

CALIFORNIA HOMES

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THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

ARCHITECTS, BUILDERS &
LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS

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SPECIAL ISSUE



Master Weavers

HOUSES AS VARIED AS THE PEOPLE WHO OWN THEM

TEXT BY MICHAEL WEBB

EACH OF THE ARCHITECTS, LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS AND BUILDERS featured in this guide is dedicated to the goal of transforming and enriching lives. Here in California, they are the heirs to a century-old tradition of fulfilling clients' fantasies while satisfying practical needs. Working in harmony with view sites and the benign climate, they create environments to nurture the body and the soul, in a wide diversity of styles.

We live in an era of standardization in which people dress alike, drive vehicles that are superficially similar, and use the same mechanical devices. That makes the home one of the last bastions of individuality. It allows the fortunate few who can please themselves to hire the best talent and create something unique. Many people prefer to play it safe and mimic whatever surrounds them, but there is no need to take such a passive approach. All of these architects have the skill to make a house stand out and fit in. They understand that the right scale, appropriate materials, a restrained palette and fine craftsmanship are crucial ingredients of any home, modern or traditional in form.

Though architects have acquired new tools, employing software programs in place of T-squares and compasses, the art and craft of building homes has changed remarkably little in the past hundred years. Architects still love to sketch and construct physical models to test their ideas and demonstrate designs to clients. And, though owners may demand larger bathrooms and closets, their needs for shelter aren't so different from those of their great grandparents. Sitting, eating, sleeping, and entertaining are consistent human activities. Adding home theaters and gyms, family rooms and saunas may double the size but not the essential purpose of a home. Servant spaces have shrunk and we spend more time outdoors, so houses are now more open, but older models can be adapted to serve today's preferences. I live in an eighty-year-old apartment by Richard Neutra that is as liveable and modern in spirit today as it was when it was new.

Exploring older neighborhoods provides delight and inspiration to architects and owners alike. It's instructive to wander the streets and appreciate the extraordinary diversity of invention, home-grown and imported. Here you can find fanciful versions of



ABOVE Looking into the courtyard of Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House. Photograph by JW Pictures. **PREVIOUS PAGE** All Coast Construction did a sensitive restoration of a diamond-shaped house by Bart Prince in Malibu.

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URBAN FABRIC AND THE
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every historical style and brand of innovation. And no other place on earth has been so receptive to innovative talent. Back in the 1910s, the Greene brothers created Arts and Crafts bungalows for affluent mid-westerners who wintered in Pasadena. Their Gamble house is open for tours and it reveals how the architects fused the traditional Japanese house with the local vernacular, combining stone, polished mahogany and Tiffany glass.

Frank Lloyd Wright was another mid-westerner who saw southern California as virgin territory where he could create a new American architecture, inspired by pre-Columbian monuments. Few of his projects were realized, but the Hollyhock House, perched on a hill at the edge of downtown LA, demonstrates the scale of his ambition. Newly restored and re-opened for public tours, it is richly rewarding to the eye and the imagination. Equally impressive is the expanse of textured concrete blocks on the Ennis House in Los Feliz, though that can be seen only from the street that winds around it.