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“Glamourized Houses”: Neutra, Photography, and the Kaufmann House

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The current debate on reproduction and architectural publication has established new terms for the examination of architectural photographs. No longer treated simply as a species of architectural documentation—such as renderings or plans—photographs of building are acknowledged as sharing in the cultural power of the photographic medium and must consequently be examined as a form of social production. The publication of Richard Neutra’s 1946 Kaufmann house reveals the power of the print media in the establishment of an architectural canon; moreover, Neutra’s habit of reworking photographs of his built designs suggests the appropriateness of reexamining his contribution to the legacy of involving photography and the media in the architectural process.

JULIUS SHULMAN’S TWILIGHT PHOTOGRAPH OF Richard Neutra’s 1946 Kaufmann house is among the most familiar of all architectural images. By 1953, when Dione Neutra sent a number of clippings to the client, the image had been published in India, South Africa, Czechoslovakia, and Argentina as well as in some of the most widely circulated consumer and trade publications in this country.¹ Years later, in an oral history project, Dione Neutra testified to the importance of Shulman’s photographic treatment to the prominence of the Kaufmann house in her husband’s canon: “Mr. Shulman made some very beautiful and stunning photographs, and then Mr. Neutra made some very beautiful and stunning slides. . . . I mean, this just simply became his most famous house; that’s how it developed.”² Neutra’s biographer Thomas Hines further confirms the belief that the single Shulman image, “one of modern architecture’s most brilliant and famous photographs,” was responsible for the success of the house: “Shulman’s interpretations were widely published, and the house was internationally acclaimed.”³ The image is, indeed, widely held to be a “modernist icon”—“an object,” according to *Webster’s*, “of uncritical devotion.”

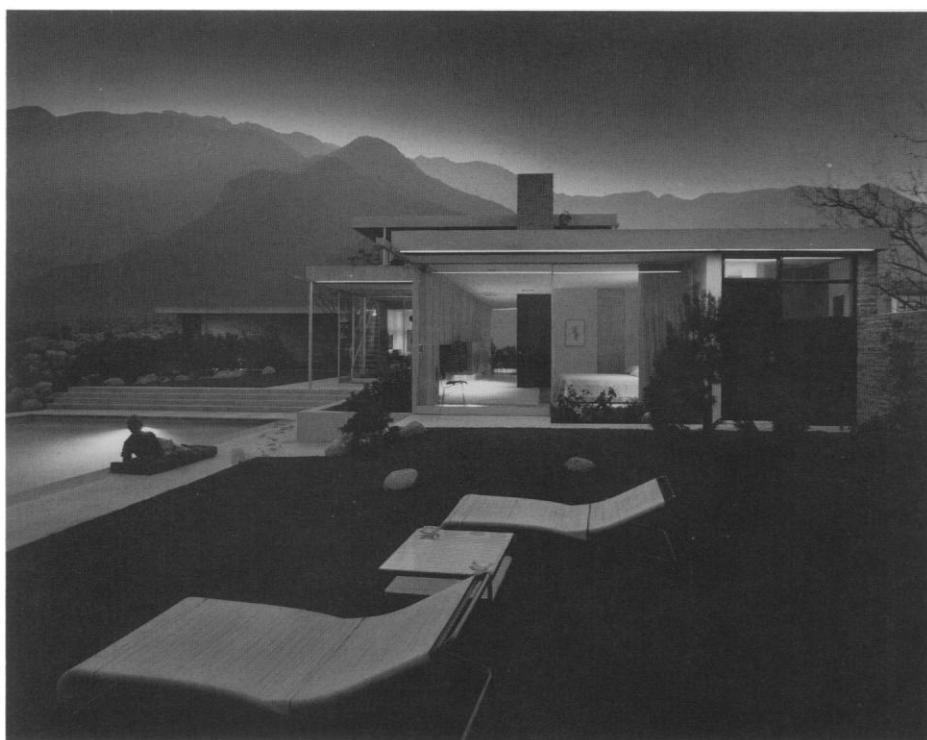
The Kaufmann house is perhaps one of the most striking examples of the way in

which a house can become identified with its photographic image. As such, it offers an irresistible entry point into the current debate on representation. The belief that an architectural photograph could serve as an object of devotion is a provocative one, in light of recent scholarship based on the writings of Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, it is precisely the loss of ritual associations—the “aura” of the art work—through reproduction that characterizes the photographic medium.⁴ Beatriz Colomina has extended Benjamin’s arguments, drawing on Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes to locate photography and architectural publishing as the site of a form of construction based upon the logic of the mass media: “Until the advent of photography, and earlier of lithography, the audience of architecture was the user. With photography, the illustrated magazine, and tourism, architecture’s reception began to occur through an additional social form: consumption.”⁵ Colomina’s terms of reference have broadened the criticism of architectural photography, which until now has been limited to narrow questions of photographic style, assuming that photographs derive their meaning and usefulness from a cargo of formal information and ignoring the economic hierarchy inscribed on the process of production and publication.⁶

If Shulman’s image has indeed become an object of uncritical devotion, it is not because of the way in which the photograph functions as architectural communication, as an expression of Neutra’s design intent; in fact, evidence in the Neutra archives at UCLA suggests that any number of other photographs of the Kaufmann house would be better suited to that task. Nor will this essay attempt to fix the appeal of the image in stylistic qualities somehow inherent in the photograph. Our reception of this image is rather the result of a much more complex social process. The original impact of the Kaufmann house photographs must be con-

sidered as the result of a carefully orchestrated publishing event. The twilight photograph that was produced during Shulman’s work at the house stands apart from the other photographs, differentiated by atmospheric effects, the presence of an observer, and the strongly manifested presence of the printer. The combined effect of these qualities was described in *Life* magazine as a “glamorous” treatment, and the image was singled out—by the media and by Neutra himself—to represent the house. Approaching the Shulman photograph as a critical locus, and tracing the extensive correspondence in the Neutra archives, we begin to raise important questions about the way in which the architect himself functioned as reader and consumer of images of his own architecture. One important benefit of this inquiry—in light of the current debate on photographic representation occurring in both the trade and the scholarly press—is that it may serve to make strange a very familiar image.

