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Interview with Richard J. Neutra

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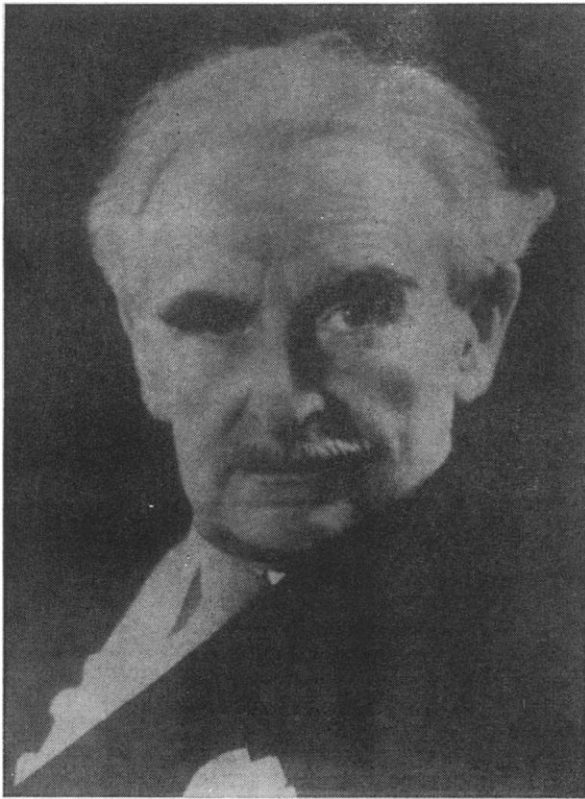
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Interview with Richard J. Neutra

THIS INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD NEUTRA WAS RECORDED ON TAPE BY RAJAT NEOGY. IT HAS BEEN EDITED AND IS PRESENTED HERE IN THE FORM OF A CONTINUOUS NARRATIVE.

A NOTE ON NEUTRA

Richard J. Neutra is one of the great personalities who fought for modern architecture in America during the twenties and thirties. Not as well-known as Frank Lloyd Wright, who was twenty years older, he is cast in the same mould: architect, teacher, philosopher and publicist. The battle they fought was long and hard, and those, like Neutra, who believed in buildings designed for their own time with simple forms to enclose space without irrelevant ornament, had to suffer many disappointments when public opinion favoured sham gothic or colonial buildings. In the end the architects won: the elegance and sheer excitement of their buildings, together with their own advocacy, eventually made the majority of Americans realise that in the 20th century only 20th century buildings would do. Particularly in California, the way the new houses became part of the garden or patio complemented and helped to create a new way of living.

By 1927, before Mies van der Rohe designed the Barcelona Pavilion or Le Corbusier the villa Garches, Neutra had built the Lovell house on a Californian hillside. This house with others he designed at that time was a forerunner of the characteristic buildings of modern architecture: white walled with long horizontal bands of continuous windows and simple taut forms, seeming to float over the ground on thin columns. Historically, therefore, Neutra is among the giants of 20th century architecture, as an early exponent of what was later known as the International Style, and one who refined and polished its precepts over the years. Like Mies van der Rohe, Neutra has remained faithful to the design principles he helped to instigate in the early twenties and since that time has designed in basically the same style.

Neutra's place in the history of architecture is secured by the houses he built in California in 1925 to 1950, but his interests now, as this interview will show, seem to be more as a philosopher and a humanist, deeply concerned about man, the individual, and biological organism living in an increasingly complex and even hostile environment. This interest in people has drawn him to town planning and low-cost housing schemes in various parts of the world, and these, like his individual buildings, have been carried out with careful respect for the individual's physiological needs.

Neutra's interests and his contribution are so wide that he is difficult to analyse, so that one picks out aspects which are personally relevant: To me, Neutra's conception of the way that a building or a room totally controls and surrounds the individual is important: that a human being evaluates and appreciates the space around him with all his senses; not only sight, but sound helps to make clear the size and proportion of a space and the nature of the surfaces; the entire surface of his skin tells him about the ventilation, temperature and humidity; the smell of a room as well as its acoustic quality are part of the impact that everybody feels in buildings but few analyse. Neutra has said, "The designer is often seen as a man who cleverly meets practical problems and embellishes his solutions by a few applications of his aesthetic acumen. But the designer deals primarily with nervous systems."

RICHARD HUGHES

I

am an architect, and I decided very early that modern architecture, contemporary architecture would be one with modern urbanism and planning, which would consider the human setting in the light, in the illumination of current human biology, or biology in general. If we do not do that we cannot say that we are architects of today. I am sure that if Leonardo da Vinci were present in this room he would immediately agree with me because he was the man who would get very much involved in the Renaissance fashion in connecting service to human beings with knowledge of what human beings are on current terms. He would make his own post mortems: after playing the lute to 12 o'clock at night in the Sforza palace of the Prince of Milan, he would go home and, against the will of the Church and the police, he would make a few post mortems before going to bed. We don't need to do this today because in the last year about 98,000 papers have been published between Moscow and New York about human biology, and most of these have been first rate papers, without reckoning any minor ones, and all this knowledge should feed into designing human setting of this day and age. We could not do this according to the post mortems of Leonardo and we certainly could not follow Aristotle because we rather use Corinthian caps on our columns than disregard what is known today in all sorts of pertinent sciences from animal behaviour, social psychology, and by behaviourists in all fields today who have observed things and know all kinds of at least theoretical and partial explanations why this high evolution progresses.

I believe very strongly that we are probably precipitating a revolution of the human brain with all our technical means because we are pressuring and stimulating the human brain, and I think here we come to connect with the problem of where the species originally came from. We know now that it is probably East Africa and not Southern Asia. What is being presented here is a basis for understanding how evolution is following behaviour, and that behaviour is not an initiative phenomenon but on the contrary is an outcome of an infinite causality or ecology effective around the species—in turn developing—especially the chance individual from which the mutations and deviations all stem to engender further evolution.

Here we come to the problem of the significance of the individual, which has been so overrun by standardisation and an industrial civilisation's economics, that make standardisation necessary. It looks (when I go through all the communist and other industrialized countries) as if this was the time when the individual will be trampled down. Nevertheless, it is just the time when the individual in this post-Darwinian age has received the greatest scientific observation. I need mention only Nobel Prize winner Roger Williams who recently sent me his newest manuscript: he has been famous for his studies of biochemical individuality and many other phases of "biological individuality". There is no doubt that by suppressing or neutralising individuality, evolution would be brought to a dead

stop, and that is certainly neither possible nor nature's intent. It certainly cannot be the intention of a designing human race. We surely need evolution. We need it badly, because we are producing artificial and synthetic situations which call for colossal adaptation not only during the life-span but also new mutations to fit, let us say, the new densities. We use this rather idiotic expression "population explosion", but there is no explosion, of course, in getting babies. "Population explosion" is a very wrong description. "Explosions" are distributing matter and not densifying matter. But what we have to face now as the architects of the next 500 or 5,000 years will be colossal densification such as has been progressing and approaching the last, let us say, 50,000 years, and certainly since the first beginning of agriculture when population densities could be increased and increased and increased. Now scientifically and technologically speaking starvation limits of the planetary population are out of sight.

But we are coming to times when we shall have to provide biological satisfaction, let us say, to a person strapped into an astronaut's capsule; *in the smallest possible space* we shall have to keep him alive so that when he comes back from Mars after 2½ months of flying and being strapped in, he is still in a shape to grin, show his dentures before the television cameras, and tell the story. Otherwise there is no use in spending several billion dollars to rocket him there.

