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How House (R.M. Schindler, 1926) Photo: Tim Street-Porter

MAK CENTER FOCUSES ANNUAL ARCHITECTURE TOUR ON SILVERLAKE/LOS FELIZ MID-CENTURY MODERNISM

October 4, 2009 Tour Features Seven Residences

(West Hollywood, July 31, 2009) California established its reputation as a beacon of advanced architecture in the middle decades of the 20th century with residential designs that established the famed “indoor-outdoor” modern lifestyle. The MAK Center Architecture Tour 2009 — an annual fundraiser for the programs of the MAK Center for Art & Architecture — focuses on this important era. Set for Sunday, October 4 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., the tour will feature seven residences, dating from 1926 through 1964, by seminal architects **Rudolf Schindler, Gregory Ain, Raphael Soriano, Harwell Harris** and **Craig Ellwood**.



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Anchoring the tour are works by **Rudolph Schindler**, who, together with fellow Austrian émigré Richard Neutra, established the precedents for what came to be known as California-style architecture. Schindler came to Los Angeles to work for Frank Lloyd Wright, but soon set out on his own and built the landmark Kings Road House and Studio in 1921–22. Today home to the MAK Center, the Schindler House (as it came to be known) was a radical design that integrated interiors and gardens into a complex spatial pinwheel that accorded equal importance to indoors and out.

MAK Tour 2009 is proud to have secured an important early Schindler residence, the **How House** (1926). Rarely available for public viewing, this elegant residence represents a turning point in the architect's development. In this house, Schindler's interest in geometry and proportion as a generator of space is combined with a sensitive use of materials. Indeed, it is one of only three houses in which Schindler employed concrete. Located on a ridge with two opposite views, the house extends outward like the bow of a boat. Because of its steep slope, the property required a confined footprint. By interlocking two boxlike structures, the lower a concrete base and the upper framed in wood, Schindler provided layered interior spaces that favor the views and are amply supplied with terraces for outdoor living. Unified inside and out by a continuous pattern of horizontal lines, the How House has been beautifully restored to its original condition.

A second residence by R.M. Schindler is also included on the tour, the **McAlmon House** (1935), one of the architect's most sculptural creations. Set atop a hill, the rhythms of its pushed-out/pulled-in facades engage the visitor upon approach. Inside, Schindler's "space architecture" is subtly articulated on different levels to distinguish day and night activities. The main living area is organized around an outdoor breakfast room and opens wide to the backyard and magnificent views.

The tour continues with several examples of residential architecture by "second generation" mid-century modern architects. Perhaps most unusual among these are the works of **Harwell Hamilton Harris**, who eschewed the "machine-age" aesthetics of the International Style for a warmer modernism inflected with regional influences. Although he trained in Neutra's office (along with Gregory Ain), Harris embraced the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Rudolph Schindler, and later in his career became fascinated with California turn-of-the-century architects Greene and Greene and Bernard Maybeck.



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Harris' **Alexander House** (1940–41) displays two stylistic personalities. The two-story home composed of white stucco boxes with wood detailing reveals a flat-roofed modernist sensibility on one side, while displaying a Prairie Style horizontality on the other. Pergolas, terraces and courtyards add to the sense of spaciousness. The architect established a lively rhythm in interiors that sequence open and closed spaces along constantly shifting axes.

Known for making modernism palatable to the public, in his stucco-and-wood **Hansen House** (1950–51) Harris exhibits a penchant for designing beautiful and comfortable homes. A winding path leads to a deck and entry elevated over the garage, providing privacy and a spectacular view of the Silverlake reservoir. Every room has a garden or lake view, and clerestory windows supply additional light. Harris designed much of the furniture, both freestanding and built-in, and the current owner has maintained original linoleum, laminate countertops and Harris' original palette.

Gregory Ain, a student of both Schindler and Neutra, believed in architecture as an agent of social change. Perhaps best known for his Mar Vista tract home development, Ain is represented on MAK Tour 2009 with another notable creation, the **Avenel Homes Cooperative** (1946–48). Built for a group of WWII veterans, the ten-unit row house complex sets each unit at an angle to the street in a sawtooth pattern. Ain's trademark geometric lines, flat roofs and lack of exterior decoration are seen here. The architect approached each unit as if it were an individual home, providing flexible interiors with sliding walls and open kitchens. As was his practice in single-family homes, he placed the garages at the street, with gardens to the rear of the property for maximal privacy.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the construction industry adapted many of the technological innovations developed during the mobilization for WWII.

Raphael Soriano was the first architect to fully exploit the potential of light steel construction, and later in his career went on to explore aluminum building systems. Steel allowed modernist architects to eliminate interior walls and generate open, flexible floorplans; substitute glass for exterior walls; and float thin roofs on minimal supports.

Like Harris and Ain, Soriano interned in the office of Richard Neutra, and he shared the older architect's affinity for machined forms. He completed Case Study House 1950, which pioneered the use of steel in residential construction and began the **Schrage House** in the same year, completing it in 1952. The only remaining one of Soriano's 1950s steel structures that is still close to its



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original state, the house was renovated in the mid-1980s with Soriano's advice. Based on a prefabricated 10 x 24-foot steel frame, the design sets a one-story pavilion atop a carport to accommodate the sloping site. With its lushly landscaped approach that hides a stair beneath a pergola, the house opens up to the north with a glass façade framing views of Griffith Park.

Like Raphael Soriano, **Craig Ellwood** expressed postwar optimism through a highly-machined aesthetic. Always seeking the lightest possible solutions, Ellwood strove to "express structure" in his early buildings through steel frames, and later with a truss-based technology. He built three Case Study houses and later developed the Rand Corporation masterplan, offices for Xerox and IBM, as well as the signature "bridge building" for Art Center College of Design.

Due to cost considerations, Ellwood worked with concrete and wood rather than steel in his **Moore House** (1964–65). He hid a lower level garage behind walls so that it wouldn't compete with the one-story pavilion living quarters, supplying his prototypical pristine box despite a complex topography. Ellwood integrated thin redwood supports into an elegant, all-glass façade. The house presents its back to the street, with its horizontal main living space oriented to the backyard and views. In acknowledgement of the modern lifestyle, an open kitchen easily connects to living areas and the outdoors.

Tickets for MAK Tour 2009 are priced at \$75, \$65 for Friends of the Schindler House and students with ID. The tour is designed to be "self-drive," but bus and lunch options are available for an additional fee. To purchase tickets, the public may visit www.MAKcenter.org.

The MAK Center for Art & Architecture is located at the Schindler House, 835 N. Kings Road in West Hollywood. Public hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Regular admission is \$7/\$17 with the guide book, *Schindler By MAK*; students and seniors, \$6/\$16 with book; free for Friends of the Schindler House and on Fridays, 4 to 6 p.m. Parking is available at the public structure at the northeast corner of Kings Road and Santa Monica Boulevard. For further information, the public may contact www.MAKcenter.org or call (323) 651-1510.

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