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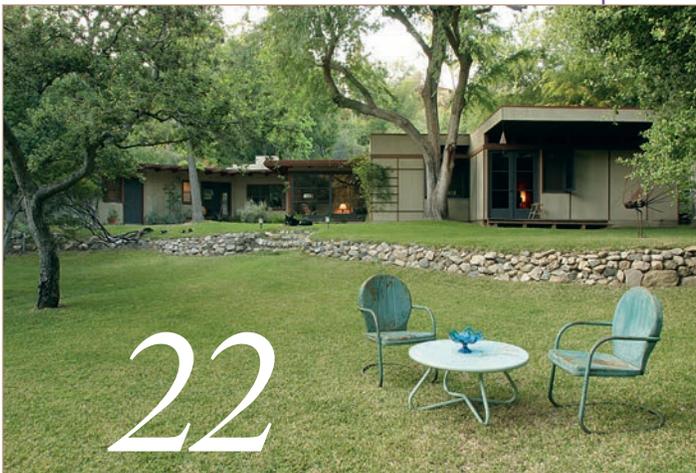
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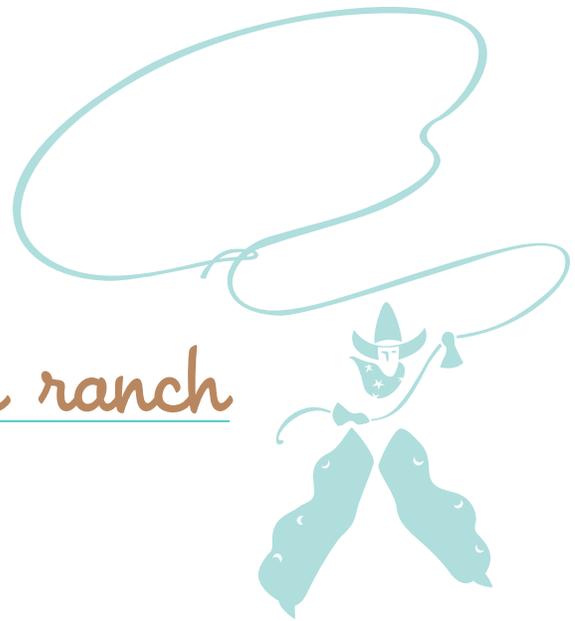
cover

An unreinforced masonry section of this 1949 home was bolstered in great style by Fung+Blatt with an interior steel roof support designed to withstand California earthquakes. In the foreground are a desk and chair by Paul McCobb and a vintage Knoll-produced Barcelona chair by Mies van der Rohe. The pottery is Norwegian and German, the painting is by Joerg Fruender and the bed was built by the homeowner.



THE MAGAZINE FOR THE REST OF US

meanwhile... *back at the ranch*



F

rom the lofty perspective of this, our fifth issue (about one inch high if you stack up all the issues so far) I feel there is a move toward a wider appreciation of midcentury design that will benefit both the committed and the soon to be. While some of us have come relatively late to the party, there are countless more who are just now becoming aware that postwar housing and design is stylish and desirable. Mainstream movies such as "The Incredibles," "Down With Love" and "Catch Me If You Can," and many TV commercials, as well as the new Mustang and the retooled Mini, all help to remind or introduce people to the idea that the '50s and '60s still have a lot to offer.

These examples of popular culture serve to bring midcentury back into the consciousness of the country, making it familiar and desirable once again. This is a trend that goes way beyond poodle skirts and geezers rockin' to Gladys Knight and her Pips on a PBS pledge drive; this is a movement that will include both boomers and young people making the ultimate step of purchasing their own atomic ranches. They will pass on McMansions and homes from other eras and consciously seek out midcentury housing as the epitome of style and warmth. Buying such a home is a long-term commitment with commensurate long-term implications for influencing people's very lifestyles; these homes will change people's lives. The ones who are smitten will develop an interest in the history and design of the era and apply it to their homes.

There are probably some long-time devotees of midcentury modernism who feel the Philistines are at the gate. I take a more inclusive position: more people, more interest, more knowledge swirling around will benefit everyone.

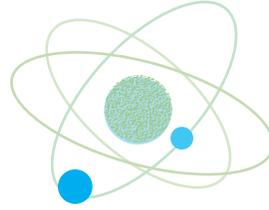
For the past 15 years the Arts and Crafts style has grown to be a major home and furnishings force that many people recognize and embrace. Quaint bungalows from the 1900s–1920s and their hand-crafted wood and leather furniture have reached into America's comfort zone, and for many people they signify a warm hearth and home. In fact, people love it so much that they will slap its facade onto any existing house or condominium just because it looks so darn cute. But it was not always so. A friend of mine once said (maybe with some exaggeration) that 20 years ago the major concern with those houses was whether there would be enough bulldozers to knock them down.

Times change. If you can discern that popularity ebbs and flows, and that houses that were once dismissed are now extolled, then it doesn't take much of a leap of imagination to see that postwar housing is the next trend. And if you take the Arts and Crafts example, smart manufacturers will soon wake up and start producing furniture, appliances, flooring, lighting and plumbing fixtures in styles that will mirror (with varying degrees of success) the look and feel of midcentury design. Cause for concern among the cognoscenti? I don't think so; the original classics will ascend in value and those of us who are budget challenged will be able to enjoy the ride also, albeit somewhere near the back of the bus.

Jim Brown
Publisher



Elizabeth Brown first acquainted our publisher with the wisdom of belts, suspenders and knee patches.



modern wisdom

* I just wanted to say thank you for this incredible magazine! I discovered it the same day I scored our very first piece of mid-'50s Heywood Wakefield (china cabinet, yard sale, \$50). Finding Atomic Ranch on the newsstand absolutely topped off an already fabulous day.

Currently we are renting a little 1956 home that our landlord is contemplating selling to us next year. It is full of untouched knotty pine woodwork and has an interior-wall fireplace, very unusual for our little Tennessee town. As we slowly add vintage finds to our early-parental-castoff decor, hopefully before long it will be ready to send in a few snapshots.

It's so refreshing to see some "real" homes with all their lived-in imperfections, rather than so many stuffy, stifling abodes that most other home decorating periodicals feature.

Thank you again for the magazine "for the rest of us." You rock!

Sally Shipman

Maryville, Tenn.

* I live in a neighborhood where we have 21 of Donald Scholz's prefabricated "California Contemporary" ranch homes. There seems to be a dearth of information about Scholz, although he appears to have been a relatively influential builder.

Christopher Hubbert

Cleveland Heights, Ohio

Scholz Design is still in business in Toledo, Ohio, and their website (scholzd.com) says the company was founded in 1946, building "distinct and innovative" homes "throughout upscale American communities in the '50s." We contacted them regarding information on their early homes—current designs run to the 4,000-square-foot mansion variety—but haven't gotten a response. Any readers out there with factoids for Christopher?

—ar editor

* For the first time in the seven years since we moved into our beautiful 1912 bungalow in the Historic District

of Old Towne Orange, we truly wondered if we had made a mistake leaving behind our 1954 midcentury classic in Santa Ana. I just wish there had been a magazine like this at that time to pull it all together for us. People thought we were crazy to track down Heywood Wakefield furniture, Formica tables, Hawaiiana ephemera, bowling balls and aluminum tumblers. We shared our AR copy with some neighbors who own a beautiful example of one of the few late-'40s homes in the area, and they've already ordered a table from one of your advertisers!

Congratulations; it really is that good!

Steve and Paula Soest

Orange, Calif.

Ad response is our lifeblood; please be sure to let advertisers know where you saw their products when you contact them.

—ar editor

* I hope that you will continue to educate the public about ranch homes and their preservation. We previously owned a Victorian, but went to California for two years and bought our first tiny "rancher" as they are called there. It had the original Crosley Metal cabinets and had not been messed with very much.

When we came back home to Colorado and started house shopping, a ranch style was high on our list. We were very fortunate to find not only a wonderful ranch on a huge lot, but one that had also been the model when this little subdivision was built so it has all the '50s bells and whistles! We were so excited, but our Realtor was just scratching his head and mumbling that it needed a lot of updating.

I don't know what it would take to educate Realtors and the buying public that if you want a "new" house, buy one, but don't take a classic period home and try to turn it into something it isn't. We would not have bought this house if all the '50s stuff had been removed and replaced with Southwest from the '80s or the current 'Tuscany' rage. All of which will be as dated in a few years as avocado green and harvest gold is from the

'60s, not to mention look stupid with this house.

Are you planning to have some resources for people that want to do restorations? One thing I am interested in is original color schemes for exteriors and interiors. Those are things that aren't mentioned when you find architectural plans or other original documents. Our home is brick but I want to paint the trim with colors to accent its '50s heritage.

Sandra Sendtko

Wheat Ridge, Colo.

* This is exactly the type of magazine my wife and I have been dreaming of! We were sad to see *Deco Echoes* disappear and want to do all we can to support you in your efforts to prevent the same fate! My wife and I have only been into midcentury stuff for about three years (we just bought our second 1950s home) and are still trying to learn more. How about a "Midcentury 101" primer for those new to the obsession? Help the newbies learn more!

Also, how about a feature on retro fabrics? Pillows, seat coverings, linens, rugs, etc., of the time and where to get originals or reproductions today. Thanks again for putting together such a great magazine.

Justin Osmer

Seattle, Wash.

* I'm so glad I recently sauntered into the Hastings store in San Marcos, otherwise I might not have discovered your wonderful magazine. (Truth be told, my subscription to *Dwell* had run out and I was hoping to find the latest run.) But there you were, and it was bliss.

