

# atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS



WINTER 2007



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### cover

A home in Echo Park, Calif., has been in the same family since it was built in 1950. The master bedroom's birch paneling was refinished and the worn original asphalt tile replaced with ceramic pavers. The bed is by Modernica and the bedside lamp is a 1980s "Pegasus" by artist Peter Shire, who grew up in the house. His "Oh My Gatto" chair sits near the picture window.



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# atomic ranch®

MIDCENTURY MARVELS

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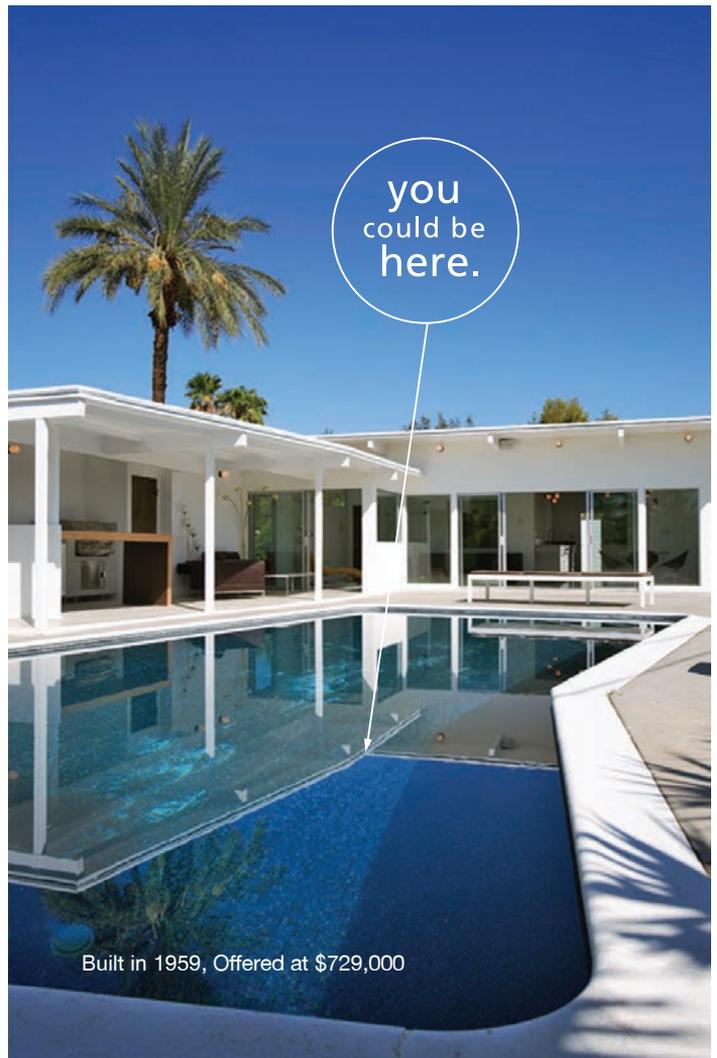
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## meanwhile... back at the ranch



t

he cause is advancing, gains are being made, things are getting better. I refer, of course, to the recognition and appreciation of the '50s, '60s and '70s ranch homes that we all love. We have been advocating in print for just four years, so I hope my opinion doesn't sound too much like a recent convert, but from our perspective there seem to be more "ranch" references in the general media as well as home-centric publications.

While it's probably the best in the vintage homes field, who could have imagined *Old-House Interiors* putting our very title on their cover, excerpting a passage of our book inside and using "atomic ranch" as a bona fide architectural style? We're even profiled in Alaska Airlines' October in-flight magazine, so travelers will also have the chance to learn about ranches.



Patt Brown

"Always the outcast"

Ranches are accumulating scholarship that will benefit us all: Here in Portland, the "G.I. Dream" exhibit currently at the Oregon Historical Society brings real insight and context to the midcentury building boom. It explains the historical underpinnings by highlighting some of the Depression-era programs and legislation that set the stage for postwar expansion. Similarly, the National Trust's brochure, *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past*, can be an important tool for anyone interested in preserving and studying midcentury buildings. It helps give us all a common vocabulary and nationwide perspective on saving the homes and neighborhoods we cherish.

We've always been fortunate to receive good press coverage and I feel it's reminding people that a ranch is a fine home and can be a stylish, praiseworthy way to live. More people now use the term to accurately describe their house and, in turn, more folks on the other side of the conversation will understand what they're talking about. The monetary value of ranches is rising and increased awareness prompts the rediscovery of unsung modernist neighborhoods. Here at AR World Headquarters, readers are constantly informing us of their own cool areas and semi-forgotten, forward-thinking architects and builders. Perhaps the ultimate benefit will be the preservation of these neighborhoods.

The proliferation of our very title is a blessing and a curse; while it may be an easy and catchy way to market a specific house, let's be clear that "Atomic Ranch" is this magazine. At the risk of seeking too much reflected glory, sometimes it feels like people are calling something a Ferrari when it's really a red car.

Very early on we worked a vintage show and throughout the event, which featured several modernist housing developments with great-sounding names, some patrons would walk up to our booth and ask, "Where are the atomic ranches being built?" We've toyed with silk-screening a banner that would read, "It's a Magazine, Damn it"; I guess it's not too late.

*Jim Brown*, Publisher

# modernwisdom



\* Been enjoying reading your magazine for the last year, as we love the ranch style and happily live in a nice mid-'60s model. We went to L.A. last week for vacation and found a shocking advertisement on the freeway near Bakersfield. Below the tagline "History Worth Repeating" was a picture of a classic 1950s ranch house—board-and-batten, dovecote, etc. We drove up for a look and found three model homes and a tract of 62 ranch houses being built in Shafter. They are priced from \$440 to \$480K; thought you might be interested: [saddlebacksouthwesthomes.com/Almond-Grove-01.htm](http://saddlebacksouthwesthomes.com/Almond-Grove-01.htm)

**Heath McClure**

*Online*

\* Just wanted to let you know what a great website you have and how much I enjoy it and the Atomic Ranch book. Being here in Australia, I am in great envy of the midcentury neighborhoods in the USA that we don't have here, and wish so much that I could have an atomic ranch house to look after and preserve. You never know, my dream may one day come true even though they are hard to find and very expensive! I am a collector and fan of midcentury furniture and marvel and drool at all the variety there is in America.

I love looking at your magazine and book and the great ideas and renovation details that are featured. I have found great websites through the book; wish we had such networks here.

I love your work and thank you very much for being so inspirational and fun as well.

**Irene Grosiak**

*Melbourne*

\* My wife and I are fans of the magazine, but we live in Oklahoma and can't really find other folks into the same midcentury styles and tastes as us. With some T-shirts it would sure be a lot easier ... Can you help a fella out?

**Darrell Amos**

*Online*

\* I have just finished phases one and two of the world's longest-in-planning (and smallest-in-budget) kitchen and bathroom remodels. I used local contractors found through angleslist who were just old enough to have worked on the original postwar houses. It was beyond difficult to find contractors who understood simple, minimalist design; simple generally meant Shaker to whomever I spoke with. And I had one hell of a time finding turquoise laminate (short of building the way-back machine, which I lacked the physics to do). Finally I got lucky and found a



commercial vendor that made a turquoise. Next on the long list of reno is replacing the original aluminum windows and upgrading to solid-slab wood doors.

I just threw a wedding shower for a friend and the theme was the "perfect wife" as seen through the

# more wisdom

pages of '50s lifestyle publications. Each guest brought a dish made from a recipe featured in one of the magazines; lime Jell-o was quite the player back then. I used vintage kitchen fabrics and a wealth of cook-books and periodicals from the era for a cool diorama. All the guests had a blast looking at the ad copy and were amazed at the overwhelming array of products that exploded during the postwar boom.

What's really compelling is how much home sizes have changed since the '50s. All the "modern" homes featured in *Good Housekeeping* or *Living for Young Homemakers* were around 1,100 to 1,200 square feet and were considered family homes. I wonder where the road forked to lead us to the 6,000-square-foot McMonstrosities that are now the standard? But hey, I'm sure they feature Energy Star-rated appliances.

I'm looking forward to checking out the AAA club here in Portland and, as always, looking forward to the next edition of *Atomic Ranch*!

**Sandi Vincent**

*Portland, Ore.*

\* I've been searching for landscape designs and dos and don'ts for our MCM yard and atrium. The best resource I have found is a realtor's website: [eichlerforsale.com/Landscaping\\_Eichler\\_Homes](http://eichlerforsale.com/Landscaping_Eichler_Homes). Glad it's there, but would love to see photos of real homes with some of the plant names (for example, what is the name of the plant on the cover of the *Atomic Ranch* book?) and ideas for layouts. I believe any focus on this would be welcome, based on the people I've come across who are also searching, including a discussion in an Amazon.com chat list.

**Tammy Reichley**

*Covina, Calif.*

*Interestingly, one of the home gardens on Realtor Renee Adelman's site was the Costas' yard featured in Fall 2007 "Homework." We have two landscaping articles scheduled for 2008, and we encourage others to send photos of their tasty exterior spaces to [editor@atomic-ranch.com](mailto:editor@atomic-ranch.com). We also tapped Rebecca Chance, a landscaper and new advertiser, to answer Tammy's question in more depth:*

The plant in the cover photo is most likely a *Dracaena*

*marginata*—common name, Dragon Tree. This grows outside only in warmer climes but a *Cordyline* would be a suitable equivalent for cooler zones.

About MCM landscape dos and don'ts—were it so simple! There is a dearth of practical information on the subject partly because, by its nature, modernism was very theoretical. I recommend learning from the originals—Garrett Eckbo, Dan Kiley, James Rose, Thomas Church, Roberto Burle Marx and, for the Asian-inclined, Isamu Noguchi—and trust yourself to interpret their work for your situation and personality.

There is a marvelous out-of-print Eckbo book, *Home Landscape: The Art of Home Landscaping*; otherwise it's vintage *Sunset* magazines for the everyperson interpretation and bits and pieces from the Internet. Remember that MCM landscape is architectural in nature and an extension of indoor spaces. As such, the patterns, shapes and geometries of MCM homes can be referenced in your garden. Employ a few of these tenets: don't be decorative, don't be too complicated; do contrast line, shape, color, form, texture and dark and light; do think of plants sculpturally; mix hardscape and softscape; and be comprehensive—design every surface, edge and detail (but keep it simple). Now you see why most people hire it out!



Jim Jensen

\* The whole town of Greensburg, Kansas, is gone. This was an F-5 twister—very rare—with 205 mph winds sustained one mile wide. I took this picture three days after the storm. Even masonry buildings are gone and new metal buildings were worthless—they ripped loose from their slabs and flew away. This

# even more wisdom

Lustron survived pretty well, but it was dozed and dumped anyway.

**Jim Jensen**

*Wichita, Kansas*

\* Viva Midcentury Modern! I was recently commissioned to create a green birdhouse for a local fundraising competition for the Denver Botanic Garden's Birdhaus Bash. Viola—"Recycled Roost" was born.

Your magazine proved to be a great architectural inspiration for the house. I kept the living space for the bird open and organic, and included a hidden entrance reminiscent of homes from that era. Art also played a big part in the design: The house has four original wall murals and a crown-like sculpture in the entry.

My partner, Kelan, added a couple of comfy pillows for the resident bird fashioned from vintage fabric his grandmother used to make a maternity dress for his mother. We also installed a vintage '70s Barbie record player to hide the hardware necessary to attach the post.

Some of the sustainable materials used were samples of Eco-Resin TM for the windows, non-toxic clay paint



and soy glaze for the interior and exterior of the house. Recycled wood was also used, along with a recycled tin roof made from an old sign. All in all, the house was a hit at the event. Thanks for the inspiration!

**Tracy Weil**

*Denver, Colo.*

\* Flipping through the Spring 2007 issue, I really enjoyed reading about your place ["Portland Meets Denmark: AR's Own Ranch"]. I'm writing to confirm that it is, indeed, a Greta Jalke Danish teak sofa you

have. We have the same sofa here at home with a matching chair.

**Martin McIntosh, Outre Gallery**

*Melbourne, Australia*



\* Just thought I'd give you a preview of the new resource I mentioned in your follow-up article a few months ago on *Little Boxes* [Postscript, Spring 2007]. The "homeowner tips" page at [littleboxesbook.com](http://littleboxesbook.com) offering Westlake homeowners info on how to repair and restore their houses might be useful to others as well.

**Rob Keil**

*Daly City, Calif.*

\* I have a thought about the back issues that I and many others cannot get and have never seen: With all the electronic know-how and technological ability we have today, why can't you make all the issues available to read, print and/or download online, for a per issue or subscription fee? This way new people who discover Atomic Ranch can also go back and read and enjoy the previous issues and there is no reprinting or print setup costs.

I thought of this because if you miss an episode of most TV shows, you can view it online. What do you think?

**Tom Anderson**

*Online*



Write us at [editor@atomic-ranch.com](mailto:editor@atomic-ranch.com) or send a note to Atomic Ranch, Publishing Office, 3125 SE Rex St., Portland, OR 97202. We'll print the good ones.



