

SAVE OUR HERITAGE ORGANISATION PRESENTS

Mission Hills Modernism

Delawie, Ruocco, and Friends: 1942-1965



AN ONLINE TOUR

ON THE FRONT COVER

Atrium and garden entrance to the Homer Delawie House #2
1833 Neale Street

THIS PAGE

Historic photo of the Mooney House, 1820 Neale Street, c. 1950.
Courtesy Steve and Civia Gordon, former homeowners



INTRODUCTION

The 1908 Mission Hills subdivision was established by San Diego businessman and civic leader George Marston, his family, and friends, as a streetcar suburb. The neighborhood is distinguished by and perhaps best known for its array of well-designed homes in the Craftsman, Prairie School, and Spanish Revival styles. What is not as well known is that Mission Hills also boasts one of the largest enclaves of Mid-Century Modern architecture in San Diego.

Mission Hills has a distinctive topography, characterized by deep canyons and steep hillsides, which proved to be irresistible to pioneering Modernist architects like Homer Delawie and Lloyd Ruocco. Ruocco, an architect, educator, and urban designer, hired Delawie, his young protégé, who later became his partner. Together and solo, they changed this neighborhood and the city with striking yet simple geometric designs built primarily of wood and glass and in harmony with nature. These homes and commercial buildings, such as Ruocco's landmark Design Center (1949), 3611 Fifth Avenue in Hillcrest, take advantage of sheer slopes previously thought unbuildable, and their rewarding views. Delawie soon founded his own successful firm. The innovative homes he designed for his family and for clients on difficult sites in Mission Hills brought him awards and recognition. He was also influential in leading the City of San Diego Planning Commission and, as a long-time SOHO member, in historic preservation.

In their creative journey, these two Modernists discovered the allure of panoramic open spaces and quirky infill lots that had remained untouched. Like their predecessor Irving J. Gill, San Diego's renowned early 20th-century Modernist, they devised or harnessed cutting-edge building techniques to craft site-specific homes, seamlessly integrating architecture with stunning natural sites and sweeping or intimate views.

Mission Hills's varied terrain, mild climate, and perch above Old Town San Diego and San Diego Bay stoked the creative fires of Mid-Century Modernist architects and designers. Some homes on canyons feature daringly jutting, cantilevered rooms and decks for breathtaking views. Others are designed around interior gardens to keep nature close. Many

homes step down a hillside, with different levels devoted to social, indoor-outdoor spaces or private sleeping quarters.

The 2007 City of San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement (1935-1970) categorizes twelve sub-styles of San Diego Modernism: Streamline Moderne, Minimal Traditional, International, Futurist-Googie, Tiki-Polynesian, Post and Beam, Tract Ranch, Custom Ranch, Contemporary, Brutalism, Organic Geometric, and Organic Free-Form. While not all of these sub-styles are represented in this tour, they collectively underscore the dynamic architecture and experimentation that defined the era.

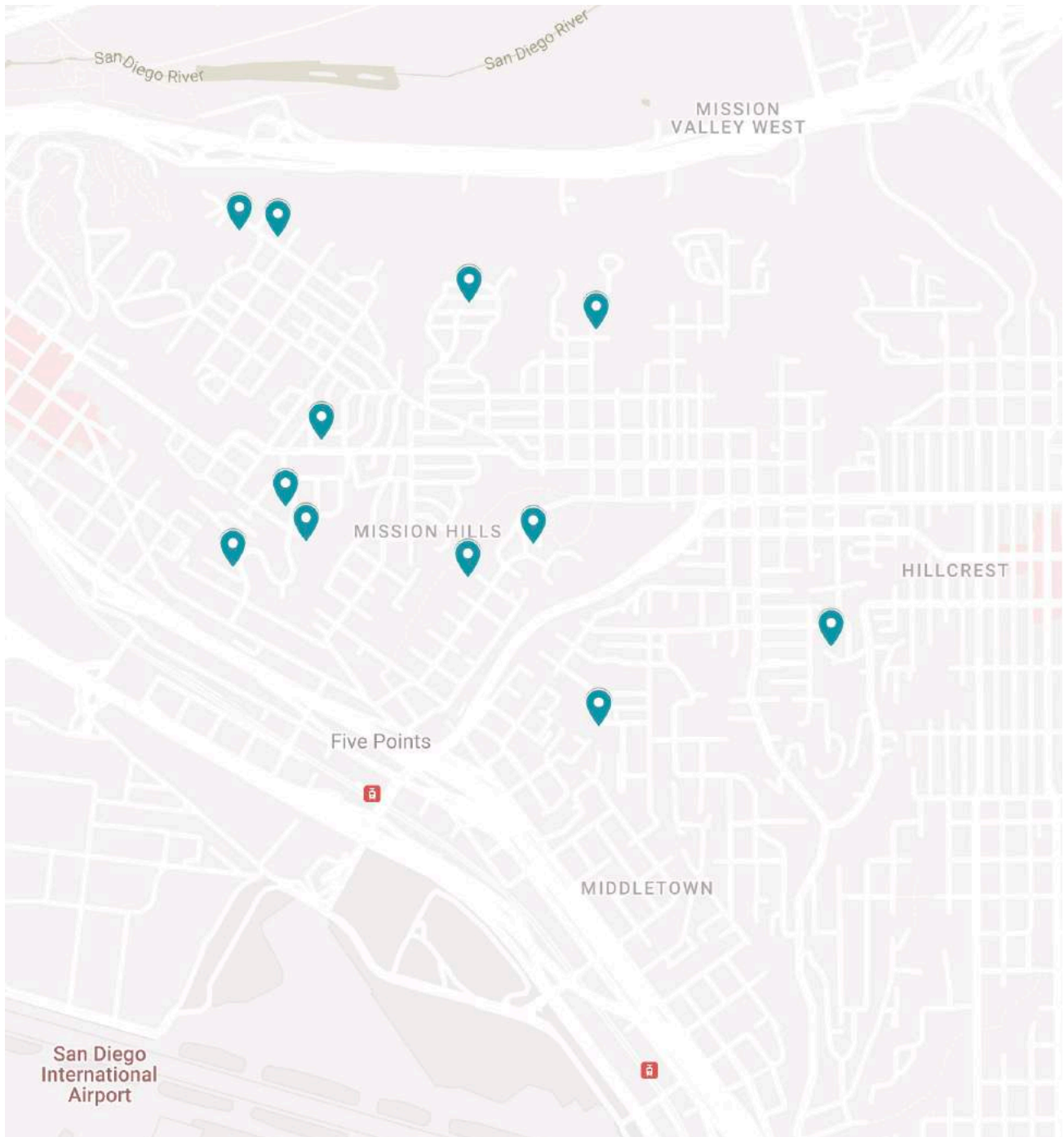
Noteworthy Mid-Century Modern architects who left their indelible mark on Mission Hills include not only Delawie and Ruocco, but also Frank Hope, Jr., whose California Ranch and International Style homes permeate the Rodefer Hills subdivision; Paul McKim, whose own home is on this tour; Sim Bruce Richards, a master of Organic Geometric architecture enhanced with natural materials; and John Lloyd Wright. Lesser-known yet influential architects such as Ronald K. Davis, Richard Lareau, and the Los Angeles-based Gin Wong also contributed to this community's rich architectural heritage.

