

## Louisiana Architecture: 1945-1965 The Contemporary House

### NATIONAL BACKGROUND

#### Introduction:

“I am not going to sit on furniture that continually reminds me of a machine shop or a hospital operating room.” Albert Einstein

Machined modernism in art and architecture wasn't for everyone. If Einstein had been talking about houses, he might have had in mind the high-art Farnsworth House near Chicago, a serene steel and glass box designed by the supreme modernist Mies van der Rohe (Photo 1). But how many people wanted to live in a glass box?

In the 1930s and '40s, there emerged, mainly in California, what might be called an alternative modern. While it definitely looked modern, it wasn't all steel and glass, relying more on the warmth of natural materials such as burl wood and richly colored stone. And it clearly looked different from orthodox (or “high”) modern.

In its day the new softer modernism was initially called the “Bay Region Style,” for San Francisco Bay, where most of its designers lived and practiced, and from whence it gained national attention. The term was coined by none other than legendary art and architecture critic Lewis Mumford. Writing in *The New Yorker* in 1947, Mumford advocated the “Bay Region Style” as “a native and humane form of modernism” – to serve as a corrective to orthodox European modernism. He lauded the California architects who, he said, “took good care...that their houses did not resemble factories or museums.”

California has long held a place in the American imagination as the fountainhead of all things new and marvelous, and this architectural genre is surely among them. But what is it as a genre? How can one come to terms with it? What is its place in the broader history of art? By way of answer, a few generalizations are possible, to-wit:

- It is *not* the kind of material that would have been front and center in a standard college course on modern architecture, or in a published history of modernism in America.
- There are vastly more houses of this modified modernism (or “soft modernism”) than the high art, orthodox modern residences designed by the great mid-century masters.

- It mainly reflects the work and influence of regional and secondary architects – not the great masters.
- Of all the post-war suburban home archetypes, it features the greatest degree of participation by professional architects, either by direct design, providing prototypes for copy, or general influence through publications.
- This is material that has only received scholarly attention within the last few years, mainly in monographs on California.
- Interpretations and assessments of the genre vary more than a little.

### Terminology:

This document uses the term contemporary to describe the softened modernism that emerged initially in the San Francisco Bay area and became the prevalent look of American residential modern in the 1950s. Other terms have been coined -- “soft modern,” “moderate modern,” “modified modern,” “hybrid modernism.” Because of its California origins, the label “California Contemporary” is sometimes used.

To complicate matters, the words modern and contemporary have been, and are, used interchangeably. The label “contemporary” was widely used at the time, probably because it was less threatening than the word modern. As British art historian Lesley Jackson notes in her book *Contemporary*, “Whereas ‘Modern’ implied something rather remote and futuristic, ‘Contemporary’ suggested something directly relevant to today.” Modern had “connotations of elitism and exclusivity,” while contemporary seemed “more accessible.”

Virginia and Lee McAlester’s popular *A Field Guide to American Houses* uses the term modern in a very general sense and considers contemporary to be a subspecies of modern. Finally, a type of contemporary house built by Joseph Eichler (see below) is called contemporary ranch house by some and simply contemporary by others.

### The Orthodox Modern, or “High Modern,” House:

“High modern” houses in the period 1945 to 1965 evolved from the European International Style, which first appeared in America in residential form in 1928, with Richard Neutra’s Lovell “Health” House in Los Angeles. And “evolved” is an important word. For “high art” modern houses of the 1950s don’t look exactly like an International Style house of the 1930s. But they have a similar feel, or design ethos.

General characteristics of a “high modern” house of the 1950s:

- It is a work of art, a piece of sculpture.
- It is devoid of ornament. (In this case, less is better.)
- Generally has a squared-off rectangle shape with a flat roof.
- Walls of glass and/or some neutral material (not a textured material such as brick or wood). (In the earlier International Style, the exterior material would have been great expanses of white plaster.)

#### The Contemporary, or “Soft Modern,” House:

The contemporary house that emerged in California was thoroughly modern-looking, but “softer.” It can best be seen as a combination of influences, all of them ostensibly “modern.”

