Kesling Modern Structures Tour

Sunday, February 9th

On Sunday, February 9th, SAH/SCC will host a tour of five Streamline Moderne homes built in the 1930s by William Kesling in the Silverlake and Los Feliz areas. The tour celebrates the publication of Patrick Pascal’s book on this unsung modernist, Kesling Modern Structures: Popularizing Modern Design in Southern California, 1934-1962 (Balcony Press, 2002).

On February 9th, we’ll enjoy a slide lecture by Pascal followed by a tour of five Kesling houses, ranging from his first Model Home to his largest houses, and ending with refreshments and a book signing. Tour-goers will see three houses in Silverlake: the Model Home (1935), the Skinner House (1936), and the Hough House (1935), then two houses in Los Feliz: the Ulm House (1937) and the nearby Johnstone House (1935).

The cost is $60 for SAH/SCC members; $65 for non-members. For an additional $20 you can reserve a copy of Pascal’s book, which will be held for you at the tour check-in table. The book retails for $27 (including tax), and a few copies will be available to purchase the day of the tour for that price. The tour is limited to 58 tickets for the tour starting at 11AM, and another 58 available for the tour starting at 12:30PM.

One of Southern California’s claims to architectural fame is the number of Streamline Moderne structures built here during the Depression. William Kesling was one of the more prolific designers in this style, yet he remains little known. One reason is that Kesling’s career was brief (1934-1937) and marred by scandal. A second reason for Kesling’s obscurity is that his work has received little publicity. Pascal’s book and this tour aim to correct this. Of the 35 homes Kesling built in Los Angeles in the 30s, only 20 remain recognizable—and they are treasures.

During the 1930s depression, as building construction came to a near standstill across the country, Southern California clients erected a surprising number of Streamline Moderne houses and business buildings. Kesling was in the right place at the right time. The new look can be traced back to transportation designers, who tested their designs in wind-tunnels and fluid tanks to produce aerodynamically advanced designs for trains, automobiles, airplanes, and ships that enhanced forward motion by reducing wind (or water) resistance. Industrial designers discovered that refrigerators, toasters, and pencil boxes with the same curves and wind lines appealed to consumers over earlier boxy models. Shoppers were even willing to pay more, maybe because these “modernistic” gadgets seemed futuristic in the same way the era’s science-fiction films and comic books painted a future technologically free of all problems.

Buildings referenced this fascination with speed and efficiency by exhibiting curved corners, ship’s rails, and porthole windows. They also featured modern-age materials, such as chrome-plated steel interior trim, magnesium floor, and glass block, which drew forward-thinking clients, even if hard times limited house size and curtailed the number of clients who could undertake new house construction.

The tour has limited space, and you must specify either the 11AM or 12:30PM session. See the back page to order your tickets for Kesling Modern Structures.
Another Sad Farewell

Long-time SAH/SCC life member Astrid Elserick died in early December of respiratory failure. She was 74. Astrid was a strong supporter of the chapter and the SAH/SCC News.

From an obituary written by Becky Dukin:

A spirited preservationist who helped protect many of Pasadena and Altadena's architectural gems, Elserick lived in Altadena for more than 30 years and was active in Altadena and Pasadena community and preservation groups. She served on the board of Pasadena Heritage, Friends of the Altadena Library House and helped found Altadena Heritage, among numerous other commitments.

She wanted to be an architect, but because she was poor and a woman, she couldn't get into architectural schools in big universities in the East, [husband] Henzi Elserick said. But Elserick taught herself architecture and became an exponent of California and modern architecture while living in Altadena. After college, Elserick worked as a writer for the first television station in Washington, DC, then moved on to write for advertising companies.

She came to Southern California in 1961 with her first husband, but the family soon left for Massachusetts, where she first worked as a real-estate agent.

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7. Tuesday
Best in Show Fall '02. UCLA architecture student work. UCLA Department of Architecture and Urban Design, 1318 Perkins Gallery, UCLA, 5-7PM. 310.205.7657, ucla.edu.