Some furnishings, like the \$8,000 Ball chair and two Bertoia chairs and ottoman, were bought new at dedece in Sydney about six years ago. The Zanettis call the generic red pedestal chairs "brandy balloons" for their shape. Readers will recognize the Warhol print and the giant one-off eBay clock on the fireplace.

# Atomic. AUSSIE

“Priscilla,” a 1959 Persian Sand Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz, sits in the driveway of Paul Zanetti’s custom-built home. Priscilla is a rare model—the only one in Australia, it seems—last owned by a guy named Guido in Dandenong and now much at home under Paul’s futuristic carport near Mudgeeraba.

A well-known political cartoonist, Paul and his wife, Michelle, love midcentury but “unfortunately in Australia these houses are far and few between,” he says. “We ended up building our own, mostly to accommodate our 20-year collection of period furniture and collectables.”

That was the situation seven years ago when they bought 10 acres on Queensland’s Gold Coast with a killer view encompassing Surfers Paradise to Coolangatta. “Now, minimal architecture is springing up everywhere,” he reports. “It seems to have been rediscovered and it is very suitable to the Australian climate, especially where we live, which is a bit like California meets Miami meets Palm Springs.”

The Zanettis’ midcentury collection, which at one point included 15 vintage Cadillacs that they used for a theme-wedding business, is now seriously edited, better to show off the distinctive architecture of their Fred-Flintstone-channels-Frank-Lloyd-Wright home. For years the couple clipped photos of their favorite houses—Richard Neutra’s Kaufman House, FLW’s Fallingwater, Pierre Koenig’s Case

*text* Bromley Davenport

*photography* Sue Vickers-Leebeek

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Study No. 22, E. Stewart Williams' Palm Springs Sinatra House—and first consulted with Neutra's son, Dion. Logistics between California and Australia proved to be too daunting, so they next turned to a local husband and wife architect team.

"I e-mailed dozens of photos of all the classic houses I admired, and this is what we ended up with," Zanetti says about the design process. "Our house is a combo of those houses and principles. It's basically all glass, stone, timber and steel, with polished concrete floors in the kitchen, dining room, bar and office areas."

You sense that Zanetti has an outsize personality from his exhaustive website and offhand comments like "Michelle wanted a site with views, as per *Arts & Architecture* magazine Case Study No. 22. She then left me alone." But they share a passion for the era, in Michelle's case partially stemming from her antiques dealer parents.

"Once we were married, we kept an eye out for old 1950s wares and furnishings, which we often restored," Paul, 46, says. "The midcentury furnishings are limited here, so a lot of what was in our collection was very kitsch.

"Over the years, as our knowledge and awareness grew, we decided to filter and aim for less stuff, but of a

The views of both the house and Surfers Paradise skyline are awesome. "We were first going to build a replica of the round house from the 'Thunderbirds,' the one the rocket goes through at launch," Paul says. "If it were solely up to me, that's what we would have ended up with, but Michelle had second thoughts, wondering how practical and comfortable living in a round house really would be. Now that would have been Jetson-esque!"



Mark Bean

"Priscilla,"  
a 1959 Persian Sand Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz,  
sits in the driveway  
of Paul Zanetti's custom-built home



The dining set and credenza are by Australian Paul Kafka, who worked on the Rose Seidler House, a famous modernist home in Wahroonga. Note the use of breeze-catching louver windows.



higher quality. When we designed our house, we built it to live as they did in 1950s and '60s Hollywood, like stepping into a time zone. There is no such place in Australia, so we decided to create one."

Said place is big: downstairs comprises a lounge (40 x 36), dining room (20 x 18), kitchen (16 x 10) and library/office (28 x 17). Upstairs is roughly 1,150 more, with a master bedroom and en-suite bath, two bedrooms for the couple's son and daughter, and a shared child's bath. A 460-square-foot guest cabin is mentioned for the future, and in recent months the Zanettis have brought additional color upstairs, including vintage 3D wallpaper in the kids' rooms. There's also a '60s Playboy bar planned

Two rare birds: Paul believes his yellow Svend Skipper armchair is a riff on a Hans Wegner Papa Bear chair. It came from a Sydney mid-century dealer and cost around \$6,000 in 2001. The floor lamp is one of only 50 made for Qantas airline lounges. "I have only seen two or three others, which were not in as good condition as ours," he says. "They were made with two different bases: a circle or the rarer star, like ours. I saw a magazine article recently featuring one priced at close to \$5,000; we bought ours about 12 years ago for around \$2,500. It's so space age/jet set, which is why we love it, and it has the 'jet set' history to boot!"





This spread, clockwise from above: The couple's bedroom has an en suite bath and an LC4 Chaise Lounge by Le Corbusier, Jeanneret and Perriand. An AMI Continental jukebox down in the home office. The kitchen has pale green lacquer cabinetry and mosaic tile back-splashes. Two views of the expansive lounge and its wraparound views.

for a niche in the immense downstairs lounge.

Vintage is their passion and the sole reissues are their Aarnio Ball chair and the Bertoia Bird chairs and ottoman; there is only one early ball chair in Australia and very few Bertoias, Paul says. "I looked at a couple of Bertoia originals at auctions, and they were so fragile from age, with worn and cracking rubber bushings and very worn fabric. I decided to go for licensed new ones, as we felt we wanted to actually use them over our lifetime, and not just look at them in fear they might break.

"We had been buying from one particular esoteric dealer here in Australia, Ken Neal, who has a tiny shop down a side street," Paul continues. "One day we were looking for a dining table and Ken showed us a photo album with the table we now have in our dining room.

"He then took us to his warehouse, which is the size of an airport hanger, and it was filled with classic mid-century furniture, mostly unrestored, which is okay by us. It was all piled on top of one another and you literally had to climb on pieces to get around. It was an Aladdin's cave of chairs, tables, phones, radios, record players—you name it.

"Many were amazing one-offs that were custom-made for wealthy clients in Sydney's eastern suburbs in the



There are views everywhere you turn in this house, from the entryway off the carport to the stacked massing of the rear facade.



An original '60s boomerang-shaped bar bought at auction was restored and tikified for poolside use during Queensland's numerous hot, lazy days.





1950s and '60s. We had known and bought from Ken for 10 years, and this is the first time he had even allowed us to see his private trove of furniture.”

That is where the Zanettis viewed the original Ball chair, as well as rare vintage Bertoiias and dozens of Australian Featherstons. But not all of their furnishings have notable pedigrees, as many of their pieces were found buried in the back of second-hand shops over the years. “We have friends with similar interests, so [that] gives us an unrealistic view of the interest in midcentury design, architecture and furniture. But it is growing,” he says.

Although new construction and remodels are typically marriage testers, Paul says their challenges were with the architects and the builder. Getting his home produced as envisioned took lots of money, lawyers and time—nearly four years from concept to move-in.

“When we bought the land, friends of ours who had built from scratch warned us about what we were getting ourselves into, having clashed with architects and builders [themselves]. But we had a vision, so we had no choice but to proceed.

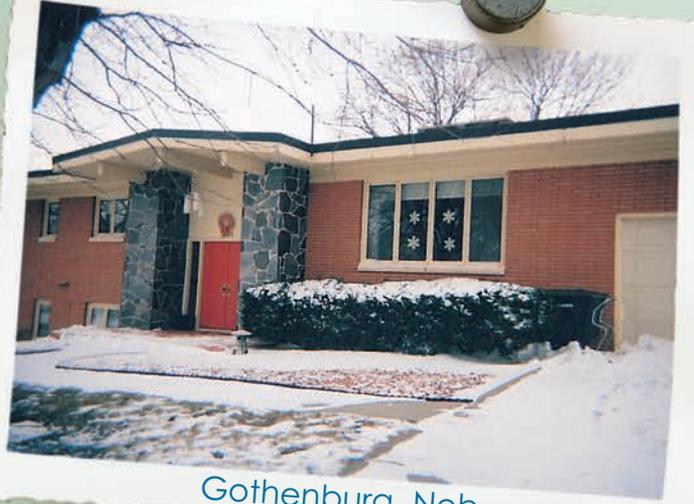
“It was a lot of planning, sweat and stress,” he recalls. “Michelle, who was pregnant with our boy, Dylan, shared the vision and didn't flinch for a second during the down-sides. We both just went with the flow and dealt with the challenges one day at a time. It's true that you really appreciate something more if you have to work hard for it, and invest a lot of yourself, which we did. Would we do it all again? In a heartbeat!” 🌂

Mark Bean photograph courtesy *Unique Cars*.

Resources page 99



Wilmington, Del.



Gothenburg, Neb.



Dallas, Texas





# home page

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## Wilmington, Del.

This is a very unusual house for Wilmington, where the ideal is a Colonial—an artifact of our history and the DuPont influence, I guess. The house sits on two acres—also unusual—and is sited so that you walk down steps to get to the front yard. Built in the 1950s with an addition in the '80s, we have done extensive remodeling since we bought it three years ago. The front entry path, including the garden and the water feature, is entirely new and we just finished redoing the kitchen as well.

**Susan Parker & Saul Hoffman**

## Gothenburg, Neb.

After living most of my life in California, in 2005 we moved to Nebraska and found this wonderful midcentury marvel. Built in 1965 from cement block, it has vaulted ceilings, a built-in toaster and Nutone mixer/blender; the deal-clincher was the indoor pool. When it's snowing outside I can feel like I am back in sunny California.

**Judy Stubbs**

## Dallas, Texas

Our 1963 midcentury modern is located in the Lake Highlands area of Dallas. The exterior features clerestory windows, a low-pitched roof, stone accents, three private patios and a cantilevered facade. Inside are vaulted and beamed ceilings, brick walls, an original freestanding fireplace, a built-in planter box and two original bathrooms. We have filled the house with vintage furniture, artwork and accessories that we have collected for the past four years. Future projects include landscaping and replacement of the ceramic floors. We love the house and area and plan to stay for some time to come.

**Gregg Lovell & Eric Bivins**

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 9.

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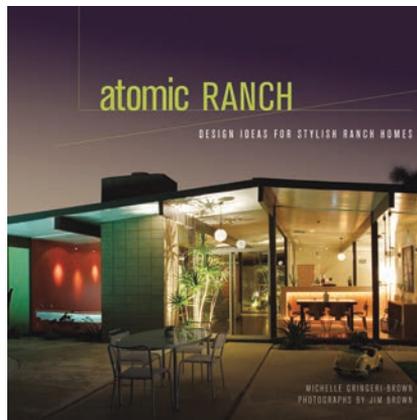
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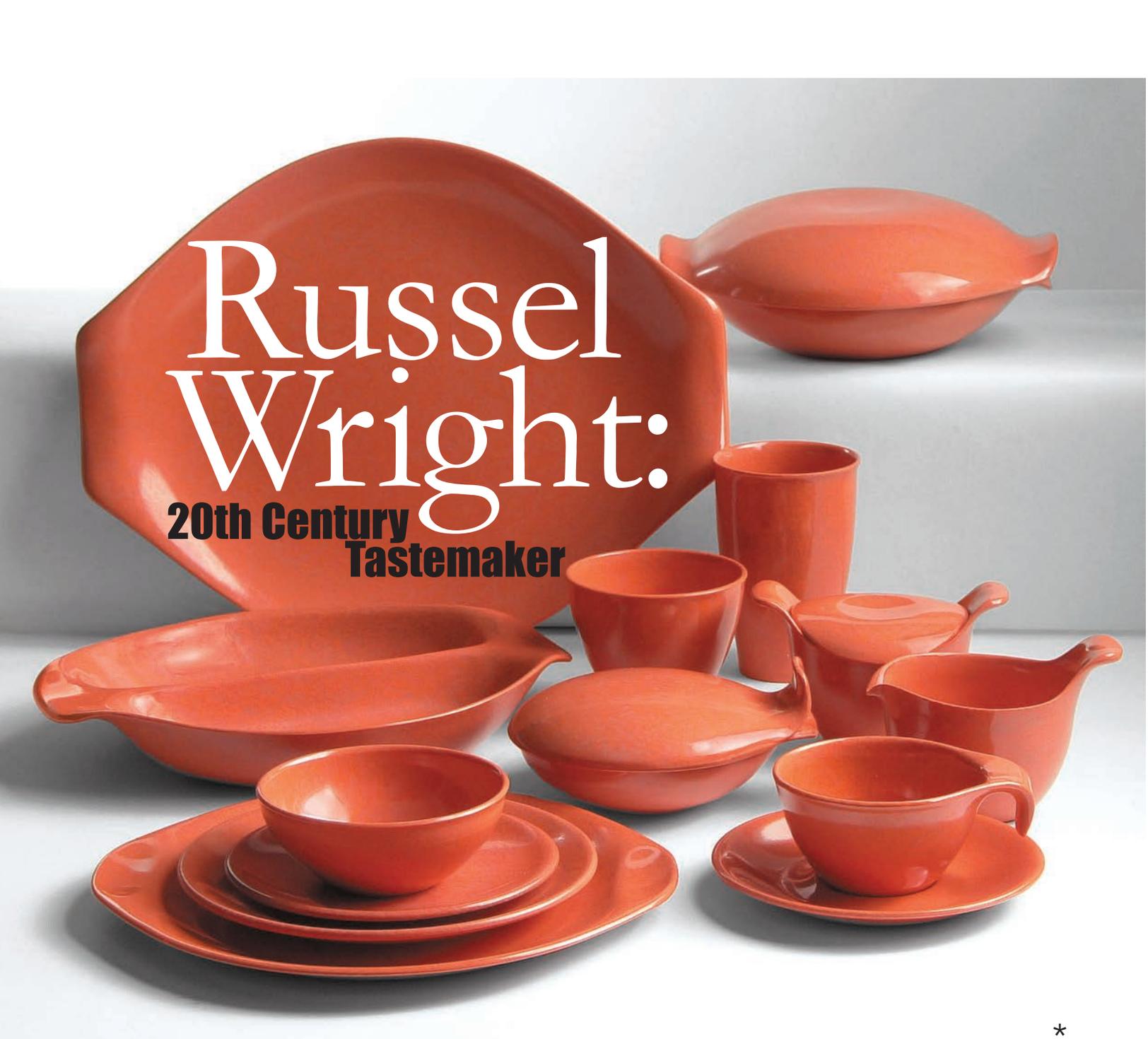


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# Russel Wright:

**20th Century  
Tastemaker**

Decades before Martha Stewart  
recruited us to her tasteful lifestyle,  
Russel and Mary Wright sought to bring  
modern living to everyman.

