

Star Trek by design

New book tirelessly traces how the classic sci-fi TV series borrowed from MCM designers—and also inspired them

WITH PLOTS FEATURING cloud-like creatures, poisonous horned gorilla-like beasts, and the Starship Enterprise suddenly besieged by—in Mr. Spock's calculation—1,771,561 teddy bear-like Tribbles, it's easy to see why viewers might have missed what this book's authors find so charming about the original mid-1960s TV show *Star Trek*.

Episode after episode featured exciting mid-century modern design, from Capt. Kirk's seat on the bridge to Eero Saarinen-inspired tulip chairs, from designer Milo Baugh-



man's swirl-rocker club chair to an Architectural Pottery planter designed by John Follis.

But the designers behind the TV show, which ran from 1966 to 1969, did more than borrow from other designers. They provided inspiration. The authors suggest that mini-dresses worn by Lt. Uhura and other women on the show influenced a line of Space-Agey garb by Pierre Cardin.

And the show's production designer, Matt Jefferies, later helped NASA design the "first re-usable space shuttle," named the Enterprise after the vessel commanded by Kirk.

Not every modern furnishing on the show was obtained from a Los Angeles design shop, though many were. Some were designed by the



Star Trek - Designing the Final Frontier: How Midcentury Modernism Shaped Our View of the Future By Dan Chavkin, Brian McGuire, 168 pages. Hardcover. Weldon Owen.

show's in-house crew. Also among *Star Trek* props were many from Europe, including a Scandinavian Rya rug onto which character Dr. McCoy "collapses in agony" in one episode.

The endless MCM record keeping is something that's a bit obsessive about the book, but compelling too. "I devoted myself to the task of documenting anything on the program identifiable from the mid-century modern genre," Chavkin writes. The book's goal, the authors say, is to be "a survey of mid-century modern design as seen on *Star Trek*."

The ideal reader for this book would be both a Trekkie and a design fanatic. "For those who are both fans and modernists, this book may offer ideas for turning your dwelling into a *Star Trek* set," McGuire suggests.

The structure of the book—many chapters open with a brief plot summary of an episode, followed by an object-by-object breakdown of furnishings and décor—gets tedious.

SPACE AGEY. The new *Star Trek* book features photos—shots from the original TV series (as above) alongside products of modern furnishings—that make the case that the show was a kind of HGTV home improvement in space.

But the photos, screen shots from the series alongside product shots of the designs spotted on-screen, make the case that *Star Trek* was a kind of HGTV in space.

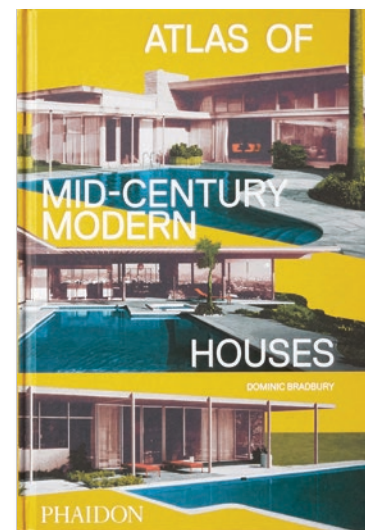
The authors point out the "impeccable taste" possessed by so many of the star villains confronted by Kirk and crew.

It's cool to find that one evil creature's abode on a faraway world is replete with "an entire set of Warren Platner's 'Platner collection' furniture:

glassware, a glass-and-metal coffee table surrounded by lounge chairs in red and purple."

Sometimes the style of the objects on view suggests the character of the aliens who own them.

"The placement of Brutalist objects," the authors write of one style of modernism, "is quite often associated with cultures engaged in conflict, from the hatred of internal class warfare to the angst of interplanetary strife."



Atlas of Mid-Century Modern Houses By Dominic Bradbury, 446 pages. Hardcover. Phaidon Press.

With more than 400 homes shown here, you would think Joe Eichler would make an appearance. But this book focuses on custom homes, most often grand ones, not tracts.

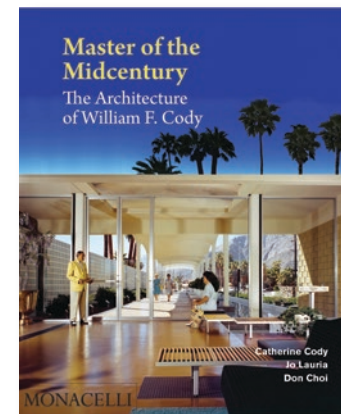
It's fascinating viewing the variety in style, look, material, and especially place. There's the 'sculptured house' seen in Woody Allen's *Sleeper*, many California Case Study Houses, and Palm Springs.

But for a Californian modernism fan, it's when Bradbury takes us beyond the Golden State that the book becomes most enlightening, as it explores regional modernist styles worldwide.

We visit the New England modernists of New Canaan, the Cape Cod modernists, and the 'Cambridge Five,' and learn about the influence of Palm Springs on 'Mexican Modernism.' The Mexico City garden neighborhood, La Pedregal, wins deserved attention, as does Denmark.

Barcelona and Catalonia emerge as a magical place, thanks to, among others, architect José Antonio Coderch and his white-walled modernism.