From the International Style “soft modern” houses took:

- the profound absence of architectural ornament
- strong rectilinear geometry and a general horizontal feel
- ribbon windows
- post and beam construction
- cantilevered parts (upper stories, roof overhangs or balconies)
- cut-in openings with little or nothing in the way of surrounds or reveals
- a general preference for flat surfaces and architectural elements precisely rendered.

To all of this San Francisco Bay Area architects added:

- posts and beams of natural grainy wood
- walls rendered in warm textured materials (brick, stone or horizontal wooden planks)
- wide, fairly massive chimneys with fireplaces (to provide the hearth-home element)
- wooden ceilings
- a design that related to the landscape. There was a strong tendency to reach into the outdoors (typically the backyard) through floor-to-ceiling windows. Atriums and other devices that blurred the distinction between indoors and outdoors were prevalent.

### Eichler Homes:

Former butter and egg wholesaler Joseph Eichler brought soft modernism to thousands of middle class Californians in the San Francisco Bay Area (and to thousands more across the country courtesy of popular magazine coverage). Inspired by living in a Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian house, Eichler turned to building in the late 1940s, initially to pre-fabricated houses. In 1950 he switched to architect-designed contemporary houses for the middle-class market. In so doing, little did he know that he would become a household word for mid-century modern enthusiasts of the early twenty-first century. Like other so-called merchant builders, his company, Eichler Homes, Inc., oversaw every aspect of selling housing to consumers – from land acquisition, to building, to marketing. However, Eichler was different from the typical merchant builder in two ways: (1) His houses were architect-designed. (2) They were unabashedly modern (albeit soft modern). *Architectural Forum* in 1950 cited his first subdivision as “a gamble in modern.” By the end of the decade, Eichler’s company had built (and sold) thousands of contemporary houses.

While the models designed by Eichler’s architects over the years had a variety of roof shapes, all distinctive, one in particular has become synonymous with his name. (Indeed, it has become an icon of today’s mid-century modern movement.) The quite distinctive so-called “Eichler roof” has a very low pitch with broad overhanging eaves. Sometimes it is symmetrical, but more often it is not, extending to form a carport on one side. In its higher reaches, the roof creates a clerestory. (See Photos 2 and 3 for a typical Eichler home in California.)

On the interior, the ceiling follows the roof pitch in a tent-like fashion. Exposed post and beam construction allowed the architects to create an open floorplan with kitchen, dining room and living room under the tent ceiling. Eichler roofs are often used in combination with natural wood ceilings and/or exposed articulated structural beams (in Douglas fir).

The exteriors of Eichler houses were typically sheathed in vertical grooved redwood boards stained naturally. Like other California contemporary houses, Eichler houses typically turn their backs to the street. At the rear they open to the landscape via walls of glass and/or sliding glass doors.

The precise origins of the above-described Eichler roof design may never be known. One version traces it to Richard Neutra. When Neutra was designing a modern house in Los Angeles in the early 1940s, so goes the story, he ran afoul of a city ordinance that forbade flat roofs. So he gave the house roof a modest pitch. His clients disliked modernist low-ceiling rooms; so Neutra created a higher ceiling by following the pitch of the roof in tent-like fashion. The resulting end gable on the house he filled in with glass. According to Neutra scholar Thomas S. Hines, he thus “predicted what became a ubiquitous trademark of American suburban architecture of the 1950s and ‘60s.”

### Frank Lloyd Wright Influence:

Some of the characteristics of the California contemporary residence reflect a local preference for well-crafted homes in natural redwood (for example, California bungalows). But, importantly, the look also bears the imprint of Frank Lloyd Wright, who in the post-war years was seen as the grand elder statesman of American architecture. First, there was his overall organic (naturalistic) approach to design – using natural materials in a straightforward manner. Then there was the horizontal “break-up the box” composition he employed in his Usonian Houses, which were intended as a prototype for less affluent clientele. Finally, there was the “hug the ground” aspect, and a profound horizontal line and ledge composition, which can be seen in his Prairie School houses, then being rediscovered by the greater art world. It should be noted that Wright himself did not practice in this genre. His influence was indirect, but nonetheless a strong presence in the background.