Unfortunately we are not currently in a ranch house. We sold our 1950s (wood floors, pocket doors, cedar paneling) home in Dallas a year and a half ago to move to the Hill Country, south of Austin. We are hopeful that when we get fully settled (looking at land for now) we will be able to build our dream atomic ranch.

Kudos!

Sally Brown

via e-mail



* Just the other day I came across this amazing "Pod Lamp" in a vintage shop here in Austin. There

are no markings on it; can you tell me anything about it? It measures 42" tall, has a wood base and leaves, and metal 'stems' with enormous decorative plastic beads. The lampshades are shiny nylon stretched over metal frames that look like they were hand-soldered together. The shades have a couple of very tiny tears and the glue at the bottom has turned yellow. Also, it looks like green plastic leaves sprouted from the base at one point, but they've been cut off. The switch is a two-way; the lamps can be lit one at a time, and take standard bulbs. When it's turned on, it's truly spectacular! I'd love to know where it came from; at \$45 it felt like a steal.

Jenny Hart

Austin, Texas

We sent the picture to Penny of Penny Lane Antiques, who may have just made Jenny's day. It is a Lux-o-Lite or Majestic lamp made in the '50s in upstate New York and should be worth \$200-\$800.

—ar editor

* I work at Barnes & Noble #2978 in Eugene, Ore., and we just received our first issue (no. 3) of Atomic Ranch. The magazine has already been passed from bookseller to bookseller, and it shall receive a place of honor in our magazine section.

You know, as a rule we Oregonians are pretty wary of Californians, but we are all in love with AR and the very hip folks who put this together. I can assure you that we are stocking it and will continue to do so until the end of time. Thanks for the awesome publication.

Jenn Prater

Eugene, Ore.

Write us at editor@atomic-ranch.com or send a note to Atomic Ranch, Publishing Office, 917 Summit Drive, South Pasadena, CA 91030. We'll print the good ones.



the house that Jack



“We kissed a lot of frogs out here” is how Joseph Hahn and David Brinkman describe their search for a Palm Springs weekend house. “There were so many great midcentury houses that were changed beyond recognition,” laments Brinkman, the director of a non-profit shelter for homeless kids. “They were horrifying and sickening to someone who appreciates the aesthetic.”

“We saw a lot of Alexanders that had been turned into Spanish adobes or Cape Cods with clapboards and shutters,” adds Hahn, a civil litigator. The prevalence of sellers who had installed Mexican Saltillo pavers throughout and heavy draperies on the walls of glass—theoretically a selling point of the homes—dismayed the couple. One home they looked at had an aluminum carport-like structure constructed over the pool as a sunscreen. This makes a certain amount of sense in a climate where people have chillers for cooling their pool water, but as Brinkman notes, “It was just like an EASY-BAKE Oven in there.”

text Bromley Davenport

photography Jim Brown



The couple saw past the seller's interior design choices to the great bones of the U-shaped house. Most of their furnishings are from Southern California vintage shops or thrift stores.

before





Behind the midcentury exterior hanging lamp, a wooden gate and a thick rock wall nearly the length of the front facade keep the floor-to-ceiling windows of the living room private.

That means Jack to me

The Deepwell neighborhood where the pair eventually found their home was built with a certain level of buyer in mind, and each house was custom designed. The couple discovered that Jack Webb built their home in 1960 as an anniversary present for Jackie Loughery, a former Miss USA and either the second or third of Webb's four wives—depending on which online biography you read.

Next door was singer Julie London's weekend pad, which was convenient since she was Webb's first wife and their children could pop back and forth between the homes. Webb's bio, *Just the Facts, Ma'am*, mentions the rock waterfall next to the pool in Brinkman and Hahn's back yard, and that Webb loved playing in the pool with his kids.

"I thought Jack Webb was the guy on 'Hawaii 5-O,'" Hahn confesses laughingly. Webb, who died in 1982, was best known as Sergeant Joe Friday on "Dragnet." His biography mentions that Eva Gabor, who would later live down the street, was a frequent guest at the house, as was Joan Crawford and Dick Van Dyke.

"We named our bar after Joan Crawford," Brinkman says dryly. "We figure that is most likely where she would have been found."

William Holden once lived across the street, which gave Hahn and Brinkman a bit of a thrill since they say "Sunset Boulevard" is their favorite movie. Liberace also bought a desert house in Deepwell in 1957. According to the book *Palm Springs Confidential*, the Las Vegas entertainer had a pink kitchen, candelabra-shaped garden torches and walls decorated with plastic flowers, cupids and portraits of his French poodles. And in the early 1990s, aging actress Loretta Young moved into a nearby home with a circular white living room and a suspended fireplace. Yet even in this stardusted neighborhood, the area is definitely looking better today than it did 10 years ago.

Clockwise from right: One of two dining areas is just off the bar and kitchen. A calm view into the guest bedroom with its paint-by-numbers Western art. The divider near the orange cafeteria chairs and wonderfully tasteful chandelier screens the space from the front door.



Through a glass, brightly

Hahn started buying Viking and Blenko-look colored glass vases and decanters three or four years ago because they were cheap and reminded him of his grandmother's glassware. "Every day another eBay package came for Joe for maybe a year," Brinkman reports. The burgeoning collection was displayed on a long buffet in their split-level Los Feliz house, but soon it began to look cluttered and was coming between them and their view of the Los Angeles basin.

"And then we kept buying furniture," Hahn says with a laugh. With nowhere to house the vintage finds, they were forced to keep things in the packing crates. The turning point came when the couple went to Palm Springs to view a meteor shower and dropped in on some open houses. "That was it. We knew we had to buy something," he says.

They passed on a 4,000-square-foot one-bedroom bachelor party pad with a pool that flowed into the living room and ended in a sunken bar, among other architectural atrocities. But they kept looking, and six months later they were the proud owners of the Webb house in Deepwell.

The couple felt blessed that the rock walls on the front of the house hadn't succumbed to the white paintbrush applied liberally to midcentury homes in town. "When we saw that the concrete block screen wall off the garage—which is kind of a Palm Springs architecture touchstone—hadn't been molested, that was very attractive," Hahn remembers. "That and the glass walls in most of the rooms that look out over the huge, private back courtyard," Brinkman adds. Even though the seller, an elderly woman who was only using half the house, had significantly different taste in interior design, the pair was smitten.

"We just got a huge dumpster and started subtracting," Brinkman says. "That was kind of our little mantra throughout it all: subtract, subtract, subtract." Light fixtures, drapes, mini blinds—inside and out—vertical blinds and canvas awnings all took a trip to the dust bin. "The decor probably worked fine for her but it wasn't our aesthetic. Luckily she hadn't done anything that couldn't be undone."

"We love **color**, and
we love **bargains**;
those have been our

Joyous decorating

Able to finally use the stored furniture, the guys also needed a select few other pieces. But budget was all important since this was a weekend house.

"I love being able to find stuff for a few bucks on eBay or at a flea market," Hahn says. "It's the modern-day equivalent of being a hunter/gatherer and satisfies a basic human biological urge—at least, that's how I rationalize it. We love color, and we love bargains; those have been our guiding principles."

Unable to find the 30'-long 1950s sectional they envisioned at any of Palm Springs' many consignment shops, the couple ended up in a thrift store they term "lower-end than Goodwill." Buried in a back room was "the" couch, or actually two matching 7' and 10' sofas with quintessential striped '70s upholstery. One hundred dollars and an unair-conditioned truck ride later, the men had the cornerstone of their living room.

That room's custom-made rug was found at the 2004 Palm Springs Modernism show. At a tough-to-sell 17' x 17', the Texas dealer was pleased to find a buyer for both it and the matching 3-D painting from a Dallas mansion. Two white Naugahyde chairs—\$200 each—came from Room 107, a vintage store in Pasadena. A couple of bottles of Formula 409 later, the chairs look right in place in the desert aesthetic.

Brinkman's aunt Jan, who had a midcentury modern vacation home in Clear Lake, Iowa, donated the arc floor lamp to the couple. In the dining area of the room, eight orange fiberglass chairs came from the University of Tulsa cafeteria and still have their identifying labels. Hahn refinished and reupholstered a Danish modern dining set they picked up at the Pasadena City College Flea Market. It and a \$20 yellow ottoman



before



Peaches, the pug, sits on David's lap while Joe looks on.

found at a nearby yard sale sit near the bar adjoining their renovated kitchen.

"When we walk into somebody's house and they have a mix of midcentury and contemporary furniture I like it," Hahn explains, "but it's not for me. I prefer sort of living in the period. Some people who are drawn to the midcentury aesthetic don't have enough imagination to branch out of mainstream choices. They don't have the courage to develop their own eclecticism within the aesthetic. We lean toward the fun, eclectic and joyous—and perhaps a bit of the kitschy—rather than austere, formulaic or severe."

Care for some desert?

Outside, the pool was made shallower and retiled, and all new hardscape installed. The curving planting areas—they don't really qualify as flowerbeds after all—were freshly populated with cactus and succulents, and mulched with gravel. The chaise longues, tables and chairs are all vintage, much of it from local yard sales.

The Sunday we visited, the water pipes in their slab had sprung a leak and plumbers were busily installing a replacement system in the crawl space above the ceiling. It was April and plenty hot already.

"It can be 116° outside, 85° inside with two big air conditioning units going," Hahn confirms. "I start laughing when I go out. It's like a joke—it's just a blast furnace."

