



HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

## **The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House**

**Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Ranch Houses in Georgia**

### **PART VI: CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION**



**September 2011**

**Richard Cloues, Ph.D.**

*The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House* is about the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Ranch House in Georgia. It is presented in six parts.

**Part VI (this part) offers concluding remarks about the Ranch House in Georgia and some sources of information about the history of Ranch Houses in the United States.**

Other parts of *The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House* tell other parts of the Ranch House story.

2



By now the answer to the question -- "Why Ranch Houses?" -- is clear --

as are the reasons why mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century ranch houses are considered important historic resources in Georgia:

3



The Ranch House in Georgia is clearly old enough to be considered "historic" -- dating back *three-quarters of a century* to that earliest Ranch House in Fort Valley ...



4



and to the *early 1940s* in places like Atlanta, Rome, and Macon.

5



More than *half a century ago*, Ranch Houses had become popular throughout the state.

6



Indeed, it was THE new house to build at the time.

7



And it was an entirely new kind of house, like nothing ever before seen in the state ...

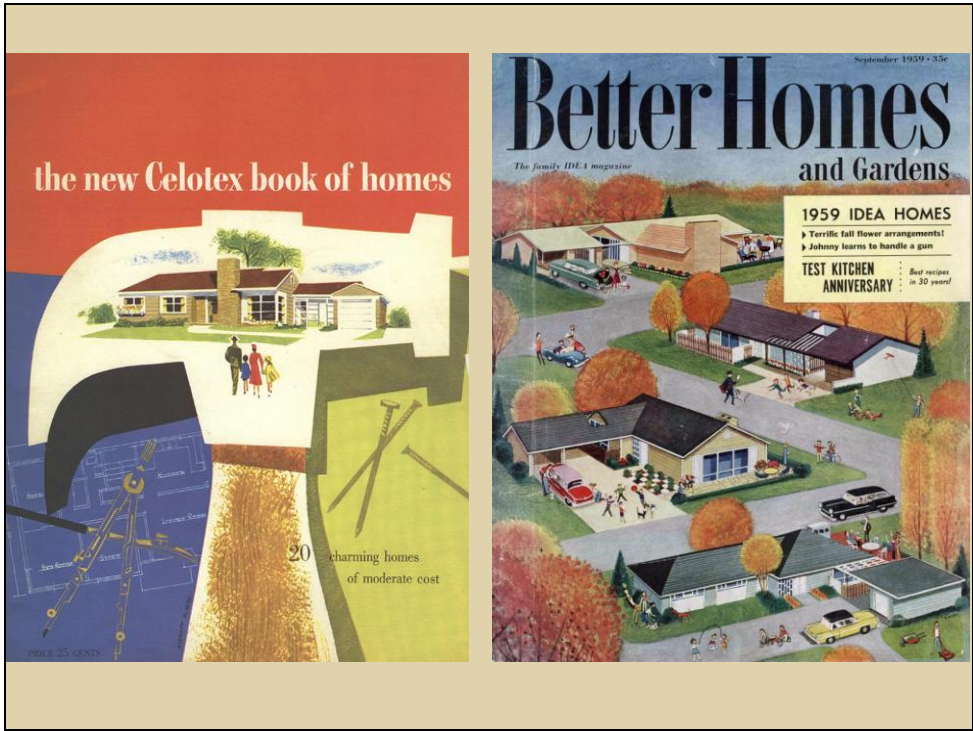


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perfectly suited for a new, post-World War II, mid-century lifestyle – casual, family-and-friends oriented, and looking forward to the future.

9



Inspired by national architectural trends ...



208-A  
SEMI-MODERN BEAUTY

This six-room, two-bath, brick home is ideal for the average family. Large livable rooms with windows placed for good furniture arrangement. Note entrance hall, large closets and kitchen arrangement with its

attractive breakfast nook with corner windows. Hip roof with wide overhang, stone entrance and large picture window result in attractive exterior.



the Ranch House in Georgia took on a distinctive “Georgia” appearance ...



with its hallmark red-brick construction ...



12



becoming, almost in spite of itself, a new and predominant "style" of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century residential architecture in the state.

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### New homes rising rapidly in growing DeKalb County

More than one-fourth of all school superintendents, said the county has one of the best public school systems in the nation. DeKalb has the highest per capita income of Georgia's 149 counties.

About 42 per cent of the county's work force is engaged in white collar jobs, officials say. A survey showed the average male worker earns approximately \$5,500 per year and the average female \$3,700 annually.

In the decade between 1950 and 1960, DeKalb County had a population gain of 125,327. DeKalb now accounts for 18 per cent of metropolitan Atlanta's population.

DeKalb County is governed by a county commission headed by Chairman C. O. Emmertich, and Commissioners Bill Evans, Jim Almond, T. M. Callaway and J. C. Hayes.

Municipalities located in DeKalb are Acworth, Dalton, Chamblee, Clarkston, Decatur, Doraville, Lithia Springs, Pine Lake and Stone Mountain.

DeKalb, with a population of more than 300,000, is a fast growing county that today one of every four Georgians is a resident and predicts that by 1970, it will have one of every two state residents. It is a strong residential sector but in the last several years has been making strides to lure industry from the North.

Last year DeKalb issued 2,300 building permits for one-family homes with a total valuation of \$44.5 million compared with 1,964 permits in 1962 valued at \$41.2 million.

However, DeKalb County Commission Chairman C. O. Emmertich is extremely optimistic over construction prospects for 1964, forecasting commercial and residential. "We believe this year will be the greatest building year in DeKalb County's history," Emmertich predicted, "and we expect at least \$125 million worth of new construction within our county."

**Sub-division springs up**

A new subdivision goes up on Springdale Drive and Spring Valley Road off of Columbia Drive in DeKalb County. (Times Photo by Tom Hubbard)

4-E THE ATLANTA TIMES, Fri., June 12, 1964

# Home construction spirals to match population surge

Residential construction is heading for a banner year as 1964 nears the halfway point and trend toward larger homes. "Consider this," Whitney said. "Just a few years ago a built-in difference between Atlanta and the two front-runners and that is the virtual absence of the tion. Everywhere new apartments are opening or about to open. Some apartment plans are

From the late 1940s into the 1960s, new Ranch Houses were built in unprecedented numbers ...

# Thousands Of Atlantans View New Collier Heights Estates Opening

An estimated crowd of four to five thousand of Atlanta's home-buying public viewed the excellent display of modern homes last Sunday at the opening of the fashionable new Collier Heights Estate subdivision.

Perfect weather and three gorgeous new homes highlighted the grand opening of these new residences built by the builders of fashionable Harwell Heights. New designs with family area, plentiful baths, built-ins and complete modern outlooks are being offered by the Atlanta firm, Calhoun Consolidated, which has become a leader in the local housing market.

An extremely tastefully decorated model home is the Monticello, decorated by Haverly's. Through skillful furniture placement, one can see the true livability of these large new split-level homes. This new subdivision is a fine example of the builder's policy to deliver the best in residential construction.

At a fair price to the home-buying public, Collier Heights Estates offers the ultimate in financing through the Prudential Insurance Company of America, with maximum conventional, FHA, and VA loans offered. A furnished model with sales office is maintained daily with salesmen on duty to assist you. If you are interested in a new home, it pay you to see these homes, designed by leading architects, in Collier Heights Estates. Sales response has been excellent and fifteen homes are now under construction for delivery in eight to ten weeks. Now is the time to reserve your homestead in a prestige area.



becoming THE most popular house EVER in the history of Georgia.

