

Turn on your television and you will see it. Open a newspaper or magazine and you will see it. The man deciding between cable and satellite lives in it. The woman pitching a cleaning product mops around it. The super model selling the unattainable sits in it.

It's been loved, hated, restored, bulldozed, copied, in style, out of style, and back in style. It's been taught, debated, and put on display.

Its influences are everywhere—from high-end to discount. You'll find it in decorative arts, architecture, clothing, housewares, and furniture. Its principles are over fifty years old but still apply today.

"It" is Mid-Century Modernism, and you will find it right here in Orange County.

When the majority of the world, our own populous included, thinks of Orange County, a lot of things may come to mind, and mid-century architecture is probably not one of them. To most, Orange County is "The OC" of television fame: Rows of million dollar mini- and not-so-mini-mansions in gated communities, one undistinguishable from the next. But pull back that glossy veneer and there is a vast treasure of Mid-Century Modern gems waiting to be discovered.

There were many mid-century modern, architect-designed, commercial buildings built in Orange County between the 1950's and the 1970's. From office buildings to churches, bowling alleys to carwashes, universities to restaurants, all built in styles representing a promising, modern, and even futuristic world. Many of these have vanished in the ever-evolving landscape that is Southern California. Here today, a mini mall, a promenade or urban lofts tomorrow. But many remain.

Check out the original building of the space age Anaheim Convention Center or the simple modern beauty of modernist master, architect Richard Neutra's Tower of Hope in Garden Grove or his civic center and police station buildings in Santa Ana. Visit Fullerton and see the wonderful and extreme slanted roofs and walls of glass of Hope University across from Cal State Fullerton, which itself has some great modern buildings. Take a trip down Beach Blvd. from Buena Park to Huntington Beach, or Harbor Blvd. from Anaheim to Costa Mesa, and you'll find scattered examples of the more playful and extreme Googie modern style in carwashes, motels, a bowling alley or two, and restaurants.

But, as everyone knows, Orange County is known for its homes, it's suburban homes; it's almost endless tracts of suburban homes.

Fueled by a growing post-World War II populace, shifting from agriculture to industrial (cold war aerospace), and the completion of the I-5 Golden State Freeway, vast tracts of single family homes were built in central and northern Orange County. Most of these homes were the more typical style of 1950's homes, with kitchen built ins, sliding glass patio doors, the occasional second bathroom, a garage for one or perhaps two cars. Modern conveniences for their time, but in a traditional style floor plan.

Exploring the hill areas of Fullerton, Tustin, Santa Ana and the coastal areas of Laguna, Corona Del Mar and Newport Beach, you can find many custom-built architectural mid-century modern homes. There are also many neighborhoods in Fullerton, Garden Grove, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Anaheim and La Habra that have individual or small tracts of homes which incorporate many of the elements that define mid-century architecture.

Characterizations that include a clean style, walls of glass, roofs that are flat, butterflies, or zigzag, post and beam construction, and the use of traditional and non-traditional materials in new ways. Open floor plans and experimentation, all geared towards the modern mid-century Californian life and beyond.

But there is no tract of homes in Orange County that better exemplifies mid-century modernism architecture than the three home tracts in the city of Orange. Fairmeadows, Fairhaven, and Fairhills or, as they are better known, Eichler Homes.

When Joseph Eichler came to Southern California, he was already a well-established homebuilder who had already constructed thousands of his extremely



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PHOTOGRAPHS ON THIS SPREAD AND COVER BY GRANT RIVERA

popular Eichler homes around the San Francisco Bay area. In 1960 his Fairhaven tract was completed, followed by Fairhills, and Fairmeadows, 350 modern Orange County homes in all.

Joseph Eichler was a progressive homebuilder with a vision. He sought to bring many of the features that were only available in custom, architect designed homes to the people of more average or modest means. Most homebuilders of the time used home designs from in house designers. Eichler did not design homes, he built them, and he was the first to hire outside, well-known, modern architectural firms to design his tract homes. Among them, A. Quincy Jones, Ashen and Allen, and Claude Oakland. These architects delivered plans for tract homes with, before Eichler, nearly unheard of "custom" features like two bathrooms standard in every home, in-floor radiant heating, open beam ceilings, open floor plans, built-in appliances, flip-up kitchen tables, Honduran mahogany wall paneling, and walls of glass, floor to ceiling glass that almost literally brings



This spread: Eichler home of Dawn Robinette and Michael Hurst

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the outside in. And on the outside, simple and clean design, post and beam construction, flat roofs with the occasional double-gable entry, and courtyard atrium entries.

Fast forward nearly fifty years and turn right on Woodland Ave. off of La Veta in the city of Orange, and you'll realize that you are not in your average housing tract. This is the Fairhaven Eichler tract, and you'll find some of the best-restored and/or re-imagined mid-century modern houses in California. After some rough years of neglect or ill conceived add ons and renovations, many of these homes have been, or are in the process of being, returned to their former glory by a new generation of modernists. Speak with any of these enthusiasts and you'll find people who care deeply about form, function, art, design, environment and preservation. After fifty plus years, many mid-century designs, concepts and principles are as innovative as when they were first conceived, blending seamlessly with many of today's "modern" designs and products.

Many of the commercial and residential buildings that define mid-century modern design are now gone or threatened. The good news is that as this type of architecture gains more recognition and a higher profile, many networks, clubs, preservationists, and homeowners are actively pressing for preservation zones and historical designations to protect what has become one of the most important and influential styles of our times. ■

— Mike Atta

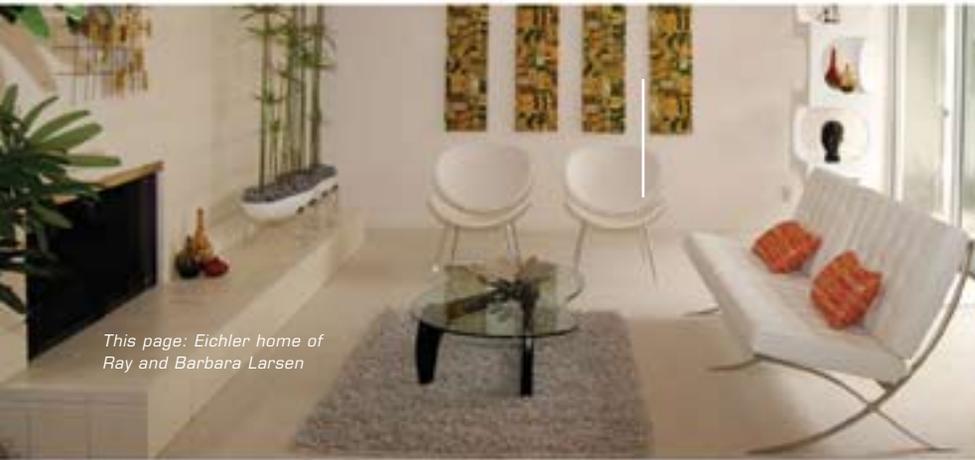
Mid-Century on the net...

- eichlersocal.com
- socalmodern.com
- lottalivin.com
- gomod.com
- atomicranch.com

Bricks and Mortar...

Otto Shop, Downtown Fullerton for a great selection of books on Mid-Century Modern architecture, furniture, art and design.

Orange County Museum of Art
Birth of the Cool: California Art, Design, and Culture at Mid-Century • Current display through January 6th 2008.



This page: Eichler home of Ray and Barbara Larsen



Returned to it's former glory by a new generation of modernists.