

# Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## RECOMMENDATION REPORT

**CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION**

**CASE NO.: CHC-2009-3041-HCM  
ENV-2009-3042-CE**

**HEARING DATE:** December 3, 2009  
**TIME:** 10:00 AM  
**PLACE:** City Hall, Room 1010  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA  
90012

Location: 19950 West Collier Street  
Council District: 3  
Community Plan Area: Canoga Park –  
Winnetka – Woodland Hills – West Hills  
Area Planning Commission: South Valley  
Neighborhood Council: Woodland Hills –  
Warner Center  
Legal Description: Lot 66, Tract TR 8812

**PROJECT:** Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the  
VAN DEKKER HOUSE

**REQUEST:** Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

**APPLICANT:** A.D. Modlin  
342 East Kingsley Avenue  
Pomona, CA 91767

**OWNER:** Josh Gorrell  
19950 West Collier Street  
Los Angeles, CA 91364

**RECOMMENDATION That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Declare** the property a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

S. GAIL GOLDBERG, AICP  
Director of Planning

**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

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Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager  
Office of Historic Resources

**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

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Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect  
Office of Historic Resources

Prepared by:

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Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner  
Office of Historic Resources

**Attachments:** September, 2009 Historic-Cultural Monument Application  
ZIMAS Report

## **FINDINGS**

1. The building “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction” as an example of Modern style residential architecture.
2. The building is associated with a master builder, designer, or architect, as a work by master architect R.M. Schindler (1887-1953).

## **CRITERIA**

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

## **SUMMARY**

Built in 1940 and located in Woodland Hills, this three-story, single-family residential building exhibits character-defining features of Modern style architecture. Built on a gently sloping hillside, the L-shaped home contains approximately 2,300 square feet of interior space. The building is oriented along a diagonal axis relative to due north. The asymmetrical, copper-clad gable roof is composed of two separate volumes which join at the knuckle of the building’s “L” shaped plan. The main entrance, located on the ground floor at the northern corner of the building, has a door built from vertical wood siding and leads to a split-level entry foyer. The ground floor is recessed and clad in leopard-spot stone. The second and third floors of the house are clad in stucco and consist of irregular and cantilevered volumes unified by horizontal structural elements and bands of sliding wood-framed windows. Additional window types in the subject building include wooden awning windows, polygonal-shaped fixed pane windows, and fixed pane clerestory windows. In the subject building’s interior, the space created by the union of the two roof volumes becomes the dominant feature of the living room. The roof itself defines the spatial characteristics of the third floor rooms. Significant interior elements include built in furniture and cabinetry. Secondary structures on the site include a curved retaining wall of leopard spot stone, and a carport with storage/service rooms.

The subject building was designed by master architect R. M. Schindler (1887-1953). Schindler is internationally recognized for his modern architectural designs that were sensitive to local conditions, and has been the subject of exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) and the MAK Center for Art and Architecture.

Schindler designed the subject property for the family of Albert Van Dekker, a film and television actor who performed in many well-known films and also served one term as a legislator in the California State Assembly. His best known roles are in films such as *Dr. Cyclops* (1940), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), and *The Wild Bunch* (1969). In 1955, Van Dekker sold the subject property to his colleague, Albert Isaac “Buzz” Bezzerides, who was the screen-writer for *Kiss Me Deadly*

and several other critically and commercially successful movies of the 1940s and 1950s. Bezzerides resided in the home for over fifty years, until his death in 2007.

Alterations to the subject building are chiefly a result of deferred maintenance and include replacement of some glass window panes with plywood, missing roof copper panels, missing bathroom tile-work, addition of wooden posts to the cantilevered roof over the living room porch, and removal of a trellis near this cantilevered roof. The garage and storage area appear to be in poor condition.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Van Dekker House property successfully meets two of the specified Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: 1) “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, and 2) is associated with a master builder, designer, or architect. As a residential building designed in the Modern style by master architect R.M. Schindler, the property qualifies for designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument based on these criteria.

The staff of the Office of Historic Resources recognizes the condition of the subject building and deferred maintenance of the property. However, these issues do not appear to have compromised the architectural integrity of the building. The staff of the Office of Historic Resources also acknowledges the challenges to properly restore and rehabilitate the subject building using the Secretary of Interior’s Standards. Staff is available to provide assistance in this capacity to the property owner regarding any future work on the subject building.

## **BACKGROUND**

At its meeting of October 1, 2009, the Cultural Heritage Commission voted to take the application under consideration. On November 19, 2009, the Cultural Heritage Commission toured the subject property.

## **CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (“CEQA”) REVIEW**

State of California CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 “*consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment.*”

State of California CEQA Guidelines Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 “*consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic buildings.*”

The designation of the Van Dekker House as a Historic-Cultural Monument in accordance with Chapter 9, Article 1, of The City of Los Angeles Administrative Code (“LAAC”) will ensure that future construction activities involving the subject property are regulated in accordance with Section 22.171.14 of the LAAC. The purpose of the designation is to prevent significant impacts to a Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth in the LAAC. Without the regulation imposed by way of the pending designation, the historic significance and integrity of the subject property could be lost through incompatible alterations and new

construction and the demolition of irreplaceable historic structures. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation are expressly incorporated into the LAAC and provide standards concerning the historically appropriate construction activities which will ensure the continued preservation of the subject property.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 8 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals of maintaining, restoring, enhancing, and protecting the environment through the imposition of regulations designed to prevent the degradation of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 31 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals relating to the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction of Historic buildings in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings.

# Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## RECOMMENDATION REPORT

**CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION**

**CASE NO.: CHC-2009-3041-HCM  
ENV-2009-3042-CE**

**HEARING DATE:** October 1, 2009  
**TIME:** 10:00 AM  
**PLACE:** City Hall, Room 1010  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA  
90012

Location: 19950 West Collier Street  
Council District: 3  
Community Plan Area: Canoga Park –  
Winnetka – Woodland Hills – West Hills  
Area Planning Commission: South Valley  
Neighborhood Council: Woodland Hills –  
Warner Center  
Legal Description: Lot 66, Tract TR 8812

**PROJECT:** Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the  
VAN DEKKER HOUSE

**REQUEST:** Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

**APPLICANT:** A.D. Modlin  
342 East Kingsley Avenue  
Pomona, CA 91767

**OWNER:** Zoe Ohl  
809 South Bundy Drive #317  
Los Angeles, CA 90039

**RECOMMENDATION**      **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Take the property under consideration** as a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.10 because the application and accompanying photo documentation suggest the submittal may warrant further investigation.
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

S. GAIL GOLDBERG, AICP  
Director of Planning

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Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager  
Office of Historic Resources

**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

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Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect  
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Prepared by:

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Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner  
Office of Historic Resources

Attachments:      September, 2009 Historic-Cultural Monument Application  
ZIMAS Report

## **SUMMARY**

Built in 1940 and located in Woodland Hills, this three-story, single-family residential building exhibits character-defining features of Modern style architecture. Built on a gently sloping hillside, the L-shaped home contains approximately 2,300 square feet of interior space. The building is oriented along a diagonal axis relative to due north. The asymmetrical, copper-clad gable roof is composed of two separate volumes which join at the knuckle of the building's "L" shaped plan. The main entrance, located on the ground floor at the northern corner of the building, has a door built from vertical wood siding and leads to a split-level entry foyer. The ground floor is recessed and clad in leopard-spot stone. The second and third floors of the house are clad in stucco and consist of irregular and cantilevered volumes unified by horizontal structural elements and bands of sliding wood-framed windows. Additional window types in the subject building include wooden awning windows, polygonal-shaped fixed pane windows, and fixed pane clerestory windows. In the subject building's interior, the space created by the union of the two roof volumes becomes the dominant feature of the living room. The roof itself defines the spatial characteristics of the third floor rooms. Significant interior elements include built in furniture and cabinetry. Secondary structures on the site include a curved retaining wall of leopard spot stone, and a carport with storage/service rooms.

The subject building was designed by master architect R. M. Schindler (1887-1953). Schindler is internationally recognized for his modern architectural designs that were sensitive to local conditions, and has been the subject of exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) and the MAK Center for Art and Architecture.

Schindler designed the subject property for the family of Albert Van Dekker, a film and television actor who performed in many well-known films and also served one term as a legislator in the California State Assembly. His best known roles are in films such as *Dr. Cyclops* (1940), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), and *The Wild Bunch* (1969). In 1955, Van Dekker sold the subject property to his colleague, Albert Isaac "Buzz" Bezzerides, who was the screen-writer for *Kiss Me Deadly* and several other critically and commercially successful movies of the 1940s and 1950s. Bezzerides resided in the home for over fifty years, until his death in 2007.

Alterations to the subject building are chiefly a result of deferred maintenance and include replacement of some glass window panes with plywood, missing roof copper panels, missing bathroom tile-work, addition of wooden posts to the cantilevered roof over the living room porch, and removal of a trellis near this cantilevered roof. The garage and storage area appear to be in poor condition.

## **CRITERIA**

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**FINDINGS**

Based on the facts set forth in the summary and application, the Commission determines that the application is complete and that the property is significant enough to warrant further investigation as a potential Historic-Cultural Monument.

**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT  
APPLICATION**

TYPE OR HAND PRINT IN ALL CAPITAL BLOCK LETTERS

**IDENTIFICATION**

1. NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT Albert Van Dekker House
2. STREET ADDRESS 19950 Collier St
- CITY Los Angeles ZIP CODE 91364 COUNCIL DISTRICT 3
3. ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NO. 2164 005 015
4. COMPLETE LEGAL DESCRIPTION: TRACT TR8812
- BLOCK \_\_\_\_\_ LOT(S) 66 ARB. NO. \_\_\_\_\_
5. RANGE OF ADDRESSES ON PROPERTY 19950 Collier St.
6. PRESENT OWNER Zoe Ohl
- STREET ADDRESS 809 S. Bundy Dr. #317 E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_
- CITY Los Angeles STATE CA ZIP CODE 90049 PHONE (310) 433 2419
- OWNERSHIP: PRIVATE YES PUBLIC \_\_\_\_\_
7. PRESENT USE Single-Family Residential ORIGINAL USE Single-Family Residential

**DESCRIPTION**

8. ARCHITECTURAL STYLE Modern  
(SEE STYLE GUIDE)
9. STATE PRESENT PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE OR STRUCTURE (SEE OPTIONAL DESCRIPTION WORK SHEET. 1 PAGE MAXIMUM)
- See attached sheet.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT  
APPLICATION**

**NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT** Albert Van Dekker House

10. CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1940 FACTUAL:  ESTIMATED:

11. ARCHITECT, DESIGNER, OR ENGINEER Rudolph Michael Schindler

12. CONTRACTOR OR OTHER BUILDER Rudolph Michael Schindler

13. DATES OF ENCLOSED PHOTOGRAPHS 1940s and July/August 2009  
(1 8X10 BLACK AND WHITE GLOSSY AND 1 DIGITAL E-MAILED TO CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION@LACITY.ORG)

14. CONDITION:  EXCELLENT  GOOD  FAIR  DETERIORATED  NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE

15. ALTERATIONS See attached sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16. THREATS TO SITE:  NONE KNOWN  PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT  VANDALISM  PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT  
 ZONING  OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

17. IS THE STRUCTURE:  ON ITS ORIGINAL SITE  MOVED  UNKNOWN

**SIGNIFICANCE**

18. BRIEFLY STATE HISTORICAL AND/OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: INCLUDE DATES, EVENTS, AND PERSON ASSOCIATED WITH THE SITE (SEE ALSO SIGNIFICANCE WORK SHEET. 750 WORDS MAXIMUM IF USING ADDITIONAL SHEETS)

See attached sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

19. SOURCES (LIST BOOKS, DOCUMENTS, SURVEYS, PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH DATES) See attached sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

20. DATE FORM PREPARED 09/06/2009 PREPARER'S NAME A.D. Modlin  
ORGANIZATION \_\_\_\_\_ STREET ADDRESS 342 E. Kingsley Ave.  
CITY Pomona STATE CA ZIP CODE 91767 PHONE (818) 512 4833  
E-MAIL ADDRESS: adm@admodlin.com

## Section 9: Description

The Van Dekker house is a single family residence located at 19950 Collier Street in Woodland Hills. Constructed in 1940, it is sited on a gently sloping hillside lot at the base of the Santa Monica Mountains, on the southern edge of the San Fernando Valley. It is wood-framed, stucco-clad building with a copper-panel roof. It contains approximately 2300 sq. ft of interior space.