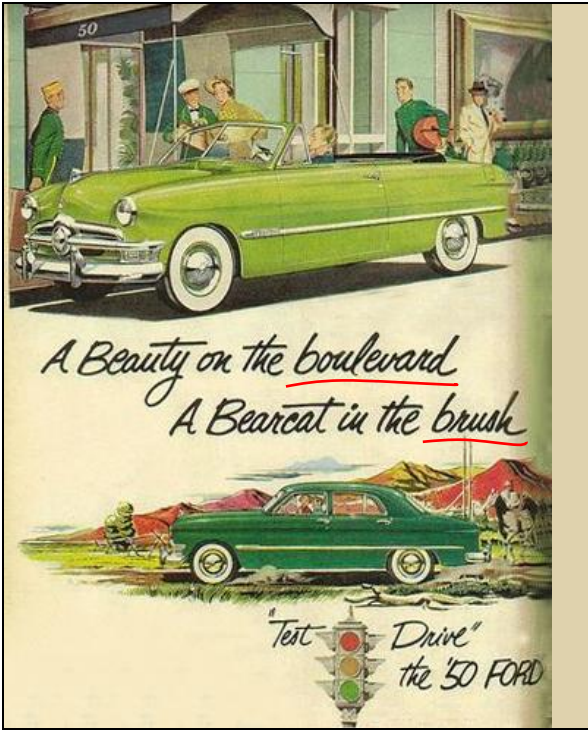


At no other time in Georgia's history has a single new type of house housed so many people in such a short period of time.





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Built everywhere in the state – in cities and towns, in suburbs, and in the countryside – it created a new residential geography.

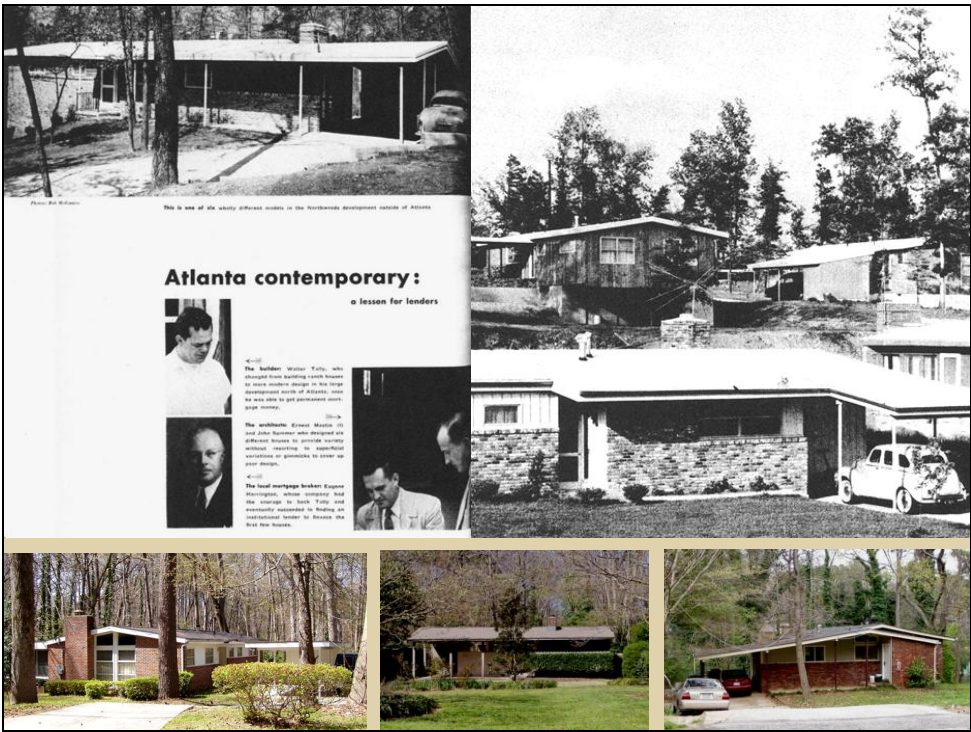
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So, to sum up:

The Ranch House in Georgia symbolizes a distinct historic period of unprecedented population growth, economic gains, and suburban development at mid-century. It provided a wide range of new, affordable, and desirable housing for a multitude of post-war families.





It was an entirely new kind of house ...

and in its design, it reflected new ideas about post-war suburban lifestyle:

casual, family-oriented, forward-looking.



So: what made the Ranch House so popular?

This propitious melding of new ideas about house design and new ideas about lifestyle.

It was *just right* for its time.

Far from being ordinary, then, the Ranch House can be considered extraordinary -- **iconic** even --

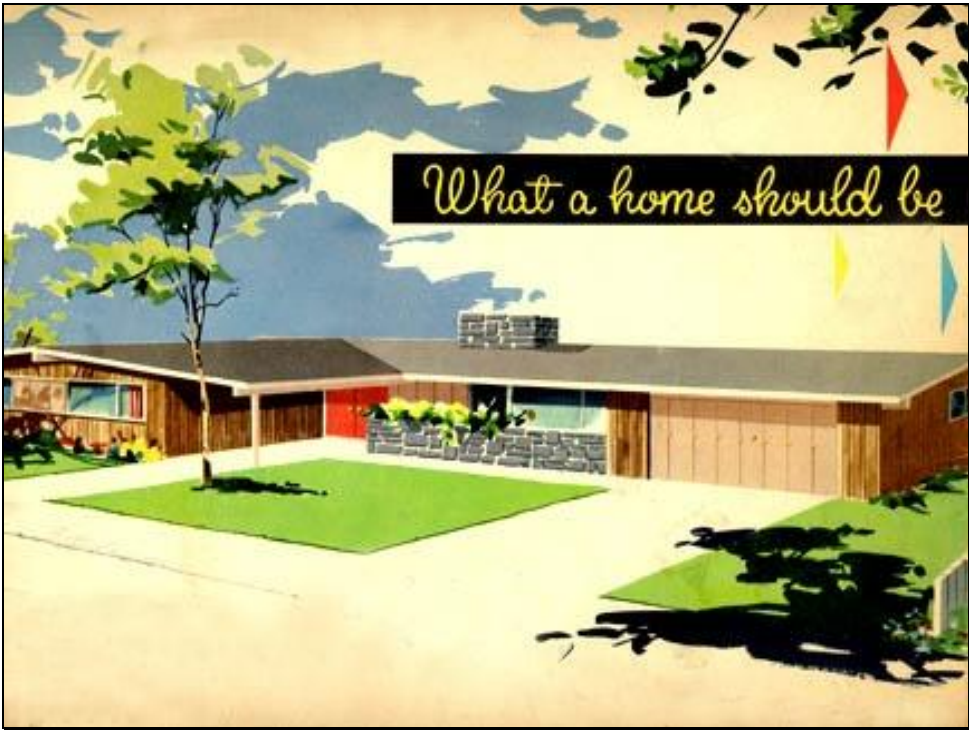


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right along with that other mid-century icon, the automobile -- a clear material expression of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century suburban life and culture.

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It was, quite simply, the perfect home for its time.

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We hope this presentation has provided you with a better understanding of Ranch Houses ...

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and we hope that it has provided you with information and insights that can be used in the hard work of identifying, evaluating, and preserving our state's mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century historic houses.





But most importantly, we hope you can find enjoyment in the history and the architecture of the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Ranch House in Georgia!

