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Cliff Notes

Getting to Know Cliff May

Builder and Pioneer

In the early 1930s Cliff May was designing homes in San Diego and Los Angeles. Then, and throughout his career, he was building homes for the Southern California climate and for people who wanted to enjoy it. He was a builder and a promoter and he pioneered a style—the California ranch house.

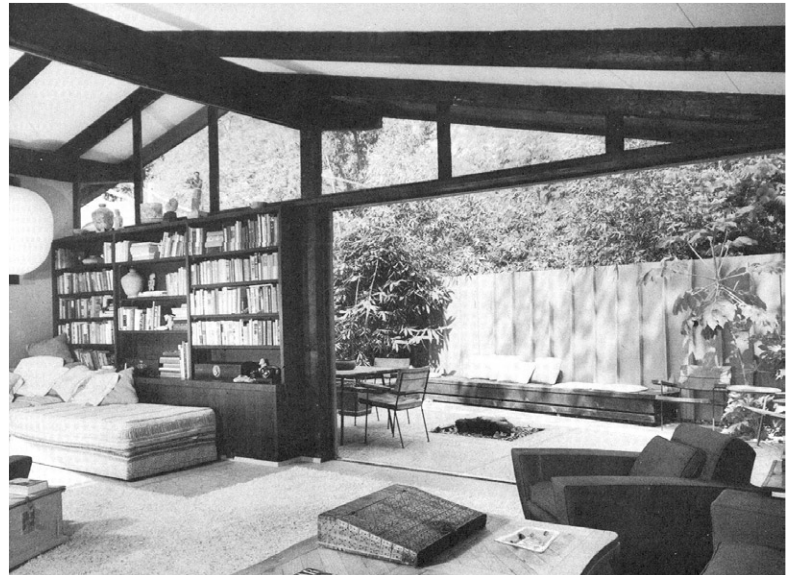
In an interview in 1936, May explained: “The early Californians had the right idea. They built for the seclusion and comfort of their families, for the enjoyment of relaxation in their homes. We want to perpetuate these ideas of home building.”

What made Cliff May exciting to anyone interested in home design was his drive to perpetuate ideas of livability rather than façade. His passion was designing homes that were in harmony with the way people wanted to live. He watched families use his houses—watched them give parties, prepare meals, use the patio for entertaining. Each idea that brought pleasure to home owners was worked over and improved in the next house he built.

The Father of the California Ranch Home

May loved wide open spaces. No wonder. A descendant of an early California Spanish family, he was raised on a San Diego ranch. Considered by many to be the father of the California ranch-style house, May is noted for combining the western ranch house and Hispanic hacienda styles with elements of modernism. His approach called for houses to be built out instead of up, with the constant goal of bringing the outdoors in.

No new idea in planning, no new material, escaped May's attention. Large expanses of glass and sliding glass doors, for example, came into his designs the month they were available. Twenty years ahead of its time, one



This Cliff May design reflects his love of open spaces.

of his homes was featured in an issue of the San Diego Union under the heading: “Home with a garden in every room.”

May studied business and accounting at San Diego State for a couple of years but left school around the time the stock market crashed in 1929. While still a student he made furniture, which he sold in a model house. That led him to home building after leaving school, and he built and designed his first house in San Diego when he was 23.

Still, May never became a member of the American Institute of Architects with the designation of AIA, but rather, spent most of his career as a licensed building designer. “I was proud that I got where I did and wasn't an architect,” he said in an interview with the Los Angeles Times at the age of 79.

Cliff May was ultimately given the designation of licensed architect when the State of California, under Governor George Deukmejian, did away with the agency overseeing building designers.

Cliff May Ranchos of Long Beach

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

Renovation

Factors to Weigh

From time to time, some Rancho owners find that their homes no longer suit their needs. You may have purchased your home when there were two in your family and now there are three or four. Perhaps you now work from home and need more space for a home office. Or perhaps your perspective on space and design have changed and you want your home to reflect those new ideas.

The question that comes up for many of us is whether it is better to remodel our home to fit our new lifestyle or sell and buy another home that is better suited to our needs.

The key questions that are usually addressed relative to remodeling are the following: Is it feasible to remodel your Rancho to create the kind of living space you need? How much will it cost and can you afford it? Is it more cost-effective to buy another home that suits your needs or remodel your existing home? Can you realistically live through a remodel project? And important to the Ranchos, will the remodel reflect the intent of the original architecture and fit the neighborhood?

If the neighborhood works for you, the obvious starting point is to research whether your home can be modified to suit you for a price you can afford. Make a list of the features your home lacks as well as those features that you want and need. Ask friends or neighbors who remodeled recently, or your real estate agent, to recommend architects.

Meet with an architect—you may want to interview several—to discuss the feasibility of the project you have in mind. Make sure you talk with local architects who know local zoning and permit requirements and allowances. You may want to have preliminary drawings done, but don't spend money on a complete set of architectural plans until you're sure you want to move forward. Once you know the renovation is feasible, consult with contractors to get ballpark estimates of how much the project will cost.

Homeowners often make the mistake of assuming that they'll recoup the full cost of a major renovation when they sell. This is rarely the case unless you own the property for a significant time after the renovations are completed. It is therefore recommended that you do not undertake a major renovation unless you plan to stay in your home for the long run.

An Architect's Value

If you are considering a renovation, whether it is extensive or modest, an experienced architect may be your most valuable resource. Architects are not just used for design and aesthetic considerations, they also excel in contract management, guided by forms and agreements from the American Institute of Architects that clearly stipulate contract tasks and project responsibilities.

Every remodel or design project represents a challenge. From the initial meeting to completion the process requires extensive know-how, specific knowledge, and able negotiation and communication skills. Even the simple definition of the "scope of work" demands a keen understanding of what an estimated budget and project should describe.

Most clients have a fixed budget in mind and a fairly good idea about what they would like to see in a completed renovation project. Unfortunately, these two concepts are most often at odds with each other. The project will almost always cost more and be more complex than originally planned, and rarely will it turn out exactly as it was conceived.

Another point to consider when meeting with architects is how interested they are in your project. Some architects are better suited for work on Cliff May homes because they have an appreciation for the style and an ability to create designs that compliment the architecture and the indoor/outdoor relationship of the homes.

The bottom line is that everything in construction is cost related, so an owner is wise not to skimp on the fees for the person who is best able to control those costs. Limiting architectural contracts to keep design fees low could be a disservice to your project and your pocketbook.

If you would like contact information for architects or interior designers who work in the area and are familiar with the Cliff May Ranchos, please contact me and I will be happy to assist you.

Real Find!

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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 and bring a touch of sophistication to your home.

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Restoration

One of the finest examples of a contemporary Cliff May Rancho is the home of Scott and Dianne Parker, which the couple restored over a period of two and a half years.

Dianne was skeptical of the house the first time they visited the property. "It was in bad shape when we first encountered it." Says Dianne. "It had suffered years of neglect. Fortunately, Scott could see beyond the decay and was able to develop a vision for what it could be."

Upon purchasing the property, Scott, an architect, promptly opened up the interior by removing a small bedroom adjacent to the living area and remodeling the outdated kitchen. The result is an airy "great room" with an enhanced appearance of openness and dimension.

Above: The Parker's living area, which receives natural light from the clerestory and floor to ceiling windows of the original Cliff May design. **Below:** Floor to ceiling glass and French doors connect the Parker's master bedroom to their private courtyard, which is enhanced visually by the symmetry of concrete pavers set within a bed a pebbles.

If you have a remodeling or interior design project that you would like to share with your Rancho neighbors, we'd love to hear from you! Please contact Rochelle Kramer at 562.627.1001 or rochelle@ranchostyle.com.



Enter to win Ranch House Style by Katherine Samon

3 Ways to Enter!



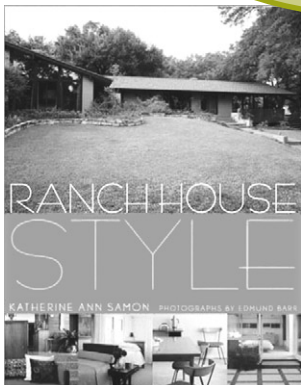
Call Doug 562-627-1001



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Entry must be received by April 15, 2004.



Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Email _____

Newsletter comments/feedback _____

Doug Kramer's

Rancho Style

March 2004



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Dear Rancho Neighbors,

Welcome to the second issue of Rancho Style. I want to thank the many neighbors who responded to the premiere issue in January; it is not surprising that so many of you share a passion for our neighborhood and its architecture. It was validating to get your responses, and it reinforces the effort to create a newsletter that is dedicated to design and architecture within the Ranchos.

Design in America has come full circle in the last 50 years. As a result, interest in the Ranchos is as strong or stronger than ever. The line to get into the neighborhood is long, primarily because individuals recognize an opportunity to be part of architectural history. It doesn't matter the condition a Rancho is in today—the more original it is the more in demand it is.

In this issue of Rancho Style I'm pleased to present a retrospective on Cliff May and his influence on residential architecture. And under my "Featured Property" section I'm excited to present the beautifully restored Rancho of Scott and Dianne Parker, whose home is featured in "Ranch House Style". If you don't have it already, I encourage you to enter to win "Ranch House Style" in this issue's book giveaway.

On the issue of the book giveaway, I'd like to extend congratulations to Rancho owner Mary Wanous for winning last issue's drawing for "Western Ranch Houses by Cliff May."

As always, I welcome your feedback concerning the newsletter or other factors relating to the Ranchos. I can always be reached at 562.627.1001 or doug@ranchostyle.com.

Best Regards,
Doug Kramer

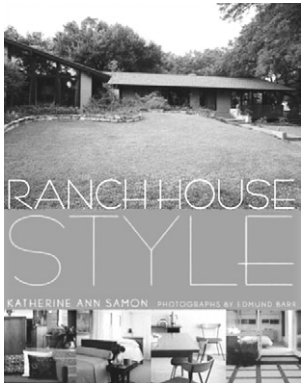
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Enter to Win!



Enter to win a free copy of "Ranch House Style" by Katherine Ann Samon.

Ranch is in style again, and this book showcases the best of it. Whether that style is the mid-century modern of Corbusier and the Eameses, or the cross-cultural awareness of the sixties, Ranch House Style offers inspiration and instruction on re-creating these looks in your own home.

Entry Form on Page 3.