

# TRANSLATION

Proceedings of the  
**Society of Architectural Historians,  
Australia and New Zealand**  
Vol. 31

edited by Christoph Schnoor  
(Auckland, New Zealand SAHANZ and Unitec ePress;  
and Gold Coast, Queensland: SAHANZ, 2014).

The bibliographic citation for this paper is:

**Diana Painter, "Regional Modernism on the West Coast: a Tale of Four Cities," in  
*Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand:  
31, Translation*, edited by Christoph Schnoor (Auckland, New Zealand: SAHANZ  
and Unitec ePress; and Gold Coast, Queensland: SAHANZ, 2014), 773-784.**

*Published in*

*Auckland, New Zealand: SAHANZ and Unitec ePress [ISBN - 978-1-927214-12-1];  
and Gold Coast, Australia: SAHANZ [ISBN - 978-0-9876055-1-1]*

*All efforts have been undertaken to ensure that authors have secured appropriate  
permissions to reproduce the images illustrating individual contributions.  
Interested parties may contact the editor.*

*This work is licensed under a  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.*



Diana Painter, *Painter Preservation and Planning*

## Regional Modernism on the West Coast: a Tale of Four Cities

What do the Northwest Regional Style, as seen in Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver BC, and the Second Bay Tradition in San Francisco and the Bay Area, have in common? Quite a bit, actually. These western regional centers share vernacular traditions, including building methods and materials, and geographic and topographic characteristics, as well as a relatively temperate climate. Each urban centre claims to have pioneered the low-slung, woodsy, highly-glazed, vernacular-quoting, residential style that came to personify high-style residential design in the immediate pre- and post-World War II eras. In reality, each urban centre produced a range of 'hard' to 'soft' interpretations of mid-century modern residential styles and types. What they did share, however, is an approach to design they would put them in the national spotlight in the extremely creative decades of the 1930s through to the 1950s.

This was a time when architectural ideas travelled north-to-south and back again along the west coast of the United States and Canada, in contrast to the historical trajectory of east-to-west. It is not surprising that these common traits translated into shared traditions, but each metropolitan centre claimed that their traditions were singular, regionally based expressions. How then did the communities develop their sense of individual identity with respect to these common influences? A clue is that each region had its community of individual practitioners, and each metropolitan centre had its own personality.

This paper illustrates how Regional Modernism on the west coast developed independently of, rather than in reaction to, International Modernism as promoted by the east coast architectural establishment. It documents influences on the development of Regional Modernism in residential design on the west coast, and it explores the ways in which ideas about modern residential design travelled and were shared by practitioners on the west coast, including Los Angeles, during this period of architectural innovation.

## Introduction

Regional Modernism in residential design as it emerged on the west coast of the United States is part of a rich tradition that developed in the late 1920s; the west coast continued to lead the country in residential design innovation through to the late 1960s. At the same time that the new east coast architectural establishment was promoting International Modernism, west coast architects were forging their own way, drawing on their own traditions, and carving out new ones. This regional response to International Modernism was variously called the Bay Region Style or the Second Bay Tradition in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Northwest Regional Style in the Pacific Northwest, and West Coast Style in the Vancouver, British Columbia area. Each region laid claim to its own Regional Modernism that nonetheless had much more in common than not.

What emerged in the Bay Area, the Pacific Northwest, and British Columbia, in contrast to the International Style, was a 'softer' modernism characterised by its use of wood, exposed structure, and gently sloping gable roofs, in contrast to the smooth stucco finishes and the flat roofs that typified the international Style. The concepts underlying the Modern Movement - that a building or product should reflect its time and its purpose - were translated into forms that seemed more fitting in these wooded, coastal regions with their temperate climates and dramatic water and mountain views. By the 1930s, this regional response came to the attention of the east coast architectural establishment, sparking a debate that would endure for the next twenty years.<sup>1</sup>

Regional Modernism on the west coast developed independently of, rather than in reaction to, International Modernism as promoted by the east coast architectural establishment, evidenced in part by the time frames in which major milestones in modernism occurred in Europe and California.