The house is sited on a square lot of approximately 20,000 square feet, on the south side of Collier Street. The building permit that was submitted to the city of Los Angeles in 1940 identifies the address of the house as 5320 Penfield Ave. This is the address for the adjacent property to the west of the house, suggesting that the original lot included this neighboring parcel as well.

Like many of Schindler's houses, this building utilizes rotated geometries in both plan and section to respond to site conditions. The Van Dekker house is oriented along a diagonal axis relative to due north. This is done to take advantage of the natural contours of the site, maximizing usable outdoor space and allowing for the best views from within the house. The floor plan is arranged as an "L" shape, with the knuckle of the "L" occurring at the northern, street-facing section of the house.

The predominant formal characteristic of this house is its asymmetrical, copper-clad gable roof. The utilization of an asymmetric gable roof to define the interior space within the house was used by Schindler in several of his other residential designs during this period of time. This roof, which resembles a rotated rectangular mass sitting atop the space below, is actually two separate volumes which join at the knuckle of the "L". The union of these two roof volumes results in a dynamic geometric relationship. This space becomes the dominant feature of the living room and surrounding spaces below. The roof also serves as the primary device in defining the spatial characteristics of the rooms on the upper floor. The upper level and main level consist of irregular and cantilevered volumes which are unified by horizontal structural elements and bands of sliding wood-framed windows.

Adjacent to the house is the carport and storage/service rooms. This building is detached from the rest of the house; however it is connected visually by the use of a long horizontal trellis. This trellis also serves to mark the entry into the motor-court, as well as the procession towards the main entrance to the house.

The primary entrance to the house is at the front door, which is located at ground level on the northern corner of the building. The entrance utilizes a split-level arrangement to divide the programs of the lower and main floors. The front door is built from vertical wood siding, as are most of the doors in the house. The lower level contains two bedrooms, a game-room, storage rooms, and a bathroom. The main floor contains the kitchen, servant's quarters, a divisible bedroom, two bathrooms, the dining room, living room, library, two semi-enclosed porches and an outdoor patio directly outside the living room. The upper floor contains a small balcony area above the living room, the master bedroom, master bath, a closet/dressing area and another enclosed porch that overlooks the rear of the property.

The primary street-facing elevation of the house (the elevation that faces north-west) is the most complex. The façade of the lower level is recessed, and incorporates leopard-spot stone and wood-framed window bands as unifying horizontal elements. The main level projects out slightly, and has another band of wood-framed sliding windows that continue un-interrupted between the porches on either end of the living/dining area. On the third level, from beneath the asymmetric gable roof, a rectangular volume cantilevers out still further. This volume, which is part of the master bedroom, is capped by a horizontal roof plane which projects outward to provide an overhang. This overhang serves as a shading device, and is also used to articulate the formal composition of the house; it wraps around one corner of this rectilinear volume in manner similar to many of Schindler's earlier "plaster skin" houses.

This use of the overhang as a design element is also evident on the roof of the porch that is located outside of the living room and library. This porch is capped by a roof that cantilevers dramatically outward on the westernmost elevation of the building. This elevation is characterized by the same three-part outward stepping of the façade as seen the north-west elevation. This elevation also has a narrow walkway that links the porch and the rear patio. Above this walkway was a trellis that has since been removed. Below all of this is a precipitous drop in elevation. The two different levels of the site are separated by a curved retaining wall of leopard-spot stone. (This is the only type of stone used on the house, indoors or out.)

Following the retaining wall to the back of the house, a large patio paved in stone is bounded by the two wings of the house. This patio exists at the same level as the living room, and serves as an extension of indoor space. The roof above the living room extends outward for several feet as an overhang above the patio. This results in an intermediate indoor/outdoor space. The glass-doors and clerestory windows adjacent to the fireplace re-enforce this visual continuity between inside and out.

The southernmost and eastern elevations are not as dynamic, consisting of flat planes of walls punctuated by the windows of the servant's quarters and service spaces. Behind the servant's rooms is a rectangular slab of concrete; on the original plans, this is a half-circle shaped area of landscape that is described as a playground.

Within the house are various design details that are in keeping with Schindler's philosophy of practicing the comprehensive design of interior space. There is extensive built-in casework within the house. A prominent example of this is the cabinetry in the dining room. Built with the same vertical siding that was used for all of the doors in the house, this cabinet unit not only serves to address the need for storage (and a furnace register), but also serves as a unifying visual element between the inside of the dining room, the stairwell, and the kitchen. The built-in cabinetry of the upper level is similar in this respect, allowing for very specialized programmatic needs while maintaining complete continuity with the formal language of the greater building. Most of the built-in cabinetry on the upper level exists within the closet/dressing room area. There are also some original cabinets in the master bedroom, along the easternmost wall and within the north-eastern alcove. Also on the third level is a balcony; incorporated within the wall of this balcony is a cabinet unit. This section of cabinetry was probably intended as a storage space which would hold plants

on top of it. There also appears to be a provision for a film projector on the balcony, although this may not be original.

Schindler was particularly attuned to the properties of artificial lighting, and was generally opposed to visible and ornamental light fixtures, considering them to be awkward and inconvenient.<sup>1</sup> The Van Dekker house utilizes alternative methods of artificial lighting; in many rooms there are linear light troffers carefully integrated within the room. Several lighting fixtures both indoors and out are hidden discreetly within a soffit or ceiling, concealed by flat plates of frosted glass.

There are an abundance of windows within the house. Many are horizontal, sliding wooden windows. Some are wooden awning windows. There are also several polygonal-shaped windows that echo the geometry of the roof. Many windows are fixed-pane clerestory windows; particularly noteworthy are the butt-jointed clerestories above the library.

The original color scheme of the exterior was described in a 1945 *Los Angeles Times* article as being characterized by "grey stucco" and "Douglas Fir stained greenish-yellow."<sup>2</sup> This was in keeping with the muted color schemes that were used in most Schindler buildings, and is very similar to its current appearance.

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<sup>1</sup> Schindler, R.M. "About Lighting." *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 11, 1926. Featured article within the "Care of The Body" Column, edited by Phillip M. Lovell, p. K30

<sup>2</sup> "A Country House Goes Dramatic" *Los Angeles Times*. Aug. 26, 1945 p. E3

## Section 18: Significance

The Van Dekker house is eligible for listing as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument based upon the following three criteria. The Van Dekker House:

- (1) Is a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced their age (Rudolph Schindler)
- (2) Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction. (Modern Architecture)
- (3) Is identified with historic personages. (Albert Van Dekker and A.I. Bezzerides)

### R.M Schindler

Rudolph Michael Schindler (1887-1953) was an important figure in the development of modern architecture, particularly within Southern California, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While his contributions to modern architecture were not entirely understood or appreciated by his contemporaries at the time, more recent critical reflections upon his work have cemented his place within the order of the master architects of the twentieth century.

Born in Vienna in 1887, Schindler attended the Vienna Polytechnic Institute, graduating with a degree in architecture in 1911. Schindler also attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna from 1910-1913, which was then directed by architect Otto Wagner. As a pivotal figure in the history of Modern Architecture, Wagner had a great deal of influence as an academic and architect. He proposed the reconciliation of architectural design with new materials and methods of construction, as well as with the functional purpose of a building. During this period of time, Schindler was also personally acquainted with Adolph Loos. Loos, the Viennese architect who authored the famous text "Ornament and Crime" in 1908, was another seminal figure in the development of Modern Architecture. It was also in Vienna that Schindler met Richard Neutra, who was to become a future collaborator of Schindler's.

In 1914 Schindler departed Europe to begin work for an architectural firm in Chicago. By 1918, he had gained sufficient experience to become a draftsman for Frank Lloyd Wright. Schindler worked on many of Wright's projects, including the Barnsdall house in Los Angeles, the project that brought him to southern California in December 1920. Schindler remained in Los Angeles and started his own practice in 1922. Schindler's first major projects, his own house and studio on Kings Road (1921-1922) in West Hollywood, and the Lovell Beach house in Newport Beach (1922-1926), are considered by a number of architectural historians to be among the first built examples of modern residential architecture in the United States or in Europe.

Schindler designed over 500 projects in his lifetime, about 150 of which were realized. In addition to many noteworthy experiments with various new building materials and construction methods,

Schindler was an exponent of an approach to design that varied considerably from the common orthodoxies of the Modern Movement that existed at the time. While many modern architects were primarily concerned with the expression of new materials and overall formal compositions as ends in themselves, Schindler's approach to architecture was, fundamentally, about the nature of the space within a building and the resulting experience that was provided for its occupants. It is for this reason that Schindler dubbed his own approach to design "Space Architecture."<sup>3</sup> As opposed to the many practitioners of the "International Style" approach to modern architecture, Schindler was acutely aware of the importance of responding to the regional and immediate contexts of a building, both in terms of site-strategy and programmatic considerations (i.e.: outdoor living spaces)

### **The Albert Van Dekker House**

The Van Dekker House was designed during a transitional period in Schindler's career. It is not only an excellent example of several character-defining features seen in much of Schindler's work, but also serves a link between the "plaster skin" houses of the 1930's and the later "Schindler frame" houses built after WWII. Notable examples of Schindler's "plaster skin" houses are the Wilson House (1935) at 2090 N. Redcliff St, Los Angeles (L.A. HCM Pending) and the Droste House (1940) at 2025 Kenilworth Ave, Los Angeles (L.A. HCM # 837). Notable examples of the "Schindler frame" houses are the Rodriguez House (1940) at 1845 Niodrara Dr, Glendale (Glendale Historic Landmark #24) and the Kallis House (1946) at 3580 Multiview Dr, Los Angeles (L.A. HCM # 860). The Van Dekker House embodies characteristics of both periods and thus is particularly critical as a reference in understanding the evolution of Schindler's designs. So, while the house is an outstanding example of modern architecture judged on its own merits, it is also an important resource for understanding the complete body of work produced by Schindler. Judith Sheine, author of several works on Schindler, explains some of the unique characteristics of the Van Dekker house: "The stone fireplace and sloped walls in the second story under the roof are important precedents for Schindler's radical post-war work, including the Kallis house." In addition, "the living space is one of Schindler's few two-story volumes and features a balcony overlooking it that connects the lower and upper floors, making a particularly dynamic relationship between the public and private spaces."<sup>4</sup>

The Van Dekker house is also serves an example of the long-running dialog that occurred between Schindler and his mentor Frank Lloyd Wright. While the two stopped corresponding in 1931, they were keenly aware of each others' work.<sup>5</sup> There is likely a conscious effort in the design of the Van Dekker house by Schindler to appropriate some of Wright's ideas and execute them in a manner

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<sup>3</sup> Sarnitz, August. *R.M. Schindler: Architect*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc, 1988 p. 30

<sup>4</sup> Sheine, Judith. Personal Interview. Aug. 10, 2009

<sup>5</sup> Sheine, Judith. *R.M. Schindler*. New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2001 p. 44-61

more befitting Schindler's vision of design, as a commentary on what Schindler saw as Wright's deficiencies. The roof-form of the Van Dekker house and leopard-spot stone bears a resemblance to what was used in Wright's Taliesin West studio. Schindler's Rodriguez House (1940) is also similar in this respect.

