

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
MULTIPLE PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION FORM**

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

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**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

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Historic name Cultural Resources of the Recent Past, City of Pasadena

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**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

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(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Residential Architecture of the Recent Past in Pasadena, 1935 – 1968

Mid-Century Modernism in the Residential Work of Buff, Straub & Hensman in Pasadena, 1948-1968

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**C. Form Prepared By**

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Organization	<u>ICF Jones &amp; Stokes</u>	Date	<u>2 April 2008</u>
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**D. State/Federal Agency Certification**

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

**Table of Contents for Written Narrative**

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 120 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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*Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena  
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## Summary Statement

This Multiple Property Submission addresses architecture in the City of Pasadena in two contexts, “Residential Architecture of the Recent Past in Pasadena, 1935- 1968,” and “Mid-Century Modernism in the Residential Work of Buff, Straub & Hensman<sup>1</sup> in Pasadena, 1948-1968.” These houses express qualities and features emerging from their shared period of significance and their geographical location in Pasadena. They reflect an architectural response to the unique circumstances, opportunities, and challenges of a 20<sup>th</sup> century, post-World War II world. The contexts for the Poppy Peak and Pegfair Estates districts and the work of architects Buff, Straub and Hensman, represented by five of the firm’s early designs for houses, are presented here.<sup>2</sup>

## Context 1: Residential Architecture of the Recent Past in Pasadena, 1935 – 1968

### Early History

Pasadena was initially a simple agricultural community, known for its bucolic weather and ample citrus groves. That would rapidly change as the railways came west and word of the opportunities in Southern California spread. Pasadena incorporated as a city in 1886, the same year the Santa Fe Line was completed, sparking the region’s first land boom. Many people from points east, but primarily Midwesterners, traveled to Southern California for the winter to escape the harsh climate back home. In 1900, an estimated 60,000 seasonal tourists enjoyed the mild West Coast winter. By this time, traveling to California had become what the grand European tour had been for Eastern seaboard residents in previous centuries.<sup>3</sup>

Many of these travelers found themselves in Pasadena, as its proximity to the railroad lines made it a natural destination for both seasonal tourists and permanent settlers alike. By the 1880s the community had changed from a small town to a thriving resort. The Tournament of Roses celebration, envisioned by early civic leaders as an opportunity to promote tourism and the warm winter climate, drew thousands of visitors to the West Coast. The tradition started in 1890 and evolved over time to include various activities, including the first football game in 1902. By 1920, the game had gained such prestige that organizers knew they needed a permanent home, and settled on a City-owned site in the Arroyo Seco for their new stadium, the Rose Bowl.

In addition to the seasonal tourists, the permanent population grew exponentially during this period as well. The proliferation of local rail and electric trolley lines built by moguls such as Henry Huntington enabled people to settle away from the urban centers and attain the American dream of a small house and a garden to call their own. As Pasadena’s population expanded, so did the commercial district along Fair Oaks Avenue and Colorado Boulevard. The heart of this bustling commercial center is known today as the Old Pasadena Historic District, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The earliest residences in Pasadena were simple board and batten structures or unadorned farm houses like those the Midwestern settlers had left behind. As Pasadena grew and turned from agriculture to commerce, area merchants began building more sophisticated residences, boasting fancy detailing and more complicated floor plans. In the late 1880s, mansions for prominent Pasadena citizens started to dominate the landscape. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, South Orange Grove Boulevard had been dubbed “Millionaires’ Row” for its abundance of grand residences lining the street. While many of these mansions were designed by prominent architects working in the city, most Victorian-era homes were built by contractors utilizing catalogues for design ideas and mass produced architectural details.

<sup>1</sup> Buff, Straub & Hensman is the firm’s title; historically it has always used the ampersand.

<sup>2</sup> See also *Cultural Resources of the Recent Past: Historic Context Report, City of Pasadena*, prepared by Historic Resources Groups and Pasadena Heritage, October 2007.

<sup>3</sup> McWilliams, Carey. 1973. *Southern California: An Island on the Land*. Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith Press, p. 130.

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## Arts & Crafts Movement in Pasadena

In addition to wealthy Midwesterners who settled Pasadena's "Millionaires' Row," Pasadena's middle and working class grew, in part to serve the needs of the affluent. The rugged nature of the frontier also attracted a creative, entrepreneurial, and artistic population which was captivated by the progressive ideals of California. In turn-of-the-20th-century Pasadena, these rugged individualists rejected the excesses of Victoriana, and instead chose to make their homes on the edge of the wilderness on the banks of the Arroyo Seco. At the same time, the anti-industrial ideals that John Ruskin and William Morris had promoted in England were taking root in the United States. In 1901, Gustav Stickley began publishing *Craftsman Magazine* in New York, and the principles of handcraft, connecting with nature, and the return to a simple life, which first took hold in the industrialized cities in the East, were embraced in the West.

These ideas held great appeal for the group of artists and artisans who made their homes along the Arroyo Seco. In combination with an appreciation for the indigenous cultures and local materials of the region, this philosophy shaped the Southern California adaptation of the Arts and Crafts movement, and with it, the creation of the Craftsman bungalow, also known as the "California" bungalow. The Craftsman bungalow was a simple, garden-oriented house uniquely suited for the climate and lifestyle of the area. It often embraced elements from the region's Spanish-Mexican heritage as well as the importance of connecting with the outdoors. Natural materials were important to the design aesthetic, with oak floors, exposed ceiling beams, and brick or stone fireplaces featured prominently. The exteriors were generally simple, to fit with the lifestyle of the inhabitants. Broad, gently-pitched roofs with wide, overhanging eaves emphasized the horizontality of the small bungalow, and were practical in shading the house from the hot California sun. Brick or arroyo stone foundations supported the wood frames, which were clad either in wood shingles or stucco, and heavy supports define the deeply recessed front porch.

Though there were many important local contributors to the Arts and Crafts movement, it is impossible to discuss the architecture of Pasadena during that era without noting the work of Charles and Henry Greene, who compare to Bernard Maybeck in San Francisco and Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago as the premier architects of the American Arts and Crafts movement. The Greene brothers came to Pasadena from apprenticeships in Boston in 1893, and took the simple California bungalow to the level of high art, with Pasadena's 1907 Blacker House and 1908 Gamble House as the definitive examples of their design aesthetic.

American Arts and Crafts enthusiasts also welcomed the use of new technology in creating the ideal living environment. The most prominent example is Frank Lloyd Wright, who famously declared in a lecture in 1901: "In the machine lies the only future of art and craft."<sup>4</sup> The connection between the Arts and Crafts movement and industrialization became inextricably bound when Henry Ford began mass producing the Model T in 1908. Charles Greene wrote in 1915, "...[B]etween the automobile mania and the bungalow bias, there seems to be a psychic affinity...They have developed side by side at the same time, and they seem to be the expression of the same need or desire, to be free from the commonplace of convention."<sup>5</sup>

Other scholars agree with Charles' observation, giving equal credit to the simple house in the garden and the automobile for shaping Los Angeles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Even in Pasadena, where outspoken activists along the Arroyo vigorously promoted a rugged lifestyle, the automobile flourished. By 1915 Pasadena had more automobiles per capita than any other city in the world – one automobile for every four residents, versus the national average of one automobile for every 43 citizens.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wright, Frank Lloyd. 1901. The Art and Craft of the Machine. Lecture to the Chicago chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution; published 1941 as "The Art and Craft of the Machine" in *Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture: Selected Writings (1894–1940)*. Frederick Gutheim, ed. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

<sup>5</sup> Greene, Charles Sumner. 1915. "Impressions of Some Bungalows and Gardens." In *The Architect*, Vol. 10. December, p. 252.

<sup>6</sup> Kaplan, Sam Hall. 1987. *L.A. Lost and Found: An Architectural History of Los Angeles*. New York: Crown, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> Scheid, Ann. 1986. *Crown of the Valley*. Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, p. 117.

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Colorado Boulevard was also one of the first and largest “Automobile Rows” in Southern California, with car dealers stretching for over one hundred blocks.<sup>8</sup>

The Craftsman bungalow led to an innovative solution for higher density housing for Southern California’s growing middle class: the bungalow court. The permanent population of Southern California nearly doubled in every decade from 1880 to 1930,<sup>9</sup> creating a shortage of housing for the middle class. A solution was found in the bungalow court, a concept originated in Pasadena “in response to ideal as well as pragmatic demands about the nature of the house, housing, and the city.”<sup>10</sup>

The bungalow court was a direct offshoot of the California bungalow tradition – a regionally suitable, moderately priced, and carefully designed domestic architecture. The bungalow court was a unique compromise for high density housing, bringing together the amenities of privacy and open space usually reserved for single family living with the convenience of an apartment. With front porches and common areas to encourage socializing among the residents, bungalow courts also helped provide new residents with a sense of identity and place.

The first bungalow court was Pasadena’s St. Francis Court, designed by Sylvanus Marston in 1908 as tourist housing. Marston’s concept, however, was quickly adapted by other developers as a new and lucrative form of permanent housing. According to a study of bungalow courts undertaken by the City of Pasadena, there were 414 courts constructed there between 1909 and 1933, which could accommodate over 6,500 residents.<sup>11</sup>

The bungalow court housing type soon spread throughout Southern California, and was also adapted into a new architecture to accommodate the growing numbers of automobile tourists. Pasadena architect Arthur Heineman, who had designed a number of bungalow courts and frequently traveled to northern California by car, observed the need for improved accommodations for roadside travelers. In 1925 he merged these two influences and opened the first motel in San Luis Obispo. The name “motel” was also coined by Heineman as a combination of the terms motor and hotel. His Milestone Motel featured a series of small bungalows in a u-shape around a central courtyard. The initial concept was for a series of eighteen Milestone Motels from San Diego to Seattle, spaced to be about one day’s drive between each one. Cost overruns and the Depression prevented Heineman’s plan from coming to fruition, but his idea had a long-lasting impact.

At the height of the Arts and Crafts era in Pasadena, the City undertook a bold experiment that resulted in an unprecedented feat of engineering. To create a strong connection to Los Angeles, accommodate the growing number of automobile travelers, and open up the west bank of the Arroyo for housing development, the City raised funds to build a bridge across the Arroyo Seco. New technologies allowed for the development of thoroughfares through previously impassable areas of the Arroyo Seco. The City of Los Angeles was a partner in this endeavor, and the resulting Colorado Street Bridge, completed in 1913, gracefully and effectively linked the east and west side of the Arroyo for the first time. Additional bridges were constructed in the 1920s due to continuously increasing automobile traffic, including the San Rafael Bridge and the Holly Street Bridge.

In Pasadena, Modernism was informed by the Arts and Crafts Movement, which was so firmly rooted in the city’s history. Architectural historian Robert Winter described Pasadena’s postwar architects as the “heirs of the ‘woody’ Arts and Crafts tradition.”<sup>12</sup> The local modern aesthetic used a more organic palette, which included wood framing and the use of natural

<sup>8</sup> Grimes, Teresa. 1996. Early Auto-Related Properties in Pasadena, California. National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Submissions documentation form, January 2.

<sup>9</sup> McWilliams, Carey. 1973. *Southern California: An Island on the Land*. Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith Press, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> Polyzoides, Stephanos; Roger Sherwood; James Tice; and Julius Shulman. 1992. *Courtyard Housing in Los Angeles: A Typological Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Pasadena Star-News*. 1993. “This is, Truly, City of Homes.” July 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Toward a Simpler Way of Life*. 1997. Robert Winter, ed. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 243.

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materials instead of the steel and cool geometry of other Modern structures. The Modernist houses of Pasadena are characterized by thoughtful design, attention to detail, the use of built-in furniture and a visual connection between indoor and outdoor space.

## Early Modernism

After the First World War, while California's regional architecture was swept up in Bertram Goodhue's romanticized version of the past, the seeds of 20th century Modernism were beginning to spread. The International Style – an architectural aesthetic that stressed rationality, logic, and a break with the past – emerged in Europe in the 1920s with the work of Le Corbusier in France, and Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Germany, where the Bauhaus School trained a future generation of Modern architects. For these early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Modernists, the machine was “the great vehicle of aesthetic transformation not only for its suggestion of cleanliness and efficiency, but also for the new materials and techniques it introduced,”<sup>13</sup> including steel, glass, and concrete. Their buildings were minimalist in concept, stressed functionalism, and were devoid of regional characteristics and nonessential decorative elements. They were working to establish a new architectural style that was reflective of the Modern era.

In 1932, New York's Museum of Modern Art hosted an architecture exhibition curated by Henry Russell-Hitchcock and Philip Johnson entitled “The International Style: Architecture Since 1922.” The accompanying publication was the first to name and define the style, introducing the American public to the new European approach to design and highlighting its major practitioners. This helped promote the style, which was critical to the development of Modernism before World War II. The Nazis closed the Bauhaus in 1933, and Gropius and Mies van der Rohe fled to the United States, by which time they had both established international reputations as pioneers of Modern architecture. Mies taught at the Illinois Institute of Technology, and Gropius at the Harvard School of Design. This meant that the tenets of International Style Modernism were now being promoted in the United States by two of its leaders.

The early impact of the International Style in the United States was primarily in the field of residential design. In contrast, it was the Art Deco or Moderne style that was the first European architectural development to have an impact on American commercial architecture. Art Deco was popularized by the Paris *Exposition des Arts Decoratif* in 1925 and featured exuberant forms and ornamentation. The exposition immediately influenced many American patrons and architects who desired a modern design that was not as austere as the Modernism developed by the Bauhaus school or Le Corbusier. The Streamline version of the style, which is seen in the 1930s and 1940s, emphasized curving forms, long horizontal lines, and less exaggerated detailing.

