

# **NEWS**

May/June

2012

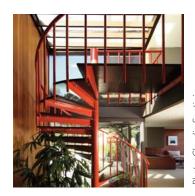


Photo: Claudio Santini
IN THIS ISSU

Kappe Apotheosis	1
President's Letter	3
Neff Bubbles	4
Japanese House Tour	5
SAH/SCC Publications for Sale	6

# Ray Kappe: Apotheosis

SAH/SCC Lecture, Modern Patrons & Tour May 24, 25, 26, 2012

Come learn about the early residential work of Ray Kappe, FAIA, as SAH/SCC presents "Ray Kappe: Apotheosis." This unprecedented focus weekend features a free Thursday evening lecture, an exclusive Friday afternoon Modern Patrons, and a day-long home tour of five early residences in Sherman Oaks.

In the 1976 Los Angeles Times review of "The Los Angeles 12" exhibition, Greg Walsh, an architect and principal in Frank Gehry's office, characterized the work of fellow "dozener" Ray Kappe as "the apotheosis of the California wood house."

Kappe has been widely recognized for his work as an educator; first for developing the architecture program at Cal Poly Pomona, then as the founder of SCI-Arc. Prior to being an educator, however, Kappe was one of many young, postwar architects who turned their talents toward designing and building residences that reflected the optimism of the period and the belief that the modern architecture of Southern California was setting the bar for the country. He was concerned with lowand moderate-cost housing during the time when demand for residential design was significant.



Barsha Residence, 1961. Photo: Claudio Santini

Before long, the young Kappe was flexing his ideas about space and materials for a series of clients of relatively modest means. Among these early houses featured on the tour is the 1956 home designed for Kappe's father, Phineas, which now belongs to architects and SAH/SCC Life Members Mark Piaia (organizer of this event and SAH/SCC Executive Board Member) and Anne Zimmerman.

The Kappe festivities begin on Thursday evening (May 24th), when author and architectural historian Dana Hutt will share insights from her recent research based on Kappe's architectural archive at the Getty Research Institute. Hutt has written extensively on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, Lloyd Wright, Will Bruder, and Frank Gehry. The lecture—at Santa Monica Public Library (Moore Ruble Yudell, 2006) will set the stage for the Saturday tour. (The lecture is free, and open to all, regardless of additional event participation.)

For the ultimate Kappe experience, join SAH/SCC for a very special Friday afternoon (May 25th) Modern Patrons with Robert Hayes, original owner of a 1959 Kappe house. In the spirit of other Modern Patrons events, this exclusive salon will feature a dialogue about the process of engaging and building a modern home by one of the most significant modern architects in postwar Los Angeles. In addition, Kappe himself will be present to share his approach to siting and designing the home. Tickets are reserved for SAH/SCC Patron and Life members, and are \$35. (Other interested participants will be put on a waiting list.)

Saturday (May 26th), from 10AM to 3PM, five early residences by Kappe will be open for viewing during the drive-yourself tour. Spanning from 1956 to 1966, these Royal Woods and adjacent houses are the stepping stones that lead to quintessential Kappe: Phineas Kappe Residence (1956), Dr. and Mrs. Robert Hayes Residence (1959), Barsha Residence (1961, 1974), Handman Residence (1963), and Butnik Residence (1966). The means are not unfamiliar: postand-beam construction, an open plan, a reverence for the landscape, attention to detail, an interest in technology. Upon checking in, tour-goers will receive an illustrated tour brochure explaining the residences and their development.



Phineas Kappe Residence, 1956. Photo: Anne Zimmerman



Phineas Kappe Residence, 1956. Photo: Anne Zimmerman

Ray Kappe: Apotheosis: registration—see order form on Page 7, call 800.972.4722, or go to www.sahscc.org.

- Lecture—Thursday, May 24, 2012; 7PM; Martin Luther King, Jr. Auditorium, Santa Monica Central Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd., Santa Monica; free; seating is available on a firstcome, first-served basis; 310.458.8600.
- Modern Patrons—Friday, May 25, 2012; 3PM; Hayes Residence, Sherman Oaks; \$35; SAH/SCC Patron and Life members only; reservations required; space is limited; tickets will be made available to general membership should the opportunity arise, on a first-come, first-served
- Self-Driven Tour—Saturday, May 26, 2012; 10AM-3PM; SAH/SCC members, \$45; nonmembers, \$65; includes 8-page tour brochure.

# SAH/SCC President's Letter

#### Going Postal

Like other places around the country, Southern California is facing the closure of many of its post offices. The latest is the pending closure of the lovely Public Works Administration (PWA) Moderne Santa Monica Post Office (Neal A. Melick and Robert A. Murray, 1937). For months now, nearby Venice residents have been fighting the closure of the post office at Windward Circle (Louis A. Simon, 1939) and advocating for continued public access to the mural by Edward Biberman that depicts Abbott Kinney and the history of Venice. Less publicized, but no less important, the 1938 South Gate

Post Office is also slated for closure.

All three of these buildings represent examples of structures developed through Depression-era public works and arts programs. While many people are familiar with the PWA, projects of the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (a.k.a., the Section of Fine Arts) are much less well known. Unlike the PWA, the goal of this program was not to provide jobs, but to create art that was accessible to the public and would "boost the morale of the people suffering the effects of the Great Depression" according to a recent article in The Wall Street Journal. The muralists were selected not on the basis of need, but through anonymous competitions. Favorite topics included the depiction of local history, local heroes, or average Americans at work or play. Because post offices were regularly used by virtually every socio-economic group, they represent one of the more truly democratic forms of art and architecture.

As a result, the United States Postal Service is the agency with the largest holdings of art from the Treasury program. If the Postal Service sells a building (such as the Venice Post Office), it still owns the artwork and is theoretically obligated to provide reasonable public access. If a deal cannot be struck with the new owner of the building, the Postal Service may remove and store the artwork for future installation.

Not surprisingly, it is the Depression-era architecture and art that are getting all the press. However, postwar-Los Angeles was also home to a number of welldesigned modern post offices from the 1950s and 1960s. Consider the Post Offices in Westchester (Craig Ellwood, 1958-9), Santa Ana (Victor Gruen Associates and Paul R. Williams, 1967), and Lakewood (Armet & Davis, 1952), as well as the first drive-in post office in the West in Long Beach (Welton Becket & Associates, 1952).

The current work on the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts (SPF Architects) at the Crescent Drive Post Office in Beverly Hills (Ralph C. Flewelling, 1932) may provide a model for adaptive reuse of these structures. There, the public space of the original retail services lobby is being integrated into a new performing arts center.

But the handwriting is on the wall: the physical post office is going the way of the telephone booth. But more than a mere corner convenience, these spaces were often the crossroads of communities and important reflections of community pride. As representations of one of the most commonly utilized federal government services, the architecture of post offices often represented the strength, stability, and reliability of the postal creed itself. However, in today's world, "neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night" prevents us from hitting "send." And in so doing, the local post office takes another step toward obsolescence.

—Sian Winship



Santa Monica Post Office designed by Neal A. Melick and Robert A. Murray (1937).

#### **Tour and Event Information:**

1.800.972.4722: info@sahscc.org



SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

SAH/SCC NEWS is published bi-monthly by the Society of Architectural Historians / Southern California Chapter, Subscription is a benefit of membership.

Editor: Julie D. Taylor, Hon. AIA/LA Internet Editor: Brent Eckerman Art Director: Svetlana Petrovic Administration: Arline Chambers

July/August 2012 issue deadline for newsletter information and ads: June 10, 2012. Please send all ad materials, and news to the attention of the editor:

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# No Nails, No Lumber

SAH/SCC Lecture & Book Signing Saturday, June 9, 2012, 1PM

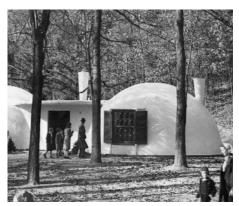
Architect Wallace Neff, known for his Spanish Colonial Revival residences of the 1920s and 1930s, was among the designers of the period who also cared deeply about a growing global housing crisis. His solution: the controversial "bubble" houses using Airform construction (an inflated balloon and gunite). The result: a low-cost, low-labor circular house with an open plan.

Join SAH/SCC Member and author Jeffrey Head for an in-depth look at this unusual facet of Neff's career when Head shares from his recent book, No Nails, No Lumber: The Bubble Houses of Wallace Neff (Princeton Architectural Press, 2011). The event is free and open to the public, and will be held at Santa Monica Public Library (Moore Ruble Yudell, 2006).

Despite plans for more than 400,000 of Neff's Airform buildings, a mere 2,500 were built. The last remaining bubble house in the United States is located in South Pasadena. Head's extensive research, however, brings to light the former locations of hundreds of others in Southern California, as well as extant structures in Angola, South America, Africa, Mexico, Portugal, and Jordan.

Head's presentation will feature little-known images of these houses and shed light on the social agenda that made Neff far more than just an architect to the stars. Refreshments will be served and copies of the book will be available for sale and signing by the author.

No Nails, No Lumber: Saturday, June 9, 2012; 1PM; Martin Luther King, Jr. Auditorium, Santa Monica Central Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd., Santa Monica; free; seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis; 310.458.8600.



Visitors at the Falls Church, VA, bubble houses in 1942.

Photo: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. (Princeton Architectural Press)



Second layer of gunite is applied to the Airform balloon for this 1958 structure created in Portugal for Port wine storage.

Photo: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. (Princeton Architectural Press)



In bubble house construction, the Airform balloon is attached to the foundation while inflating. Photo: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. (Princeton Architectural Press)

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# Japanese Restoration at the Huntington

SAH/SCC Talk & Tour Sunday May 20, 2012, 9:30AM-12:30PM

SAH/SCC is proud to present a morning with SAH/SCC Life Member Kelly Sutherlin McLeod, AIA, as we journey into the history and rehabilitation of the 19th-century Japanese House at The Huntington in San Marino, for which she served as the project architect. The restoration of the Japanese House is part of a \$6.8-million overall rehabilitation of The Huntington Japanese Garden, which also includes a new Japanese Tea Garden with a 1964 Tea House recently donated to the institution.

We will begin the day by gathering in the Founder's Room, just off the main entry to the grounds, at 9:30AM for an introductory lecture by McLeod, John Griswold of Griswold Conservation Associates, and Dr. Kendall Brown, Professor of Asian Art History at CSU Long Beach. After the talk, we will be treated to a tour of the newly reopened gardens and house, reviewing first-hand details of the preservation and restoration work.

According to information from the Huntington—based on Professor Brown's research—the house's preservation plan focused on the exterior and aimed to retain and restore original materials wherever possible. Major alterations were not made, and treatments were designed to emulate and re-create the building's original finishes and design intent.

After non-original flat paint was removed from the exterior wood features, a penetrating sealer was applied to protect and maintain an appropriately aged finish. Decay at rafter tails was repaired while maintaining as much historic material as possible. The original fine, dark Japanese plaster was also replicated as part of the renovation project.

One of the most prominent and complex features of the Japanese House is its distinctive roof, but many repair jobs throughout the years had obscured the original design and shingle type. The entire roof now has been restored to its original, slightly undulating, shape, with new shingles that replicate the originals.

A focal point of the main facade of the house is the curved, flared-gable portico over the entry. The wood bases of the portico's columns had been partially buried by stone paving, likely during the 1960s. Excavation revealed that the columns originally rested on traditional wood bases set on granite pads. Although the bases had deteriorated into dust, their shape remained imprinted in the surrounding mortar, providing the evidence necessary to re-create the wood bases for the columns.

Japanese Restoration at the Huntington: Sunday, May 20, 2012; 9:30AM-12:30PM; The Huntington Library, Art Galleries, and Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino; SAH/SCC members, \$55; non-members, \$100 (includes one-year individual membership); reservations required; space is limited; all orders are on a first-come, first-served basis; registration—see order form on Page 7, call 800.972.4722, or go to www.sahscc.org.



The historic Japanese House at The Huntington after renovation. Photo: John Ellis

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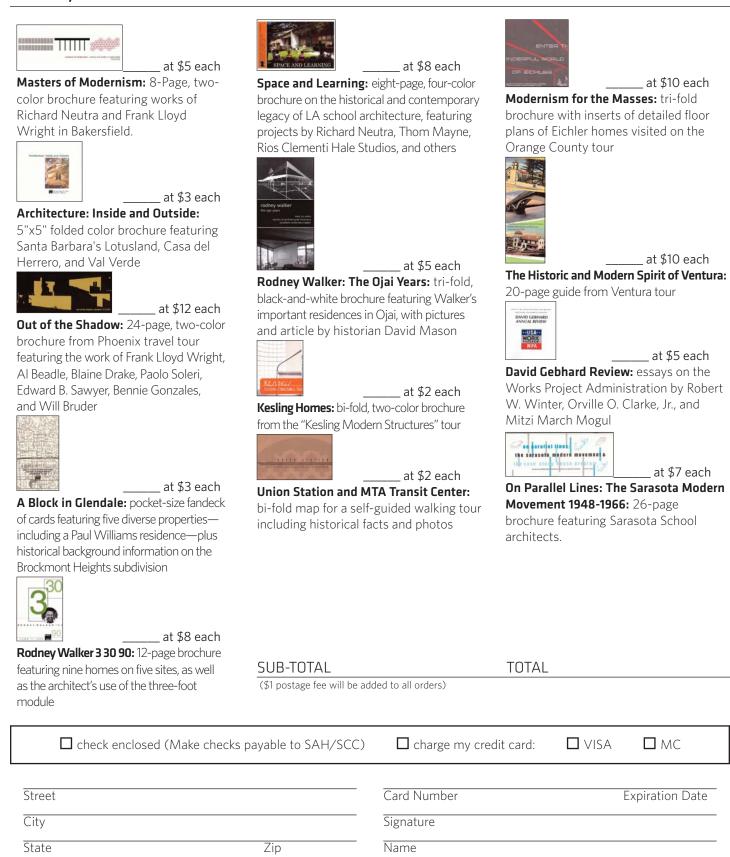
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