



MID-CENTURY MODERN

THE MOST DANGEROUS ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA



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EAMES HOUSE, 1949

THE MOST DANGEROUS ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA

What is Mid-Century Modern? The words seem to be everywhere. From Crate & Barrel to Walmart, Craigslist to Sotheby's, Mid-Century Modern is the sought-after style for life today. What is it that attracts people to this moment and this style? What is it about kidney-shaped pools and steel beams, polished concrete and plate glass, womb chairs and spider legs, that continues to seduce after all these years? Are we drawn to Mid-Century Modern design out of nostalgia (for a life we never lived)? Or does it look like a futuristic, techno-paradise in glass and steel? Was Mid-Century Modern the epitome of cool or was it part of a subversive Communist plot to rewrite the American dream? As contemporary architects wrestle with an equally unstable political landscape, the history of Mid-Century Modern becomes all the more significant.



To its creators, Mid-Century Modern was much more than a style. They wanted to change the way we lived our lives. They wanted to transform society with planes of glass, bent wood, and cantilevered balconies. Looking back, it may seem unrealistic, a fantastic dream, but for a brief moment Los Angeles was rocked by a vision of the future through the power of design.

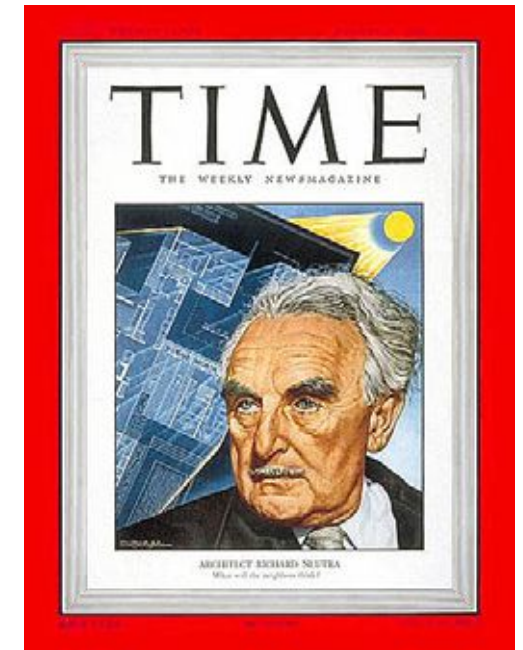


This is a story about innovative architects with revolutionary ideas and the moment those ideas took shape in the foothills, valleys and plains of Los Angeles. They understood that the houses we live in—and where we spend most of our lives—have a profound effect on us, body, mind, and soul. How architecture moves us through space, the qualities of the materials that surround us, how a home enfolds its natural setting, all of this actually shapes who we are as individuals, how we live as families, and how we come together as a society. It is the responsibility of the architect not just to shelter fragile humans, but to make them into something different, something better than before.

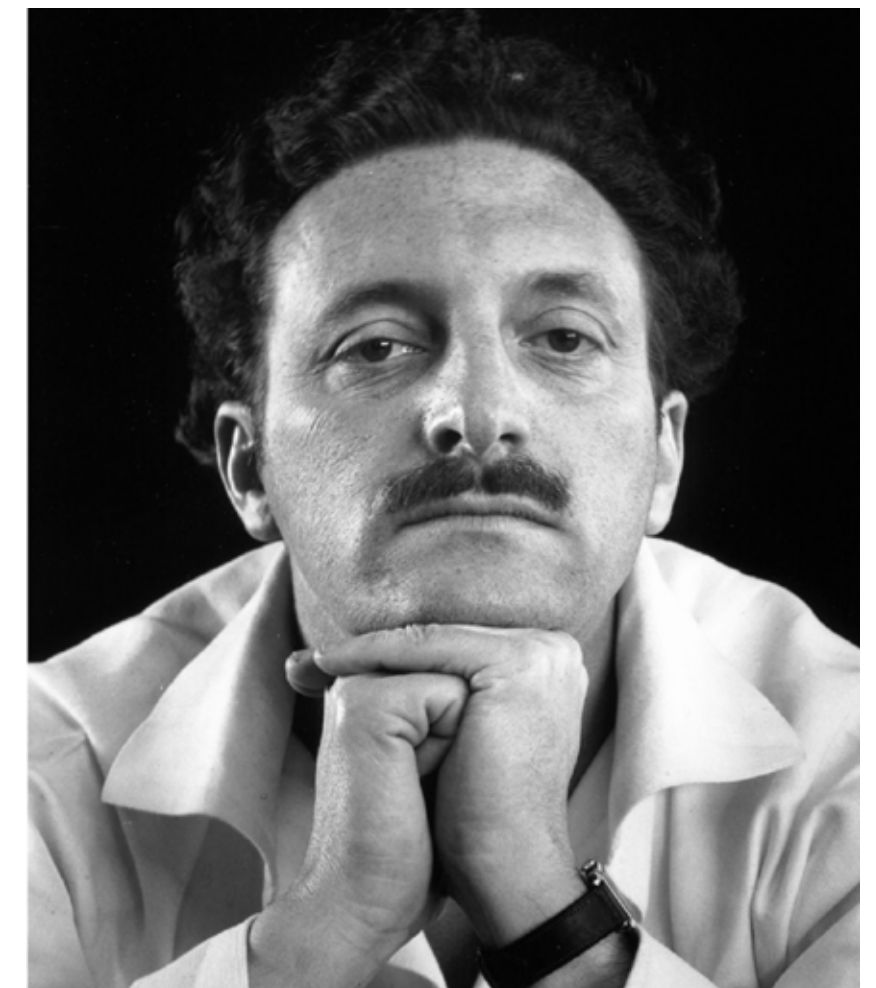
THE STORY

Mid-Century Modern architecture was the Golden Age of American architecture. Nowhere else on earth was a greater gathering of Modern Masters than Los Angeles at Mid-Century. And the world recognized it. In 1942 The Museum of Modern Art in New York—tastemaker for the world—proclaimed that “More good architecture is found in California than anywhere else in the United States.” By the early 1960s, Artforum declared “California is the architectural center of the United States. The East Coast had its Gropius, its Breuer—all imported vintages—but it could not boast of a Neutra, a Schindler, an Ain, or a Harris.” Neutra was on the cover of Time magazine and Eames furniture appeared in classrooms, bedrooms, boardrooms and airports throughout the world.

When the architectural pioneers arrived in Los Angeles from Vienna in the 1920s it was a quiet frontier town on the verge of exploding into a metropolis. As temporary Hollywood dreamworlds were being built on dusty roads throughout the city, architects like R. M. Schindler and Richard Neutra ushered in a new era of visionary design that changed the face of architecture and domestic living from this point forward.



RICHARD NEUTRA IN MOSK HOUSE



R.M. SCHINDLER



SCHINDLER HOUSE, WEST HOLLYWOOD 1921

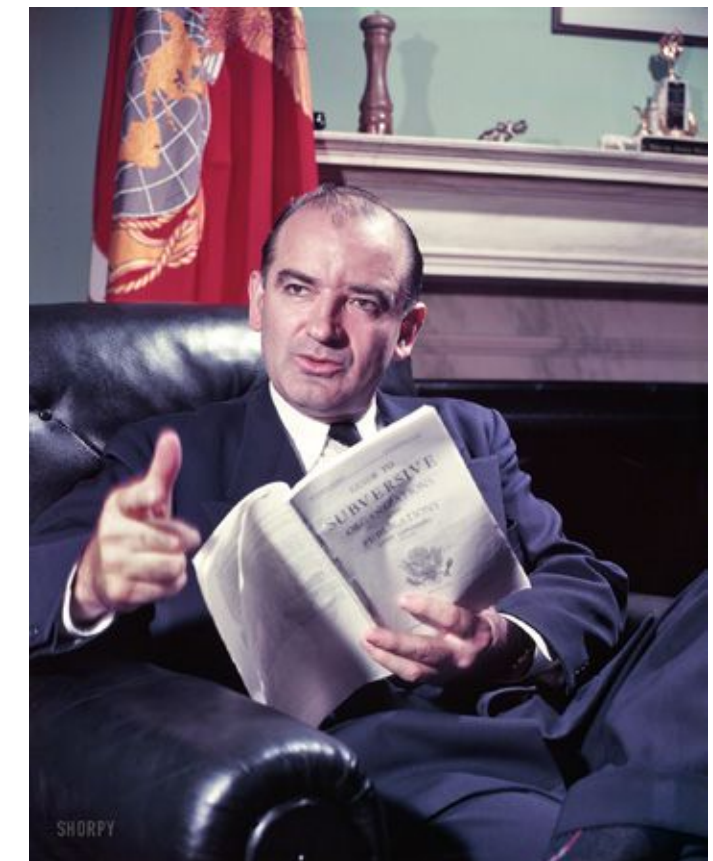
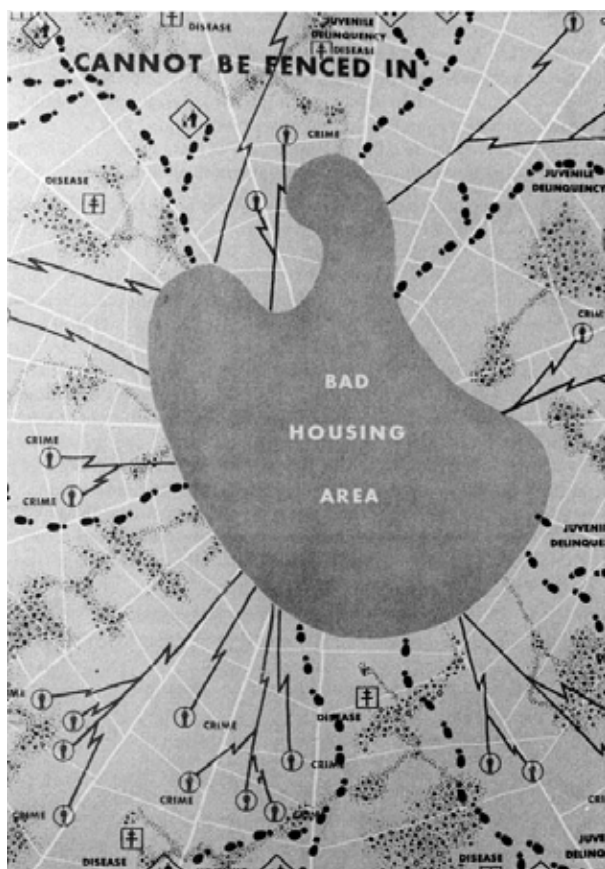
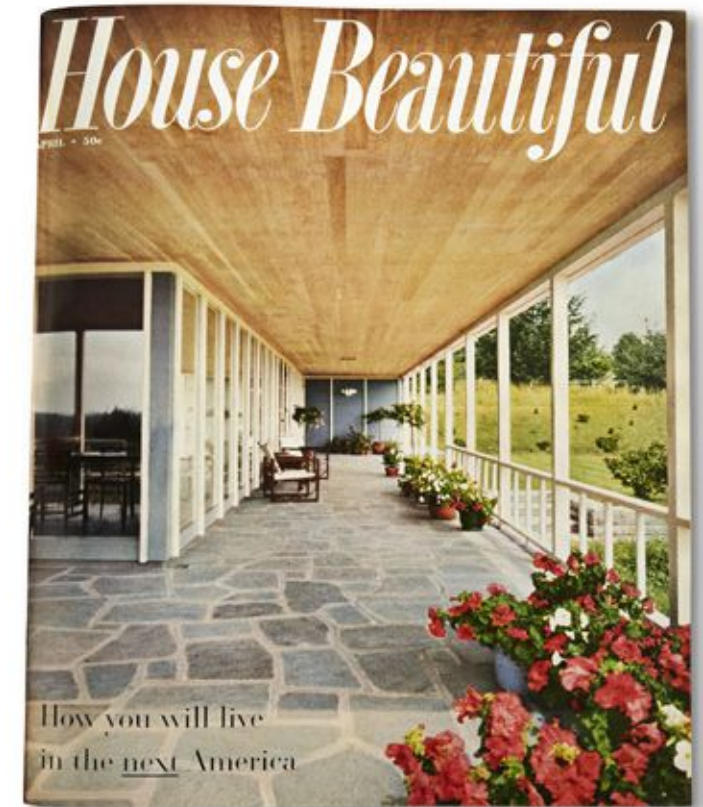
What these architectural pioneers couldn't know was that Los Angeles would soon undergo one of the most massive cultural and demographic upheavals in the history of the United States. Every decade from 1920 to 1960 saw the population of Los Angeles double. The conditions were right for architecture to take center stage in the cultural life of the city.

The New Deal brought massive government funding for public housing into Los Angeles. It was an unprecedented opportunity to create a new kind of city in America. Mid-Century architects designed some of the most iconic housing projects ever conceived. These housing projects were designed for the working class and veterans returning home. (By contrast, affordable housing today reads like a stop-gap measure to get a homeless population off the streets.) But even if modern homes were not produced on a mass scale, Mid-Century architects were committed to collective housing ideals and shared spaces within luxurious designs.



