

Los Angeles Department of City Planning

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

CASE NO.: CHC-2006-9509-HCM

HEARING DATE: February 15, 2007
TIME: 10:00 AM
PLACE: City Hall, Room 1010
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA
90012

Location: 2342-44 West Cove Avenue
Council District: 13
Community Plan Area: Silver Lake – Echo
Park – Elysian Valley
Area Planning Commission: East Los Angeles
Neighborhood Council: Silver Lake
Legal Description: Lot 48 of Montrose Tract

PROJECT: Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the
O'NEILL DUPLEX NO. 1

REQUEST: Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

**APPLICANT/
OWNER:** Ai Land Lee and Chad A. Strawderman
2344 West Cove Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90039

**OWNER'S
REPRESENTATIVE:** Charles J. Fisher
140 S. Avenue 57
Los Angeles, CA 90042

RECOMMENDATION **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Declare** the property a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Section 22.125.
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

S. GAIL GOLDBERG, AICP
Director of Planning

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Ken Bernstein, Manager
Office of Historic Resources

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Lambert M. Giessinger, Architect
Office of Historic Resources

Prepared by:

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner
Office of Historic Resources

Attachments: September 21, 2006 Historic-Cultural Monument Application

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 International Style residential architecture in the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles.
- 2) The building is associated with a master builder, designer, or architect, as a work by Rodney A. Walker.

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.

DISCUSSION

Built in 1953 and located in the Silver Lake area, this one-story residential building exhibits character-defining features of International Style architecture. This building is Duplex No. 1 of a set of two duplex residential buildings designed on the same lot by the same architect. The rectangular plan residential duplex has a low-pitched gabled roof with exposed eaves and a concealed off-center entrance. The roof appears to be supported by three square beams that stretch the length of the building. The exterior is clad in wood and glass and consists of vertical bands of wood paneling and windows from base to roof. Clerestory windows are located at the front and east end of building, with louvered windows and full-height, fixed-pane sliding door windows on the west and rear portion of the house. Significant interior elements include the wood beaded paneling that extends out to the exterior, exposed roof beams and rafters, open floor plan, floor to ceiling wood paneling, and built-in cabinetry.

The proposed O’Neill Duplex No.1 historic monument was designed by Rodney A. Walker. Walker designed several mid-century modern style homes in Los Angeles, having worked for R.M. Schindler early in his career. He was one of several famed architects who participated in the Case Study Houses program (designing Case Study Houses #16-20). Walker is recognized for playing a direct role in the construction and grading of his homes, working with a small group of carpenters. Walker also actively shunned becoming a licensed architect by the AIA throughout his career, believing himself to be a builder and craftsman.

The duplex building was built for Virginia O’Neill in 1953 as part of two residential buildings with two units each (Duplex No. 1 & 2), each set on two adjacent graded lots. Photographer Julius Shulman photo documented these buildings in 1954.

Duplex No.2 was remodeled into a single-family home in 2005, replacing interior and exterior surfaces, and is not included in this nomination. Duplex No.1 remains mostly unaltered except

for the addition of a bedroom and bathroom addition in the rear, using the same style and material as the original building.

The O'Neill Duplex No. 1 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 by Rodney A. Walker in the International Style, the property qualifies for designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument based on these criteria.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of December 7, 2006, the Cultural Heritage Commission voted to take the application under consideration. On January 4, 2007, the Cultural Heritage Commission toured the subject property.

Los Angeles Department of City Planning

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

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TIME: 10:00 AM
PLACE: City Hall, Room 1010
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

CASE NO.: CHC-2006-9509-HCM

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140 S. Avenue 57
Los Angeles, CA 90042

RECOMMENDATION That the Cultural Heritage Commission:

1. **Take the property under consideration** as a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Section 22.125 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

[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]

Ken Bernstein, Manager
Office of Historic Resources

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Lambert M. Giessinger, Architect
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Prepared by:

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Attachments: September 21, 2006 Historic-Cultural Monument Application

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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 PRINT IN ALL CAPITAL BLOCK LETTERS

IDENTIFICATION

1. NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT O'NEILL DUPLEX No. 1
2. STREET ADDRESS 2342-44 W. COVE AVENUE
CITY LOS ANGELES ZIP CODE 90039 COUNCIL DISTRICT 13
ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NO. 5422-005-034
COMPLETE LEGAL DESCRIPTION: TRACT: MONTROSE TRACT, AS PER MAP FILED IN BOOK 5, PAGE 170 OF MAPS
IN THE OFFICE OF THE COUNTY RECORDER OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY
BLOCK - LOT(S) 48 ARB. NO. N/A
RANGE OF ADDRESSES ON PROPERTY 2342 AND 2344 W. COVE AVENUE
3. PRESENT OWNER LEE, AI LAND AND STRAWDERMAN, CHAD A.
STREET ADDRESS 2344 COVE AVENUE
CITY LOS ANGELES STATE CA ZIP CODE 90039 PHONE (818)434-3396
OWNER IS: PRIVATE X PUBLIC
4. PRESENT USE 13 UNIT APARTMENT ORIGINAL USE 13 UNIT APARTMENT

DESCRIPTION

5. ARCHITECTURAL STYLE INTERNATIONAL
6. STATE PRESENT PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE OR STRUCTURE (SEE OPTIONAL DESCRIPTION WORKSHEET)
SEE DESCRIPTION WORKSHEET

HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT APPLICATION

NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT O'NEILL DUPLEX No. 1

10. CONSTRUCTION DATE: FACTUAL 1953 ESTIMATED _____
11. ARCHITECT, DESIGNER, OR ENGINEER: RODNEY A. WALKER
12. CONTRACTOR OR OTHER BUILDER: RODNEY A. WALKER
13. DATES OF ENCLOSED PHOTOGRAPHS 1954 AND JUNE 3, 2006
14. CONDITION: EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR DETERIORATED NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE

ALTERATIONS: BEDROOM AND BATHROOM ADDITION AT REAR BUILT IN SAME STYLE AND WITH SIMILAR MATERIALS AS THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE. PERGOLA AND RAFTER TAILS WITH PERIOD LIGHTING AT REAR OF STRUCTURE.

15. THREATS TO SITE NONE KNOWN PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT VANDALISM PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT
16. IS THE STRUCTURE ON ITS ORIGINAL SITE MOVED UNKNOWN

SIGNIFICANCE

17. BRIEFLY STATE HISTORICAL AND/OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE; INCLUDE DATES, EVENTS, AND PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH SITE (SEE OPTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE WORKSHEET)

THIS DUPLEX IS ONE OF TWO BUILT FOR VIRGINIA O'NEILL BY RODNEY WALKER IN 1953. THE HOUSES WERE BOTH PHOTO DOCUMENTED BY JULIUS SCHULMAN IN 1954. WALKER WAS A DESIGN BUILD CONTRACTOR WHOSE MID-CENTURY MODERN HOMES ARE FREQUENTLY COMPARED ON PAR WITH MANY OF THE GREAT ARCHITECTS OF HIS TIME. WALKER, HOWEVER, NEVER FORMALLY STUDIED ARCHITECTURE AND WAS NEVER LICENSED AS ONE. LATER IN HIS LIFE, THE AIA OFFERED HIM A MEMBERSHIP. WALKER, ALWAYS MODEST, DECLINED THE HONOR. HE ALWAYS CONSIDERED HIMSELF TO BE A BUILDER, WHO HAPPENED TO DESIGN MOST OF HIS WORK. THE O'NEILL DUPLEXES ARE SET ON TWO GRADED LOTS OVERLOOKING SILVER LAKE. NO 1 IS SITUATED ABOVE DUPLEX NO. 2 IN A MANNER THAT GIVES BOTH RESIDENCES UNOBSTRUCTED VIEWS OF THE LAKE AND BEYOND. O'NEILL DUPLEX NO. 1 RETAINS IT'S ORIGINAL INTEGRITY IN DESIGN AND MATERIALS. DUPLEX NO. 2 WAS REMODELED INTO A SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE IN 2005 AND THEN SOLD. BOTH INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR MATERIALS WERE REPLACED WITH DIFFERENT SURFACES. ALTHOUGH IT WAS A WELL EXECUTED REMODEL, THE HOME APPEARS TO HAVE LOST TOO MUCH OF IT'S HISTORIC DESIGN. PRIOR TO 2004, BOTH DUPLEXES WERE ALWAYS UNDER A SINGLE OWNERSHIP. THEY STILL FORM A UNIQUE PART OF THE EASTERN SLOPE ABOVE SILVER LAKE AND COULD BE CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES TO A FUTURE SILVER LAKE HPOZ.. HOWEVER, ONLY NO. 1 APPEARS TO RETAIN ENOUGH OF ITS ORIGINAL MATERIAL TO QUALIFY AS A HISTORIC CULTURAL MONUMENT.

SOURCES (LIST BOOKS, DOCUMENTS, SURVEYS, PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH DATES) LOS ANGELES BUILDING PERMITS PER ATTACHED, LOS ANGELES COUNTY ASSESSOR'S RECORDS, RECORDED DEEDS AND LA TIMES DATA.

18. DATE FORM PREPARED SEPTEMBER 12, 2006 PREPARER'S NAME CHARLES J. FISHER
19. ORGANIZATION OWNER'S REPRESENTATIVE STREET ADDRESS 140 S. AVENUE 57
- CITY HIGHLAND PARK STATE CA ZIP CODE 90042 PHONE (323) 256-3593

DESCRIPTION WORK SHEET

TYPE OR PRINT IN ALL CAPITAL BLOCK LETTERS

THE O'NEILL DUPLEX No. 1 IS A 1 STORY,

NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT

NUMBER OF STORIES

INTERNATIONAL STYLE, RECTANGULAR PLAN RESIDENTIAL DUPLEX

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE (SEE LINE 8 ABOVE)

PLAN SHAPE (SEE CHART)

STRUCTURE USE (RESIDENCE, ETC)

WITH A WOOD AND GLASS FINISH AND WOOD TRIM.