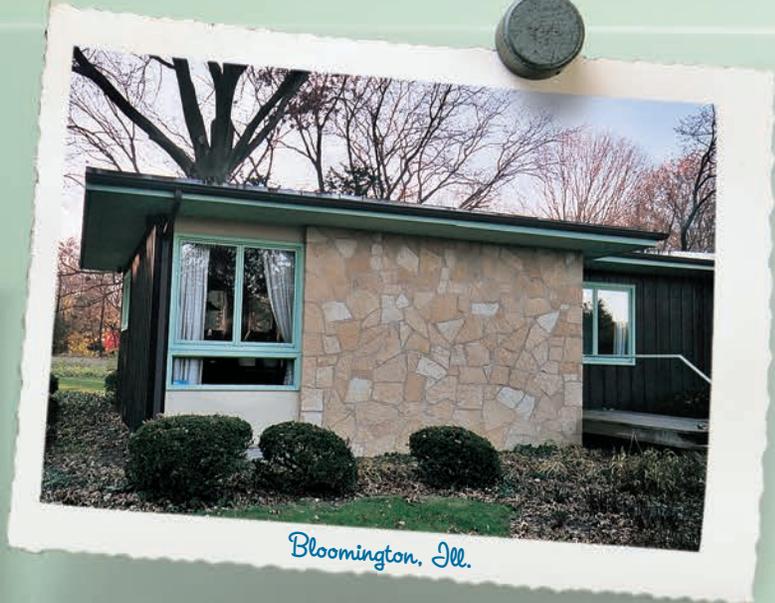
"The pool gets so hot that you can't use it," Brinkman adds. Still, the partners, who celebrated their first wedding anniversary during our visit, would consider living in their home full-time but for the lack of job opportunities.

"There's a tourist economy and a retiree economy, but not much in the way of business," Hahn explains. In answer to the question of area demographics, he says with a huge laugh, "This neighborhood is the gayest of the gay. It's a nice feature, but it wasn't why we were attracted to the house."

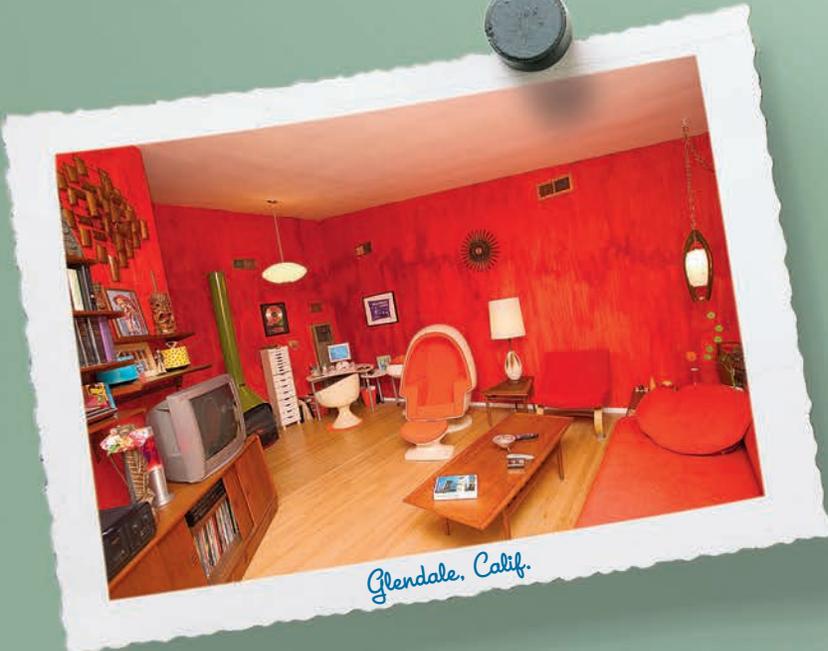
Brinkman adds wryly, "We joke that the local radio station, KWCY, which plays show tunes and big band songs, is playing for the main population—gays and retirees." 🌱



Santa Rosa, Calif.



Bloomington, Ill.



Glendale, Calif.

home *page*

Bloomington, Ill.

This architect-designed home was built in 1950 and purchased by its current owner (who wishes to remain anonymous) six months later. The living room fireplace and two exterior walls are composed of Indiana limestone. The exterior is a striking contrast of pistachio trim and redwood siding, which is maintained every few years with a mixture of turpentine and linseed oil. An addition in the late '50s of a third bath and large den served to extend the "L" and create an even more private courtyard in this secluded setting.

Linda Nobles & Michael Tanner

Santa Rosa, Calif.

This is a photo of our 1956 deluxe ranch home with its comfortable open floor plan. Eight fearsome tikis guard our front office and offer a primitive disconnect to an otherwise modern/retro style. Through sliding glass doors is a garden of palms, yuccas, flaxes and other flora that obscure all worldly concerns, and a fountain keeps the traffic noise at bay. We call it "Dean Martin Goes Hawaiian"—relaxed and lush.

Ron Hall

Glendale, Calif.

As a first-time buyer, this 1958 one-bedroom modern condo was a dream come true with its vaulted ceiling and original '50s kitchen in beautiful condition. I wanted the walls to look like lava is running down inside a volcano. I did a lot of eBay and swap meet searching, and found lots of cool stuff, including the stereo egg chair, the avocado green fireplace (just for show), Danish teak that really warms up the room and some IKEA pieces that look at home with the vintage stuff. (photo: Tor Seeman)

Jim Bacchi

Put your home on our fridge; send in a high-resolution photo or sharp snapshot and a couple of sentences about your cool pad for our next issues. See contacts page 3.

Full of character (s)

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography Jim Brown

One could never claim that this house has lacked for rugged individualists: The previous owners, Tom and Jane Apostol, are a mathematician and a writer, respectively; current residents, Irmi Maunu-Kocian, a Viennese-born administrator at a German cultural center, and Peter Maunu, a session musician, live there with their 14-year-old son, Matti. Add to this mix the pros: Kenneth Gordon, former president of the AIA California chapter, who designed the original 1949 house; Tim Andersen, a self-described “architect whose work supports a revival of local building and craft traditions,” who added on a living room in 1975; and Alice Fung and Michael Rosner Blatt of L.A.’s Fung+Blatt, the team that remodeled the master bath and upgraded a former barn to guest house status.





Peter, Irmi, Moon and Matti



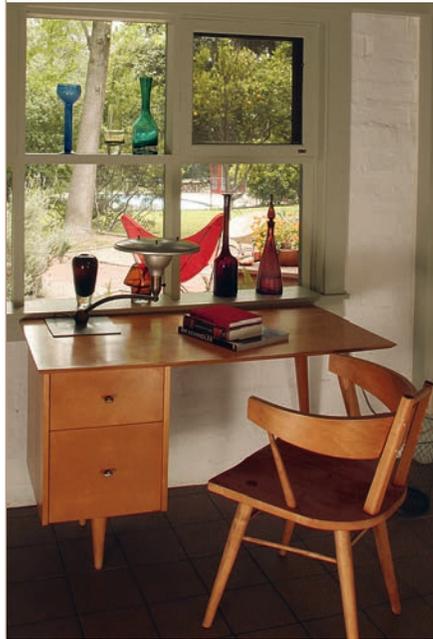
In the living room, the interior soffit below the clerestories was intended to scale down the taller addition and align with the original ceiling height, according to architect Tim Andersen. Exterior rough-sawn plywood on the addition was stained to match the house; inside, it was left natural. Furnishings include a vintage George Nelson bench, a blue Saarinen chair with wooden legs by Knoll and a Hans Wegner chair with its original upholstery. The Navajo rug on the wall dates from around 1905 and the large artwork is by Austrian Peter Kogler.

Oh, and throw in a one-third-acre garden designed by Theodore Payne, a native plant advocate, 40-some years ago.

“The first moment I saw this house I wanted it but Irmi thought it was too dark,” says Peter. “We showed it and another ‘Spanoid’ [Irmi’s term for Mediterranean/Spanish-revival bungalows] that we both liked to Fung+Blatt and to a German cabinetmaker friend; they all thought this had the most possibilities. To get a barn, a pool, an acre of land and this house for \$350,000 in 1997 was amazing.”

The house, which sits in a wooded glen just barely outside the boundaries of the Angeles Forest in Altadena, Calif., has evolved from an unreinforced masonry shed to a long, low board-and-batten rustic ranch with a modernist addendum. “It’s like European castles that start out medieval, then have baroque additions and become more and more contemporary,” Irmi says. “Now I wholeheartedly agree it was the better choice.”

“The living room addition to the Apostols’ house was my first architectural



Above, the office in the former slumpstone portion of the house looks out to the front patio and the pool area beyond. Right: The stable was converted into a guest/pool house with a homeowner-designed built-in bed and storage.



project after leaving the office of Charles Eames in 1975,” says Tim Andersen, now based in Seattle. The original living room was long and narrow with the entry opening directly into the room, making it difficult to furnish since it served more as a hallway. The owners wanted to expand the room into the garden and create a separate entry.

“There was a beautiful sycamore tree with three trunks that I pulled into our scheme by making a notch in the building for the tree and allowing it to ‘anchor’ the house to the landscape, something Richard Neutra often recommended,” Andersen explains. “In 1975, I was still persuaded by the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Historic Preservation, which advocated new additions be designed as ‘complementary,’ but distinct from the original building.

