

THE RANCH-TYPE HOUSE: EVOLUTION, EVALUATION, AND PRESERVATION

by

MICHAEL KEVIN CHAPMAN

(Under the Direction of Wayde A. Brown)

ABSTRACT

As buildings from the 'recent past' approach fifty years in age, the question of how to preserve these cultural resources is raised. This thesis considered one of those 'recent past' buildings: the Ranch-type house. Based upon an examination of the origins and development of the Ranch-type house and the architects who designed them in Georgia, the thesis specifically addresses the problem of evaluating and preserving this resource and how its significance can be evaluated. Utilizing archival materials and secondary research, this thesis demonstrates the framework within which these goals can be achieved.

INDEX WORDS: Architect, Georgia, Historic Preservation, House, Modern, Ranch, Ranch-type, Ranch type, Recent Past, Suburban, World War II.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Our buildings and towns also express our values and our society...we are our buildings, and our buildings are us.” -Mark Gelernter¹

The Ranch-type house was one of the most popular house types in the United States from the outset of the post-World War II house-building boom to the mid-1970s. In 1949, *Architectural Forum* declared, “Never before in the history of U.S. buildings has one house type made such an impact on the industry in so short a time.”² Indeed, stating that the Ranch-type house was a popular and commercially successful housing type is an understatement; however, despite enormous commercial success over an extended period of time, relatively little research has been published about the Ranch-type house. The research questions this thesis addresses are: first, what is a Ranch-type house and how did it evolve in the United States and in Georgia? second, how can the historic significance of the Ranch-type house be evaluated; and third, what are the historic preservation challenges presented by the Ranch-type house?



Figure 1. Ranch-type house in Powder Springs, Georgia.

¹Mark Gelernter. *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context.* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999), xvii.

²Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewan, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened.* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2000), 132.

Terminology

The term “Ranch house” is commonly used and may mean different things to different people. In this study, the term *Ranch-type house* will be used when referring to the type of post-World War II house identified in several architectural stylebooks, including McAlester’s A Field Guide to American Houses.³ The term Ranch-type house is used intentionally in this thesis to denote a type of house built generally within the Modern movement, which has a particular plan form and massing and to which architectural details from a variety of styles have sometimes been applied. For example, a Ranch-type house could have Colonial, Craftsman, or Spanish stylistic details while retaining essential elements of a Modern house, such as the simplification of form, a single level, and/or an open floor plan. When referencing the vernacular house form as it first evolved in the southwestern United States during the nineteenth-century, the term *Ranch house* will be used.

Historic Preservation and the Ranch-type House

To answer the noted research questions, the cultural and historic resource must be defined. First, a better understanding of the evolution of the Ranch-type house is required. Where, why, and how did it become the “Ranch” house and how did it evolve into the Ranch-type house as it is known today? The reasons why the Ranch-type house became the choice of so many people in the United States after World War II require consideration. A number of factors may have contributed to the Ranch-type’s popularity and growth, including developers, advertisers, consumer preferences, the suburban trend following World War II, and easily attainable loans. Second, the features that make the Ranch-type a potential historic resource must be considered. If the Ranch-type house is to be preserved, its significant elements must be identified. Third, what makes the Ranch-type house unique in Georgia? This thesis will consider

³Virginia and Lee McAlester. A Field Guide to American Houses. (New York: Knopf, 2000.)

three forms that the Ranch-type house took in Georgia. Fourth, architects played an especially important role in the popularization of the Ranch-type house; without their designs, the Ranch-type house would never have developed as it did. This thesis will consider the contributions of several architects in Georgia who are closely identified with Ranch-type houses.

Having defined the Ranch-type house as a cultural resource, then what historic preservation challenges does it pose? Unlike buildings associated with historic figures, such as the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. birthplace in Atlanta, Georgia, or buildings that demonstrate key elements of an architectural style, such as the spindle-work of a Queen Anne house that can be found in the Savannah, Georgia Victorian Historic District, the Ranch-type house as a potential historic resource is not widely accepted. In fact, one architect who specializes in restoring and rehabilitating seventeenth and eighteenth-century buildings recently declared, “When we get to the point of restoring ranch burgers, I quit.”⁴ Perhaps the greatest challenge presented to the historic preservation of the Ranch-type house is its ubiquitous nature. Ranch-type houses are a familiar sight in neighborhoods across the United States, much like Tudor Revival-style gas stations of the 1920s and 1930s. However, the once common Tudor gas station style has nearly disappeared.⁵ One of the challenges facing the Ranch-type house is determining how its significance can be evaluated before it suffers a fate similar to the Tudor Revival-style gas station. As one preservationist noted, those sites that languish in the “not quite old enough” category will ultimately be lost.⁶

⁴ Margaret Loftus, “Rescuing the relics of modern times. But who wants to save a ranch burger?” Available from: <http://www.eichlersocal.com/newsandarticles/usnews.htm>; Internet; accessed on 11 September 2007.

⁵ Daniel I. Vieyra, *Fill'er Up: An Architectural History of America's Gas Stations*. (New York: Macmillan, 1979,) 10.

⁶ Julie H. Ernstein. “Setting the Bar: The Pros and Cons of Holding the Recent Past to a Higher Standard.” *National Trust Forum Journal* Vol. 20, No. 1. (Fall 2005).

Given that many Ranch-type houses, and the neighborhoods built following World War II, are now passing fifty years in age⁷, the question of how to preserve these houses and neighborhoods is emerging. The fifty-year age mark is significant in the United States because that is the age at which buildings and sites may be considered historically significant by the National Park Service. Do they deserve to be treated as significant cultural and historic resources? If so, then why? Does the ubiquitous nature of the Ranch-type house make it more or less worthy as a cultural and historic resource? Even if these questions can be successfully answered, will the general public care? Has the massive number of Ranch-type houses constructed over the last fifty years diluted the value of the house type so much that average Americans will never consider them an irreplaceable cultural and historic resource? The answers historic preservationists, local government decision makers, and the general public offer for these questions will decide the future of the Ranch-type house.

Methodology

One of the primary challenges presented in researching this topic was the scarcity of published studies on the Ranch-type house in the United States. Unlike older architecture styles, or specific architectural styles such as the Craftsman, there is not a wealth of thoroughly researched material regarding the Ranch-type house. In terms of secondary sources, Jim Brown's Atomic Ranch, Alan Hess's The Ranch House, and Katherine Samon's Ranch House Style are the only commercially available books related to the Ranch-type house at this time.

There have been detailed studies undertaken by state historic preservation offices related to the Ranch-type house to determine its historic/cultural significance. While researching this thesis, studies undertaken by the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office and the Georgia Historic Preservation Division were examined. As of this writing, the Arizona and Georgia

⁷ "Parks, Forests, and Public Property." *Code of Federal Regulations* Title 36, Part 60.4, 1981 ed.

historic preservation offices have the most easily obtainable information regarding Ranch-type houses. Georgia State University in Atlanta completed a study in 2001 pertaining to post-World War II housing in Atlanta which has been invaluable. The remaining literature consists largely of articles published in journals related to and often in the context of Recent Past architecture.

Several books and journals from the 1950s and 1960s were consulted and provided a useful portrait of how this house was viewed by its contemporaries. Included in this survey of archival material were plan books featuring primarily Ranch-type houses as well as interior design books presenting a Modern perspective on the layout of a house. During the 1950s and 1960s, journals such as *Architectural Record* and *Progressive Architecture* featured Ranch-type houses and presented the advantages of a Modern house.

The Georgia Historic Preservation Division has been invaluable over the course of this study. Dr. Richard Cloues has been especially helpful, devoting considerable time over the past two years to researching and studying the Ranch-type house. His research has been indispensable to this thesis. In addition, the historic preservation division maintains archival material on Georgia architects who are closely associated with Ranch-type houses and Modernism. The materials include primary sources such as books published by the architects and their firms featuring their designs. Also included are secondary sources such as newspaper articles regarding the architects and their work, and detailed obituaries of those architects who are deceased.

Fortunately, many preservationists and architecture critics are now recognizing Modernism and the architecture of the Recent Past as a phenomenon worthy of study and consideration. As a result, more information has begun to emerge regarding this topic. Organizations at varying levels in the public and private sector have begun to conduct and

publish research regarding this topic. For example, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, the Georgia Historic Preservation Division, and the Scottsdale, Arizona Historic Preservation Commission have all considered and researched the topic of Recent Past architecture. The National Park Service (NPS) has also recognized the architecture of the Recent Past as worthy of consideration. The NPS's "Preserving the Recent Past" conferences held in Chicago in 1995 and in Philadelphia in 2000 demonstrated the emerging importance of Modern architecture and need to preserve it.

There are several organizations with a primary focus on the preservation of Recent Past architecture. On an international level, the International Working Party for Documentation and Conservation of Building Sites and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement (DOCOMOMO) was initiated in 1988 in the Netherlands. DOCOMOMO initiated a national chapter in the United States in 1997 and subsequently began establishing state and regional chapters, including one in Georgia. The organization serves as an overseer of and advocate for Modern architecture. DOCOMOMO proved to be a useful resource during the course of researching this thesis by providing background information on Modern buildings in Georgia and a timeline of Modernism in Georgia.

The chapters that follow will consider, in detail, the issues and topics mentioned above. Chapter two will examine the Ranch-type house on a national level, from its origins in the American southwest to the suburban tract house as it is known today, along with characteristics that made this type of house unique. Furthermore, chapter two will address the post-World War II housing boom and the role the Ranch-type house played, as well as the ways in which the house was popularized. Chapter three will consider the various forms that the Ranch-type house took in Georgia and some of the elements that made the house unique in the state. Chapter four

will profile five architects who are closely associated with the evolution of the Ranch-type house in Georgia.

The final two chapters will focus specifically on the historic preservation of the Ranch-type house. The fifth chapter will consider the historic preservation challenges presented by the Ranch-type house and the criteria used to evaluate its significance. Also, the fifth chapter will offer recommendations to preservationists, local government decision makers, and the general public for the preservation of the Ranch-type house. The sixth and final chapter will reiterate the need to consider Ranch-type houses and Recent Past architecture in the context of historic preservation.

The topic of Ranch-type houses is one in which I have a personal connection to. I grew up in a Ranch-type house in Powder Springs, Georgia. A photograph of the house appears on page one. While this study is far from the last word on Ranch-type houses or Recent Past architecture, it does seek to present issues that warrant consideration in the context of historic preservation. The topic of Ranch-type houses and Recent Past architecture in general, is not merely an academic undertaking for me; rather, it is a topic in which I have a personal interest.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE RANCH-TYPE HOUSE NATIONALLY

"Houses are significant in so far as they reveal the living conditions of a period and the capacity of the people who occupied them. They are a record of human society and of the peculiar genius of a given community." -Helen Reynolds.¹⁶

Throughout architectural history, numerous house styles have been popular among house builders and consumers. Whether it was the Georgian style in the late-eighteenth century, the Greek Revival in the mid-nineteenth century or the Colonial Revival in the early-twentieth century, housing styles are as varied as the history of the country from which they evolved. In the mid-twentieth century another house grew in popularity amongst house builders and house buyers: the Ranch-type. As architect and author Witold Rybczynski wrote, the years following World War II "was one period when buyers let their hair down. Buoyed by the post-World War II boom, optimistic about the future, and gripped by the idea of Progress, Americans embraced innovation as never before."¹⁷ The Ranch-type house was one of those innovations; however, it was not as new as people might have thought.

Origins

To fully understand the Ranch-type house of today, one must first understand where it originated. The Ranch house originated when the Spanish inhabited southern California in the Spanish Colonial era. The Ranch house originated in the early 1800s as a way to protect its inhabitants from the elements while living on the wide-open prairie. The community of the

¹⁶ Bastian, Robert W., John A. Jakle, and Douglas K. Meyer. Common Houses in America's Small Towns. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1989,) 32.

¹⁷ Witold Rybczynski, "The Ranch House Anomaly"; available from <http://www.slate.com/id/2163970/>; Internet; accessed 11 September 2007.

American southwest was a diverse one which included the family, friends, visitors, servants, ranchers, and herdsmen living on vast and remote lands.¹⁸ The roofs of the homes built by the Spanish had to be supported on thick heavy walls and because there was no foundation (at least none that could be recognized today) the houses had to be low to the ground. Wide overhangs from the roof helped to protect the adobe walls from the rain and the hot sun and thus kept the inhabitants comfortable inside the structure. Out of necessity, little exterior ornamentation was used on the structure. The early Ranch house had only one room, a flat roof, and dirt floors. It typically had walls “laid with inch-thick joints of mud and mortar, then surfaced with smooth mud plaster, whitewashed to protect against infrequent rains.”¹⁹ As the size of families in the Ranch houses of Southern California grew, so did the house. Wings were added, typically at the rear of the structure, giving it first an L-shaped design and then later a U-shaped design.²⁰ (See figure two).



Figure 2 Bandini House. Pasadena, California.

¹⁸ Barbara L. Allen, “The Ranch-Style House in America: A Cultural and Environmental Discourse.” *Journal of Architectural Education* 49, no. 3 1996:156.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home, 1800-1960* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 194.

The original Ranch house was built without nails and constructed with only the two hands of the builder.²¹ The house was appealing because of the safety and security implied in its massive earth walls, enclosing not just the home but often a central courtyard or patio. (See figure three). The central patio served as a focal point of the house. The patio was a place for children to play, visitors to be greeted, business meetings and transactions to take place, and other activities. The Ranch house evoked a “strong sense of place” in its inhabitants, providing distant views of the rancher’s land.²² However, the necessity for a Ranch house in the American southwest diminished after 1870 when a series of catastrophic droughts devastated the livestock and forced owners into poverty. As a result, large land holdings were broken up into smaller ranches, eliminating the need for a large, sprawling Ranch house.²³ In the normal course of events, the southwestern Ranch house would probably have gone the way of the rural log cabin. That is, a house-type that has long since dwindled in numbers but is occasionally built by an enthusiast or seen at a museum.

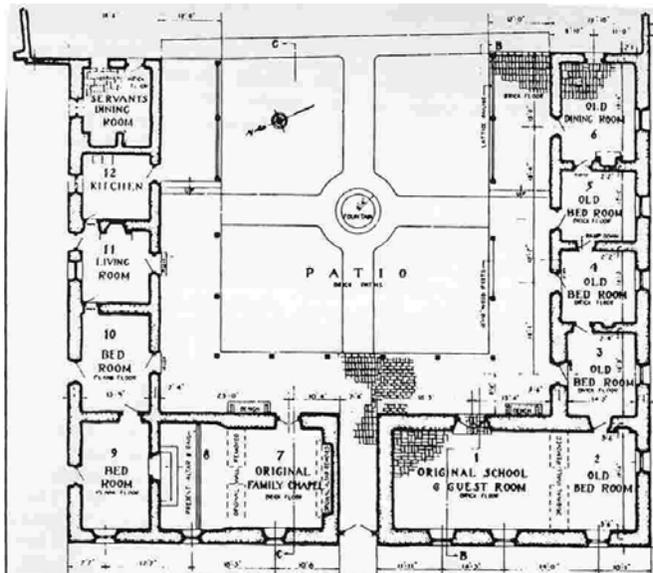


Figure 3. Casa Estudillo. San Diego, California. Built circa 1820.

²¹ Becker, 84.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

The inhabitants of the original Ranch houses of the southwest would probably have been surprised to discover how their rustic and utilitarian house evolved. The Ranch house had originally “served the hardworking ranchers in harsh climates on the plains, mountains, and valleys of the West.”²⁴ The Ranch house sensation that developed after World War II speaks to the creativity and advertising abilities of mid-twentieth century architects and home builders. They were able to successfully market a “Ranch” house to home buyers and turn it into “the vehicle for the design of suburbia and the housing of choice for its time.”²⁵

Evolution

The Ranch-type house of today is essentially a twentieth-century invention. As one architect put it, “Today the suburban ranch house is considered the epitome of conservative taste, but at the time it represented a radical departure from tradition.”²⁶ With its southwestern origins, the Ranch-type house was influenced by the Craftsman style and the Prairie style of architecture. As with the original Ranch house, the Craftsman style house developed in the western United States, primarily in California. The Craftsman style contributed its simple exterior ornamentation and low-pitched gable roof to the evolution of the Ranch-type house. The Prairie style of Frank Lloyd Wright is known for its wide roof overhang, horizontal orientation, low-pitched roofs, and lowness to the ground. The Ranch-type house also borrowed from many of Wright’s Usonian principles.²⁷ The link between Wright’s Prairie style and the Ranch-type house is further evidenced by the emphasis on convenience and realism in floor plan, materials, window arrangement, etc.

²⁴Alan Hess, The Ranch House. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004) 11.

²⁵ Ibid, 13.

²⁶ Rybczynski.

²⁷ Gelernter, 270.

Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian designs received national attention in January 1938 when they were featured in *Architectural Forum*. Usonian principles evolved from Wright's desire to construct houses that were simpler and smaller than houses he had previously constructed. During the years of the Great Depression and World War II, homeowners could no longer afford large houses. More affordable housing was needed. Usonian houses featured little ornamental decoration and typically did not contain basements or attic spaces. Usonian houses were arranged in zones: dining/kitchen areas, bedrooms, and living/common spaces. The open floor plan also became a common Ranch-type house feature. Rooms were intended to blend into one another for ease of movement and versatility in room arrangement, thus allowing a homeowner to customize the interior of the home to fit his or her needs. Having fewer interior walls and doors also helped to make the Ranch-type house cheaper and easier to build. The cost of constructing Ranch-type houses was further reduced through the use of "prefabricated wall units or standardized wood-framed windows and sliding glass doors."²⁸

Large windows were common in Usonian-type houses in order to integrate the outside with the inside. The use of large windows became a staple of Ranch-type houses, thanks in part to their use in Usonian houses. Carports, large roof overhangs, dominant horizontal lines, and open living areas were all qualities of the Usonian-type house and were all incorporated into the Ranch-type house.²⁹ Much like the Usonian-type house, the Ranch-type house was typically mass produced, featured nominal exterior and/or interior decoration, and could be assembled with relative ease; they were popular for the budget minded house buyer.

²⁸ Sarah Lindenfeld Hall. "Ranches Regain Some Respect." Charlotte, N.C.: The News and Observer. Available from <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/story/653250.html>. Accessed 30 August 2007.

²⁹ Selected Post-World War II Residential Architectural Styles and Building Types [essay on-line]; available from <http://www.coloradohistory-oahp.org>. Accessed 19 April 2007.

Plan Form

The traditional symmetrical, central hall floor plan that was once so popular gave way to the asymmetrical Ranch-type house. The layout of these “modern” homes was intended to increase efficiency of household activities as well as increase the time spent on more enjoyable activities in and around the home. As publications of the period noted, “These rooms now profit by modern devices and facilities...Efficient equipment and arrangement can save your energy and health, make the tasks pleasant and easy and give you increased leisure for relaxation and recreation.”³⁰ There were few interior walls separating the kitchen from the dining room or the dining room from the living room. This openness allowed the occupants to move freely from one room to the next in a more practical manner than before. No longer were walls and hallways located simply to achieve symmetrical balance inside the home or, put more bluntly, “because some pretentious architect wanted to line up the windows to make it look Colonial.”³¹ (See figure four).

