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Architecture Resource of the Artist

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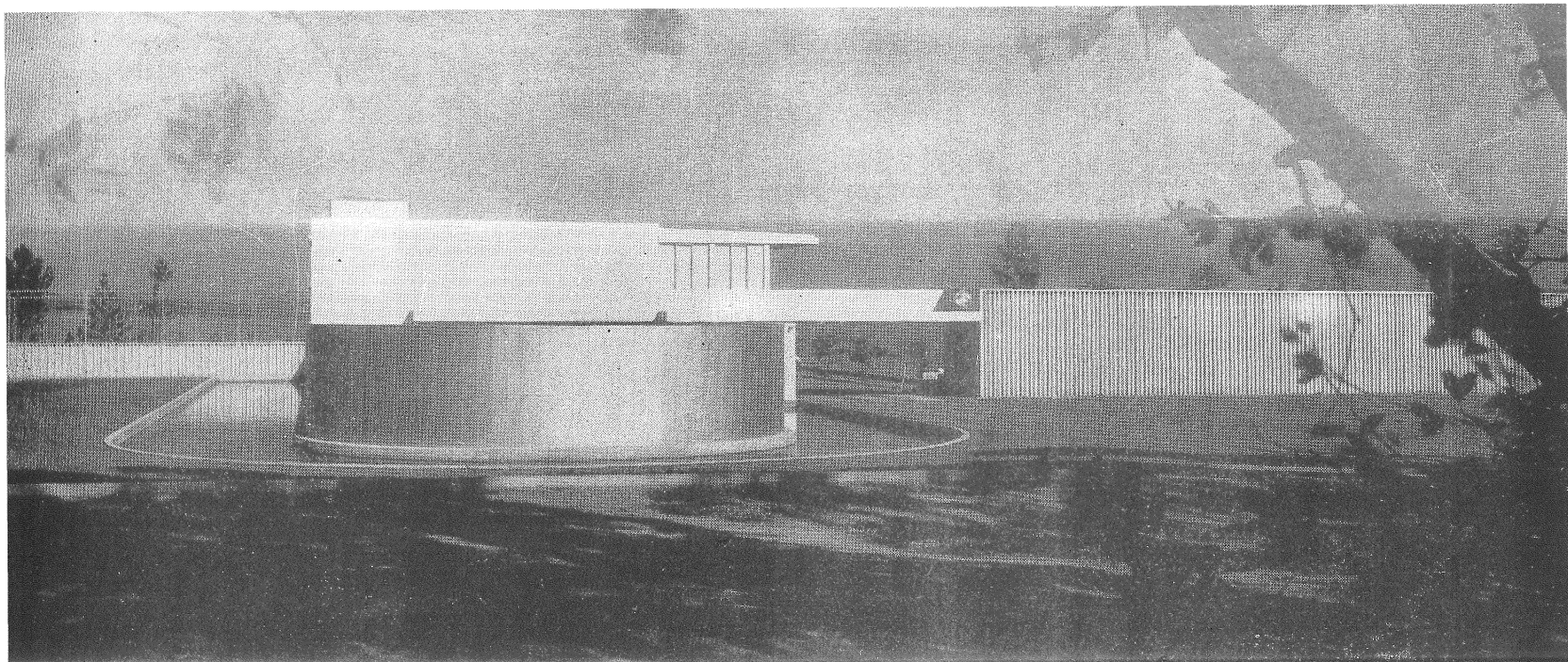
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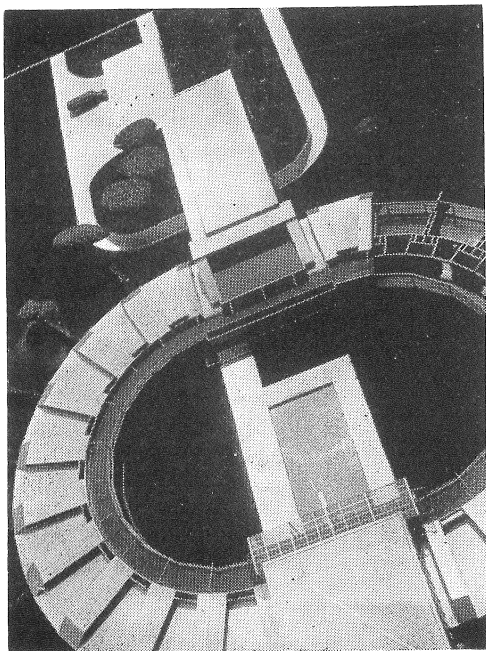


STEEL HOUSE WITH A MOAT. OWNER: MR. AND MRS. FRANK O'CONNOR (MISS AYN RAND)

Architecture RESOURCE OF THE ARTIST

By **RICHARD J. NEUTRA**
Architect, Los Angeles

A prefabricated school



• Art is answering, not merely speaking. this is what in past periods gave to it powers of demonic intensity.