During this period, Los Angeles in particular had an interesting architectural climate, and is a case study in how varying ideas can come together and inform each other. Preservationist and author Paul Gleye describes the unique circumstances in Southern California:

*The story of the architectural transformation into Modernism has been told at great length, but a part of that story not so well known is the role of Southern California. The architectural exuberance of Los Angeles, which first imported the Queen Anne from the East in the 1880s and nurtured the Mission Revival and Craftsman styles in the following decades, simultaneously supported many architectural ethics. The freedom to build as one wished, particularly in the form of single family homes which depended little on the context of the street or neighborhood, allowed revolutionary architects to flourish in the fringes of accepted styles. The resulting experimentation in Modern idioms would make Los Angeles a showcase of international significance in Modern architecture by the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>13</sup> Gleye, Paul. 1981. *The Architecture of Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

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The primary American practitioners of International Style architecture were Viennese-born architects Richard Neutra and Rudolph M. Schindler. Schindler's Kings Road House (1921) and Neutra's Lovell "Health" House (1929), both in Los Angeles, are considered two of the seminal examples of the style in the United States. Other architects who were influential in Southern California during this period include Frank Lloyd Wright, Irving Gill, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Gregory Ain, who is considered the first local architect to join Neutra and Schindler in designing in the Modern idiom in Los Angeles.<sup>15</sup>

Frank Lloyd Wright came to California in 1917, and in the 1920s created his "textile block" houses that experimented with a democratic, regional architecture. The first of these houses was the 1923 Millard House in Pasadena. The Millard House was constructed of blocks cast from concrete mixed with aggregate from the site, in keeping with Wright's notion of organic architecture in which the house "grew" out of the land. It was also meant to fit into the landscape and reflect the climate in California.

The work of Harwell Hamilton Harris was a critical link between early Modernism influenced by Richard Neutra and the European movement, and a regional Modern aesthetic in the tradition of Greene and Greene. Harris worked for Neutra in the 1920s, while construction of the Lovell "Health" House was underway before starting his own practice in 1934. The following year he designed the Laing House at 1642 Pleasant Way, which has been called "simplified Wright."<sup>16</sup>

Harris was influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright's original forms and inventions, as well as the idea of the house as part of nature. It was Harris' wife, historian Jean Murray Bangs, who would formally introduce him to the work of Greene and Greene. Bangs was one of the first scholars to recognize the work of Greene and Greene and helped return them to the California consciousness.<sup>17</sup> His work of the 1940s embraced the local traditions of a wood house that blended with nature, and helped influence the next generation of California Modernists. According to architect Ray Kappe, it was the work of Harris that "established a basis for a common ground of thinking."<sup>18</sup>

The influence of these early Modernists would not take root until the 1940s, however. The economic downturn of the Depression, from which the country was still recovering in the early 1940s, followed by the impact of World War II meant that there was little architectural development during this period. During the war much of the nation's resources were devoted to the war effort, and in fact, the Federal Housing Administration decreed that due to the scarcity of materials, only temporary housing could be constructed during the war.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it was in the exuberant, optimistic postwar period that Americans embraced Modernism, and its full impact on the architectural landscape was felt.

## World War II

The United States' entrance into World War II effectively ended the Depression in California and boosted the regional economy. California received almost 12% of the government war contracts and produced 17% of all war supplies.<sup>20</sup> California also acquired more military installations than any other state by a wide margin, and military bases were opened throughout the state. Aircraft, shipbuilding, and numerous other industries were booming due to the war effort, and unemployment was virtually eliminated.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> Gebhard, David, and Robert Winter. 1994. *Los Angeles: An Architectural Guide*. Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith, p. 375.

<sup>17</sup> Hess, Alan. 2004. *The Ranch House*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Kappe, Ray. n.d. "Regionalism: Climate, Site, and Materials." Source undocumented. Pasadena Heritage files.

<sup>19</sup> Hines, Thomas. 1989. "Case Study Trouvé: Sources and Precedents Southern California 1920–1942." In *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Homes*. Elizabeth Smith, ed. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> California Military Museum. n.d. California military history online. Available: <<http://www.militarymuseum.org/HistoryWWII.html>>. Accessed: August 2007.

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Pasadena's booming tourist economy, which was interrupted by the Depression, saw its remaining resort-era hotels co-opted for military purposes during the war. The Huntington Hotel was used as the headquarters of the Army's 35<sup>th</sup> Division and the Office of Civilian Defense for Southern California. The Vista del Arroyo Hotel was purchased by the army and converted to a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers. Pasadena also became a center for industrial research and manufacturing of scientific instruments, and by 1954 there were 394 industrial establishments in the city.<sup>21</sup>

Important atomic research and missile testing was also conducted in Pasadena during the war, particularly through the work of scientists at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL).

Pasadena's Caltech had become an internationally recognized research institute during the 1920s, a reputation that continued under President Robert Millikan's leadership through World War II. Millikan was particularly interested in physics, and worked diligently to increase funding and recognition for the program. He also invited Albert Einstein to spend three winters there in the early 1930s, which was a large promotional boost for the school. By 1937, Caltech was the leading center of aeronautical research and teaching in the United States, setting the stage for its influential role during World War II.<sup>22</sup>

In 1926, Millikan started an aeronautics department at the school, which began experimenting with rocket propulsion in the 1930s. Initially funded and housed by Caltech's Guggenheim Laboratory, the jet propulsion experiments eventually were moved off campus, and researchers leased seven acres of land from the City of Pasadena in the upper Arroyo Seco. In 1943, the name Jet Propulsion Laboratory was used for the first time, and the researchers entered into a \$5 million contract with the army to develop a guided missile. During the war, Caltech was an educational institution in name only, as all of its resources were directed to the war effort, with \$80 million in Federal funding for war-related research and development.<sup>23</sup> Military research continued at JPL after the conclusion of the war, and in 1958 it became a research facility for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

The Depression and war effort also resulted in the quest for low-cost housing, initially addressing those wildly affected by the difficulty of the economy, and later, particularly addressing the returning veteran and the nuclear family. Architects who matured in the late 1920s and 1930s were particularly interested in architecture as a cure for social problems, and many were acutely interested in solving the crisis of sanitary, affordable, and attractive low-cost housing.<sup>24</sup> While architects both in Europe and in America sought solutions to these problems, architects also addressed these problems regionally and locally. In 1935, the Better Housing Bureau of Pasadena, chaired by Cyril Bennett, sponsored a contest to build a small, low-cost model home. The winner was local architect Theodore Pletsch, whose design was constructed on the corner of Garfield and Holly Streets, across from City Hall. A ten cent fee bought you admission to the house and entry into a raffle to win ownership of the home at the close of the exhibition. After the war, local architect Whitney Smith participated in the same program with his own design for a small, affordable house.

As Esther McCoy states, "when practice wanes, theory flourishes,"<sup>25</sup> so work on low-cost housing solutions continued during the war. Gregory Ain is best known in California for his work in this arena. In 1940, Ain received a Guggenheim fellowship to research structural systems that would cut costs and speed construction.<sup>26</sup> Ain emphasized low-maintenance homes that would appeal to women running households devoid of help from servants. Ain's ideas were similar to those explored in the Case Study

<sup>21</sup> City of Pasadena. n.d. Heritage: A Short Story of Pasadena, 1930–1950. Available: <<http://www.cityofpasadena.net/History/1930-1950.asp>>. Accessed: August 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Starr, Kevin. 2002. *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace 1940–1950*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 133.

<sup>23</sup> Goodstein, Judith. 1998. History of Caltech. Available: <[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/physics/articles/goodstein](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/articles/goodstein)>. Accessed: August 2007.

<sup>24</sup> McCoy, Esther. n.d. "Arts and Architecture, Case Study Houses." Elizabeth Smith, ed. In, *Blueprints for Modern Living*, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> McCoy, Esther. 1955. "What I Believe." *Los Angeles Times*. January 2.



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Program, and to many scholars it is surprising that he was not invited to participate. His work during the Depression, and his efforts to create defense worker housing during the war indicate that his talents would have greatly enhanced John Entenza's ambitious program.<sup>27</sup> Instead, Ain directed his efforts at a variety of projects that were realized in the postwar era, locally in Altadena's Park Planned Homes of 1946.

Other architects were experimenting with their own low cost housing concepts. For example, Harwell Hamilton Harris' early commissions were also small homes that combined the ideas he learned from working for Neutra and Schindler with a modular construction system. In 1946, Harris developed a solar house for the Libbey-Owens-Ford glass company.

Wallace Neff, best known for his sophisticated designs for wealthy clients during the 1920s and 1930s, also had a life-long interest in low cost housing. In 1941, Neff developed the Bubble (or "Airform") House, which was his direct response to the shortage of traditional building materials during the war, as well as the need for innovative and inexpensive housing for defense workers.<sup>28</sup> When Neff's Airform House debuted in Falls Church, Virginia, to house defense workers, over 5,000 people lined up to view the house, causing traffic jams for miles. In 1946, Neff built an Airform House in Pasadena for his brother Andrew, which is likely the last remaining example of this housing type in the United States.

This experimental work did produce some tangible ideas that would become influential in the development of residential architecture after World War II. The discovery that a good house could be made of inexpensive materials, that outdoor living was important to quality of life, and that formal spaces such as separate dining rooms are expendable when space is limited, all became integral components of postwar, middle class housing.<sup>29</sup>

Along with these experiments, the Federal government's initiatives in the 1930s and 1940s to encourage home ownership also influenced the design of modest housing after the war. The National Housing Act of 1934 created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which helped reignite the construction of single family homes by establishing mortgage terms that were conducive to the average American family and would regulate the interest rates and terms of interest that had ballooned out of control in the aftermath of the stock market crash. During the 1940s, FHA programs also helped finance military housing and homes needed for returning veterans. In 1944, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, more commonly known as the GI Bill, also helped military families attain the dream of home ownership.

While the FHA rose to prominence because of these financial incentives, they also influenced how homes and neighborhoods were designed. In particular, FHA guidelines promoted a 624-square-foot dwelling type termed the basic plan or minimum house: "In the design of small, low-priced houses, the principles of efficiency, economic use of materials, and proper equipment, which are important in any class of dwellings, become paramount."<sup>30</sup>

*To satisfy functional and spatial requirements, FHA design staff organized the house in a side-by-side arrangement. A small hall served as the pivot for this plan type. The private spaces, two bedrooms and a bath, opened off the hall. Opposite this was a public zone with living room and kitchen. These contained a major and minor entry respectively...The kitchens were small, planned for efficiency, and stocked with up-to-date*

<sup>27</sup> Hines, Thomas. 1989. "Case Study Trouvé: Sources and Precedents Southern California 1920–1942." In *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Homes*. Elizabeth Smith, ed. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, p. 101.

<sup>28</sup> The execution of Airform construction was quick and simple. After pouring a concrete foundation, a rubber-coated balloon was tied to the concrete footings, inflated, and then sprayed with gunite. After the gunite set and was able to support itself, the balloon was deflated and removed through a door or window (and then saved for reuse). The house was then covered with a strong wire mesh, insulated, and covered with another layer of concrete.

<sup>29</sup> McCoy, Esther. n.d. "Arts and Architecture, Case Study Houses." Elizabeth Smith, ed. In *Blueprints for Modern Living*, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Hise, Greg. 1997. *Magnetic Los Angeles*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 68.

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*appliances. A utility room with an integrated mechanical system replaced the basement heating plant and coal storage.*<sup>31</sup>

As early as 1936, the FHA embraced the principles of modern community planning, advocating for well-designed comprehensive communities at the neighborhood scale. This development model would become the standard approach for the rapid development of the suburbs after the war. The FHA published a series of informational pamphlets to help spread these ideas and to inform land developers and speculative builders of the economic advantages of good planning in the creation and maintenance of real estate values. These pamphlets also outlined concepts of proper street patterns, planning for parks, playgrounds, and commercial areas, and recommended a buffer zone of multifamily dwellings and commercial buildings between major arterials and minor interior streets.”<sup>32</sup>

Of course none of these new ideas would have a meaningful impact until after the war ended and attention could be refocused on life in the United States. Architects who had been idle during the war were bursting with ideas and eager to usher in a new era in American life. The exuberance and optimism from the war victory, the population explosion, and the creation of the automobile-centric suburbia in the building boom that followed meant great changes for the way Americans lived. Southern California was at the core of this new era, and its tradition of experimentation in architecture placed it in an ideal position to lead the exploration of suburban residential architecture after World War II.

## **Pasadena in the Postwar Era**

Following the conclusion of World War II, Southern California experienced a period of unprecedented growth, as many who came west to participate in the war effort, including former military personnel, decided to settle permanently. Between 1940 and 1950 California’s population increased by 53%, which was partially accounted for by the 850,000 veterans who took up residence after the war.<sup>33</sup> This surge in population also impacted Pasadena, whose population grew from just over 81,000 in 1940 to 106,000 by the close of the decade.<sup>34</sup> California struggled to accommodate the influx of new residents, and in 1948, Governor Earl Warren stated:

*The stampede has visited us with unprecedented civic problems, partly because we did not expect to digest so much population in so short a time, and partly because even if we had been forewarned, we could have done little to prepare for the shock during the stringent war years. So we have an appalling housing shortage, our schools are packed to suffocation, and our highways are inadequate and dangerous.*<sup>35</sup>

The resulting building boom that began immediately after the War transformed how Californians lived and had an immediate and irrevocable impact on the architectural landscape. Highway improvements, mass construction of new single family residences, and the creation of new civic and public buildings such as churches, schools, post offices, and fire stations to serve the growing population began in earnest.

For these new buildings, architects largely abandoned historical precedents in favor of the modern styles that had first emerged in the pre-war years.<sup>36</sup> This new generation of architects combined a concern for landscape and site relationships, the use of natural materials, and innovative building technologies to create a new regional architecture. This was also a period of exuberance and

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 68–69.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Starr, Kevin. 2002. *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace 1940–1950*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 193–194.

<sup>34</sup> City of Pasadena. n.d. Pasadena Census and Population. City of Pasadena web site.

<sup>35</sup> Warren, Earl. 1948. “California’s Biggest Headache.” *Saturday Evening Post*. August 7, p. 20. Quoted in Starr, Kevin. 2002. *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace 1940–1950*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 194.

<sup>36</sup> McAlister, Virginia and Lee. 2004. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 477.