The idea is that we want to have technological advance paralleled, even sifted and screened, by biological insights. Otherwise it is not going to work. Everything is done for and with human material as our organic basis. We cannot and must not ignore the occupant, the living inhabitant.

* * *

I have given here some reasonings of the Richard J. Neutra Institute, that the human setting of tomorrow will not be governed by rampant stylistic and formalistic production of imitations of or borrowings from sensational magazines which are circulated with the idea to have a new issue every month and to be able to compete with other magazines in sensationalism so that they can keep up the advertising rate per inch or per line. For that purpose the editorial department of the magazine has to watch out to remain sufficiently sensational! Photographic sensation is how we mostly experience selected fragments of human setting and especially architecture.

When I lectured in Athens recently to 2,000 people the editor of the magazine *Architectonik* was sitting in the second row, and I said, "You are lucky, Mr. Kitzikis, that you publish this magazine now and not in the 5th century B.C., or you would have brought out one issue every century. Now you can bring out one issue every month, and have 28 pages of advertising to finance it, which was not possible at the time of Pericles when people and architecture made progress, fantastic progress, but without even a chance to have 28 pages of advertising, or a sensation of zigzag or curvaceousness with every Doric temple."

What was the progress? The progress there was of subtle detail improvement so that a temple like the

Parthenon looked surely very different from another Doric temple of fifteen years earlier. Of any audience, when you speak in a big hall in Athens, 30 per cent are always archaeologists, so I could readily get witnesses to what I say, that these particular kinds of progress were tiny but sensational. They were so subtle and so finely detailed, with columns tilted $1\frac{1}{2}$ degrees here and the next one $2\frac{1}{4}$ degrees and so on, with 35 mm intercolumn increase here and 26 mm there, and the floor in the middle 40 cm higher than at the four corners of the temple. All these subtleties are known today, measured and marvelled at, and the gentlemen in the hall knew about it. Old Vitruvius, a Roman slave of the Augustan age, had no idea he was just designing a text-book for the architectural schools of 2,000 years later.

Now,

if this is so, you can see that progress *can* be colossal and yet not in an American way. In our civilisation you have the famous quantitative approach and you think that everything is average and proportionate. In order to be doubly good you have to be doubly big, or something like that. If you figure all architecture just in shillings per square foot or cubit foot; and if the whole progress in Soviet architecture consists of claiming "last year we built four million cubic metres more and brought down the cost per housing unit $8\frac{3}{4}$ per cent although we added two electric outlets per kitchen;" if this is our way around the globe to gauge progress, we are completely out on a physiological limb.

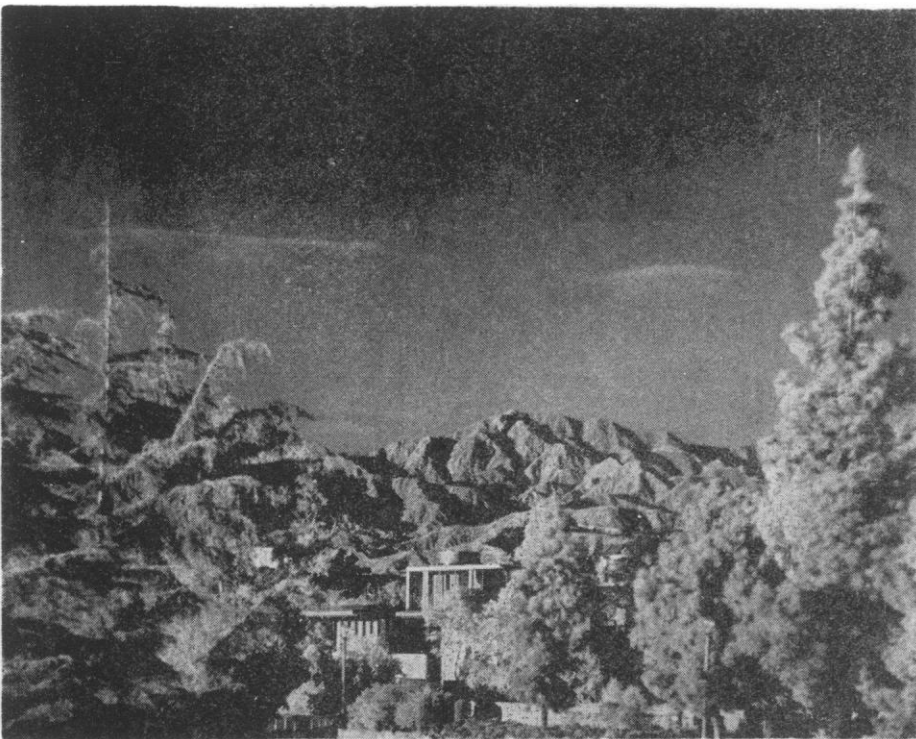
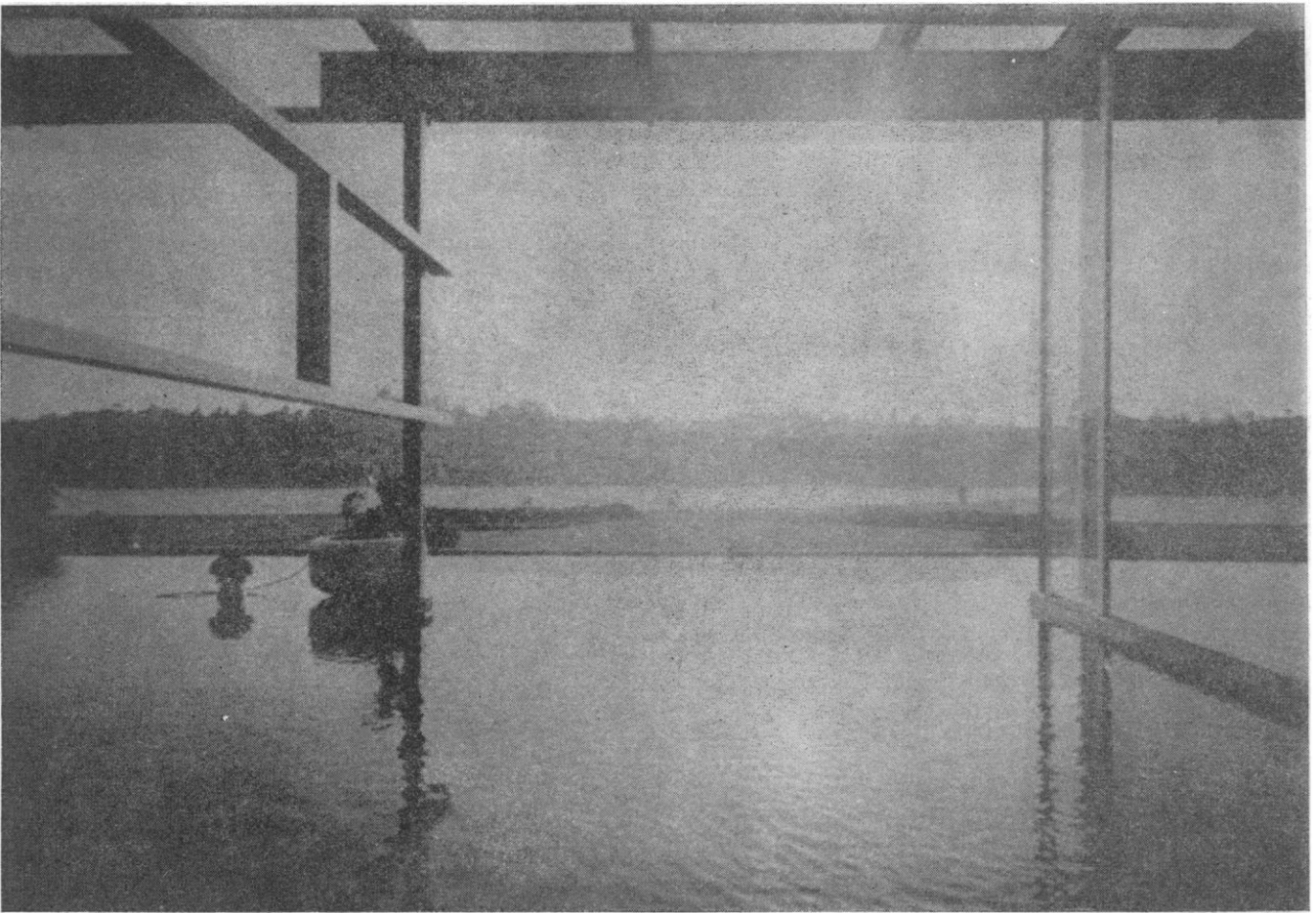
I have thought there was often an inverse proportion between stimuli and effective responses. For instance, if the differences or deviations are very minor then the responses and the reactions become not only bigger, they even become sometimes alarming. Suppose you go into an old building where the beams are starting to rot over the floor. You come to a place where there is a certain dip of $1\frac{1}{2}$ degrees slant; you cannot *see* it, stereognostically it is not recordable, but immediately you have alarm in your vestibulum, in your inner ear sense. You sense that you move out of the level. You don't know where you are out of the level but you have a reaction almost of fright because you know that you had no martini. This is very alarming; just like if you suddenly drive at night and you cannot sharply articulate; if you don't see clearly you are utterly shaken and step on the brake. My explanation, for which I have no scientific proofs, is that in such a case the very subtle defectiveness of sensorial input spells a sudden doubt in your own sense reception. You think something has gone wrong organically. If you know you definitely had no martini, then maybe you are going to have a brain stroke in the next second because something is evidently wrong. You can see that that floor is not dipping and yet . . . ! It is similar if you are on a boat, which starts slowly, almost imperceptibly, going up and down; such minimal effects are very much more disturbing than a terrible rocking of the boat. If you walk up