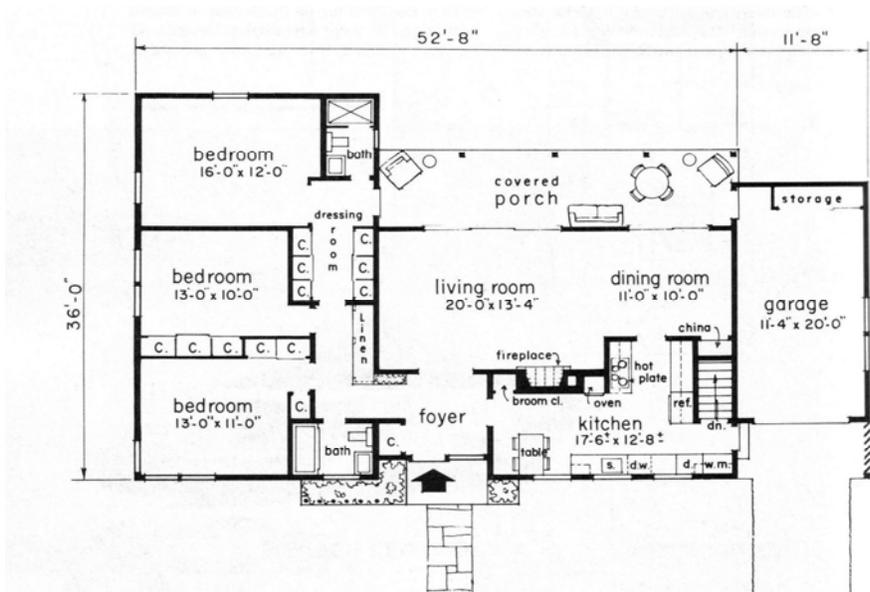


Figure 4. Asymmetrical plan. Note the lack of walls between living and dining rooms.

³⁰ Rockow and Rockow, 235.

³¹ Hess, 13.

Furthermore, by using post-and-beam construction methods, Ranch-type houses could have an open floor plan that permitted bountiful amounts of light to fill the house through newly introduced picture windows and sliding glass doors.³² (See figure five). The bedrooms were clustered on one side of the house with the kitchen, dining room, and living room/den in the middle or back and the carport or garage occupying the other end of the house, thus creating zones of activity inside the home. (See figure six). While the Ranch-type house was no larger in square footage than a house constructed a generation earlier, its long, rambling layout “suggested spacious living and an easy relationship with the outdoors” causing the Ranch-type house to grow in popularity far beyond that of houses of the generation that came before.³³



Figure 5. Picture window in Ranch-type house. Powder Springs, Georgia.

³² Robert Power, “Residences of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Power,” *Architectural Digest* 21, no.2, (1964), 20.

³³ Jackson, 240.

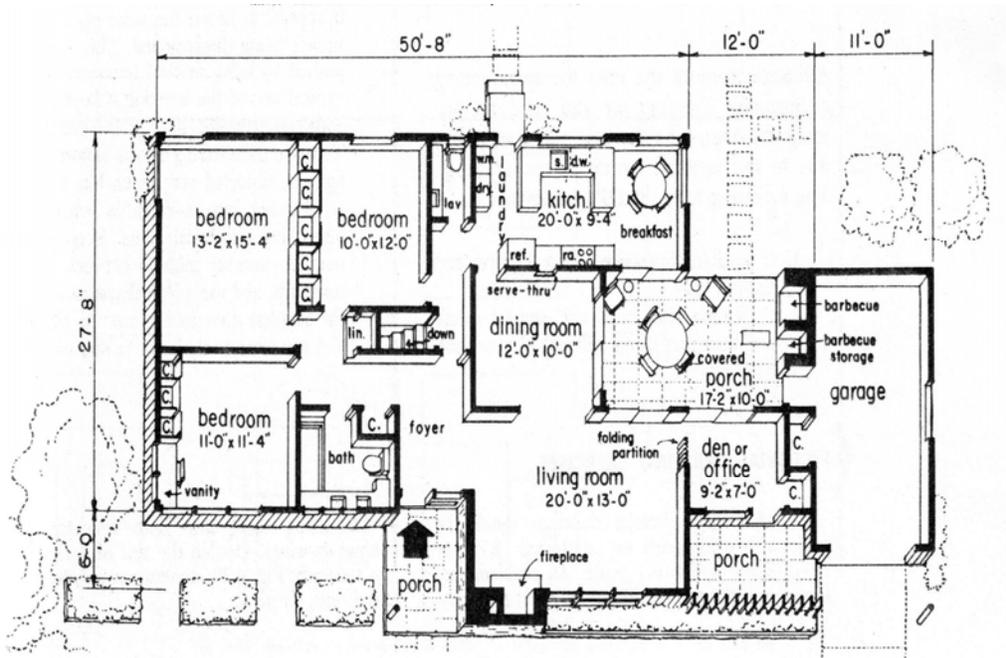


Figure 6. Zones of activity in a Ranch-type house.

Elements

In keeping with the honest and unassuming nature of the original Ranch house, exterior ornamental decorations were used sparingly. If a Ranch-type house did have exterior ornamentation, it was typically “a vestigial wrought iron grill or roof supports from Spanish precedents, or decorative shutters from the British Colonial tradition.”³⁴ (See figure seven.) These features were decorative and not an integral part of the house. The Ranch-type house could also feature “stylistic details” that were “stark and modern”³⁵ typically in homes that were custom designed by an architect. (See figure eight).

³⁴ Allen, 271.

³⁵ Christine Hunter. Ranches, Rowhouses, and Railroad Flats. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 166.



Figure 7. Decorative shutters. Powder Springs, Georgia.

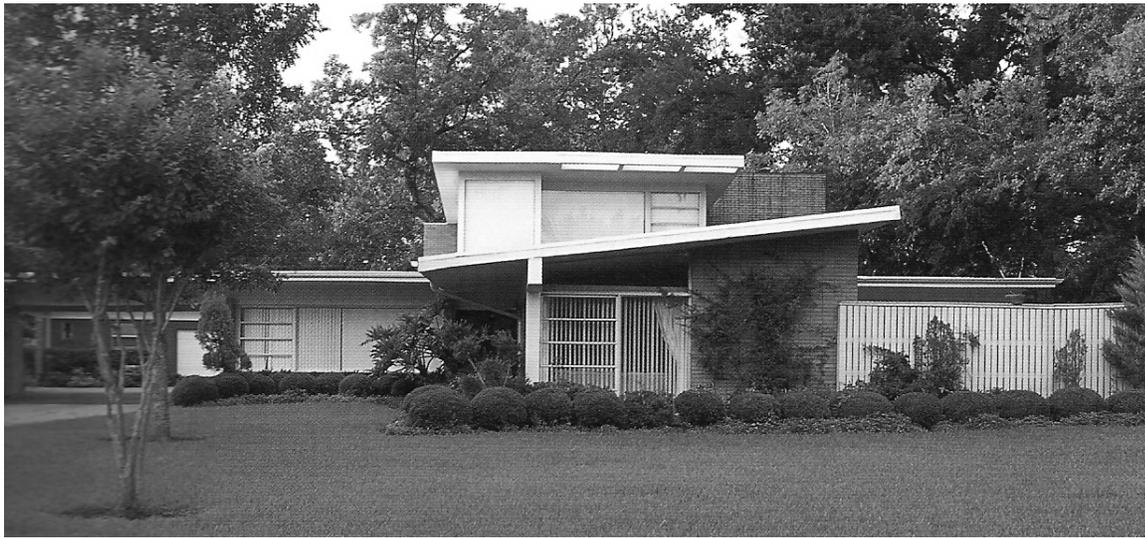


Figure 8. Ford House. Houston, Texas.

The Ranch-type house features a long horizontal façade that is further elongated by the addition of an attached garage or carport. (See figure nine). The rectilinear shape of the Ranch-type house was typically oriented with its long side facing the street. By orienting its long side to the street, the house “carried much pretense to affluence” for its owner because “even small dwellings appeared big when turned lengthwise.”³⁶ It was possible for Ranch-type houses to be built on wide lots because houses no longer had to be placed close together, as is the case with apartments or town houses in urban settings. Previous generations required that houses and apartment buildings be placed close together in order to shorten the distance required to walk to

³⁶ Bastian, et al, 183.

the nearest city streetcar stop or train station, and because land in urban areas was so sparse. Following World War II and the ever-increasing use of the automobile, homeowners did not have to worry about a long walk to the public transit station. He or she could now drive to and from their home regardless of the distance or weather conditions.

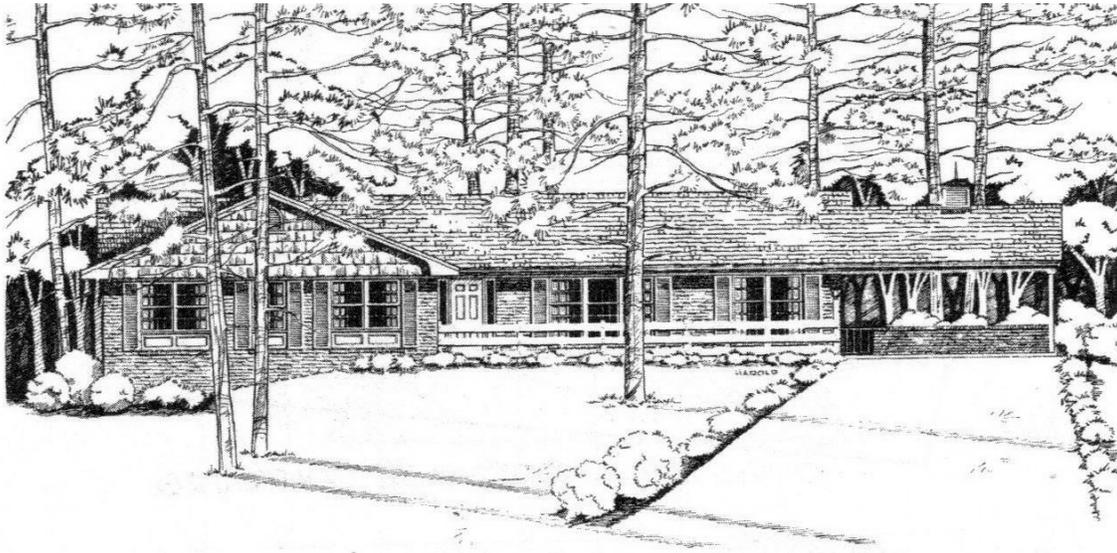


Figure 9. Artist rendering of a Ranch-type house. Note how the house is situated with its long side to the street.

A primary feature of Ranch-type houses is a single level. Following in the tradition of its southwestern predecessors and in an effort to present the image of a rambling estate in the countryside, all rooms are placed on the ground floor. The “rejection of traditional New England vertical lines for the western outdoorsy horizontal aesthetic” was intentional.³⁷ The newly developed suburbs were open and (at the time) seemingly endless. The suburbs permitted wide lots and thus allowed for wide, horizontally oriented houses. The wide suburban lots “reflected American preferences for more pastoral and less urban living.”³⁸ Limiting the house to a single level also made the house less expensive to build and thus more affordable to house buyers. Utilities for the house, such as electrical lines and water pipes, as well as heavy load bearing wall

³⁷ Baxandall and Ewen, 133.

³⁸ Bastian et al, 183.

sections could be reduced or eliminated because there were no living spaces above the first floor.³⁹ In addition, eliminating stairways took away an area of vulnerability that caused one-quarter of accidents in the house.⁴⁰

The Ranch-type house typically has a hipped roof or a low-pitched gable roof with deep-set eaves and wide overhangs, much as the original southwestern Ranch house had. (See figure ten). A front porch was also incorporated into many Ranch-type houses. If a front porch was included, it typically was not large, as most outdoor activities were intended to take place behind the house in the backyard. The Ranch-type house was traditionally “placed lengthwise on a wide lot, portraying a rural and genteel image of a large house on a sweeping lawn.”⁴¹



Figure 10. Ranch-type house with gable roof. Powder Springs, Georgia.

Interior

While relatively simple on the outside with few architectural details, the Ranch-type house could showoff its dream home status inside with the latest advances in air conditioning, automatic dish washing and clothes washing machines, and electric clothes driers along “with curved couches, leather lounge chairs, shag rugs, stainless steel toasters, and Formica-topped

³⁹ Ibid, 184.

⁴⁰ Royal Barry Wills. Better Homes for Budgeteers: Sketches and Plans by Royal Barry Wills. (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc. 1941), 12.

⁴¹ Gelernter, 270.

kitchen tables.”⁴² (See figures eleven and twelve). Wood paneling replaced wallpaper in many rooms of the house.⁴³ Designers and builders of Ranch-type houses wanted always to present the image of a thoroughly “modern” home. The houses were designed so “Comfort and utility are stressed, lines and decoration simplified, size is reduced to meet present day requirements, ornamentation is pared away.”⁴⁴ Scaling down interior ornamentation also allowed money and material to be used on other interior features such as larger kitchen cabinets. (See figure thirteen).



Figure 11. Kitchen featuring the latest appliances.

⁴² Susan Kuczka. “Ranch lovers halt teardown.” *Chicago Tribune*, 8 April 2007.

⁴³ Rybczynski.

⁴⁴ Hazel Kory Rockow and Julius Rockow. Creative Home Decorating. (New York: H.S. Stuttman Company, 1948), 127.



Figure 12. Living room/ dining room.



Figure 13. Kitchen in Ranch-type house. Note size and quantity of kitchen cabinets.

In keeping with the Modernist concept espoused by well-known architects such as Le Corbusier of the home as a “machine for living,” the Ranch-type house employed the latest machines, devices, and building materials to help make the “machine” run even better. However, the Ranch type house could offer many of the Modernist concepts without having “to look like

machines, Le Corbusier’s rhetoric notwithstanding.”⁴⁵ The Ranch-type house could be a modern machine for living, but still evoke the warmth of a traditional house by incorporating details such as artificial shutters and a small front porch. (See figure fourteen).



Figure 14. Front porch, columns, and decorative shutters add traditional details to a modern house. Powder Springs, Georgia.

Relationship to the outdoors

Easy access to the outdoors was another important aspect of the Ranch-type house. Most Ranch-type houses possess large areas of glazing and/or sliding glass doors made of insulated plate-glass. These sliding glass doors lead outside and “connect you to the day, to the time of day, and the weather of the day.”⁴⁶ The sliding glass door was a relatively new invention, unique to the Ranch-type house. Whereas access points into and out of the house had been oriented to front areas such as porches in previous generations, Ranch-type houses oriented activity to the back through sliding glass doors.⁴⁷ The sliding glass door “made the seasons into an ever-

⁴⁵ Hess, 12.

⁴⁶ John Balzar. “Back at the Ranch House.” *The Los Angeles Times* 4 December 2003: F9.

⁴⁷ David Gebhard and Robert Winter. A Guide to Architecture in Los Angeles and Southern California. (Santa Barbara, California: Peregrine Smith, 1977) 704.

changing wall decoration.”⁴⁸ Upon passing through this ‘wall of windows,’ residents and guests are lead onto a concrete patio, a signature feature of Ranch-type houses. (See figures fifteen and sixteen.)



Figure 15. Sliding glass door and patio. Powder Springs, Georgia.



Figure 16. Sliding glass door from interior. Powder Springs, Georgia.

Harkening back to the patios and courtyards of the original southwestern Ranch, the patio became a focal point of outdoor activity. The contemporary patios varied in size and shape but were typically surrounded by a landscape with flowers and shrubs. Some form of outdoor activity or entertainment was usually not far away from the patio. Whether it was a child’s playhouse, a volleyball court, a swimming pool, or a barbecue grill, outdoor entertainment was always an aspect of Ranch house life. The unification of indoor and outdoor life became essential to the “modern” lifestyle the Ranch house portrayed.⁴⁹

The Ranch-type house also marked a significant change in the activities which took place outside the home. Marketers of the Ranch-type house copied the idea of a “Ranch” house surrounded by wide-open land in selling the suburban Ranch-type house. Designers and builders

⁴⁸ Clark, 212.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

of Ranch-type houses translated the open southwestern prairie of the original Ranch house into “a broad front lawn, with the long side of the house facing the street, suggesting a large lot” in the suburbs.⁵⁰

Prior to the development of suburban houses outside of urban areas like the Ranch-type house, most outdoor activities were focused on work, not play. If a person owned a significant amount of land around his or her home, it was typically used for farming, gardening, or some other labor intensive, income-producing effort. The area that eventually became known as a backyard in the suburbs would have been used for some type of work related activity. Those who lived in what became the suburbs before World War II rarely had the luxury of simply using the area behind and around their home for recreation.

However, the Ranch-type house was designed for suburban developments where outdoor activities in the backyard were focused more on fun and enjoyment (barbecues, swing sets, swimming pools, flower beds, pleasure gardens, etc.) and less on work and physical exertion (gardens, stables, barns, etc.) The long, horizontally oriented house created a sort of screen to divide the front yard and backyard. (See figure seventeen.) One architecture critic noted, “The modern Ranch house offered vistas not of the hard work of cattle wrangling, but of the very contemporary twentieth-century preoccupations of recreation and entertaining.”⁵¹ In 1998, *Old House Journal* described the backyard of a typical Ranch-type house as something that “welcomes and shelters the private family.” In some respects this was a positive social aspect, however, in other ways it was a negative one. As Columbia University professor Kenneth T. Jackson points out, “With increased use of automobiles, the life of the sidewalk and the front yard has largely disappeared, and the social intercourse that used to be the main characteristic of

⁵⁰ Hess, 12.

⁵¹ Ibid, 12.

urban life has vanished. There are few places as desolate and lonely as a suburban street on a hot afternoon.”⁵²



Figure 17. Ranch-type house and outdoor activities.

Automobiles and the Ranch-type house

As automobile usage increased following World War II, the need for a storage space for the automobile became necessary. The automobile and its storage space eventually affected “virtually every type of building and human use of land.”⁵³ A common way to store automobiles was through the use of the carport. Typically large enough to accommodate one or two vehicles, carports became a standard feature on new homes, especially Ranch-type houses. (See figure eighteen).



Figure 18. Ranch-type house with carport. Powder Springs, Georgia.

⁵² Jackson, 279.

⁵³ Hunter, 151.

The Winterhaven Historic District in Pima County, Arizona, a district consisting primarily of post-World War II Ranch-type houses, identified three styles of Ranch-type house carports: Integrated, Attached, and Detached. Integrated carports are constructed at the same time as the home and are “an extension of the home’s roofline.”⁵⁴ An Attached carport has “a separate roof form or ridge line” than the rest of the home; however the carport is still attached to the home.⁵⁵ A Detached carport is not physically connected to the home. Ranch-type house carports were typically supported by wooden or metal decorative columns or, in some instances, brick sidewalls.⁵⁶ As architecture critic Alan Hess points out, the carport/garage “allowed residents to live in sylvan suburbs, away from crowded cities and smoky factories. In turn, the Ranch-type house accommodated itself to the car, notably in integrating garages into its design.”⁵⁷ The integration of a carport/garage is evidence of a strong connection between the rise of the automobile and the popularization of the Ranch-type house.

Cliff May

There were a number of architects and house builders who helped cultivate the popularity of the Ranch-type house nationally. Architects like H. Roy Kelley and William W. Wurster of the San Francisco firm of Wurster, Bernardi, and Emmons were two men highly influential in the growth of the Ranch-type house. Irving Gill of southern California also included the Ranch-type house in his inventory of house designs.⁵⁸ However, one person is primarily responsible for the type’s evolution and development: Clifford May. According to the late author and architecture critic Brendan Gill, May was “by far the most skillful practitioner of the Californian ranch-house

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior. Winterhaven Historic District National Register of Historic Places. (Washington: National Park Service, 2006).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Hess, 8.

⁵⁸ David P. Handlin. The American Home. (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 295.

style.” May, more than anyone else, is recognized for developing the Ranch-type as a unique type of house.⁵⁹ Born in 1908 in San Diego, California of Anglo-Spanish heritage, May spent his formative years growing up in a Spanish Colonial style house. May is credited with building the first Ranch-type house in San Francisco, California in 1932.

Throughout the early 1930s, Cliff May was designing homes in San Diego and Los Angeles. May’s first tract development in 1939 was called “Riviera Ranch” in western Los Angeles. The development was sold to the general public as “recreating the romantic charm of early-day California Ranch life but with all the modern conveniences.”⁶⁰ Then, and throughout May’s career, he was building houses for the climate in Southern California and for those who lived there and wanted to enjoy it. He was a builder and an advertiser and he broke new ground with his “California Ranch House.” In an interview in 1936, May explained: “The early Californians had the right idea. They built for the seclusion and comfort of their families, for the enjoyment of relaxation in their homes. We want to perpetuate these ideas of home building.”⁶¹ The Ranch-type house evolved from this mentality.