In addition to being a transitory link between two phases of Schindler's career, the Van Dekker house is important in that it has several rare characteristics relative to the rest of Schindler's body of built work. Sited on a sizable plot of land, and having three stories with approximately 2300 square feet, this house is considerably larger than the vast majority of Schindler's residences. The large size of the house served to facilitate a unique exploration into the articulation of interior space. The extensive use of vertical wood siding for doors and cabinetry is unusual for Schindler. Finally, while Schindler was well-known for using unorthodox building materials, this is the only known example of a Schindler house with a copper roof.

### **Albert Van Dekker and A.I. Bezzerides**

The Van Dekker house is also significant in its relation to historic personages, having been the residence of two important figures in California history: Albert Van Dekker and A.I. Bezzerides.

Albert Van Dekker commissioned Rudolph Schindler to design and construct this residence. Van Dekker (who was later known simply as "Albert Dekker") was a film and television actor who performed memorable roles in many well-known films. He also served one term as a legislator in the California State Assembly.

Born as Albert Van Eyck in New York City in 1904, Van Dekker attended Bowdoin College in Maine. While a student at Bowdoin, Van Dekker played on the football team and participated in plays. He was enrolled as a Pre-Med student, and was intending to study psychiatry. However, after a meeting with the distinguished theatre actor Alfred Lunt, Van Dekker was inspired to enter theatre professionally. After appearing in numerous Broadway productions, Van Dekker made his first film appearance in the 1937 movie *The Great Garrick*. From there, he went on to appear in over 30 feature films, most commonly portraying a villainous, or "heavy," character. His best known roles are in such films as *Dr. Cyclops* (1940), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), and *The Wild Bunch* (1969). In 1929, Van Dekker married actress Esther Theresa Guerini. They had three children - two boys and one girl; this provides some explanation for the large size of the Van Dekker house.<sup>6</sup> Van Dekker's acting career shifted more towards television and the theatre during the 1950s and 1960s. He died in Hollywood in 1968. At the time of his death, he had divorced from Guerini and was engaged to model Geraldine Saunders.

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<sup>6</sup> "Albert Dekker, Actor, Dead at 62; Player of Character Parts Is Listed as Suicide." *New York Times*. May 7, 1968. p. 47

Albert Van Dekker served a member of the California State Assembly from 1944 to 1946. As a Democrat, he represented the 57<sup>th</sup> assembly district in the Los Angeles area. He voluntarily left after one term, citing disillusionment with politics and the low pay of the position. As an Assemblyman, Van Dekker championed many liberal causes, such as overturning the death penalty. Later, he became a vocal critic of the techniques used by Sen. Joseph McCarthy and the Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities. Van Dekker was at one point investigated by the Committee; this was alleged to have had a deleterious effect on his film career. In 1952, he sent a 17 page letter to Spyros P. Skouras, president of the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, thoroughly rebuking allegations of communist activity against him.<sup>7</sup>

Van Dekker was affiliated with various causes on the political left, as were many of Schindler's other clients. It is likely that it was within these channels of the film industry and political activism that Van Dekker became acquainted with Schindler.

At the time that Rudolph Schindler was commissioned to design the Van Dekker House, Albert Van Dekker had already established a career as a successful actor. In the 1940's alone, he acted in over forty movies. During the time in which he resided in the house, he was at the height of his career as an actor, and he served his only term as an elected official.

In 1955, the Van Dekker house was purchased by Albert Isaac Bezzerides. A.I Bezzerides, also known as "Buzz" Bezzerides, was a significant figure in the development of American cinema. Bezzerides was best known as the screen-writer for several critically and commercially successful movies of the 1940s and 1950s. As a writer for film, he contributed greatly to the movie genre known as film noir and inspired countless future screenwriters and directors. Later in life, as a writer for television, he contributed scripts to such well-known television programs such as "Bonanza", "Gunsmoke", and "77 Sunset Strip." He also was the co-creator of the award-winning television show "The Big Valley," which ran from 1965 to 1969.<sup>8</sup>

The son of Armenian and Greek parents, Bezzerides was born in Samsun, Turkey. He was brought to the United States at age 2 by his parents, who settled in Fresno. Both "Buzz" and his father worked as produce truck-drivers in California's San Joaquin Valley, the experiences of which informed his first novel *The Long Haul*.

Bezzerides attended UC Berkeley, studying Electrical Engineering. He did not complete his degree. However, after leaving UC Berkeley, he worked in engineering while continuing to write. In 1940, Warner Brothers adapted his novel *The Long Haul* into the movie *They Drive by Night*. This film, which depicted the difficult plight of produce truck drivers, established Bezzerides' reputation for creating hard-hitting films that depicted the world-weary reality of the underclass. Warner Brothers was developing several of these so-called "social consciousness" films at the

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<sup>7</sup> "Letter from Albert Dekker to Spyros P. Skouras" University of Wyoming, American Heritage Center. Albert Dekker Papers. Accessed online, August 2009. <http://digital.uwyo.edu>

<sup>8</sup>"A.I. Bezzerides." *Internet Movie Database*. <http://www.imdb.com> Accessed August 2009.

time, and Bezzerides stayed under contract with Warner Brothers as a screenwriter for several years despite his discontent over compensation. After leaving Warner Brothers, Bezzerides developed screenplays for films such as *Desert Fury* (1947), *Thieves' Highway* (1949), and *On Dangerous Ground* (1952). His scripts became known for their gritty, often violent style, which influenced many contemporary and later filmmakers.<sup>9</sup> The apogee of this style was seen in the 1955 release *Kiss Me Deadly*. This seminal film is included in the United States' National Film Registry within the Library of Congress. This movie is noted for having a great deal of influence upon French "New Wave" directors such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard. Buzz Bezzerides developed the screenplay for this film; Albert Van Dekker played a leading role. Given this relationship, it is probably no co-incidence that 1955 is also the year in which Buzz Bezzerides purchased the Van Dekker House.

Bezzerrides purchased the house during the height of his career as a film screenwriter, and continued to reside in the house for over fifty years. After his purchase of the house, he began to write for television, making contributions to several well-known programs. In the past several years, there has been a resurgence of interest in his career, culminating with two documentaries, *The Long Haul of A.I. Bezzerides* (2005) and *Buzz* (2006). Bezzerides was married twice. His first marriage, to Yvonne Von Gorne, ended in divorce in the early 1950s.<sup>10</sup> His second marriage was to screenwriter Silvia Richards. Sylvia, who also resided in the house for several decades, died in 1999. Buzz Bezzerides died on January 1, 2007; his son Peter remained as an occupant of the house, residing there until July 2009.

## Conclusion

Noted Schindler expert Judith Sheine states that the Van Dekker house is "a critical example of Schindler's work in the period just before WWII, a time when he was experimenting with form and vocabulary, particularly with roof forms...it is one of only two built examples of a critical transitional period in the architect's work. I believe it deserves designation as a Historic Cultural Monument"

Rudolph Schindler described the Van Dekker house as "'A country house with dramatic accents, in view of the owner's profession and social life."<sup>11</sup> This understated description bears testament not only to the legacies of those that have owned the house, but also to the pioneering design innovations demonstrated by Schindler – innovations that have only grown in stature within the past several decades.

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<sup>9</sup> McLellan, Dennis. "[A.I. Bezzerides, 98: novelist became a screenwriter known for film noir classics.](#)" *Los Angeles Times*. Jan 9, 2007. p. B10

<sup>10</sup> "Writer's Wife Asks Divorce and Property." *Los Angeles Times*. Jan 4, 1950. p. A11

<sup>11</sup> Sheine, Judith. *R.M. Schindler* p. 196

## Section 15: Alterations

The Van Dekker house maintains a high level of its original integrity. This can be attributed to a lack of deliberate efforts to modify the house in a manner inconsistent with the design intentions of Rudolph Schindler. The most apparent alterations have been those pertaining to the roof framing, roof materials and windows. The interior spaces and key features of the house remain practically un-altered and in serviceable condition.

In several windows, the glass window panes have been replaced with plywood. This has occurred primarily on the main level, but can also be seen on the lower and upper levels. The boarded-up sliding windows in the living room are the most obvious examples of this. The large, boarded-up triangular window above the stairwell is less obvious. These are easily reversible modifications, as only the glass is missing in most instances; few window frames have been removed altogether.

The reality of deferred maintenance has resulted in some un-intentional alterations to the house, such as missing copper panels from the roof, or missing tile-work in the bathrooms. Structural support for the cantilevered roof over the living-room porch has been augmented by non-original wooden posts. Adjacent to this cantilevered roof was a trellis that has been removed. There is water damage in some parts of the house.

The garage is in generally poor condition. The wooden framing and sheathing is extremely weathered, and the concrete slab has sunk in one area. The storage area within the garage is in an extremely dilapidated state.

Records of the original landscape do not exist, so it is difficult to ascertain which plantings are original.