MATERIAL (WOOD SIDING, WOOD SHINGLES, BRICK, STUCCO, ETC)

MATERIAL (WOOD, METAL, ETC.)

ITS SLIGHTLY GABLED ROOF IS COVERED WITH ROLLED COMPOSITION, GLASS WOOD AND STEEL

ROOF SHAPE (SEE CHART)

MATERIAL (CLAY TILE, ASPHALT OR WOOD SHINGLES)

WINDOW MATERIAL

FIXED PANE, SLIDING AND LOUVERED WINDOWS ARE PART OF THE DESIGN.

WINDOW TYPE (DOUBLE HUNG (SLIDES UP & DOWN), CASEMENT (OPENS OUT), HORIZONTAL SLIDING, ETC)

THE ENTRY FEATURES A FLAT DOOR FLUSH WITH THE EXTERIOR WALL SURFACE

DOOR LOCATION (RECESSED, CENTERED, OFF-CENTER, CORNER, ETC.)

WITH A FLAT SOLID WOODEN DOOR. ADDITIONAL CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS

ENTRY DOOR STYLE (SEE CHART)

OF THE STRUCTURE ARE VERTICAL BANDS FROM BASE TO ROOF CONSISTING OF BOTH LARGE AND SMALL

IDENTIFY ORIGINAL FEATURES SUCH AS PORCHES (SEE CHART); BALCONIES; NUMBER AND SHAPE OF DORMERS (SEE CHART);

ELEMENTS, INCLUDING WINDOW FRAMING, EXTERIOR WOOD PANELING AND THE BRUSHED REDWOOD EXTERIOR

NUMBER AND LOCATION OF CHIMNEYS; SHUTTERS; SECONDARY FINISH MATERIALS; PARAPETS; METAL TRIM, DECORATIVE TILE OR CAST STONE; ARCHES;

ON THE EASTERN (HILLSIDE FACING) SIDE OF THE BUILDING. CLAIRE STORY WINDOWS ARE LOCATED AT THE FRONT

ORNAMENTAL WOODWORK; SYMMETRY OR ASYMMETRY; CORNICES; FRIEZES; TOWERS OR TURRETS; BAY WINDOWS; HALFTIMBERING; HORIZONTALITY;

AND THE EAST SIDE OF THE STRUCTURE, WITH FULL HEIGHT FIXED PANE AND SLIDING DOOR WINDOWS ON THE WEST

VERTICALITY; FORMALITY OR INFORMALITY; GARDEN WALLS, ETC.

(LAKE SIDE) AND REAR OF THE HOUSE. THE ROOF IS SUPPORTED BY THREE SQUARE BEAMS THAT APPEAR TO STRETCH THE LENGTH

ADDITIONAL DEFINING ELEMENTS

OF STRUCTURE. LOUVERED WINDOWS, STRETCHING FROM ARE LOCATED AT SEVERAL POINTS ALONG BOTH EAST AND WEST SIDES

ADDITIONAL DEFINING ELEMENTS

SIDES OF THE HOUSE. WOODEN BEADING IS IN THE INTERIOR CEILING THAT COMES OUT TO THE EXTERIOR EAVES,

ADDITIONAL DEFINING ELEMENTS

GIVING THE FEELING OF FULLY UNITING THE INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR SPACES INTO A COMPLETE LIVING AREA. THIS IS

ADDITIONAL DEFINING ELEMENTS

AUGMENTED BY THE OPENNESS CREATED BY THE WEST WALL BEING OVER 70% GLASS.

ADDITIONAL DEFINING ELEMENTS

SECONDARY BUILDINGS CONSIST OF A FOUR VEHICLE CARPORT BUILT CONCURRENTLY WITH THE ORIGINAL DUPLEX.

IDENTIFY GARAGE, GARDEN SHELTER, ETC.

SIGNIFICANT INTERIOR SPACES INCLUDE AN OPEN FLOOR PLAN, INCORPORATING THE LIVING DINING AND KITCHEN

IDENTIFY ORIGINAL FEATURES SUCH AS WOOD PANELING; MOLDINGS AND TRIM, SPECIAL GLASS WINDOWS,

AREAS, USING LOW PARTITIONS TO SEPARATE THE AREAS. FLOOR TO CEILING WOOD PANELING ON MOST NON-GLASS

ORNATE CEILINGS; PLASTER MOLDINGS; LIGHT FIXTURES; PAINTED DECORATION; CERAMIC TILE; STAIR BALUSTRADES; BUILT-IN FURNITURE, ETC.

SURFACES. THE CENTRAL ROOF BEAM AND RAFTERS ARE EXPOSED, WITH DARK WOOD BEADS FANNING DOWN THE

IDENTIFY NOTABLE MATURE TREES AND SHRUBS

SOFT CEILING SURFACE CONTINUING ON THE EXTERIOR EAVES, ENHANCING THE RELATIONSHIP OF OUTDOOR AND

IDENTIFY NOTABLE MATURE TREES AND SHRUBS

INDOOR SPACES.

IDENTIFY NOTABLE MATURE TREES AND SHRUBS

**CITY OF LOS ANGELES
SIGNIFICANCE WORK SHEET**

TYPE OR HAND PRINT IN ALL CAPITAL BLOCK LETTERS

Complete One or Both of the Upper and Lower Portions of This Page

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

THE O'NEILL DUPLEX NO. 1 IS AN IMPORTANT EXAMPLE OF

NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT

INTERNATIONAL STYLE ARCHITECTURE

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE (SEE LINE 8)

AND MEETS THE CULTURAL HERITAGE ORDINANCE BECAUSE OF THE HIGH QUALITY OF ITS DESIGN AND THE RETENTION OF ITS ORIGINAL FORM, DETAILING AND INTEGRITY.