Bradbury writes in such an informed way, you could almost believe he has been in most of these homes.



Master of the Midcentury: the Architecture of William F. Cody By Catherine Cody, Jo Lauria, Don Choi, 312 pages. Hardcover. Monacelli Press

One of Palm Spring's most prolific architects, known for custom homes and golf communities, William Cody's signature home style was a glass rectangle.

Or, was it a home with nothing but angles? Or one merging modernism with traditional Mexican elements?

This marvelous and thorough book, drawn from the Cody archive with the help of the architect's daughter, reveals a man who settled in the desert in 1946 but did designs all over, including Havana.

Like Eichler homes, many of Cody's have entry courtyards, and "garden and planters [are] interspersed" throughout his homes.

Cody designed homes for Hollywood stars, plus banks, gas stations, a Tiki restaurant, even "the first of the high-end trailer parks."

He had an awesome eye for detail and quiet color, and designed his own lamps, and door, and cabinet pulls—which are equally awesome. Alas, Cody was laid low by a stroke in his 50s and died at age 62.



San Francisco: Portrait of a City By Reuel Golden (editor), Richie Unterberger, 480 pages. Hardcover. Taschen.

Another book of San Francisco photos—bridges, Chinatown, and hippies. Ho-hum, right?

But first turn to page 223, where photographer Nat Faibman must've been standing on the bar of the Buena Vista Café, near Fisherman's Wharf, back in 1956 to catch a raucous crowd downing shots and Irish coffee. The photo's composition draws your eye to a woman with red lips and pearls, looking like a real-world version of Grace Kelly, laughing so hysterically she cannot see.

This book, which runs chronologically, from the Spanish Mission period to the Covid pandemic, is full of such surprises, many sure to appeal to lovers of mid-century style.

We see socialites at a tea for Pat Nixon, Lenny Bruce slouching in the witness box during his obscenity trial, and the Tenderloin's Black Hawk jazz club with Miles Davis on the marquee.

Mid-mod material includes architecture by Neutra and Joe Eichler's Diamond Heights townhouses.

The book features images by photographers famous and anonymous, many rarely if ever published.



Total Exotica: from Far Off Islands to Your Bachelor Pad Two CDs. Righteous Recordings.

As a genre, 'exotica' has never been as well defined as say, bluegrass, or even grunge.

And you don't always know it when you hear it, as this surprisingly varied compilation suggests. What's the through line here? There is scarce annotation, and not even recording dates are provided.

Artists range from the legendary, Esquivel, to the obscure, The Markko

Polo Adventurers.

Still, this pair of discs would be a fun listen while staring at your tiki and soaking in your spa. Disc one, we are told, recreates the "ambiance of island life," while disc two is "more jazz-tinged."

Indeed, many numbers serve as three-minute aural travelogues, wafting you to paradise islands, with vibraphones or marimbas intertwining with piano over percussion of varied sonority, tropical birds honking as needed, thunder rumbling, rain pattering.

Prefer to remain in your bachelor pad, with an attractive companion by your side? Choose the songs that let just a tinge of the exotic drift into the room.



Heroes and Villains: the Sound of Los Angeles 1965-68 Three CDs. 80-page booklet. Cherry Red/Grapefruit Records.

Midway through the second disc of this deeply researched, often surprising compilation, comes a 1967 B-side from the Royal Teens with an irresistible, gulping beat and a high tenor lead crooning in anguish, "Tears in My Eyes...all over you."

It's nothing like the surf music or the Mamas & the Papas pop that help define the Los Angeles '60s sound, but that is the point of compiler David Wells, who serves us 90 songs from artists who range from legendary to unknown.

And if stories behind some of these songs are better than the experience of hearing them, that's OK, because Wells is a fine storyteller.

Wells writes that it was in the 1960s that L.A. became "the epicenter of the American pop universe." The resulting 45-rpm singles and

LPs showed "a unique blend of blissed-out optimism and creeping existential dread."

"Bona fide musical geniuses rubbed shoulders with pornographers, rapists, and even killers," he writes, adding, "it wasn't always easy to differentiate between the heroes and the villains."



Film Noir: The Dark Side of Cinema V Three DVDs. 2.5 hours plus bonus footage. Kino Lorber.

It's all about family in this trio of terrific 1950s melodramas, part five in an ongoing series.

Consider 'The Midnight Story,' in which, to catch a suspected killer, the hero played by Tony Curtis moves into the man's home, grows to admire him—and falls in love with his niece! This is a tale filled with surprises, plus it's filmed in San Francisco.

'Outside the Law' features a super-nice hero (an earnest Ray Danton), an ex-con who finds himself romancing the widow of a friend who was murdered while being mixed up with counterfeiters.

Family drama arises as our hero cooperates with the cops by going undercover to infiltrate the counterfeiters. Trouble is, the cop supervising the investigation is our hero's father, who is desperately trying to reconnect with his estranged son.

Also about family, 'Because of You' has innocent Loretta Young imprisoned for her fiancé's wrongs. Freed, she remakes her life, marries a good man, and has a child. Then who do you think shows up with menace in his eye?

Photography: courtesy CBS Corporation