8. Saturday
Architectural Heritage; 12:30PM; $5.

9. Saturday
Edward Carty. Garden Lane; 7:30PM-Noon; $5-

10. Friday
American Folk Art.

11. Saturday
Old Pasadena. Walking tour; Pasadena Heritage; 9AM; $5; res. req. 626.441.8333.

12. Saturday
Claremont Colleges Walking Tour. Tour of the six Claremont Colleges. Claremont Heritage, Seaver House, 305 N. College Ave., Claremont. 9-10AM; $5; res. req. 909.621.0845.

13. Monday

14. 15, 16, Tuesday
Tuturiorca.

15. Teamwork
Cabinet Making.

18. 25, Saturday
Downtown LA. Walking tours of various downtown landmarks. L.A. Conservancy. 10AM-Noon; $5; res. req. 213.623.2469.

21. Tuesday
Sylvanus Marston: The Man and His Place in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Lecture on the Pasadena architect with author Kathleen Tuttle. Friends of the Gamble House. 4 Westmoreland PI., Pasadena. 7:30PM. $10; res. req. 626.793.3334, gamblehouse.usc.edu.

23. Thursday

24. Friday

25. Saturday
‘Village Green’ Historic Planned Community Tour.

FEATURED EVENT
Architectural Tour

Architectural Tour with Shubin + Donaldson. Tour of innovative homes in Santa Barbara. Garden Lane. 805.965.0922. See listing for more info.

Photo: Giro Coelho
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January

Ellwood in Pasadena

The year started with a Modem Patrons event at the Kubly residence in Pasadena, designed by Craig Ellwood. In 2017, The International Architecture Review (Editorial Gustavo Gill, 1998), Alfredo Perez-Mendez writes: "The 1964-65 Kubly house in Pasadena was built for a sensitive client with a relatively limited budget and ambitious desires. 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 tenuous desires. 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." Ellwood was born in Texas as John Burke in 1822 and first came to California at the age of 5, later arriving in Los Angeles at age 17. Writes Perez-Mendez, "The effect of Arts and Architecture magazine and Ellwood's friendship with John Entenza cannot be underestimated."

February

Davidson in Bel Air

Modern Patrons went to Bel Air to visit a home by J.R. Davidson. In her book The Second Generation (Peregrine Smith, 1986), 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 houses stretches to the side setbacks, forming a rectangle with two projections; one is the family room, which separates children's play yard from adult's outdoor living." Born Julius Ralph Davidson in 1889 in Berlin, the architect lived in London and Paris before arriving in Los Angeles in 1924. According to McCoy, "He said that to succeed as an architect in America one had to be aggressive, which he was not."

March

An Afternoon With Michael Webb

The noted architecture writer Michael Webb was the guest at the Authors on Architecture series held at Form Zero bookstore. His recent book, Modernism Reborn: Mid-Century Modern American Houses (Universe Publishing/Rizzoli, 2002) was the occasion for him to expound upon a great many homes that had been lovingly restored throughout the years. His other recent books include Beach Houses: Architecture + Design LA. It's a Great Wall! and Through the Windows of Paris.

April

Desert Dreams: The Modern Residences of Palm Springs

The very popular Modern architecture of Palm Springs was explored on this day-long tour. Several homes by architects Richard Neutra, Albert Frey, John Lautner, William Cody, Stewart Williams, William Pereira, and Don Wexler were on the agenda. Tour-goers saw the Grace Lewis Miller Residence by Neutra from 1937, a "brilliant Modernist jewel," according to Neutra: Complete Works (Taschen) author and SAH/SCC member Barbara Lamprecht. The Raymond Loewy Residence by Albert Frey in 1946 was a rare treat for its merging of outdoor and indoor space. Lautner's Elrod house of 1968, Pereira's Freestore Residence, Cody's Rubenstein Residence, and Williams' Sinatra Residence of 1947 were among the other blooms in the desert.

