

Nine Houses

The nine houses in this exhibit, presented chronologically, demonstrate the range of work from 1940-1975. However, the thematic groupings are not entirely chronological. The first group of houses – flat-roofed, single-story boxes on flat sites – start with Neutra's 1939-40 Garden house, an addition to his original 1932-33 VDL Research House. The Garden house is a nearly flat-roofed structure with only a small amount of steel, largely constructed of wood frame; this was typical of Neutra's work of the period, in which the budget often precluded the use of the more expensive steel framing. The exhibited houses actually constructed of steel frame begin with the 1952 Schrage house by Raphael Soriano, an architect who also built in the Case Study House (CSH) program. They continue with two other houses from that program, CSH #17 by Craig Ellwood, 1954-55, and CSH # 21 by Pierre Koenig, 1959. These houses all sit on a flat site – whether natural or created – with indoor spaces connecting through extensive glazing to adjacent exterior spaces designed for outdoor living.

The second group of houses used construction systems that were less pure, more composite and sometimes more expedient. The 1946 Kallis house by R.M. Schindler used a modified wood frame with sloping roofs and walls and the 1948 Carling house by John Lautner combined an unusual hexagonal steel frame with wood post and beam construction and textured masonry walls. Both architects worked with Frank Lloyd Wright, and his emphasis on the connection of the form of the house to the specific nature of the site can be seen in both designs. The 1966-68 Kappe house by Ray Kappe is constructed of concrete towers and glued-laminated wood beams and also makes a careful connection to its sloped site. These houses demonstrate that for some modern architects construction was a means to an end rather than the basis of architectural expression. This group of houses all have multiple levels, take on a variety of roof forms, and are designed to accommodate the specific shape of their sites, rather than impose a flat plane uniting inside and outside.

The third group of houses are widely identified with postmodernism, with their complex forms and use of expedient building techniques that accepted, and even exploited, vernacular building systems and imagery, using them to fashion High Style products. Frank Gehry's 1968-72 Davis studio/residence in Zuma Beach is constructed largely of conventional wood framing covered in corrugated steel. Charles Moore's 1972-74 Burns house in Pacific Palisades, was built of conventional wood framing covered in stucco. Both houses have multiple levels in their complex interior spaces, varied roof forms, and accommodate the specific nature of their sites, linking them to the second group of houses in form and spirit.