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April 2005

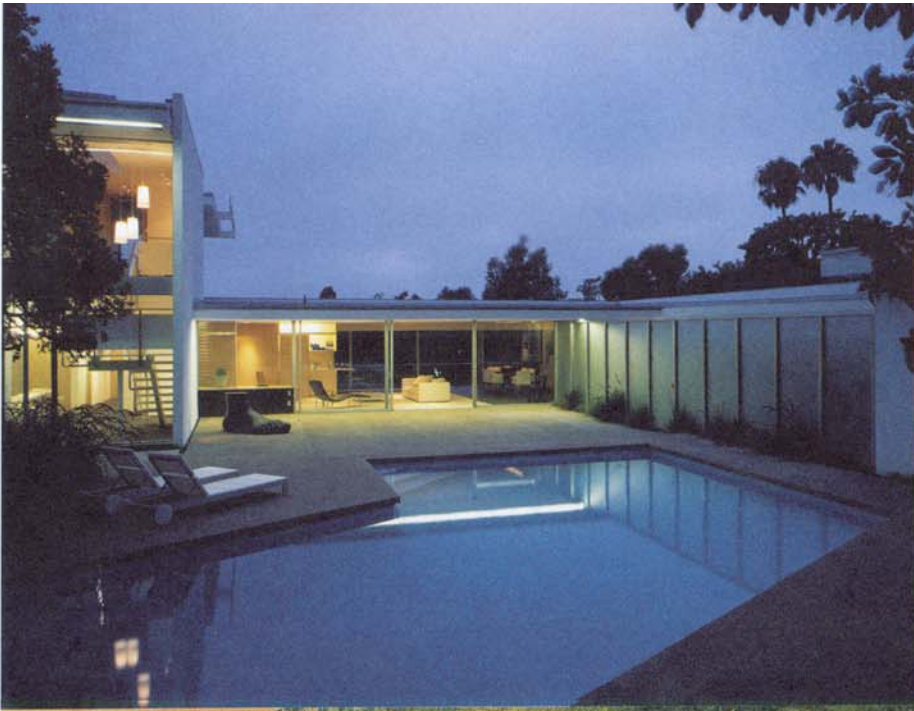
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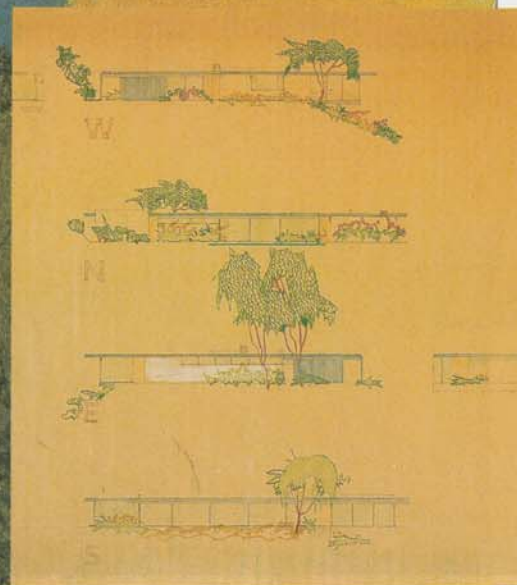


2ND STORY





The recent restoration of a Neutra house uses the master's original drawings to satisfy the current craze for more space.



By Jade Chang

In a city that has made a fetish of mid-century Modern design—the Eames lounge chair is as commonplace in Hollywood Hills homes as the \$20 halogen lamp is in dorm rooms—Richard Neutra's Hammerman House has retained a rare anonymity. Despite its accessible location, a few blocks north of Sunset Boulevard in Bel Air, the house doesn't show up on architecture tours or Neutra fan Web sites. It was never formally photographed after the original Julius Shulman shoot in 1954 and remained largely unpublished until 2000, when it showed up in Taschen's comprehensive tome *Neutra: Complete Works*.