Modern architecture may have continued to represent an image of freedom for some, but for others it signaled the creeping tide of Socialism. Democrats were routed from both houses in 1946, and by the end of the decade the New Deal was under assault. Modern architecture was swept up in the Red Scare and became the subject of relentless attack from all sides. In an influential 1953 article, *House Beautiful* took up the charge against modern architecture: "The Threat to the Next America Is Architecture!" "If we can be sold on accepting dictators on how our homes are to be ordered, our minds are prepared to accept dictators in other departments of life."

The "heart of our society" was under attack because the battle was being fought "in the home." When the home magazines went into battle so did the government. As new documents reveal, virtually all of the Mid-Century Modern architectural community was under surveillance, swept up in the communist witch-hunts led by Senator McCarthy. According to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Mid-Century Modern was "the most dangerous architecture in America."



JOSEPH McCARTHY

It's hard to imagine today, but modern architecture was at the center of public debate. Not only House Beautiful and the government, but also labor unions and educators cared so deeply about architecture that they thought it was either a savior or a serious threat to the Western way of life. In some ways of course, they were right! The home had become the sacred heart of 1950s America. When the architects altered the home, they were altering the fabric of society. After the war the suburban home became the front line, where the battle for the soul of America was waged.



CRAIG ELLWOOD

Over the course of this 6-part series we will watch how the Mid-Century architects responded to mounting social and political resistance against them. Architects, for maybe the first time, were in the middle of a social war that was being waged in all sectors of American society. That Los Angeles today is a sprawling mass of single-family homes, clearly marks the failure of the Mid-Century collective dream. But if they failed to transform Los Angeles into a city of the future, they didn't fail to leave an indelible mark that today has emerged into the mass cultural consciousness of America.



But why has it made such a grand return? Mid-Century design may be seen today as a style, but people may be drawn to it because it embodies an alternative American Dream. After half a century of political compromise and lowering expectations about the future, people crave something more. Is it possible that people are seeking out Mid-Century design for its unabashed idealism, for its visionary image of a better life—a better world—to come? If that is the case, then this series will be sure to change the way the audience sees the architecture but also the way they see our society and see ourselves.



EPISODE 1: PIONEERS (1920s)

Los Angeles in the 1920s was an extraordinary mix of sprawling agricultural fields, oil wells, and film studios. It was there in the barren fields of West Hollywood that R. M. Schindler built his groundbreaking home of the future. Schindler left Vienna in 1914 to escape the War and to work for Frank Lloyd Wright. When he left Wright's office in 1920 he built an experimental home out of commonplace materials: concrete, canvas, and redwood. It was a primitive multi-family oasis, a model collective, seemingly dropped from Mars into cow pastures. Schindler's communal King's Road House was the first great modernist house in the US and one of the first of its kind in the world.

In 1924 Schindler invited his Viennese colleague Richard Neutra and his family to live with him at King's Road. It did not go well, sparking a feud that continued until Schindler was on his deathbed in 1953. If Schindler was pure boho, Neutra was pure Prussian soldier. Between them, sex, money, children, and property got in the way. At the center of the conflict was a set of highly valuable commissions by the Los Angeles naturopath (herbal healer) Philip Lovell. Schindler designed the radically innovative Lovell Beach House in 1926. Lovell's next commission for a house in the Hollywood Hills was monumental, but Schindler was removed from the job after entering into an affair with Leah Lovell, the client's wife. Neutra was there to pick up the commission, and the all-steel Lovell House became a model of technical innovation.



R.M. SCHINDLER, THE FREE SPIRIT

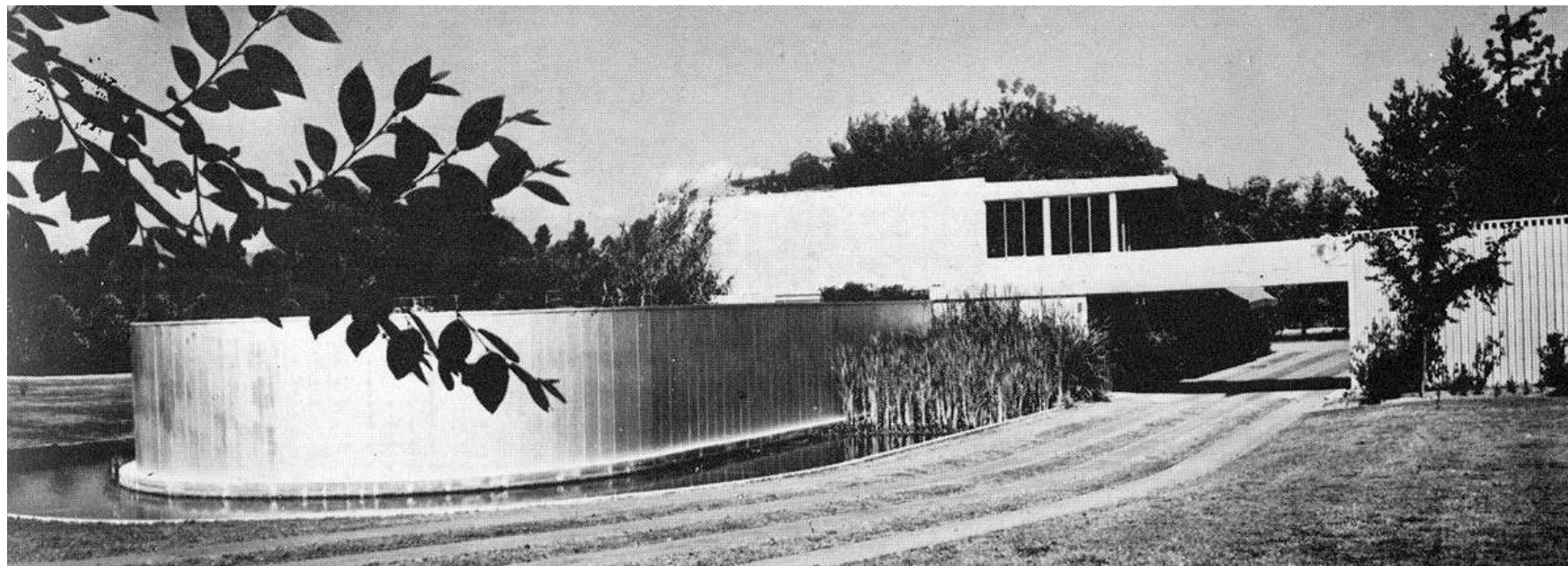


LOVELL HEALTH HOUSE 1927

EPISODE 1: (CONTINUED)

The Schindler-Neutra feud was more than personal; it was about divergent ideals. Their conflicting approaches set the architectural trends for the next forty years, establishing the basic vocabulary of Mid-Century Modern as we know it today. Schindler created the most dizzying array of avant-garde homes ever produced, in a range of shapes made exclusively of inexpensive, everyday materials. Neutra, by contrast, set out to perfect the ideal structural shape. Every one of his more than 300 houses is a variation on a single type. One of Neutra's most celebrated homes was designed for Hollywood director Josef von Sternberg. Waging war against everything Schindler stood for, the Von Sternberg House was luxurious to the point of excess. A modern castle with an electrified moat, Von Sternberg could flip a switch to incinerate any intruders on his desert compound.

The castle-like qualities of the Von Sternberg House were especially appreciated by its next owner, Ayn Rand. For many years Rand lived in this steel-plated fortress, where she wrote her best-selling conservative manifesto *The Fountainhead* about a misunderstood modern architect, Howard Roark. (Neutra insisted he was Roark.) Nothing could be further from Schindler's ideal of modern architecture than the Von Sternberg House. While Schindler's houses were informal, bohemian pleasure palaces, Neutra's were fortified sculptural outposts, looking out on a hostile world. Ultimately, the feud between Schindler and Neutra was a feud over the soul of modern architecture, and their disciples have kept the debate alive ever since.



VON STERNBERG HOUSE



AYN RAND

EPISODE 2: CAPITALIST CRISIS (1930s)

One industry thrived during The Great Depression: Hollywood film. For audiences suffering through rank poverty, film was an escape. But it was not just an escape and Hollywood took its responsibilities seriously. Alongside glamorous costume dramas, the Golden Age of Hollywood was permeated by progressive themes around class and gender equality. 1930s Los Angeles was the most progressive moment in US history, and Los Angeles was perhaps the most progressive city in the United States.

In 1937 30% of all dwellings in Los Angeles had no toilet, 50% no bathtub, and 20% were considered unfit for human habitation. The same year the US Government established the pivotal US Housing Act allocating \$500 million for public housing, and Los Angeles was granted an unprecedented \$25 million (half a billion in 2018 dollars). This irrevocably changed the character of building in Los Angeles and modern architects heeded the call. Out of the studios of Schindler and Neutra emerged a newly radicalized generation of maverick architects who set off on separate routes on a struggle to define modern architecture. The massive influx of public money into Los Angeles helped raise the stature of local architecture to a National level.

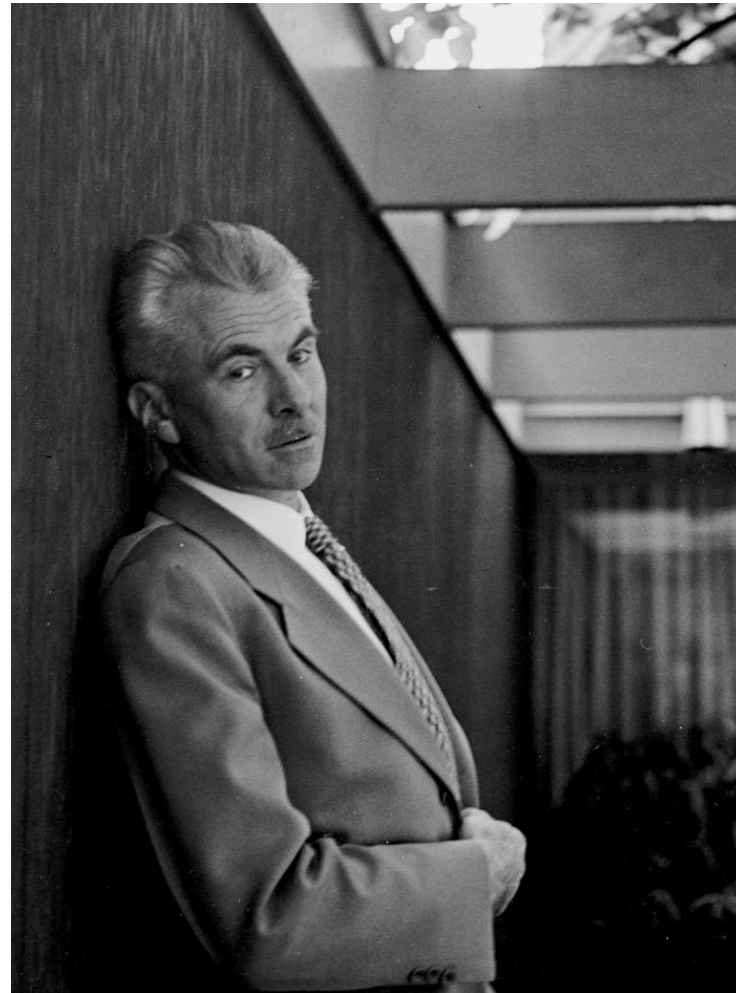


EPISODE 2: (CONTINUED)

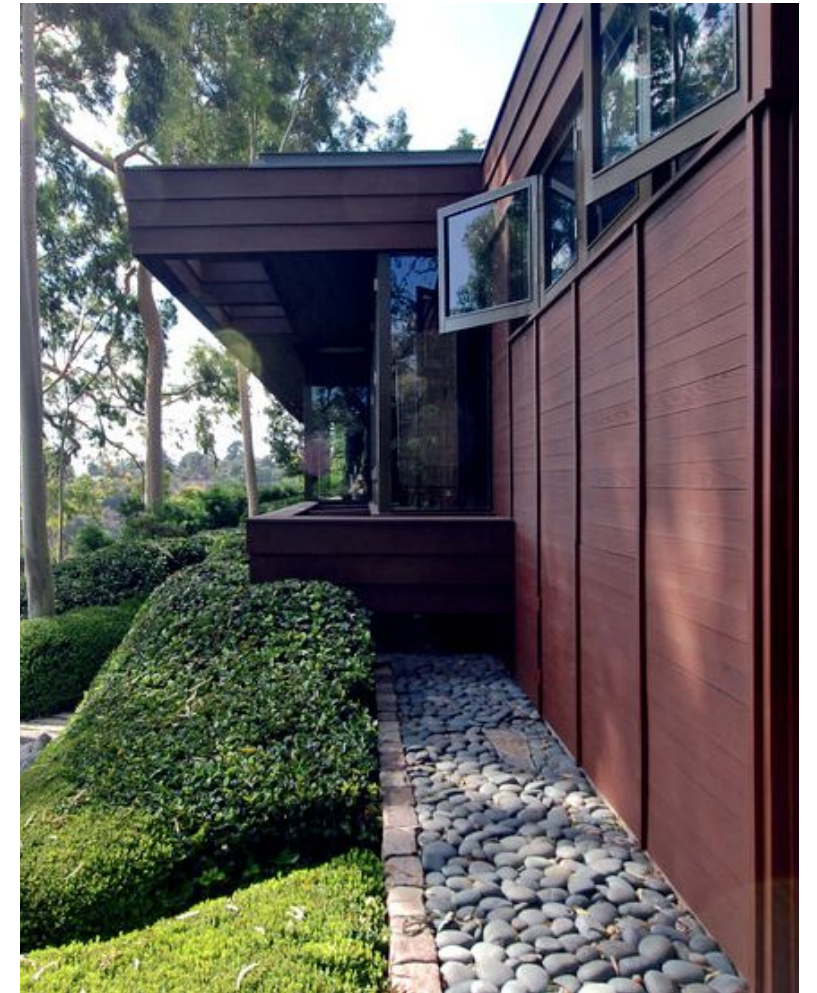
In the 1930s and 40s three embattled architects struggled to generate the style of the century. Soriano, following Neutra, went techno—glass, steel, plastic—while Harris pursued delicate compositions in wood. The extreme debates around steel versus wood was not a matter of style, but politics. Soriano's designs were empty glass boxes purposely designed for any conceivable use, while Harris's structures were designed for strong individuals. In the middle of this debate stood Gregory Ain, who fought a life-long battle for mass produced housing. Deeply involved in Communist organizations around Los Angeles, Ain was the subject of relentless intimidation by the authorities. Hounded for more than thirty years by the FBI his ideals were blocked at every turn, his mental and private life deteriorated until he died penniless, mad, and alone.



