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Cliff Notes

For Cliff May, Less was More

There's an old saying: When an architect makes a mistake, he plants a tree. The trouble is, many of the houses being built today leave little room on their grounds for trees.

"Good architecture is something that fits the neighborhood," said Cliff May at the age of 79, "but nowadays, many architects are building monuments to their clients, and the homes look like castles and mausoleums." May knew then, and throughout his career, what many home builders of today are overlooking: less is more.

For individuals who appreciate the simple, open, informal designs of developers such as Cliff May and Joseph Eichler, the tract home of today is a troubling phenomenon. As the popular term "McMansion" suggests, they are supersized. And like an extra large fries and a 32 ounce soda, they are often considerably more than the consumer needs.

"They're just too big," writes Cathleen McGuigan in her Newsweek Article entitled *The McMansion Next Door*. "And why do they keep getting bigger, when families are getting smaller? In 1970, the average new single-family house was 1,400 square feet; today it's 2,300."

Perhaps the most unfortunate development is that the McMansion mentality has begun to invade older neighborhoods. Smaller, vintage homes are being razed and behemoths are taking their place. All across the country, innovative mid-century architecture is being lost to monumental Tuscan and neo-Colonial fantasies. But finally, some people are speaking up. Sarah Susanka, a Minnesota architect, started a lot of discussion on the issue with her 1998 best-selling book, "The Not So Big House." Susanka argues that a good architect understands the importance of human scale.

Another regrettable by-product of the McMansion phenomenon is that much of the home buying public has lost touch with one of the essential principles of

modern architecture: a connection to the outdoors. As land becomes scarce—especially in California—and homes become larger, the outdoor living areas have been sacrificed. As a result, home owners have resigned themselves to more indoor living environments and less privacy from neighboring properties.

Thankfully, many of the middle-class home buyers of today are opting out of the new-house market and are choosing neighborhoods such as the Cliff May tracts.



The open, flowing, elegant space of a custom Cliff May design.

"They'll remodel an old house," McGuigan continues in her Newsweek article, "one with the honest patina of history that all the money in the world can't reproduce."

"I think there's a return to an interest in modernism," says New York architect Deborah Berke, "and I would call it a warm modernism, not sleek minimalism." She argues that a younger generation, steeped in a love of cool design and ready for a first home, isn't going to buy a mini-McMansion. "That's where the [building] industry is not reading the social signs yet."

As more people become interested in design—whether it's a toaster or an automobile—more are wanting their homes to reflect what they value. These individuals tend to share a common aesthetic and appreciation for form and function. They are, in large part, the new breed of owners who are shaping the future of neighborhoods such as the Ranchos. And somewhere in the great beyond, Cliff May is undoubtedly cheering them on.

Cliff May Ranchos of Long Beach

- Built in the 1950s
- Modernist styling
- Post & beam construction
- Clerestory windows
- Indoor-Outdoor living
- Open floor plans
- Lots designed for privacy
- Adjacent to 800 acre park
- Tree-lined parkways
- Casual, relaxed living

Rancho News

National Publication Visits The Ranchos

My wife and I recently had the pleasure of hosting a tour of the Ranchos for Michelle and Jim Brown, editor and chief photographer respectively for Atomic Ranch magazine. This new quarterly, with national distribution, is devoted to mid-century ranch houses and modernist tract homes.

"We intentionally sought out the opportunity to feature a Cliff May designed tract home," said Michelle. "May's contribution to the American ranch style home simply can't be overlooked."

Michelle and Jim soaked up the architecture, the community, and more. According to the publishers, they came away from our historic Rancho neighborhood with plans for three different features, two on specific properties and one on the neighborhood in general. "These homes are terrific," said Jim. "They are unassuming from the front, but they hold so many pleasant surprises within."

You can look for a feature of a Rancho home to appear in Atomic Ranch later this year. In the interim, you can learn more about the magazine, including subscription information, by visiting the publication's web site at www.atomic-ranch.com or by visiting Hennessey + Ingalls in Santa Monica and Out of Vogue and Otto in Fullerton. Beginning in June 2004, you will find Atomic Ranch at select Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Tower Books & Records stores.

Real Find!

Metal House Numbers

1234

Style counts and so do house numbers. Accurate Image provides a wide selection of sizes, finishes and fonts for your home address numbers. Constructed of cast aluminum or bronze, the numbers are both durable and stylish. Celebrate the chic, modern design of your Rancho with a custom set of house numbers.

Order online from www.accurateimageinc.com or call 206-522-1136.

Rancho Connections

Connecting Rancho owners and residents with service providers in the neighborhood.

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Historic Preservation Update

Many Rancho owners have contacted me since receiving our first issue of Rancho Style to inquire about the status of historic preservation within the Ranchos. Following is a summary of recent communications to update you on this process:

I have been in contact with Ruthann Lehrer, the recently retired Historic Preservation Officer for the City Of Long Beach. The City is still in the process of selecting Ms. Lehrer's replacement, and as a result, all historic district considerations are on hold. No exact timeline is available regarding the selection of a new preservation officer, though the City Planner's office has advised me that a deadline of May 15, 2004 has been set for receipt of applications for this position.

Before Ms. Lehrer left office she was instrumental in gathering two proposals for a reconnaissance level survey of the Ranchos, the first step in determining if the neighborhood has the substantial vintage architecture remaining to justify historic designation. I am in possession of both of those proposals, and both came in at approximately \$25,000. While this is a substantial sum, there may be grants available to help subsidize a portion of this cost.