Today, after a tangled 50-year affair with the family that commissioned it, the Hammerman House is revamped and back on the market—just in time to cash in on the craze for airy, open houses that happen to bear a designer name. “Properties in this style can go for thirty to forty percent more than something of a similar size in a different style,” says Beverly Hills realtor Blair Chang (no relation to the author). “Neutra houses always do well because they're warm, whereas Wright, for example, is not nearly as warm.”

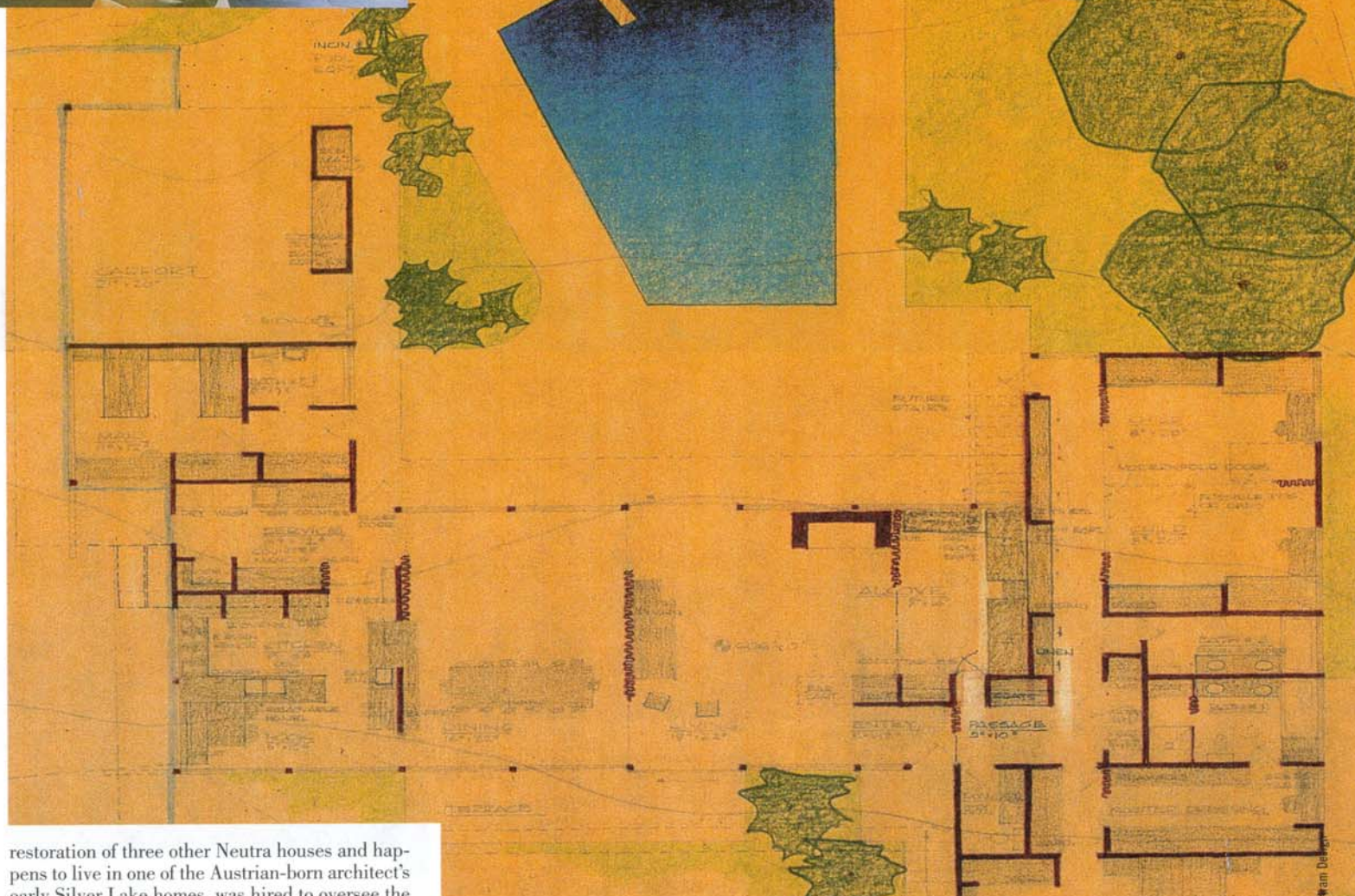
Dion Neutra, who worked with his father for about 30 years and is committed to preserving his legacy, is pleasantly surprised by the current frenzy: “It's very gratifying. I'm not quite sure what's driving it. There's some recognition of the fact that we were trying to be very respectful of nature and the planet and sustainability—some terms that are really hot now were always embedded in our work.”