RAPHAEL SORIANO



GREGORY AIN



HARWELL HARRIS

MID-CENTURY MODERN AND THE FBI

On May 1, 1950 a woman who called herself a housewife walked into the Los Angeles office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and began telling a story to one of the Bureau's agents. She said she was an occasional babysitter for architect Gregory Ain and his family. She had been in the Ain home nearly one hundred times from 1946-49. She said the Ains (and five other families for whom she babysat) were "all very nice people" but that "she was of the opinion they were either Communists or Communist sympathizers." She said she "would do anything she could to help," and she told agents "if a government man came to the house I would let him in while they were not there."

If Mid-Century Modern is the epitome of cool, it was something far more than that for the US Government. The most extraordinary information has come to light about these mid-century architectural giants. Brand new disclosures, care of the freedom of information act, have revealed a vast network of FBI surveillance surrounding these architects. Never before seen by anyone beyond the FBI agents themselves, this vast array of newly discovered documents reveal how architects were hounded by agents at their offices, on the street, and at their homes. Babysitters, friends, and wives were informants on this "most dangerous architecture in America," as J. Edgar Hoover called it.

SECURITY MATTER - C

On 5/1/50 [redacted]
 Los Angeles 46, California, (same visitore 0750, came to the office and offered the following information.

[redacted] stated she is a housewife and has been doing baby sitting since 1945 and that during the time since then she has been in the home of the above named individuals as a baby sitter on one or more occasions. She said they "are all very nice people" and that they had treated her very well and for this reason she hated to say anything against them but she was of the opinion they were either Communists or Communist sympathizers. She was asked why she was of that opinion and she stated her reasons were as follows:

1. Because of the type of literature they had in their homes, such as The Daily Worker, National Guardian, Daily Compass, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists published by Arts Sciences and Professions Council and others she could not remember but which she had read and felt were pro-Communist,
2. The fact they all seemed to be in some sort of a group although they are not close neighbors and
3. Because some of them at least, are on very friendly terms with JACOBIA CARO (who she also knew as Mrs. CHINI), whose name had been in the papers as being a registered Communist,



Bureau of Investigation
 United States Department of Justice

Los Angeles, California
 October 14, 1949

REPLY, PLEASE REFER TO [redacted]

Director, FBI

RE: GREGORY SAMUEL AIN, wa
 SECURITY MATTER - C

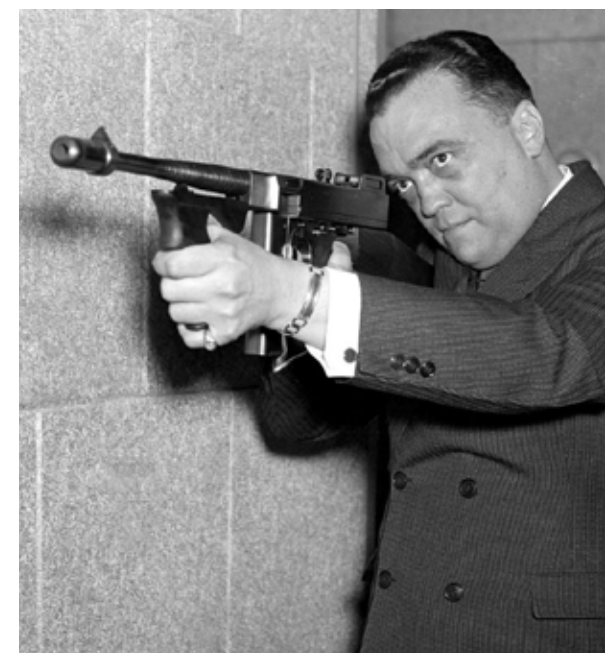
Dear Sir:

It is recommended that a Security Index card be prepared relative to the individual named below:

Name: GREGORY SAMUEL AIN
 Aliases: Fred Grant

Residence Address: 1527 W. Fourth Street
 Los Angeles, California

Handwritten notes: "card", "CONTAIN", "DATE 3/4/26: 9/1/48? SPY", "Comp. # 250432"

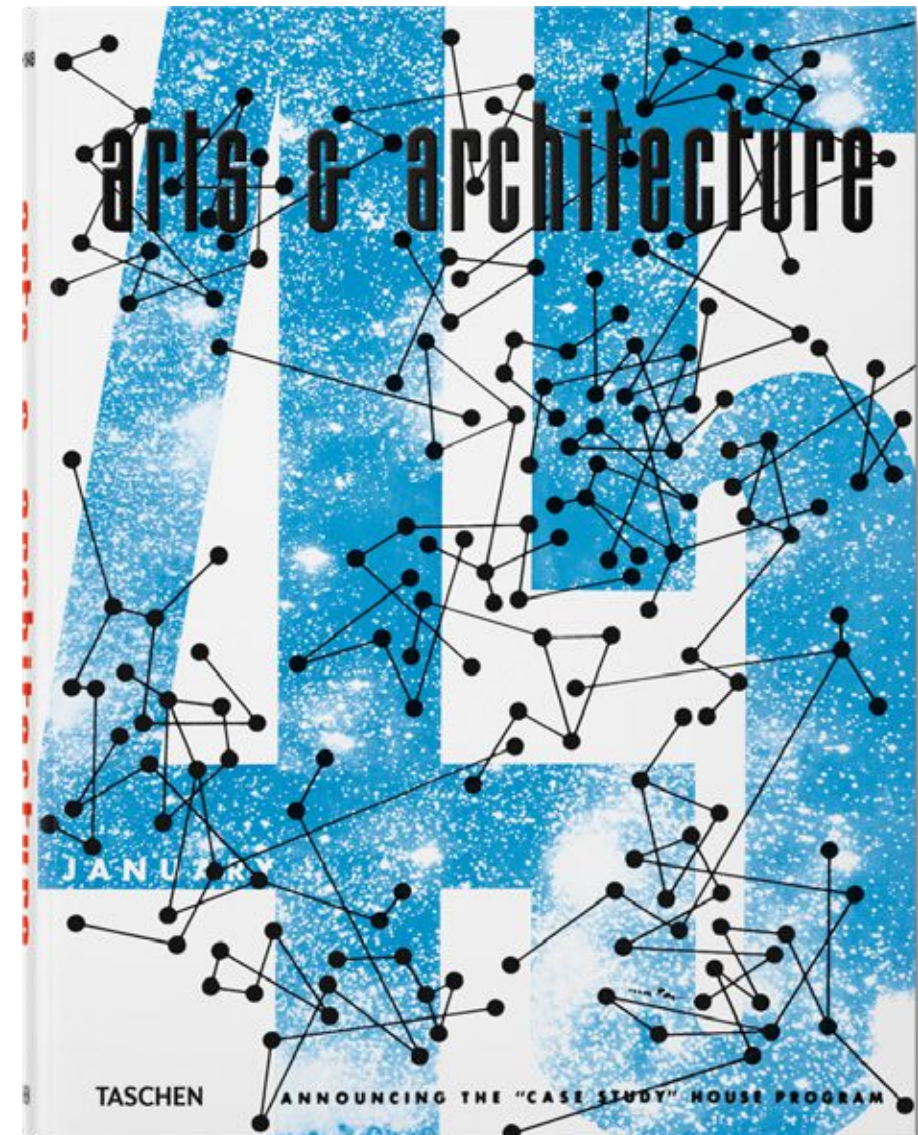


EPISODE 3: POST-WAR PROMISE (1940s)

By 1943 the population of Los Angeles was larger than 37 other states combined; one in every 40 Americans made LA their home. And with the end of the War the population of Los Angeles had risen by 20% over five years. Modern architects leapt to answer the massive housing shortage. Neutra's Channel Heights, Gregory Ain's Mar Vista, Joseph Eichler's Balboa Highlands, Smith and Jones's Crestwood Hills represented the very best in modern design for lower and middle-class audiences.

But it was John Entenza's Arts & Architecture magazine in 1945 that launched the most influential modern housing campaign in history: The Case Study House Program. Everything we think of as Mid-Century Modern happens with the Case Study Program. Architects like Eames, Koenig and Ellwood were the purest of the pures: glass, steel, water, and not a lot else. This was radical design for the most common of Americans. And for a brief moment in American history radical modern innovation became something like the common language of the street.

Over the next twenty years the Case Study Program produced over twenty houses, each one seemingly more popular than the previous. Julius Shulman's infamous photographs of the program circulated the globe in architectural journals, but more importantly home-making magazines and Sunday supplements. It started a gold rush that continues to this day: Case Study Houses offered a dreamlike vision of the future that was everybody's to own.



CASE STUDY HOUSE 21 - BAILEY HOUSE



CASE STUDY HOUSE 22 - STAHL HOUSE

EPISODE 3: CONTINUED

The Case Study idea was a massive hit with the public. Half a million people flocked to see and to gawk at, the Case Study Houses in its first few years. Fascination and revulsion, reverence and ridicule left the public wondering what this new architecture was all about. The glass boxes of Brentwood, Bel Air and the Pacific Palisades were dream worlds, curiosities along the hillside, a kind of fantastic Hollywood set, but were they places to raise a family? Suburbanites flocked to witness the glass cages and weird creatures that lived there but they returned to their (more affordable) tract homes on the flatlands.

By the end of the 1940s Roosevelt's New Deal came under increasing resistance. The routing of progressives in the 1946 election inaugurated a downward spiral in leftist politics throughout the United States. In Los Angeles the real estate lobby attempted to discredit opponents of the "free" market with anti-Communist propaganda and red-baiting. For the first time in over a decade organized labor, veterans, minorities and women were dealt setbacks in the struggle for public housing. Fritz B. Burns, the most successful tract home builder in the state, directly confronted modern home builders, accusing them of a Communist plot to take over Los Angeles. Burns backed the highly controversial "No on B" bill to crush "Communist" public housing in Los Angeles. Burns's success in defeating Prop. B. inaugurated the long history of corporate redevelopment in Los Angeles.

EPISODE 4: CALIFORNIA DREAMING (1950s)

During the postwar period modern architecture for the first time entered the mainstream. And for a time it still carried a strong social commitment. Charles Eames, speaking on the Today show, defined the sentiment of the moment: "the best, for the most, for the least."



EPISODE 4: (CONTINUED)

But the success of Midcentury Modern was also a matter of brilliant publicity. Modern architects were masters of selling dreams; they were so good at imagery that the images began to eclipse the ideas. Julius Shulman's luxurious photography spread a postwar utopia around the globe. Floor to ceiling glass, indoor/outdoor living, modularity, prefabrication, flat roofs, open plans, vast cantilevers, steel columns, moving partitions, plastic chairs, biomorphic pools, all of these things added up to an extremely attractive vision of a new way of life. LA was fun and it was cool and it was also democratic. Ray Eames, Greta Magnusson and Paul Williams showed the world that design could transcend race, gender, and class. And the clients of modern architecture were from all walks of life, teachers and dockworkers, pilots and engineers.



But postwar Los Angeles was also a period of wild contradictions. On the one hand, Los Angeles epitomized the "affluent society," and income inequality was the lowest in US history. On the other hand, McCarthyism and the Red Scare hit Los Angeles harder than almost any other city in the US. Far more than an anti-Communist tool, McCarthyism was a blunt instrument used to attack every facet of progressive thinking. The demise of public housing in Los Angeles was a direct result of the politics of the Red Scare. With the defeat of public housing and the demise of left-wing coalitions under McCarthy, a new entity entered into the spaces vacated by the Left. Urban redevelopment—later called renewal—replaced public housing and the shape of Los Angeles was altered out of all recognition by corporate interests.