May continued to build Ranch-type houses throughout the 1930’s and into the early 1940’s. During World War II, May designed and built homes for defense factory workers in California. These low cost homes allowed factory workers to live closer to work thus increasing production from the factory. It was also during this time that May’s Ranch-type house design began to attract attention outside the United States. Homebuyers in Ireland, Switzerland, and Venezuela all began seeing Ranch-type houses spring up in their respective countries.⁶²

⁵⁹ Gebhard and Winter, 26.

⁶⁰ Mary A. van Balgooy. “Designer of the Dream: Cliff May and the California Ranch House.” *Southern California Quarterly* 86 (2004): 127-128.

⁶¹ Cliff May Architecture [essay on-line]; available from <http://www.ranchostyle.com>. Accessed 14 April 2007.

⁶² Brendan Gill. “Remembering Cliff May.” *Architectural Digest*, 48 (1991): 27.

The concept of livability, rather than exterior appearance, made Cliff May and his Ranch-type house appealing to house builders and house buyers. May was enthusiastic about designing homes that were compatible with the informal lifestyle of those for whom he built. May watched as families used the homes he designed and built. He watched them prepare meals, give parties, and use the outdoor patio for entertaining. Always a student of architecture, May considered each idea that brought enjoyment to owners of his homes and then modified and improved it in the next home he built. May never allowed a new idea in design or new material to go unnoticed. For example, large areas of glass, for sliding glass doors and picture windows, came into May's designs from the moment they were available. He also became one of the first designers in the United States "to enclose the plumbing and hardware" in cabinets in the kitchen for added storage space and for a more pleasing appearance.⁶³

The popularity of the Ranch-type house was due in part to the 1946 and 1958 printings of Cliff May's book *Sunset-Western Ranch Houses*. (See figure nineteen). The books were compiled as architectural pattern books which incorporated a lot of pictures, illustrations, and text to describe the benefits of Ranch house life.⁶⁴ In 1946, Cliff May said, "A Ranch house, because of its name alone, borrows friendliness, simplicity, informality, and gaiety from the men and women who, in the past, found those pleasures in ranch-house living."⁶⁵ It was precisely those qualities of friendliness, simplicity, informality, and gaiety that made the Ranch type house so popular in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Ranch-type house was primarily concerned with a way of life, and less concerned with reviving or embellishing a historical housing type. Alan Hess said it best when he wrote,

⁶³ Faragher, 167.

⁶⁴ Bricker, 58.

⁶⁵ Cliff May and the California Ranch House [essay on-line]; available from <http://www.ranchostyle.com/clifflibrary.html>. Accessed 15 April 2007.

“The Ranch House was more about a way of living properly in the mid-twentieth century...”⁶⁶

The Ranch-type house afforded homeowners the chance to have a small slice of suburban /semi-rural life but with all the modern conveniences required by a mobile society.

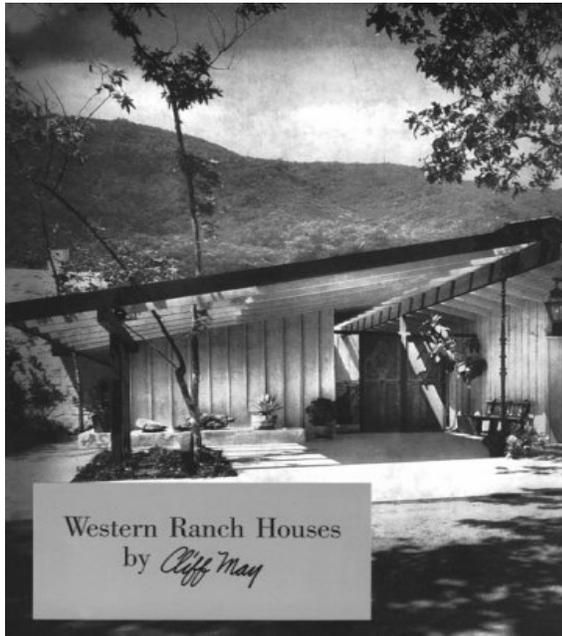


Figure 19. May’s plan book that popularized the Ranch-type house.

Suburban Expansion

By the 1930s, the Ranch-type house was an acceptable house type amongst most architects and house builders. The Ranch-type could easily be a “part of any respectable architect’s repertoire, alongside Tudor, Colonial, and Mediterranean.”⁶⁷ Thanks to the popularization of society and home interior magazines like *Look*, *Life*, and *House Beautiful* and architectural trade journals like *American Builder* and *House and Home*, the United States became fascinated with the perceived image of the laid back, informal lifestyle of the West coast. These magazines also helped to popularize the Ranch-type house itself by praising its “sunny openness, inviting picture windows and large areas of glass.” The media attention on the Ranch-

⁶⁶ Hess, 12.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 13.

type house was so positive that one million of them were constructed every year between 1948 and 1955.⁶⁸ Americans became so fascinated with the “western lifestyle” that by 1963, California had eclipsed New York as America’s most populous state.⁶⁹

The Ranch-type house was at the forefront of suburban expansion after World War II. The Ranch house was “as popular in Westchester County as in Los Angeles County.”⁷⁰ It particularly appealed to young mothers who did not have to contend with stairs to attend to the needs of their young children because the Ranch house was built all on one level. The ideas of “livability, flexibility, and an unpretentious character” were what made the Ranch house so alluring during the housing boom of the 1950s and 1960s.⁷¹ The era of Ranch-type house popularity and suburban expansion in the United States “was a time of modernization and industrialization in many sectors of the economy, including building construction.”⁷² As with most new and “modern” style of homes, the Ranch-type became a showcase for the latest household products.

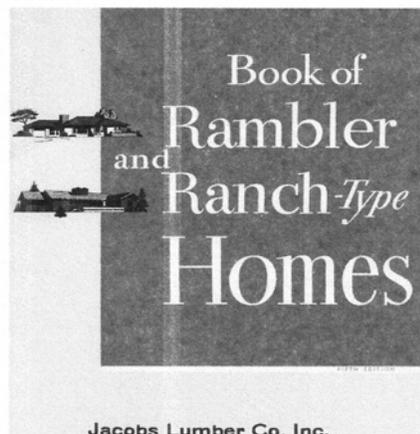
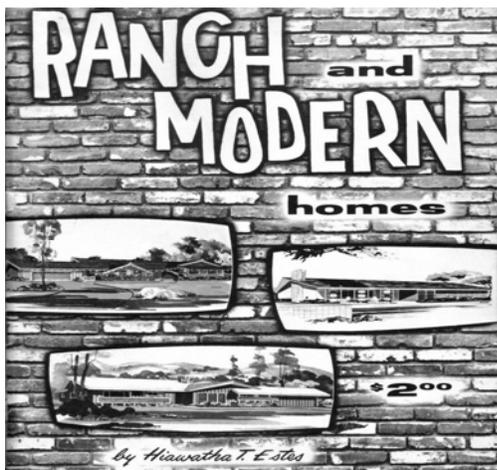


Figure 20. Plan books of Ranch-type houses.

⁶⁸ Walker, Richard. “A Theory of Suburbanization: Capitalism and the Construction of Urban Space in the United States. In *Urbanization and Urban Planning* edited by Michael Dear and Allen J. Scott. (New York: Methuen, 1981), 25.

⁶⁹ Clark, 211

⁷⁰ Jackson, 240.

⁷¹ Bricker, 59.

⁷² Burns, et al. 3.

One of those new household conveniences was air conditioning. The home air conditioning unit was instrumental in the diffusion of the Ranch-type house across the United States. Were it not for air conditioning, Ranch-type houses would likely not have become the prominent housing type it became after World War II, especially not in Georgia where summers are hot and humid. Heating and cooling a rambling structure with numerous windows would have been a complicated undertaking without the help of central heating and air. When the Honeywell Corporation introduced the multiple-thermostat central heating system after World War II, air conditioning soon followed and solved the problem of how to heat and cool a Ranch house thus allowing it to spread across the country.⁷³

Feminist theorist Jane Tompkins posited the theory that the Ranch type house became popular because it evoked a sense of freedom and “the pioneer spirit.”⁷⁴ The Ranch-type house allowed homeowners to leave the industrial lifestyle of the city and relocate to the suburbs; new homeowners might have seen themselves as modern day versions of the thrill seekers and fortune hunters from the previous century during America’s westward expansion. The Ranch-type house also afforded home buyers—many of them for the first time—the opportunity to own a modern home without the architectural severity (i.e. sleek lines, cool colors, glass walls) of a truly *Modern* home.

The need for more housing after World War II was tremendous. In 1945, the final year of the war, “new construction did not meet the demand for new housing” as was the case for the previous sixteen years.⁷⁵ Drawing on the experiences learned by homebuilders during World War II, when housing for military personnel and defense factory workers had to be built quickly

⁷³ Allen, 158.

⁷⁴ Allen, 162.

⁷⁵ Dolores Hayden. Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003) 131.

and economically, Ranch-type houses began to develop rapidly across the country. Located on the outside edge of urban cities, the Ranch-type house accounted for “at least sixty-two percent of construction” in six metropolitan areas in 1946-1947, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁷⁶ It was not to be long before the suburban areas of the United States significantly outpaced the population of urban areas. The growth rate of suburban areas was ten times the growth rate of urban cities by 1950.⁷⁷ Following World War II, the federal government’s National Housing Agency predicted that the United States needed more than five million new housing units and almost 12.5 million units in the ten years following the war.⁷⁸

The Ranch-type house was further popularized by the availability of low interest loans from banks, and encouraged by the Federal government. During World War II, the federal government placed restrictions on new home construction in order to conserve materials, money, and manpower. However, once wartime restrictions were lifted, the housing boom began and the selling price of a new home fell to just below \$10,000 in most suburban areas (approximately \$105,992 in 2007 dollars, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ inflation calculator). In order to qualify for these loans, however, the new home had to be smaller and more compact than homes from previous generations. Before World War II, the “family home was, typically, a two-story structure with a pitched roof and a basement.”⁷⁹ The Federal government deemed homes of this size to be unnecessarily large. House types like the Ranch were ideal in terms of size and cost.

⁷⁶ Jackson, 239.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Gwendolyn Wright. Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) 242.

⁷⁹ Friedman, 131.



Figure 21. Construction of suburban housing tract in Los Angeles, California.

As part of the federal government's efforts to steer the country towards a peacetime economy, the Veteran's Administration established the *Veteran's Mortgage Guarantee Program*. The program became part of what was commonly referred to as the G.I. Bill of Rights. The federal government allowed veterans to borrow money totaling the entire appraised value of a home and did not require a down payment.⁸⁰ The Veteran's Administration did, however, limit the cost of a new home to \$8,000 and limit the size to 1,000 square feet.⁸¹ The Ranch-type house proved to be a popular choice because of its low construction cost and affordability to house buyers.

With the increased availability of jobs after World War II came an increase in income. Between 1945 and 1960, the gross national product more than doubled approximately sixty percent of people in the United States belonged to the middle class.⁸² The Ranch-type house was within reach for most middle-income house buyers thanks to easily attainable government loans with low interest rates, many of which advertised "No Down Payment" or "One Dollar Down"

⁸⁰ Leigh Burns, et al. *Atlanta Housing 1944 to 1965*. (Atlanta: Georgia State University, 2001) 4.

⁸¹ Friedman, 131.

⁸² Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005) p. 937.

all across the United States.⁸³ In an effort to grow the post-World War II economy, the federal government made it cheaper and easier to buy a new home, thus leading to a demand for more of the ever-popular Ranch house. Because the Ranch-type house was one-story and typically made of only two materials (wood and brick) it was a “developer’s dream.”⁸⁴ The Ranch-type house was a symbol of modern consumer inclinations and rising post-war incomes. For the first time, one housing type became a mass-market product that could be constructed from “a range of choices in appearance, amenities, and location.”⁸⁵

Being detached from the house next door was another aspect of urban life that was embraced by significant numbers of people during the post-World War II suburban expansion nationally and in Georgia. The postwar suburb was not compacted as urban neighborhoods had been. In the ten years that followed World War II, approximately ninety-seven percent of newly constructed single-family homes nationwide were detached homes with a private lot surrounding each home.⁸⁶ The days of densely compacted urban homes were fading.

The desire to own a home was fueled not simply because it was a wise investment or because the prices were low. As far back as 1937, *Architectural Forum* was observing that, “The urge to own is based more on emotional than on financial grounds; it is more concerned with satisfaction of the ego than with considerations of economy. Which explains the widely held belief that gadgets continue to sell more homes than good construction.”⁸⁷ Things as simple as pleasing one’s ego or obtaining the latest stove were, and continue to be, huge motivators for house buyers. The Ranch-type house was the ideal vehicle for these urges, which were held back

⁸³ Jackson, 239.

⁸⁴ Allen, 159.

⁸⁵ Hess, 11.

⁸⁶ Jackson, 239.

⁸⁷ Baxandall and Ewen, 136.

for many years, first by the economic constraints of the Great Depression and then later by the need for sacrifice and frugality during World War II.

The concept of the “American Dream Home” has long appeared in popular books and magazines of the period. In the years before World War II it was the quaint one-and-a-half story Cape Cod cottage. Following World War II, the split-level, the modified Colonial, and the Ranch type house became idolized as the American Dream Home. Going all the way back to the 1850’s, Andrew Jackson Downing’s designs for picturesque country homes were meant to present an image of “domesticity and the presence of heart” as in his influential pattern book The Architecture of Country Houses. The idea of an American Dream Home was and is a powerful one in domestic architecture. As architect Christine Hunter suggests, “The image of a modest house on its own in a bucolic setting has remained powerful in the United States; for many people it is still an essential part of the American dream.”⁸⁸ The modest and unpretentious Ranch type house became, for many, the quintessential American dream home after World War II.

Regionalism in architecture

The Ranch-type house was one of a few house types that gained popularity quickly throughout the country. Before World War I, houses in the United States could be distinguished from region to region. New England had the Dutch Colonial-style houses; the Atlantic coast, particularly Charleston, South Carolina, featured town houses sited perpendicular to the street. The low country of the American south featured the raised plantation house. The Southwestern United States featured houses with bordered patios and thick adobe walls.⁸⁹ Each region of the country was dominated by a particular style. As Columbia University Professor Kenneth T. Jackson notes, “early in the twentieth century a house on the South Carolina coast looked quite

⁸⁸ Hunter, 115.

⁸⁹ Jackson, 240.

different from a house in the Piedmont a few hundred miles away.”⁹⁰ The Ranch-type house changed this precedent. It “could be built anywhere with any orientation” thus making it the dream home of many in the United States.⁹¹

By the 1960s cities as diverse as New York and Atlanta began to have Ranch-type house suburban dwellings that were similar in their design and layout. During the time of the Ranch-type’s popularity, cultural historian Russell Lynes observed, “Nobody could mind it. It was not experimental enough to be ‘ugly’ by even the most conservative, and it was not tricked-up enough to be considered ‘ugly’ by the experimental. It was merely ‘nice.’ It was ‘unobjectionable.’ It was ‘homey’ and it was said to be ‘practical.’”⁹² Though the Ranch-type house was dispersed in great numbers across the United States, there were instances where this seemingly uniform house type could take on different forms.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Allen, 159.

⁹² David Bricker, “Ranch Houses are not all the same,” *National Park Service-Historic Suburbs Bulletin* (2002), 59.

CHAPTER THREE

RANCH-TYPE HOUSE FORMS IN GEORGIA

“Though rarely innovators, Georgians have been wonderfully adept at expressing themselves and their times through architecture.” –Tom Spector⁹²

The state of Georgia experienced significant population growth following World War II. The city of Atlanta covered an area of 37 square miles in 1942. The city grew to cover 118 square miles in 1952.⁹³ The size of the city not only grew, the population of the city expanded as well. In 1940 there were 302,300 people in Atlanta. That number grew to 430,700 by 1950.⁹⁴ The population of the state as a whole increased as well. The population of Georgia in 1940 was 3,123,723. By 1950 Georgia’s population had grown to 3,444,578.⁹⁵ National population figures were similar to Georgia’s. The population of the United States increased by twenty million people between 1940 and 1950, with much of that increase occurring after 1945.⁹⁶ With an increase in population came an increased demand for housing. As noted earlier, the Ranch-type was the leading house choice in the post-war period. However, not all Ranch-type houses are the same.

In the 1988 book Common Houses in America’s Small Towns: The Atlantic Seaboard to the Mississippi Valley, several Ranch-type house forms were identified.⁹⁷ The authors of the

⁹² Tom Spector, The Guide to the Architecture of Georgia. (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1993,) 159.

⁹³ Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice. Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War II. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983, 36.

⁹⁴ Burns, et al. 23.

⁹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, “Resident Population Report”; available from <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/resapport/states/georgia.pdf>; Internet; Accessed 10 August 2007.

⁹⁶ Richard W. Longstreth, City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950. (Boston, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997,) 223.

⁹⁷ Bastian et al. 187.

book visited several towns in various regions of the United States. Towns were selected in almost each state in the eastern United States order to “facilitate comparison of house types and selected house characteristics both within and between first-order and second-order cultural regions as identified by geographer Wilber Zelinsky in his Cultural Geography of the United States.”⁹⁸ The town of Louisville, Georgia in Jefferson County was selected to represent Georgia. The authors based their selection of house types on “scholarly writings, literature from the building industry, plan and pattern books, prefabricated house catalogues, technical writings for building tradesmen, and popular writings for prospective customers.”⁹⁹ Georgia State University in Atlanta also identified several post-World War II house types in their study of Atlanta housing in the spring of 2001. The Georgia State University study referenced the Ranch-type house forms identified in the book Common Houses in America’s Small Towns.¹⁰⁰ In addition to identifying Ranch-type houses, the Georgia State University study identified several other vernacular house forms in Georgia including the Minimal Traditional Cottage, the Neocolonial, and the Split Level. While individual architects and builders modified the forms noted below, the forms remained essentially the same. The three Ranch-type house forms identified in the book and in the Georgia State University study were the Minimal, the Inline, and the Composite.

A very small house by today’s standards (in 1950 the median size for a new house was 800 square feet in 1950 compared to 2,100 square feet in 2003)¹⁰¹, the Minimal Ranch-type house was essentially a rectangular box with five or fewer rooms.¹⁰² (See figure twenty-two.) It was intended to be a starter house that could “be expanded up and out” as time and money

⁹⁸ Ibid, 14.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Burns, et al. 71.

¹⁰¹ Rybczynski.

¹⁰² Bastian et al. 187.

allowed.¹⁰³ The Minimal Ranch-type lived up to its name by having little to no exterior ornamentation. If the house did have exterior detailing, it was in the form of artificial shutters and/or a small porch on the front.¹⁰⁴ Although the Minimal form lacks the elongated horizontality of other Ranch-type houses, it does possess an open and asymmetrical floor plan, a single level, minimal exterior detailing, and picture windows.

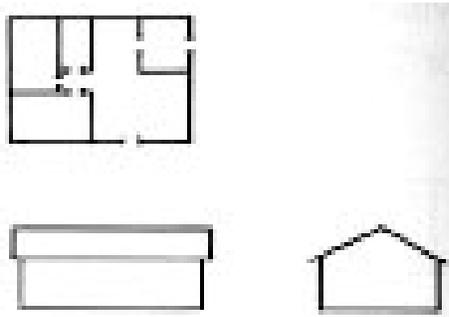


Figure 22. Minimal Ranch-type house plan and form.

