

The California collection

12 inspiring architecture and design books vital to every mid-century modern home library

By Adriene Biondo

A WELL-CURATED mid-century home library is a world unto itself, a place where we can go to learn and to dream, opening the door to the wonders of the 20th century, its influential architects, and style-makers.

For residents of California mid-century modern homes, that book collection begins with the basics—the must-haves that lay the foundation for the MCM world in which we live.

The 12 titles presented here are a practical starting place—with emphasis on California north and south, and on key mid-century figures and their work that have enriched our lives.

Keep in mind that compiling a useful library may mean search-

ing for titles that are hard to find. Surprisingly, a few of the books we recommend here are now commanding higher prices, suggesting that they have been discontinued or, impacted by the pandemic, between printings and awaiting paper availability.

For rare titles, look to online sites like eBay, and to independent booksellers who can assist with sourcing.

We hope the dozen book recommendations featured here inspire you, and that your quest for these and other quality titles covering mid-century design leads to books that add value to your home library and offer endless hours of reading pleasure.



1 EICHLER: MODERNISM REBUILDS THE AMERICAN DREAM

Honoring the legacy of Bay Area residential developer Joe Eichler, this is a thoroughly researched, hardbound history of Eichler Homes. Supplemented with 300 photographs, including original Eichler photographer Ernie Braun's compelling images of these ever-popular architectural icons. Now in its 20th year of publication, this coffee table book belongs in every Eichler home.

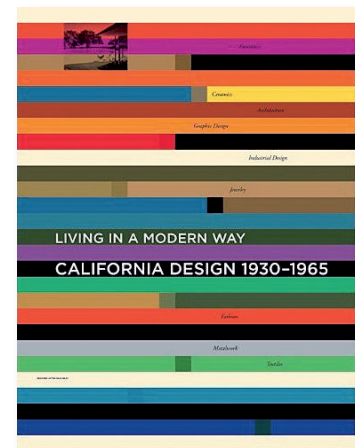
By Paul Adamson, Marty Arbunich. 240 pages. Gibbs Smith.



5 BIRTH OF THE COOL: CALIFORNIA ART, DESIGN AND CULTURE AT MIDCENTURY

Tune in your AM radio to Miles Davis' song 'Birth of the Cool' and time travel back into the 1950s style along America's West Coast. Starting with its stylized cover, explore with a modernist's eye the art, music, architecture, and design of the coolest, most innovative of any design era.

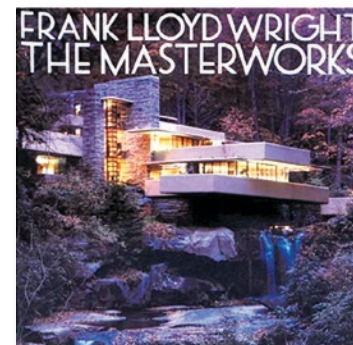
By Elizabeth Armstrong. 301 pages. Prestel Publishing.



6 CALIFORNIA DESIGN, 1930-1965: LIVING IN A MODERN WAY

A study of pre- and postwar 20th century design, 'California Design' runs the gamut from fashion to furniture to industrial design. Digging into the origins of modernism through postwar design innovations, this is the definitive book on California design. Served as the catalogue that accompanied the major 2011-'12 exhibit organized by LACMA.

By Wendy Kaplan. 360 pages. MIT Press.



7 FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT: THE MASTERWORKS

This handsome book features large-format photographs of 38 of the master architect's buildings, including the Marin County Civic Center, Fallingwater, Taliesin West, and Wright's Oak Park home and studio. Written by an apprentice to Wright, with insightful essays detailing each commission.

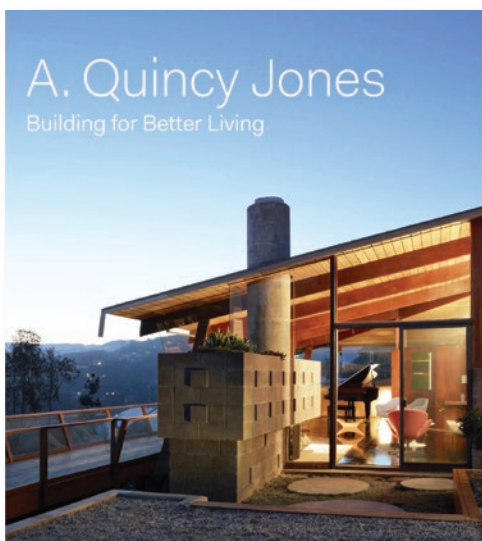
By Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer. 312 pages. Rizzoli.