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optimism that was directly reflected in the architecture. According to historian Kevin Starr, the theory that domestic architecture would not take up where it had left off before the war was fundamental.<sup>37</sup>

## Ranch House and the Growth of Suburbia

### The Ranch House<sup>38</sup>

The Ranch House is a twentieth century invention. Though its imagery often evokes historic nineteenth century California styles such as the board and batten or adobe walls of vernacular nineteenth century ranch buildings and Spanish-era haciendas, the ranch is Modern because it responded to the development and lifestyle of modern suburbia which the automobile permitted; to the mid-century economy which encouraged single family homes; to the family-oriented leisure-oriented indoor-outdoor lifestyle those homes allowed; to the appealing images of Western cowboy life spread through the media of movies and television, and to many technological building innovations that allowed an open floor plan and mass produced housing.

The Ranch House refers to a one-story, single family house with an open floor plan, and a close relationship to its yard, as manifested between 1930 and 1980. Informal in composition, it included many of the same spatial and structural tendencies seen in other Modern residential architecture of the period, though in a more moderate manner. It almost always included a garage to house the modern family's automobile.

The Ranch House is connected to many trends in California architecture since 1900. One is the evolution of a regional architecture, and the other is the development of mass production for houses. California played a major role in its creation, beginning before World War II. Throughout the greater Los Angeles region, the Ranch House is intimately associated with the development of suburbia after 1945. The Ranch style is seen in many Custom home designs, often by name architects. However, throughout the greater Los Angeles region the style was more commonly employed as pre-designed units in large subdivisions.

The Ranch continued many of the elements of the earlier Craftsman bungalows, c. 1900: rustic, unpretentious structures, natural materials and easy access to the out of doors. By the 1920s, several California and Texas architects had become interested both in Modern architecture and in regional architecture, including rustic ranch buildings and Spanish era adobe structures; this was part of a national trend reflecting renewed interest in our national history and Colonial architecture-- most notably evidenced in the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in the late 1920s. As author and historian Paul Gleye has similarly noted:

*Post-and-Beam architecture was unflinchingly Modern, but it had its roots in the open plan of Japanese architecture and the horizontality of the Craftsman bungalow. It influenced, in turn, a whole generation of developer-built homes called the California Ranch House, with their low, and rambling open plan, natural wood, glass sliding doors leading to the patio, and flat or shallow-pitched roof.*<sup>39</sup>

In Northern California, architect William Wurster and others used that region's vernacular wooden buildings as sources for house designs; Wurster's Gregory Ranch, 1928, in Santa Cruz was widely publicized in professional and popular magazines. In Southern California, architects such as Palmer Sabin, Wallace Neff, Roland Coate, and others had adapted the adobe style of the region's Spanish architecture. By the early 1930s, Cliff May also began designing and popularizing these early Ranch Houses in Southern California. Cliff May is credited with reintroducing the Ranch house in the 1930s, and is the architect most closely associated with the style on the West Coast; his obituary in the *Los Angeles Times* was published under the headline "Home

<sup>37</sup> Starr, Kevin. 1989. "The Case Study House Program and the Impending Future: Some Regional Considerations." Elizabeth Smith, ed. In, *Blueprints for Modern Living*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 131.

<sup>38</sup> The first portion of this section is based on work done for SurveyLA! By ICF Jones & Stokes Architectural Historian John English and Alan Hess, consulting Architectural Historian.

<sup>39</sup> Gleye, Paul. 1981. *The Architecture of Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, pp. 146-147. Quoted previously on p. 9 and used here again in this more specific explication of the Ranch.

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Designer Perfected the Ranch Style.”<sup>40</sup> Although May’s early Ranch houses were picturesque, with the “air of a movie set,”<sup>41</sup> after the war his work changed to respond to the times, and took on the modern characteristics of post-and-beam construction. The Henry May House, built in 1954 for May’s brother, is one of only two examples of Cliff May’s work in Pasadena, but his influence was far-reaching in Pasadena and throughout Southern California. In 1958, May published a book of his designs in conjunction with *Sunset* magazine called *Western Ranch House* which had widespread influence. By the end of the decade, Paul R. Williams, Sumner Spaulding, Lulah Maria Riggs, and almost every other notable Southern California architect included Ranch as one of the styles offered to clients. The Ranch had become a well-established choice for those who could afford custom homes. In Los Angeles, upscale communities such as Sherman Oaks and Encino featured Ranch houses.

The second major trend that helped to establish the success of the Ranch House was both social and technological. The Great Depression had suppressed home construction, but by 1939 the increased need for housing was evident. Los Angeles region developers Fritz Burns and Fred Marlow, and San Francisco Bay Area developer David Bohannon, experimented with methods of building affordable houses by the hundreds. Before World War II Marlow-Burns developed means of subdividing lots and the building of mass produced houses on a large scale in the Los Angeles communities of Westchester, and in Toluca Woods. The beginning of World War II and the demand for defense industry housing allowed Marlow-Burns, Bohannon and other home builders to apply and perfect their building methods. At the end of the war, these techniques became common industry practice, and helped to launch the development of large scale subdivisions in Los Angeles, and particularly the San Fernando Valley. These techniques led to standardization, but the housing market also demanded variety, especially in middle-income and upscale tracts. In Pasadena, Fritz Burns and Fred Marlow, along with Harrison Baker subdivided Pasadena’s best known example of the large scale Ranch tract: Upper Hastings Ranch. Upper Hastings Ranch was an 800 home subdivision developed in 1951 by Coronet Homes, with houses designed by Edward Fickett, who is responsible for over 60,000 homes throughout the Southern California region and beyond. Upper Hastings Ranch was but one component of Hastings Ranch. Hastings Ranch is a section of northeast Pasadena that also consisted of the 600-house Lower Hastings Ranch subdivision just south of Sierra Madre Boulevard. Lower Hastings Ranch was constructed between 1948 and 1954.

The many small homes which consisted of most of the region’s larger-scale tracts were influenced by FHA standards to qualify for government loans, and adopted the Minimal Ranch house as an appealing product for the public. The term “Minimal Ranch” references a standard design house, often with the stucco cladding, compact footprint and taller, square profile of the Minimal Traditional house, but with applied ornament such as dovescotes, diamond shaped glazing, decorative shutters that would be associated with the California Ranch style. Minimal Ranch is seen as a transitional design between the Minimal Traditional style and the lower pitched, rambling and rusticated Ranch style itself.

The Ranch House proved to be a highly appealing consumer product. The popularity of Western movies and television programs in the 1940s and 1950s helped to create the positive image of the style: it implied rugged individualism, a close tie to nature, and unpretentious, informal friendliness. Ranch architecture is significant as a prime expression of “California Living”: an idealized existence which is casual, rustic, independent and integrated into nature and the outdoors: a California tradition that goes back to the region’s earliest settlers and the *Ranchos* in which they lived. The California Ranch, which is also called “Traditional Ranch,” proved one of the most popular styles between 1945 and 1970.

Despite the success of the California Ranch style both in the state and beyond, the slightly later Contemporary Ranch style which reflected the abstract forms of Modern architecture also proved popular as a variation. As the Ranch style evolved away from California Ranch tract housing, Contemporary Ranch represented a second wave of the Ranch style of cleaner lines, greater abstraction, and themes more sophisticated than those associated with the frontier West. Contemporary Ranch homes are Ranch houses for the discerning buyer, and often included an entirely different set of signifiers and amenities from previous Ranch sub-

<sup>40</sup> “Cliff May.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1989.

<sup>41</sup> Hess, *The Ranch House*. (34)

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types. The antecedents of Contemporary Ranch were in Modernism, including the Case Study House program. From it, the Contemporary Ranch adopts the clean lines, generous use of glass and post and beam aesthetics into the rambling, pitched roof Ranch house building form.<sup>42</sup>

The concepts, ideas and sometimes decorative elements of Asiatic architecture informed Modernism and hence the Contemporary Ranch style itself. Frank Lloyd Wright, Greene & Greene, Richard Neutra, and Harwell Hamilton Harris were forthright and architecturally expressive about their Asiatic and specifically Japanese influences. The Southern California work of these architects advocated designs that acknowledged, if not integrated with nature and the benevolent climate of the region. The Contemporary Ranch style, as a California phenomenon, continues the same tendency of wanting an integrated, if not organic relationship to a given building's immediate surroundings. This is a Japanese idea as well, and had been for hundreds of years before the advent of Modernism. Modernism and Japanese design have much overlap, such as standardization, variety in unity, conformity to a mode of living, and usefulness to purpose.<sup>43</sup> Both traditional Japanese architecture and Modernism also explore non-load bearing walls, a lack of traditional ornament, and open plans, among other features.

For the middle or upper-middle class buyer, more as applied decoration than as concept, such Asiatic themes represented maturity, taste and sophistication. With regard to Asiatic themes, in 1940 Harwell Hamilton Harris designed a restaurant in Los Angeles' Chinatown called Grandview Gardens, which was ranch-like in its low-slung horizontality and featured latticed screens, a bouldered landscape, and other Asiatic decorations. Though the Los Angeles region featured specific examples of the convergence of Asiatic with Modern, in décor and in concept, one exhibit in New York City appears to have had an important impact upon Contemporary Ranch imagery of the late 1950s through the 1960s as it would pertain to the masses. The Ranch style, in any subtype, had rarely expressed Asiatic themes before.

In the summers of 1954 and 1955, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented the "Japanese Exhibition House," a *shoin-zukuri* style temple built within the Museum's Abbey Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture garden.<sup>44</sup> The idea for such an exhibit was originally that of Philip Johnson, the Museum's Assistant Curator (who had also co-curated the MOMA *International Style* exhibit in 1932), and John D. Rockefeller, Museum Trustee and President of the Japan Society of New York. The co-sponsorship and unified effort of the United States and Japan toward funding and producing the exhibition house and its adjacent garden was seen as a strong step toward healing relations that had been battered as a result of World War II. Additionally, it was acknowledged that various architects practicing in America and indeed Southern California were already appropriating ideas from Japanese Architecture, with which the Ranch style already had a fair amount in common. Both advocated a strong relationship to the surrounding natural terrain; both employed natural materials onto exterior elevations; both exhibited a lack of ornament in the traditional sense. After 1955 Contemporary Ranch houses began to exhibit Asiatic motifs in a manner in which they had not done prior. Over 200,000 people visited the Japanese exhibition house over two years, and the house was subject of numerous national and international press reports. Aside from the desire to mend relations between the two countries and to explicitly demonstrate what Japanese architecture actually was, according to Philip Johnson, another intention of the Japanese Exhibition House was to help define "good taste" for the middle class.<sup>45</sup>

The challenge of bringing good design to the average person's home preoccupied many architects, though few were able to work within the commercial restrictions of the building industry to build practically on a mass scale; one such example is the General

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<sup>42</sup> Historic Resources Group and Pasadena Heritage, Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Statement Report: City of Pasadena, Report. Hollywood, CA: Historic Resources Group, 2007: 63.

<sup>43</sup> This specific list of features items that author Jiro Harada felt were "the Lessons Japanese Architecture for the Western World." Harada, Jiro, The Lesson of Japanese Architecture, New York: Dover Publications, 1936 (1985): 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Shoin-zukuri*: A development of the *buke* (Samurai class) style of architecture, also the room containing the *tokonoma* and its dependent features. *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>45</sup> Pogrebin, Robin, "Is Prefab Fab? MOMA Plans a Show," *New York Times*, 8 Jan 2008. Viewed online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/arts/design/08moma.html> 2 April 2008.

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Panel prefabricated system developed by Walter Gropius and Konrad Wachsmann. Nonetheless, some of the architects of mass produced housing were themselves Modernists. Edward Fickett and William Krisel (of Palmer and Krisel) were both educated at USC's School of Architecture, where they had been exposed to many of the leading Modern architects in the region. Fickett designed many Traditional Ranch tracts, but persuaded some of his builder clients to build in a contemporary style. Krisel and his partner, Dan Palmer (educated in Modernism at New York University) were also able to persuade a few clients to build Contemporary Ranch Houses. Both firms built over 20,000 units. Along with other architects working in the style (including Charles Dubois and Jones and Emmons), the Contemporary Ranch became a significant part of the housing stock in post-war Los Angeles. They have been most notably represented by the Eichler Homes developed by builder Joseph Eichler in the San Francisco Bay Area beginning in the late 1940s, and brought to Southern California in Granada Hills in the 1950s. However, the Contemporary Ranch House was already established in the region in both mass produced and custom home versions by then.

The "Custom Ranch" house simply refers to Ranch homes that were architect designed, either individually or as part of a tract. Unlike many other residential styles, it is imperative to acknowledge the Custom versions of the Ranch style. Most often its designs are associated with large, standardized tracts often with a builder but no architect listed. Rather than providing Custom homes, a primary intention of these tracts was to immediately housing large numbers of families. Though Custom Ranch architecture incorporates style subtypes of Ranch such as Minimal, California, and most often Contemporary Ranch, Custom Ranch nonetheless has its own set of tendencies such as larger scale, decorative flourishes, and special living amenities, both inside and out. Additionally, Custom Ranch tracts and homes often present elaborated landscaping. Though the Custom Ranch home has been present since the beginnings of the Ranch style, its presence appears to have ascended from 1955 onward through the late-1970s. Particularly from the immediate post-war years through the mid-1960s, the national and regional economy was booming. For the greater Los Angeles region, this booming economy was due in no small part to the aerospace and high-tech industries of which Los Angeles was a global leader from the immediate postwar years through the 1970s. Homeowners, many with growing families, moved from a middle class to upper middle class existence and the Custom Ranch House expresses this transition.

## **The Ranch House in California and Pasadena**

The Ranch House as an architectural style began to evolve in the late 1920s in both Northern and Southern California. It blended vernacular ranch and Spanish hacienda architecture with the modern lifestyle needs, construction methods, development patterns, and popular imagery of growing suburban areas. After World War II, the Ranch became one of the most widespread housing types throughout the nation, measurably easing the housing crisis that then afflicted the nation.

