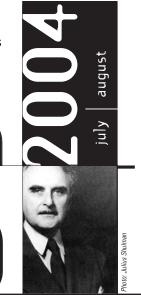


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# uthors on Architectul

# Lamprecht on Neutra

SAH/SCC Lecture and Book Signing Sunday, August 15th, 2:30 PM

The noted author, Neutra expert, and former SAH/SCC Executive Board member Barbara Lamprecht will be present at Hennessey + Ingalls bookstore to speak about and sign copies of her newly published book, *Richard Neutra* (Taschen, 2004).

"I think I am more proud of this second 'little' Neutra book than the first," says Lamprecht, M.Arch., whose second book on Richard Neutra came out in the US in May. "First, it promises no acute bodily injury or suffocation when reading it in bed," she jokes, referring to the jumbo size and weight of her first book, *Richard Neutra—Complete Works*. "After all, Neutra believed in an architecture of well-beino."

It is notable to mention that her new book was on the May 30th bestseller list of the *Los Angeles Times* for non-fiction paperbacks.

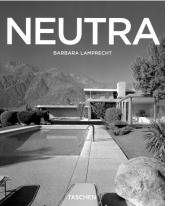
"More seriously," she continues, "initially I expected to just condense parts of the first book, but that didn't feel comfortable to me, and so this little book has 'new researches,' as the Germans say. For example, new research reinforced the importance of the 1933 Mosk House as well as Neutra's stunning and radical approach to schools and education that transformed the architecture of schools as we know them

"Second, with only 22 projects, the book challenged me to determine which Neutra, so to speak, should be revealed to people as an introduction to him. Choosing was both maddeningly difficult and the most fun, as it required me to have a thesis, an actual idea."

Lamprecht has written about architecture for two decades for publications, such as *The Architectural Review*, after working as a newspaper journalist for many years. She teaches architectural history in the architecture program at Pasadena City College and practices as an architect. Raised in western Canada, she lived in Boston, New York, and Oxford, England, before moving to Pasadena.

This special SAH/SCC collaboration with Hennessey + Ingalls is a free event and open to the public. Hennessey + Ingalls is loctead at 214 Wilshire Boulevrad, Santa Monica, 310.458.9074.





oto: Julius

2004

august

Sunday, August 15th, at
2:30PM, the SAH/SCC
Authors on Architecture
program and Hennessey +
Ingalls bookstore will
present a lecture by
Barbara Lamprecht on her
new book Richard Neutra,
followed by a book signing.
The event is free and open
to all SAH/SCC members.

News-J/A.qxd 6/15/04 6:02 PM Page 2

# SAH/SCC

# President's Letter

Irrespective of taste or style, it is always gratifying to see the press and the public respond with enthusiasm to a new work of architecture, especially if the building is trying something new, and so I've been eagerly watching the reaction to Seattle's new public library by Rem Koolhaas, which opened in May to great acclaim.

In fact, "great acclaim" may be an understatement, the building has attracted a surprising amount of praise and little negative reaction. In its infancy, the Seattle Public Library has become, like its creator, a media darling. Among the effusive coverage, Herbert Muschamp's breathless column in the New York Times stood out. "In more than 30 years of writing about architecture," Muschamp wrote, "this is the most exciting new building it has been my honor to review."

I haven't visited the new Seattle Library, and my point here is not to discuss that building in particular (although I am amused by its imagery—it looks like a pile of books that has been draped by cobwebs). Instead, this episode is for me throwing new light on the role of the architectural critic.

In short, I don't think we are very well-served by today's brand of architectural criticism, and this problem has pronounced consequences for the profession. It may not seem, intuitively, that the critic should play such an important role. After all, architects design buildings, builders complete them, and then critics simply describe their strengths and weaknesses to the small fraction of the public who happens to be interested.

