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From the Ground Up: Prototype housing helps shape the places we call home | Palm Springs Eternal: The photos of Julius Shulman | Design Pittsburgh 2009: Meet this year's lead juror | AIA Pittsburgh, a chapter of the American Institute of Architects

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HOMEFRONT

BY BECKY SPEVACK



I am an avid reader of the New York Times. Think more or less of me as you will, but it's true. The Times is my newspaper. I have never actually bought a copy, but I read it everyday, checking the headlines online as I eat breakfast. It all started years ago, when a boss's homepage was the front page of the Times' Science section. As we gathered in his office each morning, he read aloud to us about discoveries that had been made or scientific advances that were being reported. As we would sip our coffee and contemplate these wonders, he would dole out the daily assignments and our day would begin. Once I was sucked into the world of technology and found myself the owner of my very own computer, I quickly bookmarked nytimes.com in my browser and checked it often, even if only to skim headlines. My husband is also a fan of the publication, and the innocent question "Did you read the article about.....?" quickly evolves into heated debate over the dinner table. We often do read the same stories, but every so often, one of us catches something the other did not, and it never ceases to amaze me how much information there is to be found and read within the site. I can (and have) spent hours browsing its pages, clicking from one feature to the next – give me a rainy Sunday and my laptop and my day is as good as over.

I have recently become enamored with a recurring feature found in the Real Estate section – "Property Values: What You Get For... \$_____". This weekly piece picks a number (say \$370,000) and presents three properties currently on the market for that price. The properties are located all over the nation, with the author's choices and accompanying slideshow highlighting just how much variety you can find in a place to call home. These features are little more than glorified home

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ON THE COVER: Allen Cabin, 1950 (photograph 1958), Julius Shulman, photographer, architect unknown

listings, but they still fascinate me. I love to compare the square footage and acreage of one house to the next, as well as location and some of the decorators' choices. The lush, saturated images help the reader to step into the rooms, imagining the flow of the layout and what changes you would make should a place like that ever be yours.

I find it very easy to speculate about housing. Even though I love my home, I still find my mind wandering as I pass "For Sale" signs along my bus route or as I walk my dog. I think it is human nature to ponder what else is out there, especially for a place where you spend so much of your time, the place where your life is housed. *What would I do differently? How could it be improved?* These questions, which we have all asked ourselves, are likely some of the preliminary questions the architects and designers – who created some of the iconic prototype housing in our main feature – asked themselves as they put pencil to drafting paper. Spanning multiple decades and various architectural movements, these designs have withstood the test of time and many are considered modern day classics.

Keeping in line with the theme of housing, our second feature, "Palm Springs Eternal" (page 25), takes a look at an upcoming exhibition at the Heinz Architectural Center – *Palm Springs Modern: Photographs by Julius Shulman*. Shulman spent a good part of his life capturing the mid-century architecture and elegant lifestyles found in Palm Springs, CA, and those photographs are featured not only within our pages, but to a much greater extent at the HAC. I encourage you to read our review, but to also visit the exhibit in person this fall to take in the glossy renderings of a time gone by.

And finally, as is the case every September, the AIA Pittsburgh staff is gearing up for Design Pittsburgh. This year some adjustments have been made, which reflect our goals to serve the best interests of the organization and our membership. First, we're consolidating the Design Pittsburgh Gala and Awards Ceremony into one celebratory evening. While the economic situation has made this necessary, we think the venue of the newly opened August Wilson Center will help set the tone for an exciting evening. The second major change is that AIA Pittsburgh welcomes Elizabeth Shirey as a new staff member who will be focusing on membership and communications. My days on staff are numbered with my due date quickly approaching, and while I will continue to manage this publication, by the time you read this, the job of 'mother' will likely have been added to my life. With this exciting and gigantic responsibility bestowed upon me, I am stepping back from the AIA, with a fondness and gratefulness for the experiences and friendships I have had over the past four years. So, make sure to stop and say "hi" to Elizabeth at our next event, and stay tuned to future issues of this publication as the written word becomes my primary communication with you, our members. 



from the ground up

Prototype housing helps shape the places we call 'home'

BY VIRGINIA SHIELDS

It's one of humanity's basic needs. From caves to huts to houses, shelter has changed dramatically as humans have sought to better their world.



Many housing innovations have had to do with survival, furnaces for warmth, glass windows for protection, while other strides have been in the art of building and the building of art. Nonetheless, humans have been busy perfecting the construction methods of home-building for thousands of years. Each of the new developments in homes had to start with a dreamer architect and a prototype design, be it a Cro-Magnon with a crudely constructed hut or a designer with a neatly grafted blueprint.

And today's architecture is as rich as yesterday's with prototype designs and innovations. Modernism, tract housing, and green building have all drastically changed the way we think about our homes. While technology is

OPPOSITE AND INSET: Slither apartment building. A government subsidized housing project in Gifu, Japan, 2000. Architect Diller + Scofidio.

making it easier for dreams to become reality, many begin to wonder if prototype designs that surpass current construction limitations are useful in a world in crisis.

The City of Pittsburgh has a rich background of innovative homes and buildings. After most of its neighborhoods had been established, local architects focused on filling in the gaps between and within communities. Pittsburgh's infamous millionaires like Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick peppered the city with dauntingly striking Gothic buildings like the Allegheny County Courthouse, the Cathedral of Learning, and the unique mansions along Fifth Avenue. All of these buildings helped to make Pittsburgh a forerunner in the ideals of 'City Beautiful' design and gained international attention.

Prototype housing in the Golden Triangle didn't really get its start until the early 1900s, when modernist architects like Frederick Scheibler were busy crafting the next generation of housing in their backyards. Scheibler, a Pittsburgh native, was a rebel of architecture in the early 20th century. At a time when other designers were recreating grand Victorian and Gothic-style homes, Scheibler was building sleek, modernist houses. A stunning example of his work is Highland Towers. The U-shaped apartment building, made of yellow tapestry brick and stucco, with inset patterns of blue tile and

glass, was fitted with vacuum-cleaning outlets and a prototype air-conditioning system – state of the art technology for its first 1913 residents. Highland Towers is still occupied today, along South Highland Avenue in Shadyside.

The 1930s brought the beautiful homes of Frank Lloyd Wright to the Pittsburgh area, with the internationally renowned Fallingwater and, more recently, the lesser-known Duncan House. Wright designed the the Duncan House to be a prefabricated, mass produced sort of home for contemporary suburbanites. However, only a few of the homes were made and even fewer survive. One remaining prototype was bought, moved from Chicago, and reassembled in Polymath Park in Mount Pleasant Township by local builder and Wright enthusiast, Tom Papinchak. It is one of several Frank Lloyd Wright homes that allows overnight guests and is a major tourist attraction today.

After World War II, Pittsburghers began to realize that the continuation of their overzealous industrialization would leave the city stranded in a changing national, global, and economic environment. They also began to see the damaging effects pollution wrought on their fine city, and strove to stop and reverse the city's decay. Since the industrial days have passed, Pittsburgh has become one of the best cities for green building and innovative engineering.