## Section 19: Sources

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- "Writer's Wife Asks Divorce and Property." *Los Angeles Times*. Jan 4, 1950. p. A11

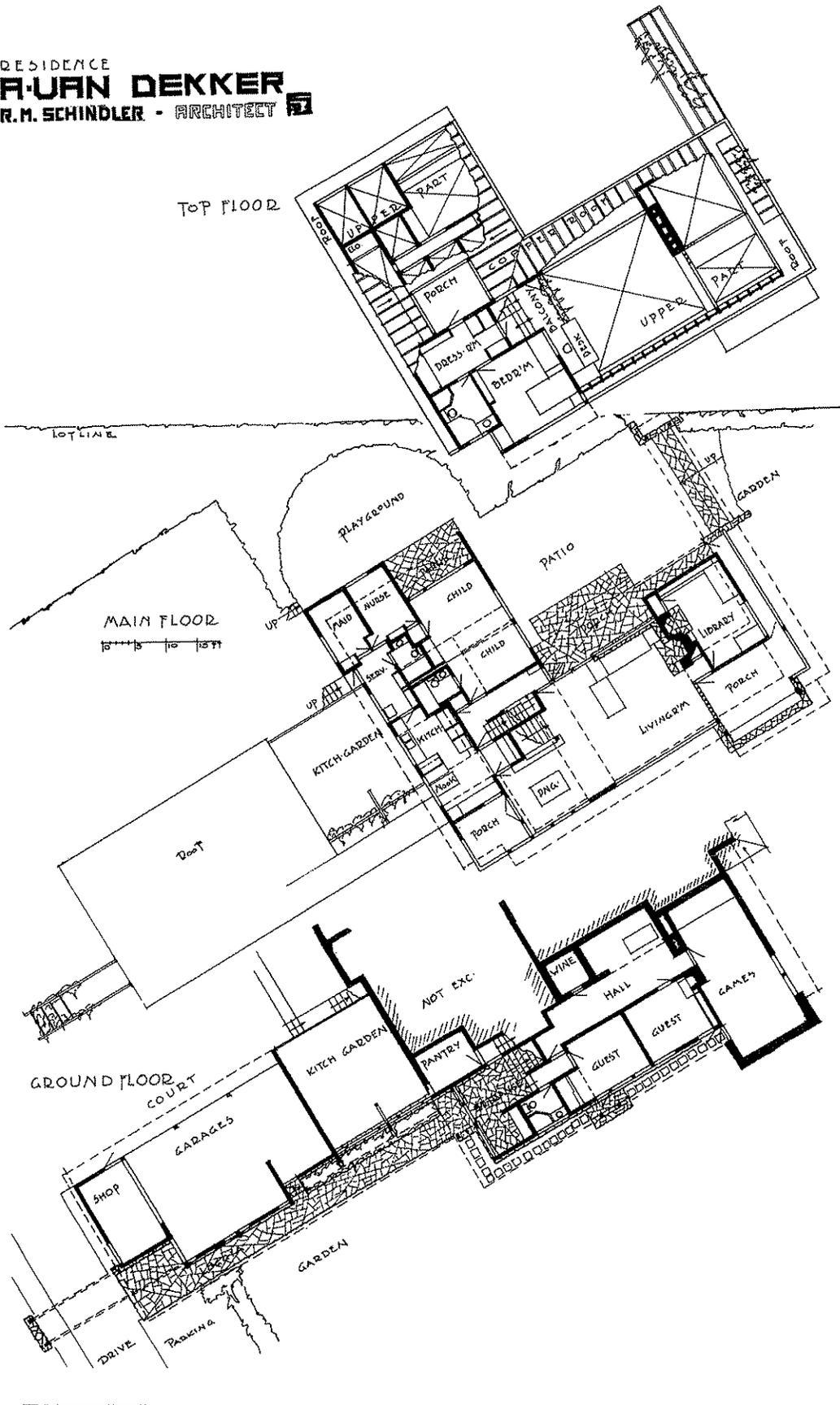
## Section 13: Photographs

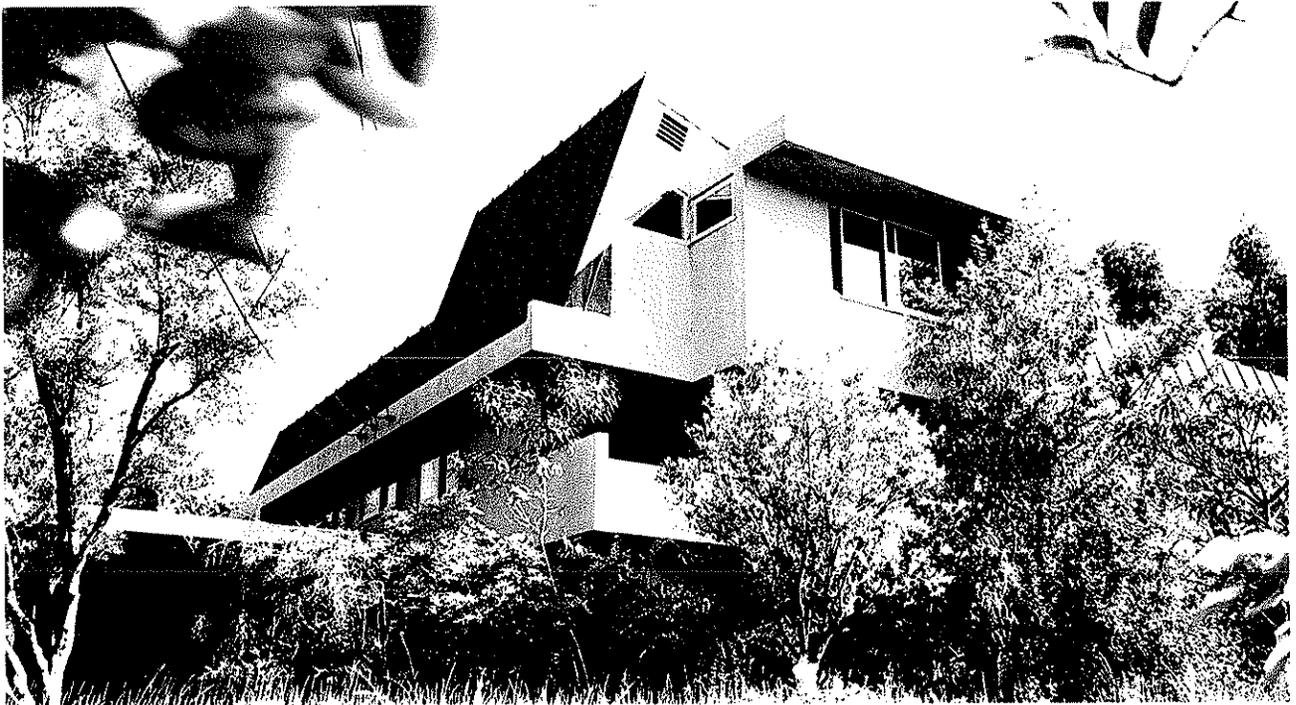
Pages 2-5: Photographs and plan from 1940s. Photographs property of the Architecture & Design Collection, University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara.

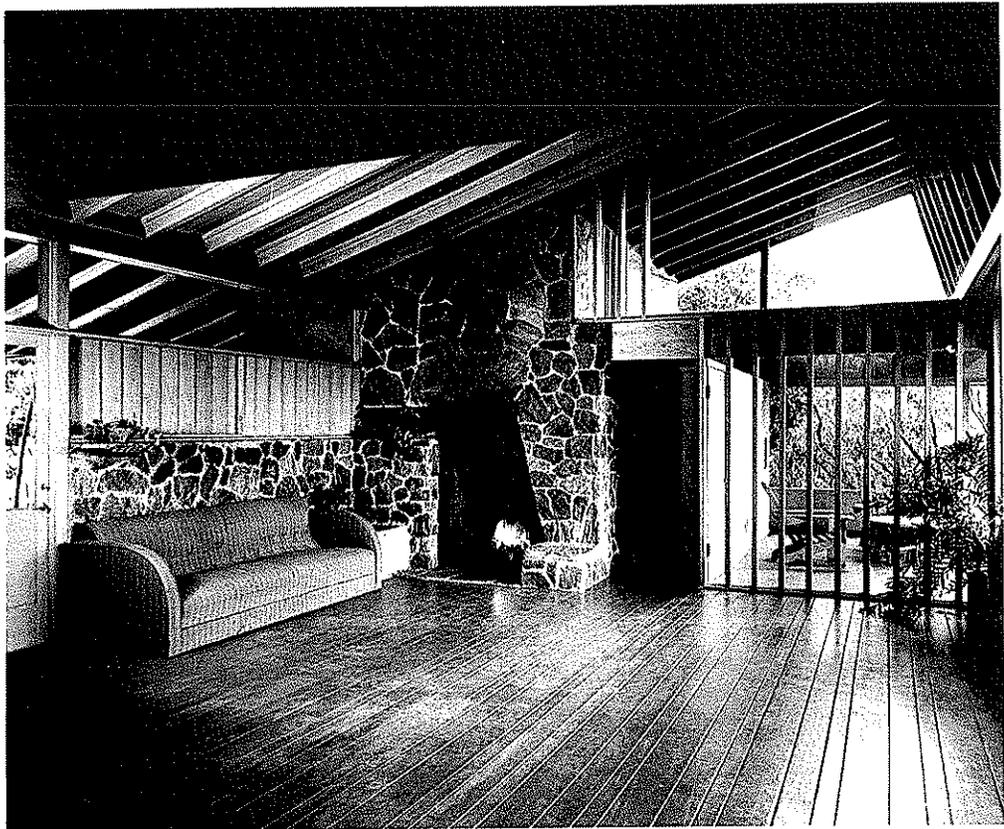
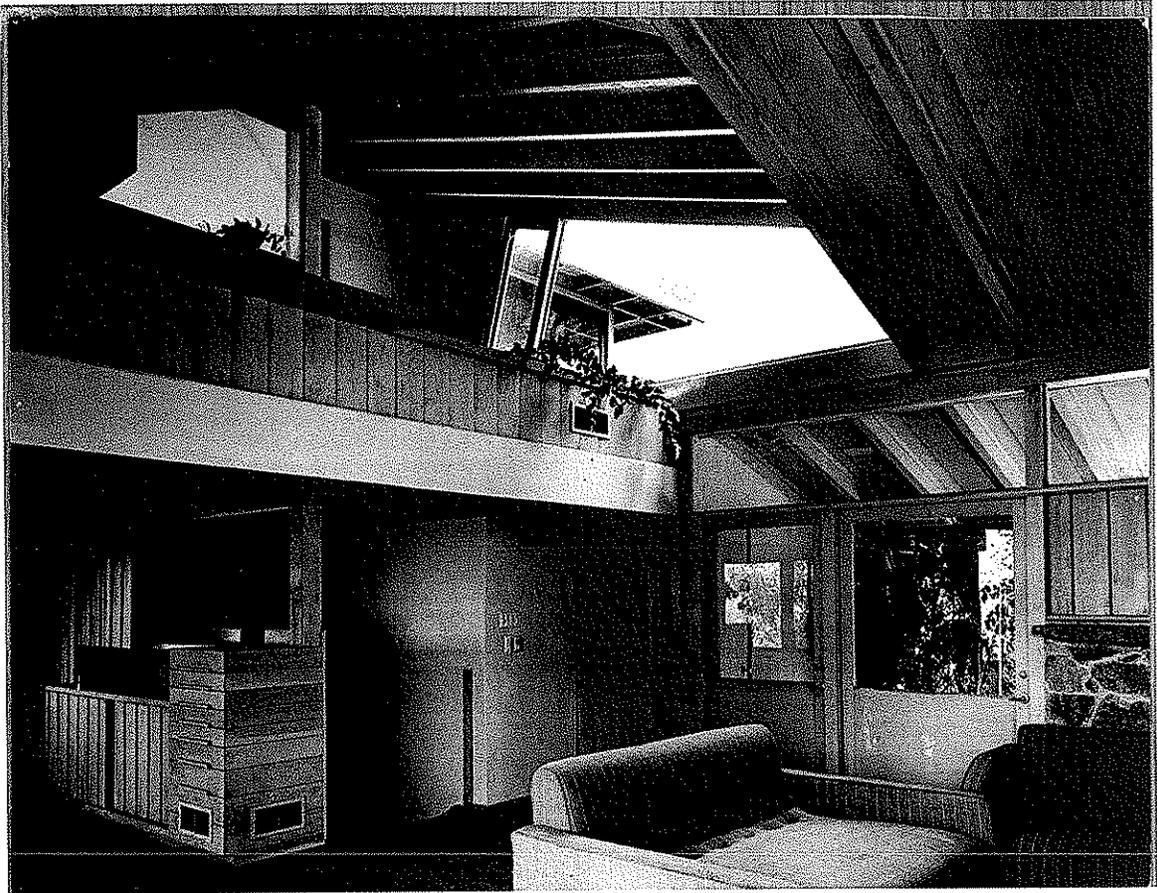
Pages 6-20: Photographs taken July and August 2009, by A.D. Modlin.