EPISODE 5: AMERICAN REALITY (1960s)

The utopian ideals of 50s America came undone as the 1960s wore on. The Case Study Program came to a sputtering halt in 1966. The houses grew in scale, the materials rarer, the clients richer. And so the walls went up in the suburbs around private atriums with exotic plants and rosewood furniture. Gone was Eames' vision of "the best, for the most, for the least" and in its place was Eames' lament that "there was an error somewhere in the wish." Looking at the works of A. Quincy Jones and John Lautner we track the rise and decline of the Mid-Century Modern architectural politics. Jones, started his career with an extraordinary sequence of collective housing projects, and ended by designing luxury homes for a narrowly restricted clientele. Lautner's houses were always Expressionist and designed for strong individuals. But what began as inexpensive and accessible spaces by the mid-1950s turned decisively inward, closing out everything but its increasingly exotic and fantastic world. What exactly went wrong?

1960s Los Angeles was a time of deep social and political ferment. Unexpected neighbors mixed Communist gatherings with Conservative Think Tanks. Albert Wohlstetter of the Rand Corporation, advisor to Eisenhower and Reagan, mastermind of the Cold War nuclear deterrence strategy, lived in a house designed by his next-door neighbor Joseph Van der Kar. (Wohlstetter is perhaps best remembered as the inspiration behind Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*.) Van der Kar, a close friend of Ainslie's and Eckbo's, was not only a leading mid-century architect, but a leading member of the Los Angeles Communist Party. Van der Kar regularly held Communist meetings next door to the Wohlstetters. Against all odds Van der Kar and Wohlstetter were best of friends. These stories exemplify the complexity and contradiction of the mid-century moment.

Los Angeles politics in the 1960s is exemplified by rise of Mayor Sam Yorty. Yorty—mayor from 1961 to 1973—was once a political radical of the Left, but became the leading voice of pro-growth, corporate redevelopment, changing parties along the way from Democrat to Republican. 1965 marked the signal event of the Watts riots, which left 34 people dead and hundreds injured. Left-wing commentators saw this as a result of the failures of public housing. By contrast, Yorty and his broad Democratic and Republican base saw the riots as licensing a massive urban renewal effort. Public housing and the New Deal coalition were dead and in its place was a newly triumphant vision of corporate run urban redevelopment.



SILVERTOP - JOHN LAUTNER

EPISODE 6: LEGACY (2010s AND THE FUTURE)

Mid-Century Modern is back in a major way. It haunts our vision of current reality—it is a ubiquitous lifestyle backdrop—arguably unlike any architectural phenomenon in American history. Contemporary architects join our discussion to reflect on the ideals and achievements of Mid-Century Modern design. What of that moment is still active in contemporary design practices, what has been left behind, and what might be ahead for the next generation? Like their Mid-Century predecessors, contemporary architects in Los Angeles are focused on the problem of affordable housing. The troubles that haunted Mid-Century efforts toward the mass-produced house remain unresolved. Land prices, regulations, the rising cost of materials, labor unions, environmental concerns are the special problems that confront contemporary architects addressing social concerns in Los Angeles today. We will look at the range of new housing developments and new housing techniques including redesigned shipping containers, tent-structures, modular construction, and prefabrication to see how contemporary architects are dealing with a similar reality to their Mid-Century predecessors.

We also evaluate the changing political landscape that forms the backdrop of contemporary architectural innovation. Los Angeles has undergone an unprecedented demographic and economic shift since Yorty's Los Angeles. Los Angeles has become one of the most diverse and expanding cities in the world, and the city has not met the challenge of housing this new population. The median income home in Los Angeles County is currently \$615,000. Compare this to \$70,000 in today's prices for a house in 1950! The challenge for affordable and middle-class housing in Los Angeles is inordinate. We will look at architects and city planners who are confronting this staggering problem and consider what the Mid-Century housing models might show us today.



MICHAEL MALTZAN ARCHITECTURE



BROOKS AND SCARPA

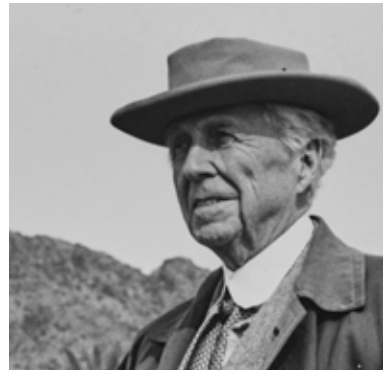


THOM MAYNE ARCHITECTURE



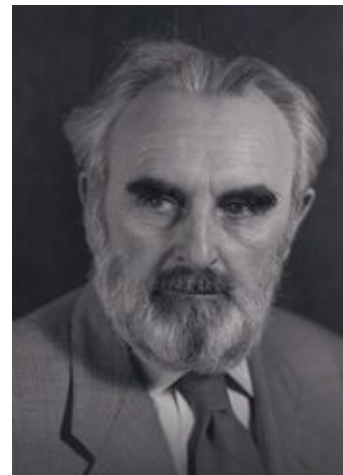
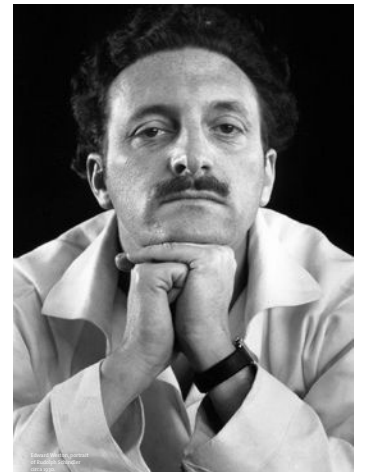
CHARLES AND RAY EAMES

THE ARCHITECTS



Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) His houses in LA are among the strangest and unique creations in architectural history. Drawing together Mayan, Aztec, and the Hollywood film set, Wright's concrete block houses created an utterly idiosyncratic vision of modern living. Wright believed that contemporary civilization was doomed to failure if it denied its roots in the primordial past, the way forward was paradoxically through the most ancient.

R. M. Schindler (1887-1953) born in Vienna, called himself a "Space Architect," brought with him the most advanced, but also some of the most idiosyncratic houses in the twentieth century. His work reflects the DNA of modern architecture in LA. Schindler's houses told a story about the evolution of mankind. The forms were meant to be read as narrating the rise of humans from an animal state of mere functionality to a mental world of pure light; his last houses dissolve the walls into colored plastic, the interior lights producing a rainbow effect of a new life beyond function.



Richard Neutra (1892-1970) born in Vienna, following Schindler, brought the seminal ideas of The Bauhaus to Los Angeles. Neutra was the most successful and influential architect of the period, his design philosophy of Biorealism also among the most perverse and fantastic. Obsessed with the possibility of creating the perfect human, Neutra thought he could alter the most basic fundamentals of life through design elements. Every doorknob, kitchen counter, showerhead, or sliding door was designed to change the person who encountered it day after day. Over time, Neutra's houses would design their user.

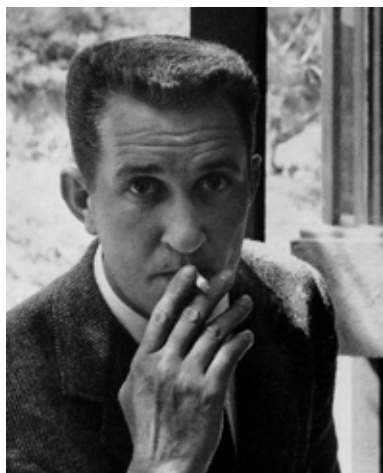
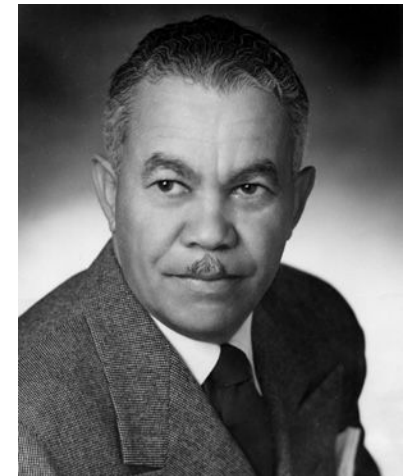
Greta Magnusson-Grossman (1906-1999) Swedish-born architect and furniture designer who was at the center of the mid-century design establishment but has been largely forgotten by contemporary history. Her elegant and innovative designs brought a warmer, more accessible—but no less modern—touch to the austerities of the LA-based Viennese masters.





Charles Eames (1907-1978) & **Ray Eames** (1912-1988) were the hippest, most celebrated designers of the century. Their wide-ranging work—furniture, architecture, toys, films, exhibitions—galvanized generations of artists to think of design in a wholly new way. Their work continues to inspire legions of admirers, their names are synonymous with everything Mid-Century Modern. The Eameses were a phenomenon, and their home was the center of the design world. They believed that the basic threat to civilization was a world drowning in images. How could contemporary citizens handle the constant and teeming influx of images? The solution was homeopathic: give audiences a dose of image overload—immerse them in a kind of manic design universe—and they would begin to see the patterns in the system, the unity behind the chaos.

Paul R. Williams (1894-1980) began his career in public housing and went on to design the homes of numerous celebrities, including Frank Sinatra, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, and Barbara Stanwyck. In 1957, Williams became the first black member to be inducted into the AIA's College of Fellows. Williams' designs were an eclectic mix of avant-garde austerity and art deco luxury. They were also the representation of a vast social vision of democratic unity, of how different ideas could harmonize in an ideal setting.



Craig Ellwood (1922-1992) one of the most complex figures of the whole mid-century scene. Ellwood was the head of one of the most successful and influential of all LA modern architectural firms, but he was also a fraud. Fabricating an identity out of almost nothing, Jon Nelson Burke convinced the world he was "Ellwood," the ideal image of the modern architect, who was uncredited, unlicensed and unable to build much of anything—except a beautiful idea.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTS

Architects from around the world visit Los Angeles to study Mid-Century Modern homes, not unlike artists who visited Rome to study the ruins of Roman architecture. You can draw a direct line from Mid-Century Modern architects to many architects practicing in Los Angeles today. In order to help audiences understand the deep and abiding significance of the Mid-Century ideal we will engage a select group of forward thinking, progressive-minded contemporary architects based in LA. Like their Mid-Century models, these contemporary architects explore new technologies and formal patterns to make our lives better. In the show's final episode we will look at contemporary work and discuss the challenges that confront progressive architecture today. We will watch them in their day to day approach to solving architectural and housing issues that face Los Angeles today including the systemic lack of affordable housing and dealing with the most pressing issues of climate change.



Frank Gehry, LA-based architect, is a worldwide phenomenon. Vanity Fair recently labelled Gehry "the most important architect of our age." He is also one of the deepest admirers, and advocates for, mid-century modern architecture in LA.

Thom Mayne, LA-based principal of Morphosis Architects, Pritzker Prize winner and distinguished teacher. In the early 1970s Mayne established a new sculptural and high-tech vision for LA architecture, one aggressively different from the modern masters he so admired.



Elizabeth Diller, founded New York-based firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro with partner Ricardo Scofidio, and has been recently named the most influential architect by Time magazine. Diller's Broad art museum in LA, completed in 2015, was inspired by numerous mid-century LA works, and is among the most high-profile works designed by any firm today.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTS (CONT.)



Koning Eizenberg Architecture, since 1981 Koning Eizenberg have worked with developers, city planners and not-for-profit clients to explore new possibilities for the design of housing and neighborhood places that strengthen community. Their groundbreaking work has been published extensively both in the US and abroad, and has earned over 125 awards for design, sustainability and historic preservation.



Michael Maltzan Architecture, since 1995 MMA has designed some of the most socially impactful projects in LA. From the Star Apartments project with the Skid Row Housing Trust, to Crest and Rainbow Apartments, to his plans and designs for the highly anticipated 6th Street Bridge project, MMA have been leading innovators in affordable housing.



Since 1991 **Brooks + Scarpa** have led the field in sustainable design practices. Their Solar umbrella house in Venice has been named by the AIA as one of the Top Ten Green Projects; Colorado Court in Santa Monica was the first Multi-family housing project in the US to be LEED certified; and Step Up on 2nd building (for mentally disabled homeless residents) are the only projects in the history of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) to win a National AIA Design Award, an AIA Committee on the Environment Award and a National AIA special interest award for a single project.

KEY HISTORIANS



Judith Sheine, the "Dean" of modern architecture in Los Angeles. Sheine has taught at UCLA, Cal Poly and is now chair at The University of Oregon. Sheine is both an architect and has written the most authoritative work on R.M. Schindler.



Barry Bergdoll, Professor of architecture at Columbia University, chief curator of modern architecture at the Museum of Modern Art from 2007 to 2013, he has published canonical works on Mies van der Rohe, the Bauhaus, Henri Labrouste, Le Corbusier, Latin American post-war architecture, and most recently Frank Lloyd Wright.