**The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House**  
**Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Ranch Houses in Georgia**  
**SOURCES OF INFORMATION**



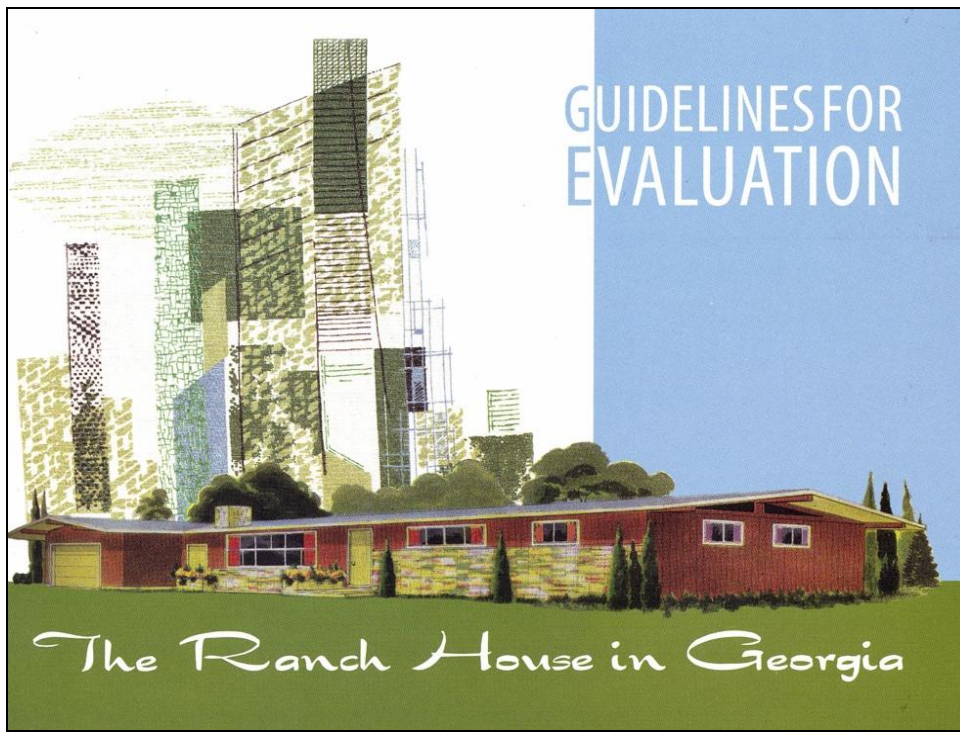
**September 2011**

**Richard Cloues, Ph.D.**

**Following is a list of list of some major sources of information about Ranch Houses in Georgia and the United States.**

Please keep in mind that this continues to be a work in progress. As we learn more about these mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century houses, these presentations will be updated to provide the latest information.





Much of what we know about Ranch Houses in Georgia is summarized in this 2010 publication. The “Guidelines for Evaluation” are intended to guide practitioners and lay persons alike in identifying, documenting, and evaluating Ranch Houses in Georgia. The report was prepared by New South Associates of Stone Mountain, Georgia, on behalf of our office, the Georgia Transmission Corporation (an electrical utility), and the Georgia Department of Transportation.

The report is available for viewing or downloading at the Historic Preservation Division’s website (currently no print copies are available):

[www.georgiashpo.org/historic/housing](http://www.georgiashpo.org/historic/housing)

The report also contains a bibliography of source materials used in its preparation.

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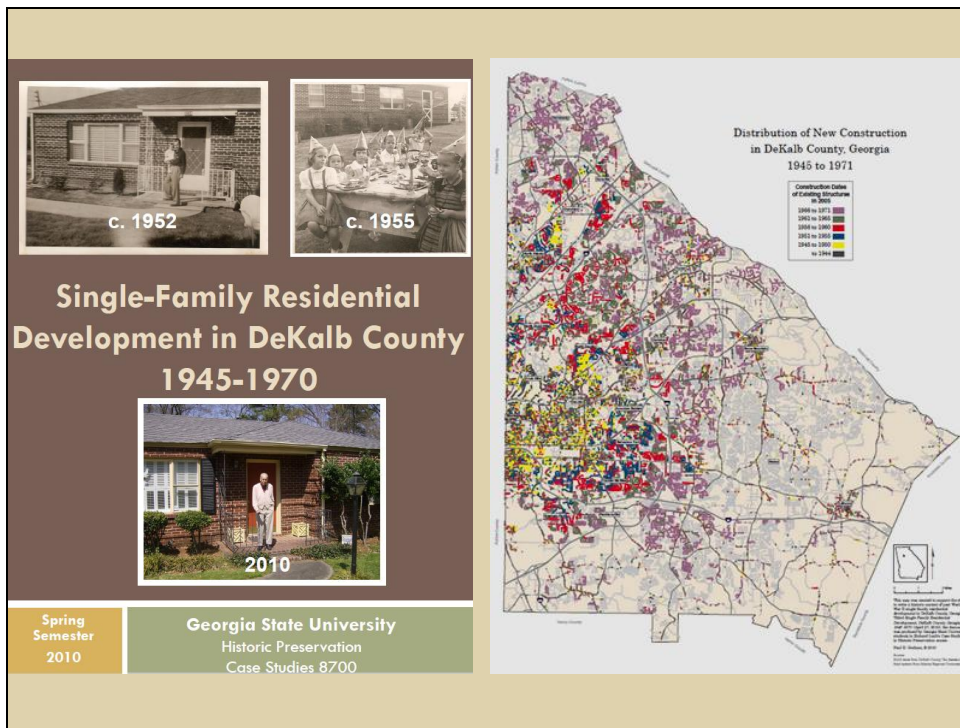
PowerPoint-based presentations addressing other aspects of Georgia’s historic Ranch Houses and our office’s Ranch House Initiative are also available for viewing or downloading on our office’s website:

[www.georgiashpo.org/historic/housing](http://www.georgiashpo.org/historic/housing)

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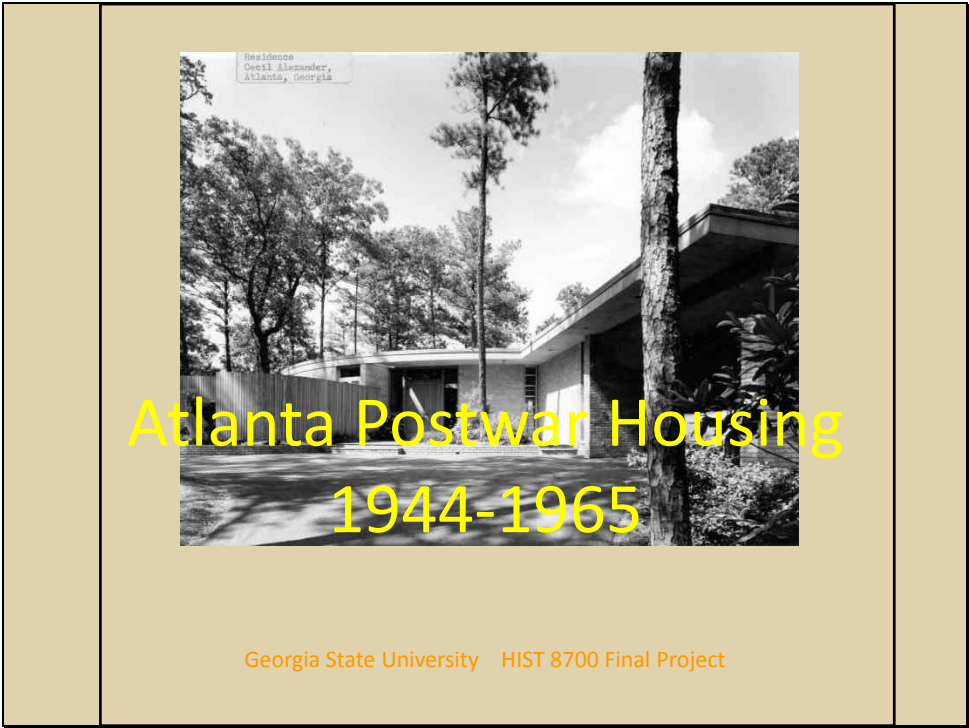