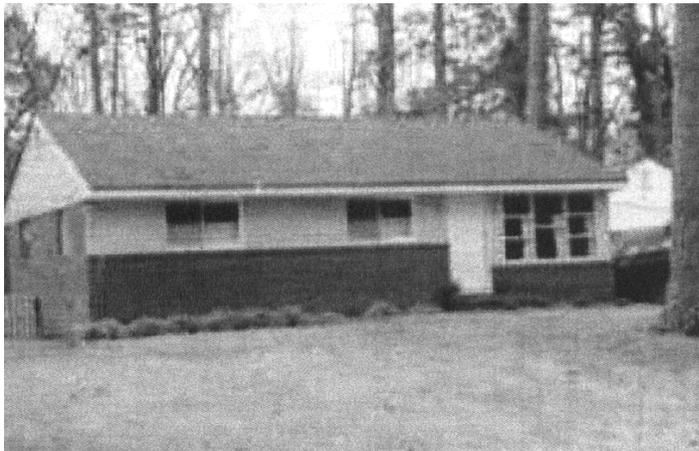


Figure 23. Minimal Ranch-type House in Atlanta, Georgia. Note the relative lack of detailing.

The Inline house form is perhaps the form most closely associated with the Ranch-type house because it appears to be the one most often constructed in tract housing developments.

¹⁰³ Burns, et al. 72.

¹⁰⁴ Scottsdale, Arizona Historic Preservation Commission. "Introduction to Postwar Modern Housing Architectural Styles." Available from <http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/Assets/documents/historiczoning/IntroPostwarHousingStyle.pdf>. Internet; Accessed 5 February 2007.

This house form can be seen in numerous post-World War II suburban developments across Georgia. The term *Inline* is used to denote the horizontality of the house and because there are little to no perpendicular projections from the house such as garages, carports, or other rooms. The Inline Ranch-type house typically has six or more rooms located on a single level.¹⁰⁵ (See figure twenty-four.) This house form typically had a carport or garage attached and integrated into plan to accommodate one or more vehicles.

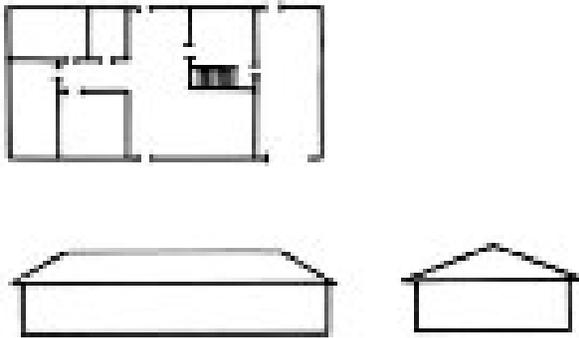


Figure 24. Inline Ranch-type house plan and form.



Figure 25. Inline Ranch-type house on Jamagin Drive in Athens, Georgia. Note the horizontal sliding windows and brick pattern.

¹⁰⁵ Bastian et al, 186.



Figure 26. Inline Ranch-type house on Vista Drive in Athens, Georgia. The section with siding near the driveway may have been the location of the original carport.



Figure 27. Inline Ranch-type house on Jamagin Drive in Athens, Georgia. Note the ornamented pediment on the left side.

The third house form is the Composite. The Composite form differs from other Ranch-type forms in that it has one or more perpendicular projections and “degrees of irregular massing.”¹⁰⁶ (See figure twenty-eight.) The Composite Ranch-type house could be arranged in an L, T, or U shaped plan on a single level with a cross gable roof.¹⁰⁷ This house form could be larger than other Ranch-type house forms because of the additional area created by the L, T, or U

¹⁰⁶ Bastian et al, 189

¹⁰⁷ Burns, et al, 77.

shaped plan. Because of its massing and plan arrangement, it was likely more costly to construct than other Ranch-type houses, such as an Inline, and thus limited to more expensive suburban developments. The additional costs were accrued because of the additional area that needed to be constructed. The Composite form is unique because it reflects designers “attempts to break the standardization of simple box shapes” and provide consumers with more housing choices.¹⁰⁸

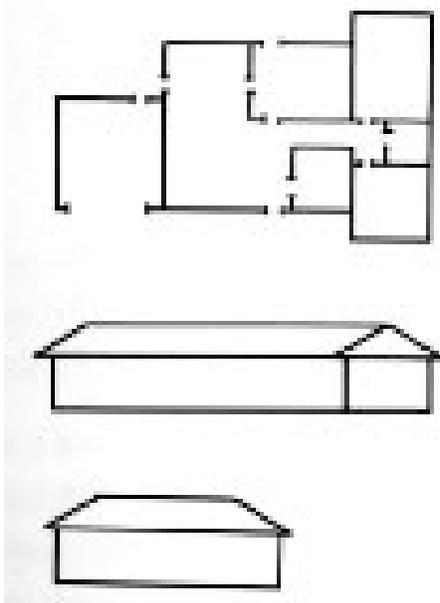


Figure 28. Composite Ranch-type house plan and form.



Figure 29. Composite Ranch-type house. Note the T-shape of this house in Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁰⁸ Bastian et al, 189



Figure 30. Composite Ranch-type house. Note the L-shape of this house in Mocksville, North Carolina as well as the wrought iron roof supports.



Figure 31. Composite Ranch-type house. L-shaped house on Davis Estates Road in Athens, Georgia. Artificial shutters and multi-colored brick add stylistic elements to the house. Note the horizontal-sliding metal windows.

Evaluating the house forms

Common Houses in America's Small Towns and the Georgia State University study is a useful framework through which to consider Ranch-type house forms in Georgia. If a survey were to be conducted of Ranch-type houses, these forms encompass nearly all Ranch-type houses that may be encountered. However, the identification of the house forms is only a starting

point from which to further evaluate Ranch-type houses. Information presented in the studies referenced above is not enough to complete an accurate survey of Ranch-type houses in Georgia. The studies do not identify the variety of stylistic elements that could be applied to make each Ranch-type house form unique. Nor do the studies address the influence that regional taste or architects had on Ranch-type house development. Any survey of Ranch-type houses has to take into consideration the house's stylistic elements, because these components make each house distinct. Furthermore, a survey has to consider the role of architects and how an architect might design a house much differently for an individual client than for a large tract development aimed at a wide variety of consumers. An architect designing a house for an individual might have more freedom in his or her design; however, popular tastes dictate the design of a development of houses that is to be sold to a mass audience.

By not addressing the array of stylistic elements that could be applied to a Ranch-type house, these studies do not present a complete framework through which to evaluate the house. Equal importance should be given to the elements that make each house unique. The city of Scottsdale, Arizona has developed a guide to post-war architectural styles.¹⁰⁹ The twenty-four page guide, replete with descriptions and photographs of postwar residential buildings, is intended for use when conducting surveys of the area's historic resources. Although the guide focuses primarily on the many forms of Ranch-type houses, the guide also features examples of the Cape Cod Cottage, the International Style, and the Split Level house found in the Scottsdale area. The guide is less concerned with the house forms and more focused on the various stylistic elements that can be applied to the Ranch-type house. For example, the Scottsdale guide features

¹⁰⁹ Scottsdale, Arizona Historic Preservation Commission. "Introduction to Postwar Modern Housing Architectural Styles." Available from: <http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/Assets/documents/historiczoning/IntroPostwarHousingStyle.pdf>; Internet; Accessed 5 February 2007.

a traditional “American Colonial Ranch” which has a front porch, artificial shutters, and “classical moldings on cornices, windows, and door openings.”¹¹⁰ The guide also features a “Contemporary Style” house that is essentially a Ranch-type house with a low-pitched gable roof, a massive chimney, and a “low horizontal emphasis.”¹¹¹ Ideally, a surveyor of Ranch-type houses in Georgia should consider using a style guide, such as the one prepared by the Scottsdale historic preservation commission, as a way of ascertaining a more complete picture of the house in Georgia. Identifying the house forms is only part of the evaluation framework. House form coupled with stylistic elements makes each Ranch-type house unique.

Stylistic elements of Ranch-type houses

A single house form could have any number of stylistic elements applied. For example, a Minimal Ranch-type house could have stylistic details such as contemporary horizontal sliding windows or a painted brick exterior while still retaining a Minimal form. The Inline form can also possess unique stylistic detailing. An Inline Ranch-type house could have double-hung sash windows, as well as horizontal sliding windows. (See figure thirty-two.) In addition, the house may have a metal roof, painted brick, and porch supports consisting of simple metal posts. The Ranch-type house in figure thirty-two is contrasted with the Inline house pictured in figure thirty-three. The house retains its Inline form even with the addition of narrow horizontal sliding windows, multi-colored brick, and artificial board-and-batten shutters. The Composite form can also demonstrate unique stylistic details. The Ranch-type house in figure thirty has an L-shaped plan and features wrought iron columns on the porch and carport as well as traditional decorative shutters. On the other hand, the only stylistic features on the Ranch-type house pictured in figure thirty-one are decorative shutters and the use of multi-colored brick. The variety of stylistic

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 9.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 18.

elements that can be applied makes each house unique, even though it may be similar in form to the house across the street.



Figure 32. Inline Ranch-type house in Ardmore Park, Atlanta, Georgia. The different window types and simple porch-roof supports add unique stylistic elements.



Figure 33. Inline Ranch-type house on Jamagin Drive in Athens, Georgia. The windows, artificial shutters, and brick pattern add unique stylistic elements.

The studies also do not mention how the inclusion of a basement might affect the house form typology. Depending on the slope of the land on which a particular Ranch-type house is built, a basement could be integrated into the design. For instance, if the elevation slopes away at

the side of the house, a basement could be included on the loping side. (See figure thirty-four.)

The studies do not address this occurrence. A Ranch-type house with a basement may warrant its own unique typology.



Figure 34. Ranch-type house on University Circle in Athens, Georgia. Basement made possible because of the sloped elevation.

No mention of plan as a significant feature of Ranch-type houses is made in either of the studies. As noted in chapter two, an open floor plan with rooms grouped together in zones of activity was an important feature of Ranch-type houses. Because the open floor plan and zones of activity were so important to the Ranch-type house, they are character-defining features that are worthy of consideration. The degree to which interior areas of houses are made available during a survey may vary, however, any survey or effort to assign a particular typology to a house should consider plan as an important feature.

Influence of the architect

The influence of the architect must also be considered. A house or tract of houses, designed by a well-trained, Modern-influenced architect, (see figure thirty-five) might look quite

different from a house designed by a less sophisticated architect designing a modest house (see figure thirty-six). For example, the architects and houses profiled in chapter four were all designed by architects highly influenced by Modernism and thus possess a number of unique features such as large areas of glazing, interior courtyards/patios, and butterfly roofs. By contrast, a tract development designed by an architect not trained or influenced by Modernism, or an architect unwilling to risk offending the conservative taste of some house buyers, might feature a house or houses that are more conservative and less architecturally distinct.



Figure 35. Ranch-type house on Golf View Drive in Atlanta, Georgia. House designed by James H. Finch.



Figure 36. Ranch-type house on Bannister Drive in Powder Springs, Georgia.

Regional taste

With some exceptions, the one element that seems constant amongst the Ranch-type house forms referenced above is the application of brick on part or all of the exterior. Cladding the exterior in brick likely added a traditional element to an otherwise contemporary house. Artificial shutters and/or wrought iron roof supports also added a traditional component to the house which appealed to regional taste. Ranch-type house designers in Georgia may have been more attentive to traditional preferences than house designers in California, for instance, because of the apparent conservative tastes of the state and region.

Climatic conditions may have further influenced the choice of stylistic elements. A Ranch-type house in a mild, temperate climate, such as in Georgia, might have larger roof overhangs or be sited differently than a Ranch-type house in Minnesota in order to limit sun exposure. Furthermore, the relationship with the outdoors likely had a larger impact on the Ranch-type house in Georgia, as opposed to other parts of the United States. Because of Georgia's mild climate, outdoor activities can take place almost year-round. The relationship with the outdoors is enhanced through the use of sliding-glass doors, picture windows, and patios.

Without a comprehensive survey of Ranch-type houses across Georgia, it is difficult to conclusively determine the exact forms in which the house occurred. However, there are certain features that Ranch-type houses in Georgia possess. As mentioned earlier, brick is the primary exterior wall material. The amount of brick used, whether on part or the entire exterior walls, as well as the color and size, varies from house to house. Stylistic features such as artificial shutters or wrought iron roof supports ornament many Ranch-type houses in Georgia, perhaps more than in other region of the country because of the state's conservative architectural taste. A carport can be found on nearly all Ranch-type houses in Georgia because homeowners in the state, like many across the United States after World War II, became dependent on the automobile. The Ranch-type house in Georgia will nearly always feature a gable or hipped roof, unless designed by a Modern-influenced architect, in which case the house may have a butterfly, flat, or shed roof. (See figure thirty-seven.) A strong relationship with the outdoors is perhaps the most significant aspect that distinguishes the Ranch-type house in Georgia from Ranch-type houses in other parts of the United States. Georgia's mild climate makes the sliding glass door and patio an almost standard Ranch-type house feature.



Figure 37. Ranch-type house with low-pitched shed roof on University Circle. Athens, Georgia.

Each of the house forms referenced in this chapter could have stylistic details ranging from colonial to contemporary applied to it. The degree to which details were incorporated depended on the designer and/or the client for which the house was being designed. While each of these house forms was incorporated into the ever-present suburban tract development across Georgia and the United States, the house had to first be designed by an architect. The next chapter will consider several architects closely associated with the Ranch-type house in Georgia. Each architect will be considered in the context of how they applied the principles of modernism in their designs.

CHAPTER FOUR

GEORGIA ARCHITECTS AND THE RANCH-TYPE HOUSE

“Therefore you will do well to recognize the fact that only the modern architect is free to use every inch of space to your greatest advantage, free to use new and more efficient materials and structural techniques and free to give you at least the feeling of spaciousness that is actually attainable.” -George Nelson and Henry Wright¹¹²

Modern architecture in Georgia began to appear “as early as the 1930s...but residential architecture remained largely traditional.”¹¹³ During the height of Modernism's popularity in the mid-twentieth century, most architects were still designing traditional/classical houses made popular in the 1920s. When architects wanted to explore the new Modern style of architecture, they often used themselves as test cases by building Modern houses for themselves or relatives, as will be shown later in the chapter. Dispensing with the formal façade found on most residential buildings in the previous decades, Modern architects designed houses that “were to be experienced from the inside out.”¹¹⁴ A more informal way of living and the combining of indoor and outdoor life were features that Modern architects continued to develop in the years that followed. Many of these architects were able to capture the “innocence and sincerity of the original” Ranch house of the southwestern United States and incorporate it into their designs.¹¹⁵

While architects such as Cliff May, Chris Choat, Ed Fickett, William Wurster, and others were designing Ranch-type houses around the country, a number of architects in Georgia made a name for themselves by designing Ranch-type houses and other modern non-residential

¹¹² George Nelson and Henry Wright. Tomorrow's House: How to Plan Your Postwar Home Now. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945) 4.

¹¹³ Burns, et al, 52.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Becker, 89.

buildings. While there are others who built Ranch-type houses and/or suburban developments in Georgia, the architects listed below are, at this time, the most well documented designers of Ranch-type houses and modern buildings in Georgia. In 2006, Dr. Richard Cloues of the Georgia Historic Preservation Division identified a number of Georgia architects closely associated with the Ranch-type house.¹¹⁶ This chapter will provide additional information about the architects regarding their influence on the Ranch-type house, as well as their biography and professional work.

James Harrison Finch

Described as the “Master of Modernism”¹¹⁷, James Harrison “Bill” Finch was born in 1914 in Atlanta, Georgia. After graduating from high school in Atlanta, Finch enrolled in Georgia Tech. Upon graduating from Georgia Tech, Finch was accepted to the Princeton University School of Architecture as a Prize Scholar.¹¹⁸ Though Finch was exposed to both traditional and modern styles of architecture while at Georgia Tech, most of his training at Princeton University was in the modern style. Finch worked for a brief time at the Atlanta architecture firm of Hentz, Adler, and Shutze before serving as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II. He remained in the U.S. Marine Corps through the Korean War before retiring as a lieutenant colonel in the Fifth Marine Division.¹¹⁹

Between his service in World War II and the Korean War, Finch made a lasting mark on residential architecture in Georgia. Finch, along with architect Miller Barnes, designed a suburban tract development in Atlanta known as Golf View. (See figure thirty-eight). The

¹¹⁶ Dr. Cloues originally identified the architects discussed in this chapter during his examination of the Ranch-type house in 2006 for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources-Historic Preservation Division.

¹¹⁷ Georgia Tech Alumni Association Magazine, “Master of Modernism”; available from <http://gtalumni.org/news/ttopics/spr98/finch.html>; Internet; accessed 3 March 2007.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

development was named Golf View because of the nearby Bobby Jones golf course that could be seen from the neighborhood. (See figure thirty-nine.) Finch and Barnes' design received national attention in 1953 in the architectural trade journal *House and Home* for their work. The journal described the development as Atlanta's attempt to go "modern without going overboard" by using "clean design" and "efficient techniques."¹²⁰ The houses in Golf View cost between \$21,400 and \$23,900 and "drew a record-breaking crowd of 10,000 visitors on opening day and sold itself with a minimum of advertising and sales effort."¹²¹



Figure 38. Golf View. Atlanta, Georgia.



Figure 39. View of Bobby Jones golf course from Golf View subdivision. Atlanta, Georgia.

¹²⁰ "Atlanta Goes Modern." *House and Home*. April 1953. 144

¹²¹ *Ibid.*



Figure 40. House in Golf View subdivision. Atlanta, Georgia.

House and Home magazine described the sixteen-house development of Ranch-type houses as commercially successful for a number of reasons. First, the houses were located within the development specifically to improve privacy and views.¹²² Finch incorporated fences, brick walls, and shrubs to serve as privacy screens. (See figure forty-one.) Second, the floor plan Finch designed was intended to have few interior walls for better circulation. He also located living rooms at the rear of the house for privacy and easier access to the outdoors through sliding glass doors. (See figure forty-two.) Finch designed the plans so that the house could be divided into zones of activity for more efficient use. (See figure forty-three). For example, living room-dining room areas were grouped together, as were kitchen-utility areas (see figure forty-four) and bedroom-bathroom areas. *House and Home* also identified the three basic floor plans Finch designed as a positive aspect of the Golf View development. Finch designed three basic plans so that they could be built in a variety of different ways by orienting houses differently from lot to lot or reversing plans so that bedrooms on the left side of one house could be located on the right

¹²² Ibid.

side of another house but still have the same plan. (See figure forty-five). Different exterior wall materials could be used on houses built with the same plan for added variety.



Figure 41. Note privacy brick wall at right. Atlanta, Georgia.

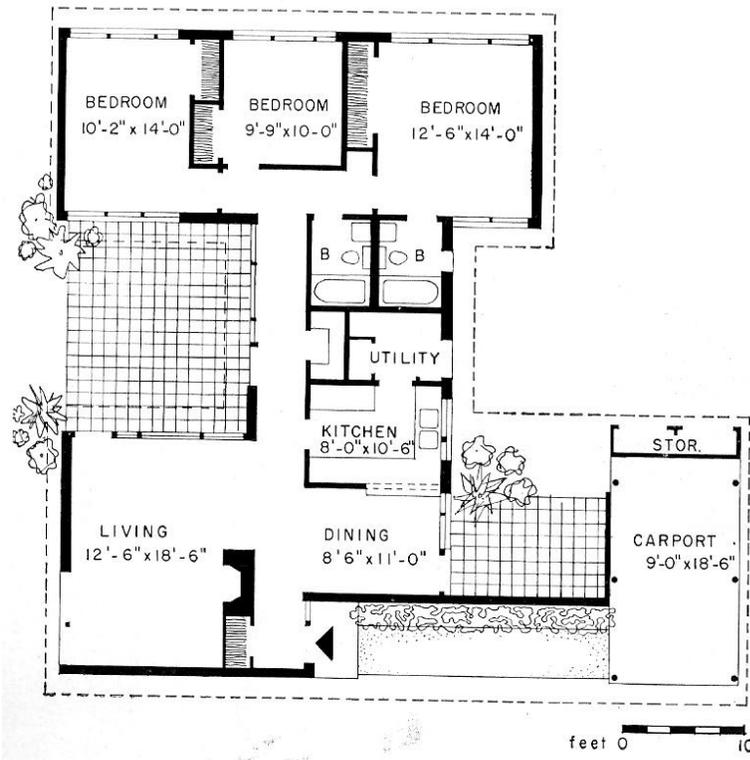


Figure 42. H-plan. Living room located at rear of house near courtyard.

