by Saarinen, and included designs from his colleagues at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, such as Charles and Ray Eames.



This 1960s photo shows the interior of the library with its striking floating staircase. The lattice of glass block and diamond shaped bricks covers the west wall.



Courtesy Concordia Theological Seminary (4)

the region visit the campus to study Saarinen's designs.



Left: A view from the dining hall's balcony, shortly after completion. The latticework wall was formed by placing diamond-shaped glass blocks between the unique Seminary bricks.

An early photo from the archives showing another view of the library study area. The light fixtures are still in place, but the upholstered furniture (color unknown) is long gone.



"Look at the diamond-shaped bricks!" I do not recall being particularly impressed, but eventually it sunk in that the architect was famous.

Fast-forward a couple of decades and I'm back in Fort Wayne, the proud owner of a 1949 California modern-style ranch. MCM design has become a passion, and while poring over furniture catalogs one day, it occurred to me that the marble-topped Tulip table I was coveting for the dining room was designed by the same guy who designed the St. Louis Arch. Wait a minute: Did that mean The Sem was designed by Eero Saarinen?!

Architecture to Chairs

Anyone with an interest in midcentury design is familiar with Saarinen's large-scale public projects, such as the TWA Terminal at JFK and Gateway Arch. Or you may know his iconic Tulip furniture and the Grasshopper and Womb chairs. While he received various commissions for corporate headquarters and university buildings, this is the only campus where the entire plan and all of the buildings

are solely his design, very much in the spirit of Gesamtkunstwerk—a total work of art.

Saarinen and Associates was chosen for the project in 1953 from a field of 20 firms from around the country. Known as Concordia Senior College (in the 1970s it became Concordia Theological Seminary), the Lutheran Board for Higher Education was responsible for selecting the architect. They stated their reasons for choosing Saarinen in true academic fashion: "It was apparent he represented outstanding architectural achievements which gave preeminent promise of a sustained interest in the spiritual ideals and the educational philosophies which are basic to the success of this new college. In addition, the majority of the buildings he has designed exhibit such honest functional solutions and structural clarity that the Board felt no doubt about his ability to design a complete campus which would aid the Church in achieving the unique purposes of its new school."

The campus plan acknowledges the German birthplace of Lutheranism and Saarinen's own Finnish heritage, and

is still referred to as ‘Saarinen’s Village’ because of the similarities to a northern European hamlet. The chapel is strikingly tall, with a steeply pitched roof. It and the surrounding plaza are the center of the community’s daily life. The dining hall, student commons and library surround the square, and academic buildings and dormitories spread out from this central social and spiritual hub of the community.

Mainly on the Plain

The site chosen for the college was typical Midwestern farmland with nary a tree or a body of water to add visual interest. Saarinen compensated by installing a manmade lake and planting trees in a pattern complementary to the layout of the buildings. The chapel was situated on the one slight hill on the site and given a dramatic roof. The other buildings are similar in style but on a smaller scale, naturally emphasizing the height of the chapel. (It is said that

the roofs all pitch at 23.5 degrees from the horizon—the same angle at which the earth’s tilt axis relates to the sun.) The continuity of appearance was enhanced by the use of buff-colored brick cladding and black-tiled roofs on all buildings, along with color-block accents in classic MCM orange or blue.

As was so frequently pointed out to me as a child, the bricks on all of the facades are an unusual diamond shape. Saarinen did not want to cut the bricks where they abutted the roofs, so he worked with the local contractor to design and produce the unique form.

The dormitories, which house only men, were designed to hold 36 residents and are clustered in groups of four. The village feel of the campus is enhanced by these groupings of dormitories, which are each no bigger than the largest faculty houses on campus. Apparently, the administration had originally requested dormitories holding at least 150 students, but Saarinen resisted, believing that





Two cul-de-sacs lined with traditional midcentury ranch homes designed by Saarinen make up the faculty residences. A flat-roofed detached garage is shared by some houses, like this two-bedroom model, left. Others have three or four bedrooms and attached garages.