DAVID JACOBSON

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

This project will be the realization of a dream I have had since I began my career as an independent filmmaker. I had the great fortune to grow up in a Mid-Century Modern home in Los Angeles, designed by Ray Kappe. The Mid-Century Modern architects claimed that their designs could change the way we live together and the way we see the world. Living in that house, like living inside of a beautiful sculpture, inspired me to become a visual artist. It also inspired me to always strive to see the world in a new way, and to try to help others do the same. This is what I hope we can do with this series. Architecture is truly amazing in how it reflects our culture, while at the same time shaping it. In the homes we design and live in, the most formative periods of our lives unfold; our minds and character are shaped there. Our shelters are the central node of the cultural matrix that makes up our sense of reality. This is why a series like this will be about so much more than aesthetics and design. It will be a series about how we see ourselves and our world. And if that weren't enough, it will also be a unique history of Los Angeles, seen through the lens of its architecture. In a moment in history when we are in desperate need to find new ideas and solutions for how we can all live in greater harmony, both with each other and with our planet, this story about a group of brilliant and idealistic architects will make it extremely timely.

DAVID JACOBSON is an award winning writer, director and producer of feature films and documentaries. His films have been featured at over 25 international film festivals, including Cannes, Berlin, and Toronto, and released theatrically throughout the world. David has collaborated with some of the world's most highly regarded talent, including Jeremy Renner, Edward Norton, Bruce Dern, and Willem Dafoe. He is an alumnus of the Sundance Institute's Screenwriters Lab and the recipient of 3 Independent Spirit Award nominations.

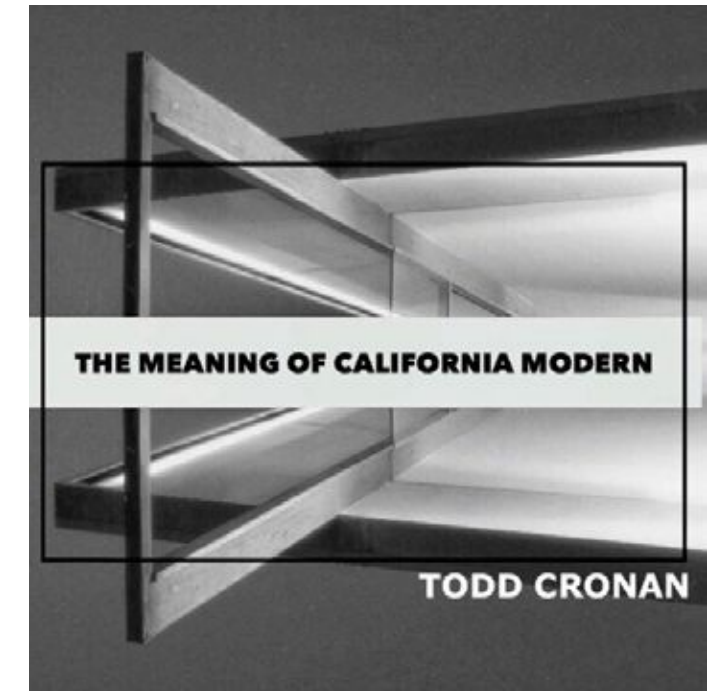


RAY KAPPE

TODD CRONAN

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER/WRITER

My family first arrived in Los Angeles in 1939, when my grandparents fled Vienna, Austria weeks after the Anschluss. My grandfather was a conductor and found work within a thriving German-speaking exile community in Los Angeles. Music and art were written into his DNA. He went on to write novels, plays, philosophical dialogues, and librettos for a close-knit audience of dedicated admirers. I have early memories of peering



into a room full of old men in suits listening to German opera on the radio, marveling at the exotic sounds and the equally exotic modern furniture. But this music, this space, this furniture, gave them a sense of community, culture, and home. No doubt these early experiences led me many years later to explore the work of the great Viennese-Jewish architects R. M. Schindler and Richard Neutra, who immigrated to Los Angeles in the early 1920s. For the next thirty years Schindler and Neutra set the terms for some of the most beautiful and challenging architecture ever created in the United States. By utter coincidence I went on to live next door to the two greatest monuments of modern architecture in LA: Schindler's Lovell Beach House and then Neutra's Lovell Health House. They looked like alien settlements dropped from another, and better, world into ours. For the past twenty-five years I have researched, visited, photographed, and published on the incredible wealth of modern architecture in Los Angeles. 2019 will see the publication of my book, *The Meaning of California Modern*, summing up my sense of the international significance of this Golden Age in California's history.

Todd Cronan is Professor of Modern Art at Emory University in Atlanta. He has published widely on modern architecture, photography, and European and American painting. He has lectured on these topics throughout the United States and Europe and is the winner of grants from the Fulbright Program, the Mellon Foundation, the Getty Research Institute, and the Huntington Library. He is the editor-in-chief of nonsite.org, a journal of art and politics.

NARRATIVE STYLE

THE MOST DANGEROUS ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA will unfold across six episodes, tracing the emergence of modern architecture in California in the 1920s through the death of Richard Neutra in 1970. Each episode will focus on two to three key architects, exploring their lives and work. We will examine their major monuments as well as the dramatic events that shaped their lives and the life of architecture at large. The city of Los Angeles will form the backdrop for this architecture as we move between the houses and the changing life of the city, the two histories deeply intertwined.



LOS ANGELES 1910s - VIEW TOWARDS HOLLYWOOD FROM WILSHIRE BLVD



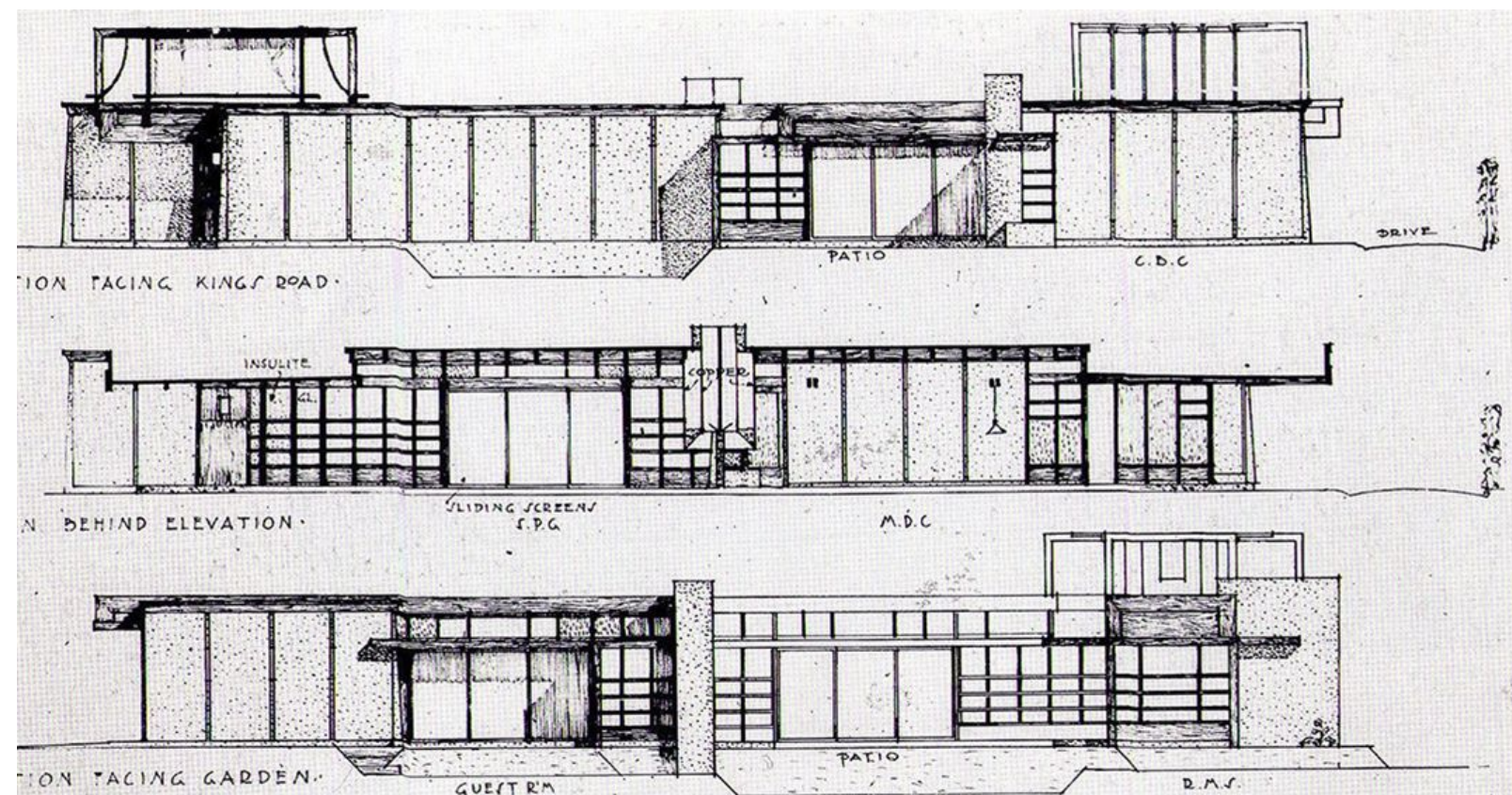
LOS ANGELES TODAY - HOLLYWOOD HILLS IN BACKGROUND

Though it is a history series, it is a history that is still being made. The ideas and work of Mid-Century Modern architects continue to influence the culture of Los Angeles (and the culture of the rest of the world for that matter). In order to move fluidly from the past to the present, we envision a special kind of celebrity host. Unlike a traditional celebrity host who shows up for an intro and reads the voiceover narration, our host will be on a very active personal journey to understand why Midcentury Modern Architecture and design are so popular today, so many decades after it was created. We will cover their journey in documentary style with a voiceover that carries both the information they are learning, but also their personal reactions to people, places and things.

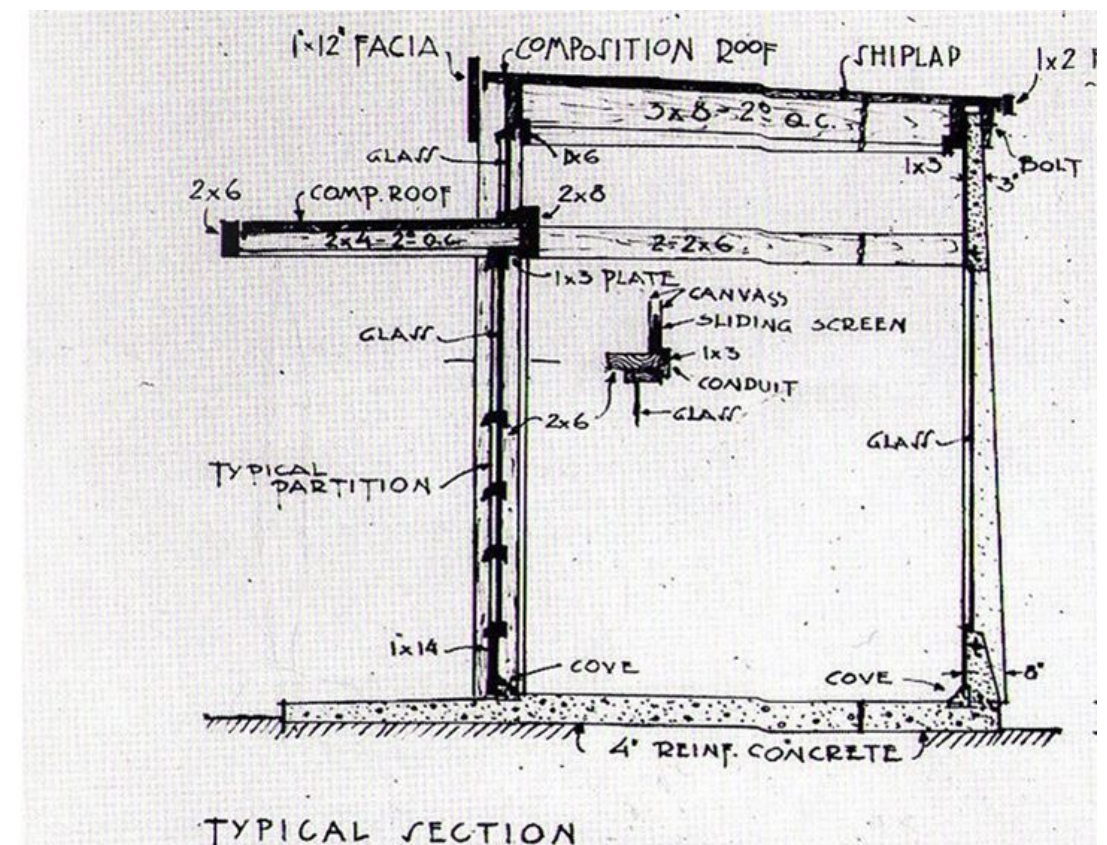
The host will need to be relatable, curious and (above all) quick-on-their-feet to dialogue on-camera with experts. Ideally they will already have a passion for architecture and a sense of humor, although this is not essential.