*text* Michelle Gringeri-Brown

---

\*

If you know Russel Wright's name, it's probably from American Modern, the most popular and successful dinnerware ever produced. A quarter of a billion pieces were sold between 1939 and 1958. New shipments caused block-long crowds of housewives to descend on department stores, and Wright dueled Emily Post in the pages of the *New Yorker* over the size of the handle on the cup, which was criticized as too small for the average man.

But the industrial designer produced much more than American Modern. His other dish lines included melamine Residential and Flair, as well as Casual, Theme, White Clover and Highlight ceramics. Then there were his spun aluminum wares (1930s), Oceana wood serving pieces, flatware, American Modern furniture (1935), Bauer art pottery, textiles, Easier Living furniture (1950), glassware and small appliances. He and his artist wife, Mary, worked as a team marketing his designs, his name and ultimately the lifestyle they both espoused in *Guide to Easier Living*, a how-to book published in 1950.

The Wrights gave readers advice on any aspect of homemaking you can image, from the floor plan—"an all-in-one-room permitting the easiest servantless living and the best kind of family life"—to a housekeeping schedule for a two-income family that included husbandly assignments such as vacuuming, table setting, cooking and defrosting the refrigerator. Charming line drawings illustrated the modern environments the Wrights promoted, from a Richard Neutra bedroom to the perfect closet for a man.

Residential, Russel Wright's line of plastic dinnerware, won a MoMA design award in 1953 before becoming the best-selling U.S. dinnerware in 1957. Wright in an early publicity photo.



## Dramatic Background

When they had been married for more than 20 years, the couple adopted a daughter, Ann, who was born the year *Guide to Easier Living* came out. Mary died two years later, so Annie Wright's impressions of her mother are fueled by the stories she's heard and the work Mary left behind.

"I think the book came from living in New York in cramped apartments," Annie says by phone from Garrison, N.Y., where she runs a catering company. "They had to be as efficient as possible in terms of storage and, because they were both into the aesthetic and how things looked, they didn't want clutter around.

"Russel was rather a homebody; things were pretty much oriented around the home. They went to parties together, and I'm always told Mary would be the one who would break the ice—she'd remember the children's names, be chatty and perky. It would take him a

Clockwise from upper left: Wright's 1930s spun aluminum line included a double boiler, sherry pitcher, bun warmer, canapé tray, flowerpot and more. American Modern pieces ready to go at the Steubenville Pottery in Ohio. Seen here in seafoam green, American Modern became the most popular china pattern ever sold after its introduction in 1939.



while to warm up. If he had his preference, he'd be at home rattling around, fixing things, experimenting."

The couple ran with a theatre crowd when Mary was alive, Annie says. They'd met in Woodstock, N.Y., where Mary was studying sculpture under Alexander Archipenko, and were involved with the Provincetown Playhouse where they were friendly with Thornton Wilder and Betti Davis.

"Like all of us, sometimes you rebel against your background," Annie comments. "Mary and Russel both came from very educated, wealthy families and they were like, 'No, we don't want any of that; we're hanging out with the true artists of the world because we're artists. We're never going to have children; we're not going to have servants; we're not going to have fingerbowls; we're not going to have lace.' But, at the same time, they really liked to live a pretty sophisticated lifestyle."



\*

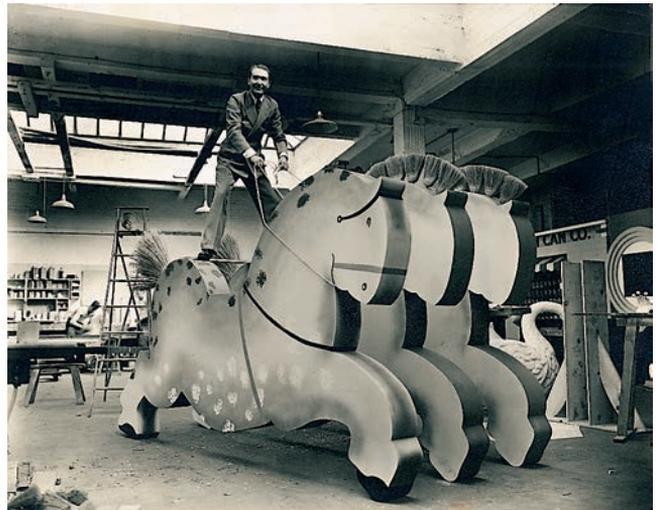
From top: Wright designed textiles as well, including carpets, upholstery fabrics, placemats, drapery and these plaid tablecloths that date to 1950. An advertising shot trumpeting the commercial use of Wright dinnerware. The American Modern brand included furnishings like this 1935 maple bedroom set.



\*



From top: This shot of the Residential line promotes Wright's buffet-service approach to dinnertime. The glass and flatware is also his design, while the wrought iron furniture is by Paul McCobb. The accompanying 1953 press release touts the melamine dinnerware's four colors and the starter-set price of \$15.95. An overhead view of the family apartment in 1949 shows a pair of his Pony chairs, now in the permanent collections of Cooper-Hewitt and MoMA. Mary and Russel Wright's NYC penthouse apartment circa 1933 with a curved wall of built-in storage.



From top: Russel Wright (in hat) circa 1910. Riding high: Wright behind the scenes at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

When Mary died, Russel was understandably devastated. "His fellow workers at the office said he was so depressed that they were worried about him," Annie recounts. "They wondered if they could do something to perk him up. He said, 'Well ... I think I'd like to meet Frank Lloyd Wright.' They called up Frank Lloyd Wright and explained [the circumstances], asking, 'Have you ever heard of Russel Wright?' FLW said, 'No ... well, *maybe* I have.'

"Russel went out to Taliesin East for three days and stayed with Wright. He had a good time; they connected in an intellectual way but not in a friendly way. During the day Russel would wander around and look at what was going on with the students there. At night he would have dinner with Wright. Later, when Dragon Rock was built, we had two toilet paper holders that are designed by FLW."

# Russel Wright Today

Annie Wright and Patrick Dickson, an artisan furniture maker in Los Angeles, have partnered to form Russel Wright Studios. You can buy faithful reissues of Wright's Pony chair and blond American Modern furniture, or spun metal vases, planters and tumblers from metal artist Rick Kline at their site, russelwrightstudios.com. There are big plans for the future, too: they want to nurture the Easier Living Collection into a full-blown lifestyle brand.

"We're hoping to see a good representative product mix of some of Russel's more recognizable pieces in a mid-level consumer market like Macy's or JC Penney," Dickson says. "We're talking about reissuing Wright-designed Bauer art pottery and, with the popularity of outdoor kitchens, we're thinking of coming out with a line of quality plastic dinnerware. We hope to see textiles—towels, rugs, drapes, tablecloths, napkins—as well as the furniture and ceramics."

Dickson brings a pragmatic approach to the project of developing the furniture prototypes. "Some of the American Modern furniture was made for apartments and smaller houses. The scale is a little small, so we're going to try to proportion that up to today's tastes. If someone wants to modify a china cabinet for an entertainment center or a plasma TV, as long as the essential externals look the same, we're OK with that. Some of Russel's designs are a little more retro, but others really still look fresh and modern today."

Resources page 99



Jim Brown

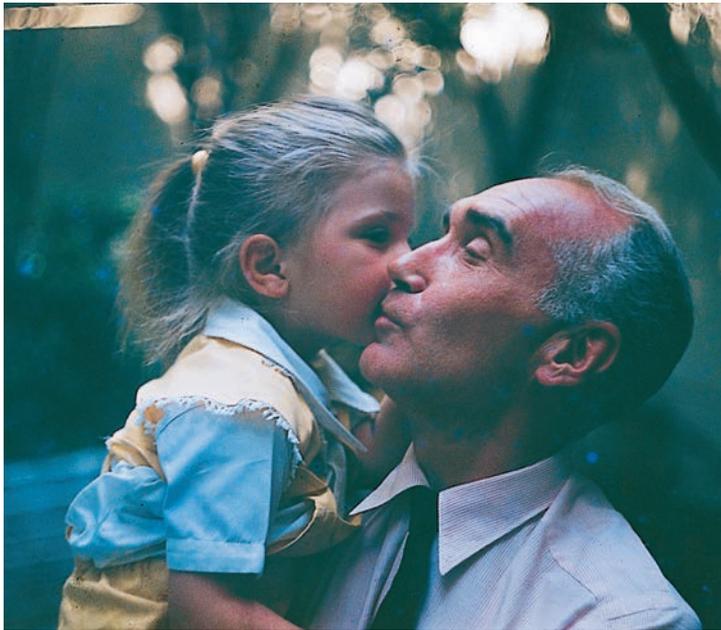


Ken Batzer Photography



**JUNIOR DINING GROUP**  
 No. 3015: EXTENSION TABLE. 10-inch Leaf folds into center. Open 52 x 30. Closed 42 x 30.  
 No. 3016: SIDE CHAIR. Upholstered Seat. Height 30 1/2. Seat 16 x 16.  
 No. 3017: BUFFET. Height 36. Top 42 x 18. Sold with or without BUFFET TOP. Height 28. Top 42 x 11.

Russel Wright Studios is marketing authentic reissues of American Modern furniture, including the buffet seen in the original catalog, as well as spun aluminum vases, flowerpots and cups.



**Designers can get a  
bad rap as control freaks;  
“Oh, he was!”  
Annie exclaims.**

## Annie & Russel

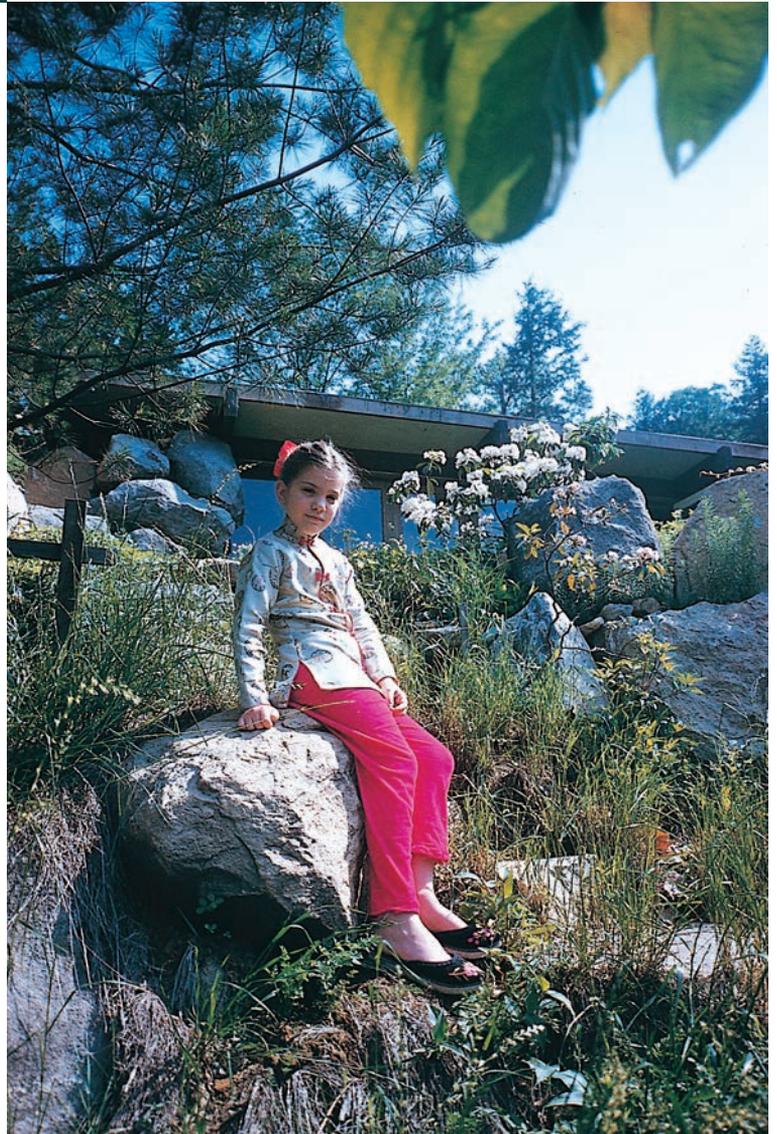
Surely Russel Wright never envisioned raising a child on his own. Although there was a nanny, juggling the duties of designer, father and head of house caused him to turn to the highly detailed approach he'd promoted in *Guide to Easier Living*.

