Modern Patrons: Ellwood in Pasadena

SAH/SCC
Lecture and Tour:
Saturday, January 26th

In Saturday afternoon, January 26th, from 2PM to 5:30PM, the Modern Patrons program will continue, this time in Pasadena with a visit to the Kubly residence designed by Craig Ellwood in 1965. Our afternoon at the Kubly residence will be an opportunity to experience the house, learn a great deal more about Craig Ellwood firsthand, and share the perspective of the owner who commissioned the architect.

The event is $10 and open to Life- and Patron-level members of SAH/SCC (the program will be available to the general membership only in the event there is space available). If you are a Life member or Patron and would like to attend, fill out and mail the order form on the back page. Space is limited.

In 20: The International Architecture Review (Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1999), Yvonne Perez-Mendez writes: "The 1964-65 Kubly House in Pasadena was built for a sensitive client with a relatively limited budget and ambitious desires. In the design for the 2,150-square-foot, four-bedroom, two-bath residence the site was actively transformed with significant groundwork. Located in a sloping eucalyptus grove, the site was modified to create two levels. The entry was placed at the lower entry level. The house was sited on the upper level at the edge of the transitional slope. It was not the central element in the platform; instead, the pool was. The house was not thought as the goal of the sequence, but as a threshold, a frontal curtain announcing and veiling the promises of the yard. It was first designed as a steel construction, but when the estimates substantially exceeded the budget, Ellwood willingly accepted the possibility of addressing the building in wood. The eccentrically-loaded columns became Kubly's idiosyncratic wood details. In Ellwood's steel buildings, welding avoided the necessity of connecting pieces. In Kubly on the contrary, the metal plates that secure the post-to-beam connection became the only perceivable detail in a very minimal building. The surgical presence of the plates changed the rustic roughness of the 6" x 6" redwood posts, qualifying the image of the house at its most critical point. As in many Ellwood buildings, a visual objective determined the technical solutions.

This example, and the insistence on the cost of the house, reflects the fact that Ellwood's career was sustained by his ability of building at low cost. Removing this fact from this account would erase the ultimate ideological reason why prototypes, series, and the play of repetition and change, organized the production of the office."

According to Perez-Mendez, Craig Ellwood was "originally born John Burke in Clarendon, Texas in 1922 and first came to California when he was 5. At 17, he arrived in Los Angeles and after the war landed a series of side jobs acting in Hollywood. Responding to the great demand for housing, he partnered with three others to form a construction company named after a liquor store that was located in front of their offices Lords & Ellwood, which he soon adopted as his own name. Later he would join the builder Lamport, Cofer & Salzman working as a cost estimator and later a draftsman on the construction of the Case Study Program Eames and Entenza houses which would be his introduction to modern architecture and most importantly, John Entenza of Arts and Architecture magazine. The effect of the magazine and Ellwood's friendship with Entenza cannot be underestimated."

Interior of Kubly residence
(Photo: Grant Mudford)
With little resistance, two major monuments of modern architecture in Southern California were destroyed in 2001. Although the actions themselves were not connected to one another, these two losses should be taken together as a scandal of enormous significance.

Both of the fatalities were Schindler houses, a particularly bitter counterpart to the recent renascence of Schindler’s reputation. MOCA’s exhibition “The Architecture of R.M. Schindler,” during its run last winter and spring, has since moved to Washington, D.C., and Vienna. And Phantom recently published Joaquin’s R.M. Schindler, a small and comprehensive survey of his works and ideas, which is reportedly selling very well. Public interest in Schindler, by all appearances, has never been greater.

The Packard House in San Marino was built in 1924 and demolished sometime last spring. Its walls were constructed of “gunite,” an experimental method in which cement mortar was sprayed onto a backing of removable formwork and reinforced by wire mesh. Conventional concrete walls required two layers of wooden forms, but Schindler constantly searched for a more economical solution. From the slab-tilt construction at Kings Road in 1922, to the Packard House in 1924, to the slip-form construction of Pueblo Hibera in 1925, to the concrete frames of the Levitt Beach House of 1928, Schindler was working at the absolute zenith of his vigorous material imagination.

The Packard House may have been the first use of gunite ever in residential architecture. Because of problems with the cost, Schindler never used gunite construction again. But it certainly influenced Neutra to use a similar technique at the Levitt “Health” House in 1927. The Packard House’s site, on Gauntt Board Drive east of San Gabriel Blvd., is currently host to the construction of another generic stucco mansion, a building that seemingly violates every one of Schindler’s architectural principles.