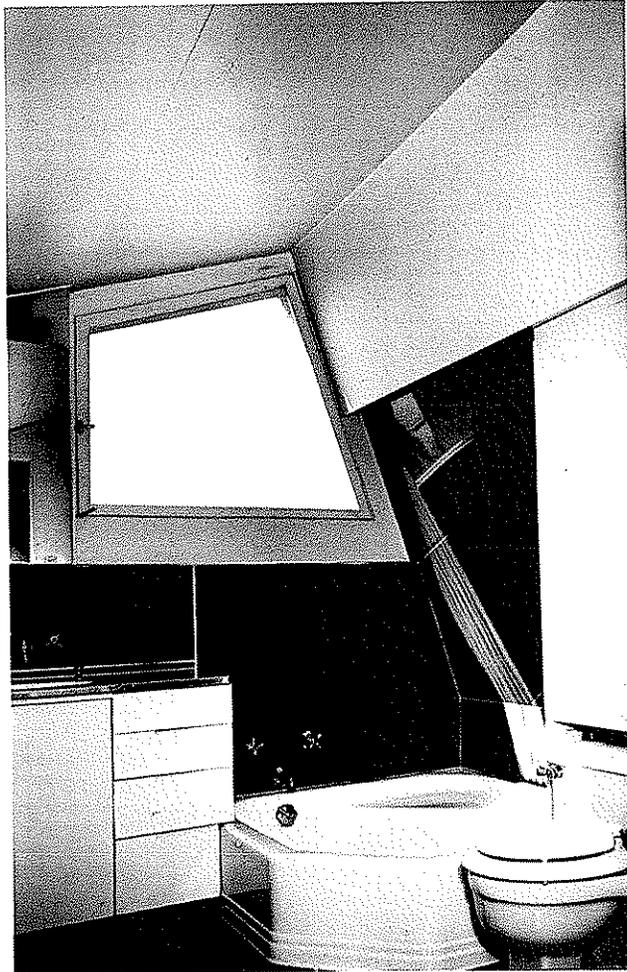
Page 21: Photograph from the 1940s. Property of the Albert Dekker Collection (Box 1, Folder 5), American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