The style and type of single-family house evolved in many distinct variations. Like the Craftsman Bungalow, it could be seen in simple, small, affordable houses for blue collar workers, and in large, luxurious custom-built houses for the upper classes. It varied in expression; one variation was the Minimal Traditional version, with a minimal number of stylistic references in small houses; it could also be found in the Traditional (or California) Ranch version, utilizing rustic materials and imagery in shake roofs, post and beam structures, board and batten walls, brick foundations and chimneys, decorative dovecotes, Dutch doors, and diamond-mullion window panes to convey a picturesque architecture; and it could be found in Contemporary Ranch Houses.

Contemporary Ranch represented a second wave of the Ranch style, and it presented the low, horizontal lines and sheltering gable or hip roof of the Ranch but with modern materials, greater abstraction, and themes more sophisticated than those associated with the frontier West. Contemporary Ranch homes are Ranch houses for the discerning buyer, with its antecedents in Modernism, including the Case Study House program. From it, the Contemporary Ranch adopts the clean lines, generous use of glass and post and beam aesthetics into the rambling, pitched roof Ranch house building form.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The language used to define Contemporary Ranch is found in: ICF Jones & Stokes, "Cultural Resources of the Recent Past, City of Pasadena," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF). Los Angeles: ICF Jones & Stokes, 2008: E10-E11.

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Though some Traditional Ranch materials (such as board and batten walls and post and beam structures) appear, they are used in a more abstract, planar, or textural manner. The Ranch could also be found in versions reflecting Colonial, French, Oriental and Japanese decorative characteristics. Being so widespread and found in so many versions, the Ranch House represents a significant aspect of city development, culture, and lifestyle in the mid-twentieth century. It is closely associated with the growth of suburbia as a major portion of the American population moved from center cities to newly-developed suburban communities after World War II. As a single family house on its own piece of property (with the outdoor lifestyle and landscaping that allowed), the Ranch fulfilled the desire of many homeowners who were able to move out of the crowded inner cities in which most of the population then lived. The rustic details, and informal and asymmetrical composition of Ranch Houses expressed their connection to naturalistic settings.

Pasadena and Pegfair Estates reflect these national trends. But Pasadena also played an important role in the development of the Ranch House style; its characteristics as a single-family home using rustic materials and imagery, open plan, and featuring a close connection to the landscape, can be traced in part to the Arts and Crafts Bungalow tradition of Southern California; local seminal examples such as the 1903 Bandini house by Greene and Greene in Pasadena, and the 1907 Curtis Ranch by Louis B. Easton in Altadena show the evolution of the Ranch House. In addition, Southern California's development of the Modern house also contributed to the Ranch House. The open floor plan, modern construction techniques, and distinctive ground-hugging form of the Modern house also contributed to the Ranch. Influenced by the Organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, seminal examples in the Pasadena area include the 1933 Lowe house by Harwell Hamilton Harris in Altadena. This modern trend in Ranch House design also paralleled the Case Study house program, and is seen in the Poppy Peak district, and numerous individual custom houses by Buff and Hensman, Smith and Williams, and other architects. They used post and beam structures, glass, and clean lines. These examples illustrate the evolution of these ideas over the decades, paving the way for the distinct Ranch House after World War II.<sup>47</sup> As a more moderate expression of Modern architectural themes, the Ranch proved widely popular among home buyers and home builders, as at Pegfair Estates.

As with the Craftsman Bungalow, the Ranch was used for both large custom homes and smaller mass produced versions. Like the Bungalow and later Mid-century Modern architecture of the Case Study program, the Ranch was also influenced by Japanese architecture. Thus the Ranch House in Pasadena in the 1950s and 1960s represents a continuation of local architectural responses to the climate, culture, and topography of the area.

As a popular architectural type and style, the Ranch House took many forms in Pasadena, as elsewhere in California. More than an architectural style, it was also often a type of suburban development and construction typical of the building boom of the post-World War II era. On one end of the spectrum, the Ranch House was used in large scale, mass-produced housing developments that utilized modern assembly-line manufacturing techniques to create affordable, modern, and decent housing. In this, it echoed (at a larger scale) the mass-produced prefabricated Bungalow houses of the first decade of the twentieth century which provided modern housing for the average person. For the Ranch, mass produced housing development subdivided a large piece of property, added roads, utilities, schools, and sometimes commercial districts, and constructed a large number of houses (ranging from a dozen to hundreds) using a limited number of models and floor plans for efficiency of manufacturing. A significant example of this application of the Ranch in Pasadena is the Hastings Ranch development (c.1950-1955) designed by architect Edward Fickett. This method of development was used on a smaller scale elsewhere in Pasadena.

In addition, individual Ranch Houses can be seen throughout Pasadena, built on individual lots by homeowners or speculative builders, using either architect designs, or purchased plan book designs.

The Ranch House (like the Craftsman Bungalow) was also popular with the upper and upper middle classes. For these home buyers, custom-built houses were designed by many architects or builders, such as Neptune & Thomas: the firm which

<sup>47</sup> Alan Hess. The Ranch House. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., 2004: 19, 21, 35.

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constructed the tract showcase house at 1540 Pegfair Estates Drive. This method of development subdivided a property, created building pads (often cut and fill on slopes), added streets and utilities, and then either sold the empty lots or built custom models on speculation. This was the method used at Pegfair Estates, where it achieved a balance of variety in the architecture with a unity in the styles and landscaping.

## The Case Study House Program

Southern California architecture in the postwar decades was distinguished by a wide range of modern design philosophies. The most widely publicized of these were those that reflected the concepts of the International Style, most notably through the Case Study House Program. The Case Study houses were a forward-looking series of built and unbuilt projects sponsored by the Los Angeles-based magazine *Arts and Architecture* and the brainchild of its editor, John Entenza. The program was conceived as a forum for experimentation in low-cost housing for middle-class families, in response to the post-war housing shortage. The program was romantic in its belief that societal ills could be cured by architecture, but it was also pragmatic in its approach to solving the postwar housing crisis.

With the Case Study House Program, Entenza's foremost goal was to create a good, affordable living environment. He wrote in 1945 that he hoped the Case Study program would be "general enough to be of practical assistance to the average American in search of a home in which he could afford to live."<sup>48</sup> He envisioned the Case Study houses as prototypes that could be easily replicated throughout the country. The Case Study House Program – and more specifically *Arts & Architecture* – brought Los Angeles and its Modern architects to the forefront of the profession. As historian Esther McCoy wrote, "A slim magazine with no outside financial backing became the greatest force in the dissemination of cultural information about California."<sup>49</sup>

The houses used modular construction, industrial materials, rectilinear forms, glass curtain walls, open plans, and a blurring of the distinction between indoor and outdoor space. The demarcation between public and private spaces was clearly defined, with the living spaces oriented toward a central, private garden and shielded from the street. In many cases total environments were created, bringing to prominence Modern furniture manufacturers and landscape architects, in addition to the architects. Landscaping combined dramatic plant materials that were also low maintenance by notable landscape designers such as Garrett Eckbo.

The Case Study House Program came to Pasadena in Case Study House #10 at 711 South San Rafael Avenue, by architects Kemper Nomland and Kemper Nomland, Jr. The house was published in *Arts and Architecture* in 1945 but constructed in 1947. It was designed specifically for the site, a sloping corner lot in the San Rafael hillside neighborhood of Pasadena. The structure is adapted to the contours of the site, with the rooms placed on several levels to accommodate the slope. The room identified as the "Studio Room" on the original plans exemplifies the connection with the outdoors that was so prevalent in Southern California architecture. There is a continuous slab from inside the house to the terrace, separated by a wall of glass that merges the indoor room with the surrounding landscape.<sup>50</sup>

Although the Case Study program did not achieve the results originally intended by John Entenza – namely to create an affordable and reproducible architecture that would solve the postwar housing crisis – it was largely influential and resulted in the further development of the middle class, single family house. In Southern California, this meant the proliferation of post-and-beam construction, which included large expanses of glass, open floor plans, and mass-produced materials. These homes were relatively inexpensive and easy to build, and the extensive use of glass meant that the indoor-outdoor connection could be emphasized to a greater degree than in previous eras. According to author Paul Gleye, the Post-and-Beam (distinguished as a style with initial capital letters) house links the regional domestic designs that came before and after:

<sup>48</sup> Entenza, John. 1945. *Arts & Architecture*. January.

<sup>49</sup> McCoy, Esther. 1977. *Case Study Houses*. Santa Monica, CA: Hennessey & Ingalls, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> "Case Study House 10." 1947. *Arts & Architecture*. October.



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*Post-and-Beam architecture was unflinchingly Modern, but it had its roots in the open plan of Japanese architecture and the horizontality of the Craftsman bungalow. It influenced, in turn, a whole generation of developer-built homes called the California Ranch House, with their low, and rambling open plan, natural wood, glass sliding doors leading to the patio, and flat or shallow-pitched roof.*<sup>51</sup>

## **Pasadena Style and the USC School of Architecture**

The term “Pasadena” or “USC style” Modernism was coined by architectural historian Esther McCoy, and reflects the profound impact that graduates of the University of Southern California’s School of Architecture, many of whom lived and worked in Pasadena, had on the architectural landscape of the region. The Pasadena style reflects the unique combination of factors that contributed locally to the City’s postwar architecture, and is best summarized by historian Alson Clark:

*The postwar Pasadenans managed to combine, successfully, creatively, the post-and-beam rationalism which ultimately came from Neutra, the Arts-and-Crafts tradition of Wright and the Greenes, and the high standards of design and technique perpetuated here by architects like Myron Hunt, Reginald Johnson and Roland Coate into a fresh, convincing expression of residential architecture.*<sup>52</sup>

USC was the first architecture school in Southern California, founded in 1916. It rose to prominence following World War II, led by Arthur B. Gallion who became Dean in 1945 and transformed the program. Gallion recruited notable local architects and landscape architects to teach design classes including A. Quincy Jones, Gregory Ain, Robert Alexander, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Garret Eckbo. Carl Maston, Edward Killingsworth, Craig Elwood, Richard Neutra, and Pierre Koenig also lectured and taught design classes during the postwar years. Harris, for example, served as design critic at USC 1938 (after just completing the deSteiguer and Laing houses in southwest Pasadena and Poppy Peak, respectively) to 1943 and returned to USC in 1945.<sup>53</sup>

Gallion also added a department of Industrial Design, which was headed by Raymond F. Loewy. During this period USC was much more than just the local architecture school; it was “the region’s flashpoint for the agile curiosity... [during] a heady, exhilarating time.”<sup>54</sup> The circumstances in postwar Southern California provided these young, eager, and mutually supportive architects the opportunity to develop a new design direction and construction system that continues to influence architecture today.<sup>55</sup> Though largely ignored in architectural history until recently, local Post-and-Beam architecture of the 1950s and early 1960s is “one of the major contributions of California to American architecture and lifestyles.”<sup>56</sup>

Among the most influential architects in Pasadena during this period were the firms of Buff, Straub & Hensman;<sup>57</sup> Smith & Williams; Harold Zook, who worked in Palm Springs for modernist icon Albert Frey (who in turn had worked for Le Corbusier in Switzerland detailing the doors on the seminal 1929 Villa Savoye using the first Sweet’s Catalog) and Ladd & Kelsey. Leland Evison, USC and Art Center College of Design, designed several Mid-Century Modern houses in the Pasadena area; Evison had worked under Myron Hunt, famous American architect who designed several Pasadena landmarks.<sup>58</sup> Like Wallace Neff, in addition to upper-end custom houses, Evison developed prototypes of what would now be called “sustainable” dwellings: low-

<sup>51</sup> Gleye, Paul. 1981. *The Architecture of Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, pp. 146–147.

<sup>52</sup> Clark, Alson. 1991. *The Golden Age of Modernism: Pasadena’s Contribution*. Unpublished. Pasadena Heritage.

<sup>53</sup> McCoy, Ester. 1984. *The Second Generation*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc.

<sup>54</sup> Lamprecht, Barbara. 2005. *Pasadena Modern*. Pasadena Heritage tour brochure. March.

<sup>55</sup> Kappe, Shelly. 1986. “Idiom of the Fifties: What Really Happened in Los Angeles.” In *Architecture California*. November/December, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Gleye, Paul. 1981. *The Architecture of Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, p. 147.

<sup>57</sup> Please also see the context statement for Buff, Straub and Hensman.

<sup>58</sup> Hunt’s works include the Rose Bowl; portions of the Throop Institute, which became the California Institute of Technology; the Pasadena Public Library; Occidental College; the Mission Inn; and the Huntington Hotel.

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cost and affordable, seen in his post-and-beam “Evi-Sun” homes, which exploited no-cost daylight and plenty of storage.<sup>59</sup> Pasadena architects Conrad Buff (B.Arch. 1952), Calvin Straub (B.Arch. 1943), and Donald Hensman (B.Arch. 1952), studied and taught at USC under Gallion's leadership, and through their prolific careers epitomized the “Pasadena style.” In Case Study Houses #20 and #28, the three explored how the principles of modernism responded to a regional context, heavily informed by the tradition of the preceding architectural philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Recalling his years at USC, Don Hensman joked that the school was “where we were ‘brainwashed’ in Post-and-Beam,”<sup>60</sup> so pervasive was its influence on his work. Also influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra, the architects visited the construction sites for Neutra’s houses to study his use of clean lines, large expanses of glass, and intersecting planes.

The Pasadena Modernism practiced by Buff, Straub & Hensman also reflects the Arts and Crafts movement in its emphasis on honest structure integrated into landscape. An excellent example of these principles is their 1957 Frank House, constructed at 919 La Loma Road, with landscape design by Garrett Eckbo. The house was designed as a pinwheel in order to integrate it with the surrounding landscape; the post-and-beam construction allowed for the large expanses of glass. The ample fenestration, combined with the siting on the edge of the hillside, give the illusion of living in a tree house. Almost every room in the house is directly connected to the outdoors, and the private gardens off the bedrooms and cantilevered wooden decks overlooking the landscape accentuate the Southern California indoor-outdoor lifestyle. Their designs also incorporated the use of natural materials, seen here in the slate floor, exposed wood ceiling, and brick fireplace.

