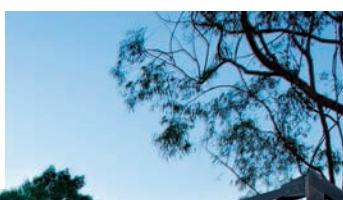


# THE RADAR DESIGN

BY KATE CHANG



**HOUSE PROUD** Clockwise from top: The Schaffer Residence, which is currently on the market in Glendale; the Desert Hot Springs Motel, which just sold; Brent Bolthouse's Polin Residence.

## CITY OF ANGLES

*House sales—and a major retrospective—trade on John Lautner's loopy L.A. legacy*

When interior designer Tracy Beckmann was just starting her career, she was hired to stage a photo shoot in John Lautner's dramatic Sheats-Goldstein residence, with its triangular folded-concrete roof, punctured by shot glasses functioning as skylights and cantilevering over the pool. She was smitten on the spot. "I swore that one day I would own a Lautner house!" she exclaims. Last December, Beckmann and furniture designer/fabricator Ryan Trowbridge were researching Lautner online when they came across the Desert Hot Springs Motel. At the open house, they knew instantly that they wanted the property—listed at \$754,000—but it took months to close escrow. They eventually snagged it for \$425,000, thanks to its location in a rough-around-the-edges neighborhood and its condition. "The banks haven't heard of Lautner," says Beckmann. She and

Trowbridge are studying the original plans now, envisioning a new pool and clubhouse on the neighboring lot that was included in the sale. "I want to be a good custodian of the place," says Beckmann, who is conscious of its standing as one of the few Lautners open to the public. "It's a treasure that we have to bring back."

To all those non-Lautner owners out there: You now have a chance to experience a Lautner space for yourself, if only at half-scale. *Between Earth and Heaven: The Architecture of John Lautner*, an exhibition that includes short films, archival materials, home tours and even an 18-foot scale model, opens at the Hammer Museum this month. This is the first major retrospective of Lautner, who trained at Taliesin West with Frank Lloyd Wright and later established a practice in

Los Angeles, where he became known for exuberant forms with sweeping views. Lautner's frequent invectives against L.A. ("Junkland," "Flicker City," a city where "nothing is real and no one cares") have not altered the fact that he has become an iconic L.A. architect—one whose houses are firmly rooted in the very ground of L.A., looking at the L.A. sky, filtered with L.A. light. What kept him here was a willing clientele. "The culture here was in sympathy with what he was trying to do," says curator Nicholas Olsberg, who put together the show with designer/co-curator Frank Escher, of Silver Lake-based Escher Gunewardena Architecture.

While Lautner's work, with its sculptural forms, interlocking geometries and eclectic structural systems, has often been seen as naively utopian or over-dramatic and excessive, the show seeks to give credit to an under-recognized master. "With regard to his reputation, Lautner was his own worst enemy," Olsberg says. "He never explained his work." Lautner distrusted the critics and was not complimentary of other architects, who returned the favor. The few he respected included Wright, Eero Saarinen and R.M. Schindler, plus a couple of virtuoso engineers like Felix Candela and Pier Luigi Nervi.

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...CONTINUED In case you're inspired to become an architectural patron after seeing the show, know that there's a growing Lautner market out there. Two of the master's houses are currently for sale. The Schaffer Residence in Glendale is one of Lautner's early works but already shows his signature touch, with floating horizontal bands of glass and wood opening up the house to the surrounding oak grove. Owner David Zander restored the house over the course of the last two years, even re-creating furniture based on photographs of the original work. The asking price for the Schaffer, a two-bed, two-bath, is \$1,958,000.

If you're looking for some more space, the three-bed, two-bath Gantvoort Residence in La Cañada Flintridge, situated on a near-acre site with a koi pond and the original swimming pool, is priced at \$2.2 million. And if you had been a little faster, you could have been the owner of the Wolff House in West Hollywood, which actor Vincent Gallo just sold for \$5.55 million.

One of the latest in a series of Lautner designs to have found a new home is the Goldstein Office. Commissioned by Jim Goldstein, owner of the Sheats/Goldstein house, the office was one of Lautner's few interior remodels. When the building it occupied was slated for demolition, the Lautner Foundation went looking for a taker. LACMA initially turned down the offer, but when new director Michael Govan arrived, one of his first acts was to acquire the space to use as his own office in LACMA West, with the idea of having it on exhibit on weekends.