“As a single parent, he had to be very organized,” Annie says. “That’s how the *Menu Cookbook* was designed. He actually took a week or 10 days off work and put together the menus. It was a coordinated thing: you just went to recipe number 25, and not only did it tell you how to cook everything, it told you exactly what to serve it on if you were in New York or in Garrison.”

After a few years, there were nearly 100 annotated menus in a loose-leaf notebook. “He was a good cook, but it took him all day. We would alternate: one would cook and the other would clean up. And women would always be sending him recipes,” she remembers. “One of his best friends was Margaret Spader; she was a home economist and a very good cook. They were very similar in the way that they were both so organized.”

Annie’s career in food has included adapting that notebook into *Russel Wright’s Menu Cookbook*, coauthored with Mindy Heiferling. With a foreword by Martha Stewart, the project gave Annie a chance to contrast the current lifestyle queen with the Wright family model. “I think comparing the two is fair, although Martha has taken it leaps beyond what he did,” she says thoughtfully.

“We were on her show three times because of the cookbook. She’s very professional and very hard working and very smart, too. I think Martha has taken what Mary and Russel were trying to do and gone in really another direction. After taping three segments, I was literally brain dead.





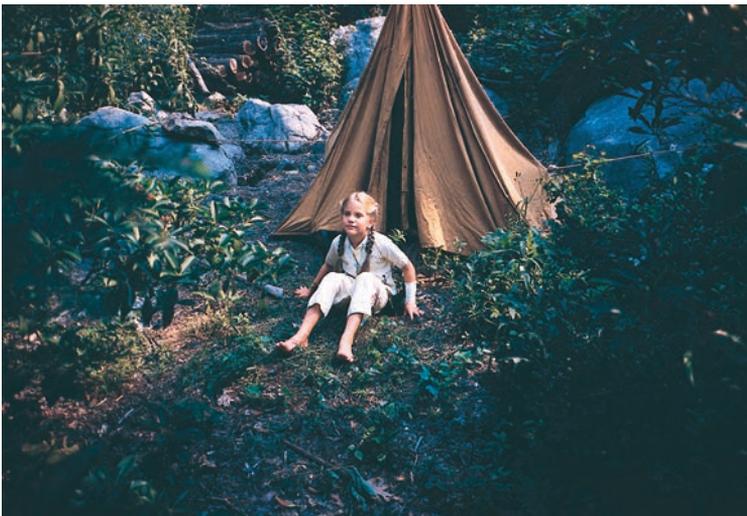
She taped nine in a row. I can't imagine Russel doing that. I know every time he went on television, he was panic-stricken. He and Irving Richards [Russel's business partner] told stories about getting a scotch at 7:30 in the morning when they were so terrified of being on the 'Today Show.' ”

Designers can get a bad rap as control freaks; was Russel that way, perchance? “Oh, he was!” Annie exclaims. “Everything was labeled. The drawers in the kitchen were labeled—salad forks, dinner forks, soup-spoons, teaspoons—everything had its place. We had seven different sets of dinnerware when we moved up to Garrison and consolidated the houses. Everything had its reason, so later on I couldn't figure out how you could possibly live with less than six sets.

“In the winter it would be brown Iroquois, but then the blue Iroquois with the white violets—that had to be for breakfast in the summer. It sounds really crazy now,” she continues, with some amusement. “And Snow Glass was very important: you had to put salads and ice cream on Snow Glass; you couldn't put that on anything else. Then you had American Modern and then of course you had all of the plastic! What if you were going to sit outside? You had to have Flair for the day, but you had to have the black Residential for night.

“He'd give me little color lectures: 'We're using chutney brown tonight because this particular salad looks best on chutney brown.' I'd listen for 20 minutes about color and that slowly grew on me. We never had a ketchup bottle on the table and when they would at a friend's house, I'd be shocked. Why were they doing something so gauche?

“I rebelled against that, but at the same time I have a sense of needing to be organized,” Annie concedes. “I clean up my house completely before I start a project, much like Russel did. Because our minds are so all over the place, we need order and structure around us. I think that's the way he was.”



Annie and her father shared a special bond, whether taking a carriage ride through Central Park or building Dragon Rock. Top, the Wrights with Diana Boyce Young, their housekeeper and friend. “She and RW were like two peas in a pod,” Annie says. “Diana was a very hard worker, making pillows, slipcovers and whatever else was needed in order to create the interior of Dragon Rock. She helped considerably with the innovative materials used in the house, like when she and I pushed the hemlock and pine needles into the green epoxy that was applied to the living room and studio. Russel often said that she was the only person who fully understood Dragon Rock and Manitoga. He actually telephoned her when he was dying in order to tell her this.”



Family photos courtesy Annie Wright



## Manitoga

Nowhere was structure more apparent than in the weekend house Russel built on the grounds of an old quarry in Garrison, just over an hour from midtown. Mary and Russel bought the property in 1942 and named it Manitoga, “Place of the Great Spirit” in the Algonquin language. Russel began coaxing a naturalist woodland garden out of its mined and logged acreage years before the house—christened Dragon Rock from a childhood comment Annie made about the site—began to take shape in 1957.

“The house is built into the side of a cliff; the idea was you wouldn’t even be able to see the house when you’re on the other side of the quarry pond. A lot of times people come to Dragon Rock and say, ‘Oh, this reminds me of a Frank Lloyd Wright house.’ I think Russel would have been terribly insulted by that,” Annie comments. “When I think of FLW houses, I think of them as sitting on top of

the land, not as integrated into the site. If you take a second look it doesn’t look at all [like FLW’s work].”

On weekends father and daughter lived in a small house about a thousand yards away during Dragon Rock’s construction. After a fire made the bungalow unlivable, Russel and Annie moved into Dragon Rock before it was finished. “We lived in the studio, which turned out later to be Russel’s place to hide. We lived there one winter without running water or electricity,” she says with affection. “The house was budgeted to cost \$75,000; when it reached \$150,000 we were broke. He just said, ‘Oh well. I guess we’re going to have to do these projects ourselves.’”

The house and adjacent studio are compact and highly personal: massive boulders and stone steps erase the distinction between interior and exterior; a cedar trunk holds up the main roof; door knobs are made from



**“I have been pleased  
to overhear some visitors to the new house  
say that they wouldn’t live in the house  
even if they  
were paid to do so.”**

**—Russel Wright on the singular pleasures of Dragon Rock**



Left: The dining room in the corner of the home has an adjoining hidden terrace glimpsed to the left of the tree trunk. The trellis-covered loggia connects the two-bedroom house to Wright’s studio, which has another bedroom and bath. Above: It’s hard to see Dragon Rock for the trees—just what the designer envisioned.



objects found at Manitoga—rocks, rusty tools; and hemlock needles, butterflies and dried leaves are pressed into the walls and decorative panels. Somewhat incongruously, Annie's bedroom, with its Victorian furniture, cuckoo clocks and braided rug, was a departure from the clean-line built-ins and modernist furnishings elsewhere in the house. "My room was my room, but it was his house," she says.

Russel kept an apartment in a brownstone he owned in NYC until the mid- to late-'60s. As he grew less enamored of city life and Annie went away to boarding school, he gradually was at Manitoga more and more. After his death in 1976, both the brownstone and Manitoga were



Manitoga photos copyright wingphotovideo.com



Opposite, clockwise from top: Wright's compact studio with a wrap-around view of nature. Annie's bath is tiled in blue Murano glass and the sliding door has 100 butterflies preserved in its plastic panels. From the living room with its rock-hugging built-ins, you descend a boulder stairway down to the dining room level (near left this page). From top: The green roof on the house and studio proved challenging in the long term. One of the doorknobs constructed from site-found materials.

endowed to the Nature Conservancy. Annie lived there full-time after college, and today Dragon Rock and its 80 acres are open to the public for tours.

As wonderful as the home and studio are, for Russel, the natural world trumped it all. "When you're an artist and you're finished with a project, you move on to the next project. In this case, that was the trails through the 80 acres of Manitoga," Annie explains. "For Russel, I think he thought of the house as the sexy part of the equation, but his love was for the outside. If he could get people to come see the house, after five minutes he'd say, 'Oh, but now do you want to go out to see the laurel blooming?' "

Buy *Guide to Easier Living* at [atomic-ranch.com](http://atomic-ranch.com); see page 60.



# ARTISTS in Residence

**The Shire clan is a damn creative bunch:**

matriarch Barbara launched the Soap Plant, a store similar to The Body Shop, on Sunset in the early '70s. Son Billy expanded it into Wacko/Soap Plant in the late '70s and moved it to Melrose. Ten years later he opened La Luz de Jesus Gallery and then Billy Shire Fine Arts. Henry Shire, Barbara's late husband, was a carpenter/contractor with an illustration degree from Pratt. And eldest son Peter is a ceramicist, sculptor and one of only two Americans involved with Memphis in the '80s (the other being Michael Graves). From this illustrious stew of iconoclasts a distinctive family house was crafted—both in 1950 when it was built and today, after a “refreshing” by Peter and Billy.

*text* Michelle Gringeri-Brown

*photography* Jim Brown





### That was then

On a hillside lot in Echo Park near downtown Los Angeles, Henry Shire drew up the building plans and personally constructed the 1,400-square-foot home. Perched on a hilly lot, there is little save the carport to be seen by passing motorists. Designed by architect Josef van der Kar, with landscaping by Garrett Eckbo, the house was home to the couple's creative and political friends.

"Joe van der Kar was a modest guy," says Peter Shire. "He and my parents were in the club that included Gregory Ain and other political radicals. They were full of the optimism of the 1930s when people were going for political change; politics was their touchstone."

Peter remembers many communist meetings at the house. "They were card-carrying members—the real deal.

Dad's was a carpenters' group, and Mom's was a neighborhood group. My friends' mothers and fathers would come over every other month and give reports on world events and analyze them in Marxist terms—it was almost like a reading club," he says. He also remembers his dad watching the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings on TV for hours while he sketched the participants.

"When my parents were young, everyone in their circle talked about why they were involved in politics and progressive philosophies. It was about a better standard of living for everybody. They didn't say a better 'lifestyle,' " Peter continues. "Part of the Marxist deal was to not be materialistic and Mother believed in buying one good suit. It's the idea of, instead of having three lawn sets from



Previous spread; Peter (in red striped shirt) and Billy Shire in front of their childhood home. The original trellises shading the front entry were wood and, with one 12' span of replacement redwood costing \$500, a new solution was needed. Peter's design, loosely based on a Garrett Eckbo aluminum project and sanctioned by architect Josef van der Kar, is straight off the original plan but with the addition of risers and baffles powder coated in his dad's original colors.

In the open-plan dining room, two Eames chairs cobbled together from nine family heirlooms in various states of disrepair are paired with four Gio Ponti Superleggera chairs that "vibrate when you sit in them, they're so fine," says Peter Shire. The photo is of his parents, caught at the moment they met by an FBI operative posing as a restaurant photographer. Right: Three Seggiolino Del Soraz chairs by Peter.





This spread, from above: The extensive original built-in bookcases hold gems from Billy Shire's collections—robots, Shag memorabilia, mint-in-box toys—and ceramics and sculptures by Peter.

Walls of glass look out on various parts of the secluded yard and patio.

The curved staircase off the carport leads to the back door—the one all the Shires' friends traditionally used—and has the only area with a view. The renovation restored the sheen to the siding and brought back punchy color to the trim and details.





“Everybody  
else’s house  
was  
weird,”

Billy Shire offers.



IKEA, having one lawn set from Knoll.”

The Shire house was equally progressive, with a radiant floor in its three bedrooms and two baths. “Dad had a keen sense of entry, so there is a formal foyer that’s as big as both closet-size baths combined,” Peter says. The living room leads to a bedroom with a four-foot sliding door; accordion doors divided the other two bedrooms off the kitchen. He remembers a mishmash of furnishings: Eames dining chairs; a custom sofa that was designed a little too high coupled with a low, low coffee table; inherited post-Colonial upholstered chairs; and furniture and various built-ins homemade by his dad.

As the baby, Billy’s room was off the kitchen so their stay-at-home mom could keep an eye on him. “There was a sandbox in the front patio that you could look out on from the kitchen, and a paneled wall between the front yards devised to keep us kids in the yard while my mom cooked,” Peter recalls. “That lasted about a month; as soon as we could walk and figure out how to open the gate we were out on the street playing.”



His impression of the original Eckbo landscaping was of a diagonal grid of hardscape squares, and plantings of avocado and guava trees and a hedge of natal plum. The flat portions of the lot were divided into three areas: an informal yard off the kitchen entry fenced off with a Japanese-style partition of fiberglass panels; a built-in barbecue and incinerator off the dining room; and a private back yard adjacent to the living room and bedrooms.