a ramp of 15 degrees you would not be alarmed at all; but you *are* alarmed if the ramp is only $1\frac{1}{2}$ degrees!

Now, this is putting practically into reverse the quantitative approach which has been the basis of science for at least 200 years. It does not go far back into all human history. On the contrary, when the human race emerged it was for endless periods hardly motivated by a numerical approach to happiness or misery; as a matter of fact quantity and counting is quite a recent thing in anthropological perspective. There are still some Trobriand islanders who cannot count more than three; they are very happy people, their women are well dressed and good looking; their villages look so good that you would be advised to take 36 rolls of Kodachrome films along when you make the trip for \$924.50 for a package vacation in the Trobriand islands. You then come back and show these films of the "primitives" in America where we have foul looking boulevards running into the most swanky suburbs. You may ask how can these boulevards look like this, and you promptly get a quantitative answer. Every damn "taxpayer", everything of real estate, along this boulevard is explained to you in dollars and cents, and neglect and shoddiness is interpreted entirely logically and in keeping with the ideas of the leading banks of that town. So you see, you come from the Trobriand islands which you paid \$924 to see, with all these Kodachromes to show that these people are happy and have no numerical explanations at all how they do it. How did it happen? How did they become shepherds if they cannot count? Don't they lose all the sheep? But no! They don't lose the sheep. They have quantity impressions, but they don't *count* the sheep when they bring them home in the evening. They know immediately that there is one of seventy two sheep lacking! *We* should have to go laboriously and start counting them.

We

have the ideas of the most advanced education-
alist in Western Europe, Dr. Martin Rang, who dis-
cussed very often whether or not we can and perhaps
do ruin an American child's brain quite a lot by introduc-
ing new mathematics at such and such an age, or at
some other age. When do you actually start, or *should*
you start counting? When can you ruin a whole civi-
lisation by numericalism, by geometricism and so
forth? You are very proud that this child when it is
four years old can already count. And there are even
children who can draw square roots when they are five
years old, and this is considered a wonder, maybe a
miracle. But the question is whether it is a wholesome
miracle or a devilish miracle. That is the decisive question.
I imagine that you could raise children with goulash
sauce instead of with mother's milk, but the question
remains, what is finally the effect of this in the long
run when these children grow up? This would have to
be tested. When the child survives, you take a bow and
say, "Look, here is the goulash sauce and it took it,"
but this performance is not convincing to me.



TWO VIEWS OF THE RICHARD NEUTRA INSTITUTE (ALSO KNOWN AS THE V.D.L. RESEARCH HOUSE, FOR VAN DER LEEUW, A DUTCH INDUSTRIALIST) AT SILVERLAKE, LOS ANGELES. TOP PICTURE SHOWS A NEUTRA INNOVATION, USING A "LAKE" OR WATER RESERVOIR TO MIRROR CLOUDS AND DISTANT MOUNTAINS, AND TO CREATE SPACIOUSNESS AND PRIVACY IN THE CENTRE OF AN URBAN COMPLEX WITH A POPULATION OF 7½ MILLIONS. ALTHOUGH ITS LINES AND DESIGN WOULD SUGGEST IT IS A NEW BUILDING IT WAS IN FACT BUILT IN 1932, MORE THAN A GENERATION AGO.

Now it all comes to this. Are we on the right track? Do we teach the right thing in the planning department or the architectural department of our university, or even in the elementary curriculum of our schools? Are these people really modern teachers who don't know anything of human biology, don't know where the species comes from, how it was formed, moulded and grew in its nervous make up, how the senses work, through which we have an immense intake every living moment? They still believe there are five senses, though biologists have discovered every two weeks a new sense or sense modality, and they know all about the complexes of what we call vision that has at least five or six senses in a package. As a matter of fact there are many more contributing factors in vision. There are two stereognastically tuned together eyes. There is much to study of the relation of photostopy to the articulation of *seeing forms* and outlines by means of nine fast oscillations of the eyeball per second so that each light ray may hit the adjacent receptors on the retina. And so much could be related, especially of effects breaking into the night vision, the particularly sensed black and white vision, which all of us are offending by neon tubes glowing red right into the night picture. Our eyes, nerves, brains suffer here because such a conflict of colour and night vision has never had any precedent in nature in the last 500 million years, except perhaps when a volcano erupts on a South Sea island. But are these damaging things permissible from the legislative point of view, any more than to dig a well and a cesspool in the same place? Because we knew of Pasteur seeing some paratyphoid bacteria under the microscope, we have had to have legislation that separates a cesspool from a well by 60 feet. Even in Manila this was passed eight years ago, just 90 years after Pasteur! His microbiotic research, strange to all previous insights of human history, has slowly but impressively reached popularity.

I will tell you a story to give you the idea. When I was a boy everybody in Europe knew that Russia was the most slovenly country, the most dirty place in the world. Now, a few months ago I was in Moscow, being driven in a car by a man who could not speak one word of English; we went to have lunch and went first into a washroom. The driver washed his hands and looked at the towel hanging there. Grinning, he pointed to it and said, "Microbes." Every person in Moscow today is aware that Pasteur discovered microbes! My Russian friend made some sign showing me that there should be some hot air coming out of the wall where he would dry his hands safely because he was surely not going to dry his hands on that towel. He shook his head and we both had a common laugh about the old-fashioned towel.