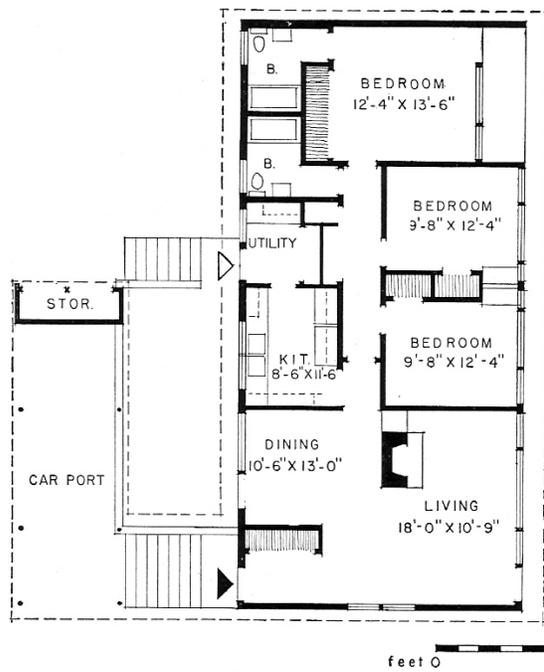


Figure 43. Areas of house grouped together by activity.



Figure 44. Kitchen in Golf View house. Atlanta, Georgia.

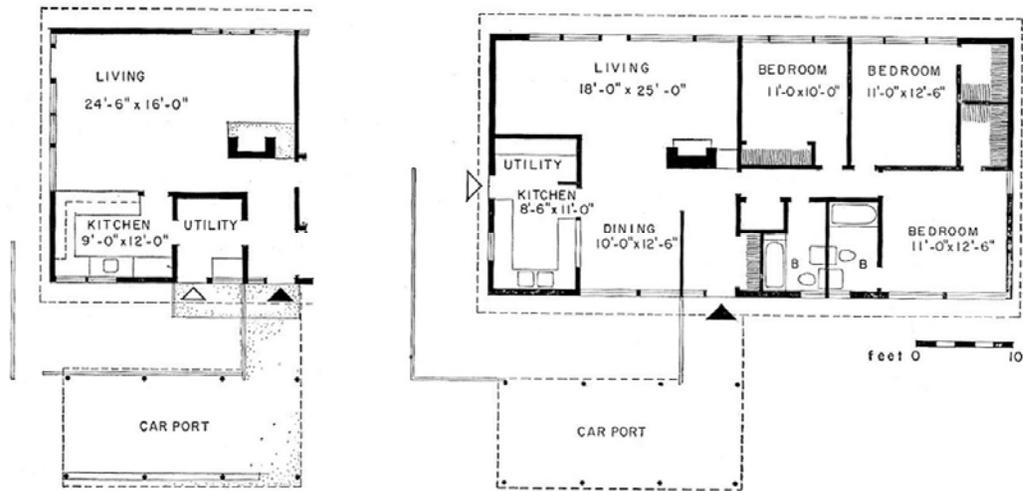


Figure 45. Alternative plans.

Finch's Golf View development received further recognition because of his use of pre-assembled materials. For example, wall sections could be assembled off site and then delivered to the development and integrated into the building. Finch's use of pre-assembled components was a precursor to the way in which houses are constructed today. The use of post-and-beam construction allowed Finch to incorporate large windows into his designs, further bringing the outside into the house. (See figure forty-six). The merging of indoor and outdoor activities was a significant feature of Golf View and of Ranch-type houses in general. Finch's designs for Golf View also made room for something that had rarely been seen in previous house designs: the automobile. (See figure forty-seven.)



Figure 46. Living room with large windows. The fireplace (right) was used to separate the living room and dining room. Atlanta, Georgia.



Figure 47. Automobile and house in Golf View. Atlanta, Georgia.

The commercial success that Finch's Golf View designs enjoyed should not come as a surprise. The one-story plan with zones of activity, a covered area for the automobile, and large windows that enhanced the relationship with the outdoors were all features that made Finch's

Golf View houses popular. The variety of floor plan arrangements and exterior wall materials are also a credit to Finch's designs and likely helped to make the development even more popular.

Upon Finch's return to the United States following the Korean War, he worked for a number of architecture firms in Atlanta. In 1958, Finch teamed with architects Cecil Alexander, Jr., Miller Barnes (with whom he had worked on the Golf View development), Bernard Rothschild, and Caraker Paschal to found FABRAP.¹²³ It was at FABRAP that Finch made his mark on the commercial and institution architecture of Georgia. Finch and his partners at FABRAP designed the Coca-Cola headquarters building, the Southern Bell headquarters building, the First National Bank Building, and the Five Points MARTA station in Atlanta. Finch and his partners also designed the Urban Life Center at Georgia State University and the chemistry and the student athletic complex at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. Teaming up with George Heery, Finch designed the Georgia Dome and the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium, as well as its successor, Turner Field.

Finch was not shy about sharing his views regarding architecture and historic preservation. Before his death in July of 2003, Finch told an interviewer, "They don't hesitate to take down some old building that has substantial character and is perhaps worth saving from a design standpoint or historical standpoint. Not if they can tear that down and build something five times as large that will return five times as much money."¹²⁴ While Finch may not have been referring specifically to the architecture of the Recent Past, his comments are still relevant. Finch's designs, and others from the post-World War II period, possess characteristics that are unique to the time in which they were constructed, and thus warrant consideration as historic resources.

¹²³ Timeline, DOCOMOMO-Georgia; available from <http://docomomoga.org/pages/timeline/timelineweb.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 May 2007.

¹²⁴ Georgia Tech Alumni Association Magazine.

Both from a design and historical standpoint, Finch's work is significant. Finch was able to apply the principles of modernism he acquired at Georgia Tech and Princeton University into residential architecture. His recognition in a prominent architectural trade journal and his success designing numerous commercial buildings, attests to his ability to produce quality designs. The Golf View development is Finch's greatest contribution to the development of the Ranch-type house in Georgia. Golf View is still a residential neighborhood today; however, several houses in the development have been demolished in favor of larger, out-of-scale houses. Finch is one of several architects who aided in expanding the Ranch-type's popularity in Georgia and across the country because of the success of his designs.



Figure 48. House in Atlanta's Golf View subdivision as it appears today.

Clement J. Ford

Like Bill Finch, Clement Ford has the distinction of being a nationally recognized designer of Ranch-type houses. Born in Atlanta around 1907¹²⁵, Ford attended school in Atlanta and graduated from Boy's High School, where he was president of the senior class. Ford was awarded the Atlanta Journal cup for his academic success in high school. After graduating from Georgia Tech with a degree in architecture, Ford enrolled at the Columbia University School of

¹²⁵ Richard Cloues, Ranch Houses in Georgia. (PowerPoint, Historic Preservation Division, 2007), 4.

Architecture in New York. While living in New York, Ford worked with architects William Lawrence Bottomly and Dwight James Baum on various Hudson River estate designs. In 1938 he was awarded the American Institute of Architect's Edward Langley Scholarship, with which he studied the architecture of hospitals and public housing in Europe. Ford took the knowledge he had gained in Europe and applied it to his work at Grady Hospital in Atlanta. Before World War II, Ford worked as a maintenance engineer at Grady Hospital. He also administered the hospital's Works Progress Administration grants, a program implemented to combat the Great Depression. When the United States entered World War II in 1941, Ford joined the U.S. Navy and served in the south Pacific, earning the rank of lieutenant commander.

After World War II, Ford returned to Atlanta and resumed work as an architect. Over the course of his career, Ford designed houses in Atlanta, West Point, LaGrange, Rome, Macon, and Sea Island, Georgia. Ford's work was not limited to houses, though; he designed the Darlington School in Rome, Georgia as well as renovations to Saint James' Episcopal Church in Marietta, Georgia, where Ford's grandfather had served as a rector.¹²⁶ In 1948, he was asked by Carrollton automotive dealer Eric Vernon Folds to design a house for him and his wife Inez on a large plot of land in Carrollton, Georgia. Ford designed a Colonial Revival style house that the Folds lived in until 1966, when it was purchased by the Oak Mountain Academy and used as a private school.¹²⁷ The house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in August 2005.

In 1952, *Better Homes and Gardens* recognized Ford for his design of a Ranch-type house as part of the magazine's Five Star Home program. (See figure forty-nine.)

¹²⁶ St. James Episcopal Church, "Historic Lawrence Chapel." Available from http://www.stjamesmarietta.com/History_lawrence_chapel.php; Internet; accessed 3 April 2007.

¹²⁷ The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, "Rambles." Available from http://www.georgiatrust.org/historic_sites/SR05_WhitesburgOther.htm; Internet; accessed 12 May 2007.



Figure 49. Ford-designed house featured in *Better Homes and Gardens*.

Five Star Home number 2103 is described as “a compromise—and a happy one.”¹²⁸ Ford’s design avoided the dullness of a traditional design while at the same time shunning the severity of a purely modern design. Ford was able to select the best qualities of both styles and merge them into this Ranch-type house design. The house contained all the features expected of a Ranch-type house: a single level, limited ornamentation, a carport, a picture window in the dining room, and an efficient grouping of activity areas. *Better Homes and Gardens* described it as efficient, comfortable, and friendly.¹²⁹ As in other Ranch-type house designs referenced in this thesis, the kitchen/dining room area were grouped on one side of the house while the bedrooms and bathrooms were grouped on the other side, in order to separate zones of activity. (See figure fifty.)



Figure 50. Ford Ranch-type house plan.

¹²⁸Five Star Home, “Ford Ranch-type house Five Star Home 2103,” *Better Homes and Gardens*, May 1952, 68.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

The dining room and living room were essentially one room with the brick fireplace serving as a divider between. (See figure fifty-two.) Ford designed the house so that the living room (the largest room in the house at 14x24 feet, see figure fifty-one) would not be a “traffic artery.” In other words, other rooms in the house could be accessed without having to pass through the living room.



Figure 51. Living room in Ford house.

The dining room featured a brick floor as well as a picture window. (See figure forty-three.) The brick floor is an example of the type of unique detailing obtained in an architect-designed house such as this one. Metal Jalousie-type windows were used in order to reduce window maintenance and so “you don’t have to sprint around closing them every time it rains.”¹³⁰ In another example of Ford’s efficient design, the terrace could be accessed from the living room or the dining room.

¹³⁰ Ibid.



Figure 52. Fireplace separates dining room and living room. Note picture window in dining room.

All of the components that made the Ranch-type house a success, both in Georgia and nationally, are present in Ford's design. The open floor plan on a single level, the metal jalousie-type windows, and the carport and terrace located outside the house were all features Ford included in his design. These were features that house buyers became increasingly attracted to thanks to the publication of house designs like Ford's.

Other architects, including those mentioned in this thesis, received well-deserved recognition in trade journals aimed at the architecture profession. Ford, however, is unique in that he received national attention in a popular magazine accessible by significant numbers of the general public, not just those in the architecture profession. As Dr. Cloues says of Clement Ford, "It's not that Ford 'invented' the red-brick ranch house—it's just that he got it legitimized nationally in 1952."¹³¹ Ford's greatest contribution to the development of the Ranch-type house in Georgia was the recognition his design received in *Better Homes and Gardens*. Ford

¹³¹ Cloues, 5.

continued to work as an architect until suffering a stroke in the late 1980's. He died at his residence in Atlanta's Lenbrook Square on 29 May 1992.¹³²

George Thomas Heery

Architect and engineer George Thomas Heery was born on 18 June 1927 in Atlanta, Georgia. Heery served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. After returning from the war, Heery briefly enrolled at the University of Georgia before transferring to Georgia Tech in Atlanta. While there, Heery was accepted into the ANAK honor society.¹³³ Heery graduated with a bachelor's degree and, in 1951, a master's degree in architecture from Georgia Tech.¹³⁴ In the spring of 1952 Heery left the firm of Finch and Barnes, where he worked as a draftsman designer, and established his own architecture practice in Atlanta. Heery then established his own firm in conjunction with his father, Clarence Wilmer Heery, Jr., a Georgia Tech graduate of the class of 1926. The father-son duo named the firm Heery and Heery. The firm opened two firms, one in Atlanta and one in Athens. While George managed the Atlanta office, his father managed the Athens office. The offices operated independently until 1954, when they were merged, creating "one company with two offices".¹³⁵ While Heery's office in Atlanta had originally been operated out the house he shared with his wife Betty on Golfview Drive, the practice was moved to an office on Peachtree Street. One of Heery's most well known Ranch-type houses was constructed in 1952. Thomas Northcutt, developer and builder of the Golf View subdivision in Atlanta, hired Heery to design and build a house for him. (See figure fifty-three.) The house featured significant areas of glazing, wide roof overhangs, and a blending of indoor-outdoor activities.

¹³² "Obituary for Clement J. Ford," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. 31 May 1992.

¹³³ Gene Asher, "Making his mark," *Georgia Trend*, May 2007, 15

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Carolyn Paris Edge. The Career of C. Wilmer Heery of Athens, Georgia. MHP thesis, University of Georgia, 1994.



Figure 53. Thomas Northcutt residence. Atlanta, Georgia.

Because of the Heery office in Athens, Georgia, the firm undertook several projects in Athens. In 1961, Heery's firm designed a complex of distinctly Modern buildings for the Family Housing complex of the University of Georgia. The complex of buildings featured low pitched gable roofs with wide overhangs, a smooth brick and concrete exterior, and large areas of glass. (See figures fifty-four thru fifty-six.) Also in 1961, Heery designed the Athens Y.M.C.A. building on Hawthorne Avenue and the Clarke County Public Library on Dougherty Street (now the Athens-Clarke County Governmental Building. See figures fifty-seven through fifty-nine.) These buildings also featured Modern stylistic details, with flat roofs, smooth exteriors, and large expanses of concrete, brick, and glass. Elements of the Ranch-type house are evident in these buildings through Heery's use of wide roof overhangs, gable roofs (in the case of the UGA Family housing complex), large areas of glass, and brick exteriors. The UGA Family Housing

complex almost appears to be an exaggerated Ranch-type house because of its stylistic features. There are also suggestions of the Ranch-type house in the Y.M.C.A. building and the public library because of the buildings horizontality and brick exterior.



Figure 54. UGA Family Housing. Athens, Georgia. Note the large areas of glass.



Figure 55. Gable roof with wide overhang.



Figure 56. Concrete and brick wall surface.



Figure 57. Athens-Clarke County Governmental Building. Note the building's horizontality.



Figure 58. Large windows.



Figure 59. Brick wall and wide roof overhang.

Between 1965 and 1969, Heery designed a Modern eight story building in the International Style to house the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Southeastern Utilization Laboratory. In 1966, Heery designed the new additions to Sanford Stadium on the campus of the University of Georgia. In 1973, Heery's firm, now known as Heery International, made a foray into historic preservation by moving the circa 1829 Hoyt House to the Athens Foundry and Mattress Factory on Dougherty Street. The adaptive reuse project turned the factory into a motel and converted the Hoyt House into a restaurant and assembly area.¹³⁶

The former Athens (GA) high school football player is closely associated with designing and building sports arenas. Not only did he design additions to Sanford Stadium in Athens, Heery designed over one hundred sports stadiums around the world. He designed the Georgia Dome in Atlanta, the Gator Bowl in Jacksonville, Florida, and Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati, Ohio, as well as international sports arenas in Calgary and Montreal, Canada, the World Cup Stadium in Paris, and a soccer stadium in Saudi Arabia. In 2007, Heery said his most prized

¹³⁶ "Athens History Village," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 4 November 1975, section G, page 4.

stadium was Rich Stadium (now called Ralph Wilson Stadium) in Buffalo, New York.

According to Heery, “Rich Stadium is the perfect open traditional football stadium.”¹³⁷

Of all the architects noted in this thesis, Heery’s work is perhaps the most diverse. Ranging from suburban houses to large sports stadiums to community planning, Heery had a significant impact in a number of areas. Heery was able to take modern design principles and apply them in a practical manner. Whether it was Thomas Northcutt’s Ranch-type house or the University of Georgia Family Housing Complex or the Clarke County Public Library, Heery applied the principles of modernism to his work. For Heery, and many architects of the era, the use of Modern design principles was more than just an attempt to build something that was a rebellious break from the past. For Heery, and others, Modern design was a way of bringing honesty to architecture and improving the built environment.

Jean League Newton

Born in 1919 to Ellamae Ellis League, an early female pioneer in Georgia architecture, Newton was a strong proponent of modernism.¹³⁸ Newton received her architectural degree from Harvard University in 1945. While at Harvard, Newton studied under architect Walter Gropius.¹³⁹ Gropius, a German architect, was an early proponent of Modern architecture and closely associated with the Bauhaus school of art and architecture. Newton eventually joined her mother’s architecture firm in Macon, Georgia: League, Warren, and Riley.¹⁴⁰

Newton earned national recognition in 1953 for her design of a contemporary Ranch-type house in Macon. (See figure sixty). Designed for her brother and sister-in-law, the house was to

¹³⁷ Asher, 16.

¹³⁸ Cloues, 4.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

be to be private and utilitarian.¹⁴¹ Facing west among long leafed pines, the house was “planned for a budgeting, servantless couple.”¹⁴² Newton designed the house so as to not have a significant amount of ornamentation or high style architectural detailing, in keeping with Modernist principles. Newton grouped the living and dining rooms around an exterior terrace. (See sixty-one.) The carport, a significant feature of any Ranch type house, was connected to the living areas through a sheltered service court. Like many Ranch-type houses, Newton grouped all the bedrooms together on one side of the house. In keeping with the utilitarian nature of the house, Newton designed the hallway between the bedrooms and kitchen to be extra large so that it could be used as a play area for small children.¹⁴³

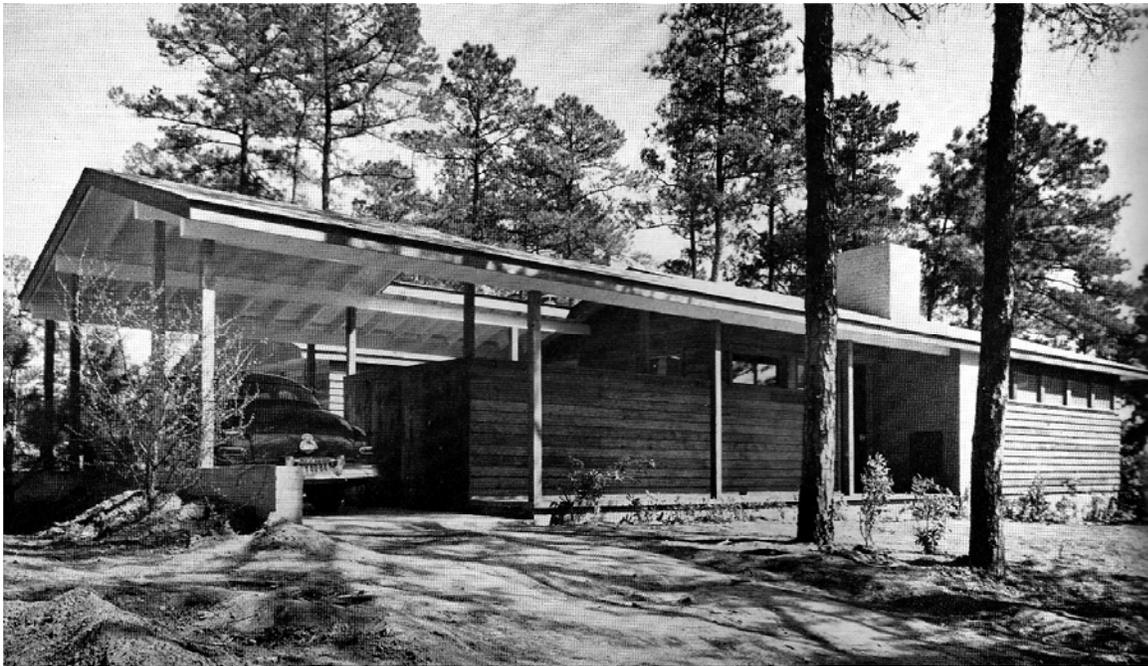


Figure 60. League Ranch-type house in Macon, Georgia.