Mission Hills possesses so many Mid-Century Modern residences partly because a rich lineage of Modernist architects who have called this vibrant neighborhood home. In addition to the dramatic geography and nearby historic Presidio Park, they were drawn to the area's charming winding streets and walkability, mature trees and landscaping, and strong sense of architecture history. Among them, luminaries like Delawie, McKim, C.J. Paderewski, John Reed, William Frederick Rosser, and Richard Wheeler also left their architectural imprints here. Master landscape architect Milton Sessions, nephew of Kate Sessions, the pioneering San Diego horticulturist and landscape designer, and a distinguished designer in his own right, lived on Lark Street. Notably, many architects continue to reside in Mission Hills, including world-acclaimed home designer and Taliesin Fellow Wallace Cunningham (born 1953).

Because Modernist houses were often constructed on oddly shaped, challenging lots or nestled within canyons, they can be hard to see from the street. SOHO is presenting this tour exclusively online and invites you to learn about and appreciate these often hidden architectural gems and their architects from an important time in the life of San Diego. We hope you enjoy it!

MAP

Click below on the map to be redirected to an interactive Google Map that will help guide you to each of the thirteen sites on the tour.



William Burnett House #1, 1949

2417 Pine Street

Lloyd Ruocco, Master Architect



This expansive residence, encompassing 4,000 square feet, is discreetly recessed from the street on a sprawling one-acre lot. A peek through the front gate shows a vaulted roof line above the entry. Floor-to-ceiling glass, delicately sandwiched between wood posts and exterior siding, bathes the interior in natural light, while seamlessly merging indoor and outdoor spaces.

Ruocco's early design ethos from 1937 to 1952 is evident throughout this house, which represents a distinct departure from European or even Los Angeles design trends of the time. Exposed redwood imparts warmth and character, blending with the home's sleek modernity. Indirect interior lighting and built-in bookcases running the length of a wall add practicality and a sense of continuity to the interior.

This house was part of a larger collaboration with the Burnett family. In 1955, Ruocco designed two Burnett Furniture stores for William Burnett (in Chula Vista and Hillcrest at Seventh and University Avenue), solidifying a connection between architecture and furniture that extended beyond the residential sphere. The Burnett family, known for their contributions to San Diego's business community since 1915, had a long-standing relationship with Ruocco, who designed three houses for them. In addition to this Modernist masterpiece, Ruocco designed Point Loma residences for William's brother, George, in 1960 and another house for William himself in 1971.



Ruth Dryer Dick/Richard George Wheeler House, 1952-56

2354 Pine Street

Richard Wheeler, Master Architect



Richard Wheeler designed this custom Ranch style house early in his career. The builder was Jerome Hope, the nephew of the master architect, Frank Hope Sr. In 1956, Wheeler designed an addition with a family room and guest suite, seamlessly integrated into the rear of the property. Builder Albert O. Westover was brought in for the addition. In 1960, San Diego landscape architects Wimmer + Yamada created the landscape design, but the original plantings remain a mystery. Joseph Yamada designed many notable residential and commercial Modernist landscapes in San Diego.



Wheeler's keen eye for detail and design can be seen in the home's exterior blend of wood siding, stucco, and concrete block. A commanding fieldstone chimney serves as a focal point, while the continuation of horizontal wood siding from the main residence to the garage emphasizes the architecture's horizontal lines.

The roof line features low-hipped angles and Dutch gables, complemented by deep, enclosed eaves and a variety of deep and shallow overhangs. On the corner of the house, adjacent to the garage, exposed eaves form an airy trellis, contrasting with the vertical wood fins on the opposite end of the house. Vertical wood siding creates visual interest near the asymmetrical, recessed solid wood door and its door-sized sidelight. Windows, both wood- and steel-framed, are



predominant, with a row of windows positioned above the horizontal siding. The floor plan unfolds in a sprawling U-shape, offering an array of open spaces and intimate nooks.

In 1952, the house garnered well-deserved recognition and was featured on the front page of the Home-Gardens section of the San Diego Union, and again in 1965 it was hailed as a new approach to residential architecture. In 2017, the City of San Diego designated the house after a painstaking restoration that successfully retained its well executed, defining characteristics.