#### Architect Designed:

A major reason for the design quality one often finds in contemporary homes in city after city is that subdivision developers who specialized in this type of house were much more likely to have access to professional architects than more typical rank-and-file developers. Joseph Eichler had them on staff. Others had architects on retainer. There were also architects, notably Edward Fickett (California), who approached developers and marketed their services as improving the quality and hence the salability, value and price of the finished homes. To increasingly affluent American suburbanites, “architect-designed” could be a cache, or as in the parlance of the time, a “status symbol.”

#### Promoting Modernism to Homebuyers:

There were various efforts in the post-war art and architectural community to promote modern architecture to middle class homebuyers. While Americans were anxious for the latest modern home conveniences, modern houses per se were a hard sell. As a 1944 museum exhibition catalog noted, “Here is a style which, more consciously than any other in history, was directed toward the improvement of the comfort, and convenience, health and happiness of society, yet there has probably never been an architectural movement more deeply distrusted by the public.” As noted above, Eichler’s early houses were proclaimed “a gamble in modern.”

Certainly the best known attempt to spread the modernist vision for housing is the Case Study program in Southern California, sponsored by the West Coast trade journal *Arts and Architecture*. The campaign began in 1945 and continued on-and-off until 1962. Various architects and designers submitted prototypes (known by number). The goal was to provide a model for distinctive, inexpensive, reproducible, modern architecture that would solve America’s housing crisis. Each model home shone like a beacon of sophisticated industrialized modernity. But ultimately the Case Study program failed because: 1) Its prototypes were still fairly pricey for a standard manufactured home, and 2) Its innovative steel and concrete designs were quite difficult for ordinary, medium skilled, construction crews to build. In other words, these houses,

more often than not, to quote Eichler scholar Paul Adamson, were “artistic, one of a kind structures.”

More successful in spreading the word were articles and advertisements in the mass media (magazines such as *House Beautiful*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, etc.). These drove a segment of popular taste in a way that the Case Study Project could not. Undoubtedly popular magazines spread the look of Eichler’s California houses to other parts of the country. For example, *House Beautiful* ran a feature story on Eichler’s Green Gables subdivision (Palo Alto, California) in November 1950. And *Arts and Architecture* published several features on Eichler homes.

In true merchant builder tradition, Eichler also marketed his houses, and in so doing, marketed modernism. Of particular importance was the work of photographer Ernie Braun, who produced a series of superlative black and white images showing people (actors) living in and enjoying an Eichler home. The women are all beautiful, the men handsome, the children adorable. All are clearly having the time of their lives living in an Eichler home.

#### Importance of Contemporary Homes:

In the end, was “contemporary” truly an alternative modernism, a separate style worthy of individual distinction and renown? Opinions vary. One school of thought notes that the Modernist Movement was not monolithic. Its identity, overall thrust and purpose were broad enough to encompass a variation that we, for convenience, might call “contemporary.” In short, goes this thought process, “contemporary” was nothing special outside the context of general European Modernism. Others, most notably Marcus Whiffen and Frederick Koeper in *American Architecture: 1860-1976*, have used the label “another modernism – and a native one” outright. And no less a contemporaneous critic than Wolf Von Eckardt noted what he termed, “a new modified modern.” British architectural historian Lesley Jackson has gone even further, lauding American contemporary architecture, and powerfully asserting that under its umbrella, “the USA emerged as one of the new design superpowers of the post-war era.”

### THE LOUISIANA STORY

Scattered around Louisiana cities are numerous contemporary, or soft modern, houses from the period 1945-65. At the risk of over-simplification, contemporary houses in Louisiana are generally of two types: (1) flat-roofed (or almost flat-roofed), high-end, architect-designed houses that tend to be isolated gems in neighborhoods filled with various twentieth century houses; or (2) middle class houses with Eichler-style roofs that tend to be in period subdivisions filled with otherwise mainstream basic ranch houses.

Much research remains to be done on Louisiana's contemporary houses. Generally speaking, the major architect-designed houses have been documented (prior to this study and as part of this study). But what about the contemporary houses (or contemporary ranch houses, depending on your terminology) scattered here and there in ranch house subdivisions across the state? How did they come to be? One assumes that for the most part they were not architect designed. How did a homebuyer in Louisiana come to choose an Eichler-looking contemporary model? Presumably they saw it in a magazine, or the developer of the subdivision offered it as a model.