Calvin Straub and Don Hensman also had overt connections to the Arts and Crafts movement that no doubt had a significant impact on their work. The family of Calvin Straub’s wife founded an Arts and Crafts ceramics firm in 1890. As a teenager Straub discussed architecture with Charles Greene and immersed himself in the writings of Arts and Crafts icons such as William Morris, John Ruskin and Gustav Stickley.<sup>61</sup> Don Hensman also experienced Craftsman architecture first-hand, as he lived in a 1912 Craftsman home at 377 Arroyo Terrace, located just behind the Gamble House and adjacent to six other Greene and Greene-designed residences designed between 1902 and 1908. The work of Buff & Hensman was recognized in 1987 when they were named the first recipients of the Gamble House Master Craftsman Award, which acknowledges “contemporary artisans whose body of work in all areas of the arts represents the basic principles of the Arts and Crafts movement – the union of client, design, materials and craft.”<sup>62</sup>

Whitney Smith (B.Arch. 1934) and Wayne Williams (B.Arch. 1941) both studied and then taught at USC. Smith and Williams started working together in 1946, and their partnership would last until 1973. During that time, they produced over 200 buildings, including residential architecture, churches, office buildings, and designs on several campuses in Southern California, including JPL. They described their work not in stylistic terms, but instead as a means to produce the best possible living and working environment for their clients in a modern California context.<sup>63</sup> Esther McCoy described their work as “...unique because of their knowledge and respect for the California modern tradition, and for their structural inventiveness.”<sup>64</sup> Like Calvin Straub, Whitney Smith grew up in Pasadena and was exposed to the work of Greene and Greene at an early age through his parents’ friendship with the Gamble family.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Interview with William Evison (Leland Evison’s son) June 2 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Pasadena Oral History Project. 2003. Interview with Donald C. Hensman, FAIA, by Sarah Cooper. Pasadena Historical Society and Friends of the Pasadena Public Library.

<sup>61</sup> Kappe, Shelly. 1997. “Calvin Straub (Buff, Straub and Hensman).” Robert Winter, ed. In *Toward a Simpler Way of Life*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 291.

<sup>62</sup> Kaplan, Sam Hall. 1987. “Contemporary Craftsman Style in Pasadena.” *Los Angeles Times*. June 6.

<sup>63</sup> Clark, Alson. 1991. *The Golden Age of Modernism: Pasadena’s Contribution*. Unpublished. Pasadena Heritage.

<sup>64</sup> McCoy, Esther. n.d. “A Statement of Architectural Principles.”

<sup>65</sup> Kappe, Shelly. n.d. “Idiom of the Fifties,” p. 16.

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Other important graduates of the USC program include Thornton Ladd (B.Arch. 1952) and John Kelsey (B.Arch. 1954). The two met while still students, and entered a partnership in 1959 that would flourish for over 20 years. Ladd & Kelsey's work was featured in the December 1959 issue of *Progressive Architecture* which described their principle design aim of a fully integrated structure, landscape and interior. The pair strove for total design control, orderly articulation of space, and painstaking care in the solution of individual problems. Prime examples of their work include Ladd's own house and studio at 1083 and 1085 Glen Oaks Boulevard, which he designed while still a student in 1950. In 1961, John Kelsey designed a home for his family at 1160 Chateau Road. The Kelsey House was named a City of Pasadena Landmark in 2005. Another interesting house is a 3,000-square-foot house on 110 Los Altos Drive that Kelsey designed in 1969 and is distinguished by its Tiki-style roof. The firm also won the commission for the Pasadena Museum of Art (now the Norton Simon Museum) in that same year.

There was little single family residential development during the Depression and World War II, so the primary focus of this section is on the postwar period, without excluding earlier examples. The major defining architect-designed residential architecture in prewar Pasadena includes work by well-known figures such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Harwell Hamilton Harris; however, lesser-known Early Modernist proponents, such as Pasadena architect Robert Cox, who designed his house at 1570 Poppy Peak Drive in a manner deemed "extreme" at the time. The major defining architect-designed residential architecture in postwar architecture includes those residences inspired by the tenets of the Case Study House Program; the Post-and-Beam architecture practiced by the teachers and graduates of the University of Southern California's School of Architecture; and the Modern variation of the Ranch house.

There are also concentrations of architect-designed residential properties from the period, which occur primarily along Pasadena's western and southern edges. These areas, composed largely of single family residences, occupy hilly terrain that had not been previously developed; this resulted in site-specific designs that responded to the unique circumstances of hillside development and were made possible by new technologies developed during and after the war. An example of this are the stilt or "Bridge Houses" built along previously unbuildable lots on Laguna Road and designed by Joseph Putnam and real estate broker John Carr.<sup>66</sup> New technology allowed these houses to be suspended over the Arroyo and a small stream running below. They are of post-and-beam construction, supported by steel piers set in concrete.

Probably one of the most important and concentrated areas of residential architecture of the City's Recent Past is located in one such hilly area in southwest Pasadena, known as Poppy Peak, the peak after which the neighborhood is named. It is particularly notable because it contains both an excellent range of different approaches to Modernism as well as excellent examples in themselves of prewar and postwar custom designed houses by both well-known, international figures in Modernism, such as Richard Neutra and Harwell Hamilton Harris, as well as highly competent, but not well-known local practitioners of Modernism such as the aforementioned Cox, whose 1937 house shows an adept attention to a particular site, a feature of Modernist design, but yet rendered in clearly individual and independent approach to Modernism. There are also examples on Poppy Peak of later, mid-century work, including four houses by the internationally known Case Study House architects Buff, Straub and Hensman, and fine examples of the period by Lyman Ennis (USC), Leland Eivson (USC; who moved and altered a Harris house in 1951), Kenneth Nishimoto (USC), Alexander Pyper, James Pulliam, and William Henry Taylor. All of these later architects were active in the Pasadena/San Gabriel and Los Angeles chapters of the A.I.A. Neutra's 1955 house here for Dr. Constance Perkins, an art history professor at Occidental College, became the City's first Historic Treasure (now called a Historic Monument).

The area west of the 210 and 710 Freeways on both sides of the Arroyo also contain substantial numbers of houses from the period, particularly in the southwest corner of the city. Many of these are infill properties in previously developed neighborhoods. In some cases, these lots were created by subdividing large estates, for example in the Hillcrest Neighborhood as well as along the Arroyo on lots previously occupied by the Adolphus Busch estate and Busch Gardens.

<sup>66</sup> Highland Park Heritage Trust. 2001. "Modern Arroyo" tour booklet.

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There are concentrations of high-style family housing, particularly in the westernmost portion of the city. Examples are found in the Linda Vista, San Rafael, Allendale, and Pegfair Estates neighborhoods. Other clusters of residential development from the period occur in the area east of Craig Avenue and north of the 210 Freeway, as well as the area south of Del Mar Boulevard and east of San Gabriel Boulevard.

Pasadena's collection of postwar, single family residential architecture contains other works by known master architects with a wider regional and even national reputation. These include Gregory Ain, A. Quincy Jones, Paul R. Williams, and John Lautner, all of whom share a wider regional importance in the postwar architectural landscape and also worked in Pasadena. In addition to the Perkins House, Neutra designed the extant John Paul Clark House, 1957, near Art Center College of Design, the Schmidt House, 1947, at 1460 Chamberlain Road, was designed in 1947 and altered in the 1950s with an addition to the street elevation. A 1936 house at 1820 Kenneth Way for Lillian and Charles Richter, inventor of the Richter scale and a Caltech seismologist whose house, was demolished in about 1970 for the building of the 210 freeway; a seminal all steel and glass house was built for Caltech historian Charles Beard in 1935 in Altadena; it remains one of Neutra's most important houses.

However, the majority of the architects working in Pasadena during this period are not well known outside of the city. Probably the most successful in reaching some level of acclaim were the firms of Buff, Straub & Hensman; Smith & Williams; and Ladd & Kelsey. These were just some of the cadre of innovative Modernist architects who came out of the USC School of Architecture and designed thoughtful and original designs in Pasadena during the postwar period. Pasadena's Mid-century Modern residential architecture, therefore, is characterized not by individual genius, but by the collective excellence of the architects who worked there after the War.

## **Context 2: Mid-Century Modernism in the work of Buff, Straub and Hensman: *A Tent with Doors***

### **Summary Statement**

Pasadena-based Conrad Buff and Donald Hensman and their partners at different times, Calvin Straub and Dennis Smith, are considered the leading Southern California practitioners of the important "post and beam" school in modern 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture. "Every California architect educated in the '50s and '60s has been influenced by the work of this firm," noted Victor Regnier, former dean of the University of Southern California (USC) School of Architecture.<sup>67</sup> The movement suddenly emerged with a precedent-setting architecture that was unleashed by an unusual wealth of talent who converged at the University of Southern California at a uniquely fortuitous and optimistic time in post-World War II American history. Buff, Straub & Hensman as well as Buff, Smith & Hensman, the firm's two principal names, has the additional distinction of maintaining that creative trajectory and work effort over the next five decades and now into its sixth.

### **Introduction**

The term "The USC School" is sometimes used to denote the Post-and-Beam movement in Southern California, emphasizing its roots in the academic institution. Within a smaller radius of geography, though not influence, the practitioners of post-World

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<sup>67</sup> Lecture, A.I.A. Orange County, July 22, 2004, by Dennis Sharp, president, Buff, Smith and Hensman.

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War II Post-and-Beam architecture, especially in wood, in the Pasadena area<sup>68</sup> are sometimes referred to as “The Pasadena School.”<sup>69</sup>

The American, California, USC and Pasadena schools of Modernism did not, by and large, subscribe to the European Modernist tenets of machine-age prefabrication, standardization, housing the masses, socialism, or declarative, earnest manifestos that dictated a particular approach to the implications of “modernity” in light of the long arm of European history. Especially as practiced in Southern California, American Modernism had an altogether lighter touch. By and large, it operated within a paradigm of capitalism that advanced consumerism and well-being as a matter of right, with its locus centered upon the individual and the nuclear family. The School’s emerging style, while inspired and grounded in some of the aesthetic lessons of the more dogmatic European theorists, responded especially to several new conditions: the more casual conditions of the new suburban American middle-class, the new wealth of a postwar economy, the nuclear (not the extended) family, and the abundance of land in the Los Angeles region.

Within the larger context of American Modernism, Buff, Straub & Hensman gained early and sustained recognition for articulating a distinctive Modernism that was regionally nuanced but nonetheless internationally influential, beginning with their light, post-and-beam wood-and-glass constructions in the 1950s and 1960s and evolving into a more monumental, volumetric approach thereafter. Buff and Hensman’s non-dogmatic approach, concern for the livability of their spaces, the acute attention to the site, their consummate respect for craft and clarity, their desire to work with individuals as much as create “Architecture,” and to need to have plenty of plain fun along the way, exemplify the USC School.

Usually associated with the single family house, theirs was and is an individual Modernism inflected by many diverse influences unique to their place, time, and personalities, influences both theoretical and personal, from Mies van der Rohe to Craftsman architects such as Charles and Henry Greene; brothers Albert and Alfred Heineman and stair builders/cabinet and furniture makers Peter and John Hall. Their own influence, in turn, was both global and local. Their work was almost automatically included in the internationally important *Arts and Architecture* magazine, 1945-67, publisher John Entenza’s vehicle for the seminal Case Study House program he sponsored, and for which Buff, Straub & Hensman designed two houses: CSH #20, the Bass House, 1955, in Altadena and, as Buff and Hensman, CSH #28, Thousand Oaks, 1966. Hensman credits Straub, better known than either of his protégés, for the introduction to Entenza and influential graphic designer and film title designer Saul Bass, considered a 20<sup>th</sup> century master of both disciplines for his work with Alfred Hitchcock, Otto Preminger and Martin Scorsese, among many others. Both the magazine and the fresh, progressive architecture it espoused were eagerly devoured by architects and critics all over the world. The practice was informally “founded” in 1951 while they were unlicensed undergraduates – even though they had designed both custom houses and hundreds of tract homes as moonlighters. The firm and its iterations have won over 30 awards and citations from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) among other institutions. Dennis Smith, both a USC ’60 graduate and a student of Buff and Hensman, joined the firm and is now partner and president of Buff, Smith and Hensman.

## **Early Development and the Influence of USC on Buff, Straub & Hensman**

The Post-and-Beam movement as expressed in Pasadena and Southern California must be distinguished from the type of architecture for which the City is primarily known. Before the watershed of World War II, which changed so many paradigms, Pasadena and southern California were already highly regarded for Craftsman architecture; along with the indigenous pueblo, the

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<sup>68</sup> Not all these practitioners, such as James Pulliam, Russell Hobbs, and others, attended USC or even West Coast schools. Berkeley and northern California were also influential. After 6 years as Dean of MIT’s School of Architecture and Planning, Case Study House architect William Wurster led the faculty of the School of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley, from 1950 to 1963.

<sup>69</sup> See the undated “The Golden Age of Modernism: Pasadena’s Contribution,” by Alson Clark, who points out older connections, such as architect Leland Evison, who graduated from USC in 1926 and worked for Myron Hunt, architect of the Rose Bowl, among many other important civic commissions.

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Craftsman ethos advocated almost a sacred attitude towards “Nature,” which then mandated, not surprisingly, an acute attention to site – a tradition already in place for millennia in Japan, one anchor in the Craftsman philosophy.

The bungalow in various iterations was the most popular single family house type in America before it lost hegemony to the ranch house after the war. The largesse and romance of the Spanish influence continued to be popular in Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean revivals. Historical eclecticism was manifest in styles from Beaux Arts to Gothic, seen next door to each other in City Hall and All Saints Episcopal Church, both products of the 1920s. These styles had long, illustrious pedigrees grounded in Europe and the West.