Below: Alternating with aluminum-framed windows, the diamond bricks accent the exterior walls of the dormitories.

Opposite: A new sidewalk bridge in the foreground of the original library building connects to a plaza recently built to expand the study facilities. Replicas of the distinctive grey roof tiles and diamond bricks were produced to uphold the design continuity.



smaller structures better fit his vision and would encourage stronger social responsibility for the group living in each house. Every cluster of dorms includes a faculty advisor's home—similar in exterior appearance, but designed for raising a family, with an eat-in kitchen, a basement rec room and built-ins in every bedroom.

Just a few minutes walking distance outside of the central campus is a grouping of more faculty homes. These are classic simple ranches, ranging from two to four bedrooms in size. All are similar in appearance, with deep overhangs on each end, picture windows, free-standing garages and clad with siding—the only buildings on campus that don't use the buff-colored, diamond-shaped bricks.

Structural Integrity

The original buildings still stand today, appearing basically as they did when completed in 1958. An \$8 million library expansion has recently been completed and, while it is not completely clad in diamond bricks, the architect used Saarinen's architectural vocabulary and it strays very

little from the feel of the other buildings.

The opening of the college was an immediate sensation in Fort Wayne. The construction progress had been closely followed in both of the local newspapers and, as *The News-Sentinel* proudly proclaimed, "This institution is a thing of beauty, not only for home folks to be proud of but for passers-through-town to gape at." To this day, art schools and architecture students from around the region visit the campus to study Saarinen's designs.

Recently, I took my 11-year-old son out to see The Sem for the first time. In typical tween style, he wasn't expressing the enthusiasm I had hoped for. Before long, I heard myself brightly exclaiming, "This was designed by the same man who designed the St. Louis Arch! And look at the diamond-shaped bricks!" ✨

Bill DeSalvo and Beth Behrendt live with their three sons in a 1949 MCM ranch designed by Edwin Gibson in Fort Wayne. Behrendt is a freelance researcher, writer and blogger specializing in design, architecture, history and food; read her at realfoodfor5.com.



The central fireplace has a concrete hearth with a marble faux finish in this interior-atrium model Streng home in Sacramento. A Sputnik light fixture and Shag's 'Welcome to Our Glorious Lifestyle' hang over a 25-year-old Italian marble table surrounded by IKEA chairs.

Bitten by the MC Bug

text Bromley Davenport
photography Scott Dahlquist







Bitten by the

A knock-off Nelson clock nudges homeowners toward a midcentury aesthetic

Mid Bug

Eighteen years ago Scott and Meong Dahlquist were looking for a home suitable for their senior residential care business. When they wandered through a 1978 tract house in Elk Grove, Calif., 20 minutes south of Sacramento, they hit pay dirt.

“The house didn’t look anything like it does now, but the bones appealed to us so much that we both instantly fell in love with it,” says Scott. “I didn’t know much about the details of midcentury design; I just knew I loved the look of the house—the tall ceilings, huge skylight and the idea of the atrium. It was furnished traditionally, but I could envision what I could do to the house. We decided almost on the spot to move here and turn our existing house into the first care home instead.”

The ranch house in question is a Streng Bros., one of roughly 3,000 modernist residences the company built in the Sacramento Valley beginning in 1959. Scott had stepbrothers who grew up in an Eichler in Cupertino, and a musician uncle’s swingin’ home in Duluth, Minn., had a Sputnik light fixture that awed him as a kid. All of that stayed with him years later. As for Meong—who was born in South Korea and previously worked as an OR nurse in North Africa—she, too, was struck by the cool Eichler designs.

“In Sunnyvale in the Bay Area we saw the Eichlers with their indoor gardens; they were so appealing,” she says. “When we saw that [feature] in this home, we wanted it.”

One of architect Carter Sparks’ designs, the 2,170-square-foot house has two baths and what Scott calls 3.5 bedrooms—the master has a suite-like sitting area that they use as a music room for Scott’s some 1,000 CDs. Their Williamson Ranch tract has four different floor plans, including ‘half-plexes,’ Streng Bros.’ name for its duplex models.