¹⁴¹ League House, *Progressive Architecture*, July 1953, 102.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

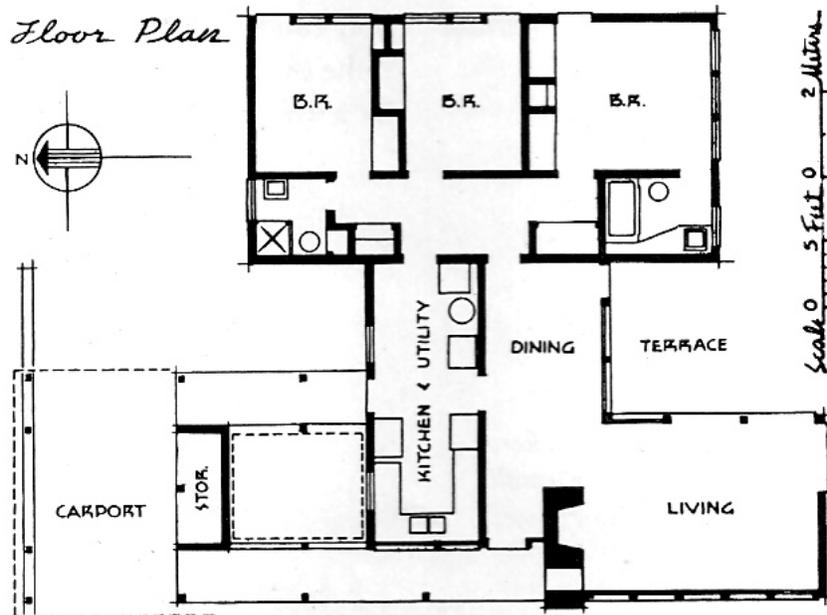


Figure 61. League house plan. The plan groups zones of activity together.

Unlike the prototypical red brick Ranch-type house, Newton used Redwood siding and white asbestos roof shingles in her design. As reported by *Progressive Architecture* in 1953, Newton intentionally chose white roof shingles in order to recall “the infinity of shining roofs atop gnarled-plank farm sheds.” The journal further described the house as “essentially a frame structure with a steel ridge and flat steel bracing.” Yellow and black asphalt tile and brick serve as floor coverings over a concrete slab. The walls in the house are painted plaster over lath and 4” wool insulation.

Newton designed the living room to be spacious and functional and installed high windows for cross ventilation and for added privacy.¹⁴⁴ (See figure sixty-two.) The functionality of the house is evident in the drapery that could be used to divide the living room and dining room on appropriate occasions. (See figure sixty-three.) The kitchen and utility area were

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

interconnected for more efficient use of space for “meals, laundry, and hobbies.”¹⁴⁵ (See figure sixty-four.)



Figure 62. Living room. Note the high windows used for cross ventilation. Macon, Georgia.



Figure 63. Facing dining room and terrace from living room. Note the large drapes. Macon, Georgia.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.



Figure 64. Facing kitchen from utility area. Note the high windows on the far wall. Macon, Georgia.

The lack of exterior red brick is perhaps the feature that makes Newton's most distinct. An informal windshield survey of Ranch-type house neighborhoods likely indicates that the vast majority of the houses were clad in brick, primarily red brick. By covering the exterior in wood, Newton gave the house a natural appearance to fit in with its surrounds. Newton's use of curtains to serve as dividers between the living room and dining room is also unique. Versatility in room use was not invented by Newton; however, she was able to effectively incorporate versatility into her design.

Newton's design was not only unique, she was unique herself. Like James Finch, Newton was recognized in a national architectural trade journal. Newton is even more exceptional because of her ability to succeed in a seemingly male dominated profession. She was not the first female architect in Georgia (that distinction goes to Henrietta Dozier); however, she was the first to receive national attention for her Ranch-type house design. She was able to apply the knowledge she gained from her studies at Harvard University under Walter Gropius to a modest suburban house. Newton incorporated all of the elements into her design that made the Ranch-

type house so popular after World War II. Any discussion of the Ranch-type house in Georgia is incomplete without a consideration of Jean League Newton.

James R. Wilkinson

Wilkinson, a graduate of Auburn University in Alabama, was responsible for bringing modernism to the firm of Stevens and Wilkinson in Atlanta.¹⁴⁶ Wilkinson and his firm designed numerous buildings in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee. Stevens and Wilkinson designed several public housing projects in the Southeast, including Techwood Homes in Atlanta in 1934 and several projects for the Opelika Housing Authority in Alabama in 1951.¹⁴⁷ During World War II, Stevens and Wilkinson designed several military projects in Georgia, including the Savannah Air Base, an Internment Camp in Fort Oglethorpe, and a hospital in Fort McPherson. One of Stevens and Wilkinson's early forays into Modernism was the residence of Judge S. Price Gilbert in Atlanta, Georgia. Price's residence featured many of the hallmarks of Modernism, including smooth surfaces, glass walls, and sleek lines. Wilkinson's firm also designed the Georgia Center for Continuing Education on the campus of the University of Georgia in 1956. Highly influenced by Modernism, Stevens and Wilkinson won the Progressive Architecture Design Award in 1956 and the American Institute of Architects Honor Award in 1957 at the South Atlantic Regional Conference in 1957 for their work on the Georgia Center.¹⁴⁸

Perhaps one of the most significant houses designed by Wilkinson and his firm was Wilkinson's own house on West Paces Road in Atlanta. Built in 1947 as a "passive solar house"¹⁴⁹ on a three-acre plot, the house was featured in the 1951 book The American House Today. (See figure sixty-five.) Wilkinson designed the house with one goal in mind: to make it

¹⁴⁶ Burns, et al, 67.

¹⁴⁷ Georgia Department of Natural Resources- Historic Preservation Division archives.

¹⁴⁸ Preston Standish Stevens and James Wilkinson. Stevens and Wilkinson: Selected Works. (Atlanta: Dittler Brothers, Inc., 1960) 5.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

“a year-round house for the architect and his wife and two small boys.”¹⁵⁰ Since The American House Today was a national publication featuring houses from around the country, the authors made note of the role that the climate of the southeastern United States had in the design of Wilkinson’s house. The chapter that Wilkinson’s house appears in is titled “Environmental Influence.” The chapter features houses from Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Texas. All are states that have warm, temperate climates where the design and orientation of a structure relative to the outdoor environment is quite important.

To ensure that his house could be used efficiently year-round, Wilkinson took steps to ensure that cross ventilation was enhanced throughout the house. The house was built with aluminum louvers underneath the south facing double-thick wall of windows in the living/dining room. Positive cross ventilation occurred as a result of the movable transom windows at the front entrance on the north side of the house, directly across from the living/dining room. Cross ventilation was further achieved in the houses bedrooms by “sliding windows on the south and high transoms on the north and west sides.”¹⁵¹



Figure 65. Wilkinson residence. Atlanta, Georgia. Note the wide overhangs.

¹⁵⁰ Katherine Morrow Ford, Thomas H. Creighton. The American House Today. (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1951) 165.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.



Figure 66. Living room. The bookcase helped to delineate the living room from the foyer.

Wilkinson designed the house to have wide overhangs at the end of the butterfly-shaped roof. The use of wide roof overhangs, a common feature on most Ranch-type houses, was also used on Wilkinson's house to make the interior more comfortable. Roof overhangs of three and one-half feet were used over the windows in the bedrooms on the south side, and overhangs of six feet were used over the living/dining room windows also on the south side. The wide overhangs had the affect of shading the windows from the sun, as well as to keep water from penetrating the house during heavy rains.

Versatility in room usage is another Ranch-type house feature used in Wilkinson's house. The guest bedroom on the northeast corner of the house was intended as a room for a servant or nurse for the Wilkinsons' small children. However, it could be converted into "one of the boy's bedrooms later on."¹⁵² The master bathroom in the western half of the house was left partially open and unfinished so that a partition wall could be installed, later providing a separate

¹⁵² Ibid.

bathroom “for the two main bedrooms when children are larger.”¹⁵³ (See figure sixty-seven.)

Allowing the house to evolve with changing needs was utilized in many Ranch-type houses and was incorporated into Wilkinson’s house. It was a feature of Ranch-type houses that made them even more popular.

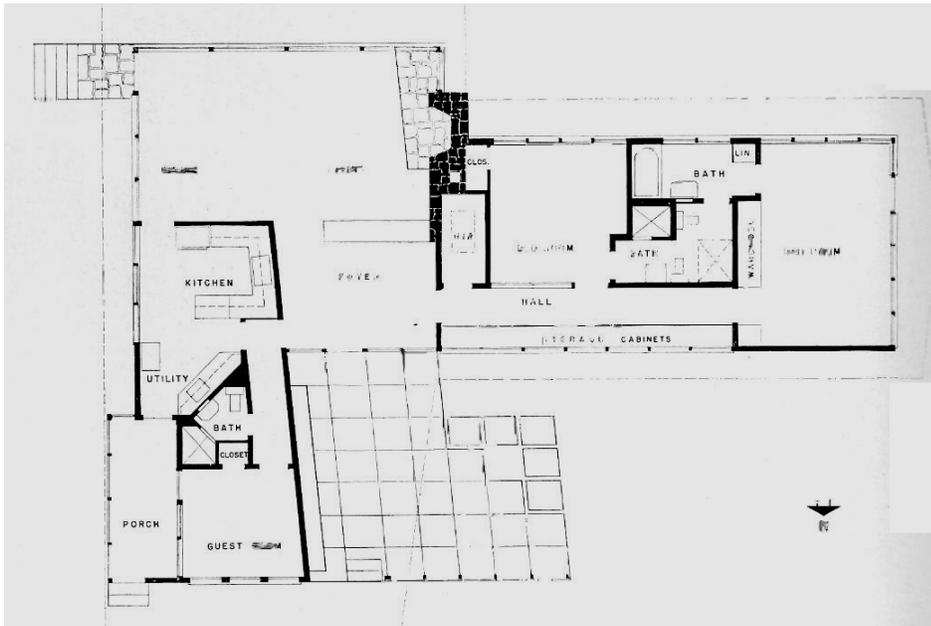


Figure 67. Plan of Wilkinson residence. Note the blending of foyer, living room, and dining room.

Wilkinson’s house was the essence of modern when it was constructed in 1947. Using new materials such as corrugated cement-asbestos exterior siding (on top of a wooden frame), acoustic fiberboard ceiling tiles, heating the house with radiant floor panels and incorporating large areas of glazing, the house was an example of Modern house building at its best in Georgia. Wilkinson left a lasting mark on the development of the Ranch-type house in Georgia with his design. Unfortunately, the house has since been demolished. Wilkinson’s Ranch-type house is now another example of lost recent past architecture.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Modern architecture in Georgia

It is worth noting that none of these architects was able to operate their respective firms based solely on designing Modern residential buildings. Even while Modernism was being emphasized in architecture schools throughout North America and Europe, “in Atlanta, most people were interested in traditional revival style homes.”¹⁵⁴ As one architect put it, “Do not pull into the average Georgia town or city expecting to find little known treasures of modern vintage. Few architects outside Atlanta get much opportunity to work in the Modern style.”¹⁵⁵ When architects wanted to design a purely Modern house, the architect often had to design it as his or her own house or design a house for a relative or friend. The architects in this chapter and many like them “were all experimenters, developing many different ways to solve the problem of efficient, marketable, and profitable” houses.¹⁵⁶

The designers and builders of the Ranch-type house in Georgia, and across the United States, were able to take many modern concepts and apply them to affordable suburban houses. These architects were, in essence, “the arbiters of a new middle-class style of life.”¹⁵⁷ Ranch-type house architects took many of the best qualities of Modernism and used them to build houses, not just for the wealthy or a small group of architecturally literate house buyers, but rather for anyone who could afford the down payment. The Ranch-type house and those who designed them did what could not be done for most stark and sophisticated examples of Modernism: make it profitable.

¹⁵⁴ Burns, et al, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Spector, 75.

¹⁵⁶ Hess, 13.

¹⁵⁷ Baxandall and Ewen, 133.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHALLENGE OF EVALUATING AND PRESERVING THE RANCH-TYPE HOUSE

"He never painted the house, nor sought to adorn it, but the passage of years has given it softness and beauty, and now we hear persons admire its functionalism." -John Brinckerhoff Jackson¹⁵⁸

In the last several years, there has been renewed interest in the Ranch-type house. As author and suburban trends observer D.J. Waldie says in regards to the Ranch-type house: "It's the late twentieth century version of the Arts and Crafts bungalow." Because of this renewed interest, many preservation-minded individuals are taking steps to ensure that the Ranch-type house is not overlooked in the pages of architectural history or in the context of historic preservation. Ken Bernstein, director of preservation at the Los Angeles Conservancy, suggests, "the Ranch house is the next emerging residential preservation issue."

The Ranch-type house, like any potential historic resource, must first be evaluated in order to determine its possible significance. The principles behind the evaluation of historic resources warrant consideration. The evaluation of historic resources is based essentially on two factors: cultural and/or historical significance and architectural importance.¹⁵⁹ Cultural and/or historic significance relates to a significant person or event in history. Architectural importance refers to aspects such as building material, craftsmanship, stylistic details, and/or being a unique example of a particular type of architecture. These two philosophies have been the underlying principles of historic preservation dating back to the 1816 effort to preserve Independence Hall in Philadelphia, the 1853 founding of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association and the creation of

¹⁵⁸ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, ed, Landscape in Sight: Looking at America. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997,) 84.

¹⁵⁹ Norman Tyler, Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles, and Practice. (New York: Norton, 2000,) 93.

the National Park Service in 1916.¹⁶⁰ In 1931, the method of evaluating and preserving historic sites expanded. The city of Charleston, South Carolina became the first city in the United States to designate an entire district as historically significant. Charleston's actions demonstrated that not only are individual buildings significant, but also the context within which the building is located. Preservationists began to take into account such things as building setback from the street, landscaping features, the relationship between buildings, and street layout when considering a building's historic significance. The National Register of Historic Places, and the criteria used to consider buildings and sites for listing on the register, is a fairly new development. Thanks in large part to the publication of With Heritage So Rich in 1966, policy makers and the general public began to pay closer attention to the historic sites and buildings in their communities. Lady Bird Johnson, wife of President Lyndon B. Johnson, wrote in With Heritage So Rich, "the buildings which express our national heritage are not simply interesting. They give a sense of continuity and of heightened reality to our thinking about the whole meaning of the American past."¹⁶¹ The National Register of Historic Places was authorized as part of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Administered by the National Park Service, the National Register of Historic Places has over 80,000 listings. The National Register of Historic Places is intended to identify, evaluate, and protect buildings, sites, and objects that are significant in the history of the United States.

Evaluating Ranch-type houses

While buildings being nominated to the National Register must meet a prescribed set of criteria, the Register is not a rigid, inflexible entity. Buildings have been listed on the National Register even if they have not achieved the fifty years of age mark, generally considered the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 36.

¹⁶¹ United States Conference of Mayors, Special Committee on Historic Preservation, With Heritage So Rich. (New York: Random House, 1966) p. 3.

threshold for listing. Nominating buildings from the Recent Past to the National Register of Historic Places is not an unprecedented occurrence. For example, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, designed by Le Corbusier, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Construction was completed on the concrete building in 1964 and it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places only fourteen years later in 1978. The home of interior designer Russel Wright in Putnam County, New York was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in November of 1996. Wright used the house, constructed in 1951, as his home and design studio. The Wright house has since been converted into a museum and houses an archive of Wright's design work.¹⁶² Another example is the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. The Modern hotel complex of six inter-connected units was built between 1964 and 1971 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in October of 2005. Perhaps one of the earliest examples of a Ranch-type house listed on the National Register of Historic Places is the home of former President Jimmy Carter in Plains, Georgia. The house, built by Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter in 1961, is part of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site in Plains. The Historic American Buildings Survey has also documented the Carter house.

Since the significance of most historic buildings in the United States is evaluated using the National Park Service's (NPS) criteria, it should be noted what the criteria are. As one preservationist wrote, "National Register eligibility is the engine that drives the preservation, cultural resource, and heritage management trains in this country."¹⁶³ The NPS's criteria for listing a building on the National Register of Historic Places are divided into four parts¹⁶⁴: Criterion A states that a building or site may be historically designated if it is "associated with

¹⁶² Manitoga/The Russel Wright Design Center. "Russel Wright and Manitoga." Available from <http://www.russelwrightcenter.org/>; Internet; Accessed on 18 October 2007.

¹⁶³ Ernstein.

¹⁶⁴ "Parks, Forests, and Public Property." *Code of Federal Regulations* Title 36, Part 60.4, 1981 ed.

events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.” The naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii meets criterion A because of the significant role it played in the United States’ entry into World War II. Criterion B is satisfied if the building is “associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.” The Warm Springs Historic District in Meriwether County, Georgia satisfies criterion B because of its association with President Franklin Roosevelt. Criterion C allows for historic designation if the building “embod[ies] the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.” A Prairie-style house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright likely meets criterion C because it is the work of a master architect. Criterion D is met if the building has “yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.” An example of a site that may satisfy criterion D is a Native American burial ground or a site with archeological evidence of pre-historic cave dwellings.

In 1979, the NPS implemented a sub-set of criteria considerations directly related to Recent Past buildings and sites. Criterion G states a building may be designated if it achieves, “significance within the past 50 years” and “if it is of exceptional importance.”¹⁶⁵ Criterion G was revised in 1990, 1996, and 1998. The NPS eventually issued National Register Bulletin 22¹⁶⁶, “Guidelines for evaluating and nominating properties that have achieved significance within the past fifty years.” Criterion G and Bulletin 22 allow resources that are of extraordinary importance to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, even if they are not fifty years old. The fifty year rule “was chosen as a reasonable, perhaps popularly understood

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior. *National Register Bulletin 22*. (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1979.)

span that makes professional evaluation of historical value feasible.”¹⁶⁷ However, the fifty year rule is not a rigid, immovable date. A building or site does not immediately attain an entirely new status simply because it changes, for example, from forty-nine years of age to fifty years of age. Rather, the context within which the building or site is evaluated is more important than its age. Historic context pertains to the “circumstances and factors from which the property emerged” as well as the “interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs.”¹⁶⁸ The Ranch-type house evolved in an innovative and complex period in the economic, political, and social history of the United States after World War II. Evaluating the Ranch-type house within this historic context can illustrate the uniqueness of the time and place in which it was built. For millions of people in the United States, events such as the rise of the automobile, the emergence of Rock-n-Roll music and television, the Civil Rights Movement, the Space Race, and the Cold War were witnessed and experienced from within a Ranch-type house.

In addition to the criteria considerations that must be met, the integrity of a site must also be evaluated. The NPS defines integrity as “the ability of a property to convey its significance.”¹⁶⁹ A historic building does not have to meet all of the aspects of integrity listed below; however, it must meet at least one to be considered historic. The seven aspects of integrity are:

1. Location: the site of the historic property.
2. Design: the elements that “create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.”
3. Setting: the area around the historic building.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ National Park Service. “National Register Bulletin 15: How to apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation.” Available from: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15.pdf>; Internet; accessed 3 August 2007.