An answer can be strikingly convincing only when a clean-cut question has been posed first. If an artistic creative problem is undefined; not defined by a given set of environmental factors, its solution is as arbitrary as the call for it was vague. An equation with many unknowns has no definite solution, needs a great deal of endeavor, of processing, of preliminary research and clarification to make it first ready for the last stroke of solution.

To grant success to his individual work, even the greatest artist-genius must be presented with a circumstantial constellation which will make his work seem a convincing, fitting answer to a problem.

As we are no longer living in a jungle of trees, ninety per cent of our physical environment is architecture in a broad sense of the word. In periods of the past, when the architectural environment had harmonious unity, it presented a defined frame of reference. Van Eyck, painting an altar piece, knew beforehand the space characteristics of a cathedral, its properties of illumination at day and night, the focal distance from which his work would be viewed, the accompanying color scheme to surround it, the emotional and intellectual frame of mind of his audience facing the unfolded triptych on a high holiday.

When a few hundred years later a man like Vermeer painted easel pictures not designed for a given spot in a particular building, he nevertheless was fully familiar with the generic character of a Dutch living room in the middle of the 17th century. His work would fit, whether Mr. van der so-and-so or Mr. van der such-

and-such purchased the picture for his home. In Vermeer's pictures themselves one can see these living quarters faithfully portrayed.

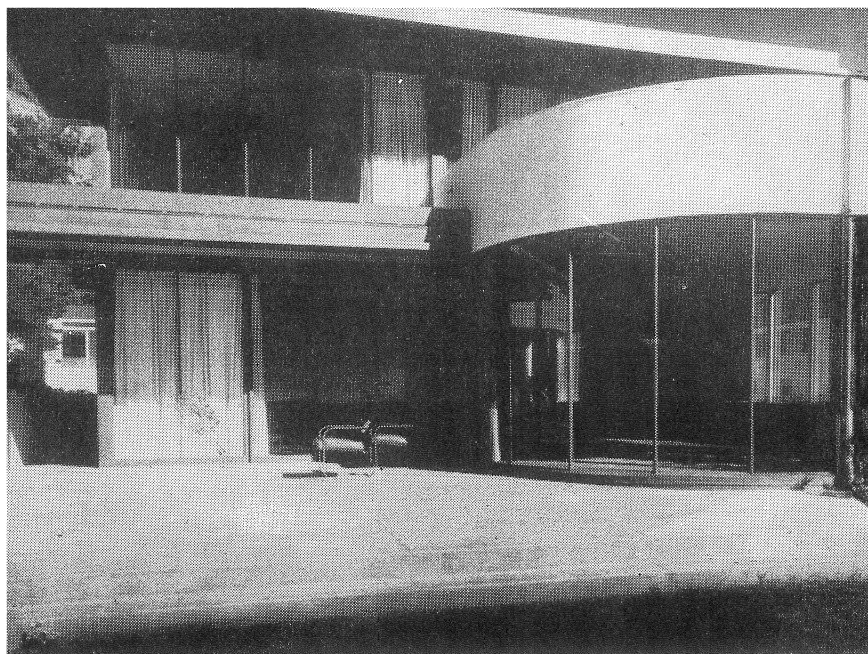
Contrast this favorable situation with the horrible uncertainty of a contemporary artist, however gifted, who composes a piece of art without any possible anticipation as to whether it will be placed in a mission type, an English cottage or a Georgian living room, with adobe imitation, jazz plaster, patterned wall paper or gypsum astragals as competitive details all around it; for a room with ample light, or dimmed down with velour drapes to mid-Victorian dignity.

He cannot anticipate anything. He thinks of the burlap hanging surface of a sales gallery as the happiest background for his picture. And there in the sales gallery the picture hangs to remain, never bought, not tempting any purchaser who has a place to put it convincingly.

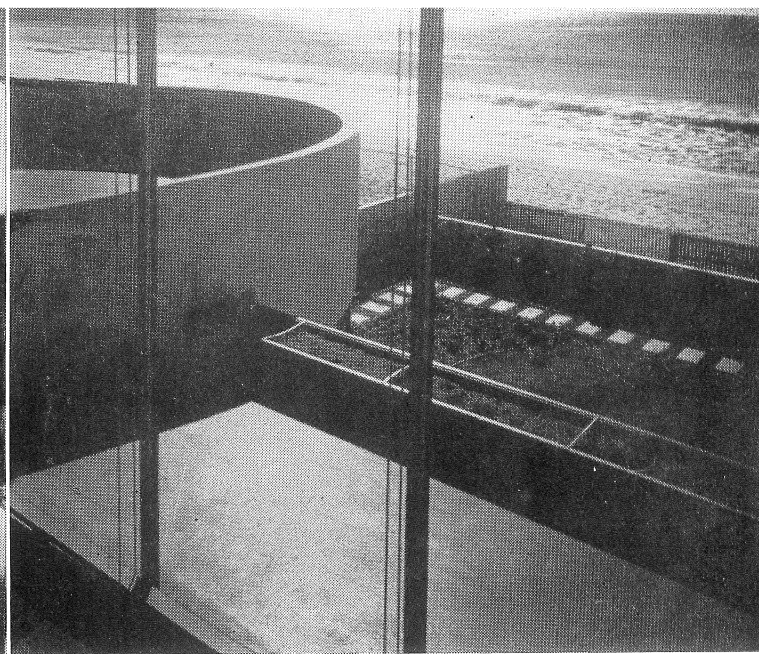
New architecture, in itself an art which does not imitate nature, which is a primary example of an abstract art—however most intimately fitted to human needs, practical and psychological needs—does and will provide more and more space for the planning and enjoyment of artistic creation. It will furnish peaceful, even vacant backgrounds, non-competitive settings, breathing room, space for the dynamic explosion of an art object, or at least a special zone of its influence.

