ICYMI: The Architecture of Apocalypse

SAH/SCC Lecture
Saturday, August 15, 2020, 1PM

Almost one year to the day, SAH/SCC re-welcomes author Stuart W. Leslie, PhD, to encore his talk on “The Architecture of Apocalypse: Thinking About the Unthinkable in Style” for our new “In Case You Missed It” series that offers popular SAH/SCC programs live online.

Leslie bases the talk on his contribution to Laboratory Lifestyles: The Construction of Scientific Fictions (edited by Sandra Kaji-O’Grady, Chris L. Smith, and Russell Hughes; MIT Press, 2019), a book on how advancements in lab design affect the work of scientists. His essay on the aerospace and think tank architecture of the Cold War explores the architectural legacy of local institutions, such as the Rand Corporation and Hughes Research Lab.

A professor at Johns Hopkins University and the author of The Cold War and American Science: The Military-Industrial-Academic Complex at MIT and Stanford (Columbia University Press, 1993), Leslie is a dynamic speaker who makes the history of modern science, as told through architecture, accessible to everyone.

In February 2018, Leslie dazzled SAH/SCC with his presentation “The Romance of Water and Power: Architecture as Advertisement,” an exploration of the commercial and industrial buildings of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power—from neo-Grecian temples to luminescent Art Deco showrooms—and their role in the community.

ICYMI—Leslie: August 15, 2020; 1PM; free; reservations required—email info@sahscc.org, call 800.972.4722, or go to www.sahscc.org; Zoom connection information sent upon registration.
SAH/SCC President’s Letter

The tragic deaths of George Floyd and so many others at the hands of authorities have opened our eyes to the role we all play in the systems that govern our lives and to the realization that inequities can no longer remain unquestioned. The peaceful mass protests are a step in that direction; violence and destruction are not only heartbreaking but serve as distractions from our personal and collective responsibilities to work toward a better future, even as we celebrate the best of our past.

I’ve been reminded of a personal experience. In 1992, after the police were acquitted of the beating of Rodney King, Los Angeles erupted in violence. For six days, the city struggled. The mayor imposed a curfew. Businesses closed. Events were cancelled. And everyone tried to find his or her way through the tumult.

It just so happened that the unrest of 1992 coincided with a planned “Neutra 100” celebration, commemorating the centennial of the birth of architect Richard J. Neutra, FAIA. Among the scheduled events was an exclusive evening salon at the Lovell Health House (1927-9). It was a pricey E-ticket of more than $100 and a friend and I had each ponied up the money for the event. When we received word that, despite the stay-at-home order, the event would not be cancelled nor money refunded, we weighed our options. My friend and I decided we might never have the opportunity to see the Lovell Health House again and decided to break curfew to attend.

My first memory of the evening is of how little traffic there was. Much like one could during the COVID-19 lockdown, we sailed along the freeways toward the Hollywood Hills. That was the first time that the Los Angeles freeway system actually fulfilled its promise of getting motorists anywhere in 15 minutes.

The entire evening was a tribute to Neutra and to the Lovells. About a dozen people attended. Caterers recreated the healthy recipes that naturopath Dr. Philip Lovell advocated for in his columns in the Los Angeles Times. I cannot remember exactly what we ate, but I think it was the first time I had ever had quinoa. Upon reflection, comfort food might have been a better choice, but it supported the thematic experience.

The son of the original owners, Gary Lovell, shared his memories of his parents, growing up in the house, and of Neutra bringing potential clients to the house seemingly unannounced. Gary’s stories imbued the iconic house with a warmth and humanity that can only come from calling a place “home.”

The contrast between the experience of the house and the context of the city was surreal. The steel framing system expressed the future-forward possibilities of using materials in new ways. The rigor of the architectural language was both beautiful and evocative of a utopian vision. Walls of glass offered a clear view of the Los Angeles basin with Henry Hancock’s lighted grid of boulevards and major thoroughfares on full display. In the distance, however, fires were visible, and the reality was that the city was far from delivering on its utopian promise.

Nearly 30 years have passed since that night. I am saddened by how far we have not come. How did we get here? It is a question I have asked myself too many times in 2020. I asked it when I sewed my first masks. I asked it when I disinfected my groceries. And I asked last week when I watched my first masks. I asked it when I disinfected my groceries. And I asked last week when I watched the news to the attention of the editor:

—Sian Winship

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Questions: Call 800.95SAHSCC.
ICYMI:
Adam Arenson on Millard Sheets

SAH/SCC Lecture
Sunday, July 19, 2020, 1PM


Combining private investment and public art, and championing historical themes in a period of dramatic cultural and political change, the Home Savings and Loan buildings are significant structures of mid-century modern architecture, and their story deserves to be known before it is too late to save these remarkable works.

ICYMI—Arenson Lecture: July 19, 2020; 1PM; free; reservations required—email info@sahscc.org, call 800.972.4722, or go to www.sahscc.org; Zoom connection information sent upon registration.
The Automobile Is Architecture

SAH/SCC Lecture
Saturday, August 29, 2020, 1PM

Longtime SAH/SCC Member and vintage car collector Richard Stanley will discuss the life and contributions of influential industrial designer—and Hollywood native—Harley Earl (1893-1969). Developing his flash on the West Coast, Earl then took it East to Detroit. He literally invented the modern design studio that made General Motors so dominant. At the time of his retirement in 1958, nearly half of all cars built in America were designed under Earl’s aegis.

