ARCHITECT RICHARD NEUTRA
What will the neighbors think?
Hips & Door Butts. Such a man may choose his own lot and design his own house for a contractor to build—if he combines the patience of Job with the energy of Samson. He would begin by learning the necessary background for an intelligent lot-seeker, making it his business to study drainage, zoning, prevailing winds, taxes and prospects for taxes, new developments and proposals for new highways & byways in the county. Before designing the house itself he would form his head with tables of construction costs (still more than double what they were ten years ago), master the rudiments of architecture, and learn to speak knowingly of financing and fencing, softs and softens, of housing himself and his family. Today, such speculative merchant-builders as the David D. Bohannon Organization, which is putting up thousands of moderately priced houses around San Francisco, and the traditional but gaudy Gerholz Community Homes in Flint, Mich., account for 20% of production. Biggest of these merchants, Levitt & Sons, has raised a whole town (Levittown, pop. 27,500) of almost identical $7,500 bungalows on the flat potato fields of Long Island. The Levitt boys knock a new house together every 15 minutes, adorn their latest model with such creature comforts as fireplaces as well as modern touches, e.g., picture windows and movable walls that double as closets.

Merchant-builders increasingly favor the modern touches—at least on the inside where they won’t glaringly show. But the man who wants a house to fit his family as well as the age he lives in still has good reason for building his own.

Or the patience of Job and the energy of Samson.
handier, to cut construction costs, heating bills and housekeeping chores.

Rendel, "functional" good looks. Gener-

ously modern homes are de-

signed for the use and enjoyment of the

family inside, not to impress the

neighbors. Their beauty, like that of any

sea shell, is more than skin-deep—practical,

not pretentious. Instead of concealing the

purposes and techniques of the construc-
tion, it accentuates them. Gingerbread
details and fussy trimmings are shunted
away. One can tell at a glance what the

house is made of and how it was put

there.

Yachts v. Cliffs. Though no two U.S.

architects might agree on the way to say

it, these two principles are the common

denominators of what the moderns are

up to. In Europe after World War I, such

top-flight architects as Germany's Ludwig

Van Der Rohe and Walter Gropius, and

Switzerland's Le Corbusier (Charles-

Edouard Jeanneret) evolved the "inter-
national" style—strict and angular, mak-
ing fullest possible use of steel, glass and

concrete (for maximum light and open-

ness), Le Corbusier's slogan: "The house

is a machine for living." Van Der Rohe

and Gropius have since set up shop in

the U.S.

Meanwhile, the late great Chicago sky-

scraper-builder, Louis Sullivan, and his

famed pupil, Frank Lloyd Wright, had

been marking out an architecturally war-

mer style of their own. To Wright and his

followers, the severity of the Interna-
tional style is anathema. (Some of Wright's

choice epigraphs for it: "Dead Sea fruit";

"the flat-boomed façade"; "the whitew

separadura").

The average American has a hard time tell-
ing the two styles apart. Main differ-

tence to the casual eye: International

houses, with their blinding rectangles of

glass and steel and concrete, outside stair-

ways and rooftop sun decks, are apt to

look a little like stranded yachts; Wright's

houses, using whatever native materials

seem best, generally hug the surrounding

landscape, sometimes manage to achieve

the look of an inhabited cliff that his

stood there forever.

Rain in the Desert. Neutra's own ca-

reer has taken him through the Inter-
national style to the outskirt of Wright's

camp. After growing up in Vienna he first

decided to be an architect, he says, when,
at eight, he took a ride on the new Vienn

subway and saw what a builder could do.

Neutra made his way to the U.S. in 1923.

At the funeral of Louis Sullivan, the un-

known Neutra presented himself to the

world-famous Wright, then squatted on

the master's doorstep until Wright took

him in for a three-month stay.