The Wolfe House at Avalon on Santa Catalina Island was built in 1928 and destroyed last autumn. Its loss had been feared for years, because the building had been poorly maintained by an absentee landlord throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and was in a state of virtual ruin when it was recently sold. Preservationists were reportedly told that the new owner would restore the house, but shockingly learned of the demolition after it had occurred. The Wolfe House was simply one of Schindler’s greatest buildings. Here, he brilliantly integrated the spaces of the house, its views, its interlocking forms, and the hillside site. Because the cascading sequence of forms and spaces were composed so sympathetically with the natural landscape, Schindler has suggested that the Wolfe House should be “considered a source of inspiration for Wright’s Fallingwater.” This project also saw Schindler finally embrace wood framing and stucco for its economy and flexibility. This became his standard material language for his excellent houses and apartments of the 1930s, and for younger architects such as Gregory Ain.

To lose these two major monuments is tragic enough. But doubly scandalous is the apparent complacency and indeed neglect of the architecture and preservation communities. Since the destruction of Irving Gill’s Dodge House in 1970, Los Angeles has developed a strong tradition of activism, culminating in the saving of Schindler’s Kings Road House. Where were the watchdogs? The preservationists? The journalists? The students?

What is needed now is a full-scale retroactive assault of publicity and protest, including the naming of names: owners, demolition contractors, city officials. Then, we must turn the bright light of responsibility on ourselves.

On a more positive note, we are happy to introduce a new graphic format for the newsletter this month. The goal of the new design is to update our image, while preserving the newsletter’s basic format. Our organization itself remains committed to our mission of offering tours and other educational events to promote awareness and understanding of Southern California’s rich architectural history.

We also welcome new board members, Hal Metzler and Ted Kane. Hal is an artist whose work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. He is chairman of the City of Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board, as well as a member of the executive board and architectural advisory committee at the Palm Springs Desert Museum. Ted Kane is a 1999 graduate of the UCLA Dept. of Architecture and a 1998 graduate of the University of Kentucky, College of Architecture. He works for Moore Ruble Yudell, and is currently researching military architecture and its influences on post-war design, a project that includes surveys of historic WWII airplane hangars throughout the southwest.

Anthony Denzer
5, Saturday
Hillmont House: Tour of restored Victorian mansion with owners and restorers Jan and Robert Angel. Neighborhood Place Project, Pasadena; 1-4PM; $10; res. req. 626.987.3332. home.att.net/~mavb/npp.htm.

7, Monday
Theme Park Magic. Program on lighting design for fun. Designers Lighting Forum; product display-6PM, program-7PM. 310.516.0115. dfla.org.

8, Tuesday

9, Wednesday
Good Design/Good Business. Lecture at architecture firm: NATA/ALA; Committee for free for AIA members and students, $5 for others; res. req. 310.385.9300, Maryam Arguello Belli.

10, Thursday
Rustic Canyon. Tour of historic and scenic canyon in Santa Monica. Neighborhood Place Project, Santa Monica; 1-4PM; $10; res. req. 310.967.3332. home.att.net/~mavb/npp.htm.

12-13, Saturday-Sunday

13, Sunday
Chamber Music in Historic Sites: Ida Kavafian, Violin; Jazz-inspired works by Revel, Poelitz, Beirne, and Garnsworthy at The Bohemian Mansion, designed by Hunt and Eisen (1898). The Da Camera Society, Bohemian Mansion, 89 Deater Place, LA; neo-lecture 7:45PM, concert-8PM; $47-$70; res. req. 310.964.3030.

18-19, Friday-Saturday
Second Nature: Redefining the Riverfront. Design charrette with student teams and faculty leader Gary Paige, with tour of the Nethercutt Museum, 1200 Getty Center Dr., LA; Fri., 11AM-5PM; Sat., 11AM-3PM. 213.621.1745; moca-la.org.

18, Friday

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24, Thursday
The Restoration of the Athenian Acropolis: Lecture on history of the project and film of the restoration process, with Acropolis Restoration Service documentation office head Fani Malliakos-Tulano. Getty Conservation Institute, 1200 Getty Center Dr., LA; 7PM. res. req. 310.440.7300.

24, Thursday

25-26, Friday-Saturday
The Fair Majestic Paradise of Stowe: The Restoration of an 18th Century Garden. Day-long conference with architects and historians on the British country estate of Stowe.

19, Saturday

20, Sunday

24, Thursday

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29, Tuesday
Introduction to Feng Shui. Class with Katar Diamond on ancient art of placement. Santa Monica College: John Adams Middle School, 3M, 6:30-9:30PM; $45; res. req. 310.343.3400. events.smc.edu.

Modern Patron.
A visit to the Kuby residence in Pasadena designed by Craig Ellwood in 1965. 2-4:30PM; res. req. 800.954.9062. See article for details.

The Huntington Library, 1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino; 9AM-5PM; $20; res. req. 626.485.2194; huntington.org.

