MANIFEST

1

LOOKING INWARD

A JOURNAL OF AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM

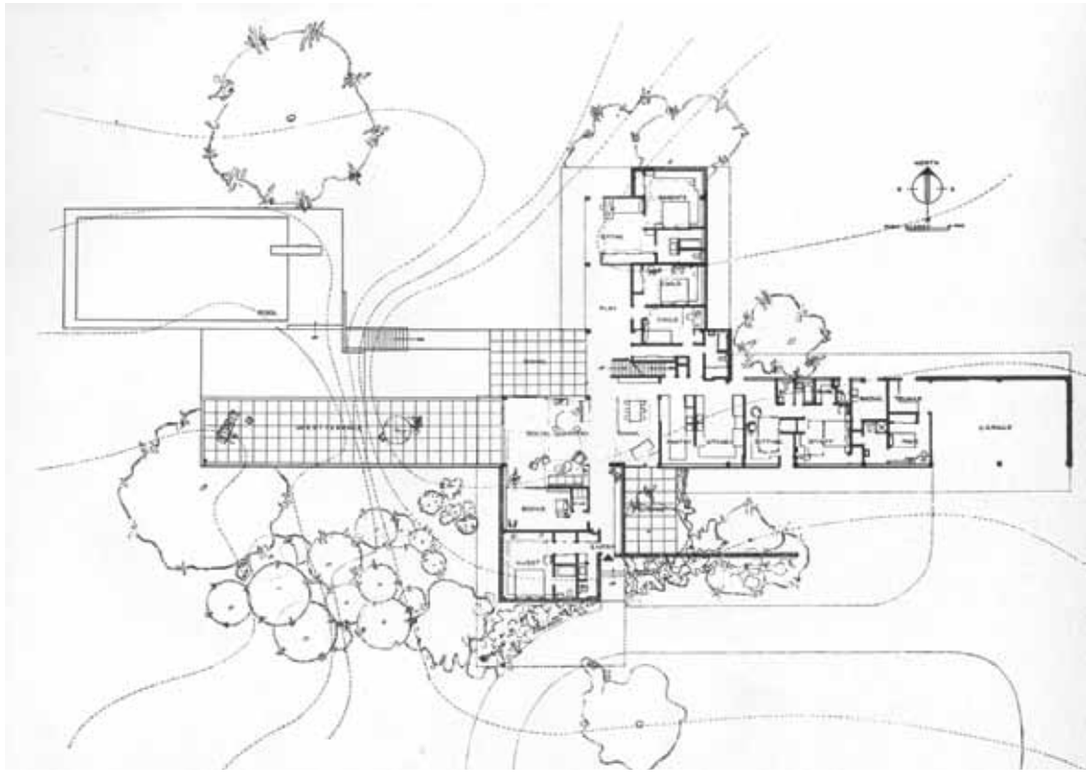
Richard Neutra, Warren D. Tremaine and Katharine Williams Tremaine House, Montecito Near Santa Barbara, California, 1945–1948
The mitered glass corner in the master bedroom, seen from the exterior
Permissions courtesy Dion Neutra, Architect © and © J. Paul Getty Trust. Used with permission. Julius Shulman Photography Archive, Research Library at the Getty Research Institute (2004.R.10)

THERAPEUTIC FRONTIERS
The Tremaine Houses in Santa Barbara

BY VOLKER M. WELTER

IN NOVEMBER 2008 the Tea Fire ravaged through the Santa Ynez Mountains above the city of Santa Barbara and the community of Montecito in California. One of the houses that erupted into flames was the home of Katharine Williams Tremaine (1907–1997), a philanthropist who is today probably best remembered for her prolific support of progressive causes. In the late 1940s, Katharine Tremaine was also known as a patron of one of the most famous private residences in mid-twentieth century American architectural history when she and her then husband Warren D. Tremaine (1906–1987) commissioned Richard Neutra to design their home in Montecito. Katharine Tremaine's second house was designed by the architect Paul Lawrence Soderburg (b. 1922) between 1971 and 1972, a few years after the Tremaines had divorced and moved out of the Neutra-designed building. Both houses are part of a larger group of architectural designs commissioned by Warren D. and Katharine Tremaine, and Warren's brother, Burton G. Tremaine (1901–1991) and Emily Hall Tremaine (1908–1987)—the latter two were famous collectors of modern art—from architects such as Philip Johnson, Richard Neutra, Oscar Niemeyer, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

The two Tremaine houses in Santa Barbara sketch the complex relationship between architecture, environment, and the therapeutic. The psychological aspirations of Neutra with regard to his architecture are well known. Neutra developed a fascination with Wilhelm Wundt's theories, which investigated physio-psychological responses to stimulations originating in physical environments. As a result, in his California work, Neutra increasingly considered architecture as an environmental discipline that could positively influence the well-being of inhabitants by triggering deliberate physiological and psychological responses. The emphasis on the interaction between the physical environment and man's responses to it recalls the debates



Richard Neutra, Warren D. Tremaine and Katharine Williams Tremaine House
Plan of the First Floor.
From: R. Neutra, Life and Human Habitat (Stuttgart: Alexander Koch, 1956), p. 132.
Permission courtesy Dion Neutra, Architect ©