But the architectural media could, and should, play a much more important role in public education. The practice of architecture is obscure to the common person. Buildings are difficult, too; many people don't know how to take them. Some architects benefit from this elitist arrangement, I suppose, but it is not tenable. For our environment, the mathematics is simple: design quality is in direct proportion to the level of public education.

Most of today's criticism only serves to make architecture more obscure, by focusing on its abstract meanings, rather than tangible issues of technique and practice. For example, in the Los Angeles Times' review of the Walt Disney Concert Hall last October, Nicolai Ouroussoff wrote: "what makes the building so moving as a work of architecture is its ability to express a deeper creative conflict: the recognition that ideal beauty rarely exists in an imperfect world."

This inquiry is not directed at Ouroussoff personally—after all, he was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize and deserves congratulations—but I think his quotation is illustrative of the gap that exists between the discourse and ordinary people. Is the deep theoretical position of the Disney Hall actually the central question, relative to miles of ticky-tack tracts and Home Depots? No, but people like Disney Hall and they would appreciate having a window into its unique character.

If our architectural writers understood their role more like that of investigative journalists, and truly made it their mission to explain buildings in all their complexity, we would be miles ahead.

Think of our architectural critics, for a moment, in relationship to our food critics. Many of our best food critics actually understand food science and explain it to the readers. Even restaurant reviewers, for the most part, understand how the average person "uses" a restaurant and a restaurant review. People want to know what's on the menu, how the food is prepared, what the atmosphere and service are like, and how much things cost. You never see a review in which an Italian restaurant is criticized for not being French; the question of genre is simply accepted as a matter of taste.

At its best, such as in the work of writers like Russ Parsons or Jeffrey Steingarten, food writing is a branch of investigative journalism. When Steingarten, writing for Vogue magazine, wanted to explain the proper French baguette, he went to Paris. But he didn't simply consume bread. He participated in the official awards for the city's best loaf, where the criteria for excellence were clearly stated. Then he visited the top 10 winning bakers, interviewed them, watched them work. He checked the temperatures of their ovens. He wrote down their recipes and tested them himself at home, experimenting with different water temperatures and types of flour (certain French flours, he found, contain unique properties that contribute to the best dough). He named the best bakeries, their addresses and hours, and printed a recipe for the perfect baguette. He's given similar treatment to dishes ranging from coq au vin, to tacos, to dog food.

Can you imagine an architectural writer operating at this level of specificity and sophistication while still speaking to the ordinary reader? What would be the equivalent, in architecture, of a recipe approved in a test kitchen? Can you imagine it printed in the newspaper?

Tony Denzer



### Tour and Event Information: 1.800.9SAHSCC; info@sahscc.org

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Please send all ad materials, notices of events, exhibitions and news to the attention of the editor:

Julie D. Taylor, Editor SAH/SCC Ne

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# Historic Fresno Celebration

SAH/NCC and SAH/SCC Lectures and Tours Saturday-Sunday, October 22nd-23rd



Fresno City Hall Annex (1939, Franklin and Kump, Jr.)

Mark your October calendars: The City of Fresno, in cooperation with the Fresno City & County Historical Society, has invited the Northern California Chapter and our Southern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians to meet for a conference with tours on Fresno's architectural heritage the fourth weekend of October. The conference celebrates the 25th anniversary of Fresno's Historic Preservation Ordinance and Laura Bush's designation of Fresno as a Preserve America Community.

The tentative schedule calls for a reception and exhibit, "Art of Historic Preservation," at City Hall the evening of Friday, October 22nd, followed by dinner in the historic Santa Fe Depot (under restoration), and a candlelight tour of the surrounding historic neighborhood.

Saturday morning, October 23rd, will be devoted to presentations on regional architectural history. Among those tentatively scheduled to speak are Karana Hattersley-Drayton (Fresno's Historic Preservation Project Manager) on pre- and post-stabilized adobe structures, Marianne Hurley (California Department of Parks & Recreation) on architect Edward T. Foulkes, and SAH/SCC members John English and Peter Moruzzi on Central Valley modernism and roadside vernacular.