“I no longer believe this separate-but-equal strategy is desirable. Modern additions to historic buildings often appear as if they had been designed by only the most unobservant, insensitive and egocentric of architects—precisely because they adhered to the Secretary’s standards. Since the 1980s, my additions have



Left: To provide a sense of continuity between new and old, the concrete floors were covered with warm gray quarry tile during the 1975 project. A Lightolier floor lamp was found at a garage sale for \$7; Peter later saw a similar one at a Melrose Ave. shop for \$800. A \$2 lamp sits near an armchair whose design evokes either “Clint Eastwood or a ‘girl’ chair,” a source of joking debate between the Maunus. The vase is by Ettore Sottsass of Milan’s Memphis movement. In the foreground is America Modern dinnerware designed by Russel Wright on a table built by Peter.



attempted to be seamless with the original building, as if they have always been there. Everyone except the architectural historians has been grateful,” he says.

Some 20 years after Andersen’s addition, the Maunu family brought in Fung+Blatt to add a bath and shade structure to their pool house, further refine the home’s layout and to remodel their master bath.

“Our interventions were subtle, but clarified and highlighted the best features,” says Michael Blatt. “A built-in sofa was added, a skylight installed in Matti’s room and new shelves adjacent to the kitchen pass-through helped bridge the spaces. The master bath drew upon the materials and feel of the original house, but was designed to create a distinct sense of escape.

“The most ambitious work we did was in an unreinforced slump-block room that I believe actually predates the original house,” he continues. “We reinforced it with an internal skeleton while opening it up to the adjacent bedroom, creating a master suite. We took a somewhat ornamental approach with it, as it was impossible to conceal anything, and a new soffit and window were added above the bed, which allows the eye to follow the space out into the garden.”

Above left: “The pool house bath and outdoor dining area were conceived as a light-handed addition to a rather monolithic structure originally built as a horse barn,” says architect Michael Blatt. “We tried to work as lightly as possible while avoiding altogether the notion of load-bearing walls, and keeping enclosure limited to a single skin at all locations.”

Above: Materials in the master bath remodeled by Fung+Blatt include redwood, glass mosaic, honed slate and maple. Reflected in the mirror, a skylight over the shower brings much-needed light into the small room.



The egg-crate trellis structure was added to define the dining area and break up the mass of the building, bringing it into a three dimensional composition with the pool, according to Fung+Blatt.

Peter Maunu has had his own hand in shaping the ranch house. He designed the trellis near the front door based on the grid of the existing windows, constructed a privacy screen off the driveway and added a decorative overhang at rafter-tail height. Inside he built in two sofas and designed the couple's bed and dresser, as well as a family dining table that's surrounded by flea market Thonet chairs he reupholstered.

"I like the idea of building furniture into this kind of woodsy, modern house—they're really the next generation of Craftsman bungalows," Peter says. He researched the sofas that Frank Lloyd Wright did in his Usonian houses as well as Schindler's built-ins and came away with some applicable ideas.



“In the evolution of Wright’s houses to his Usonian models—one-story, flat-roofed houses—there are aspects that feel like a Craftsman—cozy nooks, built-ins, very warm. Anyone who thinks that modern architecture isn’t warm should look at the interior of a Usonian house; they’re as cozy as any log cabin. The feeling of this house reminded me of them a little bit,” he says.

Both Irmi and Peter prefer well-designed generic midcentury furniture over an all-iconic collection, which they consider a bit too predictable. Their interior includes items by Arne Jacobsen, Eero Saarinen, Hans Wegner, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Paul McCobb, Isamu Noguchi, George Nelson, Jorge Ferrari Hardoy and miscellaneous flea market finds such as Scandinavian glass and

before



The original entry was to the left of the white windows in this view of the house in 1955. That same portion is center in the current photo, with the Andersen addition moving the front door to the far right in 1975.

midcentury pottery.

“There are times when he goes to the flea market and I sit home and pray, ‘Not another chair,’ ” Irmi says with a sardonic smile. “Some people have shoe fetishes ...”

As a child circa 1968, Peter lived in an Eichler in the Bay Area, a home he found to be very Japanese in design and long lasting in its impact on his taste. As an adult, he really became fascinated with architecture when he and Irmi went to Vienna.

“Being in a different visual environment, you notice everything. I’d walk down the street and the most vernacular object that every European would take for granted, like a light switch, I became obsessed with. I noticed and touched everything that I saw,” he says. “When I came home I was appalled by the lack of substance with a lot of American design and the flimsiness of things in California that aren’t built to last.”

But Irmi counters, “When we have guests from Europe, they’re always completely into the thin construction; it’s something that they find very beautiful.”

“Being able to go outside from every room makes this house wonderful,” she continues. “Growing up in Vienna we lived in the Third District, very close to downtown. There are few houses with gardens, and most people live in apartments; you can only experience green if you go to a park.”

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at home in the RANCHOS

**“Good architecture is something that fits
in the neighborhood, but nowadays, many architects are building
monuments to their clients, and the homes look like
castles and mausoleums.”**

—Cliff May, 1987

Known as the father of California ranch architecture, Cliff May built and designed his first house when he was just 23. Despite his own 1953 showcase home, Mandalay, weighing in at a robust 10,000 square feet, the 79-year-old iconoclast building-designer-turned-architect was planning to test his philosophy that “less is best,” according to a 1987 *Los Angeles Times* story.

“I want to do a one- to two-room house with everything in it,” he said just two years before his death. God knows what May would have thought of today’s taste-free monuments to zero lot lines, but I have a feeling he wouldn’t have minced words.

His Long Beach, Calif., Ranchos tract, also built in 1953, has homes with seven to nine rooms, still modest by today’s supersized housing standards. Families, singles and couples who like the open-plan, post-and-beam architecture are attracted to the tree-shaded neighborhood. Local realtor Doug Kramer and his wife, Rochelle, introduced us to three sets of owners, all of whom bought their homes in 2000, and all of whom chose different approaches to refurbishing their ranch houses.

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography Jim Brown





before

The Steeles

“It started with a leaky faucet in the bathroom,” Rob Steele, a computer technician, says with a rueful smile. “We installed a \$22 faucet and then decided that the countertop looked old and worn, so we replaced that. Then we decided to redo the whole master bathroom because it was a small project and manageable.” Sixteen months later, the Steeles were finishing up a major remodel with the clock ticking on the imminent arrival of their son, Jason.

Lisa Steele, a psychologist, had liked the openness of the house when they first toured it, and Rob saw potential. But there was a dearth of counter space in the kitchen and the living room was awkwardly long and narrow. “We sat here one night discussing if we should reface the kitchen cabinets, which were falling apart. My thought was why throw good money after bad,” says Rob, “but I don’t think Lisa knew what she was in for.”

They’d tackled the exterior first, including installing 1,100 square feet of concrete and an extensive pergola to shade the south-facing patio. Where the exterior redwood board and batten was rotted, Rob, ever the do-it-right guy, bought oversize boards and milled them down to match the old dimensional lumber.

But Lisa grew tired of the dingy look of the inside. “I told Rob I didn’t really like this house and wanted to see something different other than new concrete and plumbing.



I needed to live in a different house,” she says. So began a gut of a second bath and the living/dining/kitchen area, and conversion of an office to a nanny’s room. Lisa’s daughter, Lindsay Weiner, 10, has one of the two mirror-image “Jack and Jill” bedrooms found in the Ranchos houses, and the nursery is in the other.

In the kitchen area the Steeles moved the water heater outside and the sink to the window wall. There were six existing ungrounded electrical circuits in the whole house; now there are 12 grounded circuits just for the kitchen. They chose granite countertops, GE Profile appliances and maple cabinetry—ordering the cupboards without glass or hardware, both of which they purchased separately. Black handmade tile on the backsplash and simple hanging pendant lights over the island contrast with the blond engineered-wood flooring.

“It takes more time and energy, but we got just what we wanted,” Lisa says about not going with the standard cabinetry options. “We didn’t want to settle for less than we think the house deserves.”

Rob’s quality-work ethic was frustrated when confronted with slap-dash fixes from the past. “The difference between the best thing you can do and the cheapest is about \$20,” he contends. “Everybody who came before me saved \$20. We wanted to give this house the best of



before

what’s available today behind the walls so it will last another 50 or 100 years before someone has to do anything.”

They also changed out the windows to double-paned, insulated vinyl models. “I agree that original windows add charm, to a certain point. But they can’t be replaced, and with energy so expensive in Southern California and the safety factor, this was the right choice for us,” explains Rob. “I thought vinyl windows would look out of place in a period house, but these are unobtrusive.”

The Steeles say their home has changed their lives. “We like the look of it so well, it’s shaped our taste,” Rob attests. “It forced us to look at things differently,” Lisa adds. “Our dream is to one day build a house of our own, but now we both agree we’ll never live in anything other than a modern-style home.”



The Medeiros

Just down the street from the Steeles is the three-bedroom house of Caitlin and Tim Medeiros. Caitlin was working for a realtor at the time they were househunting, so she was able to scout new listings before presenting them to Tim, a social worker.

“The first houses we looked at were absolutely horrible,” she remembers. “They were similar in age to the Ranchos homes but nothing was modern about them—they were normal, everyday houses.”

“There was nothing unique,” agrees Tim. “We’d pull up and I’d say ‘No’ without even getting out. I’m extremely picky.”

When the couple toured the Cliff May house, they could see it needed a paint job and landscape maintenance. “With this one we looked at each other and said, ‘This is



the house,' even though it was dirty and the owners' furniture placement was very strange," Caitlin says. "They had a wall unit in front of a window and you couldn't even use the French doors. They didn't understand the house at all."

"I liked the layout, all of the light, the style of the house," Tim remembers. "We liked the neighborhood—it was quiet—the parks, freeway access to L.A. There was something about this house that, despite the negatives, we could see the potential."