“The Eichlers have more of an outdoor connection with their atriums, since the Bay Area is cooler than Sacramento,” Scott explains. “In the summer it’s hard to go outside here; in August you just want to hole up indoors, so having an inside atrium is great.”

The family room is where the couple hang out enjoying the Jesse media unit, Flat couch by Bonaldo and an area rug with a motif that matches the graphic in the Disneyland Flying Saucer poster. The Cost Plus World Market floor lamp was less than \$130.



Open to the kitchen and located behind the garage is what the Dahlquists call the living room because its Marshmallow Sofa, Noguchi table and Eames Sofa Compact are only lightly used for company. The bookcases are Jesse and the vintage bullet floor lamp came from Googie Time in Sacramento. Some of Scott's numerous jazz album covers are framed near the Cigar Lotus lamp.

Opposite: The view from the front door is of the family room and the dining area with its display cabinet of family mementos and discount-store glass. The atrium's large acrylic skylight nurtures a mix of faux banana plants and live palms, bromeliads and snake plants, watered via a hose through the front door.

Slowly they morphed to a more modernist and colorful aesthetic with yellow, orange and green accent walls.



That interior atrium, with a double-pane, tinted-acrylic skylight that minimizes direct solar gain, is the most striking feature of the Dahlquist home. But the hyper-open floor plan and the interior aggregate walkways linking the front door, den/dining room, master bedroom and living room/kitchen are close seconds.

When the couple, now in their late 50s, first moved in, they focused on decorating in a broadly Asian style—black and white furnishings, kimonos on the wall, Asian room screens. “We went with that theme for many years until I purchased an inexpensive wall clock that caught my eye five or six years ago,” Scott says. “I know it now to be an imitation George Nelson Ball clock. That was when the midcentury bug bit me.”

Slowly they morphed to a more modernist and colorful aesthetic with yellow, orange and green accent walls. “I’d spent about a month painting the house top to bottom when we moved in. One of the things I didn’t like was all of the doors were dark brown, so I painted everything ‘Decorator’ white,” he recalls. “It was very monochromatic, but that became boring. I had to experiment quite a bit with different colors: those walls were painted many times.”

The concrete slab floors were covered with carpet and there was resilient tile in the kitchen. A few years ago they put down Brazilian hardwood laminate in the public rooms, but regretted that ecologically and switched to a faux-wood laminate when redoing the bedrooms. The baths and kitchen are still fairly original; Scott says that whenever they had some money, they’d put it into the business instead of remodeling.

They did paint the dark brown kitchen cupboards and remove a hanging upper cabinet that blocked light to the dining room, as well as buy new appliances. “When we get to the kitchen and baths, we’ll do a modern Zen style, not midcentury per se,” he says.

Their furnishings are a mix of contemporary pieces bought in the past 20 years and reissues that have fed their growing interest in midcentury design. “We saw the Marshmallow Sofa and the Eames Sofa Compact together at a contemporary Sacramento store. The thing I liked about them, other than the red color, was that they



The tract's 280 ranch houses were built in four phases between 1976 and 1984; Carter Sparks designed the majority of them. —Steve Streng