The young Viennese architect named

his eldest son Frank L. Neutra, but when

he moved on to California (he kept re-

mumorising the travel poster he had seen

* Such "functional" handsomeness is not con-

trasted in the modern American U.S. exca-

ploring early Cape Cod cottages and Navajo In-

dian hogans.  

TIME, AUGUST 15, 1949

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MODERN HOUSES...

Like them or not, modern houses are here to stay. Their practicality and sometimes spectacular good looks were foreshadowed by 19th Century bridges and grain elevators, the skyscrapers and banks of Louis Sullivan, and the early works of Wisconsin-born Frank Lloyd Wright, the wild dean of modern architecture.

Half a dozen immigrants, all Europeans, have helped swell the modern U.S. tide: Germany's Walter Gropius and Mies Van Der Rohe, Finland's Eliel Saarinen, Hungary's Marcel Breuer, Italy's Pietro Belluschi and...

Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons built this Fremont, Calif. house at a cost of $11,402; it features a 17-ft. ceiling.

In Los Angeles, Raphael Soriano designed this oiled redwood house, which features a sandblasted glass fence.

Architect Pietro Belluschi calls this natural-finish wood ranchhouse at Yamhill, Ore. his best effort. Cost: $60,000.

This Long Island frame house, by Marcel Breuer, offers a hanging staircase and a fireplace which faces two ways.

This eight-bedroom Long Island house was built of wood, brick and stone for $125,000. The architect: E. D. Stone.

Alden Dow built this Flint, Mich. bungalow for a man who said that he wanted "a lot of room on a low budget."

TIME, AUGUST 13, 1949
ACROSS THE U.S.

Vienna-born Richard Joseph Neutra. Their ideas, still further developed by a third generation, have taken the varied shapes shown on these pages: houses that range in price from well over $100,000 to less than $15,000 and dot the land from coast to coast.

Modern houses still come high, and costs will not diminish much until and unless the squeaky demand grows to a roar. That, as Architect Neutra admits, may take a long long time. "In our profession," he says, "you must be an evangelist as well as an architect."

At Wiacono, Mass., famed Walter Gropius' eight-member "Architects' Collaborative" house cost less than $40,000.

In Lakewood, Colo., Victor Hornlein house is bisected by a hearth wall of brick. Built in 1948, it cost $20,000.

Robert W. Vahlberg's own six-room brick house in Oklahoma City features a solid glass front. It cost $23,000.

In Sarasota County, Fla., this Ralph Twitchell house cost $45,000 in 1948. The owner calls it "The Purple Pelican."

Two whole walls of the living-and-dining room are glass in this $17,000 Fred Langhorst house in Orinda, Calif.

This $26,000 Morgan Yost house in Highland Park, Ill. is ventilated entirely through louvers. Windows stay shut.

Bruce Goff's complicated house in Norman, Okla. was built last year for $60,000; it has an indoor flower garden.
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FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT
"Dead sea fruit?"

and rough-hewn stone; in breaking the severe verticals and horizontals of international with an occasional diagonal roofline, landscaped terraces and complicated softening patterns of light & shade.

Bigger project on his drawing boards last week was the Sanatorio Universitario Italiano to be built by the Italian government in the Alpo north of Milan. It will include sanatorium facilities for 100 students patients, plus a theater, library, recreation lounges, a residential neighborhood for employees, a shopping center, two small hotels and a church for which the Archbishop of Milan has created a new parish. Other Neutra projects range all the way from an $800 alteration job to a $415,000 residence in Tulsa, Okla., and a new community housing development in Los Angeles.

Away with Antiques, Neutra's standards are still too severe for some tastes. One young couple who eventually sold their Neutra house (at a handsome profit) explained their feelings this way: "We were crazy about it at first, it was so primitiv, so esquisite. But the truth is, we couldn't live up to it. The place went to..."
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The designer may be forever ostracized until the day of judgment. Neutra is not used to getting what he described as "cowshed modern," so they called the best man they knew of, Neutra. They were afraid he might be interested in such a small project, but as it happened, Neutra was happy to accept the commission. He designed a modern house of concrete and glass, which still stands today.

