

University of Southern California School of Architecture
ARCH 444 | FALL 2020
Great Houses of Los Angeles: And Its Other Stories



Instructor: Alex Maymind
Office: Watt Hall
Office hours: Available for appointment via email
Class times: Thursdays 9:00 – 11:50
Location: Zoom Link via email
Units: 4

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“I’ve been there three or four times, and I can never find my way around. There are no church spires, no squares...I could of course read the street signs but that’s a hell of a task. Since I don’t drive, that doesn’t interest me. [Los Angeles] is an impossible city.”
—Marcel Duchamp

Upon visiting Los Angeles in 1963, Marcel Duchamp described Los Angeles as a place that did not exist. Describing his frustrations that the city lacked wayfinding devices to help orient himself, Duchamp’s quote reveals a moment in urban history when LA was regarded as a city that nobody thought they could see. What Duchamp failed to notice was the city’s rich history of domestic architecture produced figures from Frank Lloyd Wright to the architects who participated in the Case Study House Program. The course will situate a range projects within the broader historical shifts taking place in Los Angeles and alongside key disciplinary developments taking place in the history of domestic architecture.

Contrary to Duchamp’s perception of Los Angeles, this course introduces students to the significance of Los Angeles architecture by way of a close examination of homes designed by prominent architects—each who practiced in Southern California in the early to mid-twentieth century. In lieu of site visits to individual houses, we will instead view a series of documentary films to supplement the selected readings presented and discussed in seminar.

Students will be expected to write short evaluations about three out of the total houses/ architects they study. The short essays will include the student's understanding of the project in conjunction with or contrast to the architects stated intentions. A 10-page research paper can be substituted for one of the evaluation papers. For this paper, the student must select a research topic approved by the instructor related to materials covered in the course.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

August 20 Introduction to the course

Week 2

August 27 The Concept of Domesticity

Reyner Banham, "A Home is not a House," *Art in America* (1965) 70-6.

Pier Vittorio Aureli & Maria Shéhérazade Giudici, "Familiar Horror: Toward a Critique Of Domestic Space," *Log* 38, 2016

Week 3

September 3 Explaining Los Angeles

Banham, Reyner. "In the Rear-view Mirror" in *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*. (London: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 21-36.

Michael Sorkin, "Explaining Los Angeles" in: *California Counterpoint: New West Coast Architecture Catalogue 18* (IAUS, 1982).

Documentary - *Los Angeles Plays Itself*

Week 4

September 10 Julia Morgan & the West Coast Tradition of Arts and Crafts

Karen McNeill, "Julia Morgan: Gender, Architecture, and Professional Style." *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (May 2007), pp. 229-268 (excerpt).

Gwendolyn Wright, "Domestic Architecture and the Cultures of Domesticity," *Design Quarterly*, No. 138, House and Home (1987), pp. 12-19

Week 5

September 17 California Bungalow & Gamble House of Greene + Greene

Clay Lancaster, "The American Bungalow" *The Art Bulletin* 40, No. 3 (September 1958), 239-253.

The Craftsman Vol. XXII, Number 5 (August 1912) pp. 532-547

Cheryl Robertson, "Male and Female Agendas for Domestic Reform: The Middle Class Bungalow in Gendered Perspective," *Winterthur Portfolio* 16 (Summer – Fall, 1991) 123-41.

Week 6

September 24 Regional Character: Wright and Southern California Work and Experience

F.L Wright, "Organic Architecture" (1910) pp. 25.

Stephen M. Park, "Meso-American Modernism." *Journal of Modern Literature*, Volume 34, Number 4, Summer 2011, pp. 21-47. (excerpt)

David Gebhard. "The Spanish Colonial Revival in Southern California (1895-1930)." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 1967), pp. 131-147.

Week 7

October 1 Documentary #2

Frank Lloyd Wright: *That Far Corner: Frank Lloyd Wright In Los Angeles*

Week 8

October 8 Ain & Schindler in Los Angeles: Between Living Inside and Outside

Esther McCoy, "Rudolf M. Schindler," *Five California Architects*

Reyner Banham, "The Master Builders."

Week 9

October 15 The VDL House of Richard Neutra

Sylvia Lavin, "Open the Box: Richard Neutra and Psychologizing the Environment" (2004) pp 3-23 and (1999) pp. 6-25

Beatriz Colomina, "Health and Architecture" in *X-Ray Architecture*. Lars Muller Publishers, 2019. Excerpts from chapter 1.