The journey will begin with the host engaging a wide spectrum of people about what we mean by Mid-Century Modern: from a Lyft driver, to an interior designer, to executives at Walmart, Target, DWR and Sotheby's. For them, what is it all about? Why do they think it is so popular today? The answers she gets motivate her to learn more about the true history of the movement.

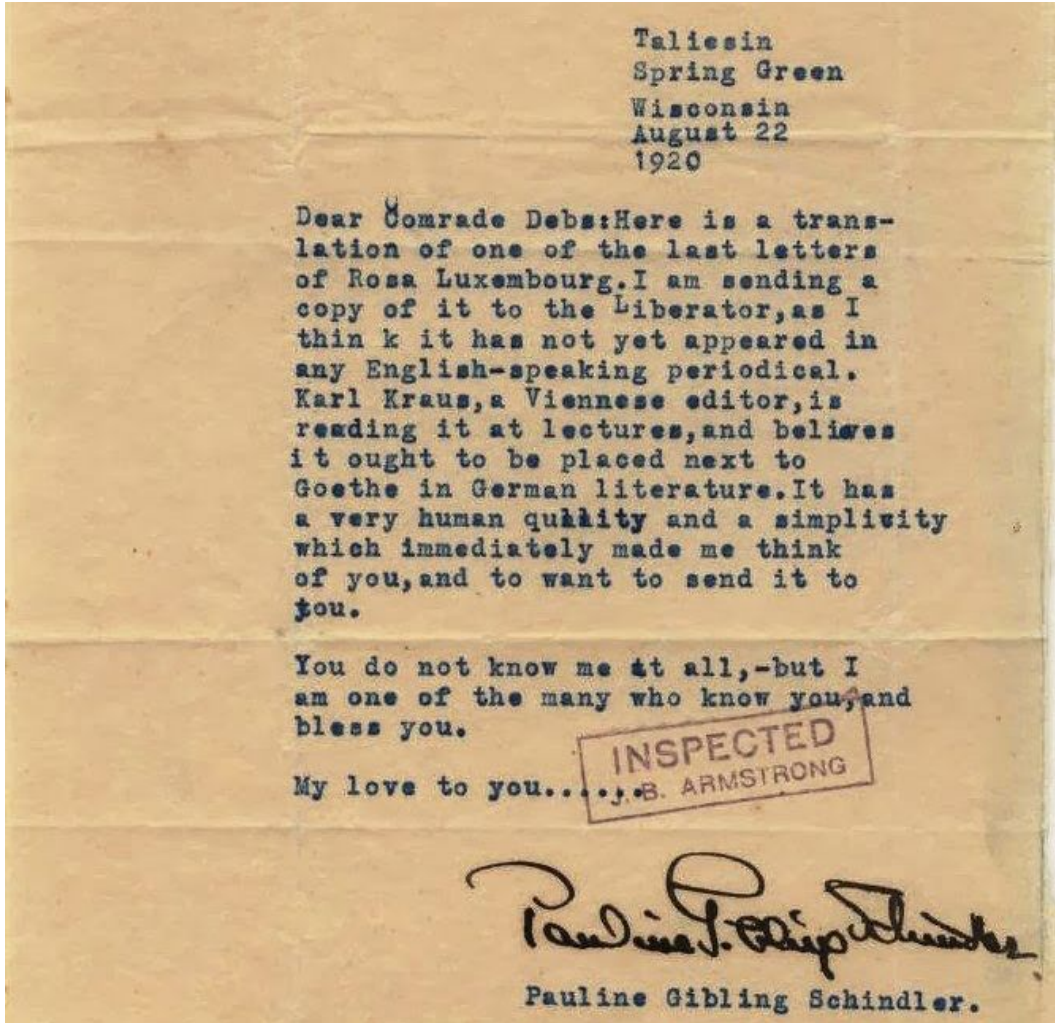
On a visit to his office, world-famous architect, Frank Gehry, tells her about how the Mid-Century Modern influenced his work and the work of his contemporaries. He also shows her his drawings, made as a student at USC, of the R. M. Schindler House and he insists she visits the house in West Hollywood. Built in 1921, and seemingly dropped from Mars, it is the start of it all.



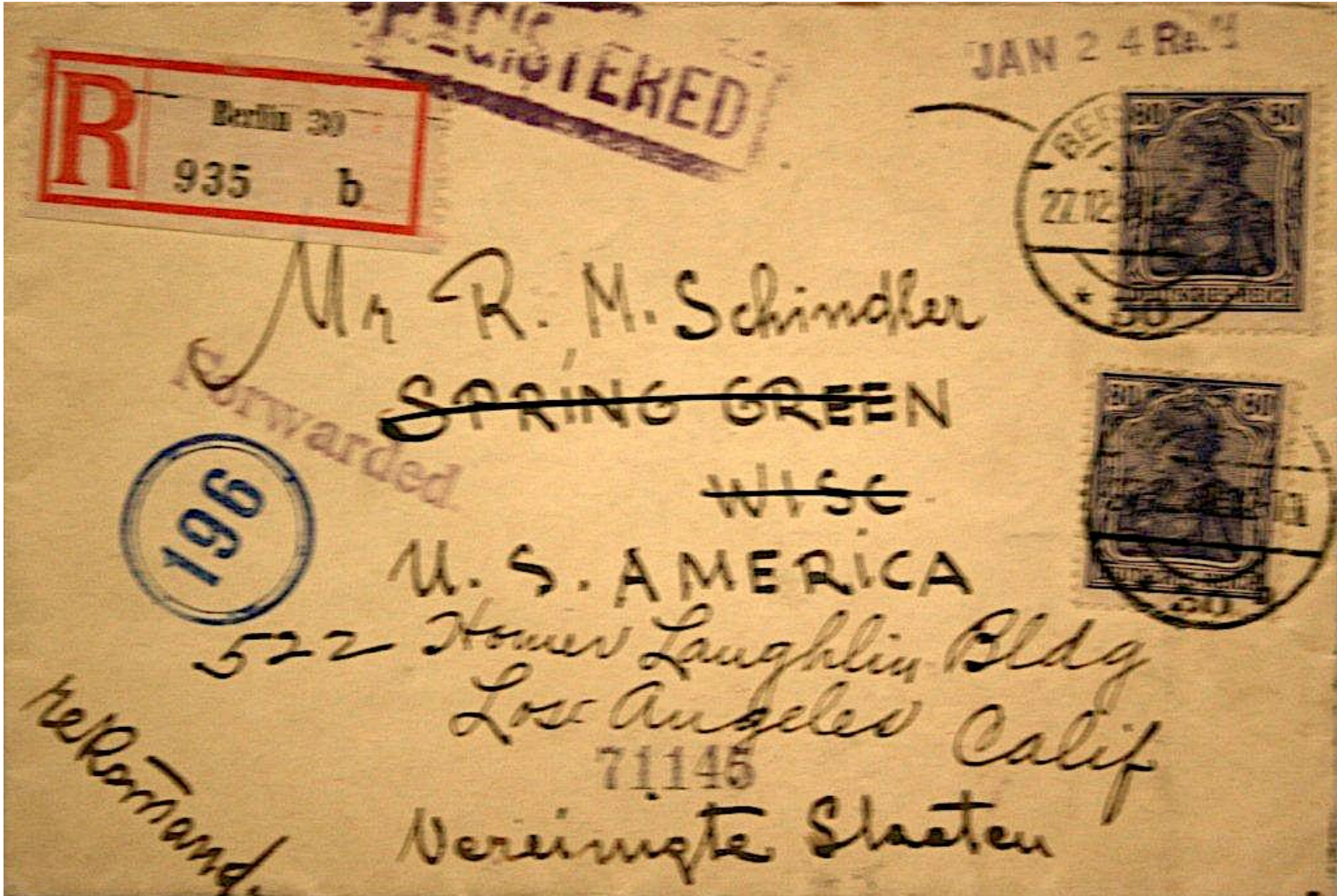
ORIGINAL DRAWINGS FOR THE SCHINDLER HOUSE



There she meets Todd Cronan, an architectural historian who specializes in Mid-Century Modern. Together, they explore the house and talk about the early days of the movement. Todd offers to be her travel guide for everything Mid-Century Modern. Over the course of the series, the host and travel guide will take occasional field trips to places like the (beachfront) Santa Barbara archives, where they will discover never before seen documents, letters, photographs, shocking FBI files, and all kinds of never before seen materials.



LETTER FROM PAULINE SCHINDLER TO SOCIALIST EUGENE V. DEBS



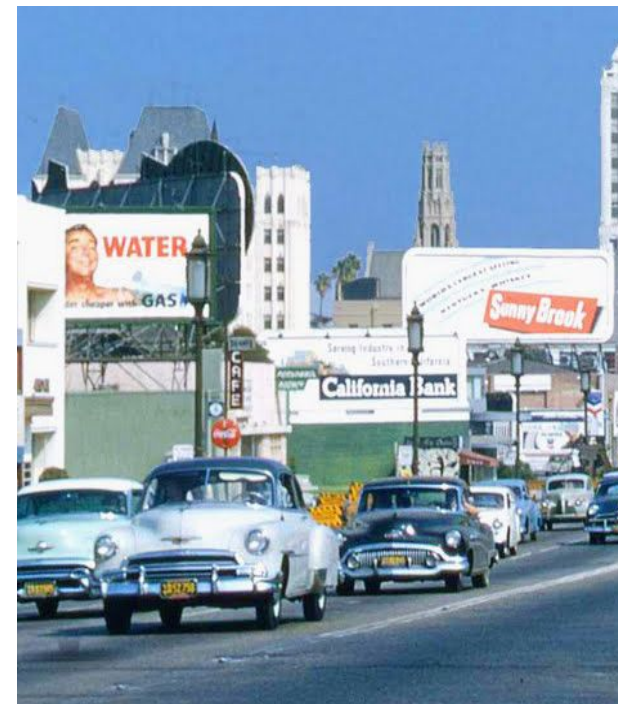
LETTER FROM NEUTRA TO SCHINDLER

Guided by dialogues with Todd and the many other experts and architects she will meet, the journey will proceed through time tracing the key moments and stories, as outlined in the episodes breakdown. Above all, our host will help us draw the history into the present by bringing a humanizing through line from episode to episode. She will also transform expert interviews into lively dialogues and give the series overall a strong point-of-view that the audience can identify with.

RECREATIONS

Although there is a wealth of archival footage of the evolution of Los Angeles, the architects were less diligent in film recording. Photography was their chosen medium of display. The life of these architects is the stuff of legend, and we want to bring those stories to life on the screen. The best way to do that is to combine the best of the documentary elements available—a treasure trove of films around the history of Los Angeles; extraordinary photography of the houses and their construction; new and extensive photography of the houses— and combine this with dramatizations of the key scenes from the architects lives.

We aim to recreate the “missing” archival footage of the architects and their lives. At our disposal are some of the most astonishing period sets imaginable: Mid-Century Modern houses. What if these architects had documented their lives in the ways many of us do today? Using the technology that was available at the time and in the documentary style of the day, we can turn these lives into living cinema.



LOS ANGELES 1920s THROUGH 1960s

Rather than recreations with an added look of 'old-time film,' we want to use the actual film technologies of the time or find ways to approximate them to generate a strong sense of place and time. As an example, in Episode 1, on the work of the 1920s, we will use a Mitchell 35mm camera, the workhorse of both fiction and doc. This camera, with vintage lenses, and the use of a slow-rated film stock typical of the period, will create the beautifully authentic look and feel of 1920s Los Angeles. We will reference key documentary films in the way we light, compose the frame, and move the camera. We can further make use of the editing techniques of the period.



BERLIN, SYMPHONY OF GREAT CITY 1927



DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES 1920s

As we move through the series, the means of documentary production will change. Each episode will bring a new visual tool to the table and provide the means to create new versions of reality. With the innovative use of these historical technologies we aim to create a palpable sense of the milieu, the distinct feel of the place and moment where these visionaries created new worlds. Like the architects themselves, each episode explores the relevant technology of the moment: the look and feel of the presentation will change as the architecture, city and technology change.