The first stage of the publishing pattern of the Kaufmann house began with a letter from Henry Wright to Neutra in January 1947, and closed with the publication of the house in *Life* and *Architectural Forum* in April and June 1949. The production of the photograph can be traced in the Neutra archives in the correspondence between three principals: Neutra the architect, Edgar Kaufmann the owner (an established patron of architecture who had commissioned Wright’s Fallingwater), and Julius Shulman the photographer. The strategy of publication was largely shaped by Henry Wright, the editor of *Architectural Forum*. In his January 18, 1947, letter, Wright solicits Neutra for projects for an April 1947 issue on “Works in Progress.” “The object of the issue,” Wright wrote “is to give *Forum* readers a snapshot—almost an ‘action photograph’—of this year’s building crop, highlighting new trends and showing which old ones are now firmly established.”⁷ Notice that the Kaufmann house



1. Kaufmann Residence (1946), Palm Springs, CA. Photograph by Julius Shulman.

TO THIS EFFECT. WILL YOU KINDLY ACKNOWLEDGE THIS TELEGRAM AS A MATTER OF RECORD— E J KAUFMANN.¹⁰

Meanwhile, photography of the house by Shulman went forward. He recently recounted the process of making the photograph (Figure 1):

I had been in the house with Richard Neutra for three days, photographing interiors and exteriors around the clock. Towards twilight I looked outside towards the east . . . of the house . . . towards the desert . . . I saw the light fading and it looked beautiful. . . . I ran out and looked back at the mountains and saw the twilight was forming . . . and I ran back in the house, got my camera, and set it up out here. . . . I got the camera focused and set it on the composition I wanted. When I was running out with my camera and shoulder bag, Neutra called me. . . . He said 'wait a minute, where are you going?' I said 'well now Richard, come on outside, its beautiful. . . . He said 'no we don't do it, we haven't got the time, we have got to do more interiors.' I said we can't stop this.¹¹

The photograph was executed during three separate exposures on a single sheet of film over 45 minutes. No artificial illumination was used in the house, but Shulman gave different light sources different exposures, leaving the camera between exposures to switch them off and on. The first exposure was for the overall exterior illumination and some of the house lights; the second for the exterior soffit lighting and other interior lights. For the third exposure, Shulman asked Mr. Kaufmann to turn on the pool light, and posed Mrs. Kaufmann to block the glare.¹²

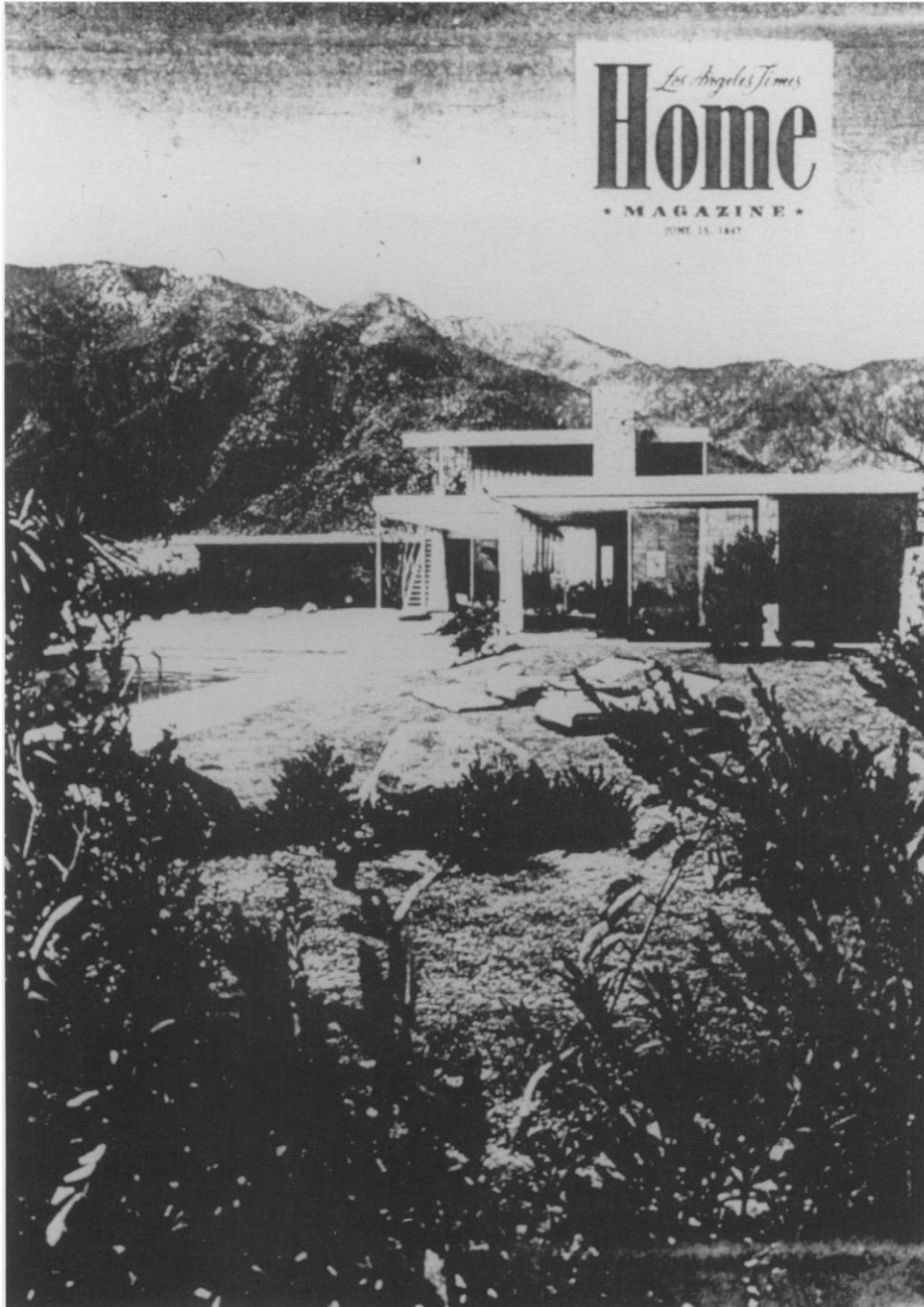
The Kaufmann house was first pub-

was nearing completion sparked a flurry of telegrams and letters, in which Wright indicated his interest in seeing material on the house and reassured Neutra that publication of construction shots would not interfere with a full presentation of the house after completion.⁸ A February 22 wire from Neutra requested that *Forum* update Kaufmann regarding the material they had been sent and their publication intentions.⁹