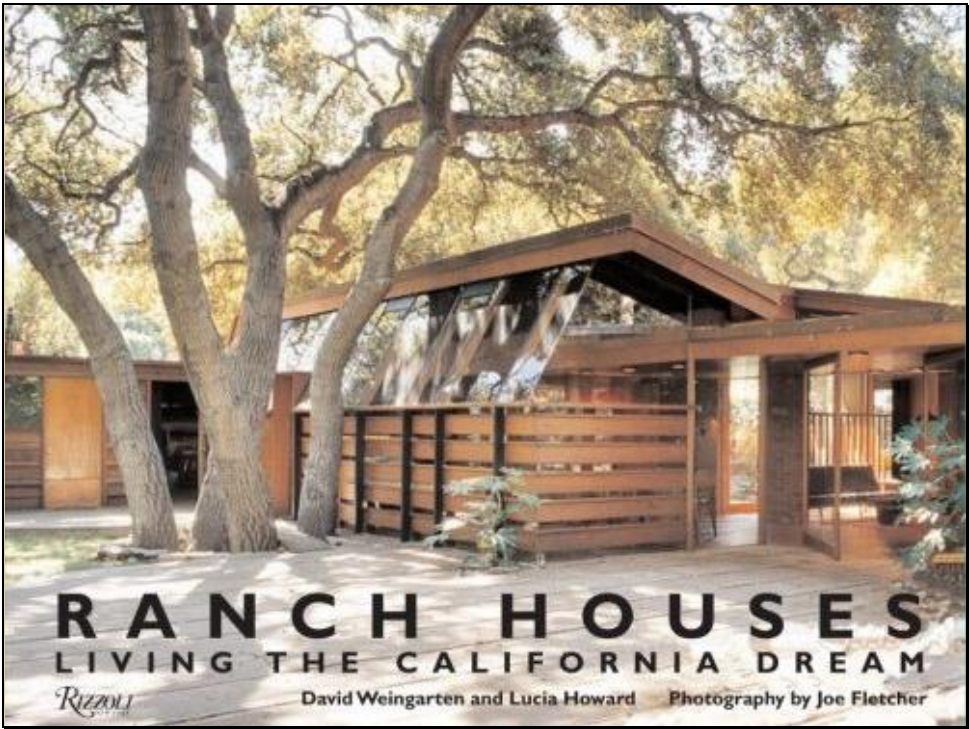
A companion piece to our “in-house” publications and presentations is a report prepared by graduate students in Georgia State University’s Heritage Preservation Program in 2010 which documents the history of the Ranch House in DeKalb County. DeKalb County, adjacent to the city of Atlanta, was an epicenter in Georgia for suburban Ranch House development during the 1950s and 1960s, and this in-depth report provides an overall historic context of Ranch Houses in the county as well as case studies of specific neighborhoods.

This report is available on our office’s website:

[www.georgiashpo.org/historic/housing](http://www.georgiashpo.org/historic/housing)

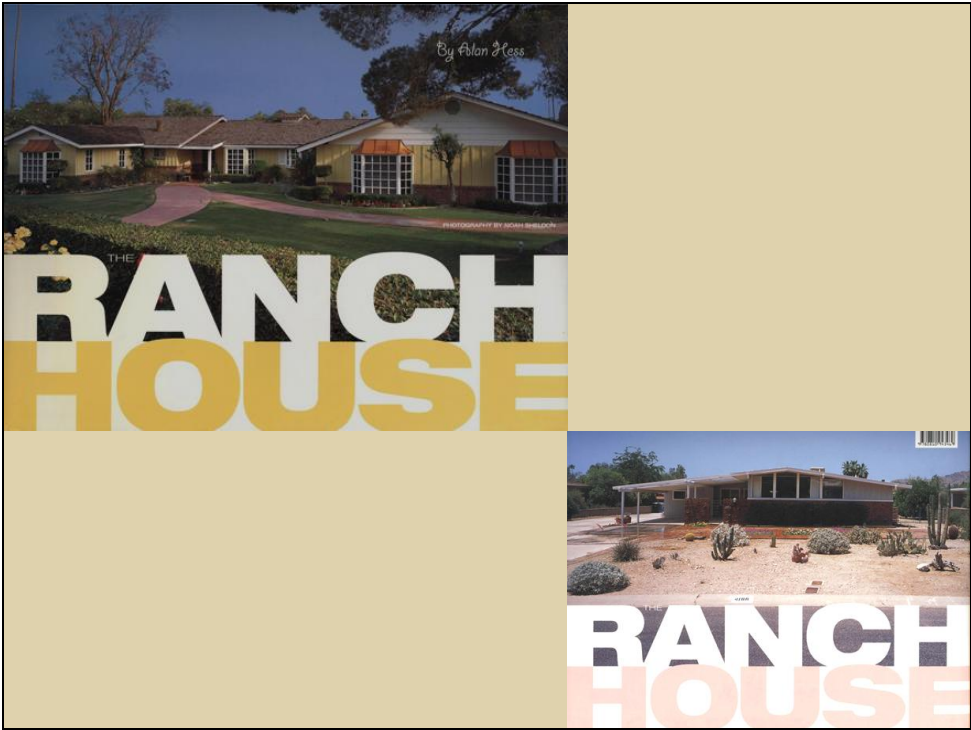


A forerunner to more recent studies, *Atlanta Postwar Housing 1944-1965* (report and PowerPoint presentation) , prepared by graduate students in the Heritage Preservation Program at Georgia State University in the spring of 2001, laid the groundwork for more recent in-depth studies in Atlanta and Georgia of several different mid-century house types including the Ranch House (available on our office’s website).

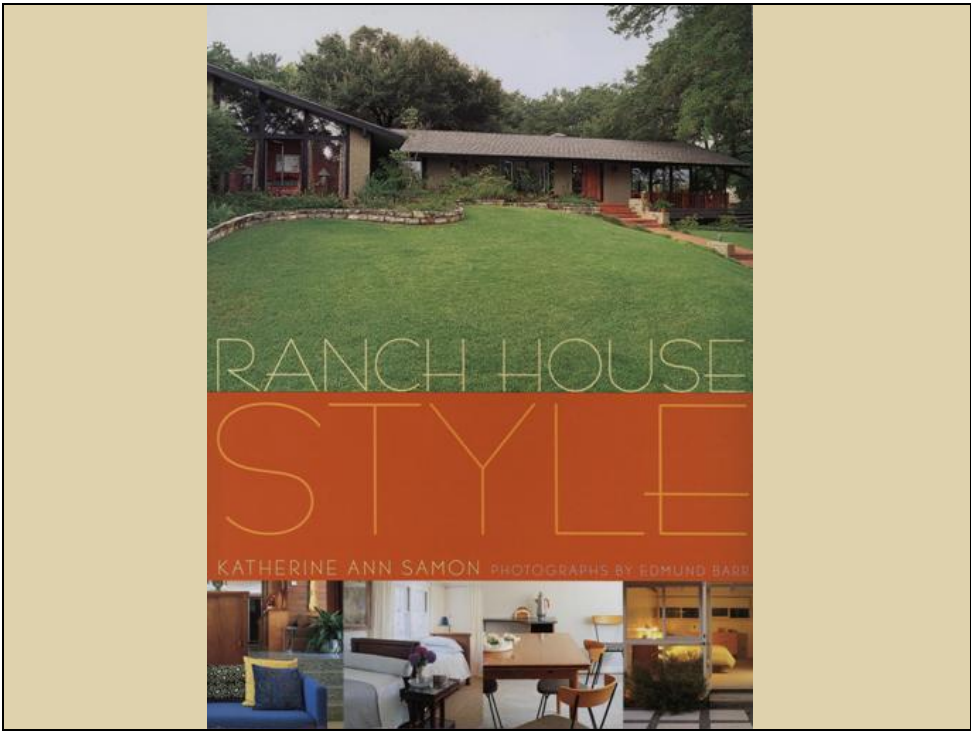


*Ranch Houses: Living the California Dream*, by David Weingarten and Lucia Howard, with photography by Joe Fletcher (Rizzoli International Publications, 2009), is the most recently published single sources of information about the Ranch House in America. It is lavishly illustrated and broad in scope, ranging from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the near present. Sidebar comments are as witty as they are insightful.