In Tokyo you can see all kinds of people running around with masks over their noses because they think they will avoid infection by breathing.

From all this it is clear that information on pathology or biological insight can become popular against a lot of ideas, and legislation can even be brought through. Microbes at least have now been recognised widely. But in the 14th century 78 per cent of the total of Europe's population died of the plague. There were various futile schemes of protection or explanations

given for it: there was supposed to be some fabulous animal sitting at the bottom of the well, or there were not sufficient Jews killed in the ghetto. But nevertheless the best Christians all kept dying and there were not enough hands to bury the dead.

Today we have proofs of certain microbiotic pathology and we know something can be done about it. The research is never fully completed, even today: there are doubts about how the plague can be controlled or contained, but at any rate you cannot work on 14th century assumptions. You cannot believe today in assumptions and insights which have been superseded by current proofs and research.

The idea of the Richard J. Neutra Institute is that the design of human setting for all human activities, whether it is rest, or elementary school, kindergarten or university campus, or production, or whatever it is, must have a sound basis in biology.

Consider

the people in a bus travelling from the breakfast table to the elevator lobby of the building where they will spend their working hours. That bus, for instance, may make a turn of say 35 foot radius to the kerb every two blocks to load in some more strap-hangers who are leaning against the lady next to them. There is a terrific humidity content, an almost intolerable heat, an ionization index which is most questionable, a disproportionate gas tension in the atmosphere which kills during one such bus journey perhaps 60,000 to 80,000 neurons that are not regenerative. All these things and more have to be known, with ever more helpful accuracy. Yet we have not spent one dollar to apply the knowledge which is already in existence. I am not speaking of something in the future. This information is actually all in existence; you can find it in your library right here, in the Medical Library of Makerere University.

Most useful sectors of this information are in existence, but are they used? When we plan cities or buildings all we know is that this structure or building is going to cost half a shilling more per square foot and the World Bank in Washington thinks it should cost just so many shillings per square or cubic foot. Is this the way we are to design the human setting? The stage of tomorrow's humanity, of its future health functioning must have better informed stage designers!

What

especially has this to do with the developing countries? If I wanted to publish a whole series of articles about port cities and harbours, which play such a great role in our economic life, where could I best engage in exemplary action? If I had the idea that I wanted to change New York's harbour, to get

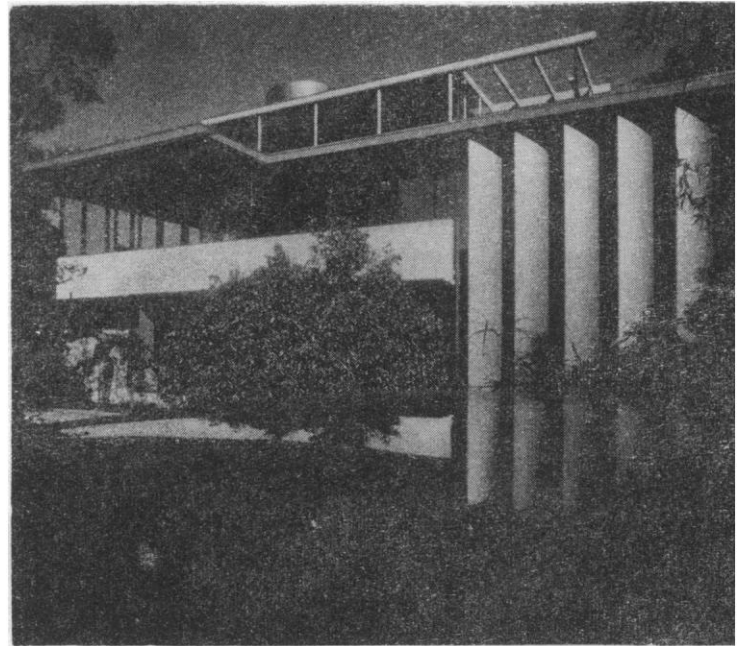
my first foot-hold with the New York Port Authority would take me twelve years! But having one cocktail with Dr. Nkrumah in his house near Kumasi, when he was in power, and just talking a bit about Tema the new port of Ghana, I could get started in one afternoon. This gives you in a much simplified way the idea why the developing countries are the logically promising place to start anything. I have been trying to explain in Washington that in addition to saying we are very generous to give Uganda this, or that, or the A.I.D. is going to finance this because we want to show you that we are nice people and do-gooders, instead of all this, and in addition to it, we can try out all our knowledge right here in Uganda, as if it was a most instructive laboratory. Building pre-fabricated exemplary rural schools at a price which local people may not know how to plan for, I, for instance, conceptualized and introduced in Mexico, and as a result there are almost 20,000 rural schools of this nature there today. They are perhaps not quite as I would like to see them, but they are amazing and have been finished by the labour of local peasants trained for this purpose. All is provided for this, and there is for example, the Pan American Union, which does its related constructive researches at The University of Bogota, Colombia which also influences preparation of rural housing for all of South America's really starving population, people who had no money to pay, and no possible economic contractor to do it. All these places and projects are really like laboratories for us. We can do there much more than we can do experimentally at home. This can be simply explained: firstly wages were much lower in Africa, and the whole process much easier. Secondly, there is not so much vested interest hemming you in when you endeavour to realize progress in a more or less virginal area, not in the middle of Manhattan or Brussels.

It is similar with *Transition*, which is a wonderful magazine; I think that *Transition* is probably better and more manageable in the emerging continent of Africa than it would be in the centres and countries of advanced age.

It is the point of view of the Richard Neutra Institute to apply all these considerations which I talked about especially the biological sifting and screening of precipitously advancing technology and industrialism. We try to do it against the least resistances and where there are perhaps promising factors to favour it.