AND / OR

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

THE O'NEILL DUPLEX NO. 1 WAS BUILT IN 1953

NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT

YEAR BUILT

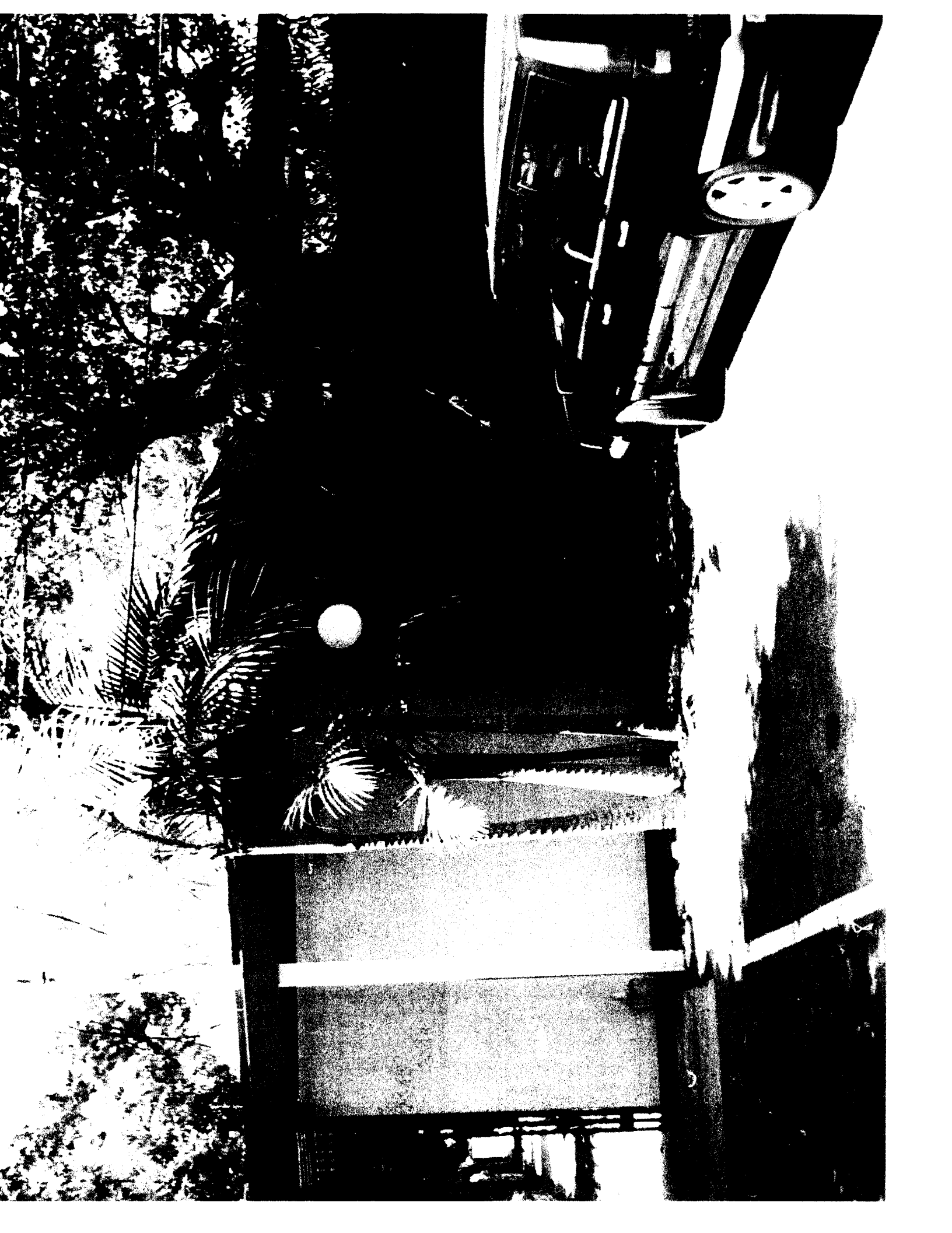
INTERNATIONAL STYLE ARCHITECTURE WAS IMPORTANT TO THE

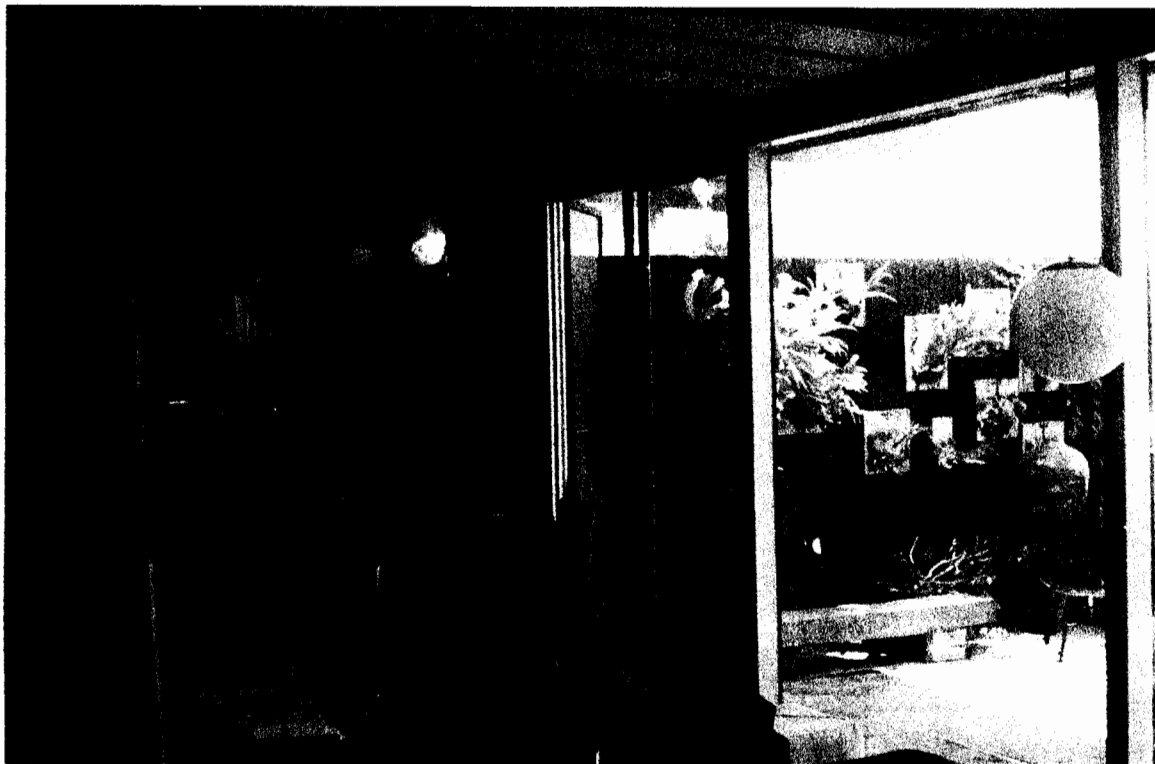
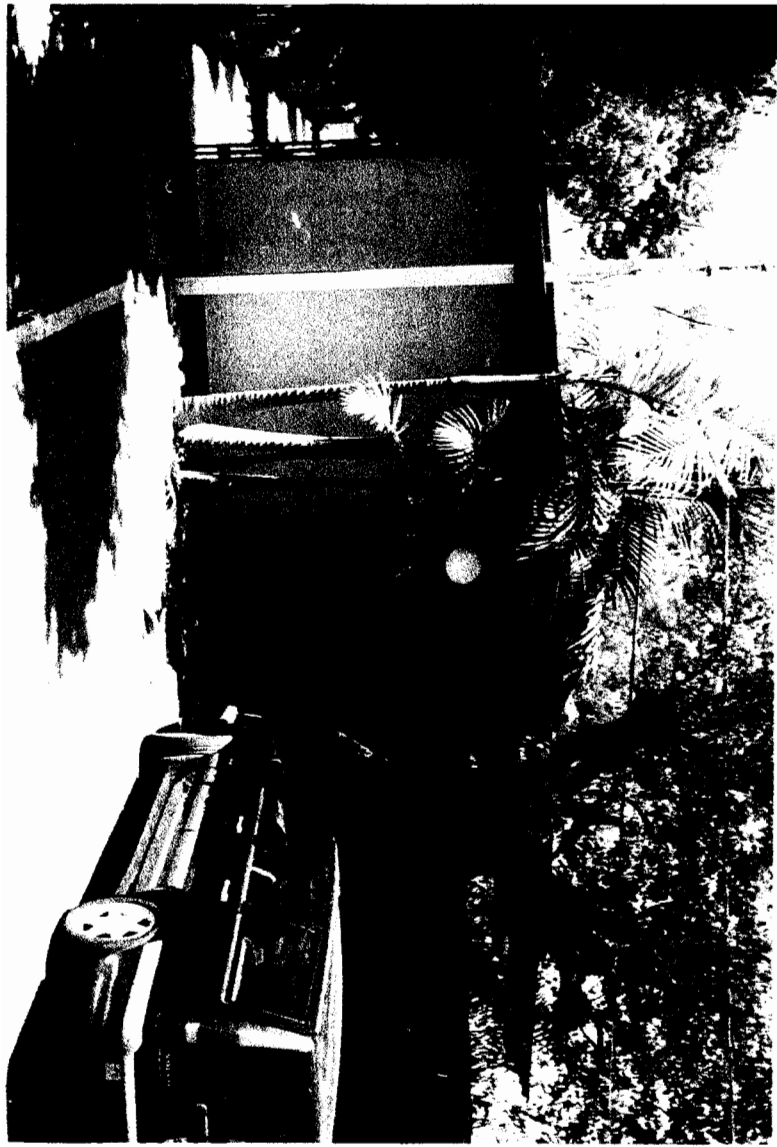
NAME OF FIRST OR OTHER SIGNIFICANT OWNER

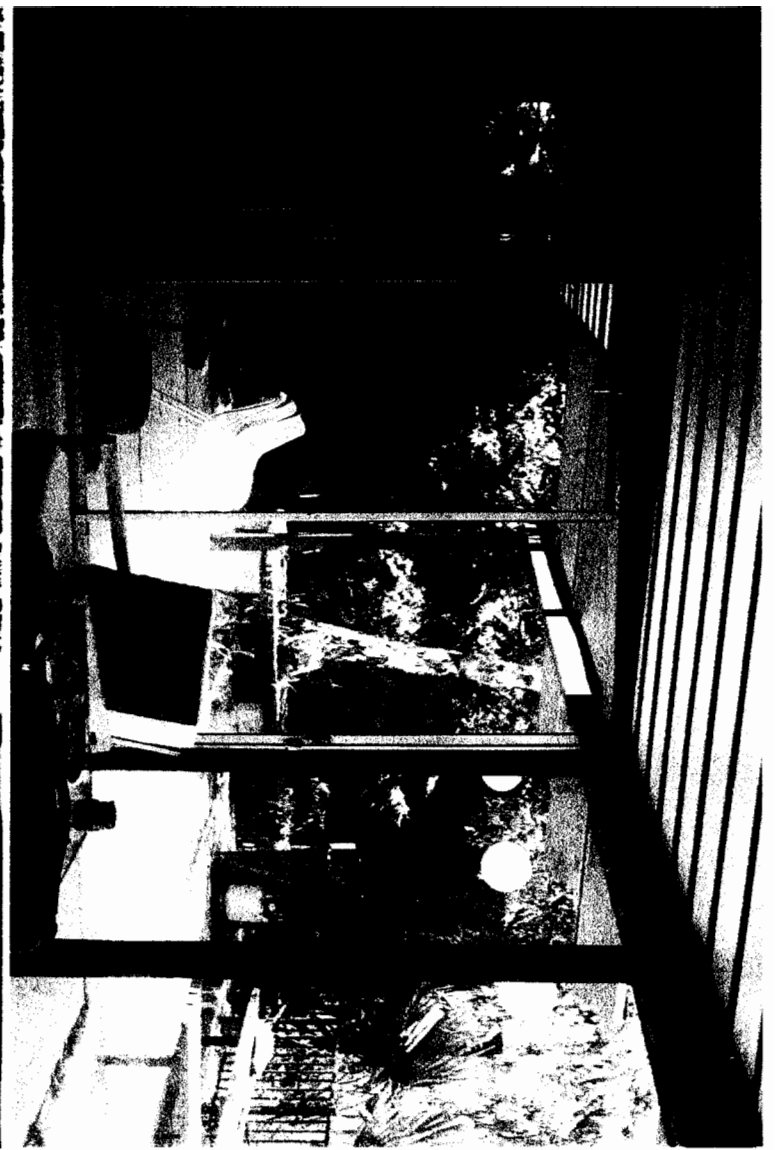
DEVELOPMENT OF LOS ANGELES BECAUSE RODNEY WALKER WAS ONE OF A GROUP OF DESIGN BUILDERS THAT WERE ABLE TO BOTH DO THE ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND THEN FOLLOW THROUGH ON THE FINAL EXECUTION AND CONSTRUCTION OF THAT DESIGN. EARLY IN HIS CAREER, HE HAD WORKED FOR R.M. SCHINDLER, WHERE HE DEVELOPED A KEEN ABILITY TO CREATE MID CENTURY MODERN DESIGNS OF BOTH FINE ESTHETICS AND HIGH QUALITY CONSTRUCTION. HE SO IMPRESSED JOHN ENTENZA, THE EDITOR OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE, THAT HE CHOSE 3 OF WALKER'S DESIGNS FOR HIS CASE STUDY PROGRAM. WALKER DESIGNED THE FIRST CASE STUDY HOUSES 16, 17 AND 18 IN 1946 THRU 48 (THE NUMBERS 16 THROUGH 20 WERE USED TWICE IN THE CASE STUDY PROGRAM. CASE STUDY HOUSE 16 AT 9945 BEVERLY GROVE DRIVE, BEVERLY HILLS HAS BEEN DEMOLISHED AND CASE STUDY HOUSE 17 AT 7861 WOODROW WILSON DRIVE, IN THE HOLLYWOOD HILLS HAS ALTERED. CASE STUDY HOUSE NO. 18, THE WEST HOUSE AT 199 CHAUTAUQUA BOULEVARD, PACIFIC PALISADES, STILL REMAINS ESSENTIALLY INTACT. WALKER'S TWO SONS HAVE REBUILT VERSIONS OF NO. 16 FOR THEMSELVES AND FOUND THAT WALKER HAD ALSO THE DESIGN FOR A HOUSE IN LOUISVILLE KY. WALKER WAS NEVER LICENSED AS AN ARCHITECT AND NEVER CONSIDERED HIMSELF TO BE ONE, YET HIS WORK SPEAKS FOR ITSELF. HE ALSO DID HIS OWN GRADING, USING AN OLD JEE WITH A SHOVEL DEVICE ON THE FRONT. WALKER DID ALL THE GRADING FOR BOTH O'NEILL DUPLEXES, MOST LIKELY WITH THAT DEVICE. ANOTHER HALLMARK WAS THAT HE ALWAYS WORKED WITH THE SAME SMALL TRUSTED CREW OF.