Surprisingly, little critical attention has been focussed on the similarities and differences in mid-century modern residential design in the four centres of the Bay Area, Portland, Seattle and Vancouver. This paper documents influences on the development of Regional Modernism in residential design on the west coast. It proposes that the various west coast regions had more in common than not. And it traces some of the ways that architectural ideas travelled south to north along the west coast and east to west and back again, eventually influencing modern residential throughout the country at mid-century.

## Parallel Developments

The Modern Movement in architecture came of age in Europe the late 1920s, marked by several events that would seal its importance internationally. In 1927 the Weissenhof exhibition, an *avant*

---

1 As late as 1951 architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, who had visited Portland in 1940 expressly to view the developments there, wrote: "The architects of the San Francisco Bay Region, whom some critics have wished to build up as the protagonists of a more humanistic school opposed to the International Style, have also frequently followed its principles almost to the point of parody . . ." Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: Norton, 1995), 247.

*garde* model housing settlement, opened in Germany, with participation by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, J. J. P. Oud, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, and Walter Gropius, among others. Architectural debate continued with the establishment of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), which convened in Switzerland in 1928, and continued to meet nearly annually for the next 28 years. These events coincided in time with progressive residential design, including the Schröder House in Utrecht, Netherlands by Thomas Gerrit Rietveld (1924), Walter Gropius' own house in Dessau, Germany (1925-26) and the Villa Savoye in Poissy, France (1928-30) by Swiss architect Le Corbusier. These icons of the International Style were all characterized by their sculptural forms, asymmetrical compositions, and lack of ornamentation, and represented a stark contrast to anything that had gone on before.

Parallel in time to the European developments mentioned above was the construction of the Dr. Philip Lovell Beach House in Newport Beach, California (1926) by Rudolf Schindler, who was from Vienna, and Dr. Lovell's Health House (1927-29) in Hollywood, by Schindler's partner at the time, fellow Austrian Richard Neutra. Both Schindler and Neutra had travelled to the United States to work with Frank Lloyd Wright, and both eventually made their homes in the Los Angeles area. These two residences became icons of the International Style as practiced in southern California. At the same time as this development, however, William W. Wurster built a summer home for Sadie Gregory (1928) in Scotts Valley, south of San Francisco. This informal, wood-clad compound, as widely published as Neutra and Schindler's work for Dr. Lovell, represented a new 'upper' west coast interpretation of modern residential design. Inspired by the vernacular rural buildings of northern California, the building complex expressed a marked contrast to the industrial forms and machine aesthetics seen in the International Modernism of Europe and southern California, and would influence practice from San Francisco to British Columbia for the next thirty-to-forty years.



Fig. 1. Richard Neutra, Dr. Lovell's Health House, 1927-29  
Photograph by Diana Painter, 2009

The Pacific Northwest would not see an equivalent introduction of new ideas until the mid-to-late 1930s, with Pietro Belluschi's design of the Jennings Sutor house in Portland (1937-38), an elegant interpretation of vernacular forms; the design of the Watzek house in Portland by John Yeon (1936-38), which exhibits a beautiful, austere formalism; and Paul Thiry's own house in Seattle (1936), which spoke to the International Modernism as practiced in Japan and Europe, from which he had recently returned. In Vancouver, B. C. Binning's own house (1941), was important for its integration

of art and architecture and also served as a gathering spot for architects and artists to discuss new design ideas.<sup>2</sup>

## Influences on the West Coast

The physical qualities that are commonly mentioned as influencing Regional Modernism on the west coast include the relatively temperate climate, the rugged topography, and the quality of the light. The dramatic landscape in much of the west coast can also be considered a determinate, as views of the water, mountains, and dramatic territorial views are much valued. As a result, sensitive site design and preserving the natural setting of a residence was important.<sup>3</sup> Because of the value placed on these factors, which by definition differ from site to site, the design process became paramount.