1844 Altamira Place, c. 1920

Modernism Screen, c. 1965

Attributed to Homer Delawie, Master Architect



Photo by Allen Hazard

Located in the small subdivision originally known as Allen Terrace, this late 1919-1921 Arts and Crafts bungalow is largely intact. Surprisingly, a distinctive Modernist screen adorns the property, an unusual feature attributed to architect Homer Delawie, c. 1965. Crafted from redwood T1-11, or tongue and groove siding, it mimics and complements the bungalow's exterior with a fusion of architectural styles.



The Uptown Community Plan Historic Survey characterized this residence as a “Craftsman Bungalow with Oriental elements” and named 1930 as the year built. However, records reveal a different timeline. William H. and Helen A. Love came to San Diego in 1919 and by 1921 they had made this house their family home. The property serves as an example of architectural evolution creating a timeless and enduring legacy.

Delawie was known to create similar Modernist screens, including one at a 1910s Prairie School house on St. James Place, although it has been removed.

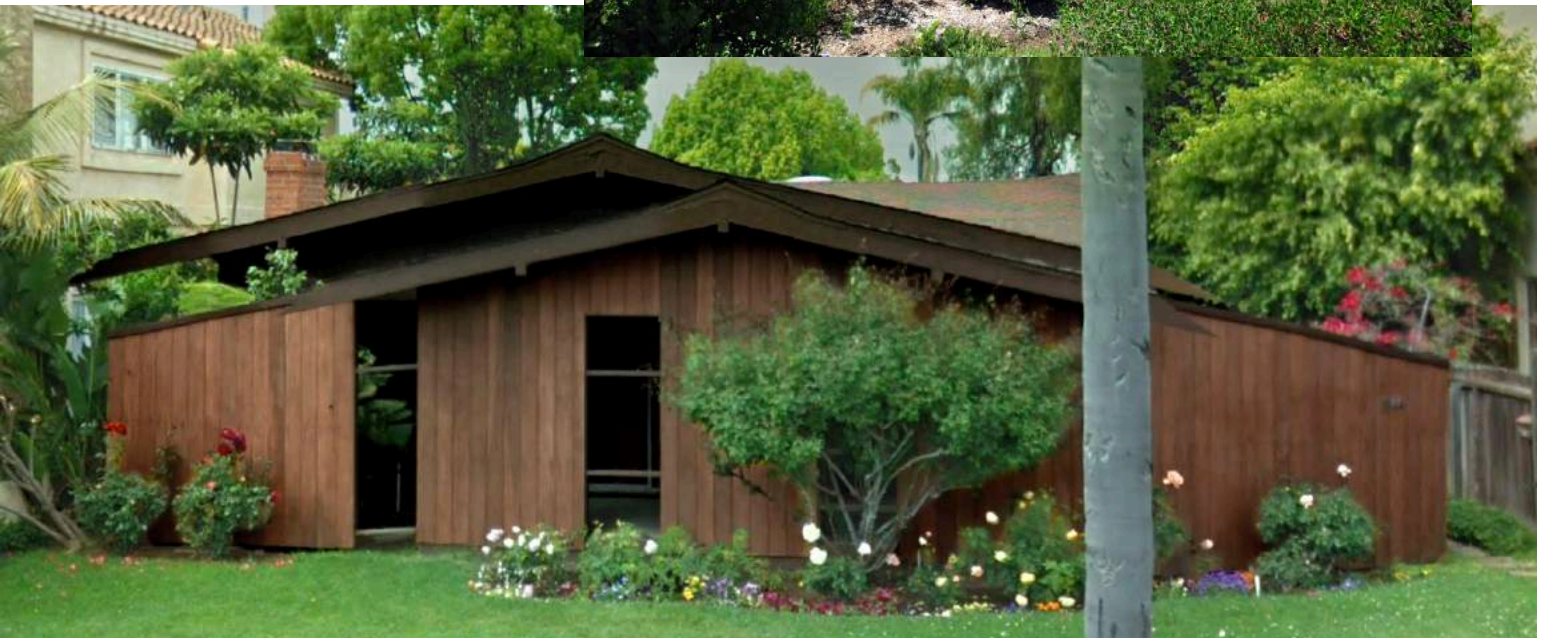


Photo courtesy Google street view, 2011

James L. O'Connor/Elizabeth Robertson House, 1942-1954

4255 Randolph Street
Lloyd Ruocco, Master Architect



Sitting serenely on Randolph Street, the James L. O'Connor/Elizabeth Robertson House represents an early Ruocco remodel/renovation that marries history and modernity. In 1942, the O'Connors asked Ruocco to remodel their 1920s Arts and Crafts bungalow as a welcoming place for entertaining. James O'Connor was a celebrated pianist. She also served as director of the San Diego Museum Art. Under Ruocco's guidance, their remodel relied on Organic design principles and sensitivity to art and music.

The architect created an intriguing interplay of exterior architectural elements and texture. Ruocco kept some of the original horizontal redwood siding, but added vertical siding, one of his hallmarks. The roof lines feature both flat and slanted planes with wide overhanging eaves and intact rafter tails on the second story. Ruocco's other additions include a studio enclosed with redwood siding and three expansive glass walls, and a spacious alcove with a raised platform with room for two grand pianos. This alcove also served as a gallery for Elizabeth Robertson's art collection, which featured Japanese kakemono (hanging silk scrolls displaying artwork), drawings, and paintings by San Diego artists. The rich, mellow tones of redwood and brick walls provided the perfect canvas to showcase these treasures. Facing a patio garden, the studio's glass panels along the north elevation invite the outdoors in, and embrace its setting and abundant indirect natural light.

Ruocco kept the original 1920s kitchen, making this house, for a time, a rare instance in Modernist design



that incorporated an earlier house style. Over time, the house underwent several significant changes and additions. In the 1950s, after James O'Connor's passing, Elizabeth married Tom Robinson, who also worked at the San Diego Museum of Art. The house was remodeled to accommodate Tom's children. In the 1960s, Homer Delawie renovated the kitchen that Ruocco had left intact, and sometime after that, architect Manuel Oncina remodeled the second-story.