The Medeiroses previously lived in Spanish Colonial Revival homes, and their decor ran to Pottery Barn and tchotchkes. Now Caitlin's minimalist streak has gotten the upper hand and the couple grapple with keeping their interiors streamlined. Their two boys, Zack, 14, and Nick, 8, are allowed their own aesthetics behind their bedroom doors.

When they moved in the couple knew they needed new

furniture—something that fit the house. "We're still buying new pieces," Tim says, "getting away from the affordable IKEA thing you do when you're younger. But that comes after a new roof, painting, landscaping."

Tim's pickiness—or dedication to doing things right, depending upon your viewpoint—included meticulously stripping the exterior of the house, replacing rotted sections of fascia board and freeing all of the painted-shut windows so they worked again. He discovered there were seven layers of trim paint, including black and bright red. Tim also replaced all of the hardware and light switches and fixed crumbling thresholds.

At the end of the two-year fix-up program, the couple looked at the sage exterior color scheme they'd picked and decided it wasn't quite ... right. So they redid it all over again. "It was fun, very fun," Tim says dryly. "I'll never, ever do that again."



The Pittses

Doug and Rochelle Kramer also steered us to a third house a few streets over in the 700-unit tract. After looking at more than a dozen homes in the Ranchos, Valerie and John Pitts found one that may have had a quick-and-dirty high-gloss paint job and “interesting” vine wallpaper, but was in good shape architecturally.

The couple had been introduced to the area by Ranchos homeowner and long-time friend Rich Modica, who worked with John on the road during the years they both toured with The Stray Cats. “Val and I were sold after driving into the neighborhood the first time,” says John, who now manages a sound rental company. “Then after walking through one of the houses, it was all over. It took several months to find one that hadn’t been someone’s not-so-great remodeling experiment.

“Since all my musical interest is around the ‘50s and ‘60s vibe,” he continues, “when we came into the neighborhood, we both said, ‘This is so right.’ These houses are different and they have this cool history. We started reading about Cliff May and realized this was an amazing find.”

Val, who works for Boeing, would have fit right in with the original owners of the homes, many of whom worked at the nearby McDonnell Douglas (now Boeing) aircraft plant. Their ranch house had been upgraded in



the '70s and the Pittses wanted to refresh the finishes. Like the Steeles, they opted for a new kitchen.

John and Val did the painting, drywalling and light fixture installation themselves and hired contractors for flooring, kitchen cabinets, electrical, and heating and a/c systems. They lived without a kitchen for four months, with a raw concrete floor and dust everywhere, but it was worth it. "We wanted a kitchen we'd really like to work in, with everything new," John says. "Modern but one that would still fit the house," Val adds.

Their main challenges came from the layout of the new kitchen/living/dining room. "We had to get creative with our design," Val says. "Because the plumbing is in the slab, you have to cut the concrete whenever you reroute anything," John notes. "That was something we really didn't want to get into so we ended up just moving the sink to the corner near its original location."

The couple demoed a wall that divided the kitchen from the living room. "The kitchen was so small before the remodel that two people couldn't work in it at the

same time. Since we cook often, we really needed more room," Val explains. They chose dark blue CaesarStone countertops, light hemlock cabinets from Nickels, an Asko dishwasher, a Jenn-Air refrigerator, General Electric range, two stainless steel sinks from Blanco and a Hans Grohe faucet that pivots between them.

"We didn't want to have any cabinets on the walls, so we came up with the idea of the floating shelves," John says. With their two dogs and two cats in mind, they felt laminate flooring would be more durable than hardwood. They're extremely happy with the resulting look, but the dogs are less ecstatic over the slippery surface. They kept their original windows, but replaced the glass with tempered after their "stunt kitty" jumped through a closed window (unscathed) one New Year's Eve.

"Cliff May built these houses so well that, 50 years later, even though there's some rot and other problems, the structure is still sound," John says. "These houses go through earthquakes and everything has held up. People can't wait to bring them back to life."

Preserving the Ranchos

A Ranchos resident since 1996, realtor Doug Kramer specializes in midcentury homes. “In the last few years there has been a growing appreciation and awareness of Cliff May’s design aesthetic,” he says. “New owners have for the most part sought out this neighborhood for its modernist qualities. And as a result, existing residents are also coming to appreciate their homes more, too.”

“People, particularly creative people, are willing to pay a significant price per square foot for a May that is in original or close to original condition,” Doug adds. “Because there’s such a limited supply and a growing

number of people who appreciate them, that continues to push prices upward.”

While Doug lauds the growing popularity of midcentury design, he admits that “the general population isn’t tuned into modernism and what makes this architecture unique. Even realtors, for the most, part aren’t too dialed into it. What scares me the most is when I see midcentury modern homes being razed and McMansions built in their place.”

And yet he and fellow homeowners who want to keep the Ranchos looking like the Ranchos aren’t necessarily jumping onto the purist bandwagon. Like many, they’ve heard that with historic designation come committees and design dictators.

“Most of us share an open yet cautious attitude about preservation,” Doug says. “On one hand, we’d love to see some guidelines that help maintain the unique character of these homes and the neighborhood. On the other, we want to fully understand the restrictions that preservation will place on us. We’ve seen some terrific remodels that really enhance the homes while maintaining the character, and we’ve also seen some disasters.”

“Some people have put second stories on or stuccoed over the board-and-batten siding,” Caitlin Medeiros offers. “I’d like to see a historic district or homeowner association here, but I think some owners would balk at restrictions.”

The Pittses also say they’d like to see more people do





the right thing by their homes. “Doug is working to educate people about historic preservation in the neighborhood, and we’re onboard,” Val says. Just next door, new buyers tore down the original ranch and built a “house that doesn’t go with the neighborhood. I wish they couldn’t have done that,” John says.

“It’s a nice enough house,” Val adds, “but it doesn’t fit here, and they could have saved the house that was there.”

Jeff Frankel, the president of the Old Towne Preservation Association (OTPA) in the nearby city of Orange, has been there, done that when it comes to convincing residents they won’t be losing valuable personal rights. Downtown Orange and 600 bungalow-era homes have been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1997, and in that time property values have more than doubled and city coffers have benefited from the tourists and film crews that flock there.

“People often comment how they would never want to live in a historic district due to all of the restrictions,” Jeff says, “but historic districts are much less restrictive than living in surrounding communities with CC&Rs. In most districts, as with ours, the standards or guidelines apply only to the exterior of the structure. Contrary to popular belief, they don’t dictate what color you must paint your home and you can still add on to your property as long as your addition is sympathetic to the original structure.

“I always encourage people to try and retain as many interior architectural features as possible or practical inside as well,” he says. “When individuals are looking for a home in our area they are more likely to purchase one that has much of the original architectural details, and these also demand a higher price. Property values rise and the community retains its historic integrity for future generations to enjoy while the quality of neighborhoods improves. It really is a win-win situation.”

OTPA is now looking at three Eichler tracts as the next focus of preservation in Orange. Like the Cliff May



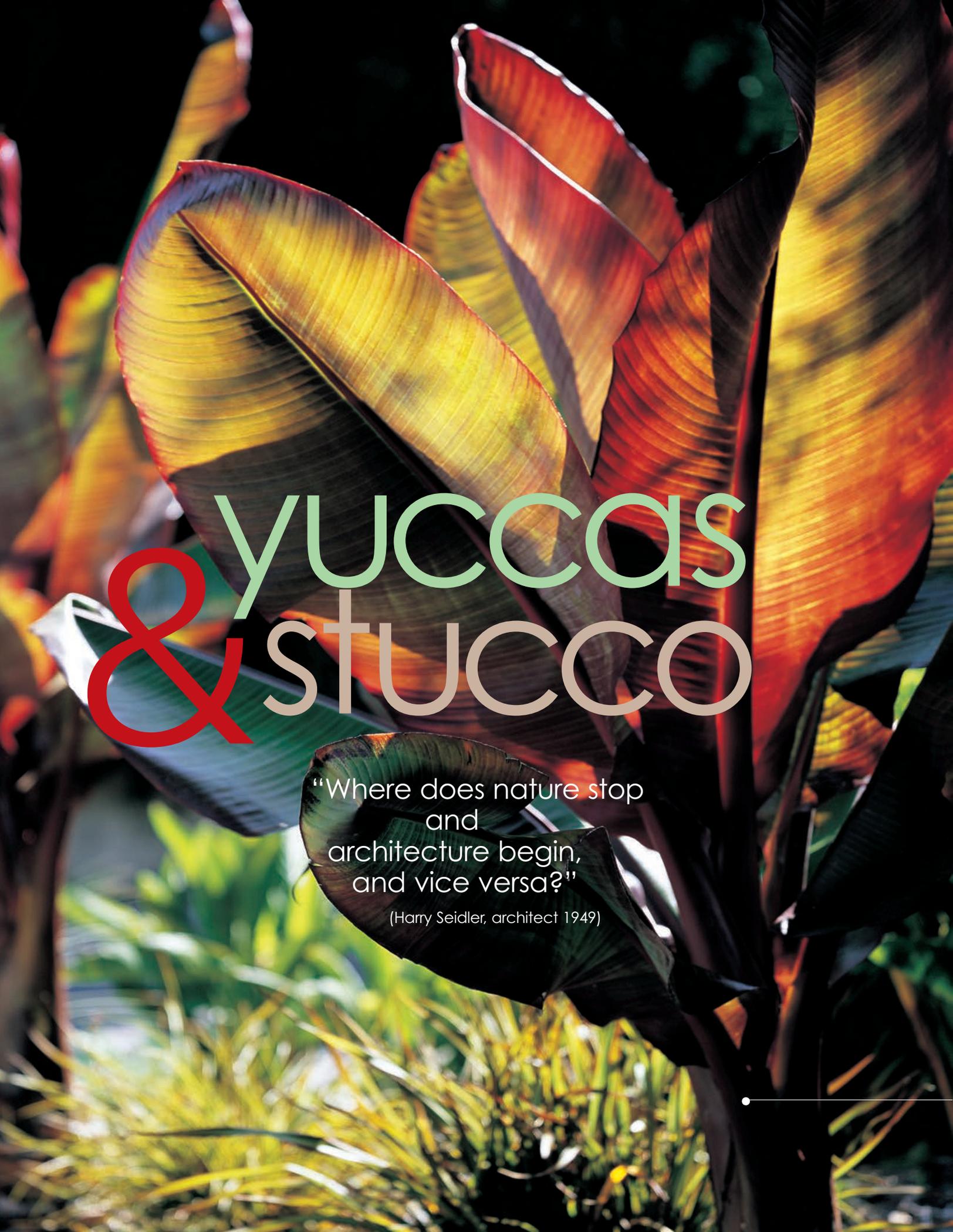
Ranchos, the Eichler neighborhoods include pristine restored examples along with homes suffering from deferred maintenance and insensitive remodeling.