4. Material: the various components that were used to construct the building.
5. Workmanship: the way in which a “particular culture or people” constructed the building.
6. Feeling: the way that a property expresses the “historic sense of a particular time.”
7. Association: a link between the building and a person and/or event in history.¹⁷⁰

Applying the Criteria

By using these standardized criteria and considerations, preservationists have earned credibility with a reasoned and consistent approach to evaluating the significance of various sites and buildings. One of the challenges presented by the Ranch-type house is that there are so many to choose from it would be an overwhelming task to document and preserve all of them. As noted in the National Trust’s *Forum Journal* in 2005, “the likely number of resources is staggering for the post-World War II period.”¹⁷¹

To demonstrate the application of the National Register of Historic Places criteria to Ranch-type houses, a typical suburban house (figure one) will be considered.¹⁷² The house was constructed circa 1962 in the Bannister Acres development in Powder Springs, Georgia, approximately twenty-five miles west of Atlanta. The house is a single level and has a red brick veneer. The house features a carport and a small front porch. The front porch is ornamented with a gable roof pediment and three wooden columns. Aside from the picture window on the front porch and the sliding glass door at the rear patio, all windows are one-over-one, double-hung sash windows. The Bannister Acres subdivision is composed of approximately twenty Ranch-type houses. The house in question is sited on a one-acre lot. All of the houses in the subdivision have similar lot sizes. Criterion A is met because the house is associated with events that are significant in the history of the United States. The house was constructed during the suburban

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ernstein.

¹⁷² Note: author lived in house from 1981 to 2005.

building boom and is part of the popular Ranch-type house trend following World War II, both of which were unique events in the history of the United States. Criterion B is not satisfied because the house is not associated with the life of a significant person. The home of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter in Plains, Georgia is perhaps the best example of a Ranch-type house associated with a significant person. The house in question does meet criterion C because it represents a particular type of architecture: the Ranch-type. The house is representative of the period in which it was constructed because of the Ranch-type features it possesses and because of the post-World War II suburban development in which it is located. It is not known at this time if the house meets criterion D because no archeological or pre-historic surveys have been conducted in or around the house.

The Bannister Acres house meets several of the seven aspects of integrity. The location of the house has retained its integrity. The street it is located on is made-up of single story Ranch-type houses; all constructed within the same period (the early 1960s). The design, both inside and out, has remained intact. The design features unique to the Ranch-type house have retained their integrity because the plan and form of the house have remained unchanged. The setting in which this Ranch-type house is located has remained essentially the same as when it was first constructed. All the houses in the neighborhood have similar setbacks from the street and have relatively similar lot sizes, thus maintaining their original setting. The materials used to construct the house have remained intact. The brick exterior, rear concrete patio, wooden columns on the front porch, wrought iron roof supports on the carport, and the interior wooden frame are all intact. The one exception is the windows. In 2000, the original wooden double-hung sash windows were removed and replaced with aluminum double-hung sash windows. The workmanship used to construct the house has retained its integrity. The house was likely

constructed, as many suburban houses were constructed after World War II, utilizing pre-assembled components that were constructed on-site. The feeling of the house remains intact because the house and the site appear basically the same as when the house was constructed, with the exception of two small trees that were removed from the front yard in 2003. Though the house is not associated with a historically significant person, the seventh aspect of historic integrity is satisfied because the house is associated with the extraordinary post-war suburban building boom and the expansion of the Ranch-type house.

The National Register criteria are a practical set of standards through which the Ranch-type house can be evaluated. New criteria are not necessary in order to evaluate the Ranch-type house. The Ranch-type has the potential to demonstrate the same level of significance as other historic resources have, using the same standards applied to other residential buildings.

There are essentially four approaches to preserving a historic and cultural resource such as the Ranch-type house. The levels of preservation that follow begin with the broadest approach for a wide-range of historic and cultural resources and narrow to a more specific approach for a particular resource. The first approach is to make decision-makers and the general public aware of potential historic resources in their community through research and surveys. An example of this tool is a program undertaken by the Scottsdale, Arizona Historic Preservation Commission to identify and evaluate the community's post-World War II resources, many of which are Ranch-type houses. The information prepared by the historic preservation commission is intended to educate decision-makers and the general public as to the historic value of these buildings and the results of designating these buildings as historically significant. The second level is the recognition of a house through listing on the National Register of Historic Places or through a local or state honorary list. In December of 2002, the Dr. Burdette L. Gainsforth

residence, a Ranch-type house in Ogallala, Nebraska, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Gainsforth house is described as “an excellent example of a Ranch style house” and “also housed a bomb shelter” beneath the house.¹⁷³ The third method is the designation of neighborhoods that include significant historic resources. The neighborhood designation can be on the local level, by way of a city or county ordinance, or through honorary listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In December of 2005, the Winterhaven District in Tucson, Arizona was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The historic district, located about 114 miles southeast of Phoenix, encompasses a neighborhood of 265 Ranch-type houses built in 1949. The fourth level of preservation is to treat the potential resource as a museum. This level of preservation treats the resource almost as a monument to a particular person or event. Using this tool to preserve Ranch-type houses is not without precedent. The first Ranch-type house museum opened in the late 1990’s in Temple, Texas; a city located about 100 miles north of Austin. The Wilsonart International Company, a manufacturer of plastic laminates, restored the house to its original condition. The restored Ranch-type house in Temple was constructed in 1959 by Wilsonart founder Ralph Wilson to serve as the family home and a testing area for new domestic plastics.¹⁷⁴ The Wilson house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in July of 1998. The Recent Past Preservation Networks reports, “The Wilson house is the first twentieth century vernacular structure less than fifty years old to have ever been nominated.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Nebraska State Historical Society. “Nebraska National Register Sites.” Available from: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/histpres/nebraska/keith.htm>; Internet; Accessed 3 September 2007.

¹⁷⁴ Patricia Poore, “The Ranch House,” *Old House Journal*, September/October 1998, 76.

¹⁷⁵ Recent Past Preservation Network. “The Ralph Sr. and Sunny Wilson House, Temple, Texas.” Available from <http://www.recentpast.org/research/tours/index.html>; Internet; Accessed 28 September 2007.

Historic preservation challenges

Preserving the Ranch-type house is not without significant challenges. The ubiquitous nature of the house makes it a challenge to preserve. The vast number of Ranch-type houses makes it difficult to examine and quantify because there are so many examples. The construction of new houses in established neighborhoods also presents a challenge to Ranch-type house preservation. The size of a post-World War II Ranch-type house does not accommodate the needs of some house buyers. Consumer demand for larger houses is a threat to the survival of the Ranch-type house. The lack of awareness as to the potential historic significance of Ranch-type houses is another challenge to the house's preservation.

Because of the immense number or apparent similarity of Ranch-type houses, it runs the risk of being regarded as unworthy of historic preservation.¹⁷⁶ The ubiquitous nature of the house may lead some to believe that the Ranch-type house will be around forever simply because there are so many. Architectural historian Richard Longstreth points out that refusing to acknowledge the importance of recent past architecture such as the Ranch-type house “can not only rob them of their physical integrity, it can rob the preservation process of its integrity.”¹⁷⁷ Doing so would diminish the historic preservation profession to the point of merely being an “arbiter of taste,” a perception that preservationists have always disdained.¹⁷⁸

Rather than setting a different standard for determining significance, preservationists should apply the same standards used on previous historic preservation efforts. Not every Ranch-type house can be preserved, just as every Craftsman-style or Victorian-era house cannot be preserved. Simply being a ubiquitous house type does not lessen the need to study and

¹⁷⁶ Ernstein.

¹⁷⁷ William G. Foulks and Deborah Slaton, eds. Preserving the Recent Past II. (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2000) 2-1.

¹⁷⁸ Ernstein.

understand the house or its development. In a sense, the fact that so many Ranch-type houses were constructed after World War II makes the phenomenon even more worthy of consideration.

Ranch-type houses and new construction

As the value of land continues to move upward, the threat to Ranch-type houses will continue to grow. The average house size in the United States has increased from 1,660 square feet in 1973 to 2,434 square feet in 2005.¹⁷⁹ As house buyers continue to demand more space and shorter commutes to work, the search for land will intensify, particularly in older, more established suburbs. These older suburbs were the first to develop after World War II and are therefore closer to the city than other suburban developments that are farther away from the city. Approximately 75,000 houses are razed each year in urban and suburban areas to make room for larger houses.¹⁸⁰ Those who are demolishing what are—by today’s standards—modest houses likely feel that the Ranch-type house is no longer compatible with today’s standards. As University of Pennsylvania Professor Witold Rybczynski points out, “What seemed exciting in one decade looks gaudy, if not downright embarrassing in the next—or simply boring.”¹⁸¹ The photograph below illustrates the impact of new construction on Ranch-type houses. The large house in the photograph was constructed on a site once occupied by a Ranch-type house designed by James H. Finch in the Golf View development in Atlanta, Georgia. The roofline of an existing Ranch-type house can be seen on the far left of the photograph. The infill construction is out-of-scale and proportion in every possible way with the Ranch-type houses in the neighborhood. Local historic designation could have prevented this house from being constructed in the Golf View neighborhood.

¹⁷⁹ Patrik Jonsson. “McMansions migrate from ’burb to city.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. 2 January 2007.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Witold Rybczynski. *The Look of Architecture*. (New York: Oxford Press, 2001), 50.



Figure 68. New house built on Golf View Drive in Atlanta, Georgia. Note roofline of existing Ranch-type house on far left.

In general there is a lack of awareness as to the potential historic significance of Ranch-type houses. It is easy for landowners and house builders to demolish these types of houses when they (or the local governing authority) do not see Recent Past resources as significant. Morris Davis, an economist at the University of Wisconsin, notes that “What’s happening across cities is that prices have increased really fast, so that the land becomes so expensive relative to the structure that it makes sense to tear down the house and build bigger.”¹⁸² The houses that are replacing the Ranch-type in many of these fast growing areas are wildly out-of-scale compared to the houses that were once on the site and the houses that are left behind. The new houses that are built distort architectural scale and perspective and cause local property values to explode upward. Davis illustrates this point by saying, “if you pay \$320,000 for a lot, you’re not going to be happy with a 1,500 square foot rambler built in 1950.”¹⁸³ Building on farmland or undeveloped woodlands has been a common occurrence in house building for centuries (many

¹⁸² Jonsson.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Ranch-type houses were built on these sites). However, the construction of large new houses on the site of existing and established urban and suburban neighborhoods is a fairly recent phenomenon and one that threatens the survival of Ranch-type houses.

Fortunately, cities and towns across the United States are recognizing the trend of constructing inappropriate and out-of-proportion new houses. For instance, several communities in Georgia have enacted city and/or county ordinances to curb this trend. The city of Decatur, Georgia requires that all newly built houses not be more than thirty-five feet in height and may not cover more than 40% of the lot. Cobb County, Georgia has a similar limit on height and lot coverage for new houses. Atlanta limits newly built houses from exceeding more than 55% of the lot. In DeKalb County, Georgia the local government has gone so far as to restrict the height of buildings to twenty-eight feet in certain districts, which must be approved by the county commission. The DeKalb County government also enacted a temporary ban on tearing down older houses in order to build two or more houses in its place.¹⁸⁴

By placing restrictions on the kind of new houses that may be built in older, more established neighborhoods, decision makers are helping to prevent the obliteration of the Ranch-type house. Local decision makers seeking to slow new development in established neighborhoods may be the best friend that Ranch-type house preservationists have. Developers and house builders should have the opportunity to practice their profession, however, not at the expense of cultural and historic resources. When sections of an established neighborhood are demolished for a new development, an important part of that neighborhood's character and make-up is lost.

¹⁸⁴ Bill Hendrick. "Some Cobb owners fear 'McMansion' trend." Atlanta, GA: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Available from: <http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/cobb/stories/2007/08/>. Accessed 19 August 2007.

Awareness of the historic significance of Ranch-type houses is also being raised through the Section 106 review process. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires agencies of the federal government to consider the impact of federally funded projects on historic properties. The Section 106 review process allows state and local governments, as well as the public, to offer input on government activities in their community. Sites or buildings may only be reviewed if they are listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places. The Georgia Historic Preservation Division reports that a significant amount of information has been gathered on Ranch-type houses in Georgia through the Section 106 review of Department of Transportation and Department of Housing and Urban Development projects.¹⁸⁵ Research conducted to determine the historic significance of Ranch-type houses affected by federally funded projects has yielded a great deal of information that would otherwise not have been gathered.

Recommendations for preserving the Ranch-type house

One of the questions this thesis sought to answer was, what are the historic preservation challenges presented by the Ranch-type house? Earlier in this chapter, several challenges to the preservation of the Ranch-type house were identified. The following is a framework of five recommendations for overcoming those challenges and preserving the Ranch-type house. Each point identifies the need for the recommendation and ways in which the recommendation can be implemented.

1. Standards for Evaluation

In order to determine the significance of a historic resource, preservationists and other decision makers should use “a prescribed rationale that is based upon consistent criteria and

¹⁸⁵ Conversation with Dr. Richard Cloues, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Athens, Georgia. 15 November 2007.

methods to determine what to preserve.”¹⁸⁶ Employing this methodology “has given the preservation movement credibility.”¹⁸⁷ Typically, significance of a historic resource is determined in part by the uniqueness or the rarity of the resource. It is less challenging to make the argument in favor of preserving a historic resource if it is one of the last surviving examples of a particular structure or object because the threat of losing the resource forever is imminent. The Ranch-type house is not faced with this type of immediate threat. However, the lack of imminent destruction does not make it any less worthy of consideration as a historic resource. The same criteria that are used for any number of other historic resources should likewise be applied to the Ranch-type house. Applying the evaluation criteria in Georgia is unlikely to differ significantly from other states. What may be different about an evaluation in Georgia are the materials and stylistic elements employed on the Ranch-type house. As discussed earlier, Ranch-type houses, particularly those in large tract developments, typically feature modest/ traditional building materials and stylistic elements such as red brick, artificial shutters, and wooden or wrought iron exterior roof supports.

2. Survey of Ranch-type Houses

Just as with any other historic resource, before the Ranch-type house can be accurately preserved it must be identified. Conducting a survey is an important aspect of any approach to preserving a historic resource. A survey gives preservationists an opportunity to identify and record what historic resources may be in their community. Surveying a historic resource typically includes photographing the resource, documenting significant features and a description of the building as well as identifying its current use. A standardized inventory form is typically used to record the data.

¹⁸⁶ Deborah Edge Abele and Grady Gammage, Jr. Preserving the Recent Past II. (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2000), 25.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

In 2002, the city of Las Vegas, Nevada undertook a survey of one of its post-World War II subdivisions. Conducting the survey allowed the city the “opportunity to unearth valuable gems” that had gone unnoticed for decades.¹⁸⁸ During the course of conducting research for the survey, it was discovered that the area in question had been developed by and marketed to African-Americans. The financing for the development was provided by a group of African-American investors and became “the first minority group subdivision to be approved for construction in the state of Nevada.”¹⁸⁹ The Berkley Square development in western Las Vegas featured 155 houses and was designed by African-American architect Paul Revere Williams, one of the first African-American members of the American Institute of Architects. Williams also designed the Los Angeles County Courthouse, the Beverly Hills Hotel, the La Concha Motel in Las Vegas, and one of Frank Sinatra’s residences.¹⁹⁰ Upon learning this important information, surveyors could then develop a historic context for the development. Since this unique cultural resource has been identified, the local historic preservation commission is considering designating it as a local historic district.

In 2005 the historic preservation commission in the city of Scottsdale, Arizona undertook a five-step process of surveying its post-World War II neighborhoods.¹⁹¹ The first step was to analyze existing city data to determine the location and dates of construction of post-war houses. Next, the commission established the historic context of its survey by examining house types, dates of construction, and development patterns. Third, the commission narrowed its focus to thirty-seven subdivisions based on dates of construction and the integrity of the subdivisions.

¹⁸⁸ Courtney Mooney, “Rediscovering a Las Vegas Neighborhood’s African American Roots,” *Cultural Resource Management* 3, number 1(Winter 2006): 5.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*,6.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Scottsdale, Arizona Historic Preservation Commission. “Summary of the Process used for Postwar Neighborhood Survey.” Available from: <http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/Assets/documents/historiczoning/NEIGHprocess.pdf> Internet; Accessed 7 February 2007.

The fourth step was to narrow the list of potential neighborhoods to twenty and begin a thorough survey of each house in the selected neighborhoods. The final step was to select houses from the survey that meet to criteria requirements for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

A survey is one of the most useful tools a local historic preservation commission or state historic preservation office has in making rational and well informed decisions. In Georgia, a survey of Ranch-type houses could utilize the resources of the *FindIt* program. Sponsored by the Georgia Transmission Corporation and carried out by the University of Georgia School of Environmental Design, the FindIt program documents cultural and historic resources in Georgia. The documentation gathered during the survey is used during the course of historic preservation planning in and around the resource. A survey of Ranch-type houses would take into account its current use, alterations that have been made to its exterior, and landscape features. An assessment of the site should also be included. If an entire Ranch-type house neighborhood is being surveyed and a number of newly constructed, non-contributing buildings are also in the neighborhood, this should be noted during the survey. The integrity of the neighborhood could make a significant difference in determining if the entire neighborhood or just individual houses will be historically designated.

3. Evaluating Significant Features of the Ranch-type House

This thesis posed question of how can the historic significance of the Ranch-type house be evaluated? When evaluating the significance of Ranch-type houses, or any historic resources, it is important to identify its character-defining features. In evaluating a Victoria-era house, for instance, its porch would be identified as character-defining. Or the decorative tile on a Spanish Eclectic-style house or the tall, narrow windows of a Tudor Revival-style house may be identified as defining the character of the building. The character-defining features of Ranch-

type houses in Georgia will typically be more modest because of the conservative architectural tastes of the state. The character-defining features that should be considered when evaluating Ranch-type houses fall into five categories: form, material, windows, site, and stylistic features.

The form of a Ranch-type house refers to its shape and composition. The basic form of a Ranch-type house is that it is one level. Beyond that most basic feature, its form can vary widely. Carports, window arrangement, and access points are also features which make-up the form of the building. As discussed in chapter three, several Ranch-type house forms were identified. The Minimal, Inline, and Composite are three forms in which the Ranch-type house appears in Georgia. Each form possesses qualities that make it unique and define the character of the building.

Material used to construct a Ranch-type house is also a character-defining feature. Brick, stucco, wood, or cement asbestos sidings used singularly or in combination were the materials used to construct most Ranch-type houses.¹⁹² Plain red brick or painted brick (see figure sixty-nine), or brick in combination with wood, were all common wall sidings. Brick appears to be the most common exterior building material on Georgia Ranch-type houses. When wood was used, it was typically in a board-and-batten arrangement (see figure seventy).¹⁹³ Ranch-type houses with Spanish details are clad in stucco or some combination of brick, stucco, and/or wood. Some Ranch-type houses were clad in cement asbestos shingles (see figure seventy-one), although it is uncertain how many.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² McAlester, 479.

¹⁹³ Hess, 11.

¹⁹⁴ Scottsdale, Arizona Historic Preservation Commission. "Introduction to Postwar Modern Housing Architectural Styles." Available from: <http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/Assets/documents/historiczoning/IntroPostwarHousingStyle.pdf>. Internet. Accessed 5 February 2007.



Figure 69. Painted Ranch-type house. Athens, Georgia.



Figure 70. Wood and brick-sided Ranch-type house. Phoenix, Arizona.



Figure 71. Ranch-type house with cement asbestos siding. Ardmore Park. Atlanta, Georgia.

Windows and window arrangement is another character-defining feature of Ranch-type houses. Windows on Ranch-type houses varied from traditional one-over-one, double-hung sash windows (see figure seventy-two) to contemporary metal jalousie-type windows (see figure seventy-three). Another window type common on Ranch-type houses are picture windows and sliding-glass doors (see figures seventy-four and seventy-five). These window types are character-defining features that should be identified and preserved.



Figure 72. Double-hung sash windows. Powder Springs, Georgia.



Figure 73. Metal jalousie-type windows. Austell, Georgia.



Figure 74. Picture window. Powder Springs, Georgia.