For ease of identifying the character-defining features of Louisiana's contemporary houses, the houses will be divided into the two categories referenced above. As can be seen, houses in the two categories share some characteristics.

Flat-roofed (or almost flat-roofed), high-end, architect designed (Photos 4-17):

- They are strongly rectilinear and horizontal in feeling.
- The crisply articulated roof enhances the rectilinear effect.
- The houses turn their back to the street. Occasionally a blank short side elevation is parallel to the street, but more typically the façade is parallel to the street and features a brick wall with minimal, if any, windows. Façade windows, where they exist, might be a narrow band near the eaves (similar to International Style ribbon windows). Occasionally, the architect lifts the flat roof above the brick wall to create a clerestory effect.
- Ornamentation is absent.
- Unlike the orthodox modern house, of steel and glass, Louisiana's contemporary houses are sheathed mainly in warmer textured materials (brick and/or wood). Even the most "high modern" of designs have textured accents.
- The distinction between the indoors and outdoors is blurred – via walls of glass, with sliding doors, providing vistas into the backyard or courtyards (both covered and uncovered). Courtyards are sometimes set into the body of the house.
- Open floorplan.

Eichler-style middle class houses (See photos 18-20):

- Roofs define this type of house more than anything else. The classic look is a very low pitched gable encompassing the entire house. It is generally asymmetrical, extending to one side to form a carport. The structural beams are exposed and form a visually prominent part of the design.

Sometimes one sees a variation of the foregoing roof, where the low broad gable is in effect broken into two components (Photo 21). Occasionally one sees the gable perpendicular to the street (but rarely).

- Typically the low broad gable provides for high clerestory windows on one side (and a carport on the other).
- One story by definition and horizontal in feeling.
- The footprint is generally that of a rectangle.
- These houses too generally turn their back to the street, with the clerestory windows referenced above placed high enough for privacy. The house opens up to the outdoors at the rear, via walls of glass and/or sliding glass doors.
- Ornamentation is absent (other than the expression of structural members noted above).
- Sheathing is typically brick veneer.
- Open floorplan.

#### Tulane School of Architecture:

In the period 1945-65, Tulane University's School of Architecture was the principal training ground for modernism in the state. (LSU's Department of Architecture was founded in 1959, granting its first four-year degrees in 1963. The Department of Architecture at what is now known as the University of Louisiana at Lafayette awarded its first degrees in 1962.)

By the late 1940s, the faculty at Tulane's School of Architecture was dominated by modernists, recalls 1951 graduate William Brockway of Baton Rouge. Saul Mintz, of Monroe, who graduated in 1953, recalls visiting modernist luminaries such as Richard Neutra doing week-long stints of hands-on teaching. When asked how he came to design in the contemporary style, Mintz quickly replied "that was all there was" – all he knew coming out of Tulane at the time he did.

The specific impact of Tulane's modernist-bent School of Architecture is a subject for future study. To date, the authors have only been able to identify two graduates (from the period in question) who went on to practice in Louisiana. Brockway, working for architectural firms in Baton Rouge, designed in a variety of styles – some modern and some not. Saul Mintz's architectural practice was very limited because of family business responsibilities. He designed a handful of residences for family members in Monroe, all clearly modern. (See photos 4-7.)

As seen below, the state's most prolific modernist architects either received their education out of state or were at Tulane in its earlier Beaux Arts training days.

#### The Architects:

The state's most notable, most prolific modernist architects were Samuel and William Wiener, of Shreveport, practicing separately or together, and Curtis and Davis of New Orleans (Nathaniel Curtis and Arthur Q. Davis, Principals).

The only known contemporary residence in Louisiana designed by a nationally (in this case, internationally) prominent architect is the redwood-clad O'Brien House (1950) in Shreveport, designed by Richard Neutra. Born in Vienna in 1892, Neutra studied and worked under leading European modernists Adolf Loos and Eric Mendelsohn. He came to the United States in 1923 and became a naturalized citizen in 1929. As noted previously, Neutra produced the United States' first International Style building (the Lovell "Health" House, 1928). He and Rudolf Schindler were the supreme California-based modernist architects. Why the O'Briens came to choose Neutra (over for example, the local and quite talented Wiener brothers) is unknown.