KODACHROME 16MM MOTION PICTURE FILM AND HOME MOVIE CAMERA 1927



KODACHROME 1940s LOS ANGELES



NAGRA PORTABLE SOUND RECORDER 1950s



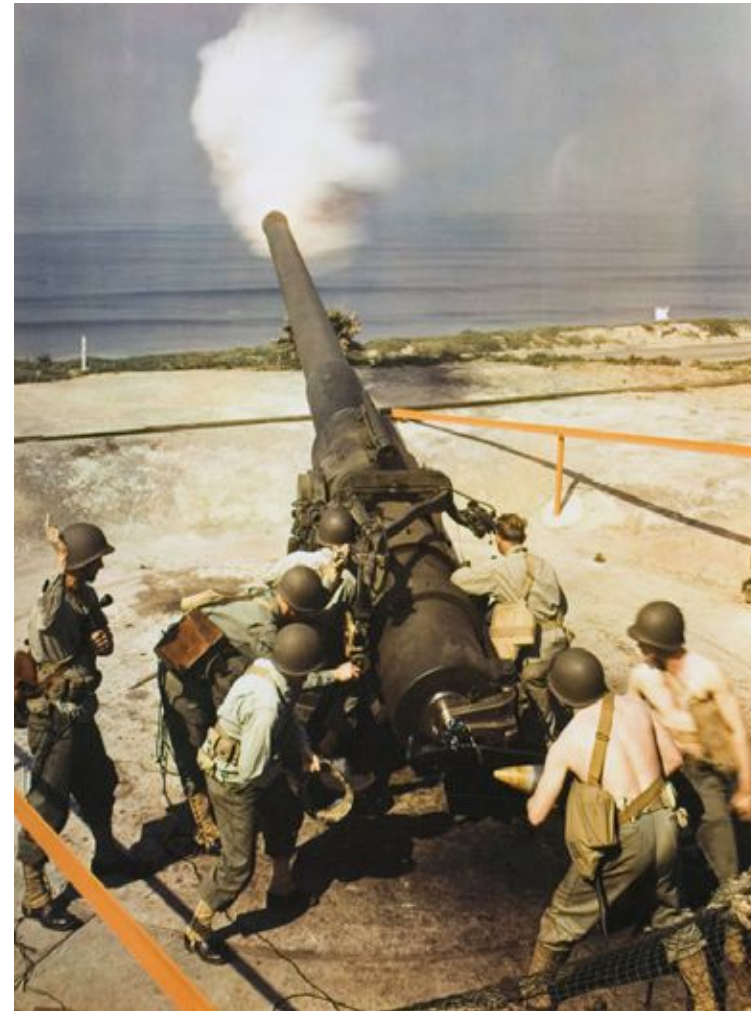
GREY GARDENS 1975



DRIFTERS 1920s



D.A. PENNEBAKER 1960s



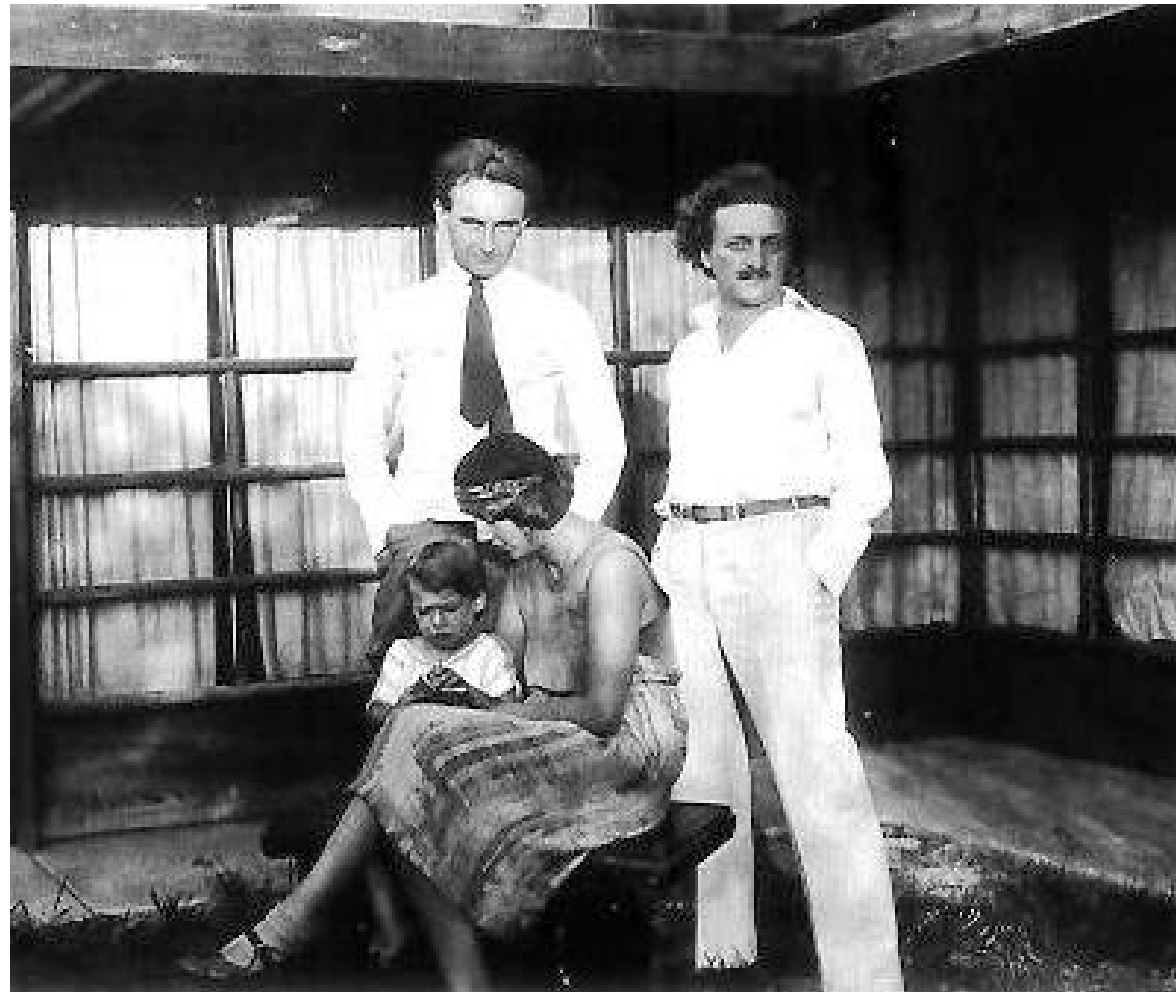
PACIFIC ISLANDS ACTION 1940s



GORDON PARKS DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY 1950s

We will introduce these re-creations at the Schindler house, the first stop on the host's journey into the past. After meeting with Todd, we see the host in the courtyard. Recalling Schindler's exotic soirees—populated with Hollywood stars and a wide array of artists, radicals and misfits—she wishes she could have been there. We transition to the recreation, a bohemian summertime festival. In a reverse angle, we see our host still sitting in their lawn chair, taking it all in. We think she is invisible, and she does too, but surprisingly someone brings her a glass of champagne and engages her with some 20s Hollywood gossip.

She wanders into the interior of the house and runs into an annoyed Richard Neutra. He can't resist spitting venom about his partner Schindler. She suggests it must be hard to live in a communal home. She offers him advice about collaborations. He's inconsolable, and Neutra launches into a tirade on the differences between his own work and that of Schindler's. He insists their friendship is at an end and the host worries she might have stepped into something far bigger than she expected.



RICHARD NEUTRA AND FAMILY WITH R.M. SCHINDLER IN HAPPIER TIMES



CELEBRATION AT THE SCHINDLER HOUSE

With David's background in documentary and narrative filmmaking, we are well-suited to generate recreations and dramatic re-enactments that will be qualitatively different from other hybrid documentaries. The overall effect of this narrative plan will be to weave together glorious imagery of the houses, discussion with contemporary experts, recreations of defining events in the lives of the architects, and a view onto the changing social and political life of the city. We aim to offer audiences a unique experience in the visual retelling of our past.

CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

These houses have been featured in numerous Hollywood films. They are cinematic at their core.



NEUTRA'S LOVELL HOUSE IN LA CONFIDENTIAL

In contrast to the archival footage, the contemporary photography will be shot in 4k Cinemascope with spherical lenses. Since most Mid-Century Modern homes spread out on a horizontal axis, it is a subject that truly calls for widescreen. Because architecture is our subject we will use spherical lenses instead of anamorphic lenses, which are currently in vogue. With spherical lenses we can minimize and distortion and have the most depth of field. There are some fantastic new wide-angle lenses, like the Zeiss 8R (an 8mm rectilinear lens), that are ideal for shooting architectural spaces without bending the architectural lines. Shooting these historic monuments with care and the best quality will make this series a truly important record for future generations.

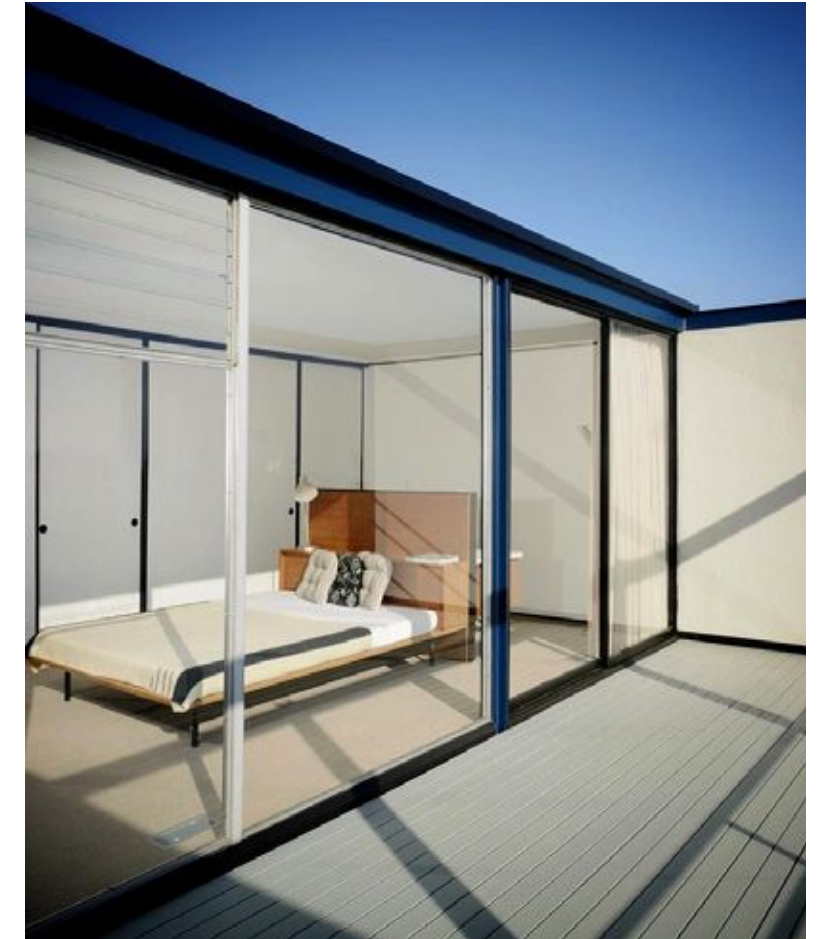


8R LENS COMPARED TO STANDARD 8MM LENS

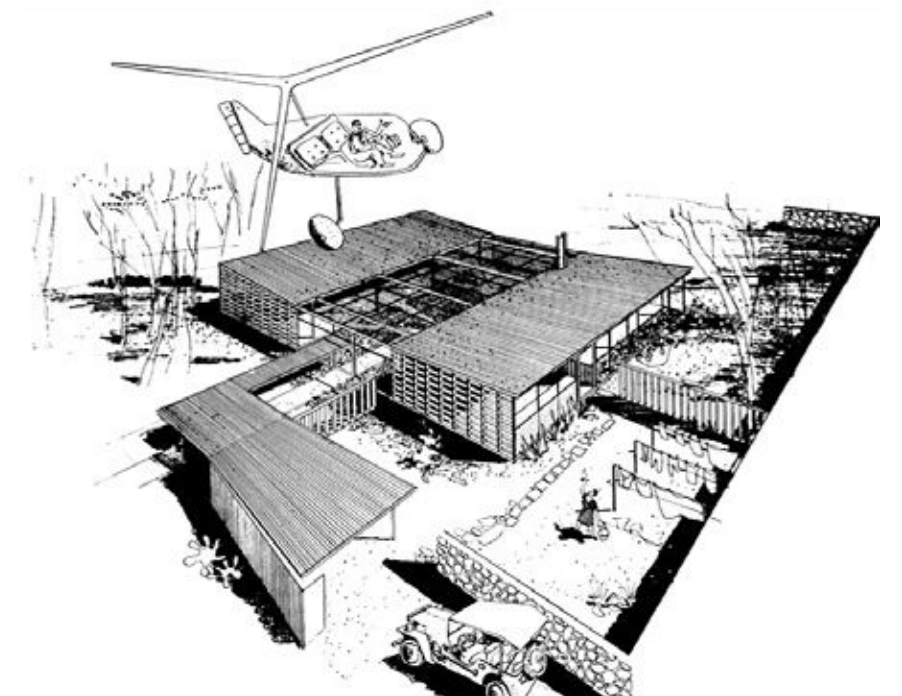




THE CHEMOSPHERE IN 2.35:1 CINEMASCOPE



We will take utmost care in photographing each house from beautifully composed establishing shots to detailed inserts. We will use techno-cranes to create precise movements from perspective to perspective while always keeping the compositions balanced and exact. Drone photography will allow us to get a clear sense of the property sitings which was always an important consideration for Mid-Century Modern architecture. We will also use drones to get interior overhead views and movement between indoor and outdoor spaces.



Though much of the contemporary photography will favor clear, well-lit compositions to showcase the architecture, at times we will work with existing sunlight and added light to give a sense of the different, often dramatic moods these houses offer to their residents.