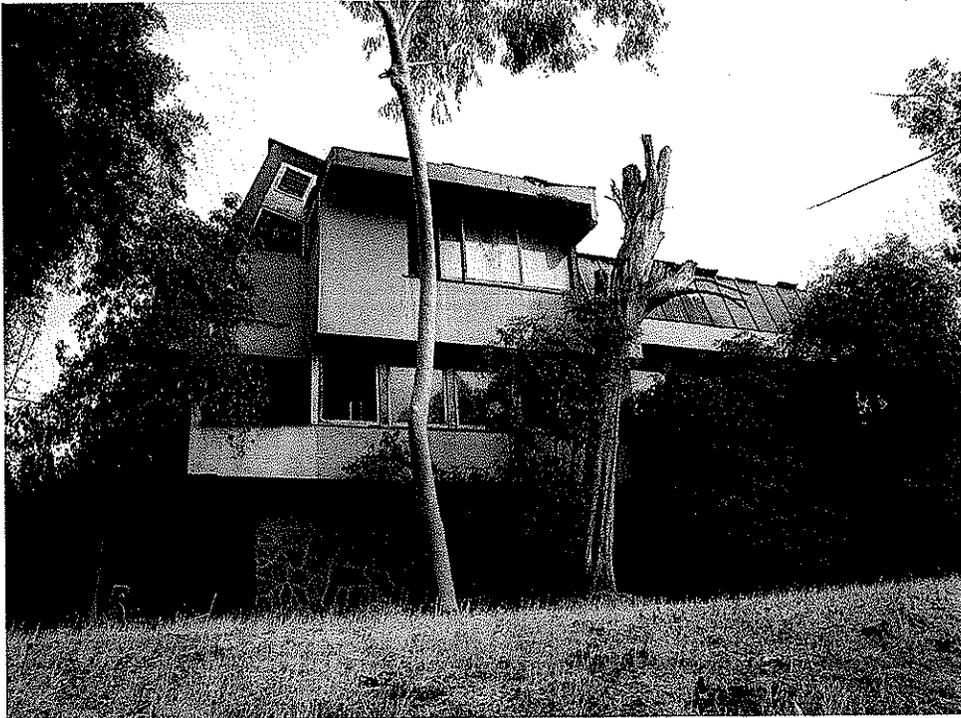
RESIDENCE  
**A. JUAN DEKKER**  
R. M. SCHINDLER - ARCHITECT

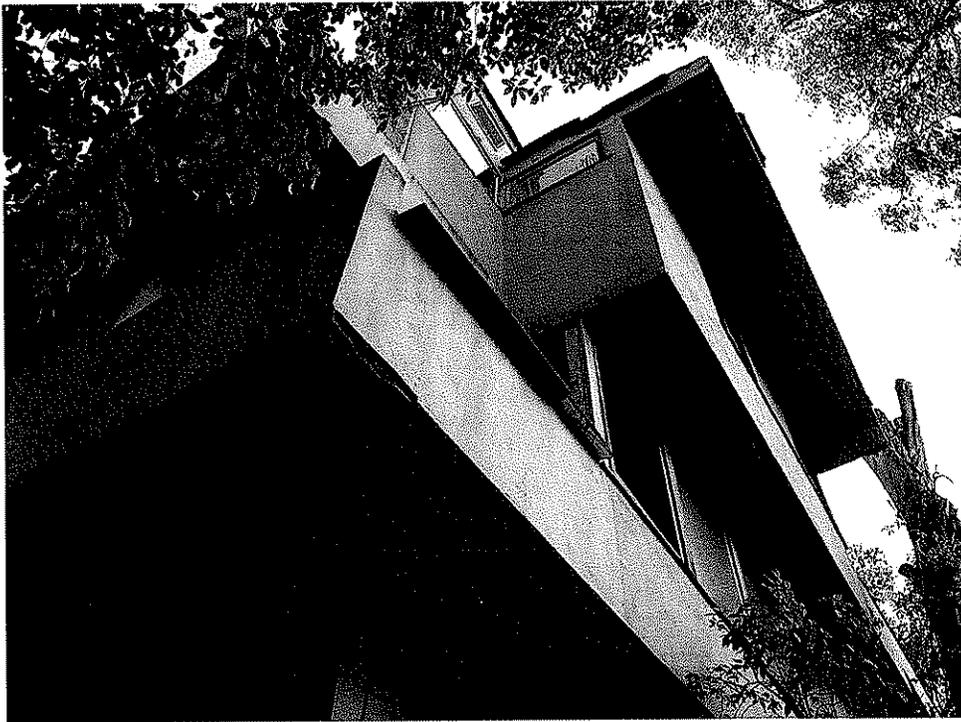




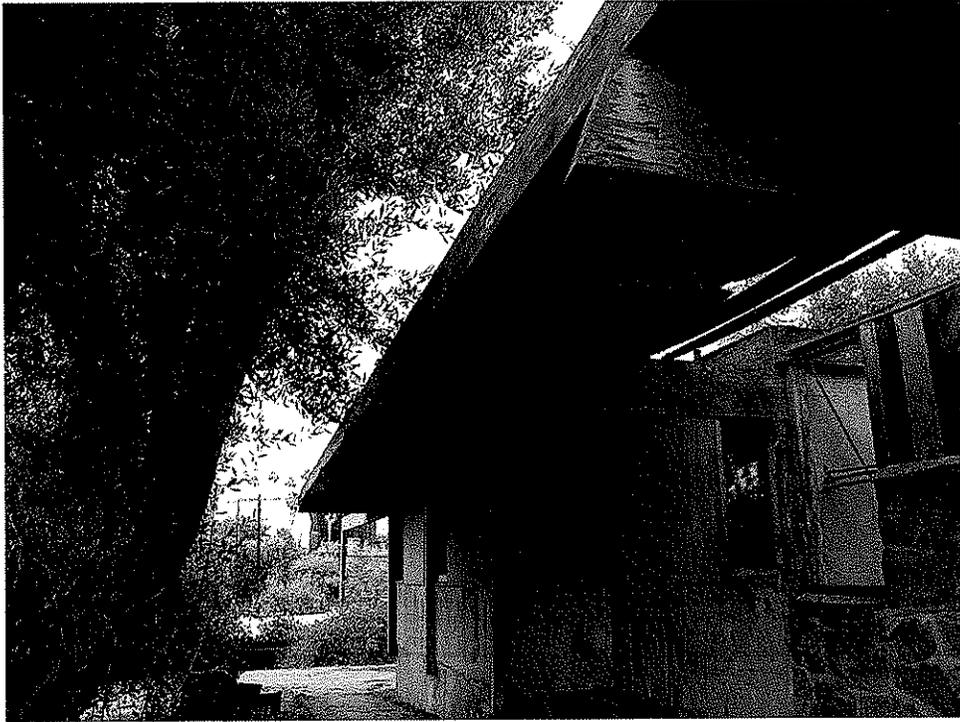


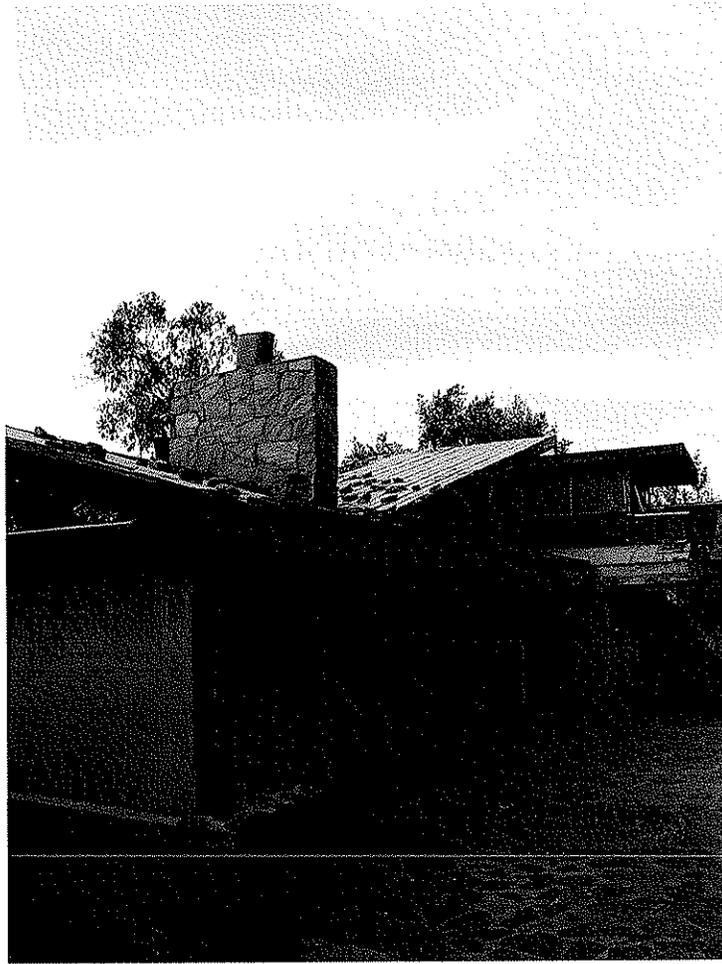


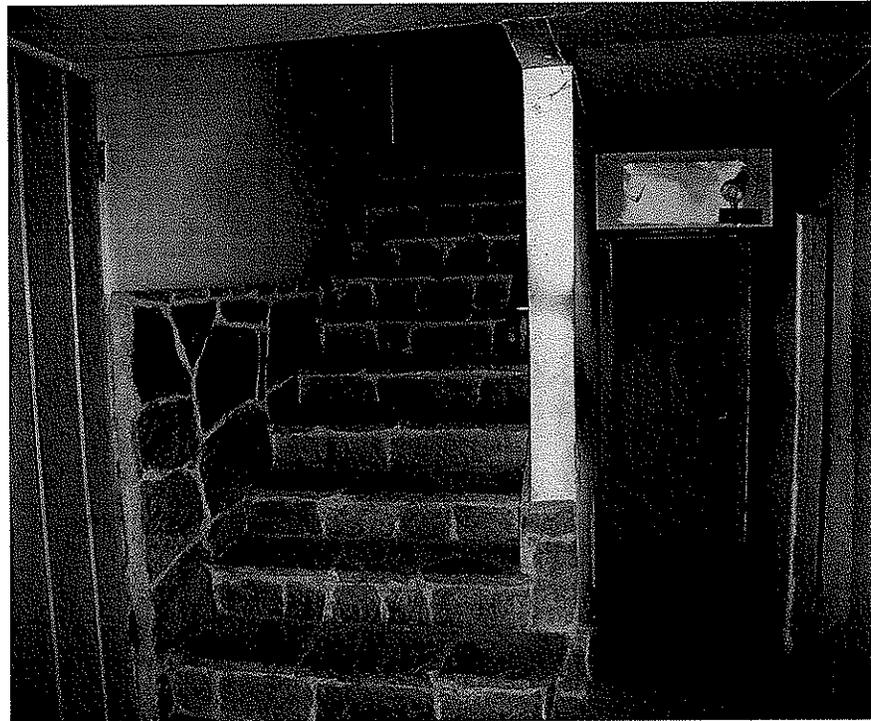
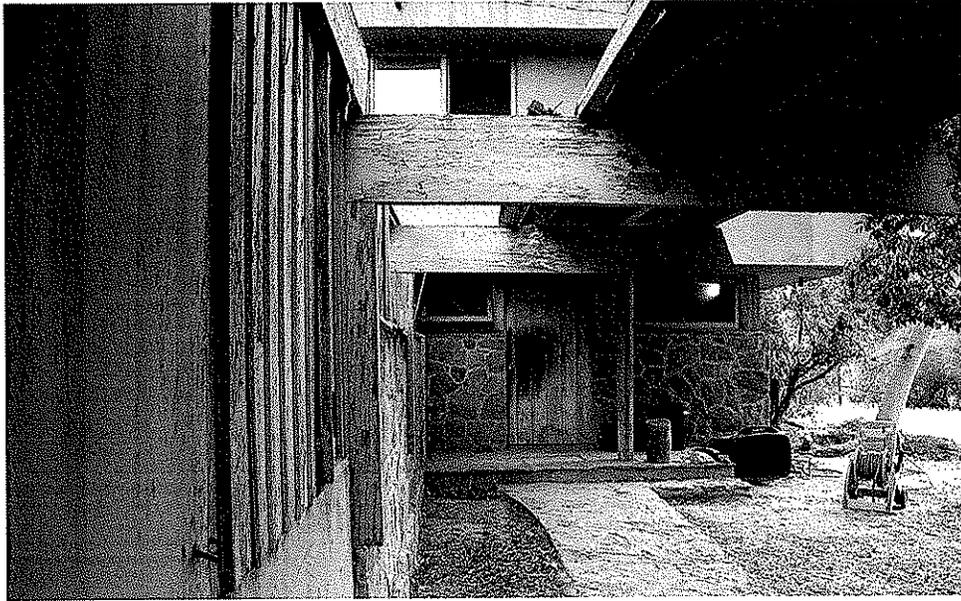


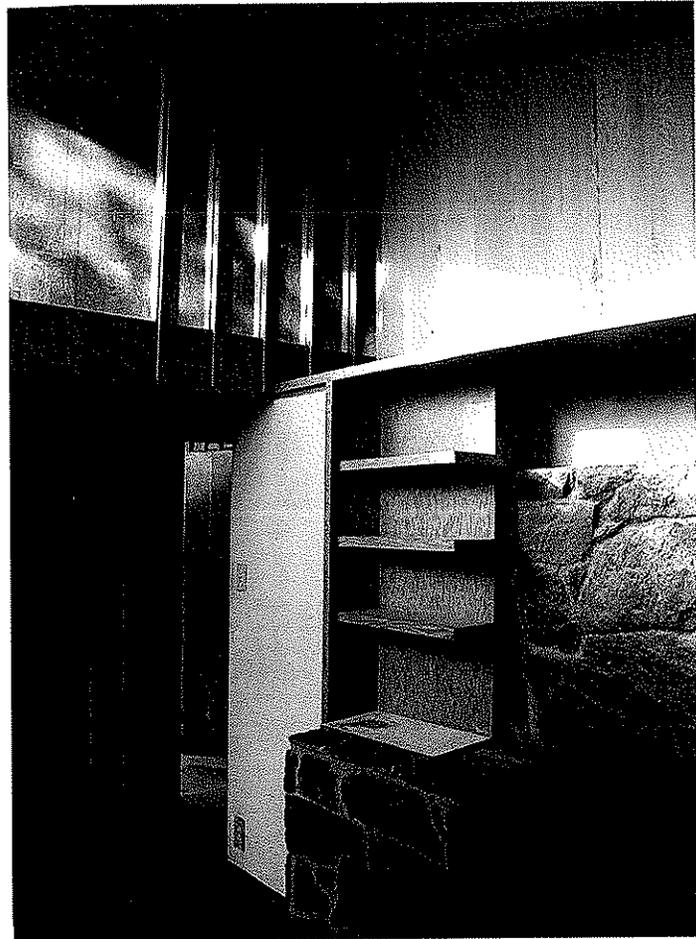


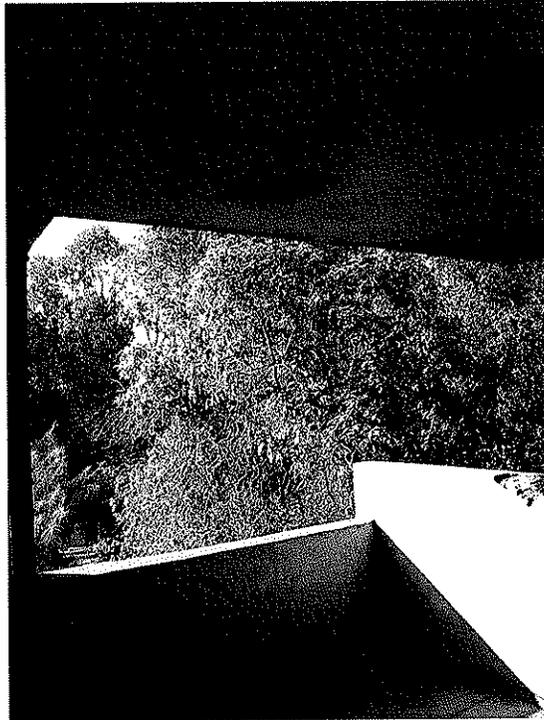
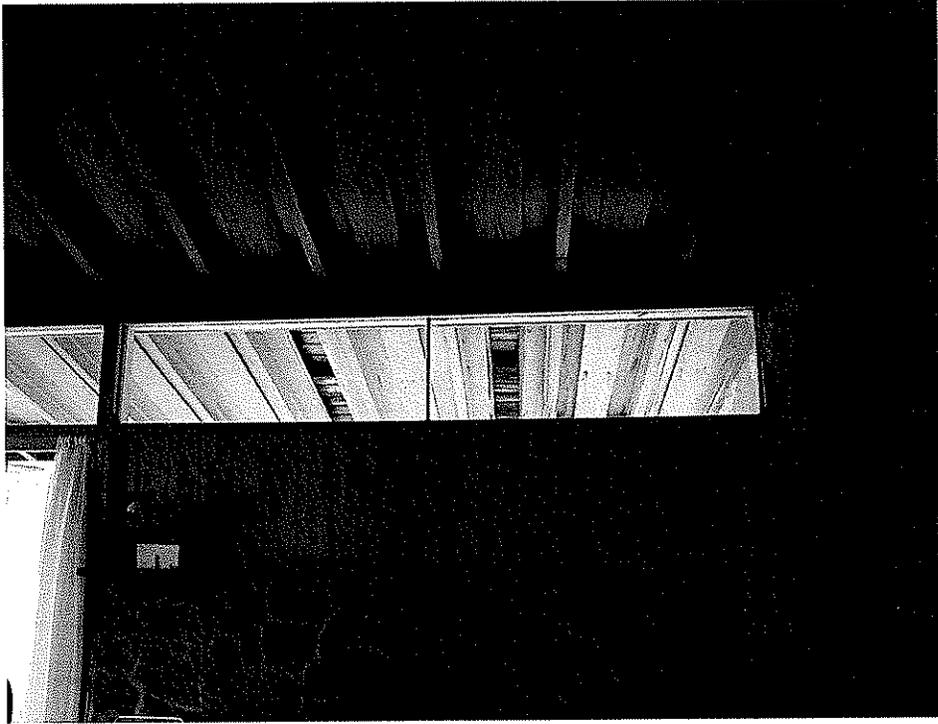