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
SIGNIFICANCE WORK SHEET
CONTINUED

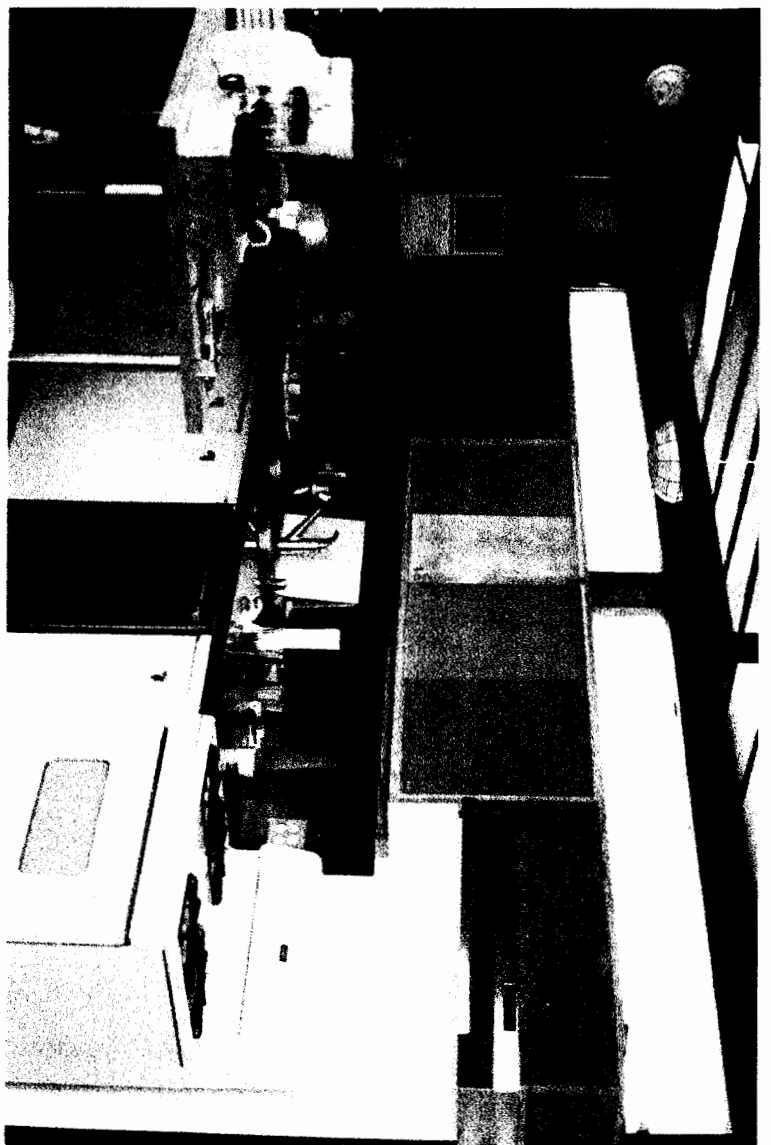
OF 3 TO 4 CARPENTERS, USING OUTSIDERS ONLY FOR PLUMBING AND ELECTRICAL WORK. THE O'NIELL DUPLEXES ARE SITED ON ADJACENT GRADED LOTS ON COVE AVENUE, A STREET THAT CLIMBS UP FROM SILVER LAKE BOULEVARD AND THEN TURNS INTO A STAIRCASE FOR THE REST OF IT'S CLIMB. THE DUPLEXES ARE LOCATED AT THE END OF THE PAVED PORTION OF THE STREET. WALKER OBTAINED A GRADING PERMIT FOR BOTH OF THE HILLSIDE LOTS AND MADE THEM INTO TWO LEVELED STEPS ON THE HILLSIDE. HE THEN PULLED THE BUILDING PERMITS ON MARCH 26TH OF THAT YEAR. THE FOLLOWING YEAR, HIS FRIEND, ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHER JULIUS SHULMAN, DOCUMENTED THE DUPLEXES CRISP LINES AND STRAIGHT FORWARD LAYOUT. A COMPARISON OF CURRENT PHOTOS WITH THOSE BY SHULMAN, SHOWS THE ORIGINAL FEATURES OF THE UPPER, DUPLEX NO. 1, BUILDING, STILL REMAIN INTACT. THE ONLY CHANGES BEING A BEDROOM AND BATHROOM, ADDED SOMETIME IN THE EARLY PERIOD, AND A PERGOLA WITH ACCOMPANYING RAFTER EXTENSIONS WITH, PERIOD LIGHTING, AT THE REAR OF THE HOUSE. THE BEDROOM ADDITION WAS DONE IN A SIMILAR STYLE AS THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE AND THE PERGOLA PORTION, WHICH COMPLIMENTS THE DESIGN, IS EASILY REMOVABLE. THE REST OF THE HOUSE RETAINS ITS ORIGINAL MATERIALS AND INTEGRITY. WHILE BOTH STRUCTURES STILL GIVE A GOOD SENSE OF TIME AND PLACE TOGETHER, THE OTHER DUPLEX WAS REMODELED IN 2005 AND HAS LOST MOST OF IT'S ORIGINAL MATERIALS. WHILE IT STILL DISPLAYS THE SPIRIT OF THE ORIGINAL DESIGN, ONLY NO 1 RETAINS IT'S ORIGINAL DESIGN WITH THE ORIGINAL MATERIALS, MAKING IT A TRUE HISTORIC EXAMPLE OF THE WORK OF A MODEST BUILDER WHO WAS TO CREATE SOME OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF MODERNISM FOR A PERIOD OF 20 YEARS, AT THE TIME WHEN MID CENTURY MODERNISM WAS AT IT'S ZENITH. WALKER DECIDED TO STOP DOING CONSTRUCTION IN THE 1960S, AFTER HE MOVED HIS HOUSEHOLD TO OJAI. HE EVENTUALLY BOUGHT THE OAKS HOTEL THERE AND BECAME WELL KNOWN AS A GRACIOUS HOST WHO LOVED TO COOK FOR HIS GUESTS. HE PASSED AWAY IN OJAI IN 1986.