You

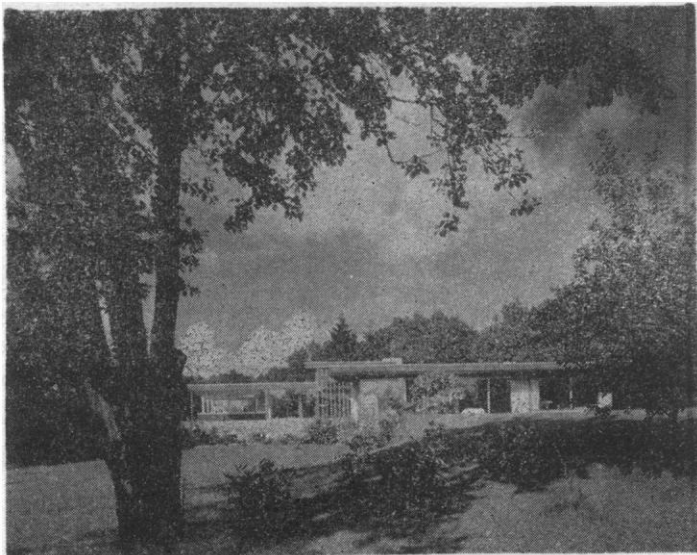
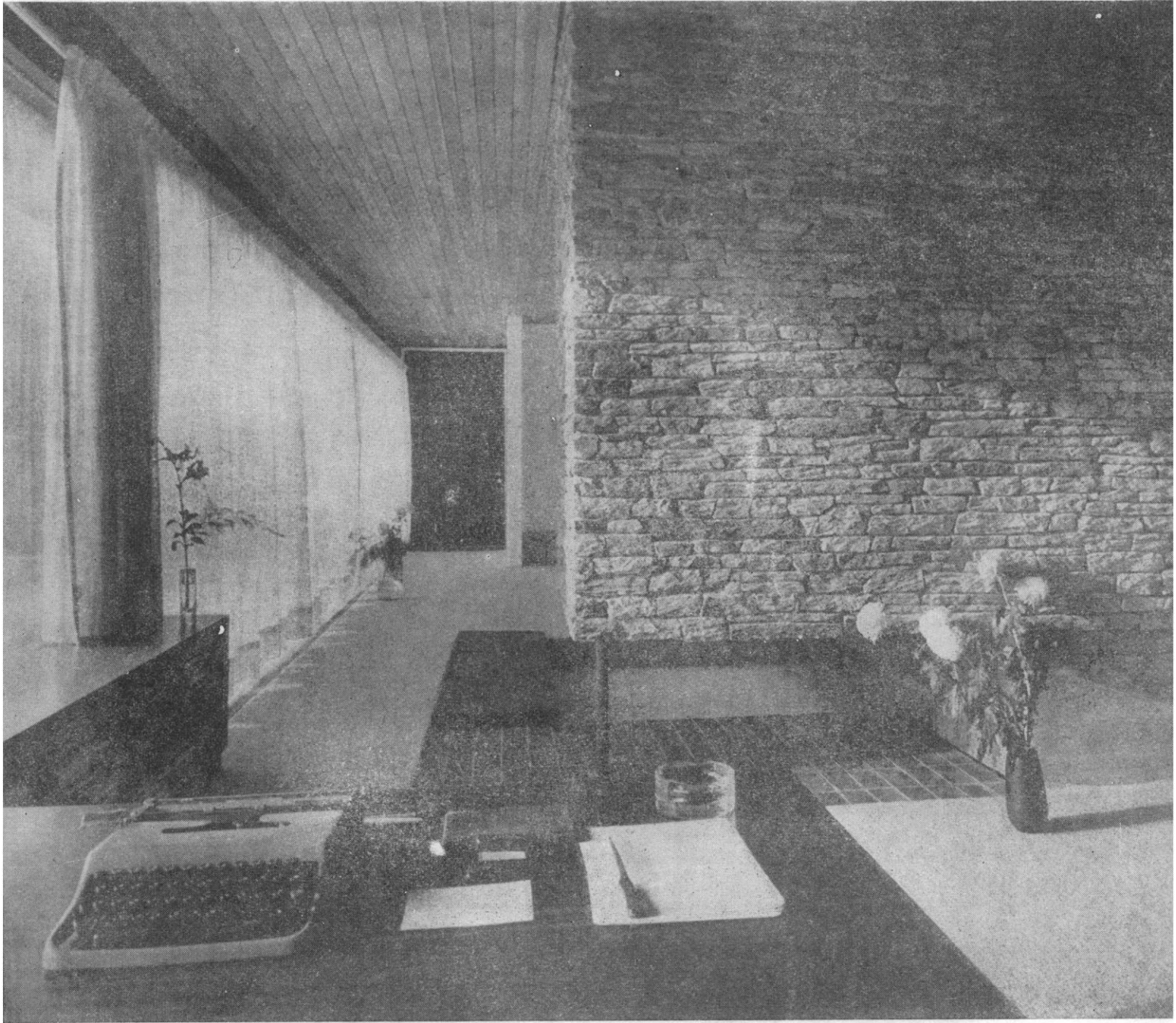
say you would like some of my views on houses? Well, I think what is wrong commonly and basically is the idea that such a thing as spaciousness is a matter of square feet. I can show you that with half the square footage I can produce a response and a reaction which other people call and recognise as satisfaction about spaciousness. So, the geometric approach, or the numeric approach, as I have already hinted, are completely wrong. In South Africa, in Johannesburg, they are allowing for a Bantu house of the sub-economic type, a lot of 40 by 70 feet. There are many critics, of course,



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE NEUTRA INSTITUTE. FEW VISITORS REALISE THAT THE ENTIRE BUILDING IS BUILT ON AN AREA OF 60 BY 70 FEET. "SPACIOUSNESS," SAYS NEUTRA, "IS NOT A MATTER OF SQUARE FEET."

who say that the South African Government is just ridiculously restricting these people. Something has to be done to open the eyes of such innocent critics. In reality, I have built for *three* families of a very much higher standard of living on a plot not much more than 60 by 70 feet! I did it for people who have very great requirements as to privacy, as to distance accommodation of their eyes, who are daily engaged many hours in fatiguing work. I did it for metropolitan people who wish to recapture a very close relationship to nature and to organic growth which yields all the dynamisms of environment you need and crave. From this alone you can see to your satisfaction that the principle of just running around with a measuring stick is wrong. On the other hand I can show you what is wrong with these Bantu houses. It is how they are placed and circumplanted. I can interpret why these people if you give them two fruit trees would not continue with their planting, would not maintain such planting. Also they spend on a house which costs 250 Rands, 210 Rands on furnishing! This makes every room look considerably smaller, more cramped and dwarfed than it is, because they must get this furniture sold to them as a status symbol. They have to do this because they want to feel like white people. Lots of explanations are given except the one that not the slightest thought has been given how to handle interior space. I have known Albert Einstein personally, and I have talked to him about psychological spaciousness. His mathematical concept about space-time does not apply here. The question here is not one of mathematical physics. What is space to us, psychosomatically, physiologically speaking? It is indeed a question of physiological responses. If you get *the feeling of a colossal, rich experience*,

