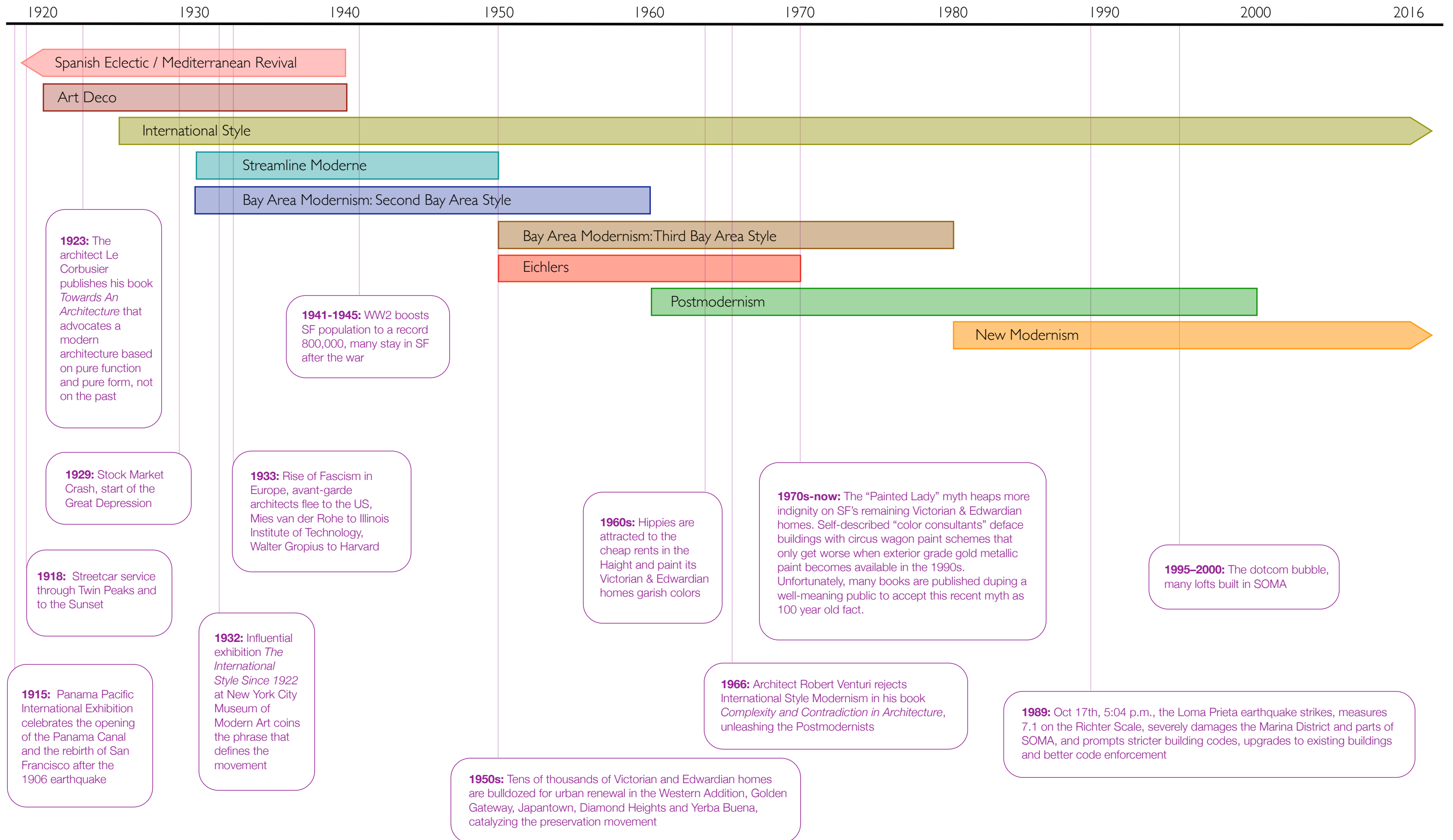


Timeline of Residential Architectural Styles in San Francisco



Spanish Eclectic / Mediterranean Revival

1915-1940

Spanish Eclectic styles were not codified until the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE). The purpose of the PPIE was to celebrate two things: the opening of the Panama Canal and the rebirth of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake.