James and Elizabeth brought artistry and culture into every corner of this remarkable residence. The O'Connor family's ties to George Marston and their marriage connections to the Klauber family, clients of the legendary architect Irving J. Gill, further enriched the historical resonance of this house. Frequent visitors included luminaries, such as Richard Neutra and his pianist wife, Dione. Richard Neutra, a famous Austrian-American architect, who briefly worked with Frank Lloyd Wright and had a close friendship with Rudolf Schindler, would often visit with Dione, who would enchant evening guests with her piano performances.

The James L. O'Connor/Elizabeth Robertson House is a true testament to the intersection of architecture, art, and culture, where innovation and tradition converge in perfect harmony.

Max Rabinowitz House, 1954

2034 Sunset Boulevard
Lloyd Ruocco, Master Architect



Max Rabinowitz wanted a **Mid-Century home** to be designed by Lloyd Ruocco. To make this happen, he unfortunately destroyed the 1912 Milo C. Treat mansion that rose from the center of Sunset Boulevard, and split the lot.

He then commissioned Lloyd Ruocco to design his Modern house on the western lot, a departure from building on Mission Hills canyon-hugging or infill lots at the time. Ruocco's design here stems from his innovative, modular houses, the Garden Villas, which were built of affordable, standard building materials and equal portions of Modern and Organic elements.

The original wooden front doors still swing open in a facade of horizontal wood siding, while a flat roof with overhanging eaves provides protection from the elements. The volume of the prominent garage emphasizes the crisp geometry of the architecture.

Inside, an open floor plan facilitates the informal essence of mid-20th-century modern living. Two movable walls ingeniously transform the large living room, den, and main bedroom into one flowing space, providing flexibility and possibly new ways to use the rooms, as needed. A defining element is the generous use of floor-to-ceiling glass walls in three-quarters of the house to embrace the backyard garden.



Photo by Allen Hazard



Mr. and Mrs. Merrill Jacobson Residence, 1957

4120 Bandini Street
Harold Warren Levitt, Architect



Photo courtesy Google street view, 2019

At first glance, a solid wall dominates the street view of this residence with only the entry—a front door and sidelights—hinting at what lies within.



Original blueprints courtesy John and Flossie L'Estrange; facing page 1,2,3 patio, entry way, interior facing front door. Photos by Allen Hazard

The house occupies a trapezoid-shaped lot, a distinctive aspect to be sure. Due to this quirky blank slate, most of the home's rooms defy conventional square dimensions. At some point, the Jacobsons converted the carport into a bedroom for their daughter.

Other than that, the layout remains unchanged. Preserving its Mid-Century Modern architecture, the current owners have made only superficial changes. Levitt, a Beverly Hills-based architect to the stars, created visual and physical connections with floor-to-ceiling glass walls that, on one side of the house, open on to a patio, and, on the opposite side, to an interior courtyard. A Modernist fireplace and flue hang from the ceiling for an arresting, sculptural focal point. Skylights bring natural light into the living spaces, while sliding pocket doors provide flexibility to either open, enclose,



or merge separate areas. Original Philippine mahogany paneling survives and enhances a bedroom and hallway closets. Owners replaced shag carpeting with wood flooring, yet the original travertine floors remain in the living room and hallway.

Former homeowner Merrill Jacobson told the current owner that his friendship with Levitt led to Jacobson commission for a home in San Diego. The current owners obtained the original architectural plans from Levitt's office in 1975, which confirmed its authenticity. This house is Levitt's only project in San Diego.

Richard and Roberta Silverman House, 1958

4021 Miller Street

William F. Cody, Henry Hester, and Ronald K. Davis, Architects



Photos by Allen Hazard

This remarkable residence invites you to imagine the challenging vacant lot before the house was built. Faced with “...an odd, rambling shape...on a canyon rim,” the trio of architects designed a dwelling that balanced the budget, the evolving needs of a growing family, and aesthetics. Cody, Hester, and Davis were well regarded for their individual work, and they stayed together for only a short time.

These architects inventively conceived of the house as an inverted, symmetrical “T” shape. The T’s top bar, divided by two uses, creates symmetry. On one side of the deep, linear house that stretches toward the canyon rim, a tall concrete wall anchors the structure to the earth. On the other side, a pair of two-car garages visually balance the wall. The entrance lies hidden between the imposing wall and the solid garages.

The result of this thoughtful, site-specific design is nothing short of spectacular. The 4,400-square-foot home has four bedrooms and three-and-a-half baths. Its exposed post-and-beam construction was favored by Mid-Century Modern architects, in part, for enabling long structural spans that made possible open floor plans and mostly unobstructed sightlines. You’d never know it from the street, but every facet of this house maximizes breathtaking views of San Diego Bay.



Photo courtesy Google street view, 2014



Tom K. Lai House, 1957-1965

3872 Bandini Street
Gin D. Wong, Architect



Gin Wong, an important Los Angeles-based Modernist architect, rarely designed houses, but he made an exception for his father-in-law, the proprietor of Tom Lai's Restaurant. Set on a 9,000-square-foot lot, the house unfolds a distinctive layout composed of three principal wings. The design exudes a sense of modernity and elegance, with roofs constructed from stepped concrete and adorned with wide overhanging eaves. In a startling illusion, one wing appears to float above its concrete base. In contrast, the other two wings incorporate vertical stucco sections instead of glass, striking a balance between openness and privacy.

The house is still owned by the family. The current stewards of this architectural treasure have preserved it and cultivated and maintained an exceptional garden landscape.