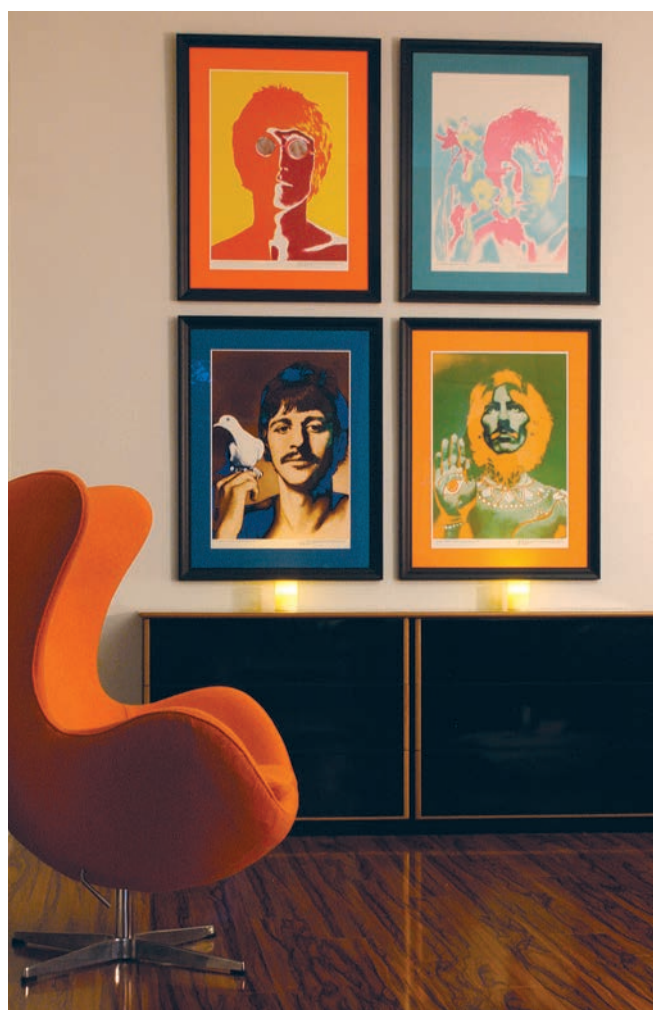
The Italian lacquered platform bed and nightstands match the dresser (opposite page), and the wall sconce is a Nelson Cigar Bubble lamp. A triptych Buddha carving is from Z Gallerie, while the decorative blue door panel came from Pier 1.



were small in size," Scott comments. "We had bigger furniture in the past, and even though the house is fairly spacious feeling, the larger, clunky furniture ate up too much space and made it look small. I focused on getting things that were a little bit cleaner and a little bit smaller."

They have many affordable items: IKEA dining chairs, a display case from Macy's, knockoff Barcelona, Egg and Eames lounge chairs, and artwork and accessories from Z Gallerie, Pier 1, Cost Plus and a local nursery. Conversely, their three sofas and Scott's collection of psychedelic '60s rock concert and Disneyland posters are investment pieces.

"Tower Records in San Francisco had handbills for great



An Egg chair knockoff sits at the entrance to the master bedroom suite. The four Richard Avedon prints of the Beatles hang over the Italian dresser bought many years ago.

Scott's collection of psychedelic '60s rock concert and Disneyland posters are investment pieces.



Vintage rock posters, a modern interpretation of an Eames lounge chair and ottoman, a Tolomeo floor lamp and copious CDs and music collectibles fill the .5 portion of the master bedroom. Below: The entry hall displays reproduction Pan American Hawaiian travel ads and menu covers from Matson Lines cruise ships.





Streng Bros.

Steve Streng, the son of original builder Jim Streng and a Sacramento Realtor specializing in the modern homes he worked on as a teenager, visited the Dahlquist home. “Their floor plan is our ‘Atrium’ 154 model with the hall closed off, a closet removed and the wall between the fourth bedroom and the master opened up to make a great office/sitting room,” he says. “The midcentury market

in California has grown considerably in the last decade, and prices in the Elk Grove area have risen 32% in the last year. The efficient floor plans and light and airy spaces that characterize MCM architecture have hooked a whole new generation of prospective homebuyers who now compete for a limited amount of listed properties. Those who have acquired the passion want nothing but MCM.”

concerts at the Winterland and The Fillmore—Jimi Hendrix, Cream, Jefferson Airplane, The Byrds, Big Brother and the Holding Company—that were free, high-quality art,” Scott explains. “All of my posters are authentic first, second or third printings from Wolfgang’s Vault, which is run by Bill Graham Presents. Graham meticulously saved all of the poster runs of every concert he produced. First printing means it was done before the concert, second printing is directly after, and the third printing was usually within a few years. The Disneyland posters in the family room are because I’m a big fan, particularly of the rides that are no longer there, like Rocket to the Moon, Skyway and Flying Saucer.”