"Everybody else's house was weird," Billy Shire offers. "We were kind of steeped in the aesthetic, so to speak. The first thing I wanted to be was an architect instead of a fireman. Even though my father was fairly working class, we had art all around. One of my favorite playthings as a child was the little blocks he'd cut up from cast-off wood. They were basic geometric shapes and I'd make sculptures and sculptural buildings. You can see that in my brother's work; it's really architectural."

### **Minting creativity**

It seems that their parents' creativity rubbed off more than their politics did, and there was no question that both

The kitchen cabinets are original, while Hank Shire put in the laminate counters in the '60s. Since the refrigerator space was built to accommodate a vintage-size model and a new one would have stuck out too far, Peter painted the existing white Hotpoint with two-part polyurethane, as he did the stove and dishwasher handles.

Opposite; A built-in vanity shelf in the bedroom holds a steel, aluminum, anodized aluminum and enamel vase prototype for *Art & Architecture* magazine made in 1986. The 2007 miniature model of Peter's Bel Air Chair for Memphis is christened the Bellaire Chair.



sons would work in the right-brain world. In addition to curating his two galleries, Billy produces graphic work that he terms influenced by constructivism.

"I don't know how I got into low-brow," he says about his catholic taste in visual media. "I am incredibly enamored of religious art; a lot of the foundations of art come from religious art. And I loved Memphis; it was more about taking design and decorative art and marrying it to functionality. At the time it was a breath of fresh air; it had a real sense of humor and was fighting off the sterility of industrial design."

The Memphis Movement Billy mentions was born in Milan in 1981, led by Ettore Stottsass. Radical and committed to bringing a less serious and pretentious approach to design, Peter Shire got involved through a quirk of fate.

"I was only really doing ceramics at that time," he remembers. "Around 1977, there was an article in *Wet*, the magazine of 'gourmet bathing'—it was just as wacky as it sounds. All of the Italians were looking at a copy and saw a pair of my teapots that were kind of square with domes. Aldo Cibic and Matteo Thun dreamt up an article on California art and showed up. Matteo, who was very dramatic, leaned over and said, 'You must come to Italy. This is your moment.'"

Peter thought about it for two weeks—they hadn't offered a ticket and he was still scraping by as an artist—then got on a plane. "United Airlines' in-flight magazine had two





Top: Just off the kitchen is a Bon Air chair by Peter that is traveling the U.S. for two years in the Craft in America exhibition. It is a further exploration of his 1981 Bel Air chair for Memphis, seen near the Shag originals (Billy discovered Shag, Peter says). The lamp is also a Memphis piece, Cahuenga, made in 1983. The white-backed chair is a steel and enamel Budlong Tuck 'n' Roll of recent vintage.

Opposite, clockwise from upper left: Scary Girl, designed by Nathan Jurevicius. Tiki figures by Peter for Billy's shop, Soap Plant/Wacko. A self portrait by Henry Shire and Peter's ceramic Mexican Bauhaus teapot series. An Anchorage teapot in silver designed for Memphis in 1982.

pages of [Studio] Alchimia stuff being shown in New York. I just flipped—that was it! When you're an artist, it's all about looking for your vision and that vision has to congeal.

"I met all of the Alchimia guys in Milan, but Alchimia was too whacked out—they were too Italian. I can tell stories for days about how disorganized and funny and fantastic they were. I went home, then Ettore called and said, 'You know, we broke away from Alchimia. We're going to start our own group; do you want to do something?' I said, 'Let me think about it; OK!' "

Peter's Memphis pieces included the Laurel lamp, Brazil table, Bel Air chair, Peninsula table, Big Sur couch and silver Anchorage teapot. The pieces on display in the house for this shoot—teapots, chair-like forms and other sculptures, kitchenwares—give an overview of his aesthetic.



"I'm interested in what people feel when they look at the work," he says. "We're Spock babies—not Mr. but Dr.—and one of the biggest concerns was whether we were happy [growing up]. I'm keen on people feeling keen when they look at the work." His bowls and teapots and cups are sold from his Echo Park Pottery studio once a year.

### **This is now**

In 2005, when Barbara, now 93, moved in with Peter and his wife, Donna, the house was ready to be refurbished. Although much loved, there were things Peter wanted to fix and surfaces needed refreshing.

"There were two funny glitches: Dad had an extreme idea of privacy so the front is virtually all a wall; there's a view across the canyon that wasn't valued at all," he says ruefully. Another thing was the stairs to the formal entry had almost equal weight with the steps to the kitchen door where friends always arrived. And par for the decade, the lights and plugs were minimal, and there was no space for a dryer. Peter also thought the living room needed some pep.

"Dad and Joe spent hours going over the Munsell color wheel," he remembers. "The original kitchen was

pea green, salmon pink and two shades of gray with some yellow details. My room was hot pink, Billy's, bright blue. The other few painted surfaces ran into the chartreuses and pinks.

"But Mom was very Berkeley. When it came to be her turn to paint it, she darkened it up and went for more formal hues. My dad was pretty whacked out but was subject to my mom's taste. [This time,] I just had to make everything high majors."

Billy and Peter Shire tracked van de Kar down at his home 18 months before the architect died. "Joe's house had bright colors in the bookcase, and when I showed him what I was thinking of for our house, he encouraged us to make the new colors even brighter," Peter explains. Also, the wood trellis was rotting after 50 years, so they showed him a proposal for doing an aluminum trellis. "He gave me his blessing for the new trellis. My brother and I had several beautiful afternoons with him in his home in Zuma Beach; he was 95 at the time."

After addressing the mundane—a new furnace—and the sublime—the new powder-coated trellis—the house and edited garden were ready for new tenants. Rented



Perched **on a**  
**hilly lot,**  
there is little  
save the carport  
**to be seen**  
by passing  
motorists

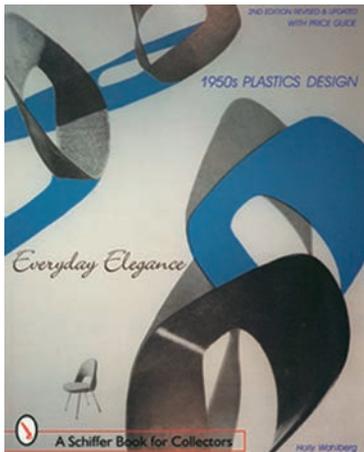
out to a young couple working in the film industry, all of a sudden the house is alive again.

"The whole house was a piece. I see it the way I see making a sculpture," Peter says. "We were continually impressed that it doesn't really provide for nostalgia or sentimentality or even a gathering of humanistic souvenirs. In the classic Shulman photo, the guy is at the stereo, the girl is sitting in her formal sheath dress on the very tailored single-pad sofa and, out the window is the Austin Healey in the carport. Where were the pictures of grandma or the kids? Where are the kids' handprints?"

"Growing up in Echo Park we got so many different influences, particularly from Mexican-American kids," Billy adds. "My three best friends in elementary school were Chinese, Japanese and Filipino. We got a little from all of those cultures. I have been doing my store for 35 years; it's a pop culture emporium but it goes beyond that into ethnographic cultures. This house is Hank's woodpile and we're a visual clan." 🍷

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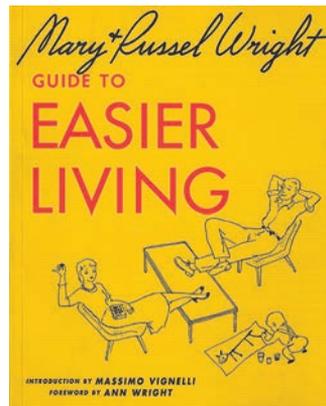
# atomicbooks



**1950s Plastics Design**  
by Holly Wahlberg

*closeout!*

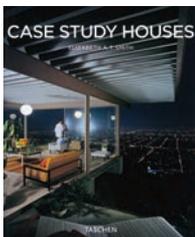
A dull title for an interesting book: More than a guide to collecting melamine dinnerware, the myriad household uses for plastic make for an interesting look into postwar America. From laminate counters and Tupperware to faux-leather upholstery and woven lawn chairs, plastic transformed our way of life. Was \$22.95, now \$19.95 with shipping. 112 pp.



**Guide to Easier Living**  
by Mary & Russel Wright

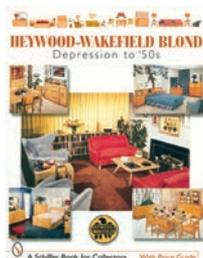
*new!*

First published in 1950, this softcover book addresses modern living Wright-style, from organizing household chores to streamlining the dining table. Using b&w illustrations, of particular interest are the contemporary floor plans and the Wrights' extensive philosophy of informal living. While the book does not showcase Russel Wright's tabletop wares and many other designs, it's a great look at the man and woman behind American Modern. 202 pp., \$22.95



**Case Study Houses**

A softcover book on *Arts & Architecture's* Case Study Houses covers Pierre Koenig's iconic Stahl House, plus 34 other projects through Julius Shulman's vintage photos, floor plans, elevations, models of unbuilt designs and contemporary color photos. Elizabeth A.T. Smith, softcover, 96 pp. \$16.45



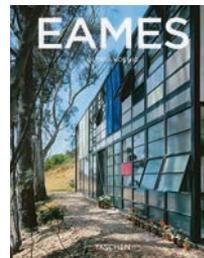
**Heywood-Wakefield Blond: Depression to '50s**

A definitive softcover volume on H-W's birch modern and streamline '30s pieces with vintage photos of upholstered pieces, tables, chairs and case goods; includes current values. Leslie Piña, softcover, 248 pp. \$33.45



**Blenko: Cool 50s & 60s Glass**

A hardcover book with beautiful examples of 1930s–1990s Blenko pieces with current values, period advertising and a reproduction of a 1960 catalog. Leslie Piña, 208 pp. \$43.95



**Eames**

This small softcover book is a concise overview of the designs and talents of both Charles and Ray Eames. Highlights include their films, two Case Study houses, early plywood experiments and their numerous chairs. Gloria Koenig, 96 pp. \$16.45

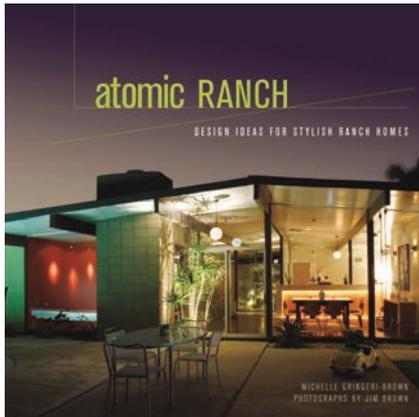


**Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb**

Westlake, the quintessential postwar neighborhood in the Bay Area, gets the glamour treatment in this attractive hardcover book looking at the "boxes made of ticky-tacky." Rob Keil, 144 pp. \$38.50

# & backs

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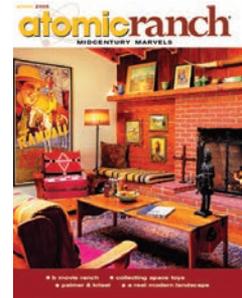
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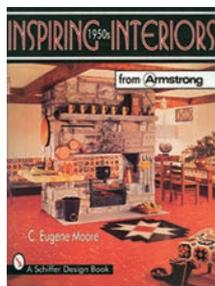
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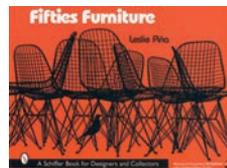


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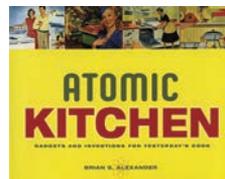
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Revised & Expanded  
3rd Edition**

Looking to start collecting vintage furniture? This accessible yet thorough book covers the heavy hitters—Eames, Nelson, Platner, Bertoia and Noguchi—as well as major manufacturers like Heywood-Wakefield, Lightolier and Herman Miller. Includes current prices and dimensions. Leslie Piña, hardcover, 240 pp. \$43.95



**Atomic Kitchen**

Tour the mid-century kitchen and its accoutrements through advertising images from the '50s. Very fun! Brian Alexander, softcover, 176 pp. \$22.95



**Saarinen**

Another in the same series as Eames and Case Study Houses, this softcover book focuses primarily on Eero Saarinen's architecture—Dulles International Airport, the TWA Terminal, Case Study House #9, North Christian Church and many more—while touching on the Womb and Tulip chair designs. Pierluigi Serraino, 96 pp. \$16.45



**The Golden Age of  
Advertising—the 60s**

*Mad Men* indeed: There's a lot to learn from this chunky hardcover book of 1960s imagery. Pop culture, the selling of the American dream and the aesthetics of the mid-century lifestyle are all explored through quality reproductions of vintage Madison Avenue advertising. Jim Heimann, 352 pp. \$22.95

# Collecting: Shirt-Pocket Transistor Radios

**One of the most appealing electronic collectibles of the atomic era is the shirt-pocket transistor radio.**

Just in time for the birth of rock 'n' roll, the transistor radio came on the U.S. market in December 1954 in the form of the American-made Regency TR-1. The new technology came at a hefty price: \$49.95. Adjusted for inflation, that's approximately \$360.