A less easily defined characteristic was the nature of the people. The west coast in general was less confined by the institutions that drove the development of architectural ideas and practice on the east coast. At the time these institutions included the Museum of Modern Art in New York, established in 1929, and the major universities, including Harvard, where Walter Gropius became chair of the Department of Architecture in 1938; Columbia University; and the Illinois Institute of Technology, whose architectural programme was directed by Mies van der Rohe, beginning in 1938. Secondly, the life patterns, as they were then called, influenced architectural responses. Lifestyles on the west coast were (and are) generally considered more casual and oriented towards the outdoors than on the east coast and in the Midwest. In the words of architectural historian David Gebhard: "The West Coast was the only region in the United States which seemed to offer a sympathetic environment for non-traditional values and ideas."<sup>4</sup>

Additional influences on the development of residential architecture in the Pacific Northwest and west coast included prevalent building materials and customs. These found expression in the use of wood, including redwood, douglas fir and western red cedar. The ubiquity and economy of these materials led to their dominance in building, particularly small-scale building. Architects and builders had a tradition of working with wood. Wood also tended to lend a 'warmer' appearance to the buildings, and a certain lightness of structure that was commensurate with regional architectural ideals as well. Southern California, in contrast, did not have the same tradition and in the early modern era, the use of smooth stucco finishes and concrete more closely aligned southern California with International Modernism.

---

2 Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit, Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963* (Montreal, Canada: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1997), 40.

3 For further discussion of site design in this era see John Ormsbee Simonds, *Landscape Architecture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 33.

4 David Gebhard, *Schindler* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 11.

Influences on Regional Modernism on the west coast can be traced to several indigenous architectural practices and building traditions. Regional Modernism has roots in the Arts and Crafts Movement as it emerged on the west coast, the architectural Revival Styles that immediately preceded the modern era and the parallel search for sources, and in the arts as practiced during the Great Depression of the 1930s, which embraced regionalism. The development of west coast modernism was also influenced by vernacular architectural forms and Asian culture, in particular the art and architecture of Japan.<sup>5</sup>

The Arts and Crafts Movement on the west coast preceded and set the tone for regional modernism. Qualities in the Arts and Crafts house that can also be found in regional modern houses include the prevalence of wood, expression of structure, a low, ground-hugging profile, deep eaves, and the use of outdoor rooms to extend the living space.<sup>6</sup> A premium was placed on healthy living and linking indoors and outdoors in this era. These ideals were expressed in the use of sleeping porches and outdoor rooms defined by trellises, pergolas and expansive front porches. The expressive use of materials for texture and to achieve a rustic quality also links the Arts and Crafts house with the later Regional Modernist house. Historically, these qualities can be seen in the work of the brothers Greene and Greene in Pasadena, the expressive use of wood by Bay Area architect Bernard Maybeck, and in the work of Seattle architect Ellsworth Storey, among others.

Another more psychological connection between architectural traditions on the west coast and the emerging modernism was the influence of the revival styles. The 1920s was the decade of the Period Revival Style, and the Colonial Revival Style was by far the most popular for single family homes in the United States. These houses, which were loosely based on prototypes from the English colonies in America, had the appeal of tradition and could be translated into grand homes as well as small modest houses. Looking to the past for precedents to inspire the present witnessed the emergence of a different revival style in California, however. The Mission Revival Style developed at a time when the missions of the Spanish and Mexican era were being rehabilitated, which sparked newfound interest in this architectural precedent and the concept of a native colonial expression.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Tudor Revival houses appear to have been the most popular Revival Style in the Pacific Northwest and Canada, perhaps reflecting the Northwest's English heritage.

The Revival Styles of the 1920s inspired an inward look at architectural roots and precedent. A similar self-reflective trend occurred in the 1930s in the New Deal era.<sup>8</sup> Regionalism and nationalism were overriding themes in the New Deal programmes of the Roosevelt Administration, and played out in literature, travel guides, the visual arts, and architecture. For example, David R. Williams prepared

---

5 For example, see Clarence W. W. Mayhew, "The Japanese Influence," in *Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1949), np.

6 Daniel Gregory, "William W. Wurster," in *Toward a Simpler Way of Life, The Arts & Crafts Architects of California*, ed. Robert Winter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 145.