A wire from Kaufmann to Neutra on March 1 gave a sense of the control over publication that the client was prepared to exercise and the reach of his influence in the magazine world:

FOLLOWING TELEPHONE CONVERSATION SO THAT

THERE CAN BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING IT IS DEFINITELY UNDERSTOOD BETWEEN US THAT THE PICTURES YOU HAD TAKEN DURING THE PAST WEEK ARE FOR YOUR OWN PERSONAL FILES AND NOT TO BE RELEASED FOR PUBLICATION THROUGH ANY MEDIA. THE YOUNG LADY WHO REPRESENTS HOUSE AND GARDEN SHOULD BE ADVISED BY YOU AS SHE CAME TO THE HOUSE THROUGH YOUR INTRODUCTION AND NO ARTICLE IS TO BE RELEASED EXCEPTING WITH MY CONSENT. I HAVE NOTIFIED ALBERT KORNFELD



2. *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine*, June 15, 1947. (Reproduced from microfilm. Photo by Julius Shulman. Copyright © 1947, *Los Angeles Times*. Reprinted with permission.)

lished—without this shot—in the *LA Times Home* section on June 15, 1947 (Figure 2). Kaufmann apparently consented to local publication early on—despite Neutra’s concerns that local publication would impair the prospects for national publication¹³ and the *Times* seized the opportunity, though the photographer initially hired to execute the job was not Shulman, but rather a photographer who styled himself “Bernard of Hollywood,” with whom the *Times* had worked previously. (It is amusing to see the ever-correct Kaufmann refer to the photographer in correspondence as “Mr. Bernard of Hollywood.”) By May of 1947 both Shulman and Bernard of Hollywood had executed bodies of photographs of the house, but Bernard’s shots got caught in an approval loop between Neutra and Kaufmann and were in Pittsburgh when the *Times* went to press with the story. Shulman’s shots were run instead. Neutra attributed this mix-up to a desire to publish quickly: “The *Los Angeles Times* evidently rushed this matter through their schedule to have what they call a scoop.”¹⁴ The first publication of the house disappointed Neutra, who reported to his client that “the color plates were not brought into coincidence in the printing and so the pictures were blurred on the pretty poor paper. . . . I hope they do not obliterate your fine memory of the house.”¹⁵ As for Bernard, Neutra tried to placate him with the prospect of national publication of his shots in *Life* and *Architectural Forum*,¹⁶ but it was not to be until 1949 that the house was published in those magazines, and the shots were Shulman’s.

The strategy of limiting initial publication of the house to *Life* and *Architectural Forum*—that is, to one consumer and one trade magazine—was developed by Kaufmann and Henry Wright in concert, and announced to Neutra in a letter from Wright dated June 17, 1947. The letter suggests the subtle control that Wright exercised over the entire publishing process. “As you suggested, Howard and I saw Mr. Kaufmann on his

visit to New York a month or so ago, and discussed the whole thing with him. He was very cordial, and asked our advice on the entire publishing pattern. He added that he preferred to have the job well presented in one or two magazines and would rather that it not appear too widely. We have since received a letter from him agreeing to our proposal that it be published only in *The Architectural Forum* and *Life*." Wright then proposed that it would be "desirable to all concerned" to postpone publication until early 1948, to reshoot some angles when the landscaping grew in and the temporary furniture was replaced. "It would, of course," he continues, "be perfectly possible to publish the material as it now stands, and we would have no great objection to doing so. But I believe, in this respect, Mr. Kaufmann's desire to get the best possible presentation in the first instance should be honored unless there is some important reason for earlier publication. I understand from Shulman that the possibility of others making unauthorized pictures during the time the house in unoccupied is rather remote. Since all the glass has been covered with paper on the inside, satisfactory pictures could hardly be obtained."¹⁷ This letter is a good example of the way in which the various interests engaged in the publication of architecture are delicately balanced. Neutra's interests may have favored early and wide publication, as a means of drawing upon the novelty value and obtaining immediate commissions, but Wright presents the publishing program as being the will of Neutra's client, and the architect has no choice but to acquiesce. The house is treated like some classified automotive prototype, and the strategies here—to control the access to the images of the house, to manage scarcity as a means of maximizing impact—are those of advertising.

Although publication of Shulman's photographs continued in foreign publications through 1947 and into 1948, national

publication in the United States did not proceed as planned. Communications between Neutra and Kaufmann in November 1947 suggest a growing rift over the architect's fee, which appears to have soured the relationship. In any case, Kaufmann seems to have grown cool to the proposal to reshoot in December, despite a letter from Shulman to Wright confirming that the landscaping had grown in.¹⁸ The genial quality of Neutra's letters barely masks a growing frustration, openly expressed at last in letters from May of 1948. "The suppression of publication is a decided damage," he writes on May 15, and he expands upon this theme two days later:

From our earlier correspondence, I had understood that you preferred to use the *Architectural Forum* and *Life* as media for publication and on this assumption, other editorial offers were set aside. It seems that the postponement of the publication for several years has rather cooled the interest of these editors and naturally will continue to do so, as novelty attracts these publishers even more than quality. . . . As you seemed to feel it inconvenient to permit this photography, I tried to dissuade the editors to bother you. However, privately speaking to you as my client, I should be happy to take and see pictures, especially color pictures, which as I said last year would completely satisfy me and might give you pleasure also. The delight a designer takes in a good shot of his pet project is not to be classed as shallow egotism, and it is spiritually and materially a loss to him not to have it.¹⁹