A contemporary style of building and living will furnish that harmonious and unified atmosphere into which the artist can compose his work with some degree of self-assurance and sound anticipation.

The technical media of art production have always been borrowed from the game



House looking at Pacific sunsets through polaroid glass



ALL THE ARCHITECTURE SHOWN HERE IS THE WORK OF RICHARD J. NEUTRA

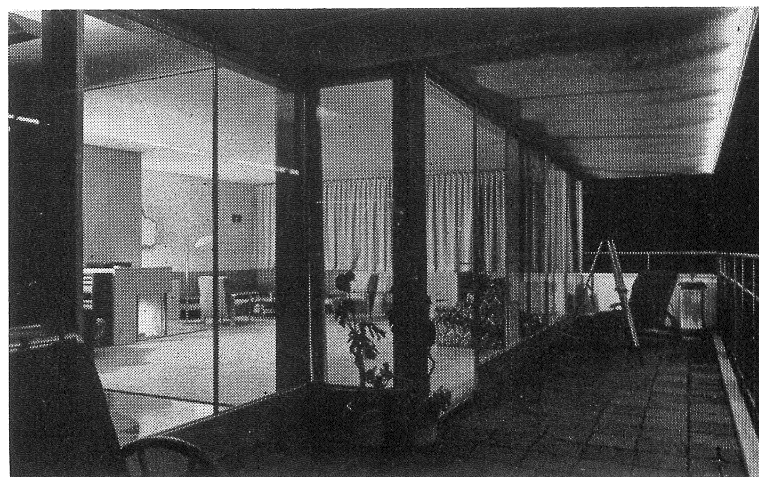
of building: al fresco from plaster, Sumero-Babylonian sculpture from glazed terra cotta, Egyptian flat reliefs from hard porphyry. New architecture deals with spun glass, pressed wood pulp, blasted rock, translucent colored plastics, metallurgical miracles of stainless metals, anodical plating, metal films, rolled an extruded metal sections, internally glowing vacuum tubes, hard and spongy rubber, and a thousand other items of inspiring material specification.

The movement of abstract design freely and enthusiastically helps itself from this treasure which the nature-imitating artist, working in a representational manner, by necessity must and did ignore.

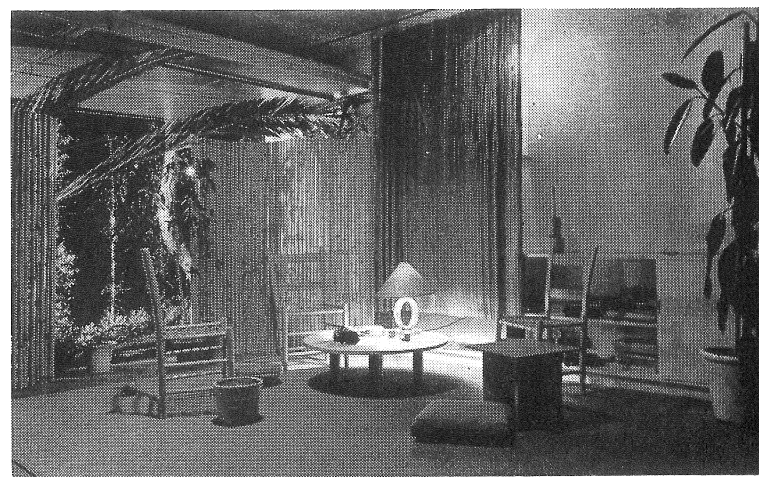
It exhibits the most affirmative attitude toward these striking potentialities in new architectural spaces and materials, and so it will realize the values of a thorough integration of contemporary art into architectural background. Abstract design, heretofore "free" art in the sense that it was unattached to any tasks of wider proportions, is groping for a broad frame of reference, which contemporary building must and can supply.

If there is such a movement, it is young, and still, no doubt, in its experimental stage. Like art in all periods of the past, and perhaps more so, it is beset with the danger of being channelled off into mere decoration and a tiring play of fashion.

The contemporary architect can do more for his fellows, the other artists, than many of them seem to sense at the moment. He sets a new stage for them, and he can position and define problems, so that a common audience will awaken to the need for solution.



Balcony over the San Francisco Bay



Above: Playroom looking out

Below: California apartment house