7 David Gebhard, "The Spanish Colonial Revival in Southern California (1895-1930)," *JSAH* 26, no. 2 (May 1967): 131-47.

8 Meredith L. Clausen, *Pietro Belluschi, Modern American Architect* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 84.

an illustration called "A Map Showing Some Indigenous Rural Houses of the United States" under the auspices of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in 1934, in which the Northwest is represented by what appears to be a pioneer-style, side-gabled, wood structure with a full-width porch and stone foundation. The *American Guide Series*, the first of which was prepared for the state of Idaho, was produced by the New Deal's Federal Writers' Project. The guides reported on the sights and history of the individual states. The Northwest School of Art also emerged at this time, drawing on regional and international influences for a thoroughly modern interpretation of place.<sup>9</sup>

It is very likely that the Rustic Style practiced in this era also had an influence on architects in the post-war era.<sup>10</sup> Architects were employed in the New Deal programmes as well. The era saw the development of such landmarks as Timberline Lodge by architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood at Mt. Hood in Oregon and Moran State Park by architect Ellsworth Storey in Washington's San Juan Islands. The rugged stone work that was characteristic of the era can be seen in the design and construction of campgrounds, retaining walls for paths and roads, and scenic outlooks. The structural expression and use of materials in this work was also seen in post-war residential design with dramatic fireplace walls, flagstone walkways that carried the outdoors in, and rough-cut cedar and redwood siding.

Finally, an interest and appreciation for vernacular forms was shared by practitioners in the early years of Regional Modernism on the west coast. Both Pietro Bellushi of Oregon and William W. Wurster of northern California professed an admiration for the barns and agricultural buildings of their respective regions. This was made manifest in Wurster's 1928 Gregory Farmhouse, as well as Belluschi's later Johnson Farmhouse.



Fig. 2. William W. Wurster, Cabins at Steep Ravine, 1941  
Photograph by Diana Painter, 2007

Architects of the era also admired the simplicity seen in the Coleman Cottages in Seattle (1911 and 1916) by architect Ellsworth Storey; and the Harry Wentz Cottage (1916) in Neahkahnie, Oregon by Portland architect A. E. Doyle. The simple forms, refined proportions, and rustic materials seen in

---

9 Sheryl Conkelton et. al., *What it Meant to be Modern, Seattle Art at Mid-Century* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 2000), 8.

10 Grant Hildebrand, "Ellsworth Storey," in *Shaping Seattle Architecture, A Historical Guide to the Architects*, ed. Jeffrey Karl Ochsner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 107.

these early precedents can be found in some post-war building, and continued to characterize the residential work of several important Regional modernists.

## Promotion of the International Style

New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which was established in 1929, did more than any one organization or institution to introduce the American public to modern art and architecture. Their advocacy of European modernism, however, had its good and bad sides. The goal of MoMA's first director, Alfred Barr, was to introduce the general public to modern drawing, painting, and sculpture, as well as the latest European trends in modern architecture. The museum's first architectural exhibit, entitled "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition", was mounted in 1932. Under Barr's direction, architectural historian and critic Henry-Russell Hitchcock Jr. and Philip Johnson, curated the exhibit and concurrently published the catalogue *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*.<sup>11</sup> Hitchcock and Johnson included only one west coast architect and building in the exhibit and catalogue, which was Neutra's 1929 Lovell Health House.

The first travelling exhibition for the museum was based on this exhibit. It travelled to fourteen locations over a two-year period.<sup>12</sup> A smaller show, on the same subject, travelled to seventeen locations over a six-year period. The traveling exhibitions were staged in museums, galleries, universities, schools, clubs, theatres, and department stores, as the museum felt that this would introduce a broader public to these progressive ideas.<sup>13</sup>

Critics of the International Style exhibit, however, held that Hitchcock and Johnson had attempted to codify the stylistic features of International Modernism and portray it as an architectural style rather than as a holistic response to designing for a new era. They felt that regarding International Modernism as a 'style' limited its growth and essential ability to adapt to new conditions. This view resonated with west coast architects. They felt that classifying their work in this way undermined its social underpinnings, and that their work emerged from and was a response to the particularities of a place, the site, and collaboration with their clients.<sup>14</sup>

The museum was soon to expand its scope in a way that was more responsive to this criticism. Nationally regarded housing planner and advocate Catherine Bauer, who would marry William Wurster in 1940, became involved with the museum in 1932 and assisted with the preparation of the housing exhibit that accompanied the modern architecture exhibit, curated by Lewis Mumford. Mumford and Bauer had travelled to Europe in 1932 together to study contemporary planning and

---

11 Henry Matthews, "The Promotion of Modern Architecture by the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s," *Journal of Design History*, 7, no. 1 (1994): 43-59.