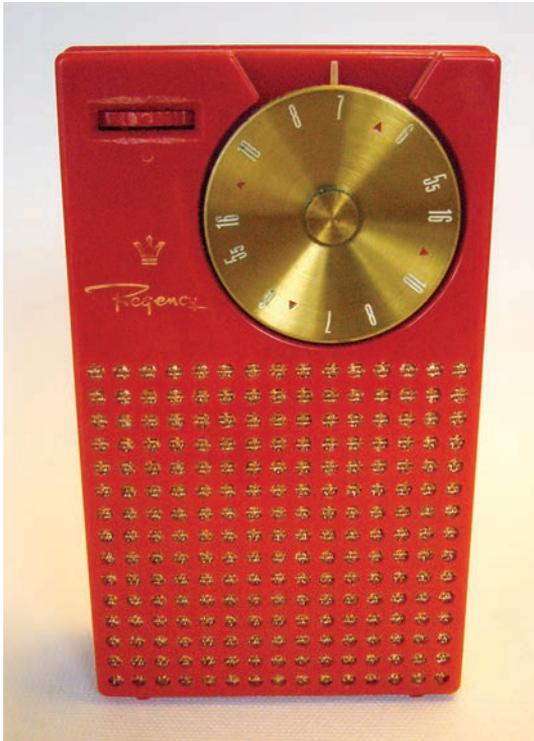
Three years later, a small but up-and-coming Japanese company named Sony exported the first transistor radio. Their TR-63, advertised as "the world's first pocketable radio," retailed at \$39.95 and was a great commercial success. As transistor technology became affordable, more manufacturers began producing transistor radio sets. Amid the fierce competition, radio manufacturers' innovative designs helped differentiate their products from others on the market. Between 1955 and 1965 thousands of unique models were produced.

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*text* Craig Campbell

*photography* Jacqueline Herman





The Regency TR-1 hit the shelves in 1954, the same year Elvis first hit the charts.



Collectors refer to Emerson's larger Explorer 888 as a "coat pocket radio." It was named after America's first satellite.



Sony's TR-63 was the first transistor radio exported to the U.S. from Japan.

## Tuning In

Transistor radios are the gems of vintage electronics. The radios are small, often only three inches tall, and the variety of designs make for rabid collecting. They are easy to display due to uniformity of size and shape, and collectors are continually battling it out for the rare and the mint. Collectors of transistor radios range from those who owned them as teenagers, to vintage-minded collectors who see the objects as quintessential and attainable mid-century design.

Assembling a collection of other vintage radios can be a pricey proposition, with rare Bakelite tube radios hitting auction highs in the thousands of dollars. Part of the appeal of collecting pocket transistor radios is that they are relatively affordable. Attractive pieces can be had beginning at around \$20, though some of the rare models can demand hundreds.

If you are looking for vintage nano-technology with style, go to eBay and type in "transistor radio." At any given time, more than a thousand examples can be found at auction. Searching "completed auctions" or getting your hands on a decent price guide will give you an idea of how high to set your bid. Vintage stores and antique malls are also great places to land a cool radio or two.



A pair of two-transistor "Boy's Radios."

## Transistor Wars

The transistor radio's heyday coincided with the space race and they were considered an extension of other wondrous space-age technology like rockets and satellites. Companies added to the appeal of their brand by giving radios spacey names: the Starfire, the Aurora, the Raleigh Astronaut and Realtone's Comet, Constellation and Galaxy models. Emerson's larger 888 "coat-pocket radio" series were all named after achievements in the American space program, including Vanguard (an early, unsuccessful rocket), Explorer (named after the first American satellite) and Pioneer (named after the long-running space probe program). Comets, stars and jets were also common motifs on the faces of radio sets, and some novelty radios were built in the shape of rockets and robots as well.

A fun category to collect is "Boy's Radios," which are brightly colored and often have two-tone plastic shells and a toy-like appearance. On the plastic shell the manufacturers actually stamped the words "Boy's Radio." Very little is known of the manufacturers, but among the model names to look for are Coronet, Windsor and Top-Flight (all identical in appearance and most likely produced by the same manufacturer) along



The Bulova 792 horizontal radio dwarfs 2"-tall vintage salt and pepper shakers.



Two-inch wonders: a Mascot Transistor Six, with its fin-shaped grill and toy-like appearance, is paired here with a Savoy Mark II toy camera.



This ornate Zephyr ZR-930 comes complete with a kickstand for (marginally) improved fidelity.

with Candle, Audition, Mascot and Mars.

Boy's Radios were made with only two transistors to get around a U.S. tariff that was higher for radios than for toys. (American regulations didn't consider any product with two or less transistors a radio.) They weren't high-quality sets, but they sold well due to their low price.

Going to the opposite extreme, cramming multiple transistors into these little cases was often more marketing hype than an improvement in performance. A transistor radio cold war ensued and companies tried to outdo each other with the number of transistors contained in their radios. Sets claiming to have 12, 16 or 18 transistors were common, but most radios used only up to eight in normal operation. Often the extra transistors in these multiple-transistor sets weren't wired to the circuit and didn't actually do anything at all.

Also considered highly collectible are reverse-painted radios. Reverse-painted models have printing on the inside of the radio's clear plastic face, giving the lettering or design the spacey appearance of floating in air.



This 1963 Global GR-900 is a fantastic example of reverse-painted plastic. Note the red "CD" marks.



Although this radio has a lot of character—the dial window is a comet in a field of stars—it is an example of the move toward a cheaply made, all-plastic design that happened in the '60s.

## Radio Resources

### *Transistor Radios: 1954-1968*

by Norman R. Smith

This book is light on text but has beautiful color photos, along with sometimes outdated pricing. Any book makes hunting for that special piece easier—you need to know what you are looking for.

### *Transistor Radios:*

#### *A Collector's Encyclopedia and Price Guide*

by D.R. Lane and Robert A. Lane

This excellent resource is out of print, but still obtainable online if you dig a bit.

### *Zenith Transistor Radios: Evolution of a Classic*

by Norman R. Smith

A comprehensive study of this important American transistor radio manufacturer. Includes every radio Zenith made from 1955 through 1965.

### [transistorradios.org](http://transistorradios.org)

Sarah Lowery, one of the biggest collectors of transistor radios in the world, recently sold her collection but this website preserves the images of the 1,000-plus radios she collected.

### [pockettransistorradios.com](http://pockettransistorradios.com)

A newer site with great photography from collector Ben Theiss, who contributed photographs of his Regency TR-1 and Sony TR-63 to this article.

### [childhoodradios.com](http://childhoodradios.com)

This fantastic site is run by Ron Mansfield; any question you have about transistor radios can likely be answered here.



These 1959 Hitachi sets had an optional speaker box for a bigger sound at home. It plugs into the earphone jack on top of the radio.

## Radios and Civil Defense

The portability of the pocket transistor radio lent itself to a run to the fallout shelter. An easy way to date a radio is to look for Civil Defense or “CD” markings on the dial. CD markings were required on all radios sold in the United States between 1953 and 1963. These may appear as two triangles, dots, triangles within circles, or the initials “CD.”

CD markings indicated the two frequencies that U.S. citizens should tune in to in the event of an emergency—an attack from the Russians or maybe Martians. In the event of a Civil Defense emergency, all radio frequencies would be shut down except for government Conelrad stations. This was to allow for maximum reception and to prevent the Soviets from using radio frequencies to guide their nuclear attack.

## Condition

Collectors usually prefer their radios to be in working condition, but it doesn’t affect pricing nearly as much as a crack in the plastic or some other physical damage to the case. Most pocket radios are AM only anyway, a format mostly abandoned by mainstream media. (Still, during an inevitable Midwest summer blackout I like to pull a radio off the shelf, put in a fresh 9-volt and tune

in some old country or gospel music.)

If you are good with a soldering iron you can save some money by buying broken radios and fixing them yourself. But keep in mind that some radios require batteries that are no longer widely manufactured.

## Fading Out

The death of the pocket transistor radio coincided with the then-reported demise of rock ‘n’ roll. By the mid-’60s, the transistor radio was no longer considered a high-tech phenomenon, with radios being manufactured in Hong Kong and sold for as little as \$10. Manufacturers cut their costs and out went the chrome, the glass and the color. In place of the drive for unique styling was the need for cheap manufacturing, and the result was the stamped-out black plastic radio.

Born in 1954 as an astonishing innovation, the transistor was a commonplace object by 1964. Fifty years later the compelling designs of pocket transistor radios echo the era’s optimism and enthusiasm for the future. 

Jacqueline Herman and Craig Campbell are both contributors to the pop culture e-zine [drastic-plastic.com](http://drastic-plastic.com) and perform in the ‘60s-influenced garage band, Rock ‘n’ Roll Monkey and the Robots. They recently defected from the upper Midwest to the Big Apple.

# postscript

updates  
on  
past  
letters

We sent you a photo of our ranch with questions on how to find out who built it, and took your answer [Spring 2007, Modern Wisdom] to heart. After getting records from our local courthouse, my

wife was looking at the paperwork one day and said that the second owner's name was Elwood Pherson. Thank the lord for modern-day technology: she Googled his name and found it listed in a town on the other side of the state. I turned right around and cold called the listing, talking with Mrs. Pherson for about 10 minutes. I asked every question I could think of, most importantly, who built the house. Mrs. Pherson said she did not know, but that they bought the house from Ted Haladay's parents in the late '60s.

After thinking about it all day, I took a stab and opened our local phone book, hoping to find Mr. Haladay's children living locally. Instead I found a Theodore Haladay listed and called him. Here's what we found out:

Our house was built in 1955 by Mr. Haladay, who currently lives in Bremerton, Wash., the next town over. The house was his own design, following styles of the day; he had no idea it was called a ranch house. Ted said he built the house with wood from a Tacoma lumberyard where he worked, but that he also got the plywood from JC Penney's for about \$30 a sheet. The gravel for the concrete came from the quarry across the street



The electric stove is completely restored and on the front it says "Frigidaire, made by General Motors." Runs just like a Chevy ...



and he and his dad used a '41 Ford in making the foundation concrete.

Mr. Haladay raised four kids in the house, which led to the addition of three bedrooms, a family room, another bath and a base-

ment around 1966. The house cost approximately \$40,000 to build and it was sold for half that to the Phersons, who lived next door, when Ted and his wife divorced. The Phersons fixed up the inside a bit, as the addition was still unfinished, and rented the house out to a couple of different people; it turns out that renters hung the drywall in the new addition. They sold to the Koonses, who owned it for about 28 years and sold to us. The Koonses poured the floor in the basement and put a roof on during the years they lived there.

I just talked with Mr. Haladay the other day, trying to get a feeling for which walls were load bearing in the kitchen area so we can tear down a wall to open up the kitchen for more table space and light. Our history hunt was comparatively easy, and all in all we are very happy with our newfound knowledge. As a side note, Mr. Haladay built several houses after this one, and he was very excited about us calling him and asked to come and see it again. We look forward to his visit and the history that will come alive from the hands that built our ranch.

**Steven & Debbie McGarr**  
*Port Orchard, Wash.*



# Houston



Selena and Michael Brichford's  
1959 William Floyd-designed  
house in Memorial Bend.

The modern enclave of Memorial Bend in Houston has a certain constancy, with its minimalist brick homes sitting on what look to be double- or triple-wide lots. Sheltered by mature trees that help offset the city's heat and average 77 percent humidity, the neighborhood

attracts midcentury architecture fans looking for homes without Tara pillars and other trappings of Southern gentility.

But the personalities of the homeowners run the gamut. Meet two households that could not be more different.

*text* Josephine Goodwin

*photography* Jim Brown



The colorful pedestal ashtray and wall-hung mailbox begin to hint that there's more to the Katchans' white-painted brick ranch than meets the eye.

# Two-Step



## The Brichfords: Modern Tradition

Moving into Memorial Bend galvanized Michael Brichford. He turned from Arts and Crafts to classic mid-century modern and began researching the history of the 350-home tract. Built in 1955–1959, several Memorial Bend houses received national recognition and appeared in period shelter magazines. Various models had names like “Shoji Contemporary,” “The Contemporama” and “The Tropicana,” and original prices ranged from \$15,000 to \$27,000. Today they’re worth \$350,000.

The older sections of the tract have smaller houses—around 1,300 square feet—while Michael’s 1959 model is 2,000. In 1961 Memorial Bend homeowners banded together to fight the building of a beltway that ultimately went through in the mid-’80s. Although the below-grade

highway brings a persistent white noise to the area, only a dozen houses were razed since the original developers had planned for that eventuality.

Michael’s research revealed his home was designed by William Floyd, a local architect he visited about a year before Floyd died. Michael became so fascinated with the era and Houston’s trove of modern buildings that he helped found Houston Mod, an advocacy group for mid-century architecture.