### Samuel and William Wiener:

Shreveport brothers Samuel and William Wiener essentially had two modernist careers in Louisiana – first as pioneering International Style architects in the 1930s and then in the post WWII years as designers of several exceptional "soft modern" residences and numerous commercial and institutional buildings. Over their decades-long careers the brothers practiced both separately and together.

Sam Wiener was almost 50 at the end of World War II, his brother William, 38. Both were educated in Shreveport public schools and received their architecture degree from the University of Michigan (Sam in 1920, Bill in 1929). Sam Wiener also had studied under Finnish modernist Eliel Saarinen and at the *Ecole-des-Beaux-Arts* in Paris.

The Wieners were among the first in America to design in the International Style. Sam Wiener and fellow Shreveport architect Theodore Flaxman went to Europe in 1931 with the specific purpose of seeing the new style and meeting its creators. Among the architects they met were Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn and Alvar Alto. In the next few years Sam and William Wiener produced a number of notable works in the International Style.

By the late 1940s, the Wieners' modernism had evolved. Gone were the white-skinned, abstract, "machine for living" houses of the early and mid-1930s. In their place were several upscale strikingly modern houses for Shreveport clients, but with "softer" personalities than the architects' earlier work. (See photos 8-13.) The houses are strongly sculptural, with large expanses of glass, but softened with textured materials such as Colorado sandstone and mahogany veneer. The interiors are known for their abundance of built-in cabinets, drawers, beds, etc. – all in warm woods.

As in the 1930s, national and international publications routinely recognized the Wieners' work. A 1951 book, *The American House Today: 85 Notable Examples*, selected from the pages of numerous publications, included two houses from Louisiana. Both were Wiener designs. *Architectural Record* selected one of the brothers' Shreveport designs as among the

twenty-nine best contemporary houses in the nation in 1956. The editors praised the use of identical materials inside and out “to enhance the unified feeling of the house.” “Now and then, one happens on a house that seems all of a piece,” they concluded.

#### Curtis and Davis:

Formed in New Orleans in 1947, Curtis and Davis was Louisiana’s pre-eminent modernist architectural firm. Its principals were Nathaniel Curtis, Jr., who died in 1997, and Arthur Q. Davis, born in 1920 and still practicing in New Orleans. Both men were graduates of Tulane University’s School of Architecture, but in the 1930s, when they attended, the school was still rooted in the Beaux-Arts tradition. (It was too early for European modernism to have taken hold.) Davis entered Harvard’s prestigious Graduate School of Design, headed by Walter Gropius, in the fall of 1945. He was one of twelve students (in that year’s class) taught by the famed European modernist. Upon receiving his masters, Davis worked for famed Finnish modernist Eero Saarinen in Michigan for a few months, before returning to Louisiana in 1947 at the invitation of Nathaniel Curtis. Curtis asked Davis to join him in opening a practice devoted to bringing contemporary architecture to tradition-bound New Orleans.

Over the next thirty-one years (the firm dissolved in 1978), Curtis and Davis gave Louisiana an extraordinary legacy of countless supremely modern buildings. Their work encompassed all types of buildings -- from a zebra house at Audubon Zoo (1960) to the Louisiana Superdome (1970s). And, like the Wieners, Curtis and Davis received much praise in national and international publications and many honors.

Curtis and Davis were modernist players on a much larger stage than Louisiana. At the firm’s height, there were offices in New Orleans, New York, Los Angeles, London and Berlin. Among their major commissions were the United States Embassy in Saigon and the James V. Forrestal Federal Office Building in Washington.

Curtis and Davis’ residential modernism was the closest Louisiana clients got to orthodox, “high modern” architecture. (See photo 14.) Their crisply articulated, strongly rectilinear, flat-roofed houses were softened with textured materials such as brick, but they often have a starker modern look to them than, for example, the work of Samuel and William Wiener in Shreveport.

There are surely other architects who designed important contemporary houses in Louisiana in the 1945 to 1965 period, but it was beyond the scope of this project to do extensive research on the subject. Firms or architects that merit further investigation include (but are not limited to): Bodman and Murrell and Murrell and Short of Baton Rouge and Claude R. Colbert, New Orleans.