“If new buyers continue to appreciate good architecture and design, this neighborhood will continue to be a special place,” Doug Kramer says. “More people are investing money in preserving and improving their homes. We have a lot of reason to be optimistic that that trend will continue.

“My hope is that, at the very least, what we have now will be preserved,” he concludes. “But my dream would be that modernism would have such a resurgence of popularity that builders would adopt that design aesthetic once again.” 🐕

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Want more on Cliff May? See “Cool Californian” in issue 4, winter 2004; order back issues at atomic-ranch.com



yuccas & stucco

“Where does nature stop
and
architecture begin,
and vice versa?”

(Harry Seidler, architect 1949)

By now, the original homeowners of the 1950s and '60s ranch houses have largely given way to a new generation of suburban dwellers, many of whom are looking to raise the stylistic bar and create fresh examples of midcentury-appropriate landscaping. For those revamping homes their parents or grandparents happily outfitted with juniper bushes and miles of Algerian ivy, the task of staying true to the neighborhood and to the original structure of the house becomes a creative awakening.

These properties and their landscapes are a breeding ground for contemporary designs incorporating eco-friendly, original ideas. Midcentury houses and gardens are often connected by common elements—aggregate paving or concrete slabs divided only by large expanses of glass, for instance—and the outdoor spaces become extensions of the interior living rooms.

The new garden is not about flower color—it's about texture and foliage. It's not devoted to hedges and Miracle-Gro—it's about selective pruning and interesting mulch. We don't have to fill every square inch of dirt with a plant. Instead, think about the architectural form within your landscape. Dramatic, minimalist gardens were the original look, and they were designed along with the houses. Now the same feel is incorporated through new plantings and an appreciation of the stature of established plants.

Using recent renovations in Southern California, let's look at some of the elements that make up a successful midcentury yard.

text Paula Henson

photography Jim Brown

Red leaf banana (*Ensete ventricosum*)

The back yard of this canyon home had an existing pool with lots of concrete and grass. The pool and all decking were redone using dark gray plaster and concrete. Henson created a fireplace in this corner (off camera) as a focal point for a seating area that includes simple built-in benches and handsome modern furniture. Plantings were chosen for their primarily Asian feel; very little flower color exists in the yard.

Horsetail (Equisetum hyemale)

Sago palm (Cycas revoluta)



Bamboo

Fountain grass (Pennisetum setaceum)

Papyrus (Cyperus papyrus)



Concrete: Formica for the outdoors

Inviting, accessible entries are an important part of the architectural look. The barely noticeable two-foot-wide cement walk from the sidewalk to the front door has been replaced by wide, easy-going entryways that practically open the door and invite you in. The driveway and his mysterious cousin, the garage, can even become design statements in their own right.

Concrete hasn't gone the way of metal awnings and corrugated fiberglass fences—it's been given a new appreciation. Always a workhorse, it appeals to the practical and conscientious recycler in all of us: colored, stamped, broken, stained—it's here and it's making itself useful.

In another midcentury neighborhood, a homeowner has employed some of the ideas that Henson promotes. A mature tree trimmed to emphasize its sculptural qualities and bamboo along the fence line provide privacy in the small garden outside of two bedrooms. A water feature, gray Mexican pebbles and plants chosen for their Asian qualities bring a sense of calm, while three New Zealand flax plants lend spots of color. The owner has contrasted rectilinear concrete elements—the low walls, the basin for the fountain, the walkway—with softer materials—grass and mass plantings of society garlic.



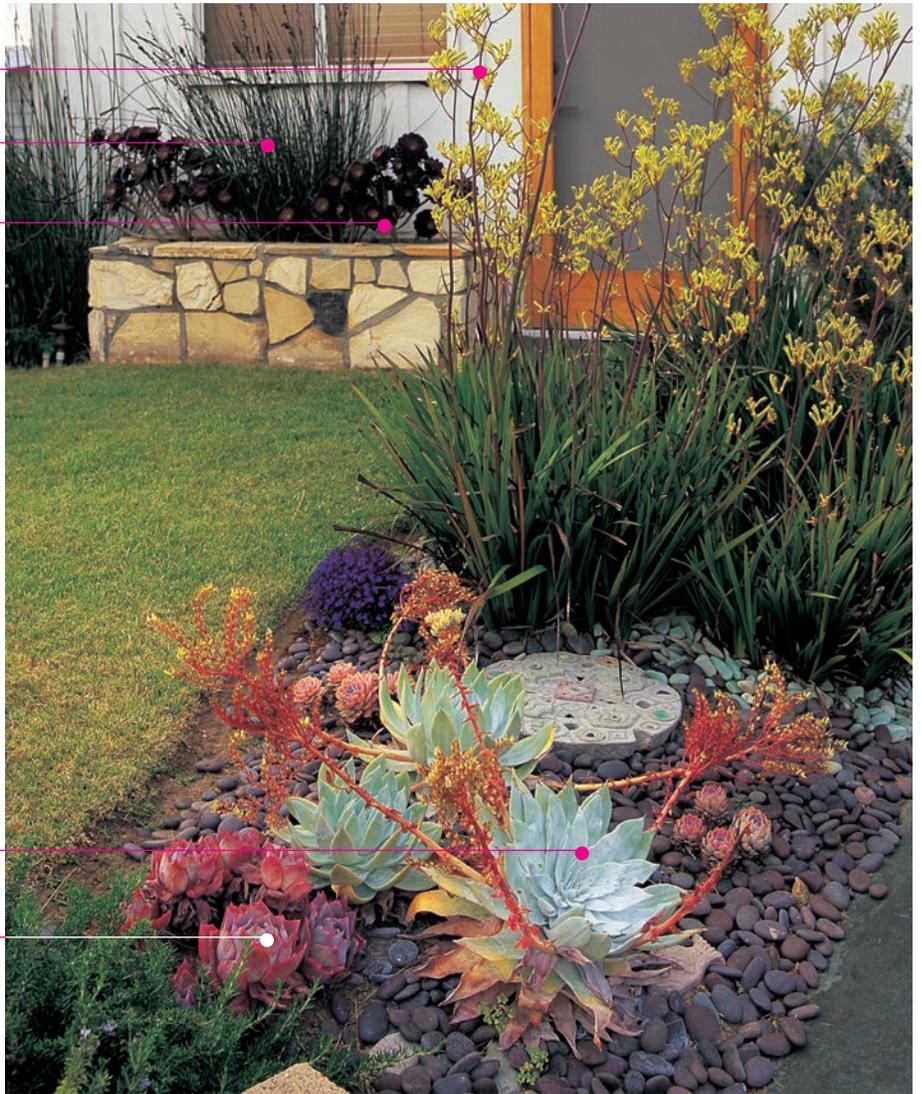
The front yard of the same home has a distinctly edgy look that is well suited to its arid climate. The golden-tone aggregate used on the driveway changes to a similar gravel mulch in a pocket garden by the garage. Succulents demand almost no attention and little water once established.

Kangaroo paws (Anigozanthos) 'Harmony'

Chondropetalum tectorum

Aeonium 'Swartzkopf'

This homeowner wasn't interested in flower color but was looking for architectural texture and interesting plants for her garden. The interior of the house has very simple, dramatic elements. Both front and back yards use a limited range of plant materials, and Henson was prevailed upon to retain small areas of lawn until the family's children are older. Other than the grass, the entire property is quite low-maintenance.



Dudleya brittonii

Echeveria 'Morning Light'

Aeonium 'Swartzkopf'

Blue oat grass (Helictotrichon sempervirens)

Phormium tenax 'Rubrum'

Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis) 'Prostatu'



Pools, Patios, Mulch, Furniture

The kidney-shaped pool was *the* water feature. With the demise of diving boards and pool slides, more aesthetic possibilities for the poolside have opened up. Sleek, minimalist pool design is today's answer. Lap pools, reflecting pools, sybaritic spas, naturalistically landscaped lagoons—the options are numerous.

Ease of care never ceases to be a key element for homeowners, and choices for hardscape materials continue to grow. In addition to concrete, exposed aggregate is now enjoying a revival both inside and outside the ranch home, and decomposed granite is available in an array of colors. Composite decking made from recycled products is gaining in popularity, but the raw elements of wood, stone and organic materials will never be out of style. Eco-friendly landscaping materials include lpe and other hardwoods harvested from sustainable forests, solar lights and stains to mask flaws in old concrete.