The couple love their home, though they say that originality is not particularly prized by those in the neighborhood. “We wouldn’t move walls, and I really like the design, but the baths and kitchen are outdated,” Scott proclaims. “By far the majority of buyers want an updated kitchen with granite counters—it’s almost expected nowadays.”

And they do have a few minor gripes. “I like to display things on the wall, like our children’s photos and our travel pictures,” Meong says. “And here we don’t have that much space—it’s all open.”

“The Marshmallow and Eames sofas look cool but aren’t that comfortable; if you have a back problem those are the couches to sit on!” Scott jokingly adds. “They’re more to look at and admire, not lie down on,” his wife rejoins.

Five years from now they can see moving to L.A. to be closer to their adult sons. While researching that housing market online, they are adamant about sticking with a mid-century or contemporary design. “Absolutely!” they both exclaim in unison. Then Scott adds, “I can’t see us ever getting a regular house.”



Resources page 78. Visit a custom Carter Sparks home in issue No. 36, Winter 2012, available at atomic-ranch.com, and see floor plans at strengbroshomes.com.

ranchdressing

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

Q: My husband and I bought a mid-century modern house in 2007. There were a few interesting vintage features remaining, including this bedroom light fixture with a label that reads 'Original Tapio Wirkkala Design Made in Finland.' The son of the original owner recalled that the fixture once had colored



glass shades over the bulbs; we don't know if the current bulbs are original or not. My research into the work of Tapio Wirkkala revealed a significant amount of glass pieces but no light fixtures. Can you provide any information on the light and possibly a source for replacement glass shades?

Mary Konsoulis

A: Kevin Eustice from Bit of Butter (bitofbutter.com) filled us in: "The light fixtures are wonderful! They were manufactured by Idman Oy in 1960 and were designed by Tapio Wirkkala. Interestingly, the light bulbs in at least two of your fixtures were also designed by Wirkkala, for Airam Oy ['Oy' means corporation or company in Finnish]. The fixtures, indeed, may have had colored shades, similar to these sold by Wright in 2010: wright20.com/auctions/view/KXCD/KXCF/338/LA/none/TOP/0/, or like these offered for sale in 2008 by Quittenbaum, liveauctioneers.com/item/5340237.

"Replacement shades are not being manufactured to the best of my knowledge, nor are replacement bulbs. The best bet would be to watch for other examples on eBay or at modernist auctions. A Treasury of Scandinavian Design, 1961, ed. Erik Zahle, depicts examples of the Idman/Airam pairing on page 126."

Q: As we do most things, I blame my mother for my obsession with midcentury modern; she gave me a dollhouse filled with this furniture for Christmas around 1969. The furniture is wood, and stamped on the bottom is 'Creative Playthings Made in Finland.' I have found bits and pieces online and in poor shape, but not a set like mine in such good condition. I have the full-size bed as well, and the furniture lives on in my guestroom/office. A value and any additional information would be greatly appreciated.

Wendy Taylor

A: Our research showed that 2013 prices ranged from \$10 for a five-piece bedroom suite to \$16 for a boxed bath fixture set, typically in well-loved condition. Creative Playthings was a U.S. company, but from the stamp on your furniture, it sounds like the furniture was imported from Finland, as was a matching gable-roof dollhouse we found listed on eBay. The company's Wikipedia listing mentions collaborations with MoMA,



Marcel Breuer, Isamu Noguchi and Louis Kahn on a variety of educational toys and exhibitions.

Maryann Roy, of *Welcome Home* (maryannroy.wordpress.com), a site for 1:6-scale modernist doll furniture, filled us in further. She notes that in 1954 the company began working with Swiss toymaker Antonio Vitali to design a series of 'Playforms' which were smoothly carved wooden animals, vehicles and figures that became very popular.