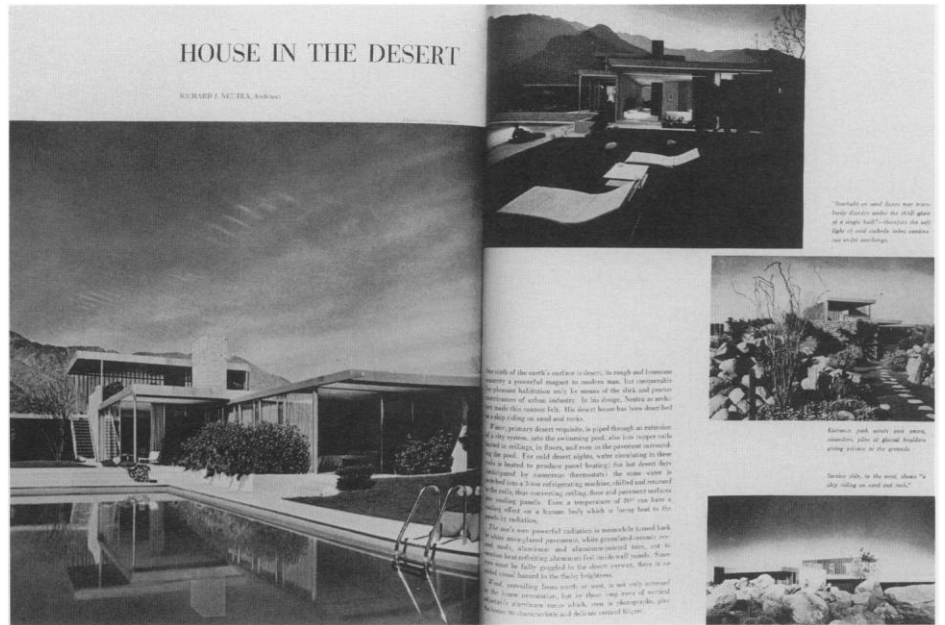
Despite Neutra's concerns about the fading novelty of the Kaufmann house, it finally received publication in the trade press in the June 1949 issue of *Architectural Forum* (Figures 3 and 4). The article consisted of

two spreads, the first shot being reproduced in color. The shot which has come to stand as the modernist icon receives a good place in the layout, but its size affords it no more impact than any of the other angles. Compare the trade publication of the Kaufmann house to the single image that appeared in the April 11, 1949, issue of *Life* (Figure 5). If this photograph is considered an icon, the confirmation of its status must surely date from its publication in this immensely influential publication. The most obvious difference is that the house isn't the center of attention; rather, the photograph itself is highlighted. It is published under Shulman's name. Note the caption—"Glamourized Houses," "Photographer Julius Shulman is a master at making them look dramatic"—and the description of how the shot was executed technically: "Neutra house in California desert was photographed at dusk by first exposing for artificial light, then for twilight. Pool terrace contains coils through which ice water flows by day and hot water by night to maintain constant comfort." According to Roland Barthes, photographic meaning is a fluid thing, determined by the relationship of an image to other images and to its context, including captions.²⁰ The use of modifiers such as "glamourized" and "dramatic" in the text begin to fix the reading of Shulman's photograph and establish its iconic authority in relation to Hollywood and the film industry.²¹ Further, this presentation implies that what sets Shulman's photograph apart is the way in which "glamour" and "drama" are superadded to the architecture through the photographic treatment, in the manner of fashion and star photography.

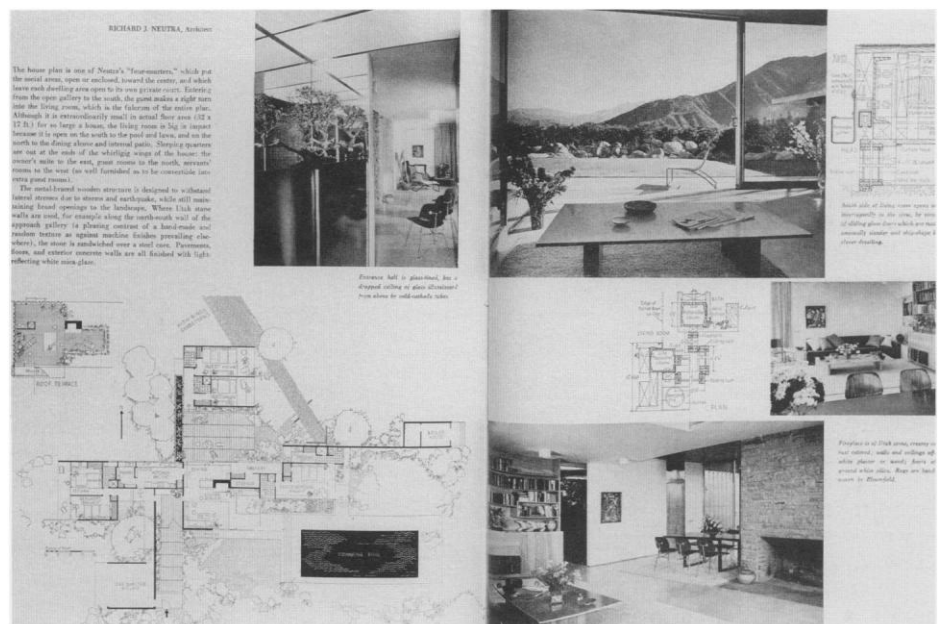
In relation to other images of architecture—and the other shots of the house—this one indeed has a very romantic quality, and there is an interesting dissonance between the architecture and the manner of its representation. Although the design is thoroughly up to date, the manner of the photograph is quite

painterly in its evocation of mood: for example, in the strong and artificial burning of the sky values, in the atmospheric qualities of twilight, and in the presence of the solitary observer. The style of the photograph refers back to the pictorialist tradition of early-twentieth-century photography and, through it, drawing on and reinforcing an aesthetic associated with paintings of artists such as Caspar David Friedrich, for example, several of whose works portray the silent contemplation of architectural subjects (Figure 6). A photograph that aspires to painting becomes problematic when Benjamin's terms are reintroduced. Indeed, it is photography's loss of the aura of painting through reproduction that is its defining feature. The very use of the term icon in reference to this photograph—with its devotional associations—speaks of the desire to reinvest photography with lost ritual value.