The land for the PPIE was reclaimed from sand dunes and the bay. A fantasy city was built and then razed after its ten month run. This wasteland was idle for 5 years until the 1920s when builders converted that reclaimed land into the residential tracts of what would be called the Marina District.

The codified styles of Spanish Eclectic are Spanish Revival and Spanish Colonial. Spanish Revival homes look like they belong in Spain, while Spanish Colonial buildings are less refined and look like they belong in a Spanish colony. Some of the more idiosyncratic examples of Spanish Eclectic predate 1915. These transitional homes freely mix elements of Spanish Revival, Spanish Colonial, and Mission Revival. San Francisco has Spanish Eclectic of both sorts: those that predate 1915 and those that came after the stylistic codification.

One of the other codified styles is Mediterranean Revival, it is another freely-mixed style that was popular with San Francisco builders and the buying public. Thousands of Spanish Eclectic and Mediterranean Revival homes were built in the Marina District and the Sunset.

Spanish Eclectic Characteristics

- low-pitched roof with little or no overhang
- red roof tile
- one or more arches over door, most prominent window, or beneath porch roof
- stucco walls
- asymmetrical facade

Mediterranean Revival Characteristics

- all of the above characteristics
- large bow front window over a garage



1001 Ashbury (1928)



2960 Broadway (1913, Willis Polk)



9 Presidio Terrace (1910)

Art Deco

1920-1940

Art Deco takes its name from the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts) held in Paris in 1925. The Expo and its style intentionally rejected the past that had fomented the no-man's-land moonscapes and gas-filled trenches of World War 1.

This new style and the new age would reject aristocracy for democracy, frugality for luxury, and European architectural references for futuristic geometric ornament (or exotic ancient non-European styles).

The term "Art Deco" makes it clear that it is a decorative style of applied ornamentation, and its friendly abbreviated nickname shows that it doesn't take itself too seriously or pretend to have deep intellectual roots. The name itself, like the flapper dress that freed women from bulky yards of fabric in previous eras, is short, simple and exudes a healthy appreciation of the brevity of life. For all its rejection of the past and industrialized human slaughter, and for all its forward-looking fantasy rather than reflection on past atrocities, Art Deco is—in an understandable pendulum swing from that recent, horrible past—an unabashedly fun style bursting with life.

San Francisco had prosperity, a Stock Exchange, and men eager to impress flappers and display their wealth so there are some fine examples of residential Art Deco to enjoy—Prohibition be damned.



99 17th Street (1932)



99 17th Street (1932)

Art Deco Characteristics

- geometric ornament of zigzags, chevrons, sunbursts, and florals, in low relief and arranged in linear patterns
- details and ornament showing the romance of the machine and efficient machine production
- vertical emphasis
- use of exotic architectural references: e.g. Mayan temples, ancient Egypt—Tut's tomb was discovered in 1922
- repetitive step-backs and parallel framing devices



16 25th Avenue (1936)

International Style

1925-Now

Mies van der Rohe's pithy maxim "Less is more" appropriately condenses the lean and functional International Style into three short words. Mies was one of three gifted architects who learned functional design from the industrial architect Peter Behrens in Germany; the other two were Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius.

Le Corbusier and Gropius admitted that they were influenced by an article published in 1920 by Austrian architect, Adolf Loos, *Ornament und Verbrechen (Ornament and Crime)*, that advocated the suppression of ornament in functional objects, but was misinterpreted by architects as advocating the radical elimination of all architectural ornament. Loos was shocked and wrote another article to refute that misinterpretation but the damage was done.