Despite not being wild about the house when they first toured it, Michael and his wife, Selena, love it now and say theirs is a story of capitalizing on what they have. “Our house certainly isn’t the most architecturally significant home in the neighborhood, but we made the most out of what we had to work with,” says Michael, who works for

Selena likes the clean lines of vintage furniture but not the pale wood, ie. Heywood-Wakefield, and is drawn more to contemporary minimalism. Michael, on the other hand, loves collectibles, and has a list of iconic pieces he's itching to add. Opposite, in this view from the kitchen, inexpensive chairs surround the reissued Saarinen tulip table and various IKEA pieces stand in for pricier choices. The black hairpin leg table (far left) is a Star 69 from Pure Design.

"The bar cart was a great steal; we had been eyeing one at a vintage store for \$400 but ended up finding this one at an estate sale for \$10," Michael says. "It had a food warmer tray on top, but I had a mirror cut to fit like the one we saw at the vintage store." The painting is by Houston artist Michelle Williams.

The off-white slipper chairs in the Brichford family room are from Restoration Hardware. An inexpensive butterfly chair from Urban Outfitters, a Herman Miller Eames LCW and Crate & Barrel woven cushions under the coffee table from Great Indoors offer more seating.



a corporate training company. Finding hardwood floors lurking beneath the teal wall-to-wall carpeting helped convince him the house had potential. "All they needed was waxing and buffing once I pulled out every staple from 38 years of carpeting."

For Selena, who works as an interior designer at a Knoll dealership, undoing some of the more offensive elements—wallpaper on the kitchen ceiling and violent green laminate counters—gave her a new canvas for her skills. "The fun part about this house was the challenge of making it our taste and a home for us," she says. "Once we moved in something just clicked with Michael. He got gung-ho about the architecture and researching the neighborhood. He really started liking modern furniture."

"Meeting Floyd helped," Michael agrees. "We found out the history and that made me want to help preserve it. Over time, I've become more obsessive about maintaining the original features of our house, like the push-button light switches and aluminum windows."

"We are budget conscious, so we're finding the look-alikes or the real thing for less," says Selena about their furnishings. Their previous family room dining table was a \$99 IKEA model; now they've upgraded to a Saarinen reissue from Knoll. Generic chairs cost \$69 each, but they'd like to step up to vintage Saarinen ones in the future. Their advice: make do until you can get the pieces you really want.



A must-have for Michael was the Modernica Eames fiberglass shell rocker reissue that they have in the guest bedroom. The vintage table lamp, believed to be Danish, got the homeowners started with a decorating theme. A Crate & Barrel bed and two stacked rattan IKEA Alseda stools make for a vaguely tropical midcentury look.

Traditional built-in cabinetry in the family room holds barware and collectibles. The floor lamp is from IKEA.

Some of their vintage seating, including two red upholstered chairs in the family room, is contract pieces from AT&T and IBM offices that they picked up at Metro Retro in Houston. IKEA is well represented by a low black buffet, a pendant light and a frosted glass storage unit in the family room, while period items include a Canadian bar cart and various paintings, pottery and other decorative pieces.

The move to modern also helped radicalize the Brichfords. "We tend to be pretty conservative politically, but this is the one progressive issue that I'm very much for," Michael says about his preservation activities. "The developers are the ones who are knocking everything down in sight. They don't care that a neighborhood is all ranch houses and Modernist one-stories with a cohesive look. They'd be happy to knock down the house next door, clear all of the trees and put up a three-story that looks down into my back yard. It's frustrating. They're destroying the character of neighborhoods and our history."

Because there are no historic ordinances or zoning in the city, Houston Mod aims to save midcentury structures by educating the public through its tours, lectures and local publicity. They're gaining a toehold, with 100 attending the first lecture in 2003, and 400 turning up to listen to Leo Marmol the next year. But size still matters to most Texans.

"It's the look-at-my-big-house syndrome," Michael says with disdain, "as if 2,200 square feet isn't enough. 'I need a huge media room and a gargantuan entry with a spiral staircase.' To me it's a waste. They're ugly retreats of design and have no originality. Around here, as soon as something is 30 years old, they want to knock it down."



## The Katchans: Wildly Inventive

Knocking things down was part of the remodel that Rita and Yuri Katchan performed on another Memorial Bend home. The Katchans and their daughter, Yelena, came from Minsk to Houston to visit friends in 1992. They've been here ever since.

Several years ago, Yuri, a mechanical engineer, found a vacant three-bedroom, two-bath former rental house. "I never had my own house or apartment in Russia," he

The view from the former dining room shows the open plan of the new kitchen and, behind the couch, one of the many decorative textures Yuri and Victor applied to the walls.





Yuri's favorite shape, the triangle, shows up in the recessed ceiling downlights, the orange soffit above the columns and the red, orange and white screen near the front door (opposite, top). He also made the coffee table, with its Keith Haring-esque stick figures.

Victor and Yuri's remodeling company did some 40 kitchen installs for Expo, but the Katchan home is more IKEA-a-la-Belarus. The Italian porcelain tile on the floor was installed on the diagonal, and the wedged-shaped mosaic tile-covered bar helps hide post-dinner dishes from the adjoining living room.

says. "We always lived with our parents. The first time I saw this house, I made an offer to the seller in about an hour. It was what I was looking for: the location was good and I love houses with a flat roof and a lot of open space. It wasn't structurally too complicated. It had a nice, big backyard.

Working with Victor Kagan, the friend the Katchans came to visit, and a four-man crew, they gutted the portions that screamed "rental house" and let their imaginations run free. A partition wall forming a narrow dining space was replaced with load-bearing columns painted four different colors. The master bathroom gained a glass-block shower that bumps out of the home's footprint, along with a whirlpool tub and textured plasterwork and intricate tile installations.

The big-box kitchen—"plain, cheap, basic, boring" in Victor's words—was torn out. Their new kitchen has IKEA cabinets but looks custom, with its angled walls, tile mosaics, triangular soffits, inlaid counter tops, and a handmade door with decorative blue glass portholes—votive candle holders inset into the wood, as it turns out. To avoid breaking into the cement slab, they routed all new plumbing inside the cabinets.





Plenty of sizzle here: the master bath has an intricate installation of porcelain tile running from the floor up the wall to the ceiling behind the whirlpool tub. A mirrored, angular vanity area and decorative ladder shelving are opposite the glass-block shower with its flagstone platform and mosaic tile floor.

“A lot of our friends believe that we are not completely normal,” says Victor, an electrical engineer, with arid amusement. “Not crazy, but at least strange. A neighbor came over and wanted to know how we came up with all of these ideas. Had we been smoking something? We told him, no, we don’t do that; we’re Russian so we will have a couple of Jacks on the rocks—that helps to get good ideas.”

Rita, a computer software specialist, was out of the country for some of the remodel. Fully confident of—or resigned to—the men’s decisions, she left it all to Yuri and Victor. “I really trust Yuri and his taste. He can’t live in a space that’s not friendly and he can never stop working on this house. But I do kind of hate it when they come up with a new idea because I know they’re going to drop right now whatever they’re doing and start something new. They’re really good together—very creative,” she says loyally.

Both men enjoy the challenges of framing out unusual walls, and Yuri is the patient one who meticulously made the intersections of hardwood and tile meet seamlessly, and set three colors and sizes of tile into a frenetic but coherent pattern in the bathroom. Victor did the welding, electrical work and the textured walls. Typically he sketches out an idea, then Yuri works up CAD drawings so the engineering pair know exactly how they’ll approach a specific project.

“We use materials and techniques that initially might have totally different applications,” says Victor. “We like to play with granite and marble and ceramics and glass and metal inserts on walls and floors.

“These colors and shapes are natural for us—that’s what we’re like: contemporary on the edge of modern. We try to avoid any parallel or perpendicular lines, but all the crazy angles can be overkill. Changing angles on a ceiling might call for two colors of paint instead of five; we argue all the time,” he acknowledges, dryly.



“I don’t like boring, plain walls,” Yuri volunteers somewhat unnecessarily. “I always like to bring unusual shapes to a house. I did just what I see in my mind; it makes me happy when I’m home.”

Perhaps the frenetic design is a refreshing anecdote to their Soviet years, but Rita does have a few things she still wishes for: an openable window in the bathroom and a place to have coffee outside their bedroom would be nice. She seems acquiescent to reality, though.

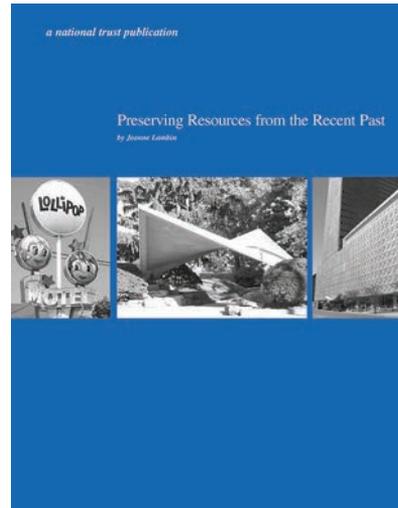
“We had carte blanche because it’s Yuri and Rita’s house; we could experiment with anything we wanted,” long-time friend Victor says. “This house is more European. Most people in Russia would love it.” 🐶

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# COOL|stuff

## Historically Minded

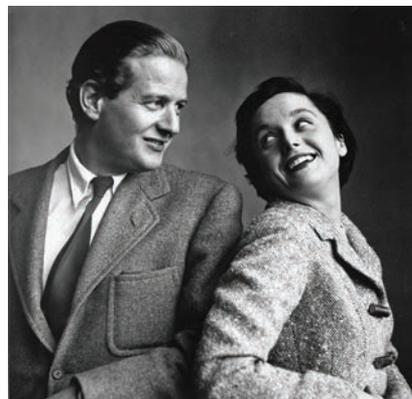
Although intended for preservationists, the National Trust's *Preserving Resources from the Recent Past* is a great handbook for neighborhood groups and homeowners alike. At 28 black-and-white pages, it's more a brochure than a book, but one that gives a good overview of the pressures facing midcentury structures today and what one can reasonably do to help save properties less than 50 years old. Author Jeanne Lambin defines midcentury architectural styles, addresses what's involved in applying for historic designation and covers Recent Past preservation efforts in various locales, including Dallas, Scottsdale and Palo Alto. Available online at [preservationbooks.org](http://preservationbooks.org) for \$8.



## Ranch Palette

Dunn-Edwards wants to help you out of your exterior paint-scheme quandary: their ranch palette brochure is illustrated with both modernist Cliff May examples and traditional midcentury homes. Grayed-down neutrals predominate: the May house is done up in light greens and white, while the shutter-clad ranch is painted Midland Tan with white trim and Casting Shadow accents. The company has 85 stores in the Southwest, but if you live elsewhere, their color schemes are still a good starting point for that exterior transformation. Visit [dunnedwards.com](http://dunnedwards.com) for a list of retail locations or order the brochure at [dunnedwards.com/retail/content.asp?content=80](http://dunnedwards.com/retail/content.asp?content=80).

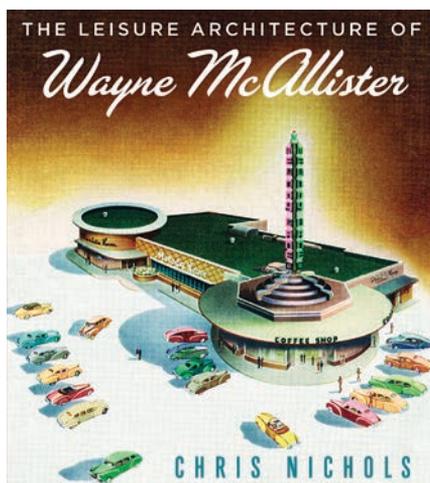




Florence and Hans Knoll

### Sixty and Still Sexy

What looks better on a Womb chair than genuine Knoll fabric? Hopsack-like Cato, in continuous production since 1961, has been updated with additional colors, including gray, blue and orange. Other offerings in the Archival Collection, which marks KnollTextiles' 60th anniversary, are suitable for upholstery, drapes and wall coverings; all are available as yardage through the Knoll site, [knolltextiles.com](http://knolltextiles.com).



### Leisure World

If you're a fan of both pre- and postwar architecture, particularly Southern California hotels, drive-ins and restaurants, you'll enjoy *The Leisure Architecture of Wayne McAllister*, out in paperback from Gibbs Smith, Publisher. Illustrated with historical photos and vintage artwork of McAllister's many commercial buildings—from the Agua Caliente resort in Tijuana and Bob's Big Boy drive-in in Burbank to the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas—author Chris Nichols makes the material eminently accessible and entertaining. \$19.95 at bookstores or [gibbssmith.com](http://gibbssmith.com)

# COOL|stuff



Wakefield

## You Light Up My ... Ranch

Brian Faherty of Schoolhouse Electric has been riffing on the midcentury theme with the company's new Modern Collection. Most are available with various finishes and mounts—surface, rod, cord, flush—like the

Wakefield 21" pendant, a style that was originally designed as a commercial fixture for hospital lobbies and office mezzanines. The shade on the satin aluminum Derby surface mount comes in white, aluminum or the matte bronze shown and can be ordered rated for UL damp installations. Prices for the line range from \$109 to \$439 at [schoolhouseelectric.com](http://schoolhouseelectric.com).