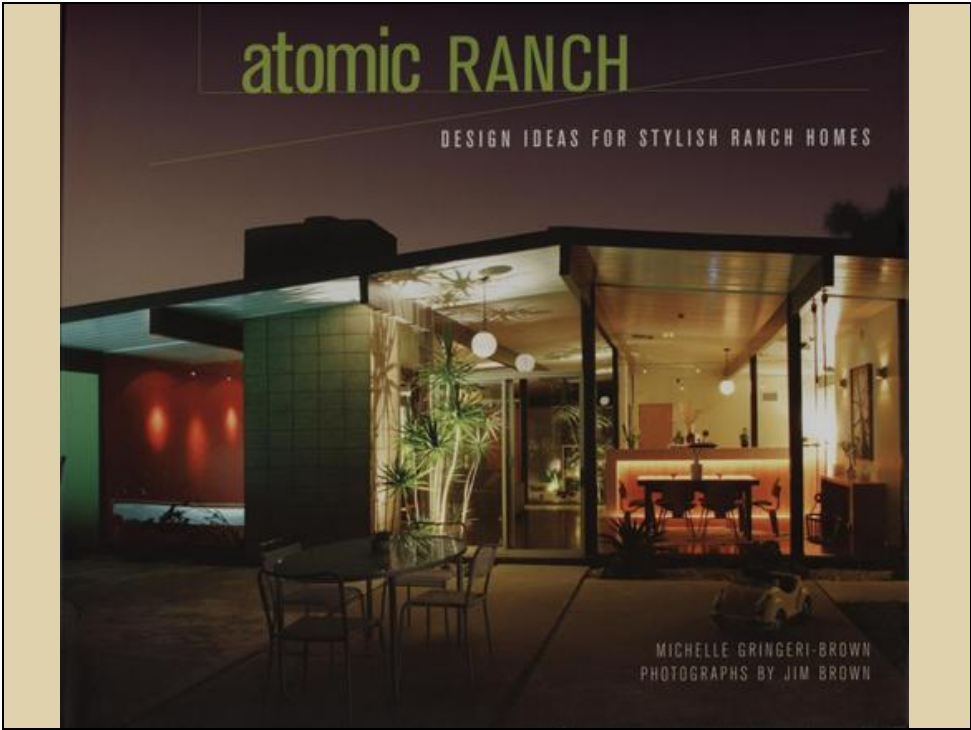




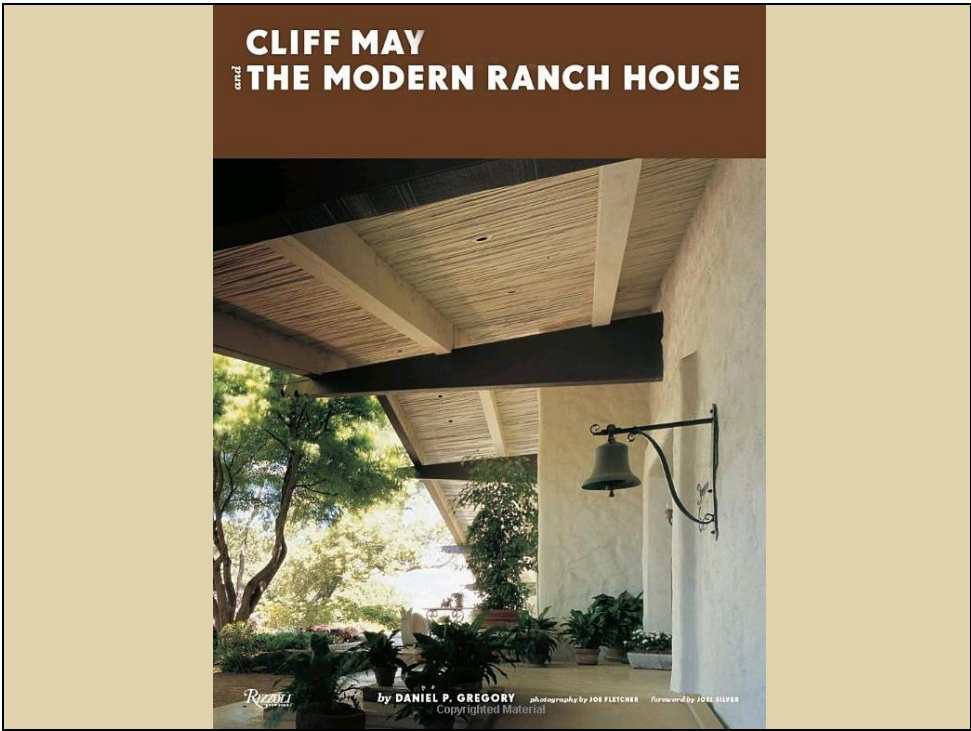
*The Ranch House*, by Alan Hess, with photography by Noah Sheldon (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2005), is among the earliest and best “comprehensive” histories of the Ranch House in America. Text, sidebars, and illustrations in the first third of the book convey the history of the Ranch House in America; the remainder of the book features photographs of landmark Ranch Houses in the United States (mostly in the Southwest).



*Ranch House Style*, by Katherine Ann Samon, with photography by Edmund Barr (Clarkston Potter/Publishers, 2003), is a lavishly illustrated idea book on how to renovate a Ranch House. The first chapter contains an excellent summary of the history of the Ranch House in America.

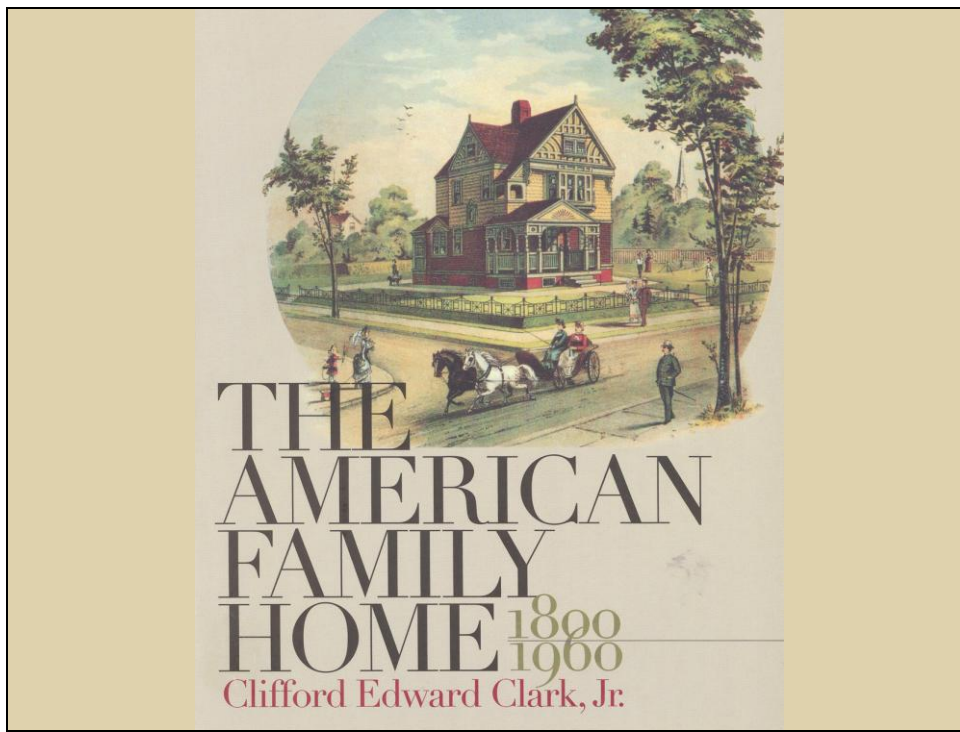


*Atomic Ranch: Design Ideas for Stylish Ranch Houses*, by Michelle Gringeri-Brown, with photography by Jim Brown (Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2006), features renovation and decorating ideas along with informative “sidebars” about the history of the Ranch House. Written and illustrated by the publishers of *Atomic Ranch* magazine, another major source of information about mid-century Ranch Houses.