Figure 75. Sliding glass door. Powder Springs, Georgia.

The site in which a Ranch-type house is located is also a character-defining feature. If a neighborhood of Ranch-type houses has a uniform setback from the street then it should be identified as a unique feature of that neighborhood and preserved. Street configuration in a neighborhood is also significant if it was intentionally arranged in a certain way. For instance, a neighborhood laid out in a grid pattern demonstrates a particular character trait of the neighborhood in question.

The stylistic features of a Ranch-type house also define its character. Stylistic features may be unique to a particular house or neighborhood of houses or unique to a particular region. For instance, colonial-style details may be more common on Ranch-type houses in Georgia and the eastern United States, whereas Spanish details may be more common in the southwestern

United States. Colonial details might include such features as decorative shutters and/or a small porch with columns (see figure seventy-six), while Spanish details might include stucco and/or exposed roof rafters (see figure seventy-seven). These stylistic elements make each Ranch-type house or neighborhood of houses unique and should be considered historically significant.



Figure 76. Powder Springs, Georgia



Figure 77. Phoenix, Arizona

One of the challenges of Ranch-type house preservation is the degree to which many of them have been altered. When considering the significance of Ranch-type houses, flexibility of standards is acceptable because the means for modifying a house were more easily obtained than in previous generations. For instance, one hundred years ago, enclosing a porch on a Victorian-era house would have been more difficult because of the expense, lack of materials, lack of skilled labor, etc. However, in the last fifty years, the ability to alter one's house has become easier, cheaper, and more common because of the availability of materials and skilled labor. There were no home improvement super-stores around the corner or rows of "How To" books in bookstores one hundred years ago. Therefore, modifications made to a Ranch-type house should be considered in this context.

4. Educating preservationists and the public

Another tool that should be employed in the preservation of Ranch-type houses, and Recent Past architecture in general, is education. Education should not, however, be limited only

to the general public. Preservationists, particularly local historic preservation commissions, need to be aware of Ranch-type houses and the role they played in history as much as the general public. There are several ways in which preservationists, decision makers, and the general public can be made aware of Ranch-type houses and the architecture of the Recent Past.

In Washington state, an initiative called “Nifty from the Last 50” began in 2003. The program recognizes and records Washington’s post-World War II resources. The Washington Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation and the Washington chapter of DOCOMOMO carried out the initiative. The state of Texas also undertook an initiative of the same name to draw attention to Recent Past architecture. While primarily a survey program, it has drawn public attention to post-World War II resources and the need to identify and record them.

In 2002, the John S. Park Historic District in Las Vegas, Nevada was nominated and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The district is made up of Minimal Traditional and Ranch-type houses. The city of Las Vegas produced a user-friendly brochure containing information about the historic district and its houses as well as including a walking tour map. The brochure is a way to inform visitors and residents of the city’s historic resources and to build awareness of the significance of Ranch-type houses. The city of Las Vegas is also developing an educational brochure for the Berkley Square neighborhood, a potentially historic African American suburban development. The brochure will contain information about “the historic importance of Berkley Square and provides information on the local and National Registers.”

The Georgia chapter of DOCOMOMO/US has taken steps to raise awareness and educate historic preservationists and the general public on the significance of Modern architecture. The organization sponsors a tour of Modern homes in Atlanta each year accompanied by a reception

and panel discussion on issues related to Recent Past architecture. DOCOMOMO's Georgia chapter also sponsored one of Dr. Richard Cloues's presentations on Ranch-type houses in 2007. In addition, the Georgia chapter keeps the public up-to-date on developments involving Modern buildings such as the Atlanta Constitution building, the Villa Rica Public Library in Carroll County, and the Trust Company of Georgia building in Atlanta.

One of the ways in which preservationists and the general public can become further educated on the topic of Ranch-type houses is through preservation related magazines and websites. In 2004, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (headquartered at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia) devoted an entire issue of its bi-monthly newsletter to the topic of Recent Past preservation. A quarterly magazine is published entitled "Atomic Ranch: Mid-century Marvels." It focuses on Ranch-type houses and other Modern homes. The magazine offers suggestions on interior design, restoration, and landscaping. The Recent Past Preservation Network (RPPN) website, <http://recentpast.org/>, promotes advocacy and education on the preservation of Modern buildings, landscapes, and structures. The RPPN focuses mainly on buildings or sites that have not reached the fifty-year National Register of Historic Places eligibility mark. The website contains a calendar of events nationwide related to Recent Past architecture, publishes a windshield survey of Recent Past sites around the United States, and offers a list of websites related to specific aspects of the Recent Past such as Lustron Homes, drive-in theatres, and early NASA launch sites in Florida.

5. The role of local, regional, and state organizations

Local, state, and regional organizations have an important role to play in the implementation of these recommendations. Local historic preservation organizations, such as historic preservation commissions and local non-profit heritage groups, are on the leading edge

of preservation activities in the United States. As important as national organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation are, it is the local historic preservation organizations that know the best approach for preserving historic resources in their community. For example, the Scottsdale, Arizona Historic Preservation Commission identified Ranch-type and other post-World War II resources in its community and have published informational brochures, conducted surveys, developed a bibliography, and produced maps of potential post-World War II historic districts. Regional organizations, such as Regional Development Centers, serve various municipalities and counties in a state. These organizations can be important in the development of regional comprehensive plans and land use ordinances. Identifying Ranch-type houses as historic resources in these regional planning documents will advance its preservation. State organizations, such as state historic preservation offices and statewide non-profit heritage groups, have an important role to play in the statewide preservation of Ranch-type houses. For example, the Texas Historical Commission conducted a public architectural survey of recent past resources, including Ranch-type houses. The commission developed a publicly accessible survey form, as well as distributed posters to interested groups and individuals to raise awareness as to the significance of recent past resources.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

“The wheel of taste has turned and houses of the post-war years are now increasingly studied, admired, and imitated.” -Alan Powers¹⁹¹

While the Ranch-type house borrowed numerous architectural details from historic precedents, it is, as architecture critic Alan Hess notes, “A thoroughly modern architecture.”¹⁹² The modern design and layout utilized in Ranch-type houses was one of the primary reasons for the type’s popularity. Modernism emphasized simplification of form, and ornamentation that focused less on formality and more on the efficient use of space.¹⁹³ The simplified exterior and interior detailing, the open floor plan that allowed rooms “to flow one to another,”¹⁹⁴ and the incorporation of large areas of glazing made the Ranch-type house an appealing choice for house buyers. The use of “modern building techniques, materials, and systems” helped to push the Ranch-type house into a level of popularity rarely seen in architecture.¹⁹⁵

There were myriad reasons why the Ranch-type house was the dominant choice of house buyers in the United States in second half of the twentieth century. Various authors have suggested that for some it was the romanticized idea of life on a ranch on the western frontier.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Stephen Calloway, Elements of Style: An Encyclopedia of Domestic Architectural Detail. (Ontario, Canada: Firefly Books, 2005,) 455.

¹⁹² Hess, 11.

¹⁹³ Gelernter., 263.

¹⁹⁴ Robert W. Bastian, John A. Jakle, and Douglas K. Meyer. Common Houses in America’s Small Towns. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 183.

¹⁹⁵ Hess, 11.

¹⁹⁶ Barbara L. Allen, “The Ranch-Style House in America: A Cultural and Environmental Discourse,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 49, no. 3 (1996), 162.

For others, it was the appeal of a single-story home with no stairs that had to be climbed.¹⁹⁷ Attempting to stay current by owning the most popular house type was reason enough for some.¹⁹⁸ The Ranch house, as it originally developed in the southwestern United States during the nineteenth century, seems an unlikely candidate for broad national appeal. The Ranch house's rather limited original geographic use in the southwestern United States, its need for a large lot to be built on (because of its horizontal orientation), and its association with a rugged, demanding way of life, would seem to make it impossible to sell as a charming single family home.¹⁹⁹ However, after World War II, the latest building materials and methods, developed in response to the need for quick and efficient housing during the war, allowed homes to be built systematically using prefabricated components. Faster and less expensive building methods, coupled with clever marketing, made this house of humble origins the most widely built in the United States.

Writing in *House Beautiful* magazine in 1947, Will Melhorn said, "Ranch houses are not just a matter of picturesque exteriors with wagon-wheel and Heigh-ho silver décor. What they offer is a better way of living-not just a fancier façade."²⁰⁰ This is the essence of the Ranch-type house and what made it so popular beginning in the middle of the twentieth-century and, also one of the issues this thesis sought to demonstrate. The Ranch-type was a solid, well-built house that could be afforded by the masses. No longer was a brick house and dependable craftsmanship reserved for the upper classes. One of the reasons why over seventy percent of the houses constructed in the United States from 1945 to 1970 were Ranch-type houses is because a large

¹⁹⁷ Avi Friedman. The Evolution of Design Characteristics during the Post-Second World War Housing Boom: The U.S. Experience. *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1995), 137.

¹⁹⁸ Kenneth T. Jackson. Crabgrass Frontier. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 237.

¹⁹⁹ Becker, 84.

²⁰⁰ Clark, 193.

number of people could afford them.²⁰¹ What followed after World War II was a house-building phenomenon that had not previously occurred on such a large scale.

The preservation of the Ranch-type house, and other types of recent past architecture, are the next phase in historic preservation. It was noted recently that “there is a groundswell among preservationists and modernist-architecture enthusiasts to preserve these and other relics of the recent past.”²⁰² However, one of the challenges presented to those who seek to preserve the Ranch-type house is the ubiquitous nature of the house. While “a few custom homes were built for the rich,” most Americans moved into tract or other mass-produced housing after World War II.²⁰³ Most Ranch-type houses were never built to be mansions or architectural monuments. They were built to embody “the easy-going lifestyle of the Southwest and West Coast.”²⁰⁴ With just a few exceptions, they were built for the average, middle class house buyer to suit their needs. It may be less difficult to preserve recent past structures that were built as architectural monuments considering that “modern icons like Dulles Airport in Northern Virginia or New York’s Seagram Building are already revered.”²⁰⁵ While Ranch-type houses were, with only a few exceptions, rarely built to be architectural monuments, they do “remind us of who we once were.”²⁰⁶ They also “reflect old values and bygone virtues and vices.”²⁰⁷ The Ranch-type house represented a new and different way of life compared to the time before it spread in popularity. A specialty market has already developed around retro 1950’s house furnishings. Partly because of the modest Ranch-type’s affordability, and partly because of its strong association with history, interest in the house is increasing. As a newspaper article recently observed, “Younger people

²⁰¹ Ibid, 194

²⁰² Margaret Loftus, “Rescuing the relics of modern times. But who wants to save a ranch burger?”; available from: <http://www.eichlersocal.com/newsandarticles/usnews.htm>; Internet; accessed 11 September 2007.

²⁰³ Jackson, 239.

²⁰⁴ Clark, 211.

²⁰⁵ Loftus.

²⁰⁶ Rybczynski., 48.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 47.

love them for their kitsch. Baby boomers seek them for their stairs-free living.”²⁰⁸ This kind of interest, fueled by nostalgia or some other force, can serve as a catalyst for renewed interest in the Ranch-type house.

Lessons for Ranch-type house preservation

Obviously, not every Ranch-type house can be preserved. Nevertheless, simply because there are so many Ranch-types does not make them any less significant. It would be a mistake for historic preservationists to wait until Ranch-type houses are truly in danger of becoming extinct. The roadside architecture of mid-twentieth century America offers a good example of what not to do. The 1950’s and 1960’s saw a number of unique “gas stations, drive-in movies, space-age style coffee shops and the first generation of Las Vegas casinos” develop along the highways of the United States as the automobile grew in usage.²⁰⁹ Unfortunately, nearly all of these cultural resources were demolished before historic preservationists and local decision makers had a chance to consider what is and is not unique and worth preserving about these cultural resources.

Another example from recent history warrants consideration. In the middle of the twentieth century, just as the Ranch-type house was spreading across the United States, the Victorian-era house was seen as old, outdated, and a thing of the past. The 1939 WPA Guide to California, compiled by the Great Depression-era Federal Writers’ Project, described these houses as an “epidemic of Victorian pestilence” that dominated California’s architectural landscape.²¹⁰ An unknown number of them were lost to the wrecking ball because they were seen as unusable relics of the past. However, with the passage of time, the Victorian-era home has been recognized, not as a useless relic, but as piece of the built environment worth saving and

²⁰⁸ Hall, 1.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 29.

²¹⁰ Federal Writers’ Project, The WPA Guide to California. (New York: Hastings House, 1939), 171.

reusing. As one author noted, it is the “anonymous office towers, tract housing, and even strip malls that some preservationists fear may suffer the fate of many Victorian homes in the 1950s: thought to be overly ornamental, junky, and dark, entire neighborhoods of them were destroyed or left to decay.”²¹¹ This is an example of the same lack of recognition attached to the Ranch-type house. Unfortunately, most buildings go through a period of being viewed as dated and out of style before they become, seemingly overnight, a “charmingly historic” building.²¹² Before countless Ranch-type houses are demolished, historic preservationists and community planners need to recognize the important and unique place they have in the history of the United States.

Answering the research questions

This thesis considered three research questions. First, what is a Ranch-type house and how did it evolve in the United States and in Georgia? As discussed in chapter two, the Ranch-type house evolved from a vernacular house type of the southwestern United States in the nineteenth century. The house was picked up by Modern architects before World War II and tailored to the needs of house buyers. Through successful media branding in popular magazines and trade journals, the house type eventually spread across the United States because of its affordability and modern appearance both inside and out. Several house forms and architects in Georgia were identified as a way of demonstrating some of the unique traits of the Ranch-type house in Georgia. Second, how can the historic significance of the Ranch-type house be evaluated? The criterion for listing sites and buildings on the National Register of Historic Places has been the standard by which potential sites and buildings have been evaluated in the United States. Though the criteria have only been in place since 1966, it has given the historic preservation profession credibility because of the reasoned approach to evaluation of potential

²¹¹ Loftus.

²¹² Ibid.

resources. These same criteria should be employed when evaluating Ranch-type houses. The significance of the Ranch-type house is demonstrated by its popularity and widespread construction following World War II, the methods and materials used to construct it, and the simplification of form and plan not seen before on the domestic landscape. Third, what are the historic preservation challenges presented by the Ranch-type house? The Ranch-type house presents several historic preservation challenges. Among these challenges is the lack of awareness of the historic significance of the Ranch-type house, the threat of demolition presented by the desire for larger houses closer to urban work areas, and the staggering number of Ranch-type houses across the United States that makes conducting a comprehensive survey difficult.

As a way of overcoming the challenges presented by the Ranch-type house, a framework of five recommendations for evaluating and preserving it is proposed.

- The criteria used to evaluate the historic significance of other potentially historic sites should likewise be used to evaluate the significance of Ranch-type houses. The framework for evaluating Ranch-type houses will differ very little from state to state, however, in Georgia the influence of conservative architectural taste will likely be evident in the use of traditional building material and stylistic elements.
- A comprehensive survey of Ranch-type houses needs to be conducted.
- The identification of character defining features such as form, material, windows, site, and stylistic features are a way of evaluating Ranch-type houses.
- An effort should be undertaken to educate decision makers and members of the general public as to the historic significance of the Ranch-type house.
- Define the role of local, regional, and state organizations in implementing the recommendations.

Conclusion

The Ranch-type has varied far and wide from its original roots as a simple dwelling for southwestern ranchers in the nineteenth century. This variety is to be expected of a vernacular type of architecture. The Ranch-type house “has adjusted to new uses, new tools and materials, new roof lines, and new shapes.”²¹³ Whether it was the use of mud mortar on the southwestern Ranch house of the nineteenth century, or the use of metal jalousie windows on a Ranch-type house of the twentieth century, it has adapted as all vernacular building types have while still retaining features of its original form. The Ranch-type house has refused to fade over time even during changes in taste, style, and regional appeal because it “seems to thrive on everything but over-sentimentality.”²¹⁴ The unpretentious nature of the Ranch-type has garnered it respect from some and disdain from others; however, from either point of view there is no denying its persistent character. While Ranch-type houses have varied over the years, its emphasis on “honest informal living made popular by cultural trends after World War II” makes it a popular housing type even today.²¹⁵ It is the Ranch-type house’s willingness to change that has allowed it to endure over a century after it was originally constructed.

Criticized by some and beloved by others, the Ranch-type house as we know it has been dotting the American landscape for over seventy-five years. It is unknown at this time whether the Ranch-type house will gain the kind of importance and noteworthiness as the Greek Revival or Arts and Crafts style home. For example, recent past icons like Edward Durrell Stone’s Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art in New York City or Richard Neutra’s Cyclorama Center at Gettysburg National Park in Pennsylvania are both threatened with demolition.²¹⁶

²¹³ Becker, 84.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Burns, et al, 70.

²¹⁶ Loftus.

However, residential architecture may do better than commercial structures. Edward Hawkins' 124 house "Arapahoe Acres" development in Englewood, Colorado became the first post-World War II subdivision listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998.²¹⁷ Since people are more likely to have formed a personal connection with residential buildings, houses may have a better chance at being preserved than commercial or institutional structures. When confronted with the question of how to preserve and showcase Ranch-type houses in the Chicago area, the Chicago Architecture Foundation stated, "it's possible the Ranch home could become the bungalow of the future."²¹⁸

As *Architectural Forum* noted in February 1957, "The subdivision or contractor-built house, the local store or restaurant, the roadside stand. These are our modern vernacular, the 20th century equivalent of the peasant cottage, the blacksmith shop, the wayside inn."²¹⁹ Whatever flaws the Ranch-type may have, it is important to remember that structures within the built environment are "a crystallization of a given moment of society, technology, and art."²²⁰ Ranch-type houses were built with materials, technology, design standards, and fashion sense that were available and popular at the time. As architect and author Royal Barry Wills explained, "I believe in Modern homes which come along in pace with the times, but are kept free of the exclusive thought peculiar to the ultra-conservative or the revolutionary."²²¹

The popularity of the Ranch-type house was caused by "a burst of postwar prosperity, a pent-up demand, spectacular population growth, and the baby boom."²²² Therefore, a house built by so many people over such a long period of time deserves to be recognized as a significant

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Kuczka

²¹⁹ Mary Mix Foley, "The Debacle of Popular Taste," *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 95, (February 1952): 142.

²²⁰ James F. O'Gorman. *ABC of Architecture*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 14.

²²¹ Wills, 6.

²²² Burns, et al, 3.

development in architectural and American history. The building boom of the post-World War II era “is unlikely to ever happen again” and if significant quantities of Ranch-type houses are lost “we are squandering a nonrenewable resource.”²²³ As architect Christine Hunter noted, “The era of greatest dominance for the freestanding house was the two decades following the Second World War. From 1950 to 1970, site-built detached single-family houses constituted seventy-two percent of all new home construction.”²²⁴ According to one architecture critic, “The Ranch House matches the philosophical potency of the bungalow, it outstrips the brownstone in numbers, and it challenges the log cabin in mythic power.”²²⁵

A complete portrait of domestic life in the United States in the twentieth-century is not complete without a representation of the Ranch-type house. Whether thought of as cheap, lackluster dwellings unworthy of study or recognition, or as modest and endearing structures, there is no denying that those who designed, built, and lived in the Ranch-type house took part in something unique in the history of the United States.

“Stimulated, perhaps, by Wright and by Le Corbusier’s experiments with natural materials...Americans looked again at the stone and wood barns of Pennsylvania, the white clapboard walls of New England, the low, rambling ranch houses of the West, and found them good. They were not interested in the picturesque detail of these buildings, but in their straightforward use of material and their subtle adaptation to climate and topography. Here was local encouragement for the growing international movement towards a friendlier, more differentiated contemporary architecture.” –Elizabeth Mock²²⁶

²²³ Loftus.

²²⁴ Hunter, 107.

²²⁵ Hess, 11.

²²⁶ Elizabeth Mock, Built in USA: 1932-1944. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1944,) 14.

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