ICYMI: George E. Thomas on Frank Furness

SAH/SCC Lecture
Saturday, August 1, 2020, 1PM


Misunderstood and reviled in the traditional architectural centers of New York and Boston, Furness was often commissioned by the progressive industrialists of the new machine age. He intentionally broke with the historical styles of the past to work in a modern way—from utilizing principles based on logistical planning to incorporating new industrial materials.

In his assessment of Furness as an architect of the machine age, Thomas grounds him in Philadelphia, a city led by engineers, industrialists, and businessmen who commissioned the buildings that extended modern design to Chicago, Glasgow, and Berlin. Thomas examines the multiple facets of Victorian Philadelphia’s modernity, looking to its eager embrace of innovations in engineering, transportation, technology, and building, and argues that Furness, working for a particular cohort of clients, played a central role in shaping this context.

ICYMI—Thomas Lecture: August 1, 2020, 1PM; free; reservations required—email info@sahscc.org, call 800.972.4722, or go to www.sahscc.org; Zoom connection information sent upon registration.
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<td>Masters of Modernism: eight-page, two-color brochure featuring works of Richard Neutra and Frank Lloyd Wright in Bakersfield.</td>
<td>$5 each</td>
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<td>John Parkinson, Downtown: 11”x17”, four-color brochure featuring a self-guided walking tour of Parkinson buildings in Downtown LA’s historic core and beyond.</td>
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<td>Rodney Walker: The Ojai Years: tri-fold, black-and-white brochure featuring Walker’s important residences in Ojai, with pictures and article by historian David Mason.</td>
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<td>Kesling Homes: bi-fold, two-color brochure from the “Kesling Modern Structures” tour.</td>
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<td>The Historic and Modern Spirit of Ventura: 20-page guide from Ventura tour.</td>
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<td>Killingsworth: A Master Plan for Learning: 11”x17”, four-color walking tour brochure of the Cal State Long Beach campus features history of master plan development by architect Edward A. Killingsworth, FAIA.</td>
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SAH/SCC is a 501c 3 nonprofit organization dedicated to providing its members with opportunities to learn about and experience the rich architectural heritage of Southern California and beyond. Our volunteer board members create tours, lectures, travel tours, and other events that explore the ideas behind the architecture as well as the buildings that result from them. From modern to craftsmen, from Spanish Colonial to contemporary, our programs are the best-kept secrets in Southern California.

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SAH/SCC Members’ Forum

Welcome to the new feature, “SAH/SCC Members’ Forum,” where we invite members to share their news, writing, and projects. In this inaugural installment, Life Member Leslie J. Erganian offers an excerpt from “Acquiring a Profession,” a chapter of “Modern Maverick: Raphael S. Soriano,” which she wrote for 100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles, A Project of the UCLA Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies. The complete essay may be read here. If you’d like to contribute, please contact me at info@taylor-pr.com.

—Julie D. Taylor, Hon. AIA, Editor, SAH/SCC News

Photos: courtesy of the Wagener-Erganian collection

As Soriano’s architectural beliefs began to diverge from USC’s curriculum offerings, he began to seek inspiration elsewhere. A friend suggested that he attend a double lecture given by Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra at the downtown Philharmonic Auditorium. There, in the embrace of a space whose walls were imbued with music, he was introduced to the charisma of Wright’s personality and the clarity of Neutra’s ideas. Whether this lecture precipitated his Beaux Arts rebellion, or simply offered him support for the direction his progressive mind had already chosen, Soriano must have left the auditorium that night strengthened by the knowledge that he was not alone in his desire to create new forms for architecture beyond the traditions of the past.

Within the next two years, two important modern architecture exhibits were held in Los Angeles: an exhibit focused exclusively on modern architecture held at UCLA in 1932 and, in 1933, the Museum of Modern Art’s pivotal International Style exhibit held at the Bullock’s Wilshire department store. During this same period, Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler—both Austrian-born Jews who, like Soriano, settled in Los Angeles in the 1920s—collaborated in a series of modern architecture lectures given at UCLA. All around Soriano, there were increasing signs that it was time for architecture to shake loose the past and to deliver entirely innovative solutions. In order to find these, Soriano would have to continue to map out his own progressive course of acquiring knowledge.

By his third academic year at USC, his fellow students had come to recognize not only the vigor and boldness of Soriano’s personality but his unusual strength in engineering. This, coupled with his excellent drafting abilities, made him an ideal candidate for an internship with an established architectural practice. No architect’s views had impressed him more than those of Neutra. Believing him to be the first great American rationalist, Soriano came to him and asked for work in the summer of 1932. Impressed by Soriano’s drawings, Neutra asked him to come work at his Douglas Street studio without pay and accompanied by his own supply of India ink. Soriano seized the opportunity, later avowing that Neutra exerted a “great influence on me,” admiring everything from the clarity and quality of Neutra’s designs to his tremendous sensitivity to colors and textures.

During Soriano’s fifth and final year at USC, Schindler came to campus in the hopes of discovering a talented young assistant for himself. Soriano’s thesis project inspired Schindler to offer him a job for a dollar a day. Much to Neutra’s dismay, Soriano went to work for Schindler. After two months, not even the pay could entice Soriano to remain. Raphael found Schindler’s drawings to be confused, lacking clarity of vision, and so he returned to Neutra’s office, where he continued to refine his own vision outside the classroom, in an atmosphere that stimulated him even without pay.