12 Elizabeth Mock, ed., *Built in USA 1932-44* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1944), 124, 127.

13 Elodie Courter, "Circulating Exhibitions," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, 1, no. 7 (March 1934).

14 Marc Treib, "The Feeling of Function," in *An Everyday Modernism, the Houses of William Wurster*, ed. Marc Treib (Berkeley: University of California Press 1995), 58.

were close personal friends. In 1934 she curated an exhibit on modern architecture and progressive community planning and by 1936 she was invited to serve on MoMA's Architectural Committee, where she was able to promote the concept of architectural functionalism and the social concerns of modern architecture.<sup>15</sup>

One of the Museum's next major architectural exhibits and publications was *Built in USA 1932-44*. This exhibit took a much broader and more geographically inclusive view of modern architecture in the United States. It included buildings by southern California architects Harwell Hamilton Harris, a noted regionalist, Gregory Ain, Raphael S. Soriano and Richard Neutra, and northern California architects Gardner Daily, Ernest Kump, and John Funk, among others. Portland architects John Yeon and Pietro Belluschi were also included, in addition to such east coast and Midwest architects as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe. In addition to single-family residential design, the exhibit included public housing (appropriate, given the need for defence housing in the war years), schools, factories, high-rises, and a broad range of other building types. The catalogue noted that the new architecture responded to a "need for humanization" and focussed on vernacular architecture as a new interest compatible with modernism for its emphasis on materials and adaptation to climate and topography. The catalogue praised in particular the work of California architects and William Wurster specifically: "Wurster, for example, was producing straightforward, essentially modern houses well before 1932, based on good sense and the California wood traditions rather than on specific theories of design."<sup>16</sup> It is likely no coincidence that the catalogue for the exhibit was written by Elizabeth Mock, Catherine Bauer's sister and Wurster's sister-in-law.



Fig. 3. Pietro Belluschi, Jennings Sutor House, 1937-3  
Photograph by Jack Bookwalter, 2013

As has been seen, after these early years, MoMA became more inclusive, recognizing a broader range of styles and interests. This was important because of the educational reach of the organization. So while Alfred Barr still referred to west coast residential architecture disparagingly as "the International Cottage Style", changes in personnel brought a broader point of view.

---

15 H. Peter Oberlander and Eva Newbrun, *Houser, The Life and Work of Catherine Bauer* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 152.

16 Mock, *Built in USA 1932-44*, 14.

New ideas about modern design were also seen in west coast exhibits. The San Francisco Museum of Art, established in 1935, developed exhibits on modern architecture, design, landscape architecture and urban planning that also travelled to other venues. For example, the influential “Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Area”, which showed from 15 August to 21 September 1949 in San Francisco next travelled to Portland, where it was mounted at the Portland Art Museum.<sup>17</sup> The announcement for the show in *The Oregonian*, emphasized the qualities that were being promoted in the Bay Area and beyond: “It stresses the possibility of better living which can result from architect-client cooperation”. The catalogue for the show included essays by Lewis Mumford, William Wurster, and Gardner Dailey, among others, and discussed such topics as the post-war house, the contribution of the client, and the influence of Japanese architecture.<sup>18</sup>

## Architects and Ideas

Architectural ideas in the mid-20th century travelled the way that architectural ideas typically travel; this era was no different. Ideas spread through exhibitions, lectures, publications, symposiums and workshops. Architects travelled and influenced others through architectural commissions in other cities, university appointments and visiting professorships, and by sitting on commissions and participating in juries and awards programs. Architects also shared ideas through professional meetings - for example, the national American Institute of Architects’ annual meeting in 1953 was held in Seattle. And of course architects influenced each other through mentoring young architects, whether at universities or in offices, and through informal organisations, and personal and professional relationships.<sup>19</sup>

Los Angeles resident Richard Neutra likely had more influence on the development of modernism on the west coast than any one architect, by visiting other locales for commissions, to lecture, and holding or participating in workshops and meetings. For example, Vancouver’s B. C. Binning, an influential modern artist and educator who regularly worked with architects, hosted Neutra at least three times for his salon, where he was able to interact with students and other professionals.<sup>20</sup> Neutra travelled throughout the American west for commissions, to conduct workshops and lecture on topics ranging from modern design to housing to post-war planning. When, for example, he designed the Jan De Graaff House (1940) and the William H. De Graaff House (1940) in Portland, he also lectured in that city.