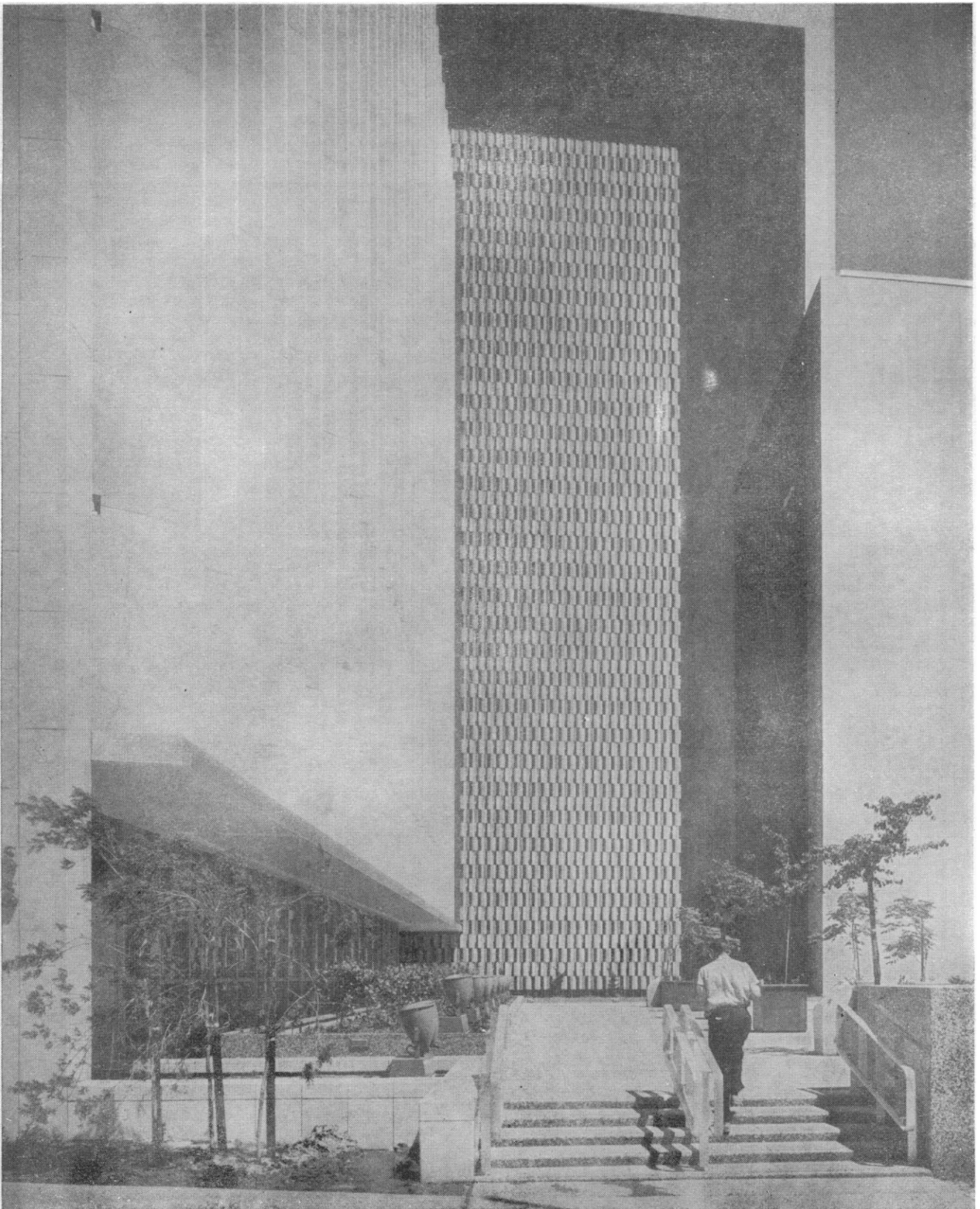
Continued on page 31



HOUSE OF DR. MARTIN RANG, A EUROPEAN EDUCATIONALIST, SET ON A LARGE PROPERTY IN A HILLY PLATEAU SURROUNDED BY WOODS IN THE TANUS MOUNTAINS AREA NEAR FRANKFURT-ON-MAIN, GERMANY. PICTURES AT LEFT AND RIGHT SHOW INTERIORS: STUDY AND BATHROOM WITH SUNKEN BATH. PICTURE AT BOTTOM LEFT SHOWS SURROUNDINGS. NEUTRA DESIGNED THE HOUSE TO ALLOW FOR A SENSE OF OPENNESS AND WARMTH SUGGESTIVE OF A MEDITERRANEAN OR PACIFIC COAST SETTING. "PHOENICIANS, NORWEGIANS, MALAYANS AND OTHERS SAILED AND MIGRATED MANY HUNDREDS AND THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO BREAKING REGIONAL BOUNDARIES, LONG BEFORE TODAY'S AIRLINE SCHEDULES, WHICH MAKE EVERYBODY A NEIGHBOUR."

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS ILLUSTRATING THIS INTERVIEW SHOW BUILDINGS OF RICHARD J. NEUTRA, WITH COLLABORATING COLLEAGUES. HIS SON AND PARTNER IS DION NEUTRA.





LOS ANGELES HALL OF RECORDS. NEUTRA REGARDS THIS 12 MILLION DOLLAR BUILDING, HOUSING ARCHIVES AND CITY RECORDS, AS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT BUILDING DESIGN IN HIS CITY. THE ALUMINIUM LOUVERS (SEEN ON LEFT OF PICTURE) ARE 120 FEET HIGH AND COMPENSATE, BY THEIR STEADY TURNING MOVEMENT, FOR THE ROTATION OF THE EARTH. AN ELECTRONIC EYE ON THE ROOF REGULATES THE ADJUSTMENTS TO THE BATTERY OF VERTICAL BLINDS SO THAT OCCUPANTS INSIDE THE BUILDING ALWAYS WORK IN A RESTFUL DIFFUSED LIGHT. COVER PHOTOGRAPH OF THIS ISSUE SHOWS ANOTHER VIEW OF THE BUILDING.

you have always also *the feeling of a large stage on which this experience has been acquired*, has played, to penetrate our organic being.

The same holds true, incidentally, with time. When you go through the Headquarters of the Richard Neutra Institute in Los Angeles, not only you but the 100,000 people who have gone there, all have the feeling that it is much "larger" than it is because you are "measuring" space and time (for you also have the feeling of having spent much time there) differently from a surveyor or geometer because it is all so loaded with experience. You are startled when you finally hear that this whole place is within 60 by 70 feet. You do not believe it, but it can be shown to you—afterwards you can take your measuring stick and measure it.

The

first thing to recognise is that we are working really for our organic human responses, re-actions of not only a nervous system but our whole cluster of organic responses, and we thus live and react every fraction of a second. The main book I have written is called *Survival Through Design*. We shall have to survive by design and not by natural adaptation because there is no time for adaptation in our technological rush and advance. Remember I was telling you that the neon signs have this gravely damaging effect, but they are only fifteen years old. It may be possible to make an adjustment of your organic equipment, perhaps even a revolutionary development whereby you can stand glowing red before a black background, but this will take something, I estimate, like 200,000 years! But now you are required to do it immediately. So instead you go to pieces. That is why we have 18,000,000 know-how Americans cooling their too hot heels in psychiatric waiting rooms annually. You just wonder how they all found a place to park their cars to get to this psychiatric waiting room, but they *didn't* find a place to park their cars and that is why their nervous system is so disturbed! There are a lot of improvements possible on brimful freeways, in subways, or in that crowded bus making these short turns so that you arrive at your elevator lobby with about 28% less vitality than you had when you were at home having breakfast! Now from a human engineering angle it would be as interesting to do something for you and fifty million other commuters as for this astronaut, who we still hope will reach the moon.