Week 10

October 22 Pierre Koenig, Charles & Ray Eames and the Case Study House Program

Arts and Architecture, January, 1945, May 1949, and December 1949;

Esther McCoy, "Arts & Architecture Case Study Houses," *Perspecta*, 1975, Vol. 15, Backgrounds for an American Architecture (1975), pp. 54-73

Week 11

October 29 Hollywood Style and Paul R. Williams

Karen Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy Of Style*

Richard Rothstein. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. First ed. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton Company, 2017.

Week 12

November 5 Documentary #3

People in Glass Houses: The Legacy of Joseph Eichler

Infinite Space: The Architecture of John Lautner

Week 13

November 12 "Widescreen Architecture": The Work of John Lautner

John Lautner oral history transcript, 1994

Colomina Beatriz. "The Media House" *Assemblage*, No. 27, Tulane Papers: The Politics of Contemporary Architectural Discourse, (Aug., 1995), pp. 55-66

Jon Yoder, *Widescreen Architecture: Immersive Media and John Lautner in Postwar Los Angeles*, Getty Research Institute (forthcoming) - excerpt

Week 14

November 19 Postwar Suburbia and the Eichler House

Anmarie Adams, "The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Postwar Suburbia," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 5, Gender, Class, and Shelter (1995), pp. 164-178.

Dana Cuff, "Domestic Speculation Architects and Builders in Postwar Los Angeles," in *Overdrive: LA Constructs the Future, 1940-1990*. Getty Research Institute, 2014.

Required Readings:

Uploaded to Blackboard

Course Requirements and Grading:

1. 2 evaluation papers + one research paper (due end of term) (30% each)	60%
2. Final Exam	20%
3. <u>Attendance/Participation (see below)</u>	20%
Total	100%

1. Class Participation

A portion of each class will be set-aside for class discussion. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and the field trips. The following are the three specific class participation assignments.

- At 11:59 pm on the Wednesday before each lecture class you are required to post on blackboard your takeaway from the readings (250-300 words)

2. Evaluation Papers

Synthesize materials from drawings, photographs, online videos, guided virtual tours, lectures, and reading material into 7 double-spaced page essay which captures your evaluation/analysis of the house. Due two-weeks after we discuss the house in class. Photos with captions diagrams, bibliography/references, and sketches are not included in the page count. The focus of the paper should be on reconciling the theories, writings, and description of ideas present in the lectures and readings against your own experience of the place. The experience of each setting should include (although need not be limited to) the following criteria:

I. Spatial Perception

1. Spatial hierarchy and relationships
2. Spatial sequence, procession, and organization
3. Indoor-outdoor spatial relationships
4. Introduction of natural light

II. Materials and Structure

5. Structural system and expression
6. Materials expression, detailing, color, and texture

III. Attention to Users

7. Function and response to intended user

Students can chose to evaluate 2 out the 9 houses, but must include at least one of the following houses:

- The Gamble House
- Barnsdall or Freeman House
- Kings Road House or Falk Apartments

Identifying signature ideas and visual/experiential techniques are essential. Each assignment should emphasize your own formal analysis. Photos/ drawings (with detailed captions and/ or annotations), diagrams, and plan annotations are an excellent way to communicate your ideas. There are thousands of photos of these houses on the internet from which to choose from. I am most interested in your detailed analysis and observations of the place--the more ideas the better!

3. Research Paper

The research paper will detail a topic raised in the readings or through the site visits. For example, you may be intrigued by Frank Lloyd Wright's experiences in Los Angeles and curious about other work he completed in southern California. This could involve a scholarly paper or a comparative analysis of several other houses. You may find the issue of spatial sequence intriguing and want to gain insight about how it can be viewed across other important residential buildings, which have dealt with this phenomena in unusual and effective ways. There are also a number of other early modernists and case study architects in southern California for which considerable material exists in the library. These include Irving Gill, Harwell Hamilton Harris, Rodney Walker, Buff, Straub and Hensman, Craig Elwood, Quincy Jones, and Bernard Maybeck (northern California). Other architects of note that practiced in California during this same period include Wallace Neff, Raphael Soriano, and many others. If these architects and their work is of interest, you may research a figure and apply a concept or theory discussed throughout the semester in relation to their projects.

The topic should be one that has been discussed in class but for which a more in-depth investigation would be rewarding and warranted. Please avoid overly general topics, such as "The Life and Times of Frank Lloyd Wright". The paper should be 10 pages in length (double spaced). I will review and approve your outline.

Additional References

Background/Evaluation/Reference:

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Greene and Greene

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