Once midcentury planter beds were laced with crushed white rock and lava stone. Now decorative pebbles have softened and refined the look. Recycled rubber, a new product resembling shredded bark, is another option for garden mulch, and tumbled glass in a multitude of colors can add sparkle to small areas.

As for what to sit on while enjoying your outdoor spaces, retro patio furniture can still be hunted down in thrift shops and vintage stores. Vinyl straps or other worn material can be replaced with longer lasting, weather-resistant coverings such as Sunbrella fabric. And consider bamboo for both plant material and furniture—it's a highly renewable resource.

Non-retro patio furniture solutions include simple, modern designs from companies like Henry Hall and Modern Outdoor. The fact is outdoor furniture and upholstery is light years ahead of the vinyl and iron we had to eventually fuss over or toss out. Options abound and comfort and durability, once thought of as things one had to sacrifice, are now paramount.

Water

Precise watering—drip irrigation—fits quite nicely with the less thirsty plants used in the midcentury landscape. The ecological awareness that began in the 1970s has resulted in a major transformation in user-friendly irrigation products, and today's homeowner is able to do the right thing. The days of high-powered galvanized sprinklers sending much of the water spewing into the atmosphere every evening has fortunately given way to a more sensible approach.

In contemporary landscape design, there is often a juxtaposition of a water feature with low-water-use plants. I think of this as the yin and yang of dry versus wet—visually, aurally and atmospherically. Water bubbling over the rim of an urn, a shallow rock pool or a ground-level rustic birdbath provides softness. And a subtle fire pit (another cornerstone of the modernist garden on the West Coast) also provides contrast between elements.

But as fountains, ponds, even birdbaths become increasingly popular, one has to be vigilant about their upkeep. Perhaps the prevalence of water-wise, self-reliant plants caused homeowners to look elsewhere for something that needed some extra attention. Aah, what about the lawn?

The Lawn Dilemma

While the term “drought tolerant” was being bandied about the badminton court of landscaping in the '80s and '90s, the ever-popular lawn kept a firm hold on Americans. For some, nothing does the trick as nicely as a thick carpet of freshly mown turf, and Astroturf just wasn't right for most of us. Unable to let go of the green security blanket lying right outside the front door, we gave the water-greedy, labor-sucking lawn a free pass. Fortunately, we have finally found acceptable alternatives.

Now meadow grasses and other low-maintenance ground covers have made it to the big time. For the grassy look, try creeping red fescue (*Festuca rubra*) or Korean grass (*Zoysia tenuifolia*). Neither need to be mowed and can be walked on; however, they don't offer an even, flat surface. Your Slip 'N Slide may not work as well, but then again you don't have to dodge those injury-causing sprinklers either.

Paula Recommends

American Midcentury Landscape Pioneers

Garrett Eckbo
Robert Royston
Thomas Church
Dan Kiley
Fletcher Steele

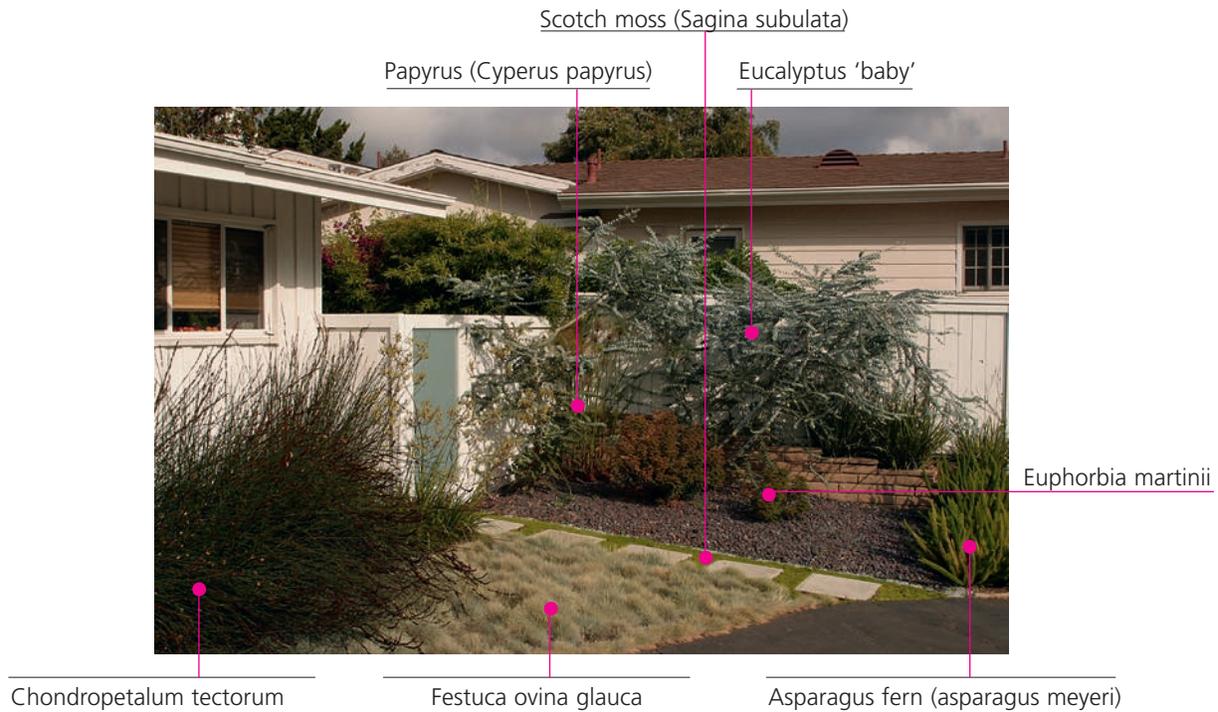
Books

Private Landscapes:
Modernist Gardens in Southern California

by Pamela Burton et al; Princeton Architectural Press

The Modern Garden

by Jane Brown; Princeton Architectural Press



Other choices include Scotch moss (*Sagina subulata*), a vibrant chartreuse color and very low growing; blue star creeper (*Pratia angulata*), a good ground cover between stepping stones; dymondia (*Dymondia margaretae*) with gray-green leaves and a small daisy-like flower; blue fescue (*Festuca ovina glauca*), a slightly taller ground cover with excellent form; thyme (*Thymus*), which has several appropriate species and varieties, especially creeping thyme or mother-of-thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*), specifically 'Pink Chintz' or 'Elfin.' Almost any groundcover other than a grass lawn uses less water and requires much less attention.

Featured Plants

Architectural texture. Foliage color. Low maintenance. Low water-use. These are the prerequisites for today's landscape flora. In climates with dramatic weather changes, plants are used for their seasonal color, branch structure and durability. Large, weeping trees; dark, glossy foliage; consistent flower color—these will always continue as hallmarks of good design.

The striking impact of mass plantings is still very much linked to the modern landscape. Contemporary landscapes incorporate less variety and much less fussy plants than vintage midcentury gardens did. Those trusty plants that have proven themselves, and even re-emerged on the scene, deserve acknowledgment. Sometimes

Plant Stars Then and Now

Then:	Now:
Yuccas	Bamboo
Ivy	Succulents and other mass plantings
Juniper	New Zealand flax (<i>Phormium</i>)
Agave	Agave
Clivia	Clivia
Clipped hedges	Natural shrubs
Trees trimmed into unusual forms	Trees with history

new isn't always better.

Today's garden can be comfortable, inviting, user-friendly and environmentally conscious. It can be designed to withstand the rigors of the modern family—pets, kids and costly maintenance crews. Many savvy owners of midcentury homes have strolled down the garden path and turned their backs on the delicate, high-maintenance water lovers. You can, too.

Now, would you like your martini poolside? 🍹

Paula Henson has designed gardens throughout the Los Angeles area and has been featured on HGTV's "Landscape's Challenge." She sits on the Board of Governors for the Los Angeles County Commission on Arboreta and Botanic Gardens.

Have a great yard at your house? We're looking for examples of interesting landscaping from all climate zones to feature, so send us your pix via e-mail, editor@atomic-ranch.com, or mail (see page 3).

jolly ranchers

Michael Okin

Friday night was Biff's "Family" Restaurant night for my clan. Biff's was 10 minutes from our tidy little Van Nuys, Calif., ranch house, but it was a world away from Mom's lackluster cooking. Dad and Mom, my brother, Mark, and I would scrunch into our favorite squeaky leatherette booth in front of a glass mosaic of a creepy brown and orange clown that I took as high art—it was the '60s after all. Then we were each handed a stiff and rarely updated plastic menu.

Preceded by her overly Aqua-netted hairdo, favorite waitress Carol bounced over to our table in her polyester getup: a burnt-orange frilly collared blouse and chocolate brown skirt. "Hi kids! How y'all tonight? Are ya hungry, hungry hippos?" she recited.

We really laughed at that line the first time, but after six months it became annoying. But Mark and I smiled and snickered politely, knowing it would get us extra whipped cream and two maraschino cherries on our hot fudge sundaes.

On truly special occasions my parents would allow me to order the jewel of Biff's menu, spelled out in humongous letters: JUMBO GOLDEN BROWN FRIED SHRIMP. Dad was tight in the wallet (he was the first person I witnessed lifting sugar packets), and for the mid-'60s it was expensive—\$2.25. But the shrimp packed a punch to mark a birthday, a good report card or to celebrate the fact that my voice was changing.