When Adele Binder, a small stylish woman of deliberately indeterminate age, began looking for an L.A.-area house to renovate, she turned to Chang, who came across the house in fall 2002 when the original owners put it on the market. After she bought it for \$2.7 million, Binder learned that the Hammermans had carefully preserved Neutra's drawings, which included preliminary designs for a second-story addition—requisite extra space for today's buyers. Architect John Bertram, who worked on the

One of Neutra's drawings for the Hammerman House is the background for this spread. Opposite page: top, a view across the pool into the living room; center, a Julius Shulman photograph taken shortly after completion of the house, in 1954; bottom, the recent renovation, which includes a second-floor addition based on Neutra's original plans, was overseen by architect John Bertram. This page: top right, Neutra's elevations.



The new staircase, left, is based on a Neutra sketch. Skylights were added to the stairwell to heighten the airy feel. The stairs start in the family room, which the Hammermans originally used as a bedroom, and lead up to the second story, with its two new bedrooms. The master bedroom remains on the first floor.



restoration of three other Neutra houses and happens to live in one of the Austrian-born architect's early Silver Lake homes, was hired to oversee the renovation. On the group's initial visit to the one-story residence, they saw nothing resembling the polished Modernist glow of the original Shulman shoot. "When I first walked in," Bertram says, "there were roses in the garden, all kinds of antique furniture, brocade wall-coverings."

"They wanted," Binder says, "an English country cottage." In an awkward bid to make the structure more traditional, a mid-1970s renovation by unlikely architect Marc Appleton—well known today for his vernacular-inspired work—had obscured many of the house's signature features. Under the Hammermans' direction, Appleton removed the island in the kitchen; and Neutra's sliding panels, which divided that room from the living area, were replaced with a wall. A built-in bar was taken out of the now tighter living room, and the original floor-to-ceiling glass panels were replaced with a solid wall. "They kind of man-



Neutra's floor plan is the background for this spread. Though he designed a pool that followed the contours of the land in the original plan, the Hammermans couldn't afford to install it. A 1970s renovation by Marc Appleton produced a more angular pool and a slightly reconfigured backyard. Left, John Bertram's floor plan for the renovation incorporates the later design.

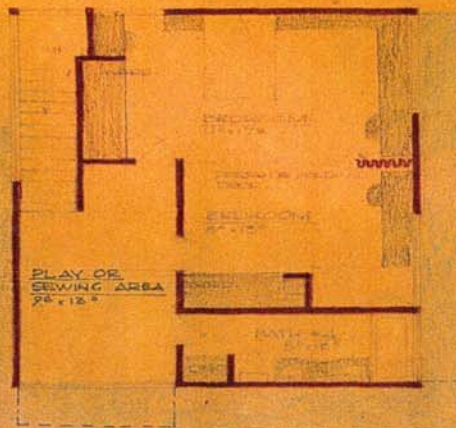
Opposite page: center photo, floor plans, and Neutra drawings courtesy John Bertram Design



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Above, louvered windows—still in good shape here in the kitchen—are rare in a Neutra house. Left, a Julius Shulman photograph of the original kitchen.



Counterclockwise from above: the second-floor bedroom window provides views of the Getty Center and the Pacific Ocean, while trees on a hill hide the 405 freeway; Bertram's plan for the second-floor addition; Neutra's original floor plan for that addition.

handled the house," Bertram says. "They tore down a lot of neat stuff." On the plus side, to make up for the loss of light, skylights were installed, and the stucco around the carport gave way to more stylish wood paneling.