Once a new preservation officer is appointed, I plan to meet with him or her to learn of any State or Federal grant opportunities that may be available to the City to help with this effort. The balance, assuming there is one, would somehow have to be paid for by the City, and any portion that the City would not be willing to fund would need to be covered through a combined effort of our owners and residents and/or other contributors in our community.

The City will hopefully complete its selection of a new preservation officer by the middle of this summer. In the interim, and throughout this process, your opinions are welcomed and valued. If you have any thoughts you would like to express on the issue of historic preservation in the Ranchos, please send them to doug@ranchostyle.com or call me at (562) 627-1001.

More information about the Historic Preservation Officer position can be found at the City web site: <http://www.ci.long-beach.ca.us>.

Free Market Evaluation of your Rancho

There are buyers for every type of Rancho, regardless of their condition. Call Doug to schedule a no-obligation assessment of your home. It will include:

- ✓ An overview of pending homes sales in the Ranchos
- ✓ A summary of recent home sales in the Ranchos
- ✓ A no-obligation consultation on the marketing of your Cliff May home for maximum exposure and value.

Call Doug Today!
562-627-1001

Rockabilly Rancho

John and Valerie Pitts developed their appreciation of midcentury style through their rockabilly roots. So when it came time to buy a home, John, a onetime road manager for Brian Setzer and the Stray Cats, knew they had to find something that reflected their appreciation for 1950s design and architecture. "We loved the neighborhood and the architecture, so the decision to settle here was easy," says John. "It just took a little patience and perseverance to find the right home."

It took the Pitts four or five attempts, but perseverance paid off when they found a four bedroom model that was prime for a makeover—and they didn't waste time.

"The kitchen needed to go," says Valerie. "It was too cramped and it diminished the openness of the room. We transformed it into what I think is the best room in the house."

The results have been spectacular, transforming the home into one of the best examples of a contemporary and modernized Cliff May Rancho.

Above: The Pitts' clean and open kitchen, punctuated by exquisite midnight blue Caesar Stone countertops. Note the innovative placement of lighting on the ceiling to avoid unsightly conduit lines. **Right:** A view from the living area looking toward the kitchen. The openness of the room is complimented by light colored hardwood floors and the tasteful, restrained placement of classic midcentury modern furniture.



New!

Want to get inside your neighbor's Rancho? Check out the Pitts' home and more at the new photo gallery at www.ranchostyle.com.



Enter to win **Atomic Ranch magazine** * (1-year subscription)

3 Ways to Enter!



Call Doug 562-627-1001



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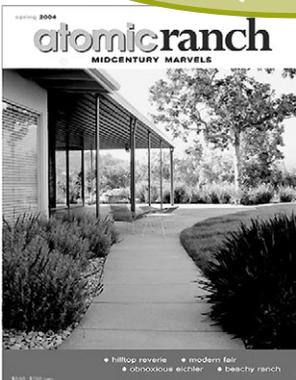
Complete this form and mail it to Doug (mailing address on back page).

Name _____ Phone _____

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Newsletter comments/feedback _____

Check here if you would like to be contacted about buying or selling a property.



Doug Kramer's

Rancho Style

May 2004



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Hello Rancho Neighbors,

Happy May to all. It has been a warm Spring thus far, and along with the weather the real estate market is heating up. I can remember a time not too long ago when we were saying that no home in the Ranchos had ever sold for more than \$300,000. It seemed like an invisible barrier at the time, but once broken it was not long before we tore through the \$400,000 mark as well. And look at us now, we strode easily past \$500,000 this Spring and we're setting new records every day.

There are signs of pressure on the market, however. The number of individuals or families who are able to afford their first home is diminishing, and with interest rates likely to rise after the elections in November, this number will shrink even further. We homeowners can't complain though—it's been a great few years!

As interest rates climb, there are ways to keep values high where other neighborhoods may decline. The Ranchos are an example of a neighborhood that has historical and architectural significance beyond that of neighboring tracts. Our understanding and appreciation of that significance will obviously play a major role in our home values going forward, and it is the goal of this newsletter to support this. Based on the feedback I've received from the neighborhood thus far, we are heading down the right track.

I look forward to continued feedback and suggestions from all of you, and I welcome the opportunity to represent you with any of your real estate needs.

Warm Regards,

Doug Kramer

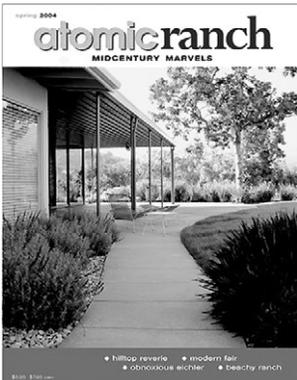
In This Issue

- Cliff Notes: Less is More
- Atomic Ranch visits the Ranchos
- Historic Preservation Update
- Rockabilly Rancho
- Atomic Ranch Giveaway



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Enter to Win!



Be sure to enter the June 15 giveaway for a free, one-year subscription to **Atomic Ranch** magazine, a celebration of the ranch house and its stylish cousin, the modernist tract home (soon to feature a Cliff May Rancho).

Congratulations to Rancho owners **Kathy Flanagan** and **John Ferlazzo**, winners of last issue's "Ranch House Style" book giveaway.

Details on Page 3.

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only and nothing herein is intended as advice. It is not intended as a solicitation if your home is currently listed with a broker. I cooperate fully with other brokers and I support their efforts. All information deemed accurate but not guaranteed. An Equal Opportunity Company. Equal Housing Company. Some offices independently owned and operated. Printed in the U.S.A. Copyright © 2004.