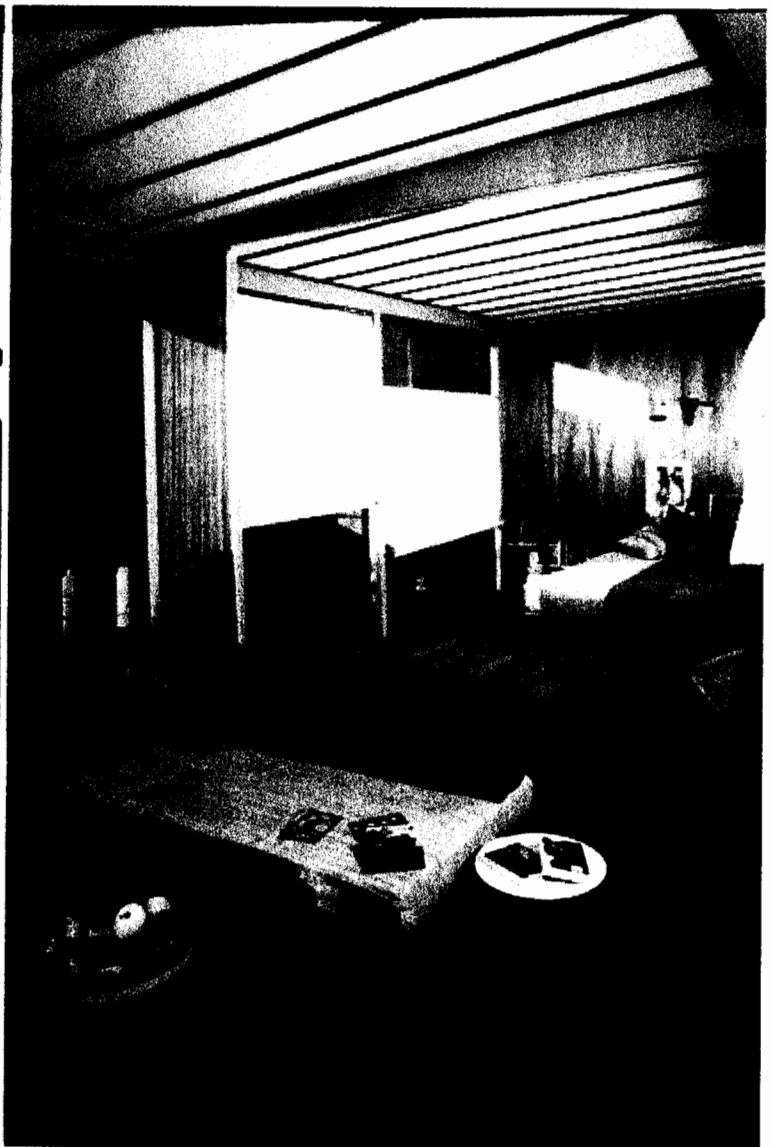


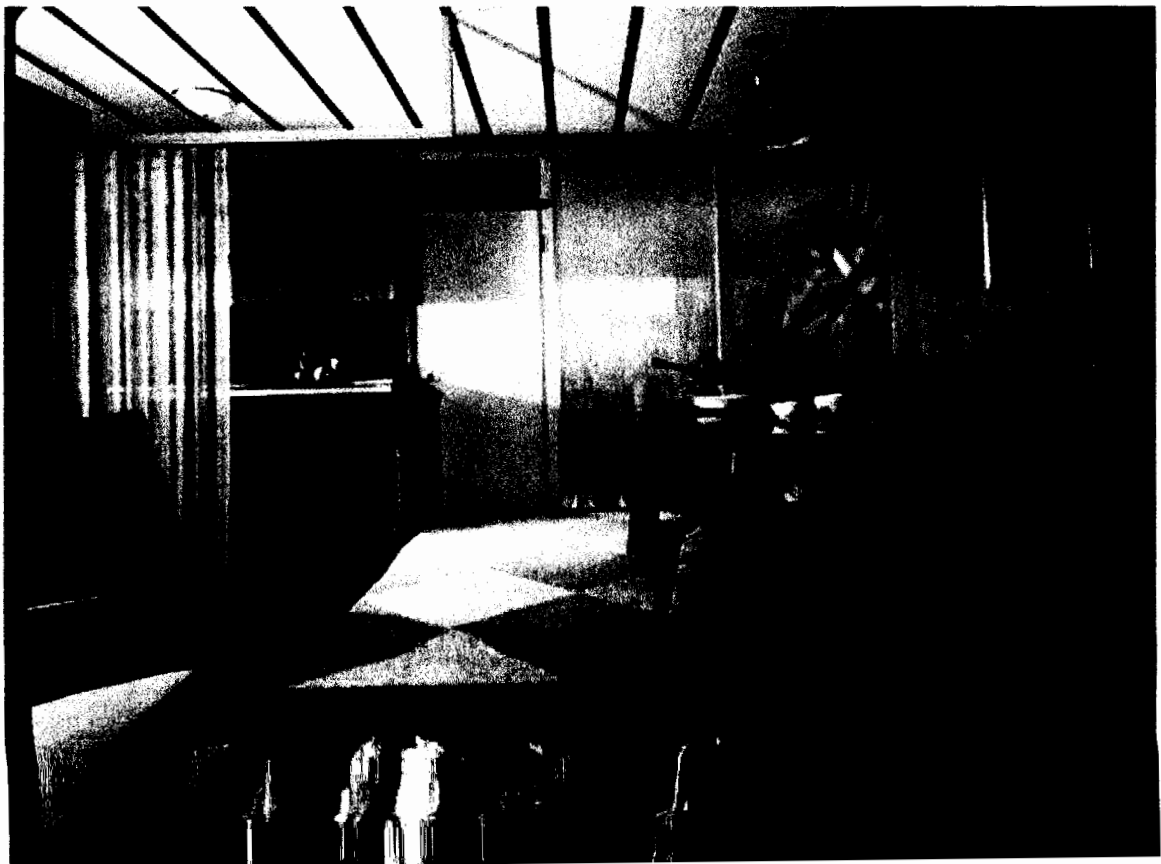


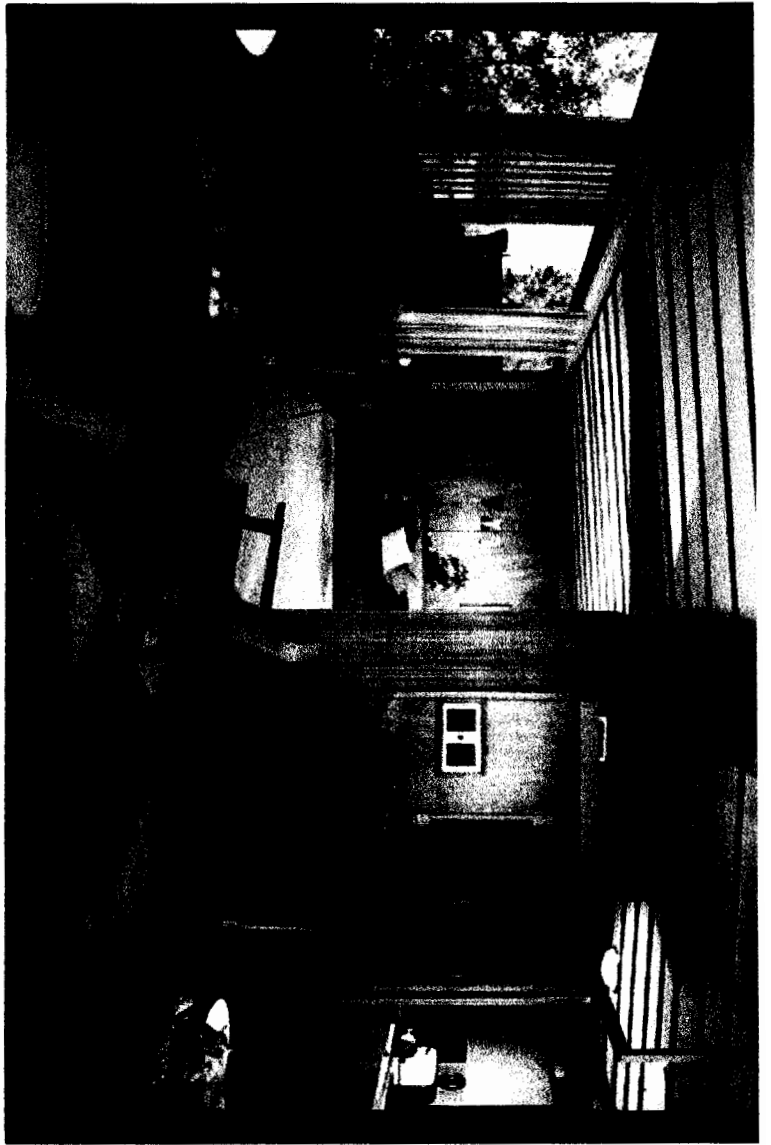


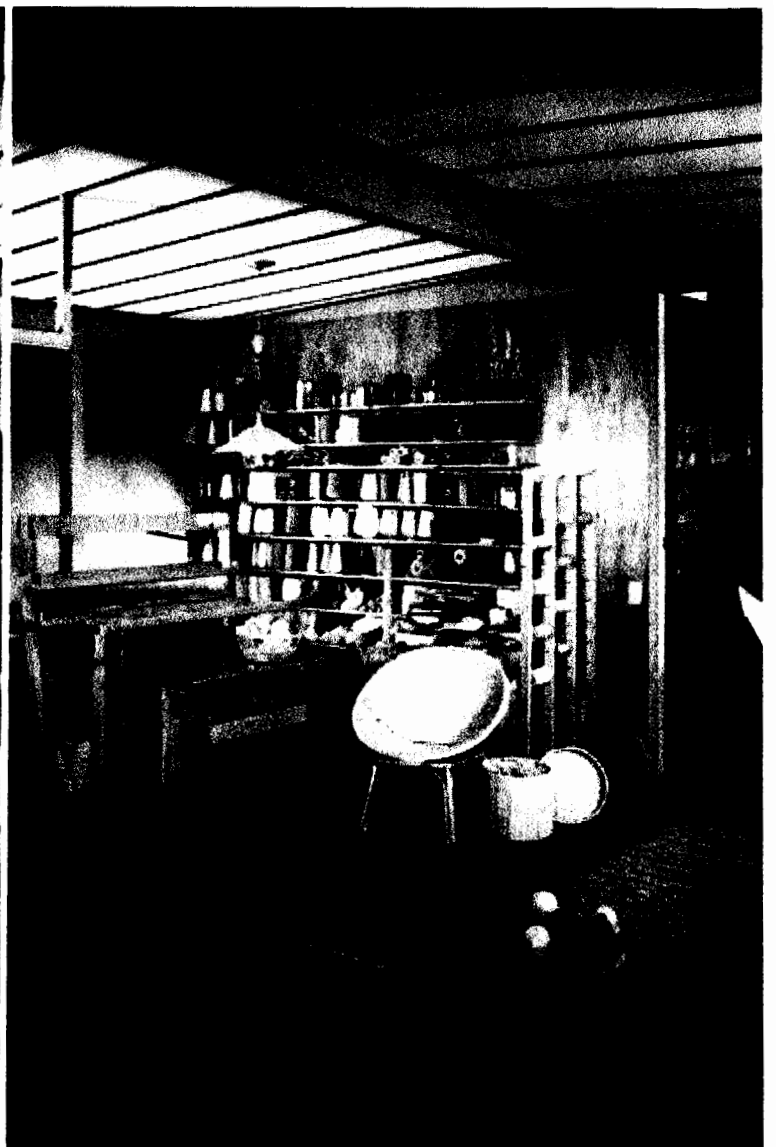
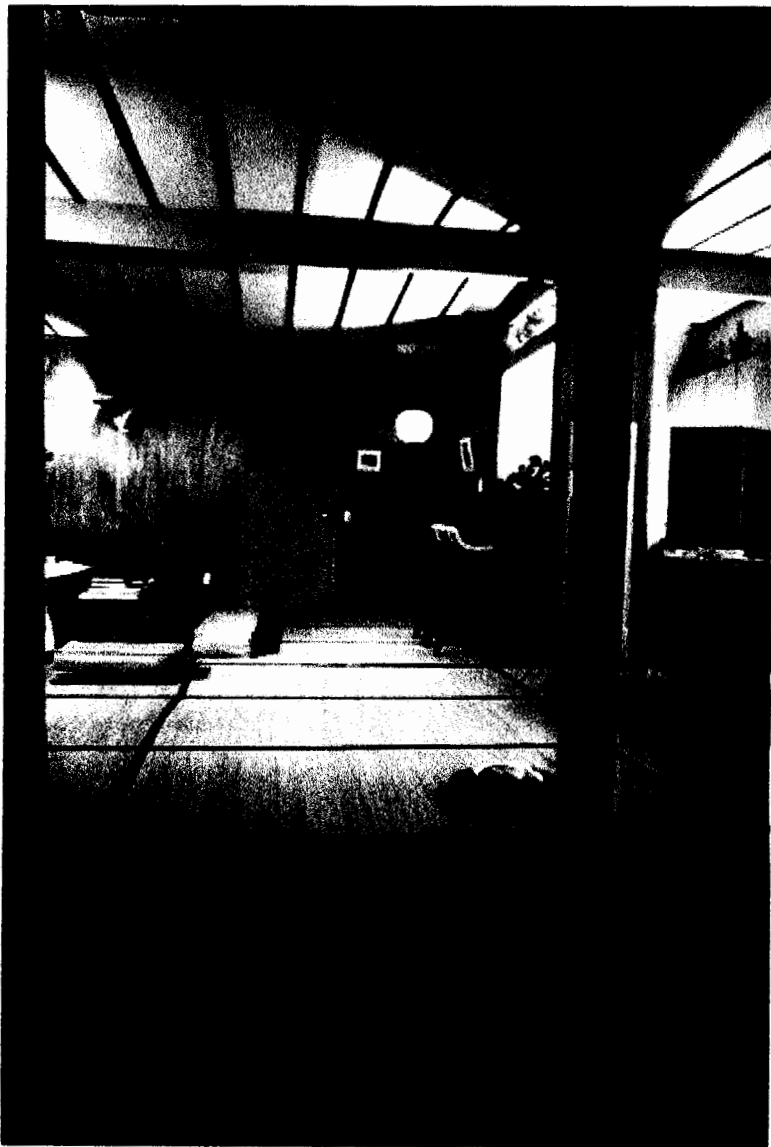














Rodney A. Walker, Architectural Designer (1910-1986)

By Charles J. Fisher

Rodney Asbury Walker was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on September 15, 1910, to Barton E. and Josephine (Schmittroth) Walker and grew up with his younger sister, Bernice, in Ely, Nevada. His father had been born in California and his mother was the daughter of German immigrants from Nebraska. He graduated from White Pine High School in 1928 and took time off from furthering his education to operate a restaurant in Ely for. This experience helped to establish in him a lifelong passion for cooking.

In the Mid 1930s, he left his Nevada home and came to California, where he attended Pasadena City College and, after getting his Associate of Arts degree, transferred to UCLA, where he earned a degree in art.

On June 27, 1938 he married Dorothea Worsley in Los Angeles. That union was to produce five children, including sons, Bruce and Craig. The following year he designed and built a house on Seabury Lane for his bride. That experience was enough to give him the desire to built more homes.

Armed with his UCLA Art degree and his natural ability to build things, he embarked on his new career. He worked for a time in the office of famed Modernist architect R. M. Schindler for \$14.00 a week just to hone his drafting skills. World War II soon intervened and Walker found himself working as a draftsman for Douglas Aircraft. This experience further enhanced his design skills and also helped to cement his love for the clean lines of Mid-Century Modernism that was truly coming into vogue at war's end.

After leaving Douglas, he formed his own construction company and hired his former Douglas manager, Ernie Kazmaar to be his foreman. That association was to last many years. He hired several more skilled craftsmen and was to work his entire building career with his small hand picked crew, using others only for electrical and plumbing work.

He soon caught the eye of John Entenza, the publisher of "Arts and Architecture" magazine, who had recently begun the Case Study House program as a means to showcase the best of Modernism. Entenza saw a

Walker house after it was built in 1946 and soon documented it as Case Study House No. 16. Walker was to design and build Numbers 17 and 18 as well. (Note: for some reason the numbers 16 through 20 were used twice in the series. Walker's houses were in the first set.) The family was to eventually live in number 16, which was located above Beverly Hills. That house was demolished in 2004. No 17, on Woodrow Wilson Drive, has been extensively remodeled and has become essentially unrecognizable. No. 18, however, in Pacific Palisades, a stones throw from Entenza's own Case Study House No 9 (HCM #530) and Charles Eames Case Study House No. 8, has remained essentially intact.

The Case Study Houses gave Walker recognition and he began to receive more commissions to design and build homes in Los Angeles. This period also brought him into contact with renown photographer Julius Schulman, who was to document a number of Walker projects over the next two decades.

In the late 1940s, he purchased a large tract of land in the Hollywood Hills from the Federal government, subdivided the land and built several homes on the land, some spec and some for clients. The house at 15222 Mulholland was extensively documented in "House Beautiful" magazine in the early 1950's.

Many of Walker's designs were in hillside areas which required extensive grading. This was another item that he did himself. He purchased a rusty old Jeep and put a tractor blade on the front of it. With this contraption he was to grade some of the most rugged lots around.

One example was a set of duplexes he designed and built in 1953 for Virginia O'Neill on two lots long before subdivided but considered unbuildable due to their 45° slope. Walker hired engineer Douglas R. Warren to do the calculations and then proceed to carve the steep hillside into two buildable lots and then construct the two identical duplexes. Schulman was to photograph the following year.