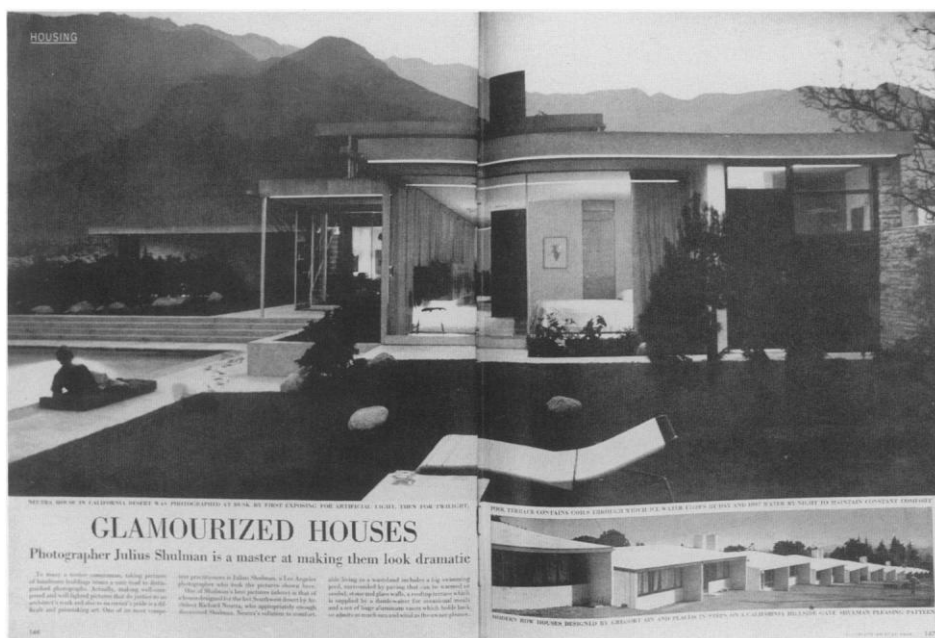
Neutra's chief influence in the process of creating an architectural icon can be traced in his pattern of submitting Shulman's photo to architectural and consumer publications. By June 1947, there is evidence that this photograph, which can be traced in correspondence through its catalog number, KP-E-30, was being submitted to publications on its own, to stand for the entire body of photographs of the house.²² Within several years, the photograph was supplied in response to requests for prints of representative Neutra projects. And yet it is odd that the architect should single this photograph out. From the very beginning, according to Shulman's narrative, Neutra resisted photographing the exterior, preferring instead to concentrate on interiors. More telling is the fact that the twilight shot fails to adequately communicate Neutra's design intentions. In a letter to Shulman regarding the photography of the Kaufmann house, Neutra directed the photographer to bear in mind that "Neatness and clarity were our design intentions."²³ In numerous instances Neutra declared that the



3. Architectural Forum, June 1949.



4. Architectural Forum, June 1949.



5. *Life*, April 11, 1949.

greater research aim of the Kaufmann house design was to advance the feasibility of desert habitation; the house was to serve, as he put it, as a “test object for further desert building of larger scope.”²⁴ Of all the exterior shots of the house published until 1949, however, this particular shot probably says less about its character as a desert structure than any other. The desert simply does not appear in it because, with the exception of the mountains, the surroundings are largely suppressed by twilight. Strictly speaking we could say that a photograph like the cover of the *LA Times Home* magazine would do Neutra’s intentions greater justice. The conflict between Neutra’s oft-expressed design aims and the way in which the house is represented in the Shulman’s shot raises interesting questions about his handling of the photograph; his eventual championing of the image can be seen as a hint of a somewhat divided attitude

toward architectural photographs and the expression of tastes that had less to do with architectural communication.

The fluidity of Neutra’s response to the Kaufmann house photograph reflects his sensitivity to the power of the published architectural photograph as a means of self-promotion. It is apparent from Neutra’s writings regarding the Kaufmann house publication that he was very familiar with the process of architectural publishing. Hines noted Neutra’s early adeptness at self-promotion: “He was willing and able, via skillful publicity, to maximize and give meaning to what would otherwise have been minor commissions.”²⁵ Understood in the crudest sense, published photographs brought him commissions. “All the clients came through publications, I would say,” Dione Neutra concluded; further, “we had one experience after another that clients would come, and

Mr. Neutra would ask them, ‘Why did you come to me?’ And they’d say, ‘Well, we saw this book of houses, and we looked through it, and every time we came to a house we liked and we’d look at the end, it was a Neutra house.”²⁶ It was clearly in Neutra’s character to embrace an effectively placed photograph whether or not it did justice to his expressed design intentions.

Whatever Neutra thought about the fact that the *Life* photograph of the Kaufmann house was published as an example of Shulman’s handiwork rather than his own, he soon attempted to capitalize on the notoriety of the house by shopping Shulman’s photographs to the companies that supplied the house with everything from locks to shower doors, presumably for use in advertising:

The magazine Arts and Architecture, which brings a presentation of this unusual building in its forthcoming issue, has asked us to furnish them photographs which could also serve your purposes, who have done a commendable job on your shower doors, which we have used in the most diversified projects.