Historic photos courtesy
Grant Yee



Drs. Thomas and Margaret Mooney House, 1949

1820 Neale Street

John Lloyd Wright, Master Architect



This house is representative of John Lloyd Wright's post-war, California residential work in an Organic style. In some ways, it echoes the modular Usonian homes his father, Frank Lloyd Wright, originated and built from the 1930s into the 1950s. Prairie School residences also influenced the younger Wright in designing the Mooney house. It is important for its affordability, modest size, and open, modular floor plan. Built for an estimated \$13,000 during the post-World War II era of optimism and renewal, the home's abundant natural wood walls inside and on the exterior contradicts its early affordable housing description. The low-hipped roof line, crowned with wide, overhanging eaves, creates an elegant silhouette, while horizontal redwood siding mirrors the organic ethos of the California landscape.



The zigzag wood ornament on the roof fascia was made from leftover wood scraps during construction, telling signs of resourcefulness and what we now call sustainable design practices. While John Lloyd Wright often employed pine or fir plywood for interior use, in this case he chose unpainted redwood for the walls and decorative ribs in the living room's vaulted ceiling, adding natural warmth to the rooms. A significant later addition is the art glass window created by James Hubbell, an internationally acclaimed San Diego artist and designer, that strengthens the home's aesthetic appeal.



Historic photo, c. 1950. Courtesy Steve and Civia Gordon, former homeowners

Homer Delawie House #2, 1963

1833 Neale Street
Homer Delawie, Master Architect



Homer Delawie's second venture in designing a home for his own family was sited to maximize views of the surrounding canyon while preserving a mature California pepper tree. His first creation, famously named the Boxcar House, can be found in Mission Hills at 1773 Torrance Street.

Delawie painted the facade of rough-sawn, vertically grooved western cedar siding a rich brown that echoed its natural setting. Preparing to nominate this house for historic designation in 2007, Delawie recalled his design in an interview: "I liked it because things were simple and direct. The use of glass and



wood siding and post-and-beam construction. I could float spaces around that complimented each other. You will notice that in my house there are no corners." This commitment to simplicity and fluidity is evident throughout the home, which is still shaded by the enormous pepper tree.

The sophisticated open floor plan, innovative overall design, and captivating setting caught the attention of the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*. When they published the house in 1965, the article noted, "Inside the house, the use of ceiling-height glass walls, slab doors, and wall-hung furniture all contribute to the sense of

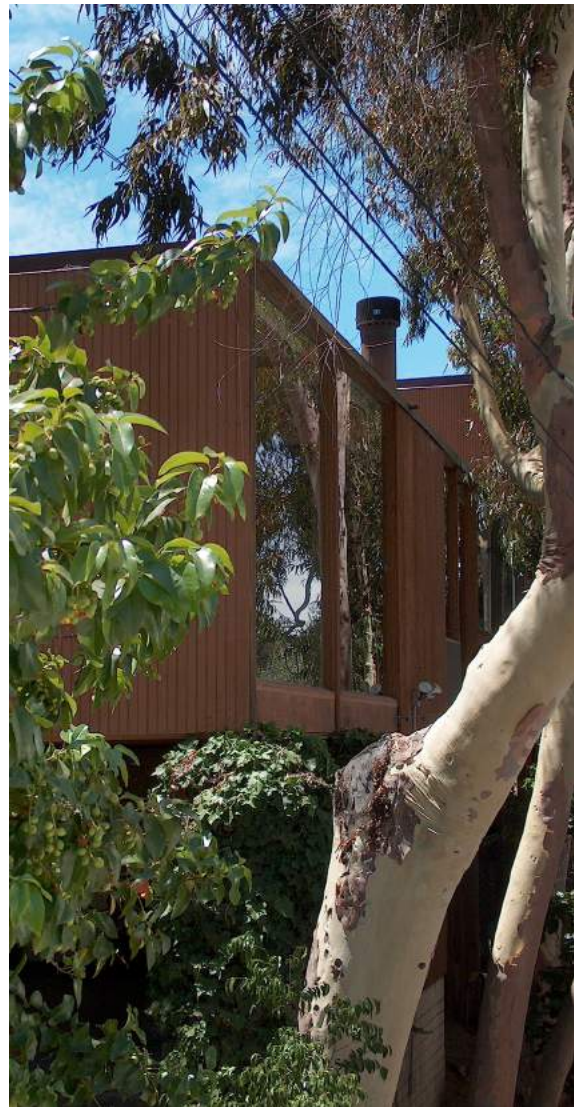


spaciousness, belying the actual size of the house at only 1,534 square feet.” Delawie made the wall-hung furniture for his children’s rooms to save space and satisfy his desire to make things. “I was always toying with the idea of furniture,” he said.

In 1981, Delawie expanded the house, adding a two-story main bedroom and bath suite at the back. He undoubtedly anticipated that his family’s changing size and needs would require more room in the house, which he provided while maintaining its architectural integrity. This house earned an Award of Merit from the San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. It appeared in the September 2004 issue of *San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyles Magazine* and was a highlight of a tour during SOHO’s 2004 Modernism Weekend.

Delawie purchased the lot for \$8,000 and built the house for \$23,500. He and his family lived here for ten years. Then, in 1973, they moved into the third and final house he designed for them in Point Loma. When asked to name his favorite designs, Homer proclaimed, “My houses! All three of my houses...this [one on Neale Street] may have been the best house for this reason: It is successful for solving all three problems—the budget, the site, and the personality of the client. It fits.”

Of course! Delawie and his family were the clients! A perfect fit.