26, Saturday
Undiscovered Los Angeles: Water and Steel. On-site tour of public and private buildings, with historic preservation consultant Robert Chaitel and real estate developer Francesca G. Smith. UCLA Extension, Westwood; 8:30AM-5:30PM; $150; res. req. 310.625.9061; uclaextension.org.

29, Thursday

29, Tuesday
The Role of the Cultic and the Societies in Shaping the American Arts and Crafts Ideal. Lecture with Arizona State University professor Beverly Brandt. Friends of the Gamble House, 4 Westmoreland Pl., Pasadena; 7:30PM-10PM; $15; res. req. 626.793.3334; gamblehouse.scu.edu.

31, Thursday

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29, Thursday
2, Saturday
Masters in Glass. Class on the works of Louis Comfort Tiffany and Emile Galle, with art historian Eleanor Schnetzer. UCLA Extension, 1010 Westwood Central Center, Westwood; 10AM-1PM; $35-$50. res. req. 310.267.6000.

2, Saturday
"Airport 191". Tour of behind-the-scenes at El Monte Airport Terminal. Neighborhood Place Project, El Monte; 10AM-1PM, $10. res. req. 626.387.3032. home.ext.net/-/rmp/airport191.htm.

2, 9, Saturday
Basic Tiling Techniques. Class on floor, wall, and counter tiling. With Rick Longhorne, Santa Monica College, 1600 Pico Blvd, Art Bldg, SVE, 9AM-6PM; $70. res. req. 310.494.3460. events.ucsb.edu.

2, 9, Saturday
Collecting and Understanding Photography. Two-session class on contemporary photography, with collector and former gallery owner Ruth Bloom. UCLA Extension, Dodd Hall, Westwood, and MOCA, 6-9PM; $120. res. req. 310.267.5836. uclaextension.org.

4, Monday
The Small Home Theatre Program on lighting design and automation for every budget. Designers Lighting Forum; product display 4-PM; program 7PM. 310.355.0185. dlff.org.

5, Tuesday

7, Thursday

7, Thursday
LA Architect: Meet the Editor. Reception for new editor Leah Hall. AIA/LA Chapter Office, 3710 Wilshire Blvd, Ste. 900, LA; 6-8PM. 818.956.5313.

7, Thursday

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8, Friday
Chamber Music in Historic Sites. Altenberg Trio Performances of Haydn, Bernstein, and Brahms at The Doheny Mansion, designed by Hunt and Eames (1889). The Da Camera Society; Doheny Mansion, 8 Chester Place, LA; mini-lecture 7-4PM; concert 7-30PM. res. req. 310.954.4390.

9, Saturday

9-10, Saturday-Sunday

13, Wednesday
Good Design/Good Business. Lecture at architecture firm, AIA/LA Design Committee, free for AIA members and students, $5 for others; res. req. 310.396.9390, Maryann Arvigo Belli.

13, Wednesday

14, Thursday

19, Tuesday
At the Crossroads of Empire: Vienna, Modernism, and Design. Lecture with Bard Graduate Center director Derek Ostergard. Friends of the Gamble House, 4 Westmoreland Pl, Pasadena, 7-30PM, $10-$15. res. req. 626.793.3334, gamblehouse.usc.edu.

23, Saturday

23, Saturday
Modern Patrons: A visit to a residence in Bel Air designed by J.R. Davidson in 1957. 2-4:30PM; res. req. 800.9SAHSCC. See article for details.

10, Sunday
California: This Land of Golden Promise. Slide talk with authors Joan Irvine Smith and Joan Denner on new book from Chapman University Press, Pein Air Arts Council, Bowers Museum of Cultural Art, 202 N. Main St, Santa Ana; 2-5:30PM, $5. res. req. 714.267.3000. bowers.org.

10, Sunday
Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803): A Modern Ruff in the Bay of Naples. Lecture with the British Museum's assistant keeper of Greek and Roman antiquities Ian Jenkins. The Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Dr, LA; 4PM. res. req. 310.440.7300.

12, Tuesday

14, Thursday
Laughter and Unease in Rome and Naples: Some Disturbing Encounters With Foreign Places. Lecture with Gotty Schneider in Residence (Chloe Chau). The Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Dr, LA; 4PM. res. req. 310.440.7300.

16, Saturday

17, Sunday

23, Saturday
Creating "Blueprints" for a Successful Presentation. Class on basic tools of professional presentation for design professionals, with communications specialist Leonard Lipton. UCLA Extension, 1010 Westwood Central Center, Westwood; 9AM-4PM; $100. res. req. 310.267.3061. uclaextension.org.