#### Geographical Range:

Virtually all houses of the type described above are in Louisiana cities (either high-end, architect-designed in a neighborhood of various houses or in period subdivisions). It would be most unusual (but not impossible) to find one in a small town or in the country.

Date Range: 1945-1965

Property Types:

As noted above, the two property types are:

- Flat-roofed (or almost flat roofed), high-end, architect-designed houses. These tend to be isolated gems in neighborhoods filled with various twentieth century houses.
- Middle class houses with Eichler-style roofs. These tend to be in period subdivisions filled with otherwise mainstream basic ranch houses.

Registration Requirements:

Under Criterion C (design) of the National Register criteria, within Louisiana, one will always be evaluating candidates for individual listing. The state does not have neighborhoods of contemporary houses (as does, for example, California).

National Register Criterion C reads, in part: **“Properties may be eligible for the National Register if they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.”** The preparers of this document, based on decades of experience with the National Register, have found this statement to be interpreted to mean that a candidate should generally be a good example of its “type, period [style], or method of construction” within a given geographical context. Broadly speaking, good contemporary houses are clear, crisp essays in geometry without decoration. They do not necessarily have to have all of the features catalogued above. (This cannot be quantified.)

Eligible:

- Clearly the “highest probability” for good examples would be high-end architect-designed houses. (These are fairly thin on the ground in Louisiana, and the relatively few practitioners of this genre were good at their craft.) Any example that retains sufficient integrity would most likely be a prime candidate under Criterion C.
- Any well-executed Eichler-style contemporary house would also most likely be individually eligible – if for no other reason than as a rare example of a nationally recognized archetype – providing, of course, it retained sufficient integrity.

Not Eligible:

- What constitutes a “poor” example of a contemporary house? Generally, these are “builder jobs” where the builder borrowed elements from here and there and didn’t put them together well. In other words, the house is a hodgepodge of elements rather than a cohesive whole.

Properties may also be eligible under Criterion C if they **“represent the work of a master.”** **“A master is a figure of generally recognized greatness in a field, a known craftsman of consummate skill, or an anonymous craftsman whose work is distinguishable from others by its characteristic style and quality.”** “A figure of generally recognized greatness in a field” does not equal a nationally significant (or even statewide) significant architect. Within the context of Louisiana, for example, Curtis and Davis and the Wiener brothers are “masters.”

However, this section of Criterion C also states that: **“A property is not eligible as the work of a master, however, simply because it was designed by a prominent architect. The property must express a particular phase in the development of the master’s career, an aspect of his or her work, or a particular idea or theme in his or her craft.”**

In short, within the context of Louisiana, not every Curtis and Davis residence, for example, is by definition eligible simply because these “masters” designed it. Put in the simplest (and perhaps most understandable) of terms, one must demonstrate “specialness” within their work along the lines defined above.

#### Assessing Integrity:

Per National Park Service guidance, assessing integrity must be done on a case-by-case basis. As for any style, the evaluator must first identify those features that make the candidate a contemporary house and assess the visual impact of alterations on those character-defining features. Are the character-defining features visually dominant or the alterations? Generally speaking, contemporary houses can “handle” fewer alterations than other styles. They are precisely articulated works of art in the best cases, and their carefully orchestrated geometry can be overwhelmed by insensitive alterations fairly easily.

#### Bibliography:

Adamson, Paul. *Eichler/Modernism Rebuilds the American Dream*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2002.

Arbunich, Marty. Eichler Historic Quest Committee. Greenmeadow Subdivision (Santa Clara County, CA) National Register of Historic Places nomination form, revised 2005.

Arbunich, Marty. Eichler Historic Quest Committee. Green Gables Subdivision (Santa Clara County, CA) National Register of Historic Places nomination form, revised 2005.