Even before the First World War, early Modernists such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, and Rudolf Schindler not only preached open-plans and new materials but a rethinking of the human relationship between nature and the human. Wright wrote,

*“We no longer have an outside and an inside as two separate things ... Now the outside may come inside and the inside may and does go outside. Walls themselves because of glass will become windows and windows as we used to know them as holes in walls will be seen no more.”<sup>70</sup>*

The elimination of “holes in wall” in favor of the breaking of the wall into solid and transparent sections, the elimination of *boundary*, was of course, one of 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture’s most profound concerns. Schindler’s King’s Road House, 1922, creates outdoor rooms and new opportunities for the eradication of boundary. Neutra’s early work, such as the Jardinette Apartments in Hollywood and the Lovell Health House in Los Angeles (as well as in the much later Perkins House in Poppy Peak), also demonstrates a new relationship with nature, now presumed to be critical to one’s health and well-being.

It is also notable to consider what transparency meant to the Europeans. After the war, much of the Modernist architecture developed occurred not in pastoral, undisturbed settings along the banks of the Arroyo. English proponents of new architecture, for example, had to find their way to bomb sites newly opened between Victorian or Georgian roughhouses.<sup>71</sup> For the Europeans, transparency was more problematic. It could be read as either opportunities for surveillance or for democracy, but came to be most readily associated with the latter. As philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote after the war,

*“The wide window, full of the outside world, requires an outside world that is full of attractive strangers, not full of Nazis. A glass door, stretching down to floor level, really does presuppose that, if there is going to be anything peeping in, or pouring in, it will be the sunshine and not the Gestapo.”<sup>72</sup>*

All of these ideas are present in the work of Buff, Straub and Hensman. What differentiates them is that in some way the great victory of August 15, 1945 was a watershed, and the firm’s approach made Modernism not only palatable but alluring: an American Modernism *by* World War II veterans *for* World War II veterans. In contrast, despite their best efforts, the prescient émigrés Neutra and Schindler were largely unsuccessful in convincing the American middle-class, while the work of Buff, Straub & Hensman did. During the decades between the mid-1940s and the early 1970s, the direct influence of the Post-and-Beam movement -- the USC and Pasadena schools -- can be seen in thousands of homes and offices before it succumbed to newly expensive energy and, to a lesser extent, seismic and hillside safety: either way, large expanses of glass were outlawed, and abiding by other new regulations drove costs up. Because of new developments in glass and building hardware, it is now popular again, but rarely does it embody both the apparent fragility and the can-do careless courage of postwar post-and-beam construction, a rare moment in American history rendered tectonically.

<sup>70</sup> Aldington, Peter. n.d. “Architecture and the Landscape Obligation in Post-War Houses.” In *The Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, Twentieth Century Architecture 4, p. 22,

<sup>71</sup> Overy, Paul. n.d. “Building Sight: House, London NW3 by Brian Housden.” In *The Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, Twentieth Century Architecture 4, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

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## USC, Arthur Gallion and Buff, Straub, and Hensman

Conrad Buff (1926–1988), Calvin Straub (1920–1998) and Donald Hensman (1924–2002) all served in the Navy during World War II. All three graduated from USC. All eventually won the special prestige as Fellows of the American Institute of Architects. Straub began teaching immediately at the school upon his graduation in 1943, and, due to a sudden death on the faculty, Hensman and Buff (both students of Straub’s among others) taught before they graduated in 1952 and taught part-time at the school until 1962.<sup>73</sup> Straub, who had also attended Pasadena City College and Texas A & M University, worked with Buff and Hensman from the early 1950s until 1962, though he left California in 1960 to teach at Arizona State University. Though Straub was born in Macon, Georgia, and Hensman in Omaha, Nebraska, all three grew up in Los Angeles and Pasadena. Of the three, Buff was unusual in growing up with artists and architects. The Buff family was based in Eagle Rock; Conrad’s mother Mary was a book author and Conrad Buff, Sr., was a noted artist who, according to Don Hensman’s memoirs, hired family friend Richard Neutra to reconfigure their garage in the late 1920s at their home just beyond the Pasadena boundary in Eagle Rock.<sup>74</sup>

According to Pasadena architects Russ Hobbs and Lyman Ennis,<sup>75</sup> both World War II veterans and graduates of Berkeley and USC, respectively, and intimates of Buff, Straub and Hensman, the G.I. Bill meant an opportunity for higher education where none had existed before. Before the war, Hensman, in particular, had never even considered college as an option, a first in his working-class family. But the veterans were immediate in seizing their opportunities.

Most accounts by these veterans, along with accounts by later USC graduates such as Randell Makinson (USC ‘56, former director of the Gamble House, author of several books on the Greenes) confirm the free-wheeling, creative, informal, impatient, can-do atmosphere at USC. “They were, we were, young kids. Young!” This was according to client Barbara Wirick, owner of the 1958 Wirick House. Nonetheless, these were also mature men who had fought in the Pacific or in Europe. Typically they were newlyweds and already had children; after winning a war, however, they didn’t think twice about working day and night on school or for a firm, moonlighting on other projects, designing and building a house by themselves and some hired hands and/or volunteer friends, and with (sometimes) little knowledge of how systems worked together.<sup>76</sup>

The tenure of Dean Arthur Gallion at USC is pivotal to the context of Buff, Straub and Hensman, as well as to the USC and Pasadena schools (movements). Like some other academic leaders of American schools of Architecture, including his predecessors at USC, Gallion had spent a year in Paris in 1928 studying at the École des Beaux Arts. Such a baptism meant an immersion in the tenets of a centuries-old tradition that stood for classic laws of composition and hierarchy, elaborate drawings, use of historical styles based on Greco-Roman precedents, strong axes and rational layouts according to program and strong axes, as well as a specific understanding of the role of an architect as learned scholar and gentleman divorced from the builders who actually performed labor. By the 1940s, however, Gallion had also worked in a very different arena, American public housing, at a time when it was most influenced by socialism and progressive post-war hopes for raising living standards for the poor and for eradicating airborne disease; Modernism’s tenets of “Licht and Luft,” light and air, were meant to eradicate such conditions. From 1934 to 1936, Gallion was a planner with the Public Works Administration (PWA) in Washington, D.C. Prior to his appointment at USC, Gallion served as the director of the Federal Public Housing Authority, responsible for California, Arizona, Nevada and Hawaii.

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<sup>73</sup> Clark, op.cit.

<sup>74</sup> There are indeed certain features that appear to be Neutraesque in the overlapping rafters cantilevering over the garage envelope; however, no drawings of this commission are in those archives collated and accessible at UCLA Special Collections Library, Richard Neutra Archives.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Russ Hobbs, February 15, 2008, and interview with Lyman Ennis, February 23, 2008; Pasadena Oral History Project. Interview with Donald C. Hensman, FAIA, by Sarah Cooper, Pasadena Historical Society and Friends of the Pasadena Public Library, 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Russ Hobbs interview.

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Gallion moved swiftly to create the College of Architecture, which before had been a department (founded in 1916) under the College of Arts and Sciences, adding to the prestige, independence, and funding opportunities for the new college. As the nomination for Poppy Peak Historic District notes, he also “added the Department of Industrial Design, led by Raymond F. Loewy, whose innovations in streamlining and the use of new materials have come to symbolize the optimism of the period.”<sup>77</sup>  
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It is of note that Gallion’s low-slung, post-and-beam, Japanese-influenced house, designed with Whitney Smith, is near the Poppy Peak District, rubbing shoulders with many houses designed by his students. His tenure as the head of USC (1945 to 1962), closely paralleled the Case Study House program in Los Angeles (1948 to 1962) and the almost immediate global influence of *Arts + Architecture*, an important trumpet in broadcasting the radical new architecture born and bred in Southern California. From all reports, Gallion was revered as dean and teacher because he took a personal interest in his students and because he hired people from a wide variety of backgrounds and views who nonetheless embraced Modernists tenets. These included landscape architects Garrett Eckbo and Emmett Wempole and architects Pierre Koenig, Thornton Ladd, Gregory Ain, primarily known for their residential work; important commercial architects and urban designers including William Pereira, Robert Alexander, Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams; luminaries such as Neutra dropped by for the occasional lecture. However, Gallion also had a strong commitment to architectural history,<sup>79</sup> and hired teachers who were firm Beaux Arts believers, according to Shulman, recounting the story of Rafael Soriano being “kicked out” because he refused to kowtow to a professor who insisted on the symmetries of Beaux Arts architecture.<sup>80</sup>

Gallion advocated a holistic approach to design which would ground Buff, Straub & Hensman’s architectural approach as well as more broadly to the USC and Pasadena schools. For example, in contrast to many contemporary schools, undergraduates, from the late 1940s to at least the early 1960s, were required to take not just a semester of landscape design but botany and plant courses, documenting specimens and species by drawing the leaf, photographing the leaf, noting what soil conditions in which the plant grew, all organized into notebooks to be used long after graduation.<sup>81</sup> Smith notes that the architects did their own landscape plans until “well into the ‘70s” and even after collaborated closely with a project’s landscape architect.

## **The Importance of the Sedlacheck-Crane House**

The young trio of Buff, Straub & Hensman exhibited exceptional talent immediately, winning student and A.I.A. awards and citations before their graduation, a trend that continued and culminated in over 30 such honors. Gallion certainly recognized their potential. Famed architectural photographer, documentarian of 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, Julius Shulman recounts that Gallion told him that the “turning point in my life was to be confronted by Cal Straub’s design” for a 1949 house in the San Fernando Valley.<sup>82</sup> According to architectural writer Shelly Kappe, Straub’s first project was

*“ ... an economical, modular, wood-beamed structure with a long in-line pavilion plan, sited on a terraced slope. The space of the entry, living room, kitchen, and study flow together and open up onto a magnificent view of the San Fernando Valley, via large floor-to-ceiling-hinged glass walls. The strong relationship between house and garden offered a foretaste of a design principle that would run throughout his work. Schindler came to an open-house event and commended the young architect on a job well done. With this encouragement from*

<sup>77</sup> USC School of Architecture web site.

<sup>78</sup> Loewy’s own house in Palm Springs, next door to Neutra’s Desert House, aka the Kaufmann House, was designed by Albert Frey, protégé of Le Corbusier; Frey detailed the Villa Savoye from using barn door details from the first Sweets catalog.

<sup>79</sup> Donaldson, Milford Wayne. 2008. Correspondence, March 17.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Julius Shulman, Friday, February 29, 2008.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Dennis Smith, January 28, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Shulman, op. cit.



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*the man he considered to be the most creative architect on the West Coast, and with publication of the Sedlachek residence in the magazines House and Home and Architectural Forum, Straub felt he was on his way.”<sup>83</sup>*

The thinking expressed in this house is seen in many BSH houses, and it is a remarkable achievement on many levels, literally. It stepped down the steep hill overlooking the valley in three sections: carport, main living, and garden terrace, a strategy permitting the preservation of trees and reducing cut-and-fill. In contrast to later projects (for example, the Wirick and Gates houses in the Poppy Peak district), here the carport is physically separated from the house, leaving a small strip for plants and trees which could then be available for visual enjoyment on the uphill side of the slope. It is the masterful planning, however, that is exceptional. Many spaces can be used for double duty, such as the study that can be incorporated into the living room or closed off with sliding doors; the change in flooring from refined, thin wood planks in the living/study area to asymmetric slate in the dining room, which in turn flows out to patios and terraces surrounding the house. This change in floor acts as a hinge or bridge linking indoors and outdoors as a natural transition rather than an abrupt even. Though the house is only 1,469 square feet of habitable space,<sup>84</sup> the master bedroom still manages to pull off privacy and an adult life: the orientation of the suite is perpendicular to the rest of the rooms, opening out to a private terrace and landscaping with full height glass wall (similar to the arrangement for the parents’ suite of the Mello House, discussed in the individual nomination.) The amount and variety of storage, a typical character-defining feature of B/S/H houses, is present here.

Straub, Shulman recounts, didn’t yet have his architect’s license and Gallion himself signed the drawings (Straub worked for his dean from 1948 to 1953, but this was his design). And in contrast to many architectural practices, where the principal and “name” of the firm gets the credit, Gallion stepped back; in every article on this house, it is Calvin Straub’s name that is featured as designer. “We all owe a lot to Cal Straub,” recalled Makinson.<sup>85</sup>

The fluid, informal, *carpe diem* atmosphere at USC—“the wonderful *esprit de corps*,” as Makinson called it—is reflected in the constantly overlapping dates of when exactly Buff, Straub & Hensman were formed, who worked for whom and when. Signatures on drawings, of course, help, but they sometimes do not abide by standard chronological or hierarchical rules. For example, Cal Straub signed the drawings of the Mello House as an independent architect; the house was designed in 1957, when he was in the middle of his tenure with Buff, Straub and Hensman, but a later (and seamless) 1964 addition accommodating two more children was designed by Buff and Hensman. This apparently casual approach to authorship is underscored by Don Hensman himself and many colleagues, clients and draftspeople who worked for them; often Don and Conrad worked on the same drawing simultaneously. Nor was design separate from life and friendship among clients: many original clients became close friends of the firm. “Design has to be conceived in all parts of your life: you have to live design,” Dennis Smith recalls Cal Straub telling a class during a lecture.<sup>86</sup>

Significantly, in addition, from its earliest days, BSH was a “design-and-build” firm in that it acted as general contractor, training subcontractors to know what the architects wanted. In addition, many of the early homeowners did much of the work, not just finish work but even carpentry and in some cases framing. Building was sometimes a family affair, as well, with brother-in-law Hugh Gates building a few of the early houses, including one built for himself as a “spec” house at 1611 Pleasant Way. This approach of acting not only as master architect but “master builder,” integrating trust, control of workmanship and craft, as well as cost-savings, is overtly emphasized today by principal/partner Smith and still sets the firm apart from many other architecture firms.

<sup>83</sup> Kappe, Shelly. 1997. “Calvin Straub (Buff, Straub and Hensman).” Robert Winter, ed. In *Toward a Simpler Way of Life*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 291.

<sup>84</sup> *House and Home*. 1952. April, p. 90.