After converting to the heady and misinterpreted apostasy of Loos, Le Corbusier wrote a series of articles from 1921 to 1923 for *L'Esprit Nouveau*. This magazine was widely read by wealthy prospective patrons and had published Loos's article in 1920.

In 1923 Corbusier collected his series of essays into book form, wrote a polemical preface for its intended audience of architects, and published it as *Vers Une Architecture (Towards An Architecture)*. It rationalized the romance of gargantuan ocean liners, airplanes, and automobiles, and set modern engineering and unadorned honesty, pure function and pure form, as the only true standards of architecture. The book's influence was, and continues to be, gargantuan. Corbusier's most famous dictum, "A house is a machine for living" still influences architects today. He published his recipe of five simple ingredients for achieving the style. Stripped-down machine functionalism, pre-cooked and by-the-numbers, reigned supreme and was here to stay. Buildings would look the same whether they were on India's scorching plains or San Francisco's foggy hills, in a Palm Springs desert or an Illinois swamp. Everything, everywhere, by everyone, would be the same.

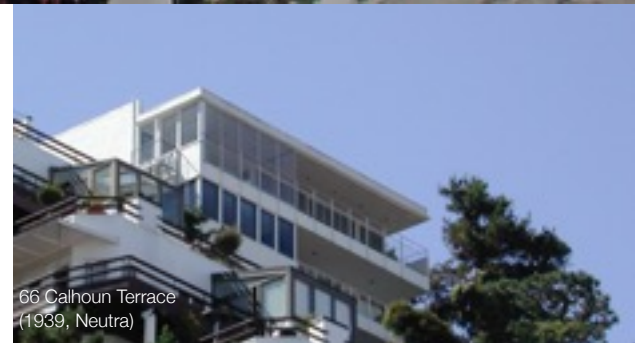
When the Nazis rose to power Mies and Gropius fled with their "degenerate" ideas to American universities and degenerated a new generation of architects. Corbusier remained in Europe, wrote voluminously and built sporadically. Nazism drove architects and designers from the Bauhaus—that laboratory of the International Style where Mies and Gropius taught—and spread them throughout the world.

The term "International Style" was coined for the 1932 exhibition at NY MoMA entitled *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*. Its catalog stated that the exhibit would prove that the stylistic "confusion of the past 40 years...[would] shortly come to an end," über-confident of a stylistic final solution a year before Nazism's rise. The exhibit was organized by the critic Henry Russell Hitchcock and Nazi sympathizer, Philip Johnson—the long-lived architect who mimicked his hero, Le Corbusier, by wearing heavy black rimmed spectacles and, in a fitting follow-through, would be an apostate too, but, ironically, of the International Style. Johnson later famously recanted his belief in the International Style for the new religions of Postmodernism and other -isms and admitted, "I am a whore . . . paid very well for high-rise buildings."

That exhibition, the ocean liners of books on its style, its high priests evangelizing in universities, and its easy-to-follow five rules with their "no beauty allowed" dogma guarantee the continued longevity of the International Style.



66 Calhoun Terrace (1939, Neutra)



66 Calhoun Terrace (1939, Neutra)



2725 Broadway (1983)



2056 Jefferson (1937, Neutra)

International Style Characteristics

- no ornamentation
- ribbon windows, usually metal frames
- windows flush with walls
- no trim on doors or windows
- white walls
- horizontal emphasis
- functionally efficient open floor plan
- simple cubic and cylindrical volumes
- flat roof
- same designs recycled from 1920s *L'Esprit Nouveau* to current issues of *dwel* magazine
- heavy black rimmed circular spectacles, the best thing about the entire style

Streamline Moderne

1930-1950

As Art Deco matured and the Great Depression limited large projects a new simpler style evolved from the basic tenets of Art Deco. This new style was Streamline Moderne.

Both styles rejected the past, but did it differently. Art Deco was a transport to another time—an exuberant fantasy future or an exotic non-European past—while Streamline Moderne was a transport to another place. It was a romance of efficient travel by ocean liner, airplane, train, and car.