The mentioned photographs are a very successful job of the photographer, Julius Shulman, and you can obtain them from Mr. Robert Cron, Arts and Architecture. You possibly have noticed the double page spread which one of these photos had in *Life*, April 11, 1949 and which has brought broad national attention to this building which your installation helped make a success.²⁷

Beyond his sensitivity to opportunities for self-promotion, however, Neutra’s handling of the Kaufmann house photograph also testifies to the personal importance of

photography to his design process. The belief that the act of photography must be directed toward recovering Neutra's design intention can be read in this reminiscence by Dione Neutra: "And I remember, later on, how, when houses were photographed, we would bring all the shrubbery along: we would plant the shrubbery, we would hold branches in order to complete his conception, and we would also bring furniture along and photograph the house as long as it was empty and not defiled by old furniture."²⁸ This example may be somewhat more extreme than the current practice, though not unlike it; notice that the styling and landscaping were severely controlled to "complete" Neutra's conception. Shulman further recalls that Neutra's practice before a shoot was to walk through a project with his Leica and shoot a roll as a means of exactly predetermining Shulman's camera placement and height.²⁹ According to the photographer, Neutra's control of the framing was directed particularly at restoring elements of his design that had been changed in the construction process: "In his case," Shulman tells, "he was devious. He would attempt to cover up, change, improve, hide certain elements that were not done according to his design intent." It was apparently not uncommon for Neutra to shoot alongside Shulman, as we can see in a photograph of the Miramar chapel (Figure 7).

Neutra transferred this habit of using the photographic process as a means of completing his conception to his handling of the prints, which afforded him—through their plastic quality—with an even more flexible means of reestablishing his design conception. Neutra contributed an introduction to Shulman's 1962 design text *Photographing Architecture and Interiors*. Titled "The Photographer and Architect," the piece is associative and convoluted rather than linear in its structure, interweaving Neutra's musings on topics as diverse as photography and cave painting. It is possible, however, to extract



6. Caspar David Friedrich, *Sisters on the Harbor-view Terrace (Harbor by Night)*.



7. Detail, Miramar Chapel. Neutra and Leica at lower left. (Photo by Julius Shulman. Courtesy Dione Neutra and Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA.)

themes that recur in Neutra's writings on architectural photography concerning the roles of architect and photographer and the uses of the medium. He spoke less about the role of architectural photography as a means of communicating architectural ideas than about the significance of photographs of a project to the designing architect. As with his May 17, 1948, letter to Kaufmann, in which he expressed his desire to have photographs for his own enjoyment regardless of publication, Neutra wrote in the introduction about the personal pleasure architectural photographs afforded him. Photographs of his projects stimulated Neutra's memory of the design process: "Do we just like beautiful photographs of our buildings?" he opened the introduction. "What makes me happy is a design idea fitting sensitively into the landscape as I may have carried it with me. Now, suddenly, it appears again, clearly hinted at least, in a still picture."³⁰

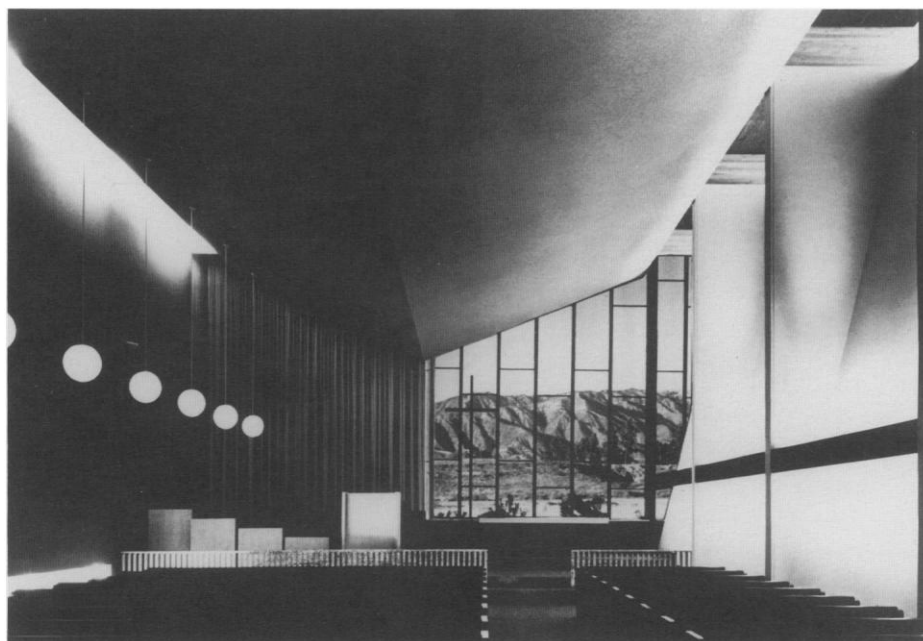
One of the important themes in the introduction is perception, and the ways in which the spatial perception of architecture differs from that captured by the optics of still photography. Neutra insisted upon reserving to architecture its spatial qualities: "Architecture is not frozen music—it is nothing frozen at all! It plays on us in time, the vivid time of our living responses which melt one moment into the next . . . A photograph, of course, cannot be looked at in so many ways. From the moment it was exposed onto the negative behind the lens, it was 'frozen.'"³¹ Despite this intellectual grasp of the limitations of photography, however, there can be no doubt that photographic prints afforded Neutra a compelling and gradually more seductive means of "completing his conception," of recapturing and progressively refining for himself his original design intentions. There exist in the archives a number of 8×10 prints that have been marked with grease pencil. Some of the prints also have text on the back in Neutra's hand. Prints of the Perkins, Sciobelli, and Singleton houses as well as the San Pedro Hacienda and Claremont Methodist Church, among others, exhibit retouching. On some prints, values are darkened in areas of emphatic high contrast; on others certain materials or surfaces are deleted; furnishings of which Neutra apparently did not approve were excised, as were mechanical installations that break outlines and apparently disturb the original design intent. He often darkened in areas of raw landscaping. The prints in the Neutra archives are crudely retouched and not publishable, suggesting that the alteration was done as a personal rather than promotional exercise. Shulman confirms this interpretation: "Neutra told me that one of his great pleasures was to take my 8×10 pictures to bed and mark the prints, studying them. He said he didn't get pleasure in the process of construction because of the constant fighting, but he enjoyed the great pleasure he obtained

studying the 8×10 prints."³² Colomina has noted the importance of photography to Le Corbusier's "elliptical" design process, as a means by which architecture can be returned from "the world of phenomena" and reexperienced in the "realm of ideas": "Construction is a significant moment in the process, but by no means the end product. Photography and layout construct another architecture in the space of the page."³³ Clearly, the sentiment Neutra expressed to Shulman suggests that, like Le Corbusier, Neutra appreciated reexperiencing his architecture in the realm of ideas. There are, however, some important differences; unlike Le Corbusier, his handling of photographs was not directed toward a publishing project, but appears rather a purely personal exercise. For Neutra, the design conception was complete not when conceived, or built, but when photographed and reexperienced.