Walker is believed to have built over 100 houses in the Los Angeles area, of which only about 35 have been identified. He also built a house in Walnut Creek for his sister and a duplicate of Case Study House No. 16 in Louisville Kentucky.

In the early 1960s, Walker packed up his family and moved to the Ojai Valley, in Ventura County. He soon decided that it was time to retire from the building trade, although he did buy and refurbish a condominium project in Hawaii a few years later. He and some several friends purchased the Oaks Hotel in Ojai and he settled into a new career as hosteller and gourmet chief. He also became known as a wine connoisseur.

Walker was always known as a modest man who was proud of his accomplishments. He set about to build the best possible house at a reasonable price. He got just as much enjoyment of building the house as he did from designing it. Typical of this was when he declined an offer from the American Institute of Architects to bestowing him the honorary title of “architect”. He felt that was never his calling and why do it now.

He was known as being easy to work with and had many very happy clients.

Walker’s sons, Bruce and Craig, were so inspired by their Father’s design for Case Study House No 16, that they have recreated versions of it for their own homes during the early 2000s.

Walker passed away from lymphoma on June 18, 1986 in Ventura, leaving a legacy of building that is finally being discovered and embraced. He never cared to speculate on his place in the field of Modern architecture, but his work speaks for itself proclaiming the hand of a designer that ranks with the best of early modern architects, even if he wasn’t officially one of them on paper.

Sources: United States 1920 Census; California Death Index; Los Angeles Times article dated June 8, 2006, by Bettiane Levine and September 19, 2006 phone interview with Bruce Walker .

Los Angeles Times article on Rodney Walker
June 8, 2006

.....ARCHITECTURE; Case Study, in duplicate; Rodney Walker's landmark House 16 helped to define modern living but then was demolished. Now his sons have brought it back -- twice.: [HOME EDITION]

Bettijane Levine. Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles, Calif.: Jun 8, 2006. p. F.1

Subjects: Architecture, Houses

People: Walker, Bruce, Walker, Craig, Walker, Rodney

Author(s): Bettijane Levine

Document types: Feature

Section: *Home; Part F; Features Desk*

Publication title: Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles, Calif.: Jun 8, 2006. pg. F.1

Source type: Newspaper

ProQuest document ID: 1050714491

Text Word Count: 3097

Document URL: <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1050714491&Fmt=3&clientId=13322&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

Abstract (Document Summary)

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Full Text (3097 words)

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CORRECTION: SEE CORRECTION APPENDED; Case Study house: A June 8 article in Home on the late builder Rodney Walker listed Case Study House No. 7 in the landmark architecture program as "moved or demolished." The house has been altered but still stands in its original location.

CRAIG and Bruce Walker live 20 miles apart but awake each morning in nearly identical new hilltop homes, post-and-beam structures with open floor plans and walls of glass. To them, the twin houses are a homage to their late father, Rodney Walker, and to the first family home he built 60 years ago.

But to the architecture world, the homes represent much more: They are near-replicas of Case Study House 16, part of the landmark post-World War II program that brought modern architecture to mainstream America. Although Rodney Walker's original design was torn down two years ago, it has been re-created not once, but twice: in Camarillo, where Bruce lives, and in Ojai, where Craig is putting the finishing touches on his own version.