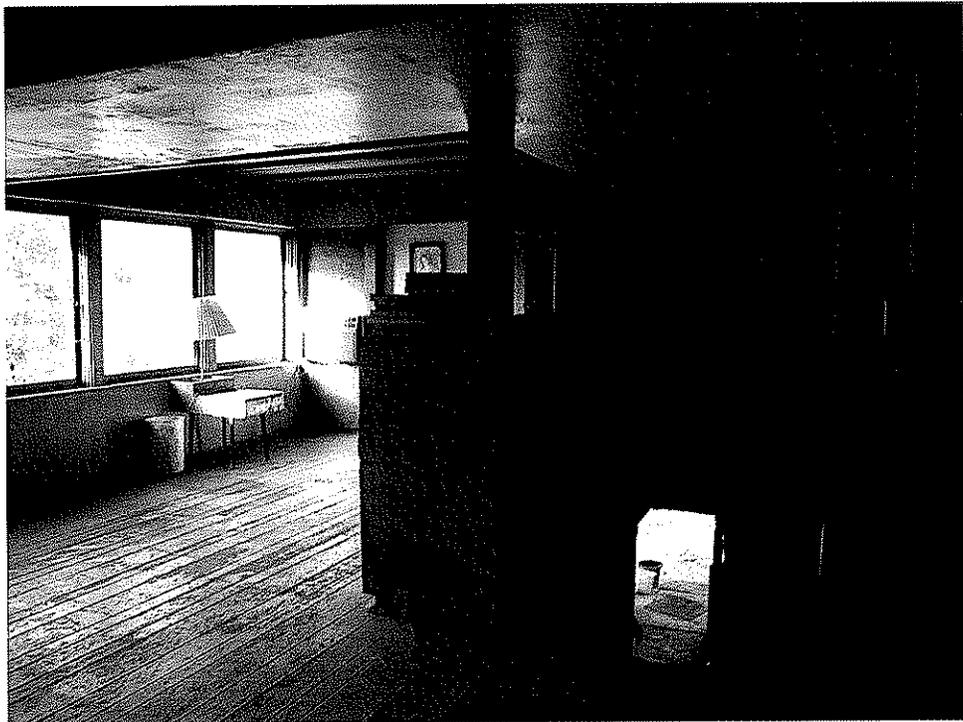


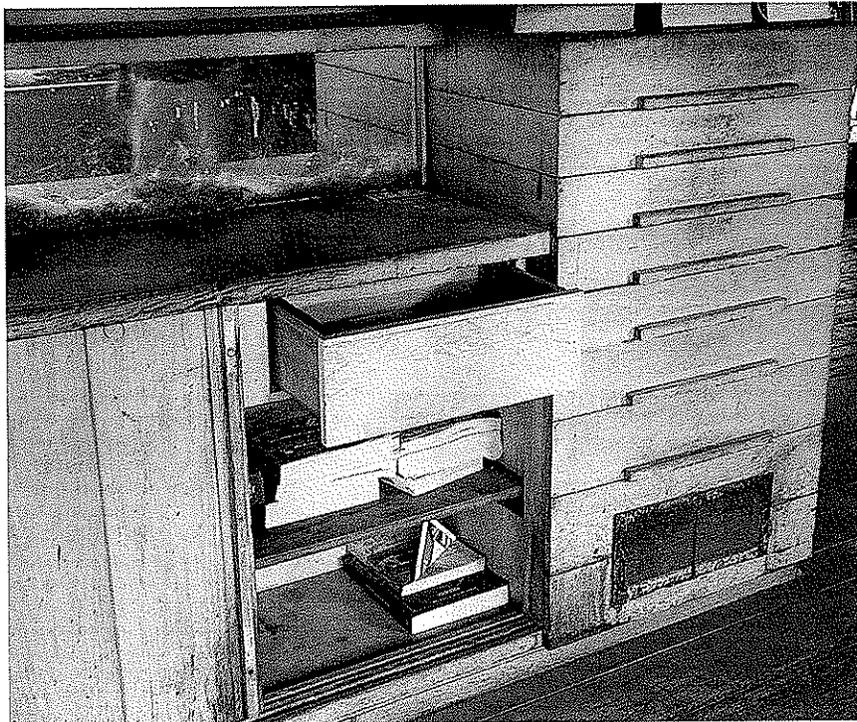
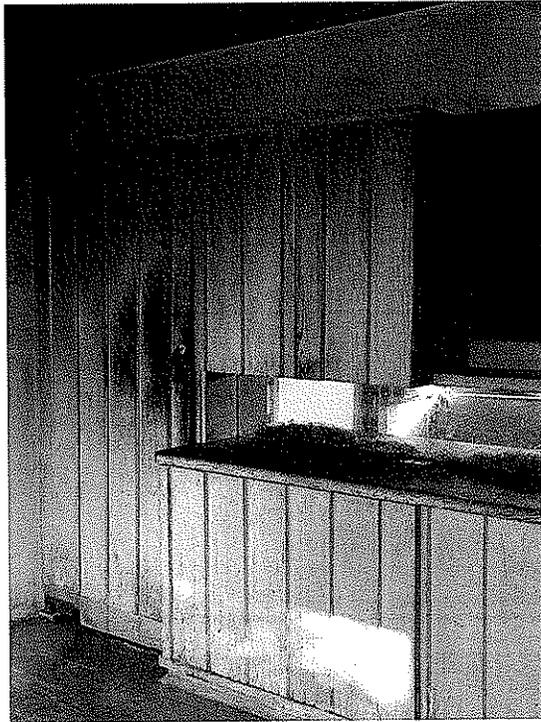


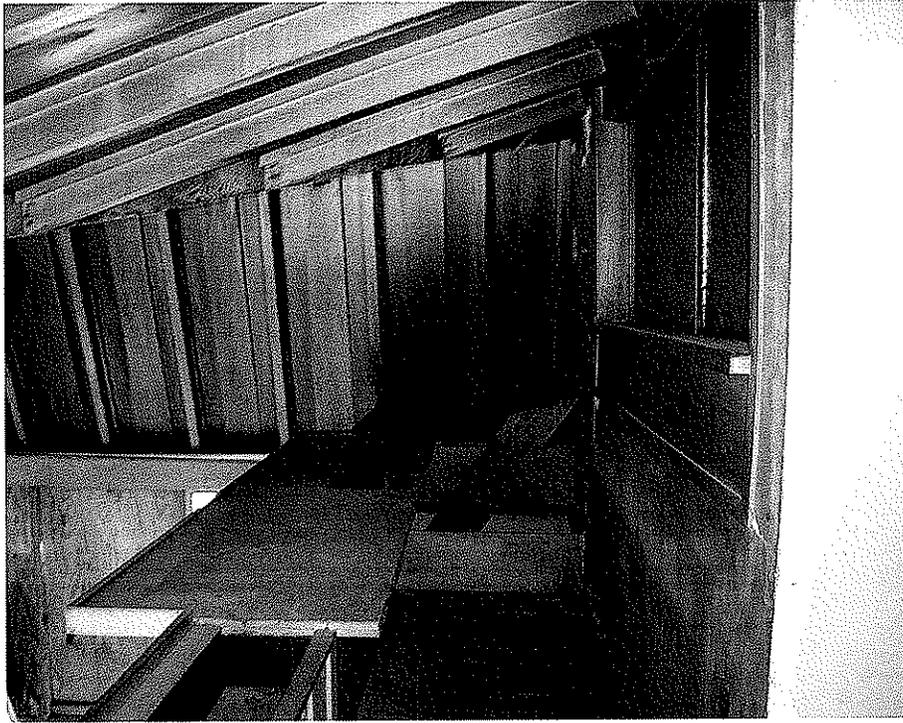


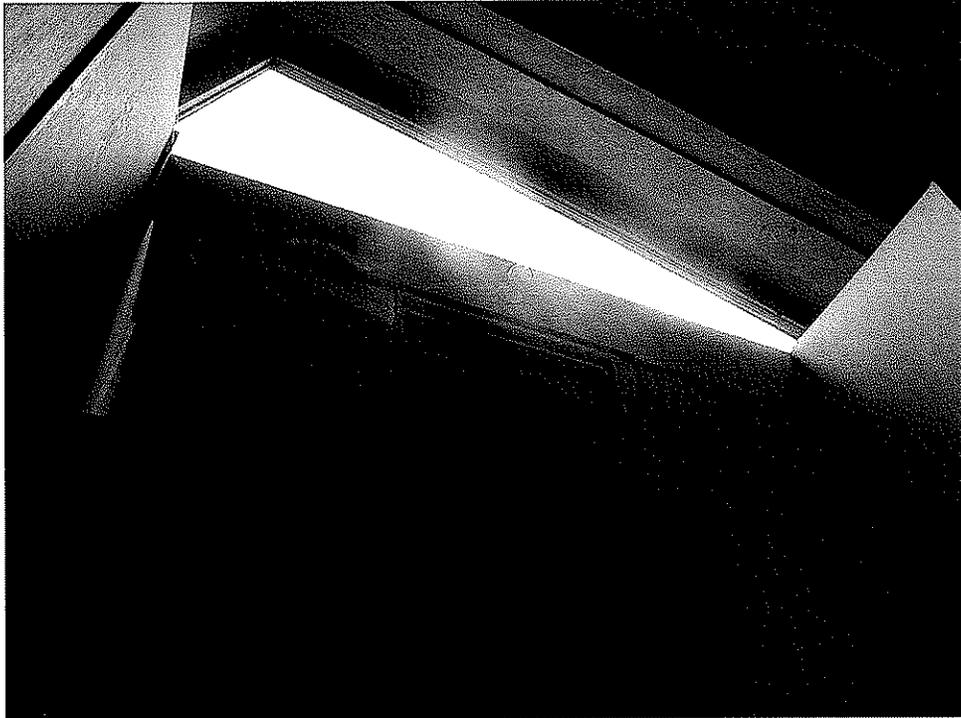
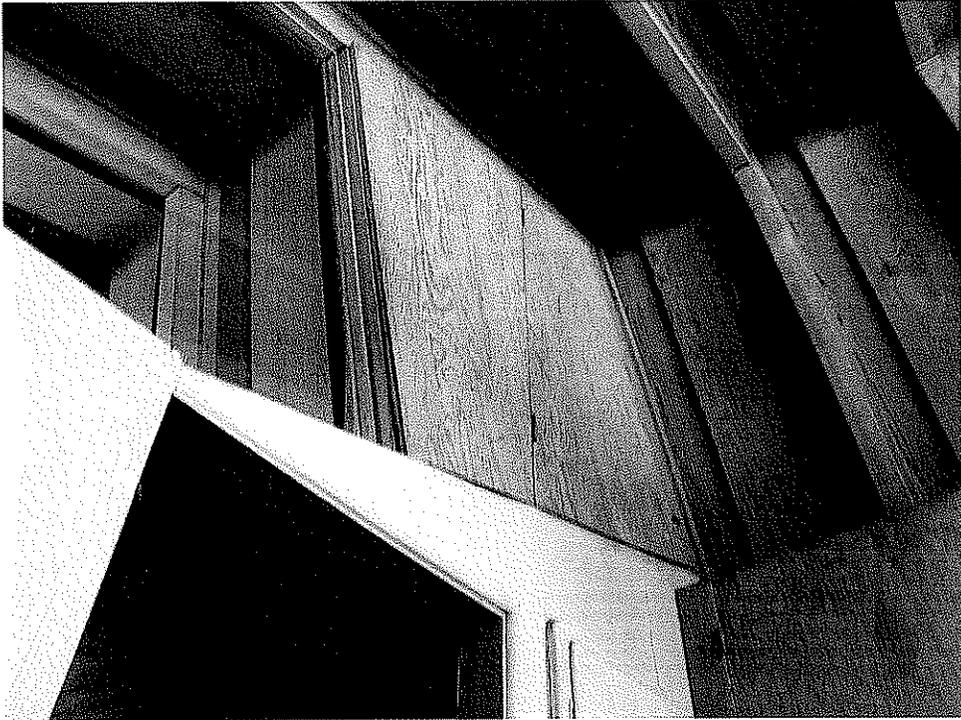