Neutra's process of recovering and refining his design intentions in relation to photographs can be most fully witnessed in the way in which he works with a print of the 1959 Claremont Methodist Church (Figure 8). A print of the nave in the archives not only exhibits grease pencil retouching, but the photographer has also used a mask in printing to control the view of the mountains beyond. Neutra darkened the contrasty altar rail, extended the right edge of the mountains outside the window, and also brought down the values of some bright areas of exterior landscaping. He wrote on the back of the print: "Claremont Methodism started in the open landscape. The left half of the altar wall is a resounding organ chamber behind an acoustically permeable drape. The right half reveals a mountain scenery which rises to snow capped Mt. San Geronio, which is gradually revealed, as the worshiper proceeds . . . toward the communion rail." It is instructive to see Neutra attempting to supply the missing temporal element in his description on the back, and perhaps his extension of the line of

the mountains is an attempt to simulate the view from an angle other than the one chosen by the photographer or even to simulate a moving perspective. His jottings on the print were expanded in the introduction to Shulman's book: "A church nave may lead to an altar wall with one-half of it open onto a snowy mountain peak. It is a thrill to behold but photographically that peak becomes a mere unimportant speck on the photo . . . How can the photographer express my compositional thoughts for the Claremont Church in its landscape anchorage, except perhaps by a series of shots: when parishioners approach the communion rail, the church stands fixed—but the view onto the snowy mountain chain unrolls like a ritual, ever widening to the right, the more they advance to the tall silhouetted cross." Although Neutra cited this project as an example of photography's incapability to represent architecture, he did so, paradoxically, after re-experiencing his design in relation to a photographic print. It is instructive once again to contrast Neutra's alteration of photographs with Le Corbusier's practice. Colomina has shown that Corbusier made drawings after photographs: "Apparently aimless (these drawings were not intended for publication) this activity seems to indicate Le Corbusier's resistance to the passive intake of photography, to the consumption of images occurring in the world of tourism and mass media."³⁴ By drawing on photographs, however, Neutra exhibits a more passive stance and is progressively drawn into their terms of reference.

Neutra's use of photographs representing himself and his practice demonstrates a drive to find completion through photography and the media that is analogous to his handling of prints of his architecture. A photograph of Neutra at the Sten house (Figure 9) from around 1935 was used for display. The relationship that is established between the architect, his architecture, and nature is



8. Claremont Methodist Church (1959). Grease pencil retouching most evident on altar rail. (Courtesy Dione Neutra and Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA.)

consistent with the sense of "messianic ideas of vision" that Hines finds in Neutra's character.³⁵ The solitary observer, in a setting which is at once natural and architectural returns us to the world of Friedrich (Figure 6) and to the twilight shot of the Kaufmann house. This manner of representing himself perhaps informs his eventual use of Shulman's shot, but notice also the business card: Neutra is drawing upon this image to sell himself as Neutra the visionary architect.

Contemporary forms of analysis drawing on the work of Lacan have afforded tools for further exploring the relationship of self to media and illuminating Neutra's drive for completion. Colomina notes, "Lacan posits that the mirror constructs the self, that the self as organized entity is actually an imitation of the cohesiveness of the mirror image. . . . The printed media are the mirror in which one's writings and works (often unrealized)

return miraculously to their author in a 'complete' image."³⁶ A particularly striking example of using the media as a mirror can be seen in Neutra's handling of his cover portrait from *Time* magazine (August 15, 1949) (Figure 10). Dione Neutra recounts how Neutra would show a copy of the *Time* cover to garner respectful treatment, for example, from the airplane crew during long flights in the fifties. She says, "And Mr. Neutra always had his *Time* cover along; so he would show them the *Time* cover, and they would be very excited and show it to the pilots, you know, and then we would be treated very especially."³⁷ By 1969, Neutra had laminated a copy of the cover and kept it in his wallet; he was observed by Norman Cousins using it to get a better table at a restaurant.³⁸ Hines acknowledges the way in which Neutra "balanced his complex personal insecurity with a forced and occasionally strained bravado,"³⁹ and these ex-



9. Sten House. (Courtesy Dione Neutra and Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA.)

amples suggest the importance of representations in the media to Neutra's search for acceptance and personal wholeness.

Toward the end of his life, Neutra's involvement in the photographic representation of his works appears to have deepened as his practice waned. In July 1969, Neutra wrote a tribute to Shulman to be published in the *Los Angeles Times* in connection with the celebration of Shulman's thirty-third year—one-third of a century—in photography: "It is hard to conceive," Neutra wrote, "that all former stretches of architectural history depend, according to the Roman proverb on stones. They were supposed to talk for themselves and forever: 'Saxa loquuntur.' That is more past, and bygone. *Film* is of the stuff to talk!—Which makes a man like Shulman, an educator of millions who become,—if not neighbors of momentous impressions,—at least passers by,—while they page through a book, a magazine, a journal."⁴⁰ This process of consuming reproduced images of architecture as a substitute for direct experience is precisely the problem now being addressed in the architectural community. In reference to the one-third of a century tribute, Neutra confided to Shulman "I wish an old architect could keep going as long as a photographer. But our dark rooms are darker than your dark rooms! And who will have the many many films I left with you . . . who will have them in 100 years?"⁴¹ Concern for posterity, as well as Neutra's persistent habit of seeking to reexperience the design process through photographic reproduction, can perhaps explain the effort to rephotograph his work near the end of his life. Hines reports meeting Neutra in February 1970, when the architect showed up at the Strathmore apartments "laden with cameras, tripods, and other photographic equipment," and Neutra shared his plan to "revisit, systematically, each of his buildings in Southern California."⁴² In fact, Dione Neutra reports

that the architect suffered a heart attack and died on April 16, 1970, while photographing his Kemper house in Wuppertal, Germany,⁴³ a house that was already represented in his files by quite serviceable prints.