Efficient travel meant streamlining. The new science of aerodynamics rounded edges, assisted air flow around corners with horizontal grooves, and smoothed surfaces so they were unencumbered and sleek. Think of the travel posters of that era.

Stationary buildings sprouted portholes, extruded horizontal streamlining bands, grew wings over doorways, curved windows around corners, and shed the exotic historical ornament of Art Deco in favor of a sleek skin. Buildings became romantic ships and airplanes to and from another place

Streamline Moderne Characteristics

- repeated horizontal lines or grooves
- curved corners
- horizontal emphasis
- smooth uninterrupted walls
- glass block
- corner windows
- porthole windows
- nautical or aerodynamic flair
- not reliant on exotic historical styles or excessive geometric ornament
- cool romance instead of heated exuberance
- imagine Le Corbusier sketching in the *Normandie's* lounge on his trans-atlantic crossing after three or four highballs; the result would be Streamline Moderne



1360 Montgomery (1936)



2944 Jackson (1939)



3944 21st Street (1941)



1966-1968 Jefferson (1947)

Bay Area Modernism: Second Bay Area Style

1930-1960

Bay Area Modernism influenced more homes throughout America than all other architectural styles combined; any numerical comparison is not even close. The vast tracts of post-World War II suburban ranch houses are linked directly to the prototypes developed by the Second and Third Bay Area Styles.

After the First Bay Area Style of Willis Polk and Bernard Maybeck in the 1890s, William Wurster picked up the baton in the 1920s and founded the Second Bay Area Style—although it was not called that at the time. Wurster was a California native who, with like-minded architects, combined a love of California landscapes and its rural buildings with the elemental quality of minimalist Japanese architecture. Their goal was inexpensive homes that allowed the outside in and were easily built of local materials.

A style born of California's climate, natural beauty, and Pacific Rim culture would be very different from a style born in Germany or France. So different that the famous architectural critic, Lewis Mumford, coined the term "Bay Region Style" for a 1947 exhibition and said the "exhibition repairs a serious omission in the existing histories of American architecture: it establishes the existence of a vigorous tradition of modern building, which took root in California some half century ago...[the style] was thoroughly modern, it was not tied to the tags and clichés of the so-called International Style: that it made no fetish of the flat roof and did not deliberately avoid projections and overhangs: that it made no effort to symbolize the machine, through a narrow choice of materials and forms: that it had a place for personalities as different as Maybeck and Dailey and Wurster and Kump."

Mumford was held in such high regard that his poorly punctuated run-on sentence ran unedited and his neologism defined the style.

Second Bay Area Style Characteristics

- simply built of local materials
- influenced by California rural buildings: unadorned wood-sheathed farmhouses, barns, sheds
- horizontal emphasis
- large glass areas
- allows the outside in
- influenced by Japanese simplicity and respect for natural materials; materials exposed to view
- canted box window



757-759 Bay (1939, Wurster)



First canted box window
2660 Divisadero (1938, Dinwiddie)



2 Mountain Spring (1956)



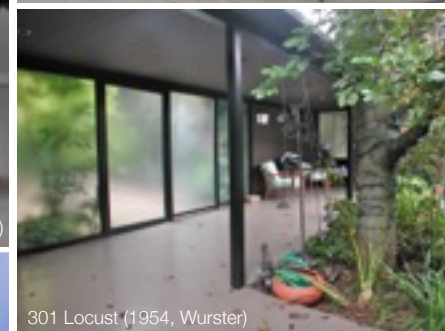
351 Filbert (1942, Dailey)



2475 Larkin (1951, Wurster)



2590 Pacific (1950)



301 Locust (1954, Wurster)



2870 Pacific (1937, Wurster)

Bay Area Modernism: Third Bay Area Style

1950-1980

As the Second Bay Area Style matured, architects tired of its plainness and flirted with playful pop culture and Postmodernism. Seduced by facile ideas and superficiality they started the Third Bay Area Style and influenced acres of tract homes throughout the US.