To me, Biff's shrimp was peerless as a foodstuff. Like the menu promised, they were a heady combination of "tender yet crisp" with a tawny veneer of batter enveloping each bit of oceanic wonder. Their delectable crunchiness was contrasted by the shocking tang of the glossy cocktail sauce and was, to my unsophisticated Valley-boy palate, the ultimate gourmet experience. Each morsel glowed under the faux-Tiffany lamp hanging over the wood-grain Formica table. Every piece featured so much luscious, flaky breading that sometimes I wasn't sure there was shrimp inside.

On not-so-special Fridays I ordered Salisbury steak, or chicken potpie. Yet when opening the menu I'd already memorized, my gaze never failed to fall on my extraordinary-occasion dish. I'd glance up from the menu embarrassed, as if caught in a carnal longing.

When we were done eating, Dad plunked down his cus-

tomary 50 cent tip and while he was paying at the register, Mom, tapping her post-dinner cigarette in the ashtray, would motion Carol over and slip her an extra buck. The Friday night ritual continued through high school, when I finally concluded that the clown mosaic was as tacky as aerosol cheese and that I should run, not walk, from fried foods.

But I've never forgotten the pure joy that Biff's fried shrimp gave me. So after many attempts to re-create this special memory, I found this recipe comes reasonably close. These little beauties aren't deep-fried, but turn out nearly as crisp and delish. No doubt Carol would approve.



Michael in the mid-'60s flanked by his mother (left) and Aunt Mimi.

Biff's "Almost Fried" Shrimp

1 lb large uncooked shrimp, shelled and deveined with tails attached
1 cup flour
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper to taste
3 eggs, lightly beaten
Olive or canola oil
Spiced panko crumbs

Place the flour, eggs and panko crumbs in three separate shallow dishes.

Heat a large heavy saute pan over high heat; add 1/2" of oil. (Shrimp can be cooked in a nonstick pan with a tad of oil if you're really being virtuous.)

Season the shrimp generously with salt and pepper. Dredge them in the flour, shaking off the excess. Dip in the eggs and then panko, and place in the skillet, turning once and cooking until golden brown, 1-2 minutes per side. Remove and drain on paper towels. Toss a little more salt and pepper on them. Serve with your favorite bright-red cocktail sauce.

Spiced Panko Crumbs

4 cups panko (Japanese breadcrumbs)
2 tbs dried thyme
2 tbs dried basil
1 tbs powdered ginger
1 tbs coarsely ground black pepper
1 tbs ancho or regular chili powder

In a medium bowl combine all ingredients and mix well. Use or store in the refrigerator for several months.

COOL | stuff



Pretty in Pink

Philanthropy and style rarely complement each other so well, but with KitchenAid's line of powder-pink kitchen appliances, it's a perfect match. Both the coffee mill and stand mixer have vintage good looks, and the reason for the unusual hue is the company's "Cook for the Cure" campaign, which supports the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation while accenting your retro kitchen at the same time. They also offer a modern blender and teakettle to complete the set. The coffee mill retails for \$99.99 and the mixer for \$249.99; available at national retailers or cookfortheure.com.

Stellar Choice

Seen Kate Spade's "Summer Circle" dinnerware for Lennox but wonder about giving the kids Cap'n Crunch out of a \$17 bowl? Macy's has an affordable look-alike to offer: "Next" dinnerware from Cellar. Dishwasher safe and available in green, yellow, blue and orange mix-it-up options, these bowls normally go for \$8 but at press time were on sale for \$3.97. Open stock includes plates, pitchers, carafes, espresso cups and serving pieces, and there's coordinating dotty barware; visit macys.com or the department store near you.



Chill Out

Nothing makes a midcentury kitchen look more authentic than a vintage refrigerator, but reconditioned ones are pricey and come with a periodic trip back to defrost land. Consider the retro look of Big Chill's classic '50s fridge in 10 yummy colors—how cool would a black one be? You can specify right or left handles, or add an icemaker and water dispenser to the 20-cubic-foot top-freezer model. Orion Creamer and Thom Vernon sell these beauties online at bigchillfridge.com and through select stores for \$2,500 plus shipping.



Rubber Room

Mulch may not be sexy, but it's a great way to conserve moisture and discourage weeds in your garden, giving you more time for loafing with friends. GroundScape Landscape, made from recycled tires, eliminates the need for yearly replacement of mulch that's blown away or decayed, and the company guarantees the color for 10 years. They even recommend the non-toxic material for playground surfaces and report that leaf blowers can be used safely to remove debris. Check availability at eastern U.S. home and garden stores or at groundscape.com.

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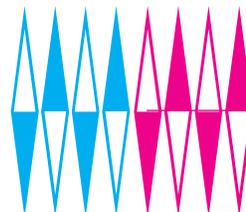


Mondo Dog-o

A cool logo and great-looking dog beds, collars and leads in fabrics that don't make you wince—who could ask for more for their styling canines? Retro Rover was kind enough to send us some fab swag in the form of a dog cushion covered in "Swank" cotton bark-cloth, so we wasted no time in recruiting our own beagle-pointer mix, Bonnie, for a photo session. Carol Hammond and L.K. Gagnon credit a slew of whiskey sours and their own long-standing dissatisfaction with denim and fleece dog accessories with helping launch their company. Retrover.com lists retailers that carry the products as well as a shopping cart for instant gratification.

Curb Appeal

Carmen and Scot Nicholls live in an Eichler neighborhood in San Jose, so it was a natural fit for them to develop reproduction Eichler house numbers for the scores of midcentury homes that were undergoing restoration in the area. Made from white plaster just like Joe's originals, the font is thought to be based on Akzidenz-Grotesk Bold Extended—first released in 1896 for all you typeface hounds. The 2"-high numbers come mounted on black wood tiles and are priced from \$30 to \$60, depending on how many digits are in your address. Their site is eichlernumbers.com.



my 2 cents

So by now maybe you're wondering: just who are these cockeyed optimists

who have cooked up Atomic Ranch? My husband, Jim Brown, our publisher/photographer, is a 25-year veteran of automotive titles and I edit another shelter magazine, but neither career fully prepared us for the immersion we've experienced since launching the magazine. Like other entrepreneurs, it's what we do at night, on the weekends and in our sleep. And maybe like you, midcentury is what we are, both chronologically and by avocation.

Our daughter, Cheyenne Wortham, joined us to handle office support as well as to contribute editorially and keep our paltry egos in check. Past coworkers—Nancy Anderson, our artful art director, and Linda Teixeira, our adept ad manager—took a look at the nugget of our idea—a home magazine for real people who love their midcentury ranch houses—and signed on to help us realize our dream. Other new and old friends are lending their own expertise: Jan Rollins (logo design); Bernice Guevarra (advertising graphics); Vickere Murphy (eagle-eyed proofing); Dave Murillo (web mastering); and Bryan Forward (home design guru). Collectively they have decades of experience creating magazines and homes of distinction. We feel lucky to have their support and talents.



Last year my niece asked, "How do you even know where to start?" It's hard to explain how to invent a magazine from the ground up—and let's face it, most people don't want that much

detail. The amount of decision making in each issue can be daunting, from where to find the next great house to shoot to hitting the right ad/editorial fit to logo colors and whether there's a colon or a comma in the caption on page 25. Luckily, we love what we do.

Your response to the magazine has been the most rewarding part. We've gotten a few cranky notes along the lines of "I don't get what's so great about ranch houses," and one devastating review that made us look for a cliff, but almost everyone else says the same thing: "Thank God! I've been looking for a magazine like this." And our advertisers are taking notice of the huge market that's out there.

Publishing is a bit like opening a restaurant: the failure rate can be sobering. But with your support—telling friends about us, subscribing, patronizing our advertisers and of course sharing your homes with other readers—we hope to be here for many a moon. Thanks for joining us on the journey.

Michelle Gringeri-Brown
Editor

Help make upcoming issues even better—send your submissions to the publishing office address on page 3 or e-mail us at editor@atomic-ranch.com.

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where'd you get that?

the house that jack built pp. 10-16

Furnishings: Palm Springs Modernism Show & Sale held annually in February, dolphinsairs.com Pasadena City College Flea Market, 1579 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, Calif., 8 a.m.–3 p.m. first Sunday of each month Room 107, 174 DeLacey Ave., Pasadena, Calif., 626.432.4867

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Architects: Fung+Blatt, Los Angeles, 323.255.8368, fungandblatt.com Tim Andersen, Seattle, 206.524.8841, tjandersen.com

at home in the ranchos pp. 38-47

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Pitts Home: Kitchen design, Stephen Kennedy, Kitchen Studio Naples, Long Beach, Calif., 562.433.6393;

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yuccas & stucco pp. 54-60

Design: Paula Henson, Terra Bella Landscape Design, 310.398.3878, terrabellandscape.com Paula recommends Furniture and accessories: Allegro Classics, allegroclassics.com Design Within Reach, dwr.com Henry Hall Designs, henryhalldesigns.com Kartell, kartell.it Modern Outdoor, modernoutdoor.com Retro Modern, retromodern.com Velocity Art and Design, velocityartanddesign.com Hardscape: Concrete Connection, concreteconnection.com Decorative Concrete, decorative-concrete.net

Architects and landscape architects: Harry Seidler, canberra.house.com.au/biographies/harryseidler.html Garrett Eckbo, ced.berkeley.edu/cedarchives/profiles/eckbo.htm Robert Royston, postwarportfolio.com Thomas Church, <http://lakewold.org/tchurch.html> Dan Kiley, gardenvisit.com/b/kiley.htm Fletcher Steele, <http://cela2002.esf.edu/research/Steele/Home.htm>

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