Paul William McKim House, 1965

3911 Portola Place
Paul McKim, Architect



Paul McKim designed this two-story, 2,448-square-foot house for his own family. You may recognize the influence of renowned architect Richard Neutra, who left an indelible mark on McKim's early work, like geometry, proportions, and scale. The home mimics a townhouse layout, with the elongated



living areas sited at the back of a narrow 30-foot lot. This innovative approach to a traditional design type not only blurs the distinction between indoor and outdoor spaces, but also demonstrates McKim's stated consideration for his neighbor's view and privacy, as well as for his family. In 1965, the construction costs were modest at \$21,000. McKim achieved this low figure by using simple wood frame and post-and-beam construction methods. Large, rough stucco exterior panels harmonize with wood slat trim, creating a striking facade. Expansive glass walls ascend the full two-story height.



The success of the McKim House arises from its H-shaped design, comprising two rectangular wings connected by an entry stairwell. Artful accents soften these twin, boxy wings and add character. The house received awards from the San Diego American Institute of Architect's Homes for Better Living Program, *House and Home Magazine*, and *Sunset Magazine*. In 1968, the McKim House was named one of the "best contemporary architect-designed houses in the nation" by the esteemed magazine, *Architectural Record*.

Historic photo, c. 1965. Courtesy Keith York

H. L. Nelson House, 1958

630 North Crescent Court

Lloyd Ruocco, Master Architect



The H. L. Nelson House is one of only a handful of Ruocco's Garden Villa houses that remains intact. These minimalist, airy houses formed the foundation of his urban design concept known as Supercity. Garden Villas were constructed of affordable standard materials aiming for atypical results.

For example, you could build your house, then dismantle it and take it with you when you moved.

Tucked away in a private cul-de-sac, and occupying a double lot, the Nelson House exemplifies Ruocco's architectural credo to create spaces that are both functional and aesthetically captivating. The exterior combines rough-hewn redwood siding with broad spans of glass that unite the interior with the lush private garden.

Calling Ruocco the father of modern design in San Diego, architectural historian and landscape architect Todd Pitman quoted the architect: "Good architecture should call for the minimum use of





materials for the most interesting and functional enclosure of space.” Pitman continued, “You see, Ruocco believed that no level of architectural genius could equal the beauty of San Diego’s natural landscape. He believed in the beauty of the trees, canyons, and sky. And if you have had the pleasure of being inside one of his simple wood or steel [framed] buildings, you know the trees, canyons, and sky of which I speak.” (Pitman created the website LloydRuocco.com)

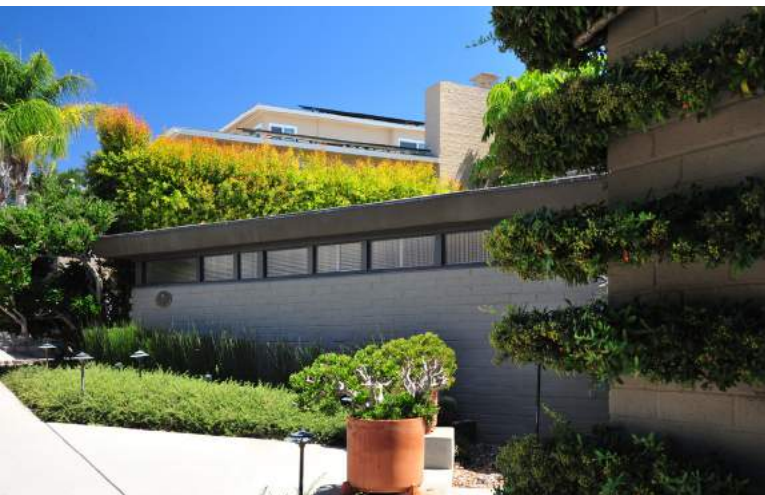
The Nelson House embodies this philosophy, where the genius of nature miraculously coexists with the brilliance of Ruocco’s architecture.

James Don and Rita Keller House, 1948

1433 Puterbaugh Street
Lloyd Ruocco, Master Architect



The Keller house is little changed from Ruocco's original design. The wood front door, flanked by sidelights and a large panel of textured glass, adds up to an inviting entryway. Its irregular shape form is crowned by a flat roof and wide, boxed, overhanging eaves. Unconventional window shapes and placement pierce the brick facade. Ribbon windows with opaque glass run the length of the house, and skylights introduce abundant natural light. At the back, large fixed windows frame changing vistas of San Diego Bay.



Distinct from Ruocco's Organic designs, the Keller House shows International Style influences. Ruocco's commitment to architectural innovation and functionality can be seen here. A massive fireplace, thoughtfully positioned to serve both the living room and the main bedroom, provides warmth and character to free-flowing spaces.

James Don Keller, who served as San Diego District Attorney, commissioned Ruocco to design this and another home to share with his wife, Rita. According to the *District Attorney's Office: A Brief History* by Gayle Falkenthal, "Keller was elected on a 'reform' ticket...



he was known as a modest, straight-arrow personality not given to any frivolous moments... no more day drinking by the D.A. staff...no more martinis at lunch hour!"

Now listed as a historic resource by the City of San Diego, this house cost about \$16,000 to build. The Kellers lived here until 1958.

One measure of an architect's success is having clients return with more commissions. In 1963, Ruocco designed a third house for the Kellers, at 9405 La Jolla Farms Road.



Historic photos courtesy Todd Pitman-Lloyd Ruocco Archive

Brief Biographies of the Architects

Architect William Francis Cody (1916-1978) graduated from the University of Southern California. He worked with Cliff May, a San Diego-born designer known as “the father of the modern ranch house,” until 1947, when he moved to Palm Springs. From 1958-1960, he partnered with Henry H. Hester. On the SOHO tour, the Richard and Roberta Silverman House was designed by the team of Davis, Cody, and Hester

Architect Ronald K. Davis (1928-2010) was born and raised in San Diego. He attended San Diego High School, and served in the U.S. Navy from 1946-1948. Davis then studied architectural engineering at California Polytechnic State University. Around 1953, after working as a draftsman at several San Diego firms, he found work in Henry H. Hester’s office. Davis worked for Hester through 1959. On the SOHO tour, the Richard and Roberta Silverman House was designed by the team of Davis, Cody, and Hester.