Architectural publications in this era played a similar role as they have always played, introducing professionals and the public to new ideas and new buildings. For example, William W. Wurster’s 1928

---

17 Catherine Jones, “Three New Museum Shows to Open Wednesday Night,” *The Oregonian*, 29 January 1950, 4.

18 *Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region* (San Francisco: The San Francisco Museum of Art / Schwartz, 1949).

19 For additional background on this topic see Beatriz Colomina’s “Collaborations: The Private Life of Modern Architecture,” *JSAH* 58, no. 3 (1999): 462-71.

20 Liscombe, *The New Spirit*.

Scotts Valley farmhouse, a Regional modern building complex, was as widely published as Neutra and Schindler's homes for Dr. Philip Lovell, both stunning examples of the International Style. In addition to magazines and books that featured these and similar iconic structures was a plethora of books on buying a home and building a home, oriented towards the general public. Examples include George Nelson and Henry Wright's *A complete guide for the home builder, Tomorrow's House* (1945) and Elizabeth Mock's *If You Want to Build A House* (1946). These books spoke to national audiences and were far more catholic in their presentation of architectural styles than professional publications.

Professorships were another way that ideas travelled. Ideas travelled from west to east when William W. Wurster served as dean of the School of Architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston, from 1944-49. His tenure was followed by Portland, Oregon's Pietro Belluschi, who served in this same role from 1950-63. Wurster continued his educational career as Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of California Berkeley, from 1949-63. In the Pacific Northwest, many of the architects who were also noted Regional modernists taught in the local universities, including the University of Oregon, University of Washington, and University of British Columbia.

Architects sat on juries together, which appeared to foster lively discussions. *Sunset Magazine*, that great 'magazine of western living' sponsored the Western Home Awards programme for residential design in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Jurors included a range of design professionals. *Sunset* drew from a national pool, but nonetheless focused on west coast practitioners. Architects also sat on committees and commissions, and shared ideas through that process. California's William Wurster sat on the University of Washington's campus planning committee at mid-century, at the same time as Seattle native Minoru Yamasaki (perhaps best known for his design of the World Trade Center in New York), with whom he often had differing opinions.

The national conference for the American Institute of Architects (AIA) was held in Seattle in 1953, which gave that city an opportunity to show off its contemporary architecture. Seattle's first architectural guide, *Seattle Cityscape* by architect Victor Steinbrueck, was published for the occasion. *Architectural Record* devoted their April 1953 issue to the region. The same issue featured short essays by Seattle architects responding to the question, "Have We an Indigenous Northwest Architecture?"<sup>21</sup> The theme of the conference was "A New Country - A New Architecture", the latter to be addressed by Pietro Belluschi. Other speakers at the conference included William Wurster, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Antonin Raymond.

Architects have traditionally gained their expertise through on-the-job training in the offices of other architects. While university training supplants some of this emphasis today, it is still the case - and always will be - that young architects are influenced by their mentors and this is a rich way

---

21 Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, "Introduction," in *Shaping Seattle Architecture, A Historical Guide to the Architects*, ed. Jeffrey Karl Ochsner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), xxxiii.

that ideas travel. In just one example of the reach this process can have, both Richard Neutra and Rudolf Schindler had worked for Frank Lloyd Wright in southern California. Their colleague Antonin Raymond, a Czechoslovakian, also worked for Wright, supervising the construction of his Imperial Hotel in Japan.<sup>22</sup> Raymond, who went on to design experimental concrete structures in Japan, also influenced the young Paul Thiry, as well as introducing him to Le Corbusier. When Thiry returned to Seattle from his trip to Japan and Europe in 1934, he built what is widely considered the first International style house there in 1936.<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 4. Paul Thiry, Edwards House, 1936  
Photograph by Diana Painter, 2005

As has been seen, each west coast centre was positioned through recent architectural concerns to look inward, examining its own history and traditions and seeking the unique qualities of place to influence architectural production. The emphasis in modern residential design on the west coast was on design as 'problem solving', with concern for the site, the setting, the climate, building orientation, and design context, in addition to interactions with their clients. Pietro Belluschi, in an address at the Portland Art Museum in 1941, laid out his principles for designing houses, noting:

"This concept of modern ... will not lead us to expect it to be just another style ... It should not even be called modern, because it goes back to fundamentals. It goes back to nature, if the owner's life is one of response to it. Therefore we may deduct that a region with similar natural and human attributes may have an architecture harmonious to them. The people are neighbors, their interests are alike, they respond the same way to life, they have the same materials at hand, they have similar landscape, the same climate. So 'regionalism' really has a meaning, which internationalism does not quite have".<sup>24</sup>

Every city and region has its own character, and every city is made up of a group of architects that may have shared values, but are also individuals. The most prominent modernists in the Portland area in the late 1930s and 1940s were Pietro Belluschi, John Yeon, and Van Evera Bailey. In a generalization that does

22 Kurt G. F. Helfrich and William Whitaker, ed., *Crafting a Modern World, The Architecture and Design of Antonin and Noemi Raymond* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2006), 270.

23 Ochsner, Introduction, xxxi.

24 Pietro Belluschi, "Houses," in *The Northwest Architecture of Pietro Belluschi*, ed. Jo Stubblebine (New York: F. W. Dodge Corporation, 1953), 28-29.

not do justice to their work, early in his practice Belluschi developed an architectural vocabulary that he continued to apply consistently in his residential work between 1936-50. He adapted this vocabulary to the project at hand, with consideration for the program, the site, and his client's preferences. John Yeon designed a small body of work. Each residence was unique, typically for exclusive clients, with the exception of the speculative houses he designed with builder Burt Smith. And Bailey practiced in a more exuberant style, seen in particular in his 'stilt' houses in the western hills of Portland.

Early modern residences in the Seattle area borrowed more heavily from the International Style, perhaps based in part on the work of Paul Thiry. Architectural historian Don Luxton has spoken of the prevalence of post and beam construction in the architect-designed residences of the Vancouver area.<sup>25</sup> The San Francisco Bay Area saw a wide range of early modern styles and types at mid-century, no doubt reflecting its larger population and geographic area. The entire range of design approaches by Bay Area regionalists includes everything from Wurster's understated rustic style to experiments in steel-frame construction and prefabrication for residences by Campbell and Wong, within a geographic area that extended from Menlo Park to Marin. What these practitioners shared, however, is an attitude toward design. While this sometimes resulted in a shared vocabulary, a similar appearance could also mask a very different approach. This became evident in the lively discussions that followed Lewis Mumford's mention of the "Bay Region Style" on his "Skyline" column in the *New Yorker* in 1947. At this time, west coast residential design had been traveling between the extremes of Wurster and Neutra and Schindler's work for twenty years. The response was immediate. Although Mumford was a champion of Wurster and the Bay Area Tradition, the architects felt that calling their body of work the Bay Region Style defeated their very purpose in designing with consideration for the site, the climate, and their client's needs, rather than an established vocabulary or even a priori design principles.

In response, a symposium was held at the Museum of Modern Art in spring of 1948 to debate the future of modern architecture, and a feature was published in the May 1949 issue of *Architectural Record*, in which eight Bay Area architects and one landscape architect were asked to respond to the question, "Is There a Bay Area Style?" The very variety of responses supports architectural historian Keith Eggener's position that regionalism is a response to local circumstances, as vague as that position might be. Eggener quotes Mumford himself from his 1941 book, *The South in Architecture*:

"Regionalism is not a matter of using the most available local material, or of copying some simple form of construction that our ancestors used, for want of anything better, a century or two ago. Regional forms are those which most closely meet the actual conditions of life and which most fully succeed in making a people feel at home in their environment ... they reflect the current conditions of culture in the region."<sup>26</sup>

What the Regional modernists shared was a concern for the particularities of the place, the site, and the people involved in its development. These are the shared values that would have a lasting effect on their legacy.

---

25 Luxton, "The Rise and Fall of West Coast Modernism."

26 Keith Eggener, "Placing Resistance: A Critique of Critical Regionalism," in *Architectural Regionalism, Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition*, ed. Vincent B. Canizaro (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 397.