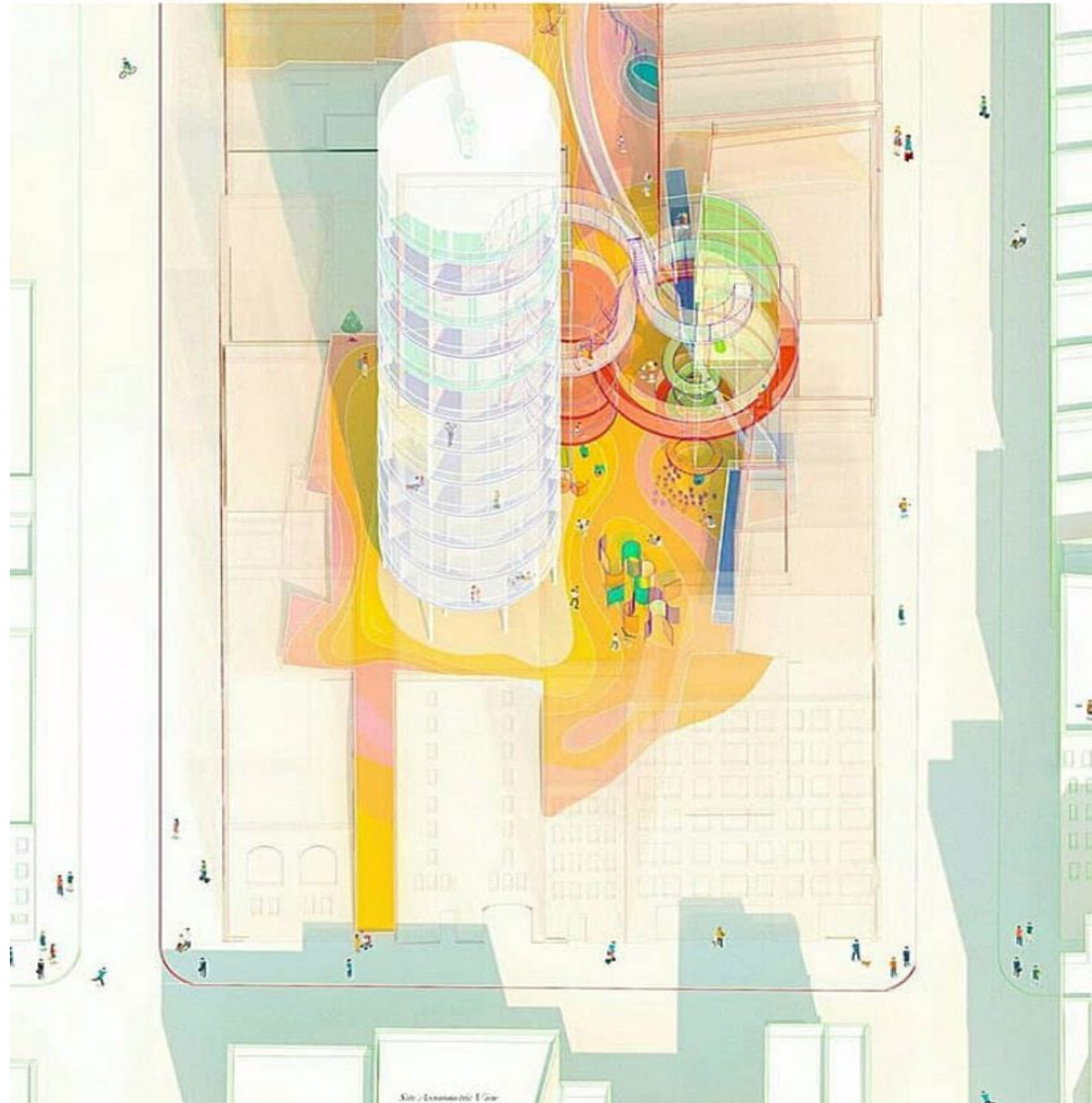
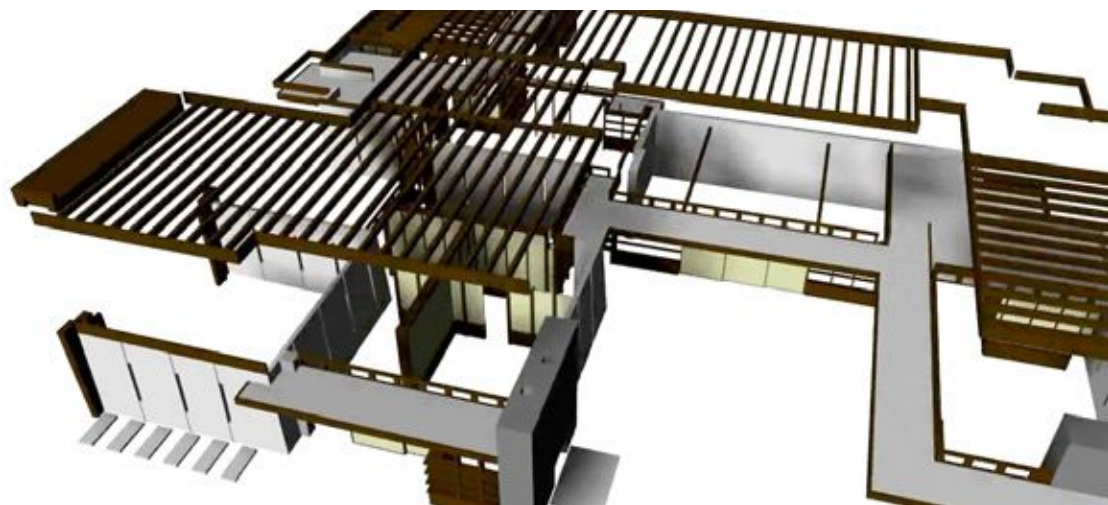


GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

With the advances in computer technology we are in a kind of renaissance of graphic representation of architecture. We will use cutting edge artists to represent the houses, infographics about the social history of Los Angeles, and for an innovative title sequence that sets up each episode

There is a strong technical dimension to architecture that will require graphic modes of representation. We will use CGI to turn each house into a 3D object that can be manipulated to view the structure from any angle.

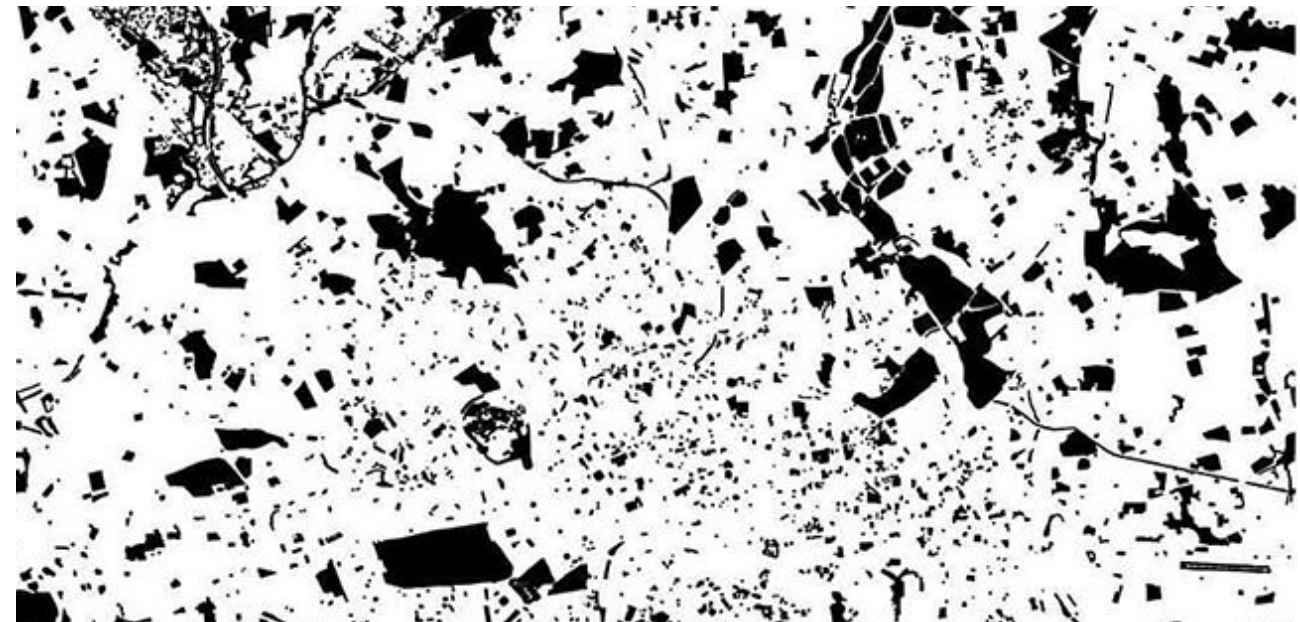
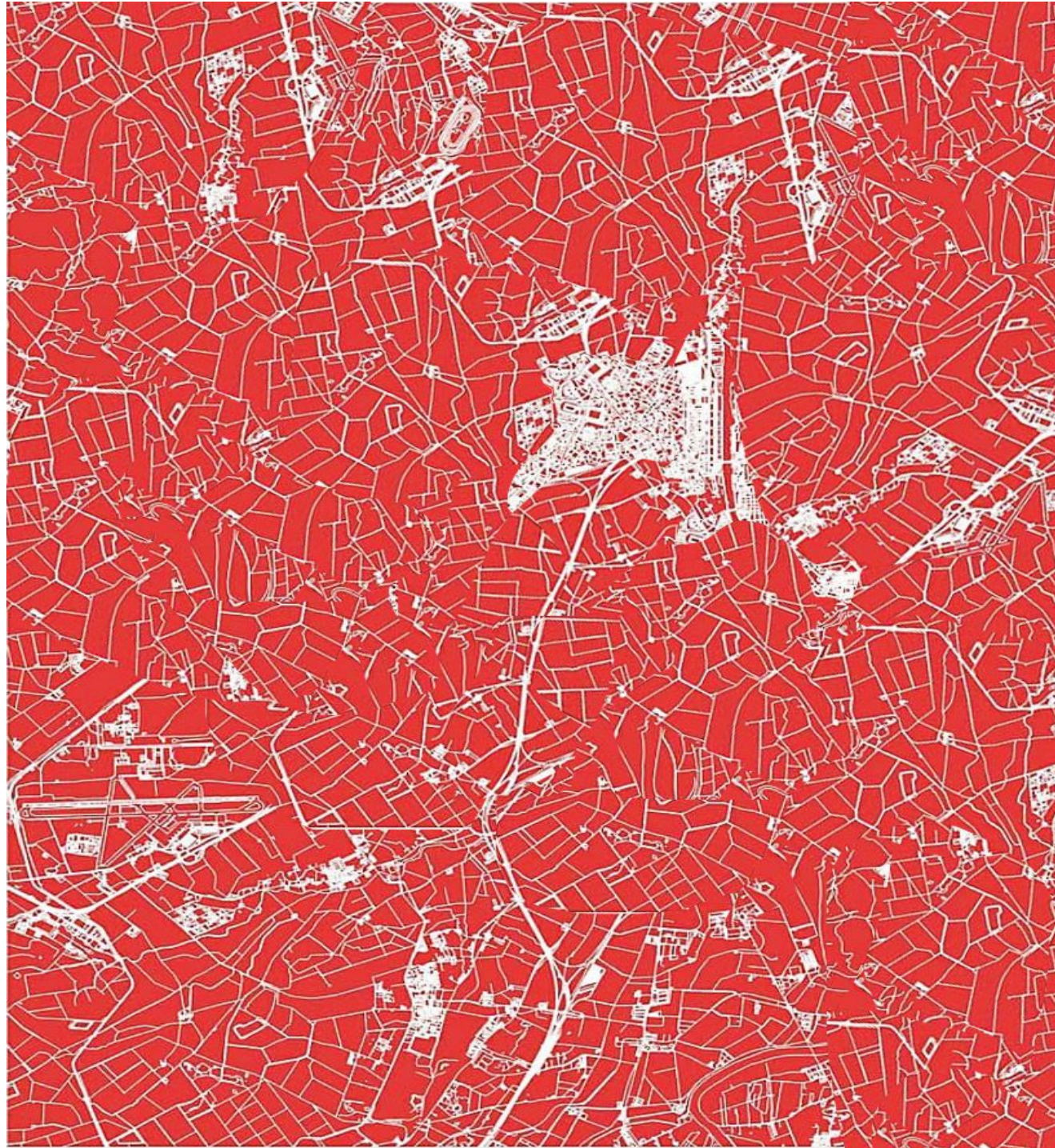
We will also be able to "take the house apart" to reveal the hidden but essential structural elements.



It is an understatement to say these homes were built in a very different Los Angeles. We will also use CGI to show audiences what the house looked like in its original setting. Peeling back the accumulated history of the city, we reveal these futuristic steel-frame houses on prairie-like streets, surrounded by open pastures.



With maps and info-graphics we will keep an eye on the population growth of Los Angeles throughout the series and the way that the urban landscape spread across the geographic region.



Potential Architectural Design samples that we will use as a basis for title sequence and other graphic elements.