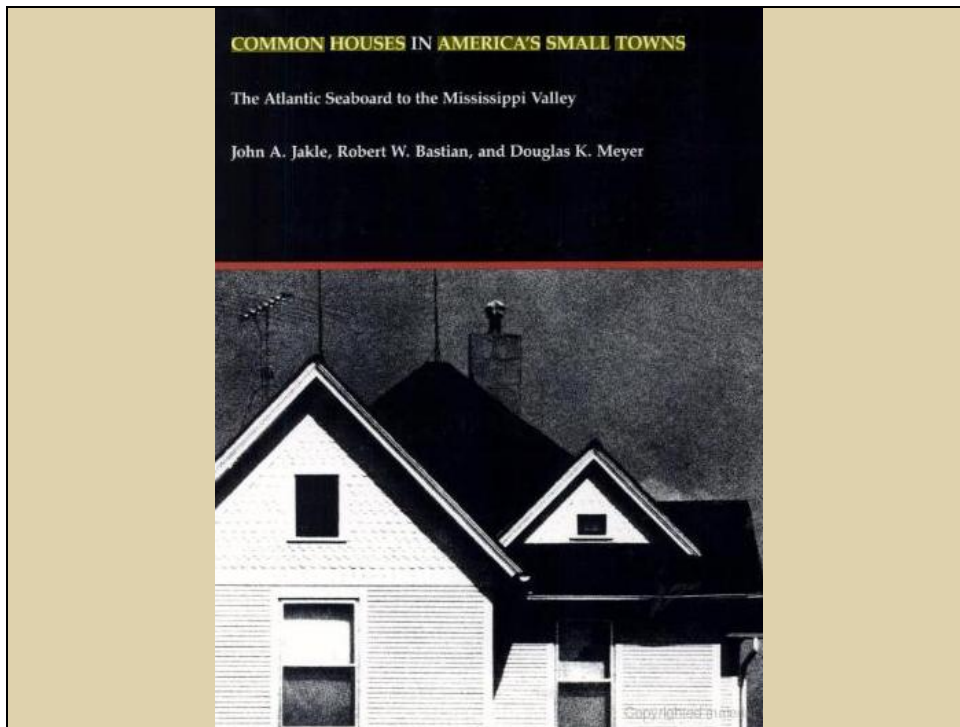


Cliff May never claimed to have invented the Ranch House but he was largely responsible for popularizing it as a new American house in the 1930s. He also designed some of the most remarkable Ranch Houses in America. *Cliff May and the Modern Ranch House*, by Daniel P. Gregory, with photography by Joel Silver (Rizzoli International Publications, 2008), puts May’s career in perspective and offers up striking photographs of many of his houses.

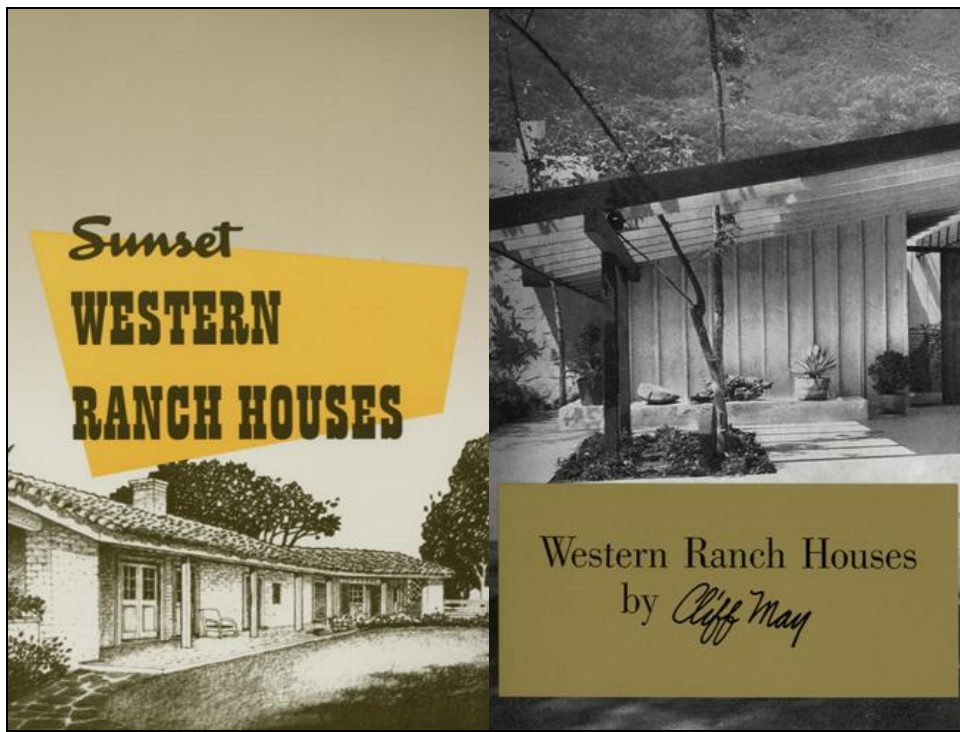




Clifford E. Clarke, Jr., was one of the first, if not the first, to recognize the historical, architectural, and cultural significance of the Ranch House. His observations on the “cultural” significance of the Ranch House in *The American Family Home 1800-1960* (University of North Carolina Press, 1986) remain pertinent today.



John A. Jakle, Robert W. Bastian, and Douglas K. Meyer promoted the concept of house “type” as a complement to the more traditional concept of architectural “style” and applied it to the American Ranch House in their pioneering book, *Common Houses in America's Small Towns* (University of Georgia Press, 1989).

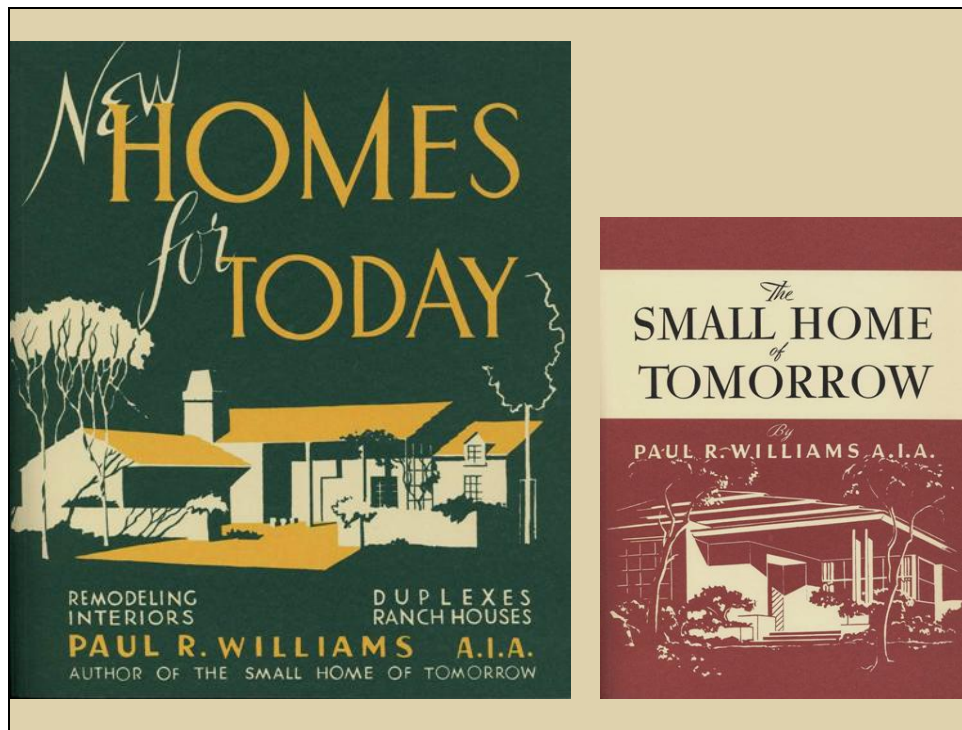


Cliff May worked closely with the editors of *Sunset Magazine* to publicize his ideas about the new Ranch House. In collaboration with *Sunset Magazine*, May edited two popular publications about Ranch Houses; each contained many of May's designs along with those of selected architects:

*Sunset Western Ranch Houses*, originally published by Lane Publishing Company, 1946, reprinted by Hennessey & Ingalls, 1999;

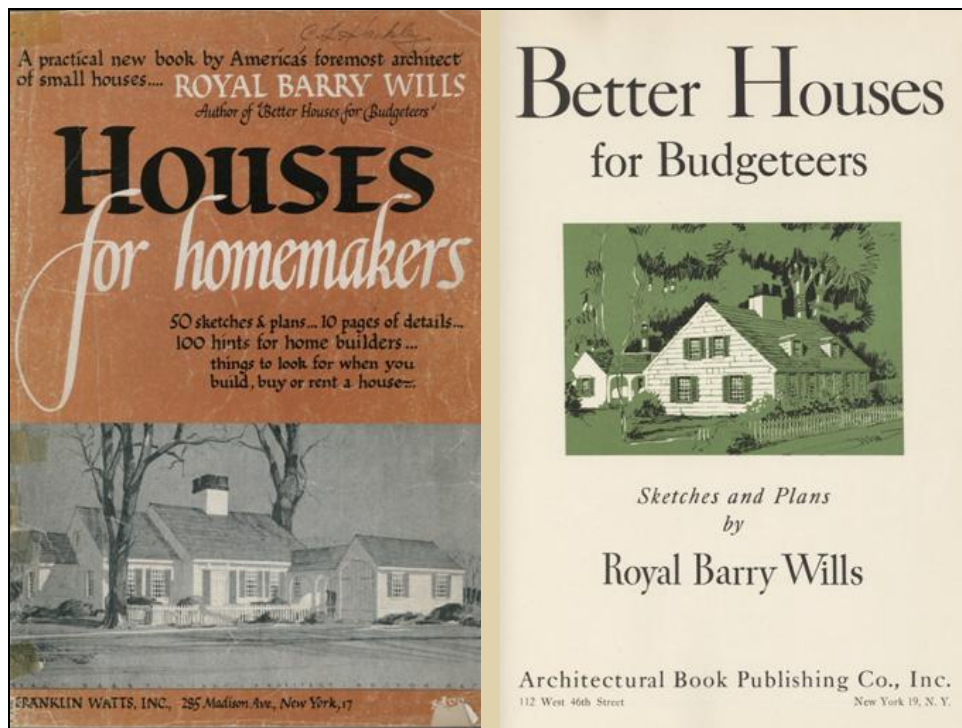
*Western Ranch Houses*, originally published by Lane Publishing Company, 1958, reprinted by Hennessey & Ingalls, 1997, 2001, 2004.





These two books were authored by Paul R. Williams, a California architect and contemporary of Cliff May. They were published the same year as May's *Sunset Western Ranch Houses*:

*New Homes for Today*, Murray & Gee, 1945-46; reprinted by Hennessey & Ingalls, 2006; and *The Small Home of Tomorrow*, Murray & Gee, 1945-46; reprinted by Hennessey & Ingalls, 2006.



Not to be outdone by their West Coast counterparts, some East Coast architects adapted the new California Ranch House for their more tradition-oriented clientele. Chief among them was Royal Barry Wills, of Boston, who authored these two books in the mid-1940s:

*Better Houses for Budgeteers* (Architectural Book Publishing Company, 1941), and *Houses for Homemakers* (Franklin Watts Inc., 1944).

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Vol. 32, No. 2  
Summer 2001

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The Western Historical Quarterly

Bungalow and Ranch House:  
The Architectural Backwash of California

John Mack Faragher

This essay examines the development of two American housing styles—the bungalow of the early twentieth century and the ranch house of the post-World War II era—each of which developed in the West and spread eastward, a “backwash” that suggests the changing currents of regional influence in twentieth-century America.

The history of vernacular house design is a subject that offers insights into the lives of ordinary people and documents important trends in social and cultural history. Two humble western housing styles—the California bungalow of the early twentieth century, and the ranch house of the post-World War II era—offer good examples. Both styles originated with builders and homeowners and were reluctantly and belatedly embraced by professional architects. The bungalow and the ranch house, as types, also offer interesting perspectives on the cultural relationship between the American West and the rest of the country. Both styles originated in Southern California, where they played important roles in building the suburban culture of that region. They then spread eastward to become nationally significant. Ethnohistorian A. Irving Hallowell once called attention to what he termed the “backwash of the frontier”—the eastward surge of cultural traits and practices originating in the West, reversing the prevailing westerling tide of cultural influence to affect the nation as a whole. With a nod to Hallowell, I argue that the “backwash” of the bungalow and the ranch house styles suggest the changing currents of regional influence in twentieth-century America.<sup>1</sup>

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Ranch Houses Are Not All the Same

David Bricker  
Architectural Historian  
California Department of Transportation  
San Bernardino, California

Introduction

With nearly constant rumbling and clattering sounds of construction, much of American suburbia was transformed during the bustling postwar period. Vast acres of land were subdivided for a multitude of new housing tracts. Their varied patterns of streets, yards, and detached single-family houses rapidly changed the appearance of the semi-rural and rural landscape beyond most downtown areas. Residential building for much of the period between 1945 and 1970 was characterized by a competitive sales market for such “ranch” houses, since the demand for affordable housing remained relatively steady and public and private financing was offered at reasonable rates.<sup>1</sup> By far the most predominant design, especially in California, was the one-story ranch house and the informal way of living that it sought to project.

Tracing its architectural heritage from adobes and wood-frame-and-sheathed ranch buildings built during the more rugged nineteenth century, the postwar California ranch house quickly attained national appeal, just as the bungalow had previously. An observation made in the late 1950s by the cultural historian Russell Lynes suggests why the ranch house appeared so popular: “Nobody could mind it. It was not experimental enough to be considered ‘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.’”<sup>2</sup>

The rather benign character of a ranch house also led to other comments at the time, many of a more critical nature. For example, the architectural historian and preservationist James Marston Fitch apparently felt uncomfortable with its sweeping popularity when he wrote: “... there was at first, a tendency to dismiss it as too exotic: ‘It’s all right for California but it wouldn’t work here.’ Now we are at the other extreme—building ‘California-type ranch houses’ in every state of the Union regardless of their fitness to the site and the climate.”<sup>3</sup>

Even the name itself has been broadly identified over the years. Ranch-style, ranch bungalow, ranchette, rambler, California colonial, and less than flattering names like ranch burger are just a sampling. Whether embraced or ridiculed, the immense number of ranch houses built in California and elsewhere clearly conveys a widespread popularity after the Second World War. While the expected context for a ranch house was its snug appearance on a landscaped parcel in the suburbs, the ranch house was portrayed in other ways, too, such as a child’s playhouse or doll house, as the setting for advertisements or for the entertainment industry, or as a popular icon in the museum and collector’s world of 1960s painting.

Preserving the Recent Past 2

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“Bungalow and Ranch House: The Architectural Backwash of California” (*The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 2001), by John Mack Faragher, presents insightful observations on their “backward” migration of Bungalows and Ranch Houses from the west coast to the east coast.

In “Ranch Houses Are Not All The Same” (*Preserving the Recent Past 2*, edited by Deborah Slaton and William Foulks, Historic Preservation Education Foundation, National Park Service and Association for Preservation Technology International, 2000), David Bricker presented an early, short, and insightful overview of the Ranch House in America.