"There was a time when architects held such great stature that clients were obedient to the architect's decisions because he had a vision of the whole, of incorporating the lifestyle into the building," daughter Nancy Hammerman says. When the Hammermans commissioned the house in 1952, they were a newly married,

childless couple in their mid-20s. Nancy says her father, Richard, was a visionary who was determined to build a Modern house. After interviewing several different architects they finally chose Neutra, whose painstaking attention to detail appealed to Richard. "My father had extensive correspondence with Neutra," she says. "He kept all the papers, letters, and drawings." The couple bought the site for a mere \$7,000 and sank the rest of their money—an estimated \$54,000 by the end—into the construction of the house.

They were so dedicated to the idea of living in a Neutra house that, according to Nancy, they went with minimal furniture for the first three years. Then in 1961 the family moved to Europe. During the next decade the house was rented out to various tenants and its condition gradually deteriorated. When the Hammermans prepared to return to Los Angeles 14 years later, they were nervous. "They loved the clean lines," Nancy says, "but they weren't sure, having lived in Europe for so many years, what it would be like to live in a Modern house. Their lifestyle had changed. They brought all these antiques back." *continued on page 127*



Images of the original living room—the black-and-white photograph taken by Julius Shulman—and the space as it appears today after a renovation inspired by Neutra's original drawings.



Second Story

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Neutra wanted a house to fit the occupants' way of life. "We asked them to list the different spaces they would like to have and what they wanted to accomplish in those spaces," Dion Neutra recalls.

For Neutra that sort of complete change in lifestyle would have presented a real dilemma. As much a scholar of human behavior as an architect, he asked his clients to fill out an extensive questionnaire detailing their habits and lifestyle. Neutra wanted a house to fit the occupants' way of life, but he had very distinct ideas regarding how they should be living. "We asked them to list the different spaces they would like to have and what they wanted to accomplish in those spaces," Dion Neutra recalls. "We'd compare this program with what they currently had. You learn a lot about people when they do that; I asked a lot of questions and tried to get below the surface as much as possible."

In the original plans for the house the architect included a very specific list of furniture for the living room: "camel table (Neutra), chairs (Neutra design or Scoop chair no. 37), lounge chair, lamp, small table. The hallway demands large low architectural pottery and philodendron." These were less suggestions than requirements. "Neutra was so completely engrossed in other people's lives," Bertram says. "He kind of lived vicariously.... In some houses he was more or less a constant visitor. He wanted to be part of what he designed, and he kind of came with it."

Still, Binder insists, not many people of the time lived the way Neutra designed. "They were much more formal in the fifties. Now we want an indoor and outdoor flow. They had that, but they didn't live like that," she says. Chang notes, "Today it's the open floor plan that people really like—it's California living.... It's really caught on with celebrities." In fact, the realtor recently sold a 1960s Hal Levitt house around the corner to Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen for \$3.7 million. "The crowd that we're going for is: a) the Neutra collector, and b) the entertainment crowd. They want high quality and something that looks really groovy."

By undoing nearly all of the Appleton renovation and adding the second floor and staircase sketched by Neutra—at a cost of \$2.5 million—they hoped to appeal to both crowds. "Although it is in some sense a spec house," Bertram says, "Adele had rather specific narrative scenarios of who the house was going to be for." While Chang advocated finishes and features that would appeal to a high-end clientele and Bertram assumed responsibility for restoring the integrity of the home with the help of Neutra's original spec book for the project, Binder concentrated on the story. "I'm a woman, and I see the home differently from men," Binder says. "I brought the function part. I think all homes should be about the people who live there and be a backdrop to their lives."

In a market that unexpectedly prizes architectural integrity, the real estate flipper and the architect-philosopher see eye to eye. Though Dion wishes that he had been consulted on the latest changes, he's pleased with the restoration: "This would come under the category of one of the better efforts. It's certainly much more in the spirit of the original design." For all their love of the house, the Hammermans needed it to change with their changing lives. Binder, Bertram, and Chang have brought the house back to Neutra's ideal. Now it's empty, awaiting a 2005 version of the newlywed couple with \$5.4 million to spend. www.metropolismag.com

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