- Architectural Record. *Record Houses of 1956, Record Houses of 1957, Record Houses of 1960, Record Houses of 1961*. New York: Architectural Record.
- Barry, Joseph. *The House Beautiful Treasury of Contemporary American Homes*. New York: Hawthorn Books. Inc., 1958.
- Davis, Arthur Q., FAIA. *It Happened by Design: The Life and Work of Arthur Q. Davis*. University Press of Mississippi in association with The Ogden Museum of Southern Art, University of New Orleans, 2009.
- Ford, Katherine Morrow and Creighton, Thomas H. *The American House Today: 85 Notable Examples*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1951.
- Eckardt, Wolf Von, editor. *Mid-Century Architecture in America: Honor Awards of the American Institute of Architects, 1949-1961*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1961.
- Hess, Alan. *Forgotten Modern: California Houses 1940-1970*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2007.
- Hines, Thomas S. *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 2005.
- Jackson, Lesley. *'Contemporary': Architecture and Interiors of the 1950s*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1994.
- redstickmodern.com*. The postings on this website gave the authors leads on Baton Rouge's mid-century modern houses.
- Serraino, Pieuluigi. *NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006.
- Smith, Elizabeth A. T. *Case Study Houses*. London: Taschen, 2007.
- Whiffen, Marcus and Koeper, Frederick. *American Architecture: Volume 2: 1860-1976*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981.
- Wiener, Samuel Collection. Louisiana State University-Shreveport Archives.
- Wiener, William Collection. Louisiana State University-Shreveport Archives.
- Wiseman, Carter. *Twentieth-Century American Architecture: The Builders and Their Makers*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2000.

This document was prepared for the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation by:  
Jonathan and Donna Fricker  
Fricker Historic Preservation Services, LLC

First Draft: September 2009  
Final Draft: February 2010

## PHOTO GALLERY



Photo 1. Mies van der Rohe's supremely elegant "hard modern" Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois, 1951. One architectural historian (Carter Wiseman) described it as "skyscraper abstraction at domestic scale."



Photos 2 & 3. An Eichler home in San Mateo, California.



Photo 4. Saul Mintz (Tulane School of Architecture, 1953) designed this exquisite modern house in Monroe for his in-laws in 1958. Note how the street façade completely turns its back to the world. The custom designed gates lead to a large courtyard with some of the original plantings. While the house is clearly quite modern, its starkness is relieved by the use of warm-colored brick given extra texture by a pattern of bricks that extend beyond the main wall plane.



Photo 5. The rear elevation overlooks Bayou DeSiard. Note the glass walls and garden on the left set into the body of the house. Mintz's exceptional design blurs the distinction between outdoors and indoors in many ways, as shown in the following photos.



Photos 6 & 7. Saul Mintz design in Monroe.



Photo 8. Samuel G. Wiener and William B. Wiener and Associates, Architects (Samuel G. Wiener, lead designer), 1956. Built of Colorado sandstone with mahogany and slate accents, this house presents its side to the street. The same materials are used inside and out – truly blurring the distinction between the two.

Photo 9. Rear elevation shown to left. The house is completely unaltered on the exterior and interior, including the bathrooms and kitchen. The grounds retain the original pool, terraced landscaping, and mahogany veneer pool house.





Photo 10. The living room as it appeared in *Architectural Record Houses of 1956*. The dining room is behind the firebox. Photo courtesy LSU-Shreveport Archives.



Photo 11. The same image taken August 2009. Note the built-in cabinet to the left. The bar behind the diamond pattern section opens into the living room and the kitchen.



Photo 12. The same room seen at night, as it appeared in *Architectural Record Houses of 1956*.  
  
Image courtesy LSU-Shreveport Archives.



Photo 13. The continuation of the same building material from the outside to indoors blurs the distinction between the two. The sliding glass doors to the left open to an original pool and landscaped grounds.



Photo 14. The Steinberg residence in New Orleans' Garden District, 1958, Curtis and Davis, Architects.



Photo 15. A stunning soft modern house in New Orleans' Lake Vista neighborhood.



Photo 16. Miami architect Wahl Snyder designed this luxurious contemporary house for Baton Rouge developer/builder W. Hamilton Crawford and family in 1956. The October 1957 issue of *House Beautiful* devoted several pages to the house. Photo by William Howland.



Photo 17. A classic soft modern house in Shreveport (architect unknown). The house totally turns its back to the street. The architect lifted the roof above the brick wall to create high windows.



Photo 18. A classic Eichler-style contemporary house in Shreveport.



Photo 19. One of several Eichler-style contemporary houses in the various New Orleans neighborhoods along Lake Pontchartrain.



Photo 20. An Eichler-style house in Monroe.



Photo 21. A variation on the Eichler-style roof where the roof is broken into two components.