The main inspiration of the Second Bay Area Style—simple wood clad California rural buildings—was kept and updated, as David Gebhard noted, “with a renewed pop art appreciation of the constructor / builder’s vernacular. In their buildings they tended to turn the horizontal Second [Bay Area Style] buildings on end and to introduce vertical spatial complexity.”

Architect Andrew Batey takes the explanation further, “I think [Joseph] Esherick was the turning point, in that he broke down the overt modesty of William Wurster and started playing with the elements.”

Two ideas of Postmodernism played with in the Third Bay Area Style were “Decorated Shed” and “Building as Billboard.” In a typical example shed forms were jammed against each other, usually offset to display their “shedness,” and clad with wood boards that were a “billboard” for the idea of a “farm house” or a “barn.” Wood boards were most often run vertically, sometimes diagonally, less often horizontally. Wood shingles were also used.

Banal homes of 1960s and 1970s have a San Francisco pedigree.

Third Bay Area Style Characteristics

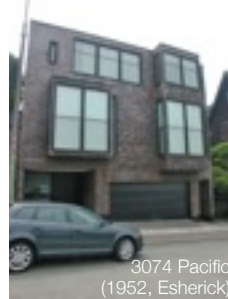
- based on simple wood-clad California rural buildings
- vertical emphasis
- vertical spatial complexity
- wood board siding, run vertically, sometimes diagonally, less often horizontally; wood shingles also used



3700 Washington (1951, Esherick)



3074 Pacific (1952, Esherick)



3074 Pacific
(1952, Esherick)



3074 Pacific (1952, Esherick)



3085 Pacific (1949, Esherick)



261 Laurel (1971)



895 El Camino Del Mar (1963, Esherick)

Eichlers

1950-1970



Block of 1000 Duncan (1962-1964, Anshen and Allen)



Eichler Characteristics

- exposed post and beam construction
- large areas of floor to ceiling glass
- sliding glass doors
- interior atriums
- dedicated master bath (first time such an innovation was used in tract homes)
- low-sloped gable roofs with glass to the underside of the roof
- simple exteriors and interiors

Joseph Eichler was a visionary developer who believed that modern architecture would benefit America's middle class. He backed up his belief by hiring some of the best modern architects of the time to design his post-World War 2 homes.

Frank Lloyd Wright was Eichler's most desired architect but was unobtainable. Undeterred, Eichler hired Wright's disciple Robert Anshen, partner in San Francisco's famous firm of Anshen and Allen, to design the initial homes in 1949. Eichler would later hire other famous architects and build over 11,000 homes in Northern and Southern California.

All the homes would display Wright's core ideas of breaking the box, bringing the outside in, radiant heated concrete floors, floor to ceiling glass, simple natural materials kept exposed, and the open floor plan. These ideas made Eichler homes airy and modern, in great contrast to the boxy warrens of most post WW2 homes. However, to keep costs down and to satisfy the International Style aesthetics of his non-Wright architects, Eichler homes would eschew Wright's use of integral ornament for Mies van der Rohe's unadorned simplicity. Although Eichlers lack the intelligence, beauty, and grace of Wright's homes, they are more humane "machines for living" than anything by Corbusier or Mies.

The style that would bear Eichler's name is rooted in San Francisco and the California hills. The public was slow to adopt his homes and it is only recently that they have become popular.



240 Twin Peaks Blvd (1958)

Postmodernism

1960-2000



102 Laidley Street (1988, Kotas & Pantaleoni)

To Mies van der Rohe's modernist maxim "Less is more" architect Robert Venturi famously riposted "Less is a bore."

Venturi's 1966 book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* rejected International Style modernism and, at its best, freed architects to borrow freely across architectural styles in search of appropriate "contextualism." At its worst it allowed and applauded cardboard-thin "quotes" of "super-sized" architectural elements pasted to boring boxes.