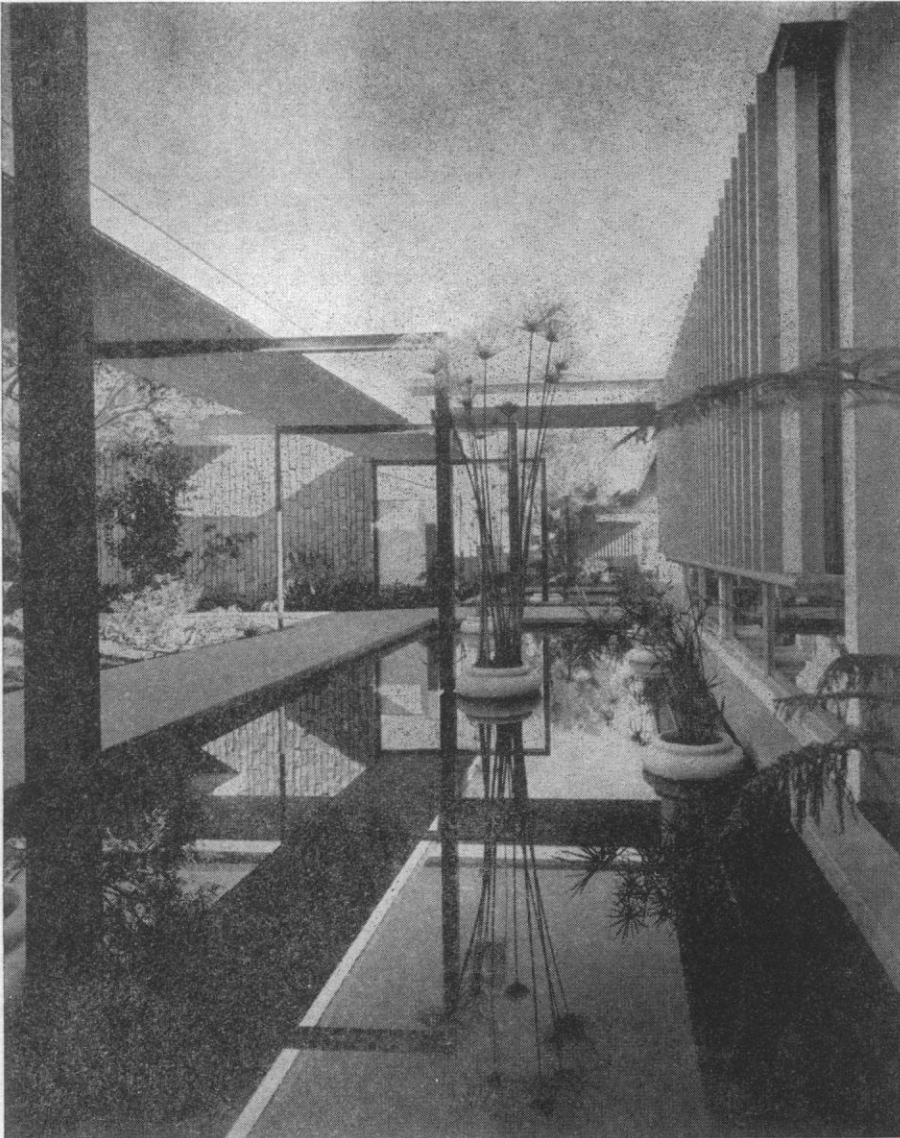
Considering

all this, we have not to spend our touristic vacation "in the wilds" but rather in the ecological order of nature where everything is completely equilibrated and balanced. This is the interesting part of a visit into the nature preserves of Uganda or East Africa, and it should by no means be advertised as being a vacation in "the wilds". In fact the wilds are in the centre of Nairobi and Manhattan. They are not at all in the nature park where there has been order for

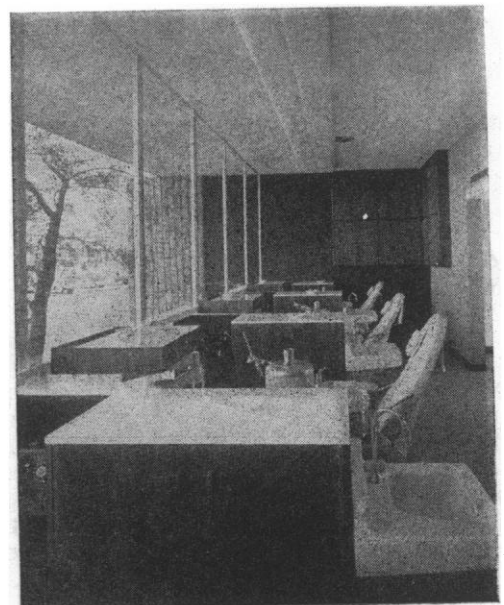
100,000 years. "The wilds" is a completely wrong nomenclature for advertising and it is a completely wrong approach to make a guidebook for the tourist or explain to him what he is going to see. The interesting part is first of all the *whole* landscape—though not in the village with Australian eucalyptus trees around, and corrugated sheet metal from England on the roofs. It is in itself a striking experience to see the botany suit the geology; and then you see how all these animals seem to fit in. No doubt they live on each other but the whole balance is such that the species survive, evidently always in an alerted manner. But I would not say that they give the impression of being nervous wrecks, these zebras or wildebeestes. They are auditive extremely sensitive. When I was in North Natal at a hide, I just coughed a little and all the zebras at 200 feet distance just started galloping away: they were very alerted, but I didn't get the impression that they were neurasthenic or hysterical as we are, or that they would have to be brought to a psychiatric clinic.

As

a young man I was often in and out of the house of Professor Sigmund Freud—you know that I am from Vienna. I was a young man then, and Anna Freud, the great child psychologist today in London was at that time fourteen years old. There was his grand group of followers from Jung to Rank and Adler, all in those days at his house, all still peaceful disciples. I would mention to him that I wanted to be an architect. I was studying architecture because I thought the environmental impact was so vital, and I was convinced, of course, with my study. I could do decisive things for the human setting. I would tell him I had read William Wundt who wrote in 1868 on physiological psychology, in Leipzig. Professor Freud would only smile, because to him the formative and moulding influences of a human mind were primarily human relations: when you were growing up the way that your dad treated you at 2½ years old, and whatever else happened in your family circle, was more important than whether you grew up in the palace of a Maharajah or in a slum. This seemed his attitude and of course it is rather well expressed in his writings. I, on the other hand, could not possibly study architecture if I were to subscribe to this view. So I would say this as an answer: let us take a most intimate human relation, a primary human relationship which may be formative. For instance, let us consider a baby held by the mother on her arm. Let us note how it is supported with her right palm at its bottom while her left lower arm tenderly supports the shoulder girdle, and also the baby's head a little. She starts suckling it—this kind of relationship of a mother suckling a baby I would consider a very self-dependent primary thing. Well, you put her into a test chamber and raise the temperature by ten degrees centigrade, double the humidity content of that chamber, and you watch her. You will see that both the child and the mother are going to show changes. Then you raise again the temperature by ten degrees centigrade and again double the humidity content. You will come to a point where you see this baby fall off the nipple, and the mother is not even going to notice it.



THE MARINER MEDICAL ARTS BUILDING. PICTURE ABOVE SHOWS ENTRANCE INTO THE CLINIC. AT RIGHT IS A DENTAL CLINIC. WELL DESIGNED CLINICS, SAYS NEUTRA, MAKE FOR MORE RESTFUL PATIENTS. BEAUTY CAN OFTEN BE "NERVE-COMFORTING".



The idea that man is individually or in a social group apart from his environment and independent of it is just a naive Stoic assumption. It is so naive that you wonder how Stoicism ever succeeded, or how such nonsense could have been called philosophy. Of course one of the greatest Stoics was an Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. He had a wonderful palace and a protective body-guard. He thought and expressed that everything outside had no influence on him—he was a philosopher. As a doctor he had no lesser man than Galenus, the father of late antique and medieval medicine. I think it must be a wonderful thing for a medical practitioner to be the doctor of an emperor who is a Stoic. You can do anything and he will absolutely not yell or respond drastically to any treatment.

It

is really interesting to consider how human brains will take all kinds of continued conditionings, and it is interesting that brains which are more developed, like the human one, do this more. Evidently simple or lower mammals have not the same ability to go through such interesting cerebral gyrations as humans have done.

Now, speaking of catacombs, today practically all churches which I have lately seen, from Finland to Zululand (I just visited a Catholic church built eighty miles north of Durban, Natal), are full of mystic make-up; even Catholic churches are just imitating catacomb environments like those Callisto caves. Le Corbusier's Ronchamp, if one may say so, is the classic example, and he really overwhelmed everybody on earth, it seems, with this romantic mystic view of what a Catholic church can look like. It has two very differently styled pulpits for preaching, it has various sorts of "ancient" apsidical rounds, and thick heavy walls, as if it all was built over a period of 400 years, though all of it was designed in the same week and built from one set of blueprints. The whole thing looks like a charming conglomeration fused over many years, and always carried on by some unskilled peasants, though actually it was built by a general contractor or the crews of today's entrepreneurs. Now religion in our day has taken on this kind of romantic shape and it doesn't make much difference whether it is a Lutheran, an Anglican or a Catholic church; so many of them tend to the same kind of theatrical setting for religion and to mysterious illumination or "free", accidental, unsymmetrical layout, a thing which misfits an old established liturgy like the Catholic one. Even in the prolific Barocco style which started with the counter-Reformation, all the churches of this period are liturgically extremely correct, and in principle suggest a rigid ritual rather than the whims of some stage designer.