24, Sunday
Chamber Music in Historic Sites: Los Angeles Master Chorale. Spanish Renaissance, Mexican Baroque, and Venetian polyphonic music at Los Angeles City Hall. Rotunda, designed by Austin, Parkinson, Marin & Whitley (1929). The Da Camera Society, City-Hall, LA; 3PM and 7:30PM; $30, res. req. 310.564.4300.
In Saturday afternoon, February 23rd, from 2PM to 4:30PM, the Modern Patrons program will continue, this time in Bel Air with a visit to a residence designed by J.R. Davidson in 1957. This will be an opportunity to experience the house, learn a great deal more about J.R. Davidson first-hand, and share the perspective of the owner who commissioned the architect.

In her book The Second Generation (Peregrine Smith, 1984), Esther McCoy writes: "The 1957 house in Bel Air is on a canyon rim with 100 feet of fairly level land, Davidson pushed the house forward to save the level space at the back for terrace and open garden. The 2,300-square-foot house stretches to the setbacks, forming a rectangle with two projections; one is the family room, which separates children's play yard from adult's outdoor living.

"Davidson had the opportunity to stretch his skill with the gallery plan in his house. It is an extension of the living room, almost a room in itself. The one fireplace which backs up to it, is flanked by three-foot high cabinets without glass above, thus making the fireplace freestanding and the two places interlocking. Along the wide gallery are desk, settee, and the many cabinets and shelves typical of earlier galleries.

"On the living room side a nice drama is played out as forms build up from the colorful rubber tile floor to the long wide shelf at hearth level, capped with concrete slab covered with bright pads and cushions, to the fireplace of Palos Verdes stone, then on up to the finely proportioned white plaster hood. The hood folds over at the top to continue as a skylight, the hood and skylight so alike in dimensions that one seems a reflection of the other. Indeed, as the south sun enters through the skylight, throwing shadows of glazing bars on the white surface, the hood is something of a sundial whose shadows tell the time.

"The post-and-beam construction with posts at intervals of 9 feet in one direction and 21 feet in the other allows many half walls; a freestanding cabinet separates the living room from the kitchen, with book shelves and small bar on the living room side, and on the reverse it forms a passage from carport entrance through the end of the kitchen to the family room. Over all the spaces floats a ceiling of two by fours with spacers between, visible from any of the social rooms as a continuous textured surface."

Born Julius Ralph Davidson in 1889 in Berlin, the architect lived in London and Paris before arriving in Los Angeles with his wife Greta, in 1924. He was a seemingly shy, reserved man who wasn't concerned with self-promotion. Of Davidson's character, McCoy writes: "He said that to succeed as an architect in America one had to be aggressive, which he was not." His commissions primarily came from clients who would become friends. His efforts were solely devoted to providing a highly resolved modern architecture, finely crafted to the specific sensibilities of his clients and not using the commission to gain notoriety. Thus he endeavored almost virtually unknown (except among his colleagues) for nearly 50 years in Los Angeles. Only now, nearly 25 years after his death, Davidson's reputation is growing and finally gaining long overdue recognition for a remarkable legacy of exquisitely designed modern buildings, primarily residential, in and around Southern California.
The Historic and Modern Spirit of Ventura: 20-page guide.
Modernism for the Masses: three-fold brochure with inserts of detailed floorplans of Eichler homes visited on the tour to Orange County.
Cool Pools: Booklet and cassette tape from "Reflections on Water: Cool Pools Along Sunset Boulevard."
Reconsidering Lloyd Wright: 21-page, four color booklet from "Reconsidering Lloyd Wright House Tour"
Union Station and MTA Transit Center: A two-fold map for a self-guided walking tour including historical facts and photos.
Spanish Romance: Tour brochure of San Marino and Pasadena, visiting historic landmarks such as the Mission San Gabriel Arcangel, El Molino Viejo, Mrs. Ethel Guthrie's House, and Mrs. Grace A. Ohimund's House.

Prices include sales tax. Total: $   

SAH/SCC Events:
Modern Patrons: Ellwood - January 26th
Modern Patrons: Davidson - February 23rd
Authors on Architecture - March 2nd

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10% discount at Form Zero Architectural Books + Gallery

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$100 Patron (up to 2 names at same address)
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$750 Friend of SAH/SCC (one time contribution, one name)
$1500 Corporate Sponsor (annual contribution; call 800.9SAHSCC for specific sponsorship opportunities)

SAH/SCC Membership:

IN MEMORIAM

SAH/SCC is sad to announce the passing of longtime Life Member David Palmer. David (along with his wife Helen) was always a welcome and inquisitive participant at talks and tours. At the Members Celebration a few years back, Barbara Lamprecht and I monopolized him to discuss letterforms, a passion and obsession all three of us share. He was amazed that two young (sic) women would be interested in his stories, and wondered if he were keeping us from doing other things.

Julie D. Taylor