graphical coverage is especially welcome, not least as it deals with the peninsula in the epoch of its mapping and description by topographers and cartographers of the stamp of Leandro Alberti and Ignazio Danti.

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Modernism

Dietrich Neumann, editor
Richard Neutra's Windshield House

Barbara Mac Lamprecht
Richard Neutra: Complete Works
Edited and designed by Peter Goessels

Clean. The Neutra space is clean, clearly a setting to be used and enjoyed. And where the climate allowed (and at times even in places where it did not) there was that seamless connection between interior and exterior, between house and garden, in which the architectural membrane was rendered nearly ephemeral. And if throughout his career Neutra retained aspects of de Stijl tradition—with its emphasis on spatial definition by planar composition—there was a mitigating engagement with the site's particularities (the "mystery and realities," as he once termed them in a book title) and the lives of those for whom he was building (the basis of his "biorealism").

A significant testing of Richard Neutra's design approach was the modernist holiday mansion for the John Nicholas Brown family, erected on Fishers Island, New York, in 1938. At 14,500 square feet, this was hardly the modest residence more characteristic of the architect's work in his adopted homeland, Los Angeles. Windshield, as the house was known, is not among the best known of the Neutra works, perhaps for its denial of the open spaces that distinguished Neutra's California works, or its paucity of professional photographic records, or its almost immediate (first) destruction by a hurricane shortly after its completion (rebuilt within a year, it was ultimately consumed by fire in 1973). Yet given the size of the structure, that it was Neutra's first commission on the East Coast, and that the clients played such a central role in its conception and execution, the story of the house makes informative and engaging reading.

Richard Neutra's Windshield House, edited by Dietrich Neumann, adroitly balances architectural investigation with social history. As introduction, Thomas Hines reprises his prior Neutra studies to present the architect's works before and after Windshield. Dietrich Neumann provides the book's principal essay, tracing the development of the project and its design, and explaining why this is one of the most prominent New England families sought a truly modern vacation house. Windshield involved extensive collaboration between architect and clients, perhaps more than any other of Neutra's residential projects. In response to the architect's habitual questionnaire, the Browns provided Neutra with an explication of their lives and desires, spelling out requirements in surprising detail (the typescript of the Brown reply is reproduced in facsimile in the appendix). For the most part, the process went smoothly, although with considerable give-and-take between the parties; John Brown was intimately involved with the course of design, from the basic ideas to the choice of materials.

While Joyce M. Bothelho's biographical sketch of John and Anne Kin-solving Brown eschews any critical dimension, it carefully establishes the clients' values and personalities that so strongly colored the making of the house. Despite Windshield's high cost (the most expensive modern house in the United States at the time), the Browns decided against complete custom furnishing. Thomas Michie's chapter on the furnishings details the surprisingly strong role played by Finnish architects Aino and Alvar Aalto and their Swedish design colleagues. At that time Aalto's furniture was hardly known in the United States and there was no commercial outlet for it. The size of the furniture order placed with Artek allowed customization of finishes and fabrics, much of which was executed after its arrival in Providence. J. Carter Brown, the son of the builder, closes the study with reminiscences of life within the house, adding the insight of one who has lived in, rather than merely studied, the place.

Except for the captions, the book's typography is blissfully legible and the text is for the most part jargon-free. The sole flaw in the design is a heavy band of silver that heads every page, an unfortunate design tic that stiles the page, forces the images to be unduly small, and renders the captions minuscule. One would have welcomed less silver and more visible detail in the images.

In researching the book, the authors drew on the rich surviving documentation of the Neutra papers and the Brown archives to conjure a remarkably complete tale (what will historians do in the future in an era of unrecorded telephone calls and erased e-mail?). All told, Richard Neutra's Windshield House provides a balanced architectural and social chronicle of a significant, and unknown, building in the modern corpus.

Richard Neutra: Complete Works is monumental in scope and production, with an elephantine format: measuring 12½ x 16 inches and bound to open horizontally, it comprises 464 pages and a surfeit of images (they are not numbered). The book is superbly printed with a lightly tinted spot varnish that shows the photographs, by Julius Shulman and others, to great advantage. There are recent color images as well, presumably where the condition of the house remained faithful to the original, and/or the photographer's assignment and travel schedule made new photography practical. In all respects, this is a noteworthy publication.
Neutra’s triumphant return to contemporary consciousness derives in large part from the image bank through which his architecture was recorded. Here the photographic protagonist was Julius Shulman. From their meeting in 1936, Shulman became the principal photographer for the expatriate Austrian, capturing in stunning black-and-white images (and at times in color) the essence of Neutra’s buildings. In this sense, for us, the reading audience, our Neutra is Shulman’s Neutra: he is the photographic Boswell to Neutra’s Johnson. We admire Neutra’s spatial compositions because of Shulman’s photographic compositions, the architectural play of space and light and shade through the chiaroscuro of the photographic print. Thus, any book on Neutra is also a book on Shulman.

The text, which includes an introductory essay and project descriptions, is the work of Barbara Mac Lamprecht, professor at California Polytechnic University at Pomona, which holds Neutra’s VDL House and a part of his archives (the principal donation of Neutra materials rests with the UCLA library’s special collections). Peter Goessel is credited as both editor and designer of the book’s ordered and handsome format. Neutra’s son Dion, architect and inheritor of the practice, contributes an introduction, while Julius Shulman adds the epilogue. The texts appear in English, German, and French. Clearly the inspiration for the format is the series of “Complete Works” books begun by Willy Boesiger / H. Girsberger in Zurich, the Le Corbusier series having the longest run and being the best known. But here the lucid modernity of the earlier models has been exaggerated to postmodern proportions, losing many of the qualities that marked the prototypes. Clearly, the publishers wanted to avoid a multivolume series and to put all of Neutra into a single book—a problematic decision.

The lead essay is clearly written, with some new insights on Neutra but little correlation between his biography and architectural ideas and practice. Lamprecht discusses his Viennese background and training, his war experience, and his uneasy connections with his compatriot Rudolph Schindler. She cites also how Neutra’s interest in technology played against his concerns for the life of the individual and society as a whole. But it is difficult to find coherence in the essay, whose structure is less clear than the style in which it is written. The narrative jumps from biographical sketch to thematic or architectonic notes, with—quite curiously—a few project entries thrown in their midst. There is little here, apart from several acute architectural analyses, that rivals, much less surpasses, Thomas S. Hines’s 1982 biography Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture. But to be fair, one doubts that was the author’s or editor’s intention. This is an introductory essay rather than a book in itself.

Clearly, the meat of the book—over 90 percent of it—comprises the projects themselves. Here Lamprecht is at her best, somehow managing to maintain her focus throughout the hundreds of projects, almost every time with a description worth reading. For example, the description of the Grace Lewis Miller House in Palm Springs (1937), after admitting that the house has suffered over the years, informs us: “It was she [Miller] who insisted the ceiling be raised 6 inches for a feeling of lightness. It was he [Neutra] who knew the reflecting pool would cast dancing light on the white ceiling, who designed bedroom cabinetry calibrated precisely to house specific hats and sweaters” (131). And Lamprecht is also frank about the shortcomings of Neutra’s thinking. For the William and Melba Beard House, Altadena (1935), detailed note is made of the foundation’s construction system and the deficiencies of the cooling ventilation that was supposed to result. Such critical distance brings a believability to the writing that unanimous praise would not.

Admittedly, there will be few who will read the book through in a short period as a reviewer does. But should one do so, he or she will discover that the project descriptions contain relatively little redundancy. The author nicely balances perceptive discussion of compositional strategy with snippets of Neutra’s own project descriptions or those from client letters before, during, or after construction. (A study of the responses to Neutra’s customary request for client biographies and profiles—in the form of a questionnaire in later years—would be an interesting study in and of itself.) The coverage is uneven, however. In some instances there is extended discussion without parallel pictorial illustration, at other times just the opposite. Some projects have photographs and no description. And there is some studio jargon, like speaking of Neutra’s “moves,” and quirks like spelling terrazzo with a capital T or speaking of “glassed” façades, but these are of minor consequence. Typographic mistakes are minimal, a major accomplishment in itself in this era of loose copyediting. More troubling is the complete absence of captions and/or keying of images to the text (what editors call “figure callouts”). As a result, it is difficult, and at times nearly impossible, to relate the issues presented in the descriptions to the spaces depicted in the photographs. This leads to a breakdown in communication between author and reader.

Plans accompany almost every building, a very welcome addition to a catalogue of complete works. But the clarity achieved through redrawing is outweighed by the overly simplified graphic language of the plans, which seriously diminishes Neutra’s original representational language. The new plans are conceivably as diagrams, with each building floating in a very un-Neutraesque way on white space—in effect, completely denying the building’s site and context. Little distinguishes bearing walls, the primary architectonic definers, from nonstructural partitions. In the plan, closets are shown without doors; the purity of the spatial boundaries—how the architect intended them—thus appears more as Arts and Crafts than mature Southern California Modernism. This distortion serves the architect’s work poorly, as does the lack of roads, paths, landscape, all of which
were important to Neutra's conception of architecture. One need only compare the architect's own presentation site plan of the celebrated Kaufmann House in Palm Springs (1947)—one of the few of the architect's drawings reproduced in the book (62)—with the corresponding new plan accompanying the project description (181). Every vestige of the site—rocks, cactus, paving, agave, even lawn—has melted into air. Could we argue for fewer plans with more detail? Obviously, this is an issue open to diverging points of view, but the distortion of the spaces by the graphic manner and the characterless void that surrounds remain troublesome.

Even more problematic is the almost complete absence of sections throughout the book. To an architect like Neutra architecture equals space, and section equals—and in many cases surpasses—plan as the critical representation. The entrance and descent into the living room of the Lovell House (Los Angeles, 1929), for example, is best captured in section. The neat tucking of recreation functions under the terrace of the Tremaine House in Montecito (1948), or even its bedrooms embedded into the hillside, is arguably more significant than its noted pinwheel organization. Indeed, in many of the project descriptions, the author rightly stresses the spatial development of the project as its essence. Alas, uncoordinated photographs and a diagrammatic plan just do not correspond in quality and completeness to the author's narrative, which is unfortunate. Space (in the book), one would hazard, was a major consideration. But this brings up questions relating to the conception of the book as a whole, which, to my mind, is flawed.

This volume presumably was conceived as a reference to the complete works of Richard Neutra. It tries, at the same time, to be a coffee table book (or as a colleague said, it is less a coffee table book than a coffee table—just add legs). And yet almost every aspect of its design conception—no doubt a major part of the project—seems off base. Given its gargantuan size and horizontal format, it is a book that thwarts easy reading at best, and at worst makes reading almost impossible. Given its weight (nearly ten pounds) and its wingspan (nearly 3 feet), you just cannot hold this book in your hands.

So it must rest on a table of some sort. But you cannot sit in the center and fully read both pages, as the outer columns of the ten-column format are just too far away, at least for those of us of a certain age for whom visual acuity has become a problem. Compound this by the sheen off the coated stock and you've got reading problems. Either you have to move the book on the table or you need to move physically back and forth—ideally on a chair with wheels—just to get through it. Perhaps a committed poststructuralist critic would be thrilled by this conflating of the cognitive reading act with the physical exertions of the body. I was less captivated; reading, even as a reviewer, became a real chore. I have my doubts whether anyone else will ever really read this book, which is a considerable shame given the work involved and the richness of images and information it contains.

A "Complete Works" book is destined to serve primarily for reference. We want to know what was designed or built in what year, perhaps in what order, perhaps in what materials or with what spatial composition, for whom, in what landscape. It should be easy for the reader to find a year or a project. Given the ten-column format that allows a project to begin in any column, it is an arduous task to find a particular project. In some cases, the photographs of one project seem linked with the text for its successor. Very few images actually bleed the full page, and most would have been comfortably accommodated on a 9 x 12-inch page. There is, quite welcome, an index, but its position at the end of the book demands turning ten pounds of pages to reach the reward. For all these reasons, the elephantine design appears misconceived. Three separate language editions, while more complicated for the publisher to market, would have been more appealing to the reader, even if it meant publication in two volumes. At a cost of $150 for the present study, two books in a nice slipcase wouldn't have been out of line.

The book's design also raises questions about the nature of architectural publications in the last decade. Since Bruce Mau's massive version of Rem Koolhaas's S,M,L,XL hit the stands, books have become thicker and thicker. In the Netherlands, at least, the thickness often accompanies smaller-format pages, which can be picked up and read. Richard Neutra: Complete Works wants to have both grand measure and monumental presence. This it achieves, but it does so at a cost to its content.

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Sarah Williams Goldhagen

Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism

A decade has passed since the flurry of publication that accompanied the Louis Kahn retrospective exhibition in 1991. Sarah Goldhagen's excellent book under review here advances Kahn scholarship to a further milestone, although she does not so much alter our understandings as refine and generally expand them by paying close attention to nuance and detail. Goldhagen places seven of Kahn's most notable works (or small groups of related works) in their intellectual, cultural, and artistic contexts. To adopt and adapt the somewhat strained vocabulary of her book's title, she "situates" these projects for us, rather than writing Kahn's artistic biography, although the buildings are presented chronologically, and a narrative of artistic investigation, discovery, and invention runs through the chapters.

The first chapter treats Kahn's early work as an architect of public housing in the 1930s and 1940s and his unsuccessful entry in the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial competition of 1947, which was won by Eero Saarinen.