Other recent sales include the Stevens Residence in Malibu, to Michael LaFetra, an avid collector of modernist houses known for his pristine restorations, and the Segel Residence on Carbon Beach, sold by Courtney Cox and David Arquette to Dodgers owner Frank McCourt for \$27 million. (The Arquettes had bought the house in 2001 for around \$10 million.) "There's a situation with any famous, iconic architectural house: The pricing not only involves the general real estate pricing, but it also has an art value. And now it seems to be moving more into the art realm," observes Crosby Doe, of Mossler Doe, the go-to agents for modernist architecture. Doe sold his first Lautner, the Garcia house, in 1984 and currently has the Schaffer listing. "They are less affected by the general real estate market and have continued to appreciate while other houses in some circumstances are actually falling. Sometimes it takes longer for them to sell. That's what we're seeing now—there's a longer period to find the right buyer for the property."

Throughout his career, Lautner built for middle-class clients: teachers, dentists, musicians, engineers, those who had saved up to afford their own houses. Some acted as builders to keep costs down. Present-day owners are movie producers, actors, those with the means to buy multiple houses. The Chemosphere was built for \$140,000, for a young aerospace engineer and his family, who could only afford an impossibly steep site; it's now owned by publisher Benedikt Taschen, who bought the property in 2001 for \$1 million. Critics compared the house, a polygonal platform supported on a single column, to a UFO, while Lautner saw it as the most practical solution to the site.

Lautner always saw himself looking for a structural solution as well as a sculptural one. One of the most interesting of these is the Polin Residence, now owned by nightlife impresario and *The Hills* fixture Brent Bolthouse, who recently de-listed the two-bed, two-bath property, which he was trying to lease for \$10,000 per month. Located in the Hollywood Hills, the house has a roof that's suspended by a three-point

CONTINUED ON PAGE 128...



Beyer Residence, Los Angeles, 1983.



Walstrom Residence, Los Angeles, 1969.



Schaffer Residence, Glendale, 1949.



Polin Residence, Hollywood, 1947.

BEYER AND WALSTROM; RESIDENCE PHOTOS BY JOSHUA WHITE; SCHAFER RESIDENCE PHOTO BY SCOTT MAYORAL





A series of doors in the Schaffer Residence.

**THE RADAR DESIGN** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 64... structure that Lautner envisioned as adaptable to any terrain while freeing the walls below from their load-bearing role, thereby allowing them to be customized for each owner. Many of his works were, effectively, experiments in repeatable, pre-fab or low-cost housing solutions, but he never had the opportunity to expand his ideas on a large scale. What makes Lautner unique is that he saw the radical as essentially rational. The only thing more startling than the Chemosphere itself is a 1962 drawing for the *L.A. Times* that shows a swarm of Chemospheres, rising from the hills as organically as mushrooms.

Great houses are demanding. They can dictate how you wake up in the morning, how you walk, what you see. In exchange, they can change your perception of the world. Lautner's works always create a lookout to the outside, with arching forms that span a panoramic view or converging sight lines that focus your attention on a point. "If there's a view, he'll find it," says Olsberg. "Or he makes the house create views. He wants you to own your view. He was building a very personal relationship between you and the world." **A**

July 13-Oct 12. *Between Earth and Heaven: The Architecture of John Lautner*, at the Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA. 310.443.7000, [www.hammer.ucla.edu](http://www.hammer.ucla.edu). Lautner Home Tours, July 27 and September 14, presented with the MAK Center. Tickets \$145; to purchase tickets, you must be a member of the Hammer Museum at the Contributor level or above. 323.651.1510.



Segel Residence, Malibu, 1979.



WELCOME TO THE O.C., COMRADE! Luxehills' central plaza.

**THE RADAR REALTY!** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 74... family homes. Moreno was charged with designing similar homes, as well as a master plan for the development. The town center he created is actually modeled after a French hill town, complete with a central square and a water feature that leads down the hill, but Moreno went with California Mission style, with all the multiple arches and arcades that style suggests. Mission accomplished: Luxehills looks like a dead ringer for Newport Beach.

Over in "Napa Valley," in addition to spacious 3,500- to 8,000-square-foot homes laid out with the same master suites and great rooms that would make an O.C. soccer mom squeal, Feola even Californified the streetscape. His team created wide poplar-lined streets, a Spanish Colonial fountain in the center of a roundabout at the entry of the development, and houses set back much farther from the curb than is typical in China (in order to allow for big green lawns with flowering shrubs, large entryways and long walkways).

"They rely more on public transport than we do, but they have a huge and emerging car culture," says Feola, explaining that the Chinese have taken a shine to pretty much every overindulgent part of our lifestyle, including car dependency. "You can't get anywhere near the conference center when there's a car show going on. They get in their new cars, and they drive down this nice tree-lined lane to their spacious new homes. It's a lifestyle they really enjoy, which we do as well. There would be rebellion there if they had to give it up." **A**



Another view of Luxehills, outside Chengdu.