Derby



## Ditch the Dishpan

Go ahead and venture outside the stainless steel ghetto: Big Chill just introduced a good-looking, period-appropriate dishwasher in the same fantastic colors as their '50s-style refrigerators. The stamped metal exterior comes in red, yellow, orange, green, pink (!), blue, black and white as well as custom colors. Available as a ready-to-install Energy-Star dishwasher with six cycles beginning at \$1,700, or you can buy the front panel for \$525 to make over most panel-ready brands such as KitchenAid, Miele and Bosch. Check out [bigchillfridge.com](http://bigchillfridge.com) for features and retail locations. 

# ranchdressing

House parts ...  
midcentury collectibles ...  
the inside scoop on  
what's what  
and where to get it



**Q:** Here is a photo of a chair we purchased at a thrift shop. It was suffering from loose joints due to dried out glue, and the finish was an odd opaque amber-brown shade, but we couldn't resist its modern design. We took it apart, refinished it to match a patch of stain on the bottom of the seat that had not been exposed to air, replaced a damaged dowel and glued it back together.

We must admit, part of the appeal of this chair is that it was made in Grand Rapids, Mich., our hometown. The label under the seat reads, "Manufactured by Brower Furniture Co, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Pattern #153, Date 3-30-54."

Is there anything you can tell us about this chair or its design? Were chairs like this common to households in the 1950s? What room would it have been used in? How likely is it that we'll be able to find another one of these?

**Ethan & Cheryl Allen**

**A:** We polled three midcentury authorities, and all had different hunches. Nick Horvath: "This chair looks like a Sligh Chair Company piece, a company that did institutional furniture, all mostly contract-type stuff.

*Peter Maunu: "Grand Rapids was home to many furniture manufacturers throughout the 20th century and this side chair is an interesting hybrid. Its lower half, with the substantial seat and splayed legs, shows the influence of American country handcrafted furniture and artists like George Nakashima, Paul McCobb and Russel Wright. The upper half has an earlier Jugendstil or craftsman appearance, somewhat reminiscent of Otto Wagner or Josef Hoffmann. I don't know who designed this, but it is a nice, solid midcentury chair. It seems to be a relatively conservative dining chair for 1954 and, though there is something common about it, I cannot recall seeing one exactly like it. I would think it might be difficult to complete a set."*



Courtesy Treadway/Toomey

*Lisanne Dickson of Treadway/Toomey Auctions had these comments: The chair is a common form that reflects the design sensibilities of the 1940s, meaning the shape and style show up in multiple examples from the period. Gilbert Rohde designed chairs with the same*

barrel-back shape, for example. In an upcoming auction we have yet another iteration of this form, one armchair that will be sold as part of a group of Deco furniture. We do not know the maker or designer, and it does not have substantial value.



**Q:** My pro-furniture-refinisher-in-a-previous-career husband has an eye for all things quirky. He spotted this last week and, except for some grime and a bit of wear on the upholstery, it's in pretty good shape. Despite a couple of hours surfing all sorts of search terms on the Web, I couldn't find anything similar enough to tell us what the heck we stumbled onto.

He thinks it might be ash or birch and says the spring type, weight of the hinges and construction details makes him think it might be '50s or '60s era. As you can see in the photos, it seems to have the original tweed upholstery, which is worn a bit but still serviceable, and is somewhat of a daybed/sofa/couch that converts into a sleeper.

The cane inserts on the arms are woven, not pressed, and the hinge cams up the base frame to rotate down flat when opened. There are no visible markings anywhere on it. Can your experts help us?

**Lynn Hay**

**A:** *Nick Horvath:* The sofa bed looks like a classic Selig piece, right down to the cane inserts. If you handle the restoration right, this sofa could be worth a few bucks, around \$800–\$1,200, depending upon the market and where and how you sell it.



**Q:** I have what I think is a 1960s daybed with ends that can sit up or lay flat. I took the worn black and white houndstooth cover off the seat and purchased new burlap straps that I still need to install. The wood needs a little work, but the springs are all in good shape. Can you tell me what it might be worth?

**Pam Southwell**

**A:** *Lisanne Dickson:* "The daybed is interesting. It reminds me of some of Harvey Probbler's later work and, to a lesser extent, Edward Wormley's designs for Dunbar. The concept of creating living room furniture that could be used multiple ways was popular during that period and convenient for the smaller homes of the times, like the ranch.

This is the sort of thing that you might see in a SoHo gallery for \$3,250, simply because it is functional and stylish and N.Y. rents are so high. At auction, as a generic '60s piece (finding the designer is not out of the question with enough time and digging), I would probably estimate it at \$800–\$1,000. We tend to estimate items conservatively, so if such a daybed sold for \$1,500 (plus 20% buyer's premium), it is not that far from the \$3,250 SoHo price that gets reduced by 40%. (The equation between N.Y. retail, other U.S. retail and auction values is a topic for another time!)

# more ranch dressing

## croutons

✘ Daren Adkins' request for a source for pattern blocks generated a couple of leads:



My wife and I just had a wall of it built as a privacy screen on the patio we put on our 1954 ranch in Nashville. Let me tell you, I had the hardest time finding manufacturers. My first search only led to Barbados! No way that would have been affordable. Luckily I found them right in my own backyard, so to speak, because nobody, and I mean nobody, made these anymore and I had to have them!

Tankersley Concrete (417 Heil Quaker Ave., Lewisburg, Tenn., 931.359.3112) has three different patterns and they cost \$4 per 12" x 12" block.

**Jason Phelan**



We've looked into using screen blocks, and found them on Orco's website: [orco.com/pr\\_screen.htm](http://orco.com/pr_screen.htm). I didn't see the exact pattern in the photo, but they

have six others. [Orco is based in Southern California.]

**Joohae Matthes**

This type of concrete decorative block is generally referred to in the concrete industry as "screen block." The specific pattern Daren showed is called "Morocco." It appears in concrete block product catalogs as early as January 1959. Well over 100 different patterns were produced during the heyday of



screen block production, starting in the late '50s and reaching a pinnacle with its extensive use in many buildings constructed for the 1964–65 World's Fair.

Although today the Morocco pattern is no longer available, several concrete masonry companies still carry a handful of patterns. You might try Superlite Block, which distributes nationally, or in California, Basalite Concrete Products, Angelus Block Co. or Orco Block Co. In Florida, contact White Cement Specialties. Attached is a photo of a mold for the Morocco pattern that we discovered in the bone-yard of a local Southern California concrete block producer.

**Barbara and Ron Marshall**



✦ Travis Weedman asked for a resource for the masonite-type patterned panels used as decorative screens in the '60s. A fellow MCM enthusiast on lottalivin.com suggested Pattern Cut, a company in Anaheim that laser cuts door and wall panels, air supply grates and more: [patterncut.com](http://patterncut.com). Travis included a shot of his finished basement installation.

✦ Peter Maunu's chronic eBaying yielded a further lead on April McMurray's inquiry about the '60s plastic chair shown in Fall 2007 Ranch Dressing. The seller's posting IDed a similar pair of chairs with what looks like loose seat cushions as molded fiberglass chairs by the Vectra Group in Dallas. The pair didn't sell by the way...<http://cgi.ebay.com/ws/ebayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=190144625948&ssPageName=ADME:B:EF:US:11>

✦ Alyson Pratt was looking for a replacement mailbox, which I doubt she'll ever find. But you might suggest she have her original mailbox plated in brushed chrome or nickel. I had great success in refinishing some chrome pieces in my Eichler that I knew I'd never be able to replace. There are many metal finishers and refinishers around. If she can't find one, she should be able to find a chrome plater through an auto body shop.

**Brad Myers**

*Need a renovation resource or wondering if that flea market find is anything? Send your questions and photos to [editor@atomic-ranch.com](mailto:editor@atomic-ranch.com) and we'll run them past our experts.*

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# atomic events



## December 1–2 San Francisco Deco the Halls Show

Two hundred dealers, plus a vintage fashion show and swing dance performance at the Concourse Exhibition Center, 8th and Brannan streets; [artdecosale.com](http://artdecosale.com). Affiliated walking tours of Art Deco

buildings in the Marina and Downtown districts through [artdecosociety.org](http://artdecosociety.org).



## Through January 15 Dearborn, Mich. Best of Friends: Buckminster Fuller and Isamu Noguchi

Models, sculptures, photographs and drawings by the inventor of the geodesic dome and the midcentury designer at The Henry Ford Museum. This stop in the touring exhibit also features Fuller's Dymaxion House and three-wheel 1934 Dymaxion Car that the two men collaborated on. More info at [thehenryford.org](http://thehenryford.org).

## Through January 20 Bellevue, Wash. Russel Wright: Living With Good Design

See Wright's housewares first-hand at this touring exhibition celebrating the industrial designer's body of



The Wright exhibition earlier this year in Palm Springs

work. At the Bellevue Arts Museum, [bellevuearts.org](http://bellevuearts.org). Moves to The Goldstein Museum of Design in St. Paul February 8; <http://goldstein.cdes.umn.edu>.

## February 1–3 Miami Miami Modernism

Sixty vendors of vintage furnishings, collectibles and fine art at the Knight Center at the Miami Hyatt Regency, 400 SE 2nd Avenue. Preview gala Friday night; [miamimodernism.net](http://miamimodernism.net).

## February 15–17 Palm Springs Palm Springs Modernism

Part of Modernism Week, 80 vendors of vintage furnishings, collectibles and fine art at the Palm Springs Convention Center, 277 N. Avenida Caballeros. Preview gala Friday night and a special exhibition on Architectural Pottery. Other activities that week (2/15–24) include tours of the Frey House and Palm Springs architecture, a classic car show, slide lectures and films, opening for "Julius Shulman: 70 years of Palm Springs Photography" and more; [palmspringsmodernism.com](http://palmspringsmodernism.com).



## Through February 16 Portland, Ore. The G.I. Dream: Family, Home, Peace & Prosperity

The Oregon Historical Society's exhibit traces how American culture was impacted by the optimism of the postwar years, from its bigger-is-better cars to space-age kitchen appliances. Special features include retro holiday decor, vintage collections, a film festival, scooter parade and a ranch home tour. Visit [ohs.org](http://ohs.org) for details or call 503.222.1741.



Photo courtesy Constance L. Breuer

**Through February 17 Washington D.C.**  
**Marcel Breuer: Design and Architecture**

Know for his iconic Wassily chair, Breuer also designed single-family homes, churches and numerous furnishings in wood, steel and aluminum. This is the only U.S. stop for this exhibition from Germany's Vitra Design Museum of the designer's models, drawings, floor plans, photos, furniture examples and multimedia displays. At the National Building Museum, 401 F St. NW; nbm.org.

**February 23-24 Cincinnati**  
**20th Century Cincinnati**

Join 1,600 other patrons at Ohio's MCM showcase at the Sharonville Convention Center, 11355 Chester Rd. Furniture, lighting, decorative objects and more from 50 dealers; 20thcenturycincinnati.com.

**March 1-3 New York**  
**The Modern Show**

The 69th Regiment Armory at Lexington and 26th St. hosts 80 European and American exhibitors selling vintage art, textiles, glass, ceramics, jewelry and furniture; stellashows.com.



Joe Apodaca  
coffee pot  
1963

Dan Kvitka

**Through March 23 Portland, Ore.**  
**The Living Room**

Garage sale finds, modern classics and vintage and recent crafts on display in a domestic setting that explores high and low art and MCM design. The Museum of Contemporary Craft; museumofcontemporarycraft.org.



**Ongoing Great Bend, Kansas**  
**Lustron House Museum**

Furnished in authentic 1950s-era style, tour a porcelain-clad steel Lustron home at the Barton County Historical Society Museum and Village. Winter hours, Wednesday-Friday, 10-5; beginning in April, open every day except Monday. Seventeen other Lustrons are in Great Bend as well, but this is the only one open to the public; bartoncountymuseum.org.

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## where'd you get that?

### atomic aussie, pp. 18–27

Paul Zanetti's website: [zanetti.net.au](http://zanetti.net.au)

### russel wright: 20th century tastemaker, pp. 34–45

Books and DVD on Wright: *Russel Wright: Good Design is For Everyone*, *Guide to Easier Living*, *Russel Wright's Menu Cookbook: A Guide to Easier Entertaining*, *Russel Wright: Creating American Lifestyle*, "Russel Wright: Designs for Living, Home and Woodland Garden" available from [russelwrightcenter.org](http://russelwrightcenter.org) ✖ Dragon Rock tours: April through October, [russelwrightcenter.org/tours.html](http://russelwrightcenter.org/tours.html)

### artists in residence, pp. 48–58

Peter Shire: Annual pottery sale December 1–2 from 1 to 5 pm; 1850 Echo Park Ave., L.A.,

323.662.8067 ✖ Artwork available through Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, [franklloyd.com/dynamic/artist\\_bio.asp?ArtistID=28](http://franklloyd.com/dynamic/artist_bio.asp?ArtistID=28)

✖ Billy Shire: [soapplant.com](http://soapplant.com) ✖ [billyshirefinearts.com](http://billyshirefinearts.com)  
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### houston two-step, pp. 72–80

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