Religion, like any other profound attitude, holds faith in lastingness of values and basically our human species has in all its organic psychosomatic make-up much that lasts.

Los Angeles

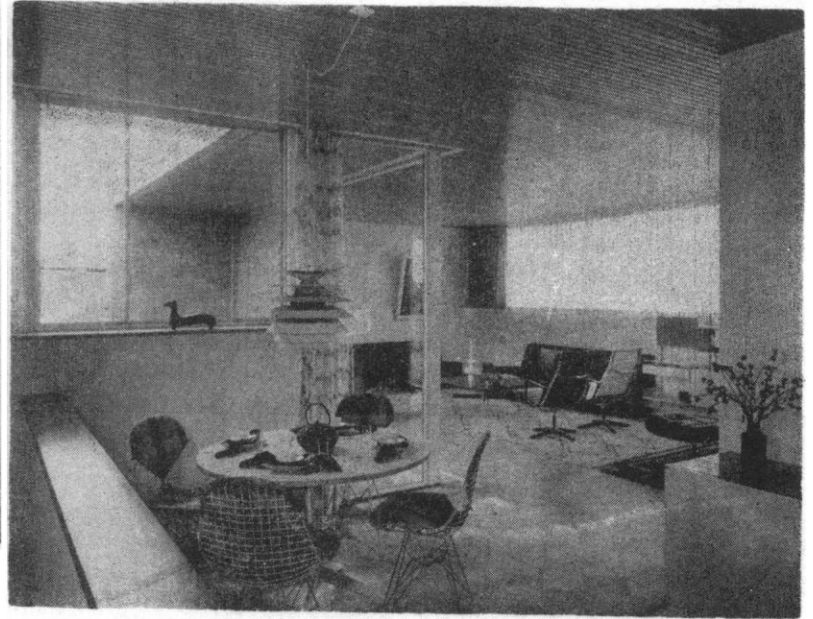
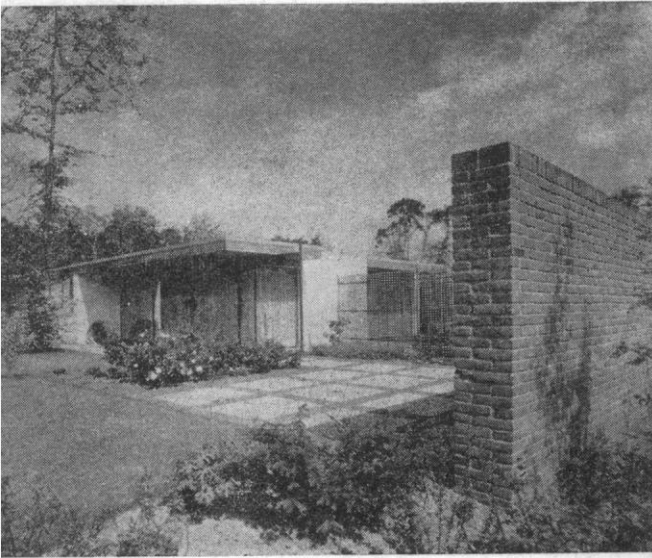
seems a place where everything was possible, and yet California with a nice climatic region

is at the same time so close to certain parts of East Africa where long ago mankind took its start. It is an interesting place. It is not only a mild climatic region like the original country of the human species, but it is also a place without native population, where everybody is in a big melting pot and you cannot find the grass roots. Therefore a person like me could succeed with the aspiration to tackle a renovation of the human setting. If I were to have tried the same thing in Hartford, Connecticut, I am sure I would not have succeeded in one lifetime. As California is "a development country" in that sense one can do certain things there which could not be done "in the old country", as immigrants used to say in America.

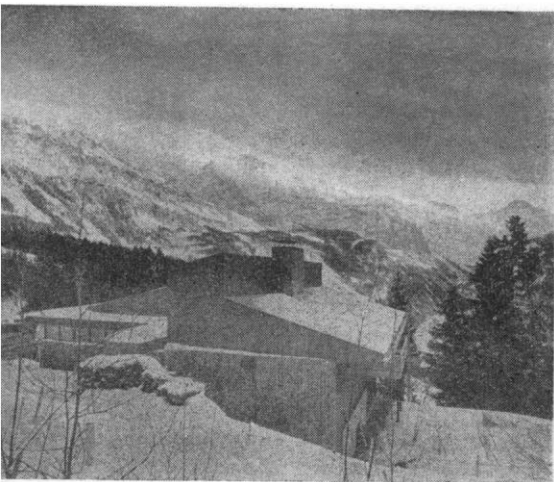
Towns like Kampala, Nairobi, etc. are much like Leopoldville, now Kinshasa, from the start much more experimental, much more interesting than you would find them in the old countries. Evidently people who would be very conservative in the home country are here doing things which they would never have done at home. This is what I meant to say, also, about Los Angeles. It was also a place where various things could be done which were very much more radical than what you see here in old established places.

But what I mean is this. To design a building which stands on V-shaped supports is not really as radical as starting to change human habits of family life and domestic structures, to accommodate and remould them. I have changed a good deal of what was seemingly confirmed in past daily life. I arrived in California fifty years ago, and what I did there was much closer to intimate human group existence in the narrower circle than, for instance, a Bank building which can more easily imitate something seen in a magazine that was built perhaps in Finland or Brazilia. At that time I was working with no magazine examples. None of my clients had ever heard of any such thing as I proposed, and I could not show any pictures. It was really quite an uphill struggle. But a single exemplary action can often take along a lot of imitators and followers, and there have since been very many people trained in my offices. The Richard Neutra Institute believes that people can be trained all around the world, because it believes in taking in local colleagues and their staffs. When I came to collaborate with such distant professional friends, not only the principals but the whole crew, there was dancing in the streets, as it seemed each time there was going to be an interesting project arising from our co-operation.

The principle of the Institute is always to try and raise the local level of professional performance, never to push people aside by a foreign operation saying, "We know it all already, we are going to do this for you. *We* are going to build this hotel in intercontinental style." Even open international competitions are questionable because you do not want to have people at some terrific distance winning without local knowledge and doing the work. This might be a set-back. You want to have local people developing. They may not be so experienced—of course they cannot be—but you have to use every possibility of "on the job training" for them. And this "on the job training" is really the principle of the Institute whether it is in Pakistan, Venezuela, Los Angeles or Rome. □



THE BEWOBAU PROJECT IN QUICKBORN AND WALLDORF, GERMANY. A LOW COST HOUSING PROJECT BY NEUTRA AND BEWOBAU. AS POPULATION DENSITIES INCREASE, PLANNING SKILL ON SMALL PLOTS OF LAND CAN DEMONSTRATE SPACIOUSNESS AND PRIVACY. PICTURE AT RIGHT SHOWS INTERIOR OF LIVING ROOM FROM DINING AREA.



TWO VIEWS OF FRITZ RENTSCH'S HOUSE IN THE ALPS IN SWITZERLAND.