In the afternoon, a bus tour will visit eight or more historic sites, including several historic and restored adobe works (garden offices, the adobe Chateauesque Kearney Mansion, and modern homes), ending with a reception in the well-known Forestiere Underground Garden.

There may be additional walking tours on Sunday for anyone wishing to stay over. Details, hotel arrangements, and registration information will appear in the September/October SAH/SCC News. Consider going by train; the conference hotel is half a block from the Amtrak station, in the historic St. John's Neighborhood. Thanks to Karana Hattersley-Drayton and Fresno for hosting this opportunity to meet our Northern California counterparts and to explore this Central California city.



Kearney Boulevard Gateway (Boulevard designed by Rudolph Ulrich; Gateway designed by Charles H. Franklin, 1933)



# Postcard from Ojai

A few weekends ago, a fortunate group of tour-goers, including myself, enjoyed a great day visiting the Ojai homes of architect and builder Rodney Walker. We started the day with coffee and pastries, and a lecture and slide presentation on the work of Walker and his connections to other prominent mid-century modern architects of the time. The buses were loaded and we were off to see the first house of the day.

We drove up into the southern foothills of the Ojai Valley to the Lloyd residence, which is perched at the top of a slope overlooking the valley to the north. The house was well-integrated into the existing oak trees and had large expanses of floor-to-ceiling glass, bringing the nature and views right into the house. The roof had a distinctive butterfly shape and natural woods were used throughout. This residence was well sited to provide the best views and solar orientation, yet provided privacy to the bedrooms. The house was built of cost-saving materials, a practice that Walker used in many of the homes he built. He developed the innovations needed to use these materials in an elegant and modern way.

Our group then headed back east to have a delicious lunch at a local restaurant, where we broke into groups and discussed what we had just seen. After lunch we headed further east to see the remaining four

The first I saw was the McCann residence, an early Walker home in the valley, with a great covered porch looking out over orchards and oak trees. This house had an unusual ceiling profile in the main living space, with the ceiling sloping in two directions, like a great tent. The site was unique with large boulders scattered about. There was a separate quest studio and attached carport that was quintessentially modern.

The next house for me was the Pehrson residence. Although it had been substantially remodeled, the home still exuded the clean modernism that Walker imbued in his work. The north facade looked out over a beautiful pool, while the south side of the "L"-shaped home enclosed a beautifully landscaped courtyard. The interiors were sensitively designed to stay in the modern vernacular.

Next on the tour was the Harvey residence, by far the most dramatic of the five homes we saw. The main living space had a huge vaulted ceiling that continued outside of the house and into the landscape. There was even an oak tree that the open-trellis portion of the roof wrapped around, further reinforcing the connection between the building and nature. The main living space was very dramatic and central, with the bedroom wings separated on either side of the main space. Like the others, this home was nestled among the oaks and orchards surrounding the property.

The last house I visited was the Semel residence, which was similar to the previous home in that it had a large, vaulted ceiling in the living room. This room had its ceiling sloping upward with its highest point right above the dramatic fireplace. Floor-to-ceiling glass provided views in several directions, including looking out over a pool. The floor of the main space was polished concrete, which shone like oiled leather. This was probably the best preserved of all of the homes.

Overall it was a great day. The weather was ideal with clear skies and moderate temperatures. It was truly a beautiful location and an enjoyable experience that our fortunate members were able to have. Hats off to board members Sian Winship, John Berley, and especially Rodney's son Craig Walker, for all of their hard work in preparing for the tour, and to the other board members that provided support. Thanks also to the kind owners who allowed us to tramp through their living rooms!

Brent Fckerman



Rodney Walker's youngest son Craig describes the plan organization of the Lloyd residence from 1961



The remarkably expressive roof of the Harvey Residence





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For those of you who missed out on recent SAH/SCC tours, or would like more information for your reference, here's an opportunity to get your hands on the publications printed especially for SAH/SCC events. Don't let another chance pass you by.

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