Master Architect Homer Delawie (1927-2009), who was born in Santa Barbara, designed three novel houses for his family, one of which is on the tour. He joined the navy fourteen days before the end of World War II, then studied architecture at California Polytechnic. In a 2007 oral interview with Janet O’Dea and Allen Hazard, Delawie recalled that while on vacation in San Diego he drove by Lloyd Ruocco’s Design Center at 3611 Fifth Avenue, a 1949 Modernist marvel that struck him at first sight. “I slammed on the brakes. There was a man in the street and he was looking a little mad. I almost ran over him and I stopped and it was Lloyd Ruocco. So, we started to chat and after three hours I went home to Santa Barbara. The next day, Lloyd called me and offered me a job.”

Delawie was a successful architect with some of his best-known works on this tour. He was also very active in the San Diego design, planning, and preservation communities. He was an early member of Citizens Corner (now called, Citizens Coordinate for Century 3), and was the first architect appointed to the City of San Diego Planning Commission, which he later chaired. He also served on the city’s Historical Resources Board, and the city’s Balboa Park Committee.

Master Architect Henry Hartwell Hester (1925-2006) Born in Oklahoma, Hester’s family eventually moved to San Diego, as his father was in the navy. In 1952, Hester graduated from the University of Southern California’s architecture school. Like Delawie and other accomplished Southern California architects, many of Hester’s designs were handsomely shot by the famed Modernist photographer Julius Shulman. His architecture has been published in more than 30 architecture magazines and three books. One of his most acclaimed designs is the Salomon Apartments (1959) at 3200 Sixth Avenue in San Diego. After it was meticulously restored, the building reclaimed its status as a top-tier Modern landmark and place to live, and was added to the City of San Diego historic register. He collaborated with Cody and Davis on the Silverman House.

Architect Harold Warren Levitt (1921-2003) was born in San Francisco and graduated in 1943 from Stanford University with a degree in graphic arts. He later earned an architecture degree from the University of Southern California. Regarded as an architect to the stars, Levitt worked in his firm's Beverly Hills office designing homes in Los Angeles for Quincy Jones, Burt Lancaster, Dean Martin, Olivia Newton-John, Debbie Reynolds, Kenny Rogers, Lionel Richie, Steven Spielberg, and many more. In creating custom homes for so many different personalities, he became a celebrity of sorts himself. Levitt also designed the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas. The Jacobson Residence on this tour is his only work in San Diego.

Architect Paul McKim (1931-) was born in Indiana. Following service in the U.S. Navy (1951-1955), he earned a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Illinois. Shortly after moving to San Diego, McKim worked for Richard "Dick" Lareau. In 1964, he established Paul McKim and Associates in Ruocco's Design Center in Hillcrest. He was a visiting lecturer for what is now the San Diego State University School of Environmental Design (1967-1968) and served on the board of the American Institute of Architects San Diego chapter during the same years. In 2014, McKim received a Lifetime Achievement award from the chapter. McKim still manages a solo practice. His own award-winning house is on the tour.

Master Architect Lloyd Ruocco (1907-1981) is regarded as the father of San Diego Modernism. He led San Diego's Organic architecture practice and is considered one of the region's greatest post-war architects. With the most homes of any architect represented on this tour, Ruocco and his work remain widely respected.

Born in Maine, he moved to San Diego at a young age. While still in high school, he worked as a draftsman for Richard Requa. Beginning with Requa, Ruocco surrounded himself with San Diego's best architects throughout his lifetime. After he graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 1933, he reconnected with Requa and worked with him off and on until Requa's death in 1941. Ruocco's next position was with William Templeton Johnson, working on projects that included the County Administration Center, and, later, on design and development plans for a new village, Rancho Santa Fe.

In 1947, Ruocco designed, built, and opened his office, and thus began the life of the now legendary Design Center. The Design Center would provide inspiration and training for San Diego's creative leaders and many Modern masters. From 1959-1961, he partnered with Homer Delawie. Along with creating homes that are coveted to this day, he was instrumental in founding several community design organizations: Citizens Coordinate for Century 3, Allied Artists, and Allied Craftsmen. He also published several textbooks to bring art and design to schools. Ruocco's profound legacy continues to influence the region's architects not only in the Organic style, but also in a responsibility for civic leadership.

Master Architect Richard George Wheeler (1917-1990) was the son of Master Architect William Henry Wheeler. He attended San Diego State College before graduating in 1941 from the University of California, Berkeley. In 1947, following service in the U.S. Navy during World War II, Wheeler returned to work for his father and eventually opened his own office. He mentored locally acclaimed architects, including Hal Sadler, Gayne Wimer, and Roger Matthews. By his own account, Wheeler was involved in the design of some 400 buildings. He worked continuously until he retired in 1989. He designed the Ruth Dryer Dick/Richard George Wheeler House..

Architect Gin Wong (1922-2017) was born in China and with his parents came to the U.S. during the Great Depression. He served in the Air Force during World War II. In 1950, he graduated from the USC School of Architecture and joined the Los Angeles firm of William Pereira. As a key member of that prominent firm, he was director for the original 1952 Los Angeles International Airport. Wong played a major role in the design of many iconic West Coast buildings, including the CBS Television City, the Occidental Center, Crocker Bank, and the Union 76 gas station in Beverly Hills, one of his best-known designs. In San Francisco, his fingerprints were on the Transamerica building and the St. Francis Hotel tower. In 1974, he founded Gin Wong Associates and designed internationally recognized hotels, university campuses, and commercial buildings, including the Gibraltar Savings and Loan branch in La Mesa. In 2007, he received the Construction Industry Lifetime Achievement Award from the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. And, in 2013, the Los Angeles Conservancy's Modern Committee honored Wong with a Modern Masters award. He designed the Tom K. Lai House on this tour for his father-in-law.