"While I could not find any written information that states he fashioned doll furniture, it is not too far-fetched to draw the conclusion that your pieces were also designed for *Creative Playthings* by Antonio Vitali. I hesitate to give a value on your treasures, as this fluctuates with the market. Although they do not have great monetary value currently, sometimes the sentiment is all that matters. I hope you will continue to enjoy your pieces."



whimsical planters

Three stoneware figures, 14½ to 15½-in. high, are weatherproof, whimsical indoor or outdoor planters for flowers, real or artificial. The three, Simon, Henrietta and Lily, are also suitable as statuettes or desk caddies.—Everthine (A/W), 7960 West Third St., Los Angeles.



croutons

The stoneware figure shown on page 69, Summer 2013, turns out to not be Ole Christensen, but instead is a planter from Stoneware Designs West, a ceramics company operating in the 1960s and '70s out of Southern California. You'll often find these pieces marked with an easily lost sticker, or impressed with 'SDW' in the mold. The company made three different types of these planters, all very similar in form, and resembling those of several other companies working at the same time, including Ole Christensen. These innocent childlike figures seem to be a common theme during the era.

Kevin Eustice & Alison Walker, bitofbutter.com

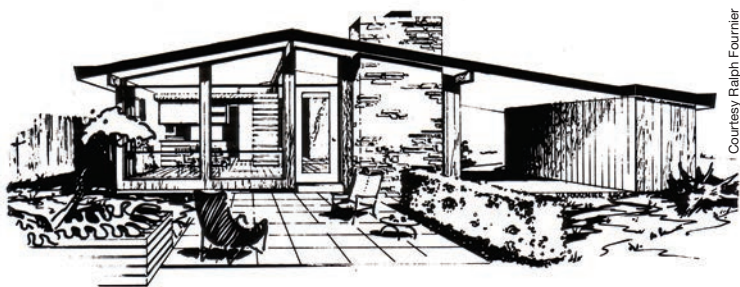
Thanks to Marcy from rhanvintage.blogspot.com for sharing the original ad.

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.

atomicevents

Through January 12 **Spokane, Wash.** **Spokane Modern Architecture: 1948–1973**

The city's architectural creativity during this 25-year period is showcased in an exhibit at the Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture. Explore the work of Ken Brooks, Moritz Kundig, Royal McClure, Bill Trogdon and Bruce Walker through vintage photography, drawings, models and select furnishings and decorative arts; northwestmuseum.org.



Architectural rendering of a Ridgewood Modular Home

Courtesy Ralph Fournier

January 13–February 22 **St. Louis, Mo.** **Suburban Modernism: The Architecture and Interior Design of Ralph & Mary Jane Fournier**

Modern STL and Maryville Univ. are co-sponsoring an exhibition on two local architects who produced hundreds of midcentury modern homes in the area. View drawings, renderings, photographs, paintings and a documentary at the Morton May Foundation Gallery, thanks to financial assistance from the Missouri Arts Council; modern-stl.com.

February 13–23 **Palm Springs** **Modernism Week**

Tour neighborhoods and killer open houses, shop for vintage midcentury wares, ogle old cars, attend lectures and cocktail parties—everything a MCM enthusiast could dream of in the California desert. Special features include speakers Charles Phoenix and Trina Turk, tours of Sunnylands, the Prefab Showcase, the Modern Living Expo, travel trailers and an illuminated sunset architecture



David Lee

tour. Palm Springs Modernism Show & Sale at the Convention Center runs February 14–17th. Full info and tickets (many events sell out) at modernismweek.com.

Through February 16 **Palm Springs** **Richard Diebenkorn: The Berkeley Years, 1953–1966**

Enjoy the artist's abstract landscapes and representational paintings from his years in the Bay Area at The Palm Springs Art Museum; psmuseum.org.



February 22–23 **Cincinnati** **20th Century Cincinnati**

Queen City Shows is expanding its midcentury modern sale, now in its 20th year. Seventy dealers specializing in furniture, lighting, artwork, accessories, vintage clothing, jewelry and more will be at the Sharonville Convention Center; 20thcenturycincinnati.com.