What's most unusual isn't that the Walker sons have built the same house from the same resurrected plans. It's the fact that until about five years ago, they had little idea that their lovably eccentric father was such an important figure in architecture.

Not until historians came calling for more information about their father's work, did Bruce and Craig begin to appreciate his place in the evolution of the modern home. Their dad, who died in 1986, never talked much about his professional success. He left behind no records of what he built, or where. He left no copies of his architectural plans for posterity. All the sons had were memories, along with a few photos and faded magazine spreads from the '40s and '50s.

And so began a journey, not just to better understand their father's legacy, but to live with a significant part of it: their childhood home, one of their father's greatest accomplishments, Case Study House 16.

SITUATED on 3 1/2 acres above Beverly Hills, Case Study House 16 was a relatively simple structure that was easy and inexpensive to build in 1946. It had a kind of newfangled elegance: clean lines, soaring roof, an airy interior instead of the usual enclosed rooms. "Modern conveniences" were included: a dishwasher and radiant heat.

For John Entenza, editor of Arts & Architecture magazine, who discovered the house after it was built, it embodied the breakthrough modern aesthetic he hoped to encourage with his Case Study project.

Photographer Julius Shulman chronicled the Case Study houses and knew most of the architects involved, including midcentury legends such as Richard Neutra and Pierre Koenig. Shulman remembers Rodney Walker as brilliant and delightful to deal with, a fellow who had excellent relationships with his clients.

"He never tried to foist any impractical ideas off on them," Shulman says. "People who came to Rodney knew they were going to get a good house. And they always did. He gave them houses they loved to live in, because he was down to earth and real. Unlike most architects, he wasn't egotistical at all.

"I think Rodney helped introduce contemporary architecture to a wider range of the public than most architects working at that time."

Critics have described Walker's homes as expressive and sincere. Crosby Doe, a real estate agent who specializes in architecturally significant homes, calls him "a true individualist. He was wonderful at creating great volume in glass, and capturing the drama of the site," Doe says. "What it always boils down to with a house is this: Is it wonderful? Is it going to give you something in terms of your everyday life? Walker's houses did."

Aesthetics were important, but Rodney aimed to achieve so much more. Bruce, 63, and Craig, 57, recall how their father preached to them -- and to anyone else who would listen -- about the need to build high-quality houses at a low cost, and to eliminate every speck of waste.

"If he needed 3 feet from a 4-foot piece of wood, he'd save the unused 12 inches for interior built-ins," Bruce says.

The brothers sometimes tagged along to construction sites, where their father wielded hammers and saws and quite literally built his houses by hand. Rodney wasn't an architect and never yearned to be one. He preferred the title designer-builder, his sons say, because he was as passionate about the physical act of putting a house together as he was about designing it. In later life, when the American Institute of Architects offered to bestow upon him the honorary title of architect, Rodney respectfully declined, Craig says. It just wasn't important to him.

Rodney reveled in his role as head of a photogenic clan. With his wife, Dorothea, and five fine-looking children, they formed a sort of Von Trapp family troupe. All played recorders, occasionally gave concerts and looked as if they might break into "Edelweiss" at any time.

Bruce and Craig think their father built between 75 and 100 houses in the Los Angeles area but can only identify 35, based on personal recollections and those of family and friends. Three were chosen for the Case Study program and were therefore written about in architectural and consumer magazines. If not for that, there might be no written record at all of his accomplishments.

PART of the genius of many Case Study houses is not only how they redefined modern living in the '40s, '50s and '60s, but how their designs remain so relevant. Flexible floor plans with spaces that can serve dual purposes, an appreciation for indoor-outdoor living, the use of new technology and techniques to create distinctive, clean-lined quarters -- these principles, still important today, were what drew nearly 4,000 people to see Case Study House 16 the day after it appeared on the cover of a Los Angeles Times Sunday magazine.

Bruce and Craig Walker say they chose to re-create famed No. 16 not because it was part of the Case Study program, but because it suited their needs. Both are married, with grown children, and both say the 2,000-square-foot plan is as practical today as when it was built. The plan calls for an expansive main room with two bedrooms and baths on one side, and another bedroom and bath on the other side, near the kitchen and dining room. A fabulous roof garden provides an extra 1,000 square feet of living space that can be enclosed and converted into extra living quarters if necessary.

Both brothers say they had revisited the 1946 house over the years. But the last time they called, wanting to take another look, they learned that it was gone.

"Bruce and I were on our way to a meeting and phoned the owner to ask if we could look at a few things," Craig says. "He said no, because it's just been torn down. We were shocked."

The owner said it had fallen into disrepair and would have been too costly to rehabilitate. That left the brothers with no original house and no plans to use as reference.

Bruce, an acoustical engineer and oboist, called everyone he knew who might have information -- even the widow of his dad's carpenter -- to no avail. Armed only with some old photos and a 1948 issue of House & Garden magazine, which showed a mini picture of the plan in a photo essay on the Walker house titled "The House That Does Not Depend on Servants," he set out to build.

"I knew from being involved with some of my dad's projects how he built walls and laid things out," Bruce says. "And I have all this design software on my computer. So I just took the old articles and created a plan for how things should go together."

He turned over that plan, along with the old photos, to an architect and a structural engineer who worked their magic to meet current building requirements.

By the time Craig, a secondary school teacher, was set to build his version, the brothers had learned -- through detective work and chance -- of a project their father had built in Louisville, Ky. That structure and a house for his sister in the Bay Area were believed to be the only homes Rodney built outside Southern California.

Bruce and his wife, Delores, went to Louisville.

"We had no idea exactly where it was," Bruce says. "We just started driving around an area where we thought it might be. We turned a corner, and the house was in front of us."

"The house" was Case Study 16, the identical design. Rodney had left a set of plans with the owner, who still lived there. She gladly turned them over.

BRUCE and Delores have been living in their Camarillo house for about four years; Craig and his wife, Debi, moved into their Ojai house early this year.

The homes are fraternal, rather than identical, twins. Craig added a two-story atrium and master bedroom to the original layout - - an idea he filched from another of his father's designs. Bruce stuck more closely to the '46 plan but turned one bedroom into a huge walk-in closet and replaced cantilevered stairs to the roof with a traditional staircase that provides storage underneath.

Of course, it wasn't easy for contractors to comprehend or adhere to the specifics of midcentury construction, the brothers say. They won't discuss costs, but they said in the battle between high quality and low cost, quality won.

"There are some areas in my house where quality didn't exactly always win," Bruce says with a chuckle, "but then neither did low cost."

Rodney Walker built his houses with a small crew of two or three regulars -- no outsiders except plumbers and electricians. When he wanted to move earth or grade land, he often did it in a contraption he rigged himself: a large shovel-type item he attached to a rusty old Jeep. When he wanted to build a wall of windows, which often made his houses appear to float, he simply cut a groove in a piece of wood, set the glass into the groove, and puttied over it.

His sons were confronted with a cadre of subcontractors and high costs for grading hilltop lots, installing double-paned metal-framed windows (required by code), and all sorts of specialty materials to replace the relatively inexpensive ones their father used, some of which are no longer available.

Would they do it again? "Definitely," says Craig. "We'd like to build another one in the future."

"Absolutely," says Bruce, "if I could afford to."

FOR reasons Bruce and Craig have never determined, their father walked away from residential design and construction in the 1960s, when he was in his early 50s. For the next 25 years, he never looked back.

He started life anew from his home base in Ojai. He became a wine connoisseur, a gourmet cook and a jewelry designer. He bought and refurbished 10 condos in Hawaii and formed a corporation with friends that bought the Oaks hotel in Ojai, where he was pleased to present his newest recipes to dining room guests. He never took a salary, his sons say, and he enjoyed his time as a hotelier. When the thrill wore off, he stopped just as abruptly as he'd quit building.

But he never stopped cooking. His sons remember with delight that even in the kitchen, their father was cost-conscious.

"He'd have us taste something great he'd prepared, then he'd ask us to guess how much it cost to prepare it," Bruce says.

At the time of his death from lymphoma 20 years ago, he was writing a cookbook titled "A Few Good Broths," which featured easy, inexpensive recipes from around the world.

His sons say he never reminisced about building or his place in the realm of architecture.

"He didn't think he had one," Craig says. "He never saw himself as influential, never hobnobbed with those big names like Pierre Koenig. He wasn't self-promoting."

Rodney's Case Study House 17 in Los Angeles also has been demolished, but his Case Study 18 in Pacific Palisades, as well as his masterpiece -- a 4,000-square-foot, steel-framed, hexagonal glass house with a triangular

the Society of Architectural Historians in association with the American Institute of Architects, whose annual convention opens today in Los Angeles.

Bruce says that only recently have he and his brother gotten a strong desire "to discover what our dad had really done." Before then, all they knew was that he'd built some really wonderful houses and that he made great spaghetti.

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Bettijane Levine can be reached at home@latimes.com.

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Begin text of infobox

The Case Study houses

The Case Study House program was started by Arts & Architecture editor John Entenza in 1945, and it ran until 1966, when the magazine ceased publication. Some houses were built specifically for the program; others were brought in later because they represented design that was inventively modern and relatively low-cost. According to Elizabeth A.T. Smith, author of the definitive "Case Study Houses," the most iconic designs came in the later years, when industrial materials such as steel were more readily available and homeowners wanted a higher degree of finish. Of the 36 Case Study designs, 25 were actually built. (For reasons that remain unclear, the same number was assigned to different projects.) The completed homes are listed below with notes about demolition or significant remodeling, as researched by the Los Angeles Conservancy's Modern Committee:

No. 1: Julius Ralph Davidson, 1945-48. 10152 Toluca Lake Ave., North Hollywood.