To end on this note risks casting Neutra's relationship with the photographic medium as some sort of cautionary tale, but the lessons of his use of photography are a bit more complex. Neutra incorporated so much of the ambivalence toward architectural photography that is currently manifested in the architectural community. His clear and elegantly phrased intellectual grasp of the limitations of architectural photography coexisted with a deep fascination with the way in which his architecture and, indeed, he himself were represented in photographic prints and the media. Shulman's photograph of the Kaufmann house can be read, then, not just as a document containing a certain amount of formal information of the house with a superadded stylistic gloss, but as a construction that mirrors some of the architect's tastes and habits, as well as the larger process by which images of architecture are produced and meaning is ascribed.

Perhaps when the architectural community has fully apprised itself of the limitations of architectural photography and the larger problems inherent in the current practice of architectural publication and promotion, a photograph like this one will be able to be correctly appreciated and enjoyed for what it is: a work that ultimately remains a compelling architectural fiction.

Acknowledgments

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10. *Time*, August 15, 1949.

Notes

1. Dione Neutra, letter to Edgar Kaufmann, Feb. 10, 1953, Neutra Archives, UCLA.
2. Dione Neutra, *To Tell the Truth*, oral history project, UCLA Special Collections, p. 294.
3. Thomas Hines, *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture* (New York: Oxford, 1982) p. 204.
4. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 224.
5. Beatriz Colomina, *Architectureproduction* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), p. 9.
6. A recent book that preserves a more limited approach to architectural photographs is Cervin Robinson and Joel Herschman's *Architecture Transformed* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987). Robinson and Herschman concern themselves with photographic style, drawing terms of reference from the early relationship of architectural photography and rendering. They proceed to trace the historic and stylistic interplay between the "objective" stance of elevational photographs and the "emotional" component of perspective views. Lumping photography and rendering together, however, denies the role of the medium itself to be understood in analyzing the products of each medium and reinforces the assumption that all architectural representations derive their meaning and usefulness from the sort of limited cargo of formal information that they share.
- It is odd that almost all writings on architectural photography focus on the decisions made by photographers who, with a few exceptions, find themselves the most vulnerable, being at the bottom of the food chain,

and who consequently tend to internalize the expectations of their clients as a means of economic self-preservation. Much more important is the largely unexamined influence of architects and representatives of the media on the practice of architectural photography.

7. Henry Wright, letter to Richard Neutra, Jan. 18, 1947, Neutra Archives.
8. Henry Wright, wire to Richard Neutra, Feb. 19, 1947, Neutra Archives.
9. Richard Neutra, wire to Henry Wright, Feb. 22, 1947, Neutra Archives.
10. Edgar Kaufmann, wire to Richard Neutra, Mar. 1, 1947, Neutra Archives.
11. Personal interview with Julius Shulman, Mar. 16, 1992.
12. Ibid.
13. Richard Neutra, letter to Edgar Kaufmann, May 17, 1947, Neutra Archives.
14. Richard Neutra, letter to Edgar Kaufmann, May 22, 1947, Neutra Archives.
15. Richard Neutra, letter to Edgar Kaufmann, Aug. 1, 1947, Neutra Archives.
16. Bernard of Hollywood, letter to Edgar Kaufmann, May 22, 1947, Neutra Archives.
17. Henry Wright, letter to Richard Neutra, June 17, 1947, Neutra Archives.
18. Julius Shulman, letter to Henry Wright, Dec. 6, 1947, Neutra Archives.
19. Richard Neutra, letter to Edgar Kaufmann, May 17, 1948, Neutra Archives.
20. As quoted in Beatriz Colomina, "Le Corbusier and Photography," *Assemblage* 4, p. 9, 1987.
21. A letter from Bernard of Hollywood to Edgar Kaufmann (May 31, 1947, Neutra Archives) suggests that the choice of this photograph by *Life* might also reflect the magazine's editorial policy of favoring peopled photographs of architecture.

22. Richard Neutra, letter to *Fortune* magazine, June 1947, Neutra Archives.

23. Richard Neutra, letter to Julius Shulman, Mar. 3, 1947, Neutra Archives, quoted in Hines, *Richard Neutra*, p. 201.
24. Richard Neutra, letter to Bernard of Hollywood, May 27, 1947, Neutra Archives.
25. Thomas Hines, *Richard Neutra*, p. 70.
26. Neutra, *To Tell the Truth*, p. 260.
27. R. Thorston, letter to M. Luskin, June 28, 1947, Neutra Archives.
28. Neutra, *To Tell the Truth*, p. 271.
29. Personal interview with Julius Shulman, Mar. 16, 1992.
30. Richard Neutra, Introduction to Julius Shulman, *Photographing Architecture and Interiors* (New York: Whitney, 1962), p. vi
31. Ibid.
32. Interview transcript, Lian Hurst Mann and Julius Shulman, Mar. 1992.
33. Colomina, "Le Corbusier and Photography," p. 14.
34. Ibid., p. 9.
35. Hines, *Richard Neutra*, p. 70.
36. Colomina, *Architectureproduction*, p. 16.
37. Neutra, *To Tell the Truth*, p. 466.
38. Richard Neutra, *Nature Near: Late Essays of Richard Neutra* (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra, 1989), p. xiv.
39. Hines, *Richard Neutra*, p. 70.
40. Richard Neutra, letter to Julius Shulman, Jan. 29, 1969, Neutra Archives.
41. Richard Neutra, letter to Julius Shulman, Mar. 18, 1969, Neutra Archives.
42. Hines, *Richard Neutra*, p. 4, 5.
43. Neutra, *To Tell the Truth*, p. 470.