Neutra & Family at Home

"Life with Neutra..."

Money Laura—Grilled Ham

The unhappily married couple had some fine old silver, with which they were particularly proud, and wanted a sideboard on which to display it, but Neutra said no, sideboards were "bourgeois." They had no mantelpiece either—Neutra frowned on mantels. At last one day their little boy came and said, "Mr. Why can't we live in a regular house?" That helped them decide. They moved to a farm.

"Cow-Shed Modern," Mr. B., a Los Angeles stockbroker, and his family are more typical of Neutra's clients. The B's lived in a conventional house, furnished with antiques and larger than they needed, since their 21-year-old son was away at college most of the time. A year ago they decided to build something small and modern on a steep lot in the hills near Colby Canyon. Mr. B. was afraid of getting what he described as "cow-sheaded modern," so they called the best man they knew of, Neutra. Neutra was afraid he might not be interested in such a small project, but as it happened, Neutra was happy to accept the commission. He designed a modern house of concrete and glass, which still stands today.

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Peace of Mind and Sleepy Time

The B's are happy with their modern home, which Neutra designed for them. They love the way it looks and the way it feels. They say it is a perfect place to live, and they are grateful to Neutra for making it happen.

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TIME, AUGUST 15, 1949

grew to $19,500, not including patio, garden and subsequent extras, but Neutra based his 10% fee on the lower figure. The B's were not worried about the investment. The resale value of Neutra houses has been demonstrated time & again. Real-estate agents never fail to insert the words "Neutra House" when they advertise one for sale. Says Neutra: "I consider myself literally conservative, dependable over the amortization period."

Indoors & Out. Neutra's house for the B's had been finished and occupied by last week. Viewed from the street it lay along the hillsides like an airy fort, constructed of redwood, rusty-beige stucco and plate glass. A high, curving, angular deck jutted out at one side; a larger, unraveled deck of slate-grill redwood served as the entrance over living. The living room was an 18 x 20 ft. rectangle staggered irregularly by a guest closet, bookcase, birch-trimmed dining alcove and flagstone hearth. Along one wall were 24 ft. of plate glass windows, with sliding draperies. The opposite wall, facing out into a patio and three-tiered garden, was 32 ft. of almost solid glass.

The two bedrooms were contrasting tiny—only 12 by 14 ft.—and so was the 8 by 10 ft. kitchen, but with their built-in furniture they had the utmost efficiency of modern cabinets and galleys. There was nothing to sweep under, and no space to mind things. The two bathrooms had overhead infra-red lamps to take the chill off. Neutra, with his characteristic attention to detail, had taken down a hanging from his own house to show Mrs. B. how the living-rooms draperies should be made.

The 1,250 sq. ft. of house were more than doubled by the accessible decks, patio and garden. The B's agreed that it cut down on housework and let a lot more sun, space and air into their lives. It would not date—at least not for a long time—it fitted all their special needs, and it was handsome in a boldly simple way. When they had sold their antiques and moved, in Mrs. B. could think of only one word to describe the way she felt about it: "liberation.

With the B's, as with most top-flight architects, the context of modern is traditional may be all over, with the verdict going to the modernist. The general public has still to be convinced. Architecturally, argue modernists like Neutra, the public has nothing to lose but its chains. But to millions of Americans the chains the modern architect removes are still among the comforts of life: the over-stuffed warmth of their living rooms; bedrooms big enough to serve as separate castles—and a refuge from the rest of the family; space to putter and store things in attics and closets, walls, that shut the outdoors out and make the inside cozy.

If what is now called "modern" architecture actually becomes traditional in the U.S., it will be not merely because more & more people have learned to like it. Modern architects will have been learning, too, mastering clean lines, common-sense conveniences and liberating openness of style with the warmth and coziness of home.