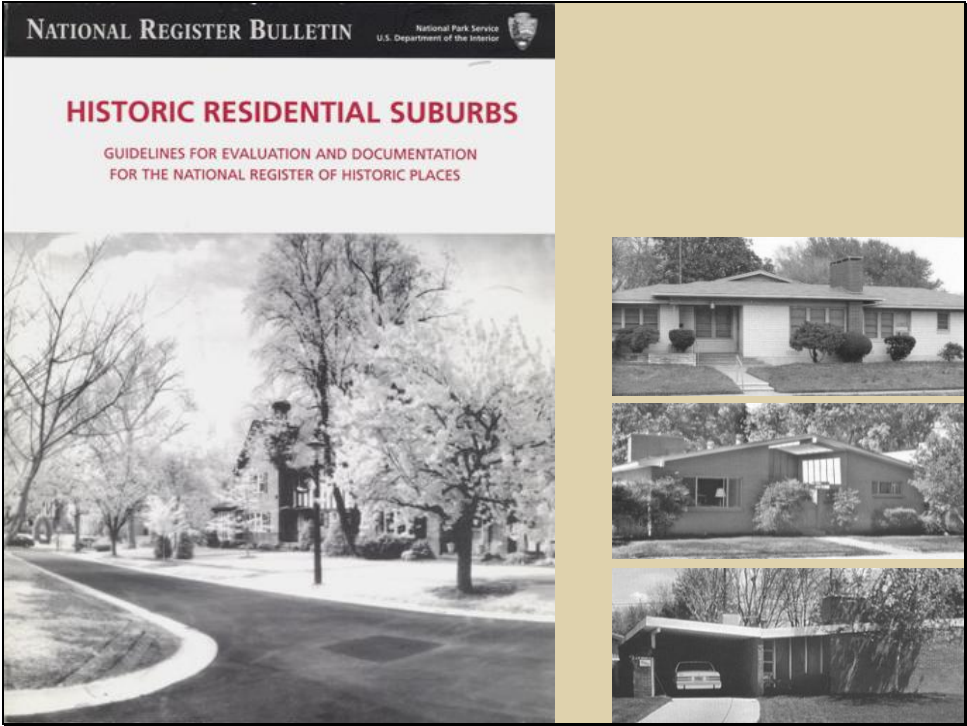




Atomic Ranch Magazine (and web site: [www.atomic-ranch.com](http://www.atomic-ranch.com)) presents timely feature articles about the past and future history of the Ranch House in America.



The Recent Past Preservation Network's *Bulletin* presents feature articles about mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture including houses. The Winter 2011 issue highlighted perspectives from state historic preservation offices; Georgia's Ranch House Initiative was featured.



A fundamental publication for any historic-preservation-related study of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century residential architecture is David Ames' and Linda Flint McClelland's *Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places* (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2002).

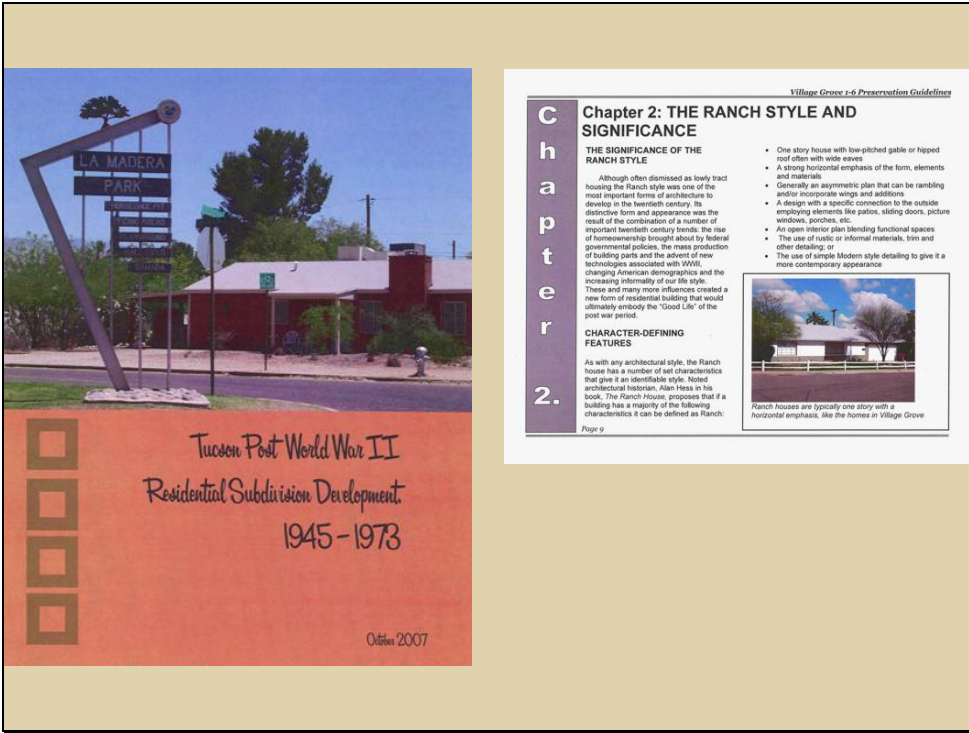




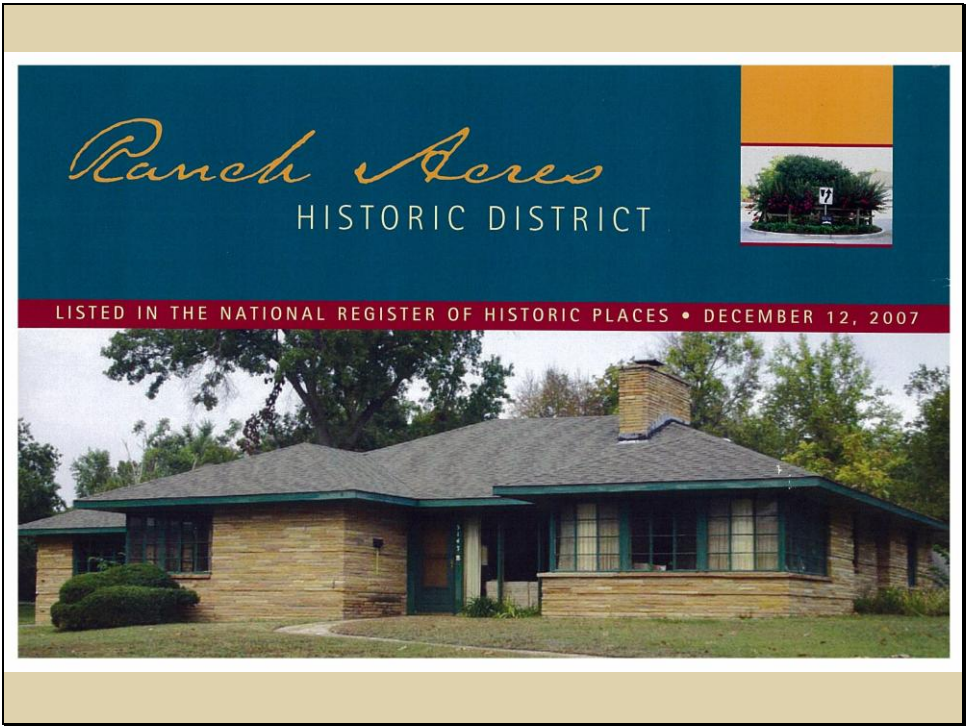


From a Ranch House historiographical point of view, check out the National Register of Historic Places registration form for Arapahoe Acres in Englewood, Colorado. Arapahoe Acres, developed between 1949 and 1957, was the first post-World War II residential subdivision to be listed in the National Register – back in 1998! It features a variety of architect-designed Contemporary-style Ranch Houses along with Split-Level Houses and Two-Story Houses.





Even more information about Ranch Houses across the country, but especially in the Southwest, can be found in citywide historic resource surveys, some of which, like this one from Tucson, Arizona, focus on mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century houses. A number of these can be accessed on-line.



Other cities, such as Tulsa, Oklahoma, have published handbooks about their mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century historic neighborhoods. This one, Ranch Acres, was developed between 1949 and 1962. Not surprisingly, the houses in this neighborhood are Ranch Houses, and the neighborhood is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

# **The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House**

**Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Ranch Houses in Georgia**

**THE END**



**September 2011**

**Richard Cloues, Ph.D.**