Postmodernism's highest goal was contextualism—to make buildings fit in the local fabric and respect their neighbors—the opposite goal from the International Style.

Unfortunately, Postmodernism's concepts of the "Decorated Box" and "Building as Billboard" did not lead to great buildings. Its homes were cut-and-paste stage sets, most often built of cheap materials that aged as poorly as their design concepts. It led to cartoons. As cartoonist Matt Groening wryly noted, "Mistakes were made."



2910 California
(1989, Kotas & Pantaleoni)



715 Florida
(1981, Kotas)

Postmodernism Characteristics

- Fake historical ornament pasted to boring boxes; both usually over-scaled
- Intentionally jarring juxtapositions of different architectural styles
- Fetishized architecture: e.g. a child's drawing of a house would be used verbatim (peaked front wall, oversized chimney, mis-sized and randomly located windows with large sashes and over-scaled mullions, pastel colors)
- Stage set thin walls—usually with cut-outs
- Aims for humor, whimsy and wit
- Palm trees, real and fake, inside and out
- Looks like a cartoon
- Cheap materials archly "quoting" expensive materials

New Modernism

1980-Now



Rather than react to the International Style with Postmodernism's cartoony kitsch, other architects searched for new answers in Modernism's seminal buildings and in human nature. These efforts grew into the branches of New Modernism.

One branch took Wright's powerful phrase "breaking the box" literally and crumpled and exploded non-rectilinear forms. This branch produced the short-lived Deconstructivism movement that devolved into intentionally bizarre forms that would have very little to do with the building's structure, use, or inhabitants.

Another branch mimicked Modernism's seminal buildings but updated them with new materials and new technology, exaggerated the scale of some of the elements, dunked the parts into a crayon vat and glued them together. Ironically, this branch copied building forms of the past—an idea abhorrent to the original modernists—and colored them like the Postmodernists.

Humane Modernism is another branch. Its buildings use modern materials, technology, and computer modeling for a higher purpose than energy efficiency or structural daring. Its buildings strive to be humane; a radical concept in modern architecture that up to this point had revered machines, not humanity, and had rejected nature, not embraced it.

Humane Modernism's aesthetic is contemporary, but it is warm, tactile, colorful, and durable. It uses the best traditional building methods to increase the everyday quality of life of the inhabitant—such as local sustainable materials beautifully detailed and exposed to view, and roof overhangs that actually shade the windows.



New Modernism Characteristics

- Modern aesthetics but using tactile, local, sustainable materials
- Energy efficient, structurally daring, structurally expressive
- Materials are displayed honestly, texture and color are exploited; everything is not smooth and painted white
- Nature incorporated and respected much more than in past Modernist buildings (e.a. photovoltaics, plants, overhangs, "green building")



Philosophy

Nature and geometry are my principal sources of inspiration for architectural design. My primary architectural goals are to create buildings that magnify our humanity, that enhance and resonate with our lives, that add to our delight in living, and that satisfy our need for and appreciation of beauty.

Firm Profile

James Dixon established JDA in 1996 to bring that philosophy to life.

JDA offers complete architectural, interior design, and landscape architecture services from conceptual design through construction administration for a broad client base of custom homes, restaurants, retail, corporate headquarters, hotels and schools,

JDA's practice is nation wide with project locations from the coastal ridges of California, to the Rocky Mountains and the Ohio plains, to the cliffs overlooking the Atlantic.

James Dixon received a Bachelors of Architecture from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and completed his final year of study in Europe. He was Project Architect for the late Aaron Green, FAIA, the last living link to Frank Lloyd Wright's organic school of architecture.

James Dixon

a r c h i t e c t

737 Pine Street
6th Floor, Suite 62
San Francisco
California
94108

415.310.5611

James@JDArchitect.com

www.JDArchitect.com

Architectural Consultation

James Dixon is available for home visits and consultations with groups and individuals for building identification and design. Please enquire about rates.