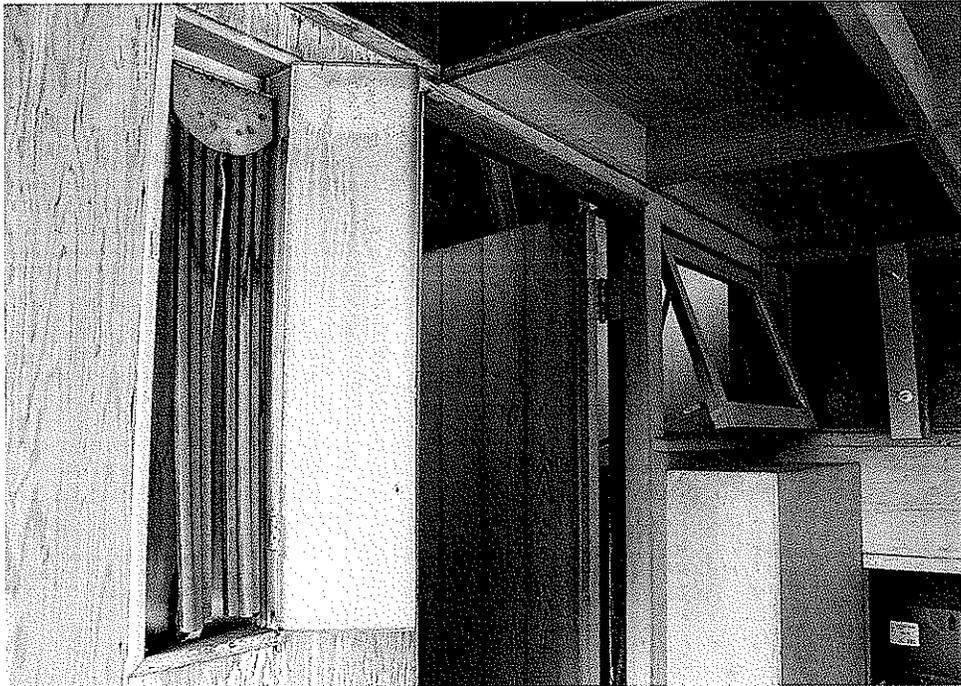
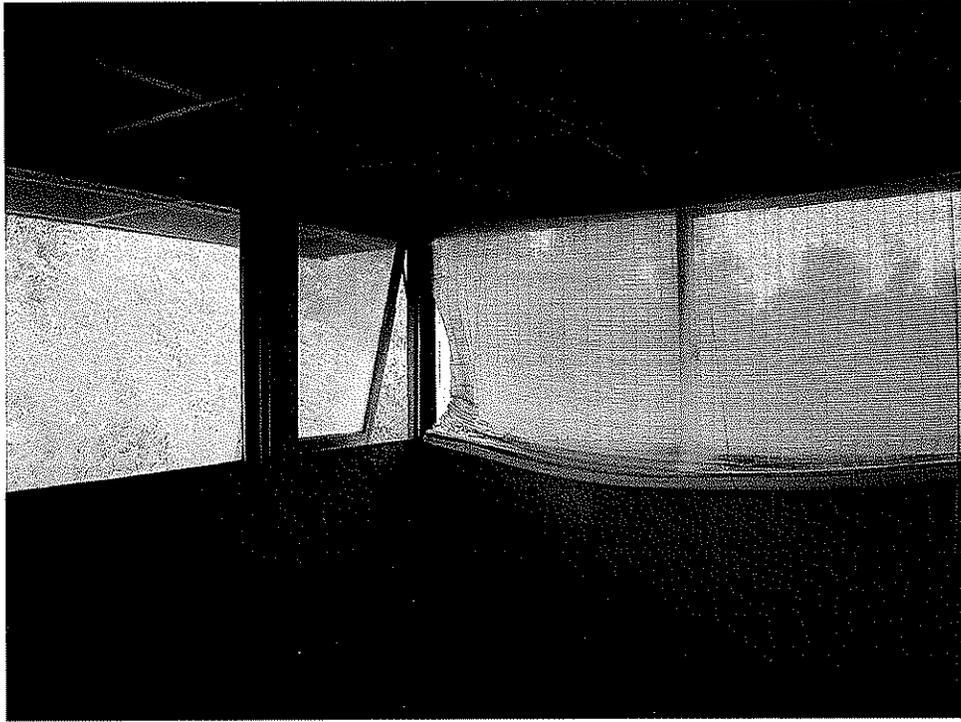


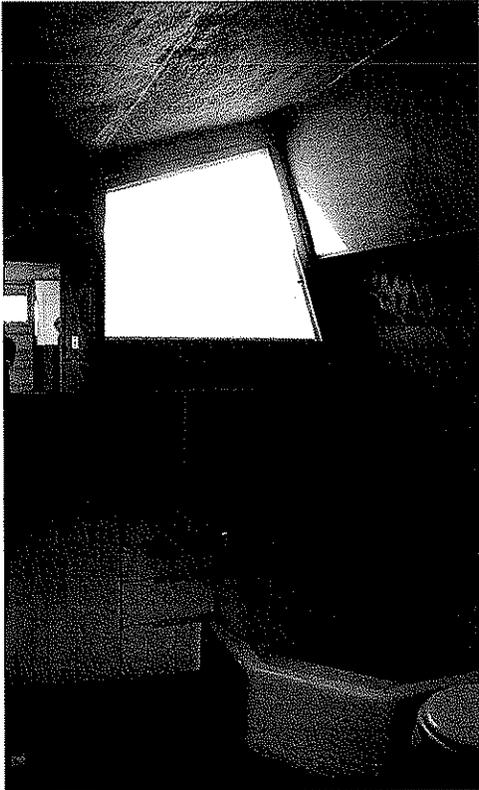
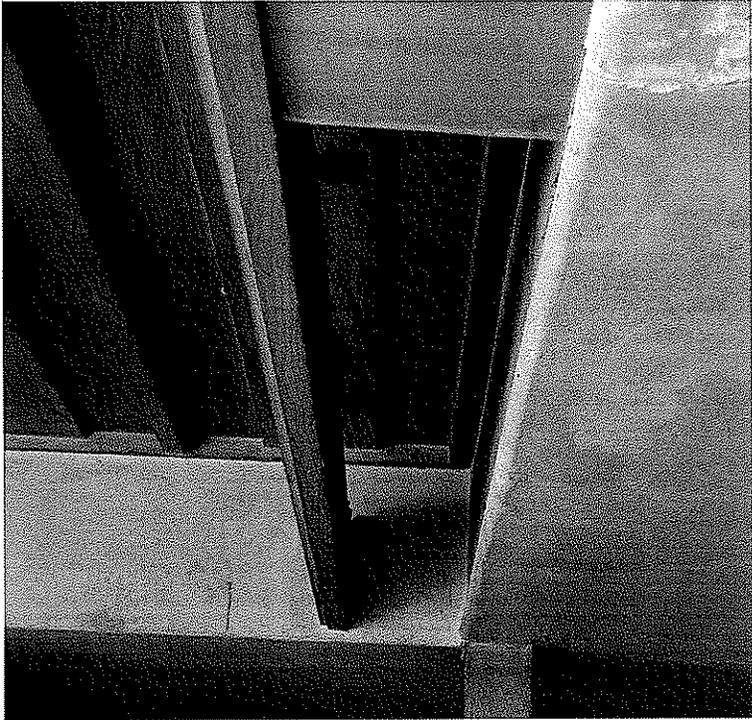


















**City of Los Angeles  
Department of City Planning**

09/16/2009

**PARCEL PROFILE REPORT**

**PROPERTY ADDRESSES**

19950 W COLLIER ST

**ZIP CODES**

91364

**RECENT ACTIVITY**

None

**CASE NUMBERS**

CPC-2005-8252-CA  
ENV-2005-8253-ND  
ENV-2005-8253-MND  
AFF-25036

**Address/Legal Information**

PIN Number: 171B113 574  
Lot Area (Calculated): 20,388.5 (sq ft)  
Thomas Brothers Grid: PAGE 560 - GRID E3  
Assessor Parcel No. (APN): 2164005015  
Tract: TR 8812  
Map Reference: M B 150-31/36  
Block: None  
Lot: 66  
Arb (Lot Cut Reference): None  
Map Sheet: 171B113

**Jurisdictional Information**

Community Plan Area: Canoga Park - Winnetka - Woodland Hills - West Hills South Valley  
Area Planning Commission: Woodland Hills - Warner Center  
Neighborhood Council: CD 3 - Dennis P. Zine  
Council District: 1375.01  
Census Tract #: Van Nuys  
LADBS District Office:

**Planning and Zoning Information**

Special Notes: None  
Zoning: RA-1  
Zoning Information (ZI): None  
General Plan Land Use: Very Low Residential  
Plan Footnote - Site Req.: See Plan Footnotes  
Additional Plan Footnotes: Canoga Park  
Specific Plan Area: None  
Design Review Board: No  
Historic Preservation Review: No  
Historic Preservation Overlay Zone: None  
Other Historic Designations: None  
Other Historic Survey Information: None  
Mills Act Contract: None  
POD - Pedestrian Oriented Districts: None  
CDO - Community Design Overlay: None  
NSO - Neighborhood Stabilization Overlay: No  
Streetscape: No  
Sign District: No  
Adaptive Reuse Incentive Area: None  
CRA - Community Redevelopment Agency: None  
Central City Parking: No  
Downtown Parking: No  
Building Line: None  
500 Ft School Zone: No  
500 Ft Park Zone: No

**Assessor Information**

Assessor Parcel No. (APN): 2164005015  
Ownership (Assessor) : OHL,ZOE TR  
809 S BUNDY DR NO 317  
LOS ANGELES CA 90049  
Ownership (City Clerk): OHL, ZOE (TR) ALBERT I.  
BEZZERIDES HOUSE TRUST  
19950 COLLIER ST  
WOODLAND HLS CA 91365  
APN Area (Co. Public Works)\*: 0.465 (ac)  
Use Code: 0100 - Single Residence  
Assessed Land Val.: \$52,412

**Public Safety**

**Police Information:**

Bureau:	Valley
Division / Station:	West Valley
Report District:	1083

**Fire Information:**

District / Fire Station:	93
Batallion:	17
Division:	3
Red Flag Restricted Parking:	No

# ZIMAS INTRANET

09/16/2009

City of Los Angeles  
Department of City Planning



**Zoning: RA-1**  
**General Plan: Very Low Residential**

**Tract: TR 8812**  
**Block: None**  
**Lot: 66**  
**Arb: None**

**Address: 19950 W COLLIER ST**  
**APN: 2164005015**  
**PIN #: 171B113 574**