Master Architect John Lloyd Wright (1892-1972) was born in Oak Park, Illinois, a renowned enclave of houses his famous father designed. But growing up as Frank Lloyd Wright's second child, John Lloyd Wright's path meandered. Eventually, he followed in his father's footsteps and succeeded as an architect. In 1910, during a falling out with his father, he was taken in by his older brother, architect Lloyd (Frank Lloyd Wright, Jr.), and joined him in San Diego, where they lived with Prairie School architect Barry Byrne, who had worked for their father. Soon John began work as a draftsman for architect Harrison Albright while he was designing the Prairie School style Workingman's Hotel (now the Golden West) in downtown San Diego. John went on to design the 1913 Wood House in the Prairie style in Escondido. In 1914, he reconciled with his father and left the area to assist him with Midway Gardens in Chicago.

After another disagreement with his father during construction of the Imperial Hotel in Japan, John took a break from architecture, but was still inspired by it. He invented the now classic, still popular construction toy, Lincoln Logs. By 1946, he reconciled with his father again, but stayed and developed his career in the San Diego area. He lived in Del Mar and designed numerous houses and commercial buildings that are today admired and landmarked throughout San Diego County, including the Mooney House on this tour.

Additional Modernist Projects In Mission Hills

Houses designed by Homer Delawie

Boxcar or Delawie #1, 1958
1773 Torrance Street

Donald K. and Nancy M. Westphal House, 1963
4285 Jackdaw Street

Houses designed by Ruocco/Delawie

Dr. James Sandell House, 1959
2030 Sunset Blvd

Howard L. Chernoff House, 1960
4522 Trias Street

Houses and buildings designed by Sim Bruce Richards

Chester and Joanne Hayward House
1840 Neale Street

T.R. Newsom House, 1955
2580 North Arroyo Drive

Bryan Worthington House Remodel, 1968
2137 West California Street

Janet Goodwillie Remodel, 1982
2580 North Arroyo Drive

Brav & Schwartz Law Offices, 1982
4026 Dove Street

Houses and buildings designed by Lloyd Ruocco

The Lamplighter
817 West Washington Street

Arthur Goodman House, 1953
2414 Marilouise Way

Dr. W.J. Tighe House, 1951-52
3252 Hawk Street

William M. Beers House, 1954
631 N. Crescent Court
Note: remodeled 1964

Trail House, 1954
1440 Puterbaugh Street

Srull House, 1955
2156 Mergho Impasse

Dr. Purvis Martin House, 1955
4472 Arista Street

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Salik Residence, 1957
2110 Guy Street
Note: Heavily Altered

Gilchrist House, 1959
2021 Rodelane Street
Note: Remodeled

Other Notable Sites

3920 Pringle Street, 1947
Attributed to Albert "Al" Gabbs, Architect

4047 Bayview Court, 1950s
Architect, unknown

Store M Music Theory Store, 1950s
827 West Washington
Architect/Builder, unknown

Mission Hills Bicycle Shop/Urban Fusion, 1950s
141 West Washington Street
Architect/Builder, unknown

Louis and Barbara Hoffman House, 1955
3939 Bandini Street
Loch Crane, Architect

Jim Clark House, 1958
1878 Washington Place
Frederick Liebhardt, Architect

Frye House, 1958
2316 Juan Street
Frederick Ralph Livingston, Architect

John A. Detchon House, 1960
4284 Ibis Street
Henry Hester, Architect
Joe Yamada, Landscape Designer

John "Jack" and Peggy Bone House, 1960
1914 Guy Street
Richard Lareau, Architect

3876 Alameda Place, 1960
Architect/Builder, unknown

Former Mission Hills Library, 1961
925 West Washington Street
R.J. Hortie, Contractor

Dr. Hodge N. Crabtree House, 1962
4521 Trias Street
Liebhardt and Weston, Architects

William Frederick Rosser House, 1967
2468 Presidio Drive
William Frederick Rosser, Architect

PRIMARY TYPEFACES

Neutraface light is used for the body text throughout as well as on the cover in the title below the tour header. It was influenced by the work of Modernist architect Richard Neutra (1892-1970) and was developed with the assistance of Neutra's architect son and former partner, Dion Neutra (1926-2019).

Erbar condensed appears as the tour header in the cover title. Ludwig & Mayer released it as Erbar Grotesk in 1926. Designer Jakob Erbar's goal was to design a printing type free of all individual characteristics, possessing thoroughly legible letter forms, and a creation of pure typography. A total of 11 styles were added to the family from 1926 to 1930.

Mostra Nuova is used in the cover title, the back cover text, and titles and footers throughout. The font is based on a style of lettering seen on Italian Art Deco posters and advertising of the 1930s.

RESEARCH, EDITORIAL, PRODUCTION, AND DESIGN

Alana Coons
Allen Hazard
Ann Jarmusch
Sandé Lollis
Janet O’Dea

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sandé Lollis
Except where otherwise noted

RESOURCES

City of San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement
Lloyd Ruocco Archive - lloydruocco.com/about
Modern San Diego - modernsandiego.com
Oral history of Homer Delawie by Janet O’Dea and Allen Hazard, 2007
Save Our Heritage Organisation - Various publications

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mission Hills residents Allen Hazard and Janet O’Dea are local authors, historians, and preservation advocates.

Todd Pitman, ASLA - Landscape architect, architectural historian, Ruocco authority
Keith York - San Diego Mid-Century Modern architecture historian



Published by Our Heritage Press
PO Box 80788, San Diego, CA 92138

For a catalog of other tours, visit our website at www.SOHOsandiego.org

Copyright ©2023 Save Our Heritage Organisation

Financial support is provided by the City of San Diego
Commission for Arts and Culture.



Commission for
Arts and Culture