<sup>85</sup> Makinson, interview with B. Lamprecht January 29, 2008.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Dennis Sharp, January 28, 2008.

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## Design Approach

While much of their personal ethos and practice was informal, the trio was not casual about their architectural decisions and design approach. The character-defining features of the early, post-and-beam work of Buff and Hensman, Cal Straub, Buff, Straub and Hensman, and Buff, Smith and Hensman reflect the firm's philosophy linking apparently contradictory ideals: complex architectural compositions and open, interconnected spatial layouts with low-cost materials that were nonetheless carefully chosen and placed, and with methods that did not require sophisticated connections but that illustrated a close attention to the appearance and longevity of the connections. As Don Hensman once pointed out, Post-and-Beam reflects a type of inexpensive, simply detailed construction and not "just a style."<sup>87</sup>

Buff, Straub and Hensman's early work also reflects a firm commitment to the Modernist tenet of space rather than mass, illustrated in the extensive use of glass and comparatively thin structural elements that are also distributed more generously (that is, larger spans between modules) than would be seen today, when various codes are far more restrictive. This approach, and the character-defining features that comprise it, achieved three effects: a feeling of lightness; the sense of being actively connected to the outdoors with few visual interruptions, and a lack of formality, in contrast to more formal architectural styles that are also more spatially more hierarchical and predictable.

This character-defining feature, reminiscent of vernacular and rural Japanese residential construction, a knowledge of which was also influential in USC curricula as well as in the work of the Greene brothers, predates four important developments in California building law, which directly affected the visual appearance of BSH houses:

*a. Although the Long Beach earthquake of 1933 made many public buildings safer, the 1994 Northridge earthquake precipitated far more extensive seismic requirements for residential architecture, which in turn has consequences for how buildings look. For example, lateral resistance typically meant more plywood paneling, often located at the corners of buildings, as well as more connecting hardware. Tongue-and-groove roofs, often a character-defining feature of this architecture, now had to be covered with plywood and "nailed off" to specific nail or screw schedules with extensive requirements. Visually, this meant the roof could no longer be a very thin plane. Glass fenestration had to have silicon rubber or some intermediary material between frame and glass, to accommodate different rates and types of movement.*

*b. Energy requirements, primarily Title 24 introduced in 1978, prescribed the amount and type of glazing and insulation required. In the earlier roofs, negligible R-values (A measure of a material's resistance to the passage of heat) for roofs, for example, again meant that roofs could be quite thin. Today, such roofs, even with thin rigid insulation, are not possible. Insulation must also occur between glass and its frame, adding another solid transition of material between outdoors and indoors, thus diminishing the "weightless," almost diaphanous feeling quality of the house.*

*c. Hillside ordinances began to be introduced in the '90s, intended for environmental protection, to preserve view sheds and corridors, and hillsides themselves. These ordinances restrict lot coverage, the size of a building footprint, and the height of a building, and typically also require neighborhood "buy-off" into the proposal. While it is possible to obtain a variance, the cost of negotiating such a variance can be long and costly, and would have not been possible for many of the modest budgets of early BSH clients.*

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<sup>87</sup> Personal communication (conversation), Lamprecht/Hensman, fall 1999.

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*d. Other fire/hazard ordinances forbade the use of carports in favor of garage, which BSH typically used because they were cheaper, used less materials, and “airier,” according to Smith. In addition, in high fire-risk areas, exposed rafter tails of less than very large size and unboxed eaves are not allowed either, along with carports, because they can help fuel a fire.*

The absence of these laws in mid-century directly affects the feeling and character-defining features of this architecture and helps to locate their period of significance more precisely. Thus, this mode of building, typically seen from the very late 1940s through the early 1970s in Post-and-Beam architecture, ties the style and construction method to a specific period of time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By and large, such a repertoire of character-defining features is not possible today, or if possible, obtained with some difficulty and additional cost.

(It is also noteworthy that while mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Post-and-Beam houses can feel almost frail, particularly at double-height interior corners, the group of houses has weathered many earthquakes with little or no apparent structural damage.)

In addition to the construction techniques of Post-and-Beam architecture, the connection to the outdoors was further enriched by the architects' approach to the individual sites for these custom houses. The indoors and outdoors were integrated using many strategies, including stories that step down a hill, typically with the garage at the top of the hill, and transitions among levels through the use of such elements as terraces, stone steps, wood staircases, reflecting pools, water elements, and screens of plastic or fiberglass. These elements typically are located so that virtually all principal spaces, and in many cases secondary spaces (the word “room” may suggest discrete volumes that can be closed off), have immediate access to the landscape and vistas of the immediate outdoors. Views were vital to the firm's approach, according to realtor John Carr, whose father William (one of the original subdividers of Poppy Peak, as noted in the district's description) often found and sold lots for the firm's clients; particularly, Conrad Buff would often be very active in reviewing available lots for views and situation. Views of mountains and vistas were also important to early Modernists as taught at USC, according to Pasadena architect Lyman Ennis, WWII veteran, G.I. Bill recipient and USC graduate.<sup>88</sup>

In addition, each building was oriented precisely on the site to exploit the sun's path of travel and changes in topography. “We were taught to listen to the site first, what were its characteristics, what impact did the views have,” said Randell Makinson, USC grad '54, recalling his student days and USC training with and under Buff and Hensman.<sup>89</sup> Lush, informal-looking landscaping was nonetheless carefully planned and sophisticated. Areas were zoned as distinct outdoor rooms that extended from the house to include the larger site. Varying applications of transparent glass; translucent glass and/or plastic, or opaque surfaces all responded to needs for privacy, daylighting and also framed views.

Curves and asymmetric pavings, as seen in the contributions of landscape architect Garrett Eckbo (a fellow USC faculty member who often collaborated on Buff, Straub & Hensman projects) often offset the orthogonality of Post-and-Beam houses. Eckbo was influenced by Modernist artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, who employed curves and straight lines in his work.

Such signature strategies enlivened the design while not adding substantially to the cost of the buildings.

Buff, Straub & Hensman also used color to refer to nature: like Craftsman architecture, greens, browns and earth tones, whether conveyed through paint or stain, were used in abundance. However, the appreciation for Modernist art was illustrated in front doors that were painted a vibrant color such as orange, red or turquoise, commanding an attention rarely seen in Craftsman bungalows, whose front doors were more likely to be subtle in tone. Like vernacular Japanese architecture, light stucco, often with the color integrated into the substrate rather than applied afterward, was contrasted with a dark stain used for wood members, especially prevalent in Calvin Straub's work, though certainly embraced by Buff and Hensman as well.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with World War II veteran, USC graduate (class of '53), and Pasadena architect Lyman Ennis, February 6, 2008.

<sup>89</sup> Makinson, op.cit.

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Like the size of the wood timbers, some of these paint and stain techniques the firm used, and which still can be appreciated in many of the houses Buff, Straub & Hensman designed, can also illustrate their mid-century period of significance. For example, a dark brown, oil-based, semi-transparent finish the firm typically used allowed the wood grain to show. Today, such an effect is harder to achieve because today's legal formulations of similar colors, environmentally more responsible, do not provide both the transparency and the longevity of protection the firm required, resulting in that finishes that are more opaque and do not obtain the appearance of the wood grain.

Between the very late 1940s and late 1960s, While Buff, Straub & Hensman favored wood for their residential structural system (vs. their contemporaries such as Pierre Koenig, Craig Ellwood and Rafael Soriano, who advocated steel) in the tradition of Craftsman residential architecture with which they were so familiar, they employed Modernist sensibilities in how they used it. Simplicity and ease of construction were requisites. Wood ornamentation was kept to a minimum, or the grain itself was considered as ornament. For example, a smaller piece of lumber, e.g., a 1x3, might be centered on a 4x4 structural post to add visual variety. In a similar but opposite fashion, other wood "sandwiches," with the middle piece indented (creating visual texture and chiaroscuro), were used for balcony and stair details and lighting soffits indoors and out.

These ornamental members were *nailed*, not notched or screwed, together, indicating their acceptance of rapid, cheap construction techniques to respond to the needs of a young, new middle class with progressive tastes and a small budget, an approach which eschewed the more laborious, hand-crafted woodwork often associated with Craftsman architecture and the Arts and Crafts movement as advocated by 19<sup>th</sup> century figures such as architect/designer William Morris and writer John Ruskin. Nonetheless, the firm was resourceful in using one element in different ways to unify a specific project. For example, plywood siding might be used vertically, applied as exterior cladding to the house envelope, and then horizontally, as patio flooring. In another cost-cutting move, the firm employed the consistent use of modules based on simple spans and easily available dimensional lumber, including 32" (the width of two stud bays) and larger spans of 6' and 8' for structural lumber. And while the trio's almost exclusive use of wood was analogous to Craftsman architecture of wood, the simple, strong articulation of exposed wood members—rafters, joists, posts, beams—recalls vernacular Japanese architecture, which in turn had influenced the work of earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century Modernists both in America and in Europe through various publications, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, and Bruno Taut.

While Buff, Straub & Hensman are famous for the Post-and-Beam construction technique, they were architects as well, responding to the client needs posed by young families with spatial layouts that, while open plan, also clearly differentiated private and public space and children's' and parents' areas.

## **Later Work and the End of Post-and-Beam**

By the late 1970s, the era of mid-Century Post-and-Beam ended. New laws prohibited the expanses of glass and required larger or more structural members and connections, all of which undermined the lightweight openness and the "casual cool" of the 1950s and 1960s architecture. But instead of considering these new regulations in a negative light, according to firm principal Dennis Smith, the firm accepted them as a challenge. Buff and Hensman (Straub by this time had long taken up teaching at Arizona State University) saw their work become far more monolithic, with deeper, thicker overhangs, more use of stucco, a greater emphasis on mass, and fewer windows. The Narver House, 1975, is a taut, monolithic, bilateral composition in all wood and glass; Buff's 1977 house for him and his family, known as "Rapor," has an exceptionally thick roof and heavy, stucco-clad supporting piers, as does the 1979 King House. These houses feel far more pueblo-like, solid, and permanent. Buff confirmed this: "Part of it was sheer boredom with post-and-beam, but a good deal was due to the energy crunch. We had to learn to use glass only where it was meaningful to the inhabitants. We sought greater mass in our buildings to make them easier to heat and

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cool. And we wanted a look of strength. We found that in the long run, very thin architecture doesn't hold up too well. I think my house will, but we're still learning."<sup>90</sup>

In fact, much of the Post-and-Beam architecture has held up very well through earthquakes and California summers. The 1958 Wirick House, probably the most fragile looking of any of their work, almost improbable in its robustness, is a testament that "very thin architecture" can indeed bear witness to a special time in Pasadena's architectural past.

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<sup>90</sup> McMasters, Dan. 1981. *Los Angeles Times*. Conrad Buff interview. Home Section, February 1, p. 14.

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## Associated Property Types

### PROPERTY TYPE DESCRIPTION: *Single Family Residences in Pasadena, 1935-1968*

Within this Multiple Property Submission, the single family residence refers to a detached residence, typically one- or two-story, designed for a specific client and specific lot by an architect or building designer in one of the following styles in Pasadena's Recent Past, 1935 – 1968. It does not apply to multi-plex housing, such as duplexes or apartments, and does not apply to tract housing built by developers.

### Context 1: Residential Architecture of the Recent Past in Pasadena, 1935 – 1968

#### The Single Family Residence in the California Ranch style

Ranch architecture is a significant California invention that encapsulates the ideal for suburban domesticity shared by the tens of thousands who moved to the region during the Post-World War II boom period. In its various subtypes, Ranch architecture conveys popular design currents in addition to popular aspirations and domestic imagery throughout Southern California during the middle portion of the twentieth century. The California Ranch style, also called "Traditional" Ranch, applies traditional or Western detailing to the Ranch house building form. The resulting architectural style appropriated the many wooden features – including wall cladding, roof shingles, and ornamentation – of many vernacular houses in the West. Along with the Minimal Traditional style, the California Ranch became the dominant domestic style in Southern California's postwar suburbs and examples of its stylistic iterations are found in Pasadena. The California Ranch style uses elements of historical vernacular ranch or hacienda architecture in California. It is found in both custom houses and mass produced tract houses. It is typically a one-story building, and other features include:

- Asymmetrical, informal composition often with attached garage
- Eclectic wall cladding including board and batten, stucco, stone, brick often on the same building
- Decorative rusticated features such as dove-cotes and shutters, barn elements such as cross bracing for garage doors.
- Fenestration consisting of picture windows or diamond shaped window mullions
- Dutch doors, French doors, sliding glass doors
- Gravel or shingle covered, low to moderately pitched gable roof with extended eaves and exposed rafter tails
- Brick or stone chimneys
- Brick watertables with integral planters.
- A variation on the Traditional Ranch, seen in the 1930s and again in the 1960s, may also use Spanish hacienda features, such as: Spanish tile roofs, roughly textured stucco walls, deep window insets suggesting adobe construction
- Swimming pools

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## **The Single Family Residence in the Contemporary Ranch style**

Contemporary Ranch architecture is sometimes referred to as “Modern Ranch.” Contemporary Ranch homes are Ranch houses for the discerning buyer, and often included an entirely different set of signifiers and amenities from California Ranch architecture. While still repeating the single story, single family, gabled, informally composed form and siting of the California Ranch, Contemporary Ranch moves away from many of its traditional and rusticated applied decorative motifs and toward an expression informed by Modernism and its Asiatic Antecedents. Like many Custom Ranch homes, often Contemporary Ranch homes are architect designed.<sup>91</sup> Contemporary Ranch architecture rises to prominence after the mid-1950s, continuing onward in the region through the late 1970s. Contemporary Ranch stylistic elements include:

- o Split-level configurations
- o Sprawling plan, often with radiating L- or U-shaped wings
- o Low, horizontal massing and wide street façade
- o Exposed framing elements, either structural or decorative
- o Wall materials include stucco, vertical or horizontal wood boards, or board and batten
- o Flagstone, often in an irregular course, or slumpstone over the entirety of a façade
- o Clerestory windows, picture windows, aluminum sliding windows, full-height vertical sidelights—often with mottled privacy glass
- o Windows and doors are treated as consciously conceived void elements
- o Sliding patio doors at the front elevation
- o Novel detailing such as striping or bronze rose plate hardware around knobs at entry doors, which are often double
- o Decorative screens over porches or carports
- o Double garages often away from street view
- o Elements of Spanish architecture such as adobe-like walls and Spanish tile roofs
- o Hanging spherical globe lights

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<sup>91</sup> Regarding The Single Family Custom Ranch House: Custom and Contemporary Ranch homes have a great degree of overlap. Custom Ranch is not a style in the manner of California or Contemporary Ranch, but is rather any Ranch house that is custom built, often but not always by a named architect or builder, either individually or within a tract. Most often the design of Custom Ranch homes are specifically tied to a given client and lot. Unlike other residential styles, it is important to distinguish Custom from typical tract examples of Ranch because perhaps more than any residential style over 50 years old, Ranch is prominently associated with massive tracts for the many. Many Contemporary Ranch homes are custom designed. Though Custom Ranch is not its own style, it represents a subtype of Ranch House that is usually the result of greater expenditure. In concept, Contemporary and Custom Ranch Homes present the semantics of discernment. These Ranch houses, particularly the Custom versions, were intended for the homeowner of maturity, money and taste. These ideas get expressed through: highly decorative designs when built in the California Ranch style; complex, variegated massing with Modern expressions and Asiatic motifs when designed in the Contemporary Ranch style; a larger scale; and numerous special amenities and “extras,” both inside and out. Other Custom Ranch features include elaborated landscaping, and a greater variety of design when such homes are completed within a tract.