Through February 23 **Sacramento** **Ray Eames: A Century of Modern Design**

The California Museum is celebrating the early work of hometown girl Ray Eames with an exhibition of family artifacts from her early life in Sacramento and work prior to meeting Charles in 1941; californiamuseum.org.

March 29–July 6 Salem, Mass.
California Design

Two hundred examples of California midcentury modern design from LACMA at The Peabody Essex Museum. Furniture, industrial and graphic design, ceramics, film and architecture are covered among the works by Charles and Ray Eames, Richard Neutra and Greta Grossman; pem.org.

Through Fall 2014 NYC
Designing Modern Women, 1890s–1990s

MoMA's exhibition focuses on women's contribution to 20th-century modern design, including a 1952 kitchen by Charlotte Perriand and Le Corbusier, and furniture and other designs by Eileen Gray, Eva Zeisel, Ray Eames, Lella Vignelli and more; moma.org.



Courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society

Ongoing Columbus, Ohio
1950s: Building the American Dream

Hands-on is encouraged at this exhibition, which includes a porcelain-steel Lustron home erected inside the Ohio History Center. Visitors can sit on the vintage couch, play a vinyl record and open the kitchen drawers to get a feel for what it was like to live in the compact prefab house. A 1957 Chevy Bel Air, an Airstream trailer, '50s television programs and midcentury appliances up the ambiance, while other displays address postwar gender roles, housing segregation and popular culture. More at ohiohistory.org/1950s.



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resources

What Lies Beneath, pp. 14-22

Basement kitchen cabinets & counters:

homedepot.com ✕ Metal edging: barsandbooths.com

✕ Windows: marvin.com ✕ Bar stool: interior

expressoutlet.com ✕ Dinette set: vitroseating.com

✕ Heywood-Wakefield refinishing: Scott Schilke,

Retroseksual.com ✕ strictlyheywake.com ✕

Upholstery: citranoupholstery.com

My Favorite Space(s), pp. 28-31

Homeowner's blog and shop: finelycrafted.net ✕

Bantam sofa: dwr.com ✕ Lounge chair & ottoman:

modernica.net ✕ Area rug: verdehomeinc.com ✕

Coffee table: danishmodernla.com ✕ Artists & crafters:

Sarah Lodato, instituteofstitchesandcrafts.com ✕

Kati Galusz, etsy.com/shop/LunasCrafts ✕ Carla Ek,

ekcreationsstudio.etsy.com ✕ Emma Lawrenson,

etsy.com/shop/littleprintpress

Three Acres & a Bugatti, pp. 34-45

Vintage furnishings: homeanthology.com ✕ Bantam

sofa, Herman Miller shell chairs, Nakashima

Straight-Backed chair, Jens Risom chair & ottoman,

Skagen nesting tables: dwr.com ✕ Split-Rail chairs,

Case Study planter, Nelson Bubble lamp, Case Study

bedroom furniture: modernica.net ✕ Appliances:

sears.com ✕ Bath tile: heathceramics.com

Bitten by the MC Bug, pp. 62-71

Living room: Bookcase, jessechicago.com ✕ Eames

Sofa Compact & Marshmallow sofa: yliving.com ✕

Cigar Lotus lamp: modernica.net ✕ Family room:

Couch, bonaldo.it ✕ Wall unit, jessechicago.com

✕ Tiki Arc Spheres floor lamp, worldmarket.com

✕ Dining room: Similar chairs, Tobias, ikea.com ✕

Similar Sputnik lamps, practicalprops.com ✕

Bedroom: Egg chair, inmod.com ✕ Lighting,

dwr.com ✕ Accessories, zgallerie.com ✕

pier1.com ✕ Homeowners' favorite resources:

googietime.net ✕ scoutliving.com ✕ lumens.com

✕ limn.com ✕ Vintage rock posters: wolfgang's

vault.com

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