

The homes of Los Angeles' (architectural) stars

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(CNN) — [Los Angeles](#) may be most famous for Hollywood, but it is also a mecca for modern architecture and an ideal destination to explore the work of the legendary architects synonymous with home design from the 1920s to the 1950s.

In the late 19th century, [California](#) was connected to the rest of the country by the railroads that successfully joined east to west. And with the inception, innovation and rapid growth of the film industry in the early 20th century, California became a magnet for artistic adventurers, drawing Midwest-based architects Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler west to ply their trade, launching Southern California's great modernist architecture period.

Their revolutionary living structures were a radical departure from traditional design, including their distinctly Southern Californian relationship with nature: Outside and inside circulate seamlessly, doors slide, gardens and outdoor spaces abound.

After World War II, *Art & Architecture* magazine launched a project called the Case Study House Program. The scheme, announced in the January 1945 issue of the publication, challenged eight designers and architects, including Charles and Ray Eames and Richard Neutra, to design homes that "create 'good' living conditions for eight American families." The houses needed to be "capable of duplication and in no sense be an individual performance."

Nice try, *Art & Architecture*. Decades later, the [Case Study houses](#) have become just that: dynamic, vivid performances, though the structural similarities among them blithely eschew the term "individual."

According to Laura Massino Smith, the architectural historian at [Architecture Tours Los Angeles](#) and author of numerous guides to Los Angeles neighborhoods, these architects could "get away with methods of construction that they might not in other places: No snow, no ice and not very much rain. It made it a hotbed for innovation."

With Massino Smith's expert counsel, we've selected five of these historic homes -- all of which you can visit, enter and experience. Hopefully they'll stand forever despite the winds of time and, yes, occasional inclement California weather, a testament to modernist sensibilities and the unique beauty of Los Angeles' culture, climate and instinct for trailblazing, innovation and experimentation.

Hollyhock House

Frank Lloyd Wright's very first commission in Southern California, [Hollyhock House](#) (1921) is in many ways the bold starting shot of L.A.'s modern architectural movement.

Built to feel (in Wright's word) "indigenous" to its surroundings, Hollyhock House explodes the boundaries between indoor and outdoor space. The primary building material, terra-cotta, is an homage to the Mayan history of the region, and every major room is mirrored by an equivalent outdoor response.

Hollyhock House was Frank Lloyd Wright's first project in Southern California.

The house is detailed in Wright fashion down to its remarkable chair spines (which look both like human and floral spines), and the signature gesture in both furniture and decorative detail is the image of the Hollyhock, the owner's favorite flower.

Today Hollyhock House serves the artistic interests of its original owner as a full-time arts center serving the greater Los Angeles area.

Hollyhock House is available for self-guided tours, Thursday through Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

*4800 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90027; [barnsdall.org/hollyhock-house](#)
[15 things to do around Los Angeles](#)*

Schindler Kings Road

Not only were Rudolph Schindler and Frank Lloyd Wright influenced by one another -- they sometimes worked together. Schindler was a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright, who brought him to Los Angeles initially to supervise Hollyhock House.

A philosophical and artistic exercise in communal living, the Schindler House (1922) began as a deeply personal experiment for Schindler and his wife. The house was designed to be shared with another couple, with a room for each of the four inhabitants.

The conceit was to reinvent the idea of a shared living space, and create a home that both removed conventional barriers but also offered more individual spaces for dwellers. And, indeed, the house stayed true to its impulse for openness, as it was famous for its social gatherings, from parties to salons to left-wing political events.

According to The MAK Center for Art and Architecture, "the house became an architectural laboratory: it is the birthplace of the Southern California modernism we celebrate today."

Schindler House is available for self-guided tours, Wednesday through Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

835 North Kings Road, West Hollywood, California 90069; [makcenter.org/sites/schindler-house](#)

Neutra VDL House

Perhaps the most quintessentially mid-century modern L.A. home (though Massino Smith is loathe to name just one), the Neutra VDL Research House (1932), located in the hills of the Silver Lake neighborhood, is hard to beat.

"It is one that has a lot of the principles of the mid-century modern architecture because, our climate being what it is, he was able to build a house with glass walls, flat roof, the littlest amount of shelter really needed."

When the original VDL tragically burned down in 1963, Neutra and his son and partner Dion rebuilt it (known afterwards as VDL II), using the same footprint and envelope and preserving many of the key design elements from the original, while enhancing certain materials and the precision of its relationship to the outdoors.

Richard Neutra developed the concept of biorealism, a theory that proximity to nature was actually good for your health, and he sought to design houses that reflected that premise. This house, in both its original and second incarnations, is no exception.

Neutra VDL is available for self-guided tours on Saturdays only, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

2300 Silver Lake Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90039; www.neutra-vdl.org

Video: [Uncover hidden L.A. with a movie location scout](#)

Eames House

Also known as Case Study House No. 8 (1949), this house is a remarkable example of both L.A. modernism and the Case Study project.

Charles and Ray Eames, who are typically associated with the modernist furniture still very popular today, ordered every piece of building material for No. 8 from a catalogue; as Massimo Smith described, it was "an early example of prefab."

Their commitment to a non-custom approach yielded a building made of two glass and steel rectangular boxes (a living space and a studio) that situates itself seamlessly into the natural environment of the Pacific Palisades hills. The house is purposefully made "homey" by the many artifacts and souvenirs of the Eames' travels placed liberally among all the rooms.

No. 8 is available for self-guided tours 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., every day except Wednesday and Sunday. Reservations are required.

203 Chautauqua Boulevard, Pacific Palisades, California 90272; eamesfoundation.org/house/eames-house

Stahl House

The Stahl House (1960) is truly an icon of mid-century architecture, both because of its "perfect modernism" (as Massimo Smith describes it) and because it was captured by architectural photographer Julius Shulman shortly after completion, becoming perhaps the defining image of L.A. modernism for decades to come.

A Case Study house (No. 22), the building itself is most notable for its physical relationship to the city: cantilevered over the Hollywood Hills and with three walls of glass overlooking the city, Stahl House both floats above and lives inside of Los Angeles' vast sea of lights.

Pierre Koenig is the architect of record, but Stahl House was the brainchild of owner Buck Stahl. It is a glamorous building, but the Stahls raised their three children there, a testament to its utility and livability.

Stahl House offers guided tours led by docents three times per day, on specific dates. Go to www.stahlhouse.com to view calendar and register for tours.

1635 Woods Drive, Los Angeles, California 90069; www.stahlhouse.com

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