No. 2: Sumner Spaulding and John Rex, 1945-47. 857 Chapea Road, Pasadena (listed as Chapman Woods/Arcadia in some references).

No. 3: William W. Wurster and Theodore Bernardi, 1945-49. 13187 Chalon Road, Los Angeles (Mandeville Canyon).

No. 7: Thornton Abell, 1945-48. 634 N. Deerfield Ave., San Gabriel. House has been moved or demolished.

No. 8: Eames House. Charles and Ray Eames, 1945-49. 203 Chautauqua Blvd., Pacific Palisades.

No. 9: Entenza House. Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, 1945-49. 205 Chautauqua Blvd., Pacific Palisades. Remodeled.

No. 10: Kemper Nomland and Kemper Nomland Jr., 1945-47. 711 San Rafael Ave., Pasadena.

No. 11: Julius Ralph Davidson, 1945-46. 540 S. Barrington Ave., West Los Angeles. House has been moved or demolished.

No. 15: Julius Ralph Davidson, 1947. 4755 Lasheart Drive, La Canada Flintridge.

No. 16: Rodney Walker, 1946-47. 9945 Beverly Grove Drive, Beverly Hills. Demolished.

No. 17: Rodney Walker, 1947. 7861 Woodrow Wilson Drive, Los Angeles. Altered.

No. 18: West House. Rodney Walker, 1947-48. 199 Chautauqua Blvd., Pacific Palisades.

No. 20: Bailey House. Richard Neutra, 1947-48. 219 Chautauqua Blvd., Pacific Palisades.

1950: Raphael Soriano, 1950. 1080 Ravoli Drive, Pacific Palisades. Remodeled beyond recognition.

No. 16: Craig Ellwood, 1952-53. 1811 Bel Air Road, Bel-Air.

No. 17: Craig Ellwood, 1954-55. 9554 Hidden Valley Road, Beverly Hills. Remodeled beyond recognition.

No. 18: Fields House. Craig Ellwood, 1956-58. 1129 Miradero Road, Beverly Hills. Remodeled beyond recognition.

No. 20: Bass House. Buff, Straub & Hensman, 1958. 2275 N. Santa Rosa Ave., Altadena.

No. 21: Pierre Koenig, 1958. 9038 Wonderland Park Ave., West Hollywood.

No. 22: Stahl House. Pierre Koenig, 1959-60. 1635 Woods Drive, West Hollywood.

No. 23: Triad. Killingsworth, Brady & Smith, 1959-60. Rue de Anna, La Jolla. One of the three homes has been remodeled.

No. 25: Frank House. Killingsworth, Brady, Smith & Assoc., 1962. 82 Rivo Alto Canal, Long Beach.

No. 26: Harrison House. Beverley Thorne, 1962-63. San Marino Drive, San Rafael.

No. 28: Buff & Hensman, 1965-66. 91 Inverness Road, Thousand Oaks.

Apartments

No. 1: Alfred N. Beadle and Alan A. Dailey, 1963-64. 4402 28th St., Phoenix.

[Reference]

Message No: 30868

[Illustration]

Caption: PHOTO: : MODEL HOME: Case Study House 16, top, is one of Rodney Walker's greatest accomplishments. It's since been torn down, but the designer's sons have re-created it as their own homes. Above, Craig Walker's living room.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Stephen Osman Los Angeles Times; PHOTO: : MODEL HOME: Case Study House 16, top, is one of Rodney Walker's greatest accomplishments. It's since been torn down, but the designer's sons have re-created it as their own homes. Above, Craig Walker's living room.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Julius Shulman J. Paul Getty Trust; PHOTO: CRAIG'S HOME: The finishing touches are being put into place in his Ojai residence, right. Craig, below, used plans for Case Study House 16 as a template; he furnished it with chairs and lamps taken from a different project, the 4,000- square-foot glass house that is considered Rodney's masterpiece.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Lawrence K. Ho Los Angeles Times; PHOTO: BRUCE'S HOME: At his Camarillo home, left, Bruce Walker wanted to re-create father Rodney's Case Study House 16 not because it was a landmark, but because it's still a practical design. Among the features Bruce, below, wanted: an open layout, high ceilings and abundance of natural light.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Lawrence K. Ho Los Angeles Times; PHOTO: FAMILY: Bruce leans against father Rodney as dark-haired Craig laughs.; PHOTOGRAPHER: John Engstead Rodney Walker family; PHOTO: THE INSPIRATION: Case Study House 16 embodied Rodney Walker's modern aesthetic of clean lines and airy interiors. Built in the '40s in Los Angeles, it has since been demolished.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Julius Shulman J. Paul Getty Trust; PHOTO: TWO OF A KIND: The entrances to Bruce and Craig's homes bear the unmistakable mark of their father's plans but still show slight differences. Bruce's home, left, incorporates a traditional staircase with storage underneath. Craig's entry more closely follows the original cantilevered design.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Lawrence K. Ho Los Angeles Times; PHOTO: TWO OF A KIND: The entrances to Bruce and Craig's homes bear the unmistakable mark of their father's plans but still show slight differences. Bruce's home, left, incorporates a traditional staircase with storage underneath. Craig's entry more closely follows the original cantilevered design.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Lawrence K. Ho Los Angeles Times; PHOTO: CRAIG'S HOME: The finishing touches are being put into place in his Ojai residence, right. Craig, below, used plans for Case Study House 16 as a template; he furnished it with chairs and lamps taken from a different project, the 4,000-square-foot glass house that is considered Rodney's masterpiece.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Lawrence K. Ho Los Angeles Times; PHOTO: BRUCE'S HOME: At his Camarillo home, left, Bruce Walker wanted to re- create father

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Credit: Times Staff Writer

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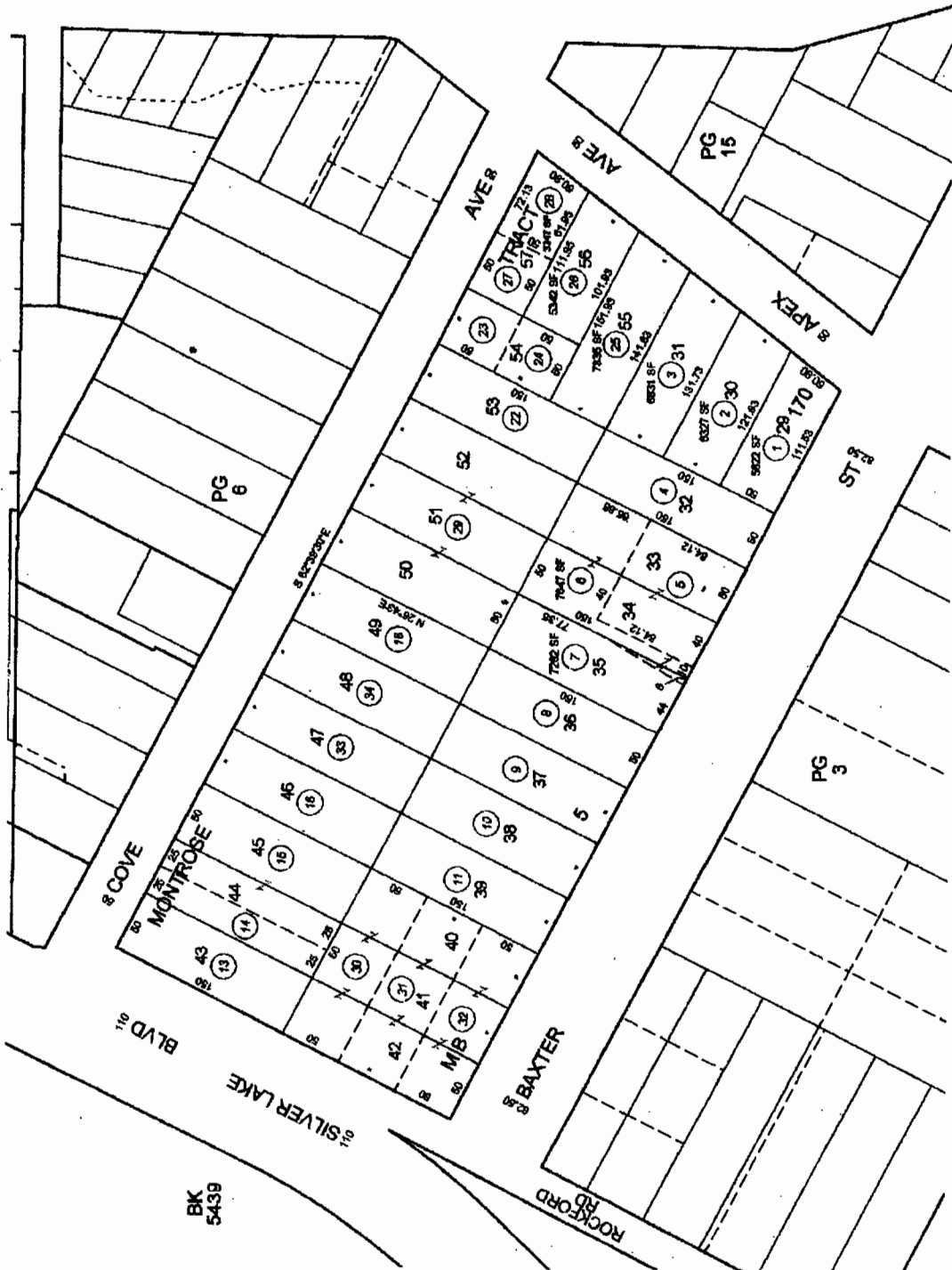
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