May

Walker in Ojai

Modern Patrons took a visit to Ojai, where Case Study architect Rodney Walker created a home for his family in 1958. Attendees were treated to insights by Walker's son Craig. Walker's own homes lead to his work on the Case Study project, as explained by Elizabeth A.T. Smith in Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Homes (The MIT Press, 1998): "John Entenza invited Walker to participate in the Case Study program after seeing the architect's 1946 home for himself and his wife in the hills above Beverly Hills, which became Case Study #16. Walker soon completed two more Case Studies, #17 and #18. Born in Salt Lake City, in 1910, Walker attended Pasadena City College and built his first house in 1937 in Los Angeles.

June

Eichler in Orange

Modern Patron Fran Karns opened her 1964 Eichler home to SAH/SCC to gain an interesting perspective of the Eichler lifestyle. Noted Eichler expert Paul Adamson writes: "Eichler homes are a particularly brave attempt to bring architecture of critically pure ideologies and good aesthetic taste to the popular marketplace. Contrary to the popular wisdom of the time, Joseph Eichler hired a group of progressive California Architects—A. Quincy Jones, Frederick Emmons, Robert Anderen, Steven Allen, and Claude Oakand—to design house prototypes from which he built nearly twelve thousand unabashedly Modernist homes and several boldly progressive apartment buildings."

August

Preservation Summit

In the wake of the shocking destruction of several important historic buildings over the Summer, SAH/SCC hosted a Preservation Summit. The event was held in the lobby of the historic Herald Examiner building in downtown Los Angeles, itself a successful preservation story. The lively discussion was moderated by Larry Maintle, who later aired it on his radio show "Air Talk" on KPFK-FM. Discussing issues of preservation that day were: Ken Berinstein, the Preservation Director for the Los Angeles Conservancy; Alan Lieb, of the LA Conservancy Modern Committee; Christopher C. Martin, FAIA, CEO of AC Martin Partners; Peter Moruzz, the chair of the Palm Springs Modern Committee, and a representative from Urban Partners.

October

Ain on Avenel

A self-guided tour of Gregory Ain's 1946-47 Avenel Homes began with talks by Richard Cerasi, an architect who resides in one of the homes, and Anthony Denzer, SAH/SCC Board President and a Ph.D. candidate on Ain. The Avenel Homes, a 10-unit cooperative housing project intended for World War II veterans, adapted the best features of a hillside commune, garden apartments, and suburban houses. The whole was rendered in International Style modern architecture with radically flexible interiors. Both newly renovated units and those occupied by long-time homeowners were visited. Ain graduated from Lincoln High and attended both USC and UCLA. Ain was among the first modern architects who could call himself a native of Southern California. He lived on a commune for a time as a child, and brought an extraordinary social commitment to the practice of architecture. He sought to solve what he called "the common architectural problems of common people."

December

Atop City Hall

The SAH/SCC Members Celebration took place this year at the Bradley Room high atop City Hall in downtown LA. The Bradley Room is one of the crowning jewels of the 1928 building, and affords 360-degree views of the city, Los Angeles City Hall, one of downtown's first modern landmarks, has been restored to its original glory by an expert team headed by AC Martin Partners, whose founder, Albert C. Martin, along with John Parkinson and John C. Austin, designed the structure. The iconic tower became Los Angeles' modern image, appearing on letterhead, police badges, and several television series. The historic landmark had endured several earthquakes, and was slated for renovation even prior to the Northridge quake, which then necessitated full renovation. Christopher C. Martin, FAIA (grandson of Albert and CEO of AC Martin Partners), was present to discuss the 10-year, $273-million seismic and historic design restoration of the building. The tower is the tallest base-isolated building in the United States. Base isolators, an innovative seismic solution that allows buildings to move separately from the ground, have been used mostly in low and mid-rise buildings—until now. To use this system for such a tall building is an historic event in itself. Costs for saving the building were high, and several voices argued for tearing the building down.
SAH/SCC Publications Order Form

For those of you who missed out on recent SAH/SCC tours, or would like more information for your reference, here's an opportunity to get your hands on the publications printed especially for SAH/SCC events. Don’t let another chance pass you by.

Avenel Homes: two-fold, two-color brochure from "Ain on Avenel!" Tour

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’s 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 Arcángel, El Molino Viejo, Mrs. Ethel Guthrie’s House, and Mrs. Grace A. Ahmanson’s House.


Prices include sales tax.

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