8 CASE STUDY HOUSES: THE COMPLETE CSH PROGRAM, 1945-1966

This book profiles the pivotal Case Study House program that set a new standard for affordable modern living. Exhaustively researched, the book covers the postwar building boom, and the 36 now-famous experimental, architect-designed 'case studies.' The author curated the 1989 exhibition 'Blueprints for Modern Living' for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

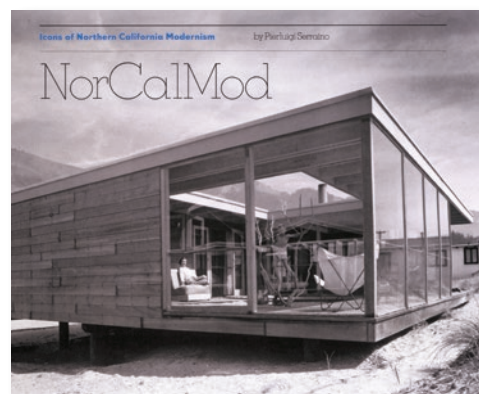
By Elizabeth A. T. Smith. 440 pages. Taschen.



2 A. QUINCY JONES: BUILDING FOR BETTER LIVING

This book documents the Eichler architect's commercial as well as residential works, including the Los Angeles home he designed for actor Gary Cooper. A highly collaborative designer by nature, Jones worked with notable architects such as Paul R. Williams and Frederick Emmons, lending his unique brand of mid-century elegance to California.

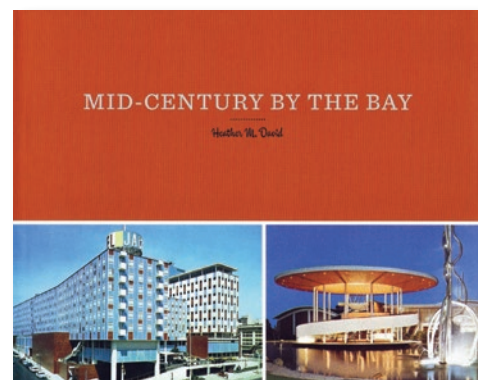
By Brooke Hodge. 224 pages. Prestel USA.



3 NORCALMOD: ICONS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA MODERNISM

In this book, architect and theorist Pierluigi Serraino introduces an illustrated history of the modernist architecture that followed the traditional 'Bay Region Style' established by earlier architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Marcel Breuer, and Walter Gropius. Exceptional photographs highlight important Northern California modernist treasures from the past and present.

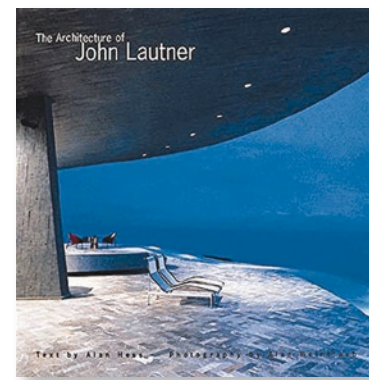
By Pierluigi Serraino. 288 pages. Chronicle Books.



4 MID-CENTURY BY THE BAY: A CELEBRATION OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

A fond tribute to the Bay Area's postwar period, 'Mid-Century by the Bay' takes us on a nostalgic visit into the culture and design of the 1950s and 1960s, and fosters an appreciation for innovative mid-20th century architecture. Curated by Heather David, a San Jose-based cultural historian and collector.

By Heather M. David. 152 pages. CalMod Books.



9 THE ARCHITECTURE OF JOHN LAUTNER

Known for dramatic designs, such as the Chemosphere house built on an 'unbuildable' hillside lot, Lautner is also known for his ingenuity and mastery of craft. Author and architect Alan Hess covers Lautner's years as a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, and details the legacy of this 20th century master architect.

By Alan Hess. 276 pages. Rizzoli.



10 JULIUS SHULMAN: MODERNISM REDISCOVERED

If you love California modern, you're sure to be captivated by this one. Authored by architect Pierluigi Serraino, and seen through the impeccable lens of renowned photographer Julius Shulman, whose extraordinary never-before-seen architectural views are immortalized between the covers of this important book published in high style.

By Pierluigi Serraino. 636 pages. Taschen.



11 EAMES: BEAUTIFUL DETAILS

True to its title and illustrated cover art of Eames' 'The Toy,' this presentation brings together the fluid beauty produced by the two icons of mid-century design, Charles and Ray Eames. Author and artist Eames Demetrios is the grandson of Charles and Ray, and longtime director of the Eames Office.

By Eames Demetrios. 408 pages. AMMO Books.



12 ALEXANDER GIRARD

A book to curl up with on a rainy day, this tribute to the important 20th century designer leaves no stone unturned. With his keen understanding of color and geometry, Girard's designs for Herman Miller, Braniff Airlines, furnishings, textiles, and every imaginable discipline come to life in this comprehensive biography.

By Todd Oldham. 664 pages. AMMO Books.