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- o Decorative wrought iron supports at the entry
- o Shaped, double or decorative chimneys of flagstone, concrete, masonry, or stacked course Roman brick
- o Novel chimney capping
- o Flat or low-pitched hip or side gabled roof
- o Overhanging boxed eaves with plain fascia board trim
- o extended roof beams
- o Sunken conversation pits and sunken Japanese style bath facilities
- o Residences advertised as “Balanced Power” homes.<sup>92</sup>
- o Solariums
- o Covered table-top ranges in the backyard.
- o Swimming pools
- o Underground utilities
- o Lush, mature landscaping of the tropical rather than Mediterranean variety.
- o Steeply bermed front yards often covered with Ivy
- o Decorative planters
- o Freestanding landscape elements including lantern light poles and stand alone mailboxes
- o Wide entry stairs, often with a staggered layout, made with non-concrete, novel materials

*Many Contemporary Ranch Homes from the mid-1950s onward looked to and appropriated Asiatic styles which represented maturity, taste and sophistication. These Asiatic elements include:*

- o Continuous lintels, either actual or implied, across the upper portion of elevations
- o Red or orange persimmon colored entry doors
- o Vertical wood latticework,<sup>93</sup> *Shoji*,<sup>94</sup> or *Manji-kuzushi*<sup>95</sup> decorative screenwork.

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<sup>92</sup> Energy companies promoted the best use and highest technologies of their resources in many Ranch tracts of the late 1950s and 1960s. Often, bronze medallions would be located near entryways that served as equal parts certification and promotion touting that a house was consciously designed in regards to its utilities. One of the more common examples of this is the “Medallion Homes: Live Better Electrically” campaign seen in many Contemporary Ranch homes. The Homes in Pegfair Estates were advertised by the Southern California and Southern Counties Gas Companies as “Balanced Power Homes.” These homes were touted in ads for the conscientious design of these utilities within the house, and for the best selection of specific appliances such as ranges, dishwashers, and air conditioners. Display Ad 245—No Title. Los Angeles Times, 11 Feb 1962: M28; “Newest Guide for Homebuyers: The Live Better Electrically MEDALLION,” Better Homes and Gardens, Oct 1958: 178-179.



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- Large scale round windows openings
- *Irimoya*<sup>96</sup> or *Engawa*<sup>97</sup> roofs
- Traditional roof tile (*Gawara*)<sup>98</sup>
- Extended gables with lattice infill often adorned with notched ridgepoles or exposed beams
- Exposed rafter tails, either bevel cut or flat ended
- Decorative boulders
- Garden lanterns, based on use in Buddhist temples and tea ceremonies
- Flagstone paths in which individual flagstones are typically set within earth, not mortar

## **The Single Family Residence in the Modern Movement style**

In its elimination of historical references in favor of inventing new forms and attitudes and ways of building predicated on new ideals that spoke to the future, Modernism changed architecture irrevocably. Southern California was one of the earliest areas in America where residential Modernism was introduced and where it became far more integrated into popular culture than elsewhere in the nation, so much so that it is now a well-established philosophy, style, and approach here. Pasadena not only has important examples of such residential architecture, it has some of the earliest examples of such work. Modern houses in Pasadena illustrate the sustained depth and adaptability of the movement as it matured from early works for avante garde “early adopters” to a mid-Century Modernism that won local middle-class appeal. This range can be seen in the variety of individual expressions of residential architecture over the span of 70+ years, many of which are highly competent, high quality designs. While these houses vary widely in appearance (because to some extent each Modernist developed unique design vocabularies throughout their individual practices), nonetheless, houses of the Modern Movement share certain attributes. They are almost always architect-designed, custom houses. Horizontality is an important common feature; on hillside properties, many Modern houses incorporate stepped rectangular volumes that follow the site to retain horizontal qualities, particularly evident in western Pasadena where Modernism was popular. Historical precedents such as bilateral symmetry, traditional interior layouts with individual rooms with doors were eliminated in favor of exterior forms that directly expressed interior layouts based on function and formerly separated uses now merged. Traditional styles of detail and ornament were eschewed in favor of simple, stripped geometrical forms and exteriors, often with no or little window or door trim. Exposed structure was advocated as evidence of

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<sup>93</sup> Latticework was originally placed in front of houses associated with pleasure quarters, was used upon stores and was used upon traditional Japanese residences for purposes of privacy; the thin wood vertical members, between which were narrow openings, permitting individuals within to see out, but not vice-versa.

<sup>94</sup> Originally interior partitions with a framework grid of flat wood members

<sup>95</sup> *Manji-kuzushi* is a pattern of abstracted swastika forms often found across the upper levels of Shinto shrines. The design, which reads as an asymmetrical pattern of right angles, is often used as a decorative screen in front of windows

<sup>96</sup> *Irimoya* Roofs: A side gable on low-hip roof commonly seen upon larger temples in Japan. Such roofs overhang widely, and as a result, many of the buildings have extended eaves. See Artur Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955: 50.

<sup>97</sup> *Engawa* inspired roofs: Long, low hipped roofs with long eaves; described by Arthur Drexler as, “vast, hat-like roofs are made to hover above the fields by constructions that seem only indifferently concerned with what they support.” Drexler, *The Architecture*, 55.

<sup>98</sup> *Gawara* tiles are thick, square tiles, are concave, and are placed in linear courses.

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“honesty” in materials. Familiar materials, or materials associated with industrial or commercial uses (such as battleship linoleum) were employed in new ways. Using new, experimental materials such as the new waterproof plywood and Masonite was encouraged. However, despite the sometime “machine look” of some of these houses, the key distinguishing traits of the Modern Movement as expressed in Pasadena almost invariably includes a careful siting of the house onto a particular lot and setting, exploiting topography, sun and views. Generous expanses of fenestration, including large windows, French or sliding glass doors, patios and rear and side decks (usually confined to the rear of the house), fostered an intimate connection with a fairly benevolent outdoors while a relatively closed street facade conferred privacy. Character-defining features Include:

- Horizontal rather than vertical orientation
- Simple geometric volumes, often interlocking
- Compositional balance achieved without employing formal bilateral symmetry
- Use of datum lines to unify composition
- Simple roof outlines: flat roofs, parapets hiding slopes, shed roofs, broad gables, low slopes.
- Second and third stories often located at rear of house; stepped volumes above or below a house often employed on hillsides
- Restricted palette of materials
- Structural elements partially or entirely exposed
- Smooth stucco / sand finish stucco
- Generous fenestration in rear of house, usually overlooking or accessible to side and rear patios and decks
- Minimal fenestration on primary (street) façade, although this feature can vary widely
- Windows grouped as horizontal bands; window units that often terminate at corners; full-height sliding glass doors, windows grouped (rather than windows as separate punctured openings through the wall plane)
- If present, ornament is non-Classical, non-Western and designed by architect as part of a holistic package.
- Use of combinations of inexpensive/unconventional/experimental materials such as plywood, redwood, rough stone, board-and-batten, stucco, hollow-core tile, concrete (Schindler, Wright, Gill), glass block, textile masonry blocks (Wright), corrugated plastic (Schindler)
- Lack of standard fenestration trim; restrained or absent trim
- Pedestrian path to street may not be direct or immediately obvious
- Landscape treated as outdoor rooms and spaces extending from and integrated with the house
- Enclosed garages with hinged doors or carports (particularly in post-war construction)

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## The Single Family Residence in the International Style

The International Style's restricted palette of character-defining features is associated with the 1932 "International Exhibition of Modern Architecture," that introduced Modernism, especially a specific 'flavor' of European Modernism, to America. International Style houses are typically highly pedigreed (custom) designs by highly trained architects and based on theoretical ideals. Though relatively rare, the late 1920s and early 1930s residential works in the International Style by Richard Neutra, Gregory Ain and Harwell Hamilton Harris in Pasadena and the greater Los Angeles area had an enormous impact on future generations of architects, especially local architects who could experience the radical new work first hand. The International Style is a specific expression of Modernist architecture which has a specific repertoire of physical attributes. Three principal aesthetic characteristics associated with this style include: flat roofs, smooth white stucco (or, more rarely, horizontally oriented tongue-and-groove wood), and bands of horizontally grouped windows. In addition, International Style houses do not blend in with, but rather, are intended to sharply contrast with their settings, (often extensively landscaped or pastoral settings) and to be appreciated as pieces of free-standing sculpture in space. Cladding was to be distinct from the structural skeleton, and interior partitions were not load-bearing. Other elements such as "piloti" hoisted the building into the air with columns that permitting parking for the automobile beneath the house, detaching the building from the ground plane and further distinguishing it from its setting as well as from historical precedent. "Following World War II, certain elements of the style became softened into a more widespread vernacular called the Contemporary style."<sup>99</sup> Important character-defining features include:

- o Orthogonal and crisp massing
- o Strong sense of horizontality – no obvious pitch to roof
- o White in appearance
- o Building clearly distinct from land and/or ground plane
- o Asymmetrical placement of volumes (spaces or rooms), windows, entrances
- o Interior volumes expressed on the exterior (rather than fitting into a conventional residential "box")
- o Groups of banded windows alternating with wide bands of stucco
- o Steel casement windows with thin moldings, jambs
- o Lack of Western/Classical ornament
- o Smoothly rendered stucco
- o Use of same flooring material inside and outside to unify overall environment
- o Roof overhangs often absent
- o Use of steel, not wood, for framing//structure, often exposed
- o Use of experimental, new materials such as exterior-grade marine plywood, tempered Masonite, Bakelite, Factorlite (obscured glass), transparent glass, ceramic tile; industrial/commercial products, e.g., Ford headlamps from cars, sliding steel doors
- o Flat single panel (no raised panel) doors

<sup>99</sup> Virginia and Lee McAlester. 1998. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. p. 469.

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- o Custom relationship to site or type of site
- o Pedestrian path to street may not be direct or immediately obvious

## **Context 2: Mid-Century Modernism in the Residential Work of Buff, Straub & Hensman in Pasadena, 1948-1968**

### **The Single Family Residence by Buff, Straub & Hensman**

As designed by master architects Buff, Straub & Hensman, the foremost practitioners of what is known as The USC School or The Pasadena School of Post-and-Beam architecture, the firm's residential architecture is an innovative and original expression of the post-war Modern Movement. Their approach is closely associated with Pasadena's built culture, to which the firm has made a unique and sustained contribution, and with the City's specific climate and topography, employing the area's arroyos, glens and hillsides to express unique relationships between house and site refined for each circumstance yet related by a common design typology. For over 60 years, Pasadena has been the home and base for the firm, still extant and practicing as Buff, Smith and Hensman. It is also the location of a majority of the examples of their early, mature, and late residential work. The firm's work illustrates that a more informal Modernism could appeal to the American middle class, a cultural breakthrough that spoke to the wide popularity of a new kind of Modernism. This shift from elitism to acceptance illustrates how the firm devised ways to create affordable, unfussy, elegant architecture that sought an essential relationship with nature oriented around a casual yet sophisticated life style. The firm devised simple details for their designs that were nonetheless handsome and carefully integrated and finished. Finally, Buff, Straub & Hensman's single family residences are also significant not only because they are directly associated with the built culture of Pasadena, but because of the firm's larger influence, demonstrated in local, regional, and national awards, and in its influence through local, national and international publications.

Single family houses designed by Buff, Straub & Hensman within this period of significance illustrate this unique regional Modernism in integrating a Modernist philosophy with architectural traditions, vernacular Japanese and Craftsman features, that are associated with wood construction, such as exposed structure, simplicity of expression, and the integration of indoors and outdoors. Examples include sleeping porches and front and side porches or grouped windows (evident in Craftsman houses) and rear and side patios and decks, large windows, or interior flooring that extended into the landscape (Modern Movement houses) and exposed structure (all three styles of houses.) However, the firm synthesized these disparate approaches to create a signature style. Virtually all of the firm's work was devoted to single family, free-standing houses on custom lots. Important character-defining features of the houses designed by Buff, Straub & Hensman include:

- Orientation horizontal rather than vertical
- Simple geometric volumes
- Second and third stories often located at rear of house; stepped volumes above or below a house often employed on hillsides, maintaining strong horizontal quality
- Open plan layouts that also provided clear distinctions between public and private, adult and children's zones
- Simple roof outlines: flat roofs, very low-pitched roofs with broad gables
- Wood used for structure (often stained dark brown) and trim, (dark or contrasting color) interior and exterior
- Exposed structural elements used for both interior and exterior





















