MID-CENTURY MODERN

A Historian's View

Dr. Anthony Denzer April 2017

Because "Mid-Century Modern" architecture contains "widely divergent" examples, "it is impossible to create a meaningful historical category or a style label that will have lasting value."

A surface similarity — buildings that have that "postwar modern" feel — at closer observation dissolves into a surprising multiplicity of forms, materials, and audiences.

"The difficulty in relating specific buildings (and in many cases their furnishings as well) not only to each other but to modern architecture as a movement has proved a formidable challenge."

—Alice T. Friedman (2010)

Themes

Forms: Free vs. Fixed

Leisure & Travel

Japanese & Pacific influences

Flintstones-Jetsons dichotomy

Problems of Categorization

Honor-award house:

A wonderful world of your own

By JOSEPH B. MASON
BUILDING CONSULTANT

Protected terrace and open-sky inner court blend indoor and outdoor living without sacrificing privacy. The price (including land): $24,950 for this four-bedroom house with two bathrooms, family room, dining room, and a 12-by-20-foot living room

Don't underestimate the importance of your surroundings when you serve meals to your family and friends. Here the family room, kitchen, and dining room extend across the rear of the house to produce this striking open arrangement. Glass walls reach to the two-inch plank-and-beam ceiling and have sliding doors encased in aluminum frames

Builder: Eichler Homes
Architects: Jones & Emmons

The front of this award-winning house concedes that the auto is here to stay: Both garage *(at left in photo below)* and carport are provided. Guests enter through door in the opaque-glass fence that separates carport from inner court

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERNEST BRAUN

FEW houses in modern times have had the acclaim of the one shown on these pages. The team of builder and architects that produced it has been given the first award of honor—"for better home design and community planning"—of the American Institute of Architects and the National Association of Home Builders.

What makes it such a wonderful house? First of all it has both value and extra-fine livability. It sells in Sunnyvale, California, for $24,950, complete with land, fences, and built-in appliances. The plan includes a 12-by-20-foot living room, a dining room, family room, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a garage and carport. It has radiant-heated floors, sturdy post-and-beam construction, insulated walls and ceilings, and ceramic-tile baths.

And it features in a modern dwelling the dramatic use of a beautiful old idea—the inner court. Too, the architects have closed the street side to public view, and they've opened the rear with floor-to-ceiling glass walls that look out on a garden terrace. Beyond are high fences at the edge of the property. With these devices they've achieved an atmosphere of daylight and natural beauty throughout the house, yet they've preserved that essential human right—privacy.

But it is in the extra quality of livability that the house excels. You enter through a door in an opaque-glass wall, or fence, that separates the carport from the charming inner court. An electric latch for opening and shutting this door is controlled by a push button inside the house.

The open-sky, glass-enclosed court introduces an element of surprise to those first seeing it, but it becomes, on better acquaintance, a source of uplift for its constant reminder of the natural beauty of sky, daylight, and planting. It invites use as an outdoor living room, as a yard in which children can be watched at play, and as a meeting place for