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Author

Solomon, Daniel

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Daniel Solomon

In 1943 my father was an Army doctor at a base outside Sacramento. My parents made friends with three other Jewish families whose breadwinners were a furrier, a dentist and an architect. The three families got together all the time to cook and eat, play bridge and tell funny stories.

The furrier lived in a bungalow with a porch and a great sloping front lawn. The dentist lived in paradise, a pink house on a corner in old Sacramento with big screen porches, a swimming pool and a rose arbor.

The architect had a beautiful daughter named Missy who was six months younger than I. Shortly after the war, they moved to one of the first Eichler houses outside Sacramento. I will always remember the architect's pride as he conducted the first tour of his dream house for the other three families. For reasons I did not understand as a little kid this speech entered the comedic lore of the other families and all of the adults could do a version of it to the vast amusement of the others for years afterwards. I began to see what was funny years later when Missy and I found the open plan of the architect's utopia an uncongenial setting in which to share the first gleams of hormonal dawn. The indelible stolen moments of early adolescence took place in the furrier's cozy nooks and the dentist's magic rose arbor.

By many measures, Eichler's houses are one of the success stories of the post-war years, and they are cult objects today, like vintage race cars. During the war years there was very little work for architects and some, like John Entenza, the sponsor and editor of *Arts and Architecture*, made work for many of the leading architects of the day by imagining what post-war life might be like.

Entenza and his distinguished stable of underemployed architects created the Case Study House program, a fantasy during the war and a reality of limited scope afterwards. The Case Study program was the precursor to Eichler, who studied its results, appropriated what he liked and discarded what didn't work for him. Eichler also studied the works of William Levitt whose Levittown, Long Island, was the model of rationalized mass production of housing for the G.I. Bill.

Eichler's formula was comprised of equal parts of Entenza's Case Studies and Levittown, but the synthesis of the two was something quite different from either. Like Levitt, Eichler had no illusions about changing the techniques or materials of home building. He saw correctly that the exquisite steel fabrication of the Case Study houses was a romanticized view of war technology that could never be adapted to housing on a large scale. Like Entenza, he believed that there was a moral basis to the aesthetics of modern architecture that masses of people could understand, respect and learn to love. (Eichler himself lived in a Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian House and he saw himself as a missionary bringing the grace of modern architecture to a mass market.) Thus Eichler's houses look like modest versions of the Case Study Houses, but they were made of timber, plywood, light wood framing and particle board, not unlike the houses of Levittown.

Eichler was an aesthetic missionary, but the times were larger than he was. His noble accomplishment was part of something that was far from noble—the post-war policies that built our sprawling, isolating suburbs and wrought ruthless damage on our cities and city-regions. Eichler houses promised a lot, but they also delivered something their creators never thought about, something more terrifying and more enduring than all they set out to do.

Curiously, the bungalows promoted by *American Craftsman* and *Bungalow Magazine* thirty years

before promised exactly the same things and delivered none of them. The kitchens were dark and segregated, rooms didn't open to gardens and the tectonic morality of the Arts and Crafts ideal was only there on the front porch. The rest was framing, cladding and a symbolic language of trim, not unlike Mies van der Rohe's symbolic language of trim masquerading as structure in a different American building context. Yet the bungalows also delivered something their purveyors were apparently totally indifferent to, at least they never wrote a word about the subject. They delivered beautiful streets, common courtyards, neighborhoods, communities—the American town at its noblest, most democratic and most civil. It is why bungalow neighborhoods are so popular today.

Eichler's streets are the opposite. Period piece publicity photographs depict an entirely private world in which no two buildings reside next to one another, in which there is never a relationship to something older or different. It is a world in which the vanity fair of the street has given way to the carport, to endless rows of them, which in the real world most often have the totemic autos of the staged photographs displaced by the detritus of daily life.

The grand things that Eichler accomplished did not survive Eichler, the man. Without him as the force and the conscience, the art of the Eichler house quickly vanished. What did not vanish quickly, what was left for a later generation to struggle with, was the vanquishing of the street—the hegemony of the private over the public. Frank Lloyd Wright and the Case Study architects imagined private utopias in which townscape would magically melt away; Eichler realized their dreams on a huge scale. It is for our generation and our successors to learn to build the American town all over again from scratch—like stroke patients learning painfully in their old age to walk and talk.



San Mateo Highlands
(Calif.) development, 1956

Eichler photos by
Ernie Braun, courtesy
Eichler Network Archives



Unknown location



One of the first Eichler atrium models, Ashen & Allen design. San Mateo Highlands (Calif.) development, 1958



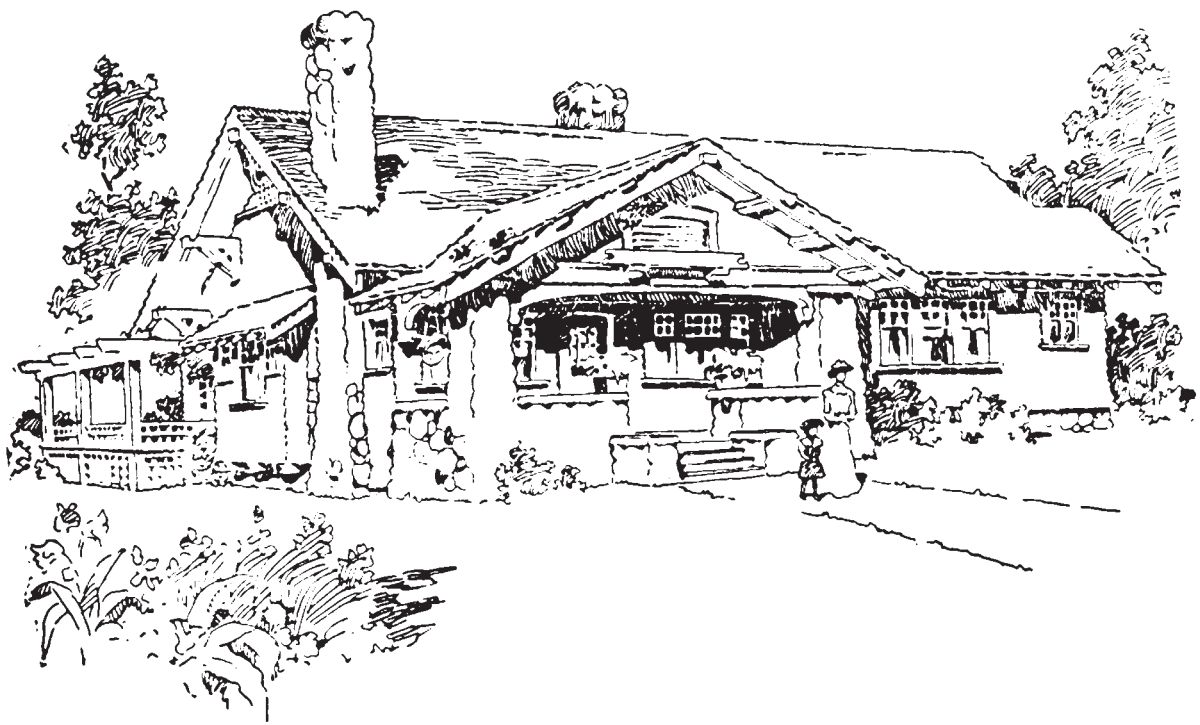
Dusk in the rear patio. Terra Linda development, San Rafael, Calif., 1960



Back patio barbeque
Unknown location



Fairbrae development,
Sunnyvale, Calif., 1960



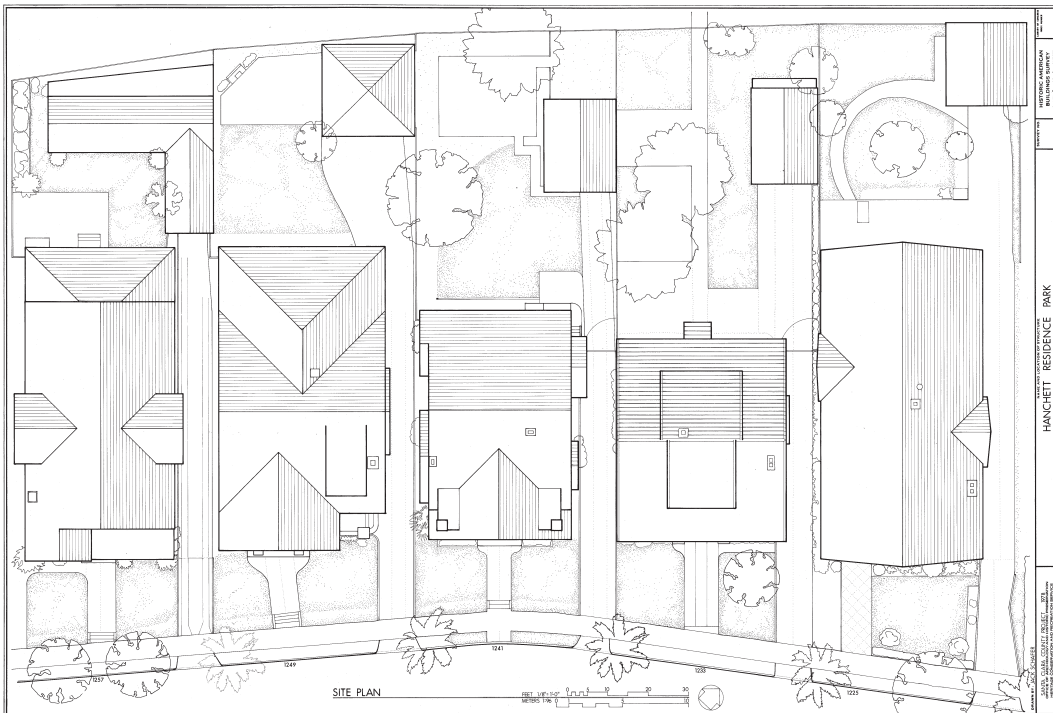
From William Phillips,
*Bungalows, Camps and
Mountain Houses*
Courtesy AIA Press



Lucas Valley, Calif.,
development, 1956



Fairbrae development,
Sunnyvale, Calif., 1960



Above: Hanchett Residence Park, San Jose, Calif., 1978
 Graphic by Historic American Building Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior, courtesy Beth Wyman

Left: Bungalow community in Bend, Ore.
 Courtesy Michael Houser