

Desert maverick

Eschewing Palm Springs' classic modern expression, novel architect Hugh Kaptur turned to energy efficiency, insulation and solar power

MORE THAN A BOOK ABOUT one of Palm Springs' most prolific modern architects, Steven Keylon's book suggests just how fun and varied mid-century modern architecture can be—including as it morphs into late-century modern.

Hugh Kaptur produced more than 200 buildings in and around Palm Springs. Nine of his buildings, among his largest projects, line Tahquitz Canyon Way, the Champs-



The Modern Architecture of Hugh Michael Kaptur By Steven Keylon. 152 pages. Paperback. Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.



Palm Springs. He considered buying a now-classic Alexander tract home—but didn't because of its window walls and lack of insulation.

"Being a young man and having to watch how I spent my money, I couldn't be spending a lot of money on power bills," he recalls.

His interest in insulation led to creative solutions, including an office building from 1978 with colorful flowering gazania growing on earthen berms that serve as buttresses.

Kaptur also designed solar 'Sunergy Houses' back in 1975 that, sadly, were never built, with abstract sculptural forms and built-in speakers in the pool "for underwater listening enjoyment."

Best known for stucco or slump-walled structures that suggest Pueblo buildings, Kaptur also designed condos inspired by the New Orleans French Quarter, apartments influenced by "tent structures in an Arabian desert," homes dubbed "Mexican Modern" and "Tahitian Modern," Japanese-influenced homes, and his fair share of glass-walled homes, often using steel.

Élysées of Palm Springs.

Even in his early days—Kaptur's designs first got built in the desert in 1958—the architect often shied away from what's considered the classic Palm Springs modern look.

"I wanted to get out of the thin-lined, post-and-beam type of construction and into more solid forms of construction," Kaptur tells the author.

"The Purcell house is nice, it's earthy, it has mass to it," he says of one of his homes.

Kaptur, who is still designing, does much of the talking in this well-illustrated, thorough, and friendly book.

Energy efficiency influenced Kaptur's architecture from his arrival in



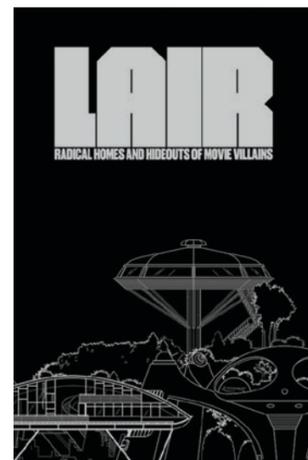
RENEGADE. Above: The stucco front of the Selzer House, the unusual design from 1988 by Hugh Kaptur (pictured below left, circa 1960s), is played up in the new book. Owner Paul Selzer called it "Mexican modern."

One major influence on his work were buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright, especially the angular shapes of Taliesin West. You can see this in Kaptur's first project in Palm Springs, the Impala Lodge.

His signatures include a wide variety of decorative beam-ends and oddly shaped, expressive windows and window surrounds.

Kaptur was born in 1931 and grew up in Detroit, the son of a famous auto designer. He studied architectural engineering and joined the Marines during the Korean War, serving in Japan. He discovered Southern California during his service.

A highlight of the book are the many renderings drawn by Kaptur and preserved in his archive. They are a delight.



Lair: Radical Homes and Hideouts of Movie Villains Edited by Chad Oppenheim with Andrea Gollin. 296 pages. Hardcover. Tra Publishing.

In real life Oppenheim is an architect who runs a mid-sized firm that produces glistening, undulating, and joyful buildings worldwide. In dreams, though, and in this book, he explores what one contributor calls "modern

dwelling that symbolically signal the unstable, the transitory, the amoral."

And he loves them. Why not? The villains' homes on display in *Lair* include several designs by architect John Lautner and many by one of Oppenheim's favorites, the set designer Ken Adam, "the Frank Lloyd Wright of décor noir."

"It's just always interesting to me how the bad guys always have the cool habitats," Oppenheim writes. "Have you ever wondered why that is?" Films in the book include 'Diamonds Are Forever,' 'North by Northwest,' and 'Lethal Weapon 2.'

The book is artfully designed but frustrating. Images and type are silver on black matte pages, and photos are hard to read. Wouldn't color have better presented these "machines for tyrants to live in?" Still, artist Carlos Fuego's remarkable architectural renderings look great in silver and are the book's highlight.

Why do villains crave modernity? "If you're going to do bad stuff," one commenter says, "do it in a cool place."



Everything She Touches: The Life of Ruth Asawa By Marilyn Chase. 224 pages. Hardcover. Chronicle Books.

Few artists add to the fabric of San Francisco as much as Ruth Asawa. Among her public art works, at Ghirardelli Square you see her mermaid fountain, and at Union Square a fountain sculpted originally in dough depicting the life of the city.

Known as much for her education advocacy as her art, Asawa even has a school of the arts named for her.

And the works she is best known for—described by critic Alfred Frankenstein as "huge abstractions in knitted wire mesh, with transparent black and gold forms, interpenetrating in subtle rhythms"—hang like magical clouds in the tower of the de Young museum.

Frankenstein, writing in the mid-1950s, went on to call them "among the most important contributions to sculpture to emerge from California."

Still, as Marilyn Chase makes clear in this compact bio, Asawa is an artist of international importance. Her story is fascinating: Growing up on a farm, interned with her parents during World War II, studying at now-legendary Black Mountain College, a racially mixed marriage with a modern architect, juggling an artist's life while raising six children.

Chase's book catches Asawa's spirit with deep affection.



I'd Love to Turn You On: Classical and Avant-Garde Music that Inspired the Sixties Counter-Culture Three CDs. Cherry Red Records.

Do you ever play Bach back to back with Berio? That would be Johann Bach's Baroque counterpoint followed by Luciano Berio's mash-up of voice and electronics?

Or the soundtrack from the slashing scene in 'Psycho,' then a bit of Shakespeare dialogue, followed by an excerpt from the gorgeous Seventh Symphony of Sibelius?

There's some cheek in this CD collection but also scholarship, as the uncredited compilers of this British box set have analyzed songs by the Beatles, Pink Floyd, Frank Zappa, and other 1960s pop stars to suss out their avant-garde influences.

The connection is often surprisingly direct, other times less so. In the latter case, the densely written 34-page booklet helps draw the sonic line from long-haired composers to the four mop tops and beyond.

The Beatles borrowed techniques—like tape-splicing, running tape in reverse, and blending electronics and found sound—from mid-century avant-garde composers like Stockhausen, Berio, and John Cage. They then made pop songs out of those things for people who would never have listened to the sources.

Still, the experimental pieces here make great listening, as do others by jazz inventors like Charlie Parker and Sun Ra. This collection is a trip.



Leo Richardson Quartet: Move CD. Ubuntu Music.

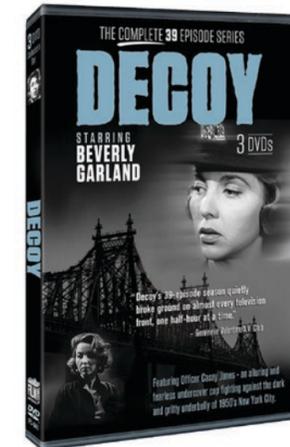
Mid-century jazz will never die as long as there are young musicians who play it as convincingly as Richardson and his working quartet, leaders in the London music scene.

Richardson got his degree in jazz performance just seven years ago, and this CD is only his second outing. *Move*, like Richardson's highly recommended predecessor, *Chase*, take you back to the days of hard bop in small, smoky clubs.

There are some fast, skittish bebop melodies, some Coltrane spirituality, a sense of rising joy and fulfillment. Tunes are blues-based, and there is a bit of Calypso. The album opens with several up-tempo tunes, which are great and show how tight the band is.

But even better are the beautiful ballads, including 'e.f.g.' on which Richardson sounds a bit like saxophonist Zoot Sims with light vibrato. The piece has a logic to it, a pace, a familiarity, like a standard you can't quite name.

All the tunes are self-penned, or, in one case, composed with the band, whose members play like they've been together for a decade.



Decoy Three DVDs. 39 episodes over app. 17 hours. Plus booklet. Film Chest Media Group.

Imagine 'Dragnet,' that classic detective TV series from the '50s, with a heart. Instead of Jack Webb's staccato just-the-facts delivery, we have a policewoman played by Beverly Garland—often undercover, but also in uniform—in an abundance of taut half-hour episodes. The show aired from 1957 to 1959.

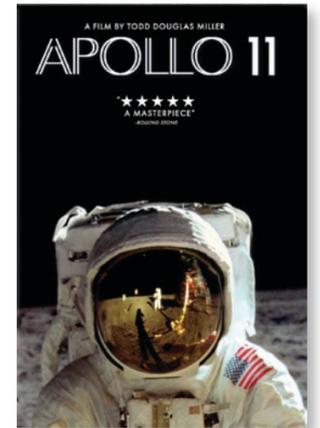
How many TV shows back then starred women? Relatively few. As cops? Fewer, if any. And were filmed on the streets of New York? Just this one.

Scenes are shot at Bellevue Hospital, the Stork Club, neighborhood bars, and throughout Brooklyn and Queens. Fine B&W cinematography will appeal to fans of film noir.

But skip historical importance. These are great oddball stories, as heavy lidded Officer Casey Jones sometimes works as hard to prove a suspect innocent as to catch her man. Unlike every other TV serial, this one has no repeating characters other than

Casey, no sidekicks or familiar foils. Topics can be hard-hitting: junkies, college athletes taking payola, obscene phone calls, mental illness, and murders. Casey is a straight-talking cop—but she doesn't play tough. She's a cop who cares.

One caveat—sound quality is only fair.



Apollo 11 Directed by Todd Douglas Miller. DVD. 1.5 hours plus added features. Universal.

Immense, heavy treaded vehicles slowly, oh so slowly, move not just the Apollo 11 spacecraft and its Saturn 5 rocket, but the entire launch pad, across the tarmac at the Kennedy Space Center.

It is July 16, 1969, 50 years before this documentary opened in theaters last year, and three men are about to fly to the moon. Two of them, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, will soon be the first to walk on its surface (and to this date, the last).

Few events have been as dramatic—though, surprisingly perhaps, almost everything went right. So where's the drama?

The drama is in the footage, and the patience with which it is put together. No talking heads. No narrator. You're not watching history. You are there.

The film provides hour-by-hour, sometimes minute-by-minute original footage, some shot in high-intensity 70mm that remained unseen, locked away, for 50 years. We see the astronauts in space, men in white shirts facing dials at Mission Control, tourists in sunglasses applauding the launch.

There's drama, comedy, and the sort of optimism that can be hard to imagine today. The film captures the mood of the era, or at least part of that era. There's nary a hippie to be seen.

Photography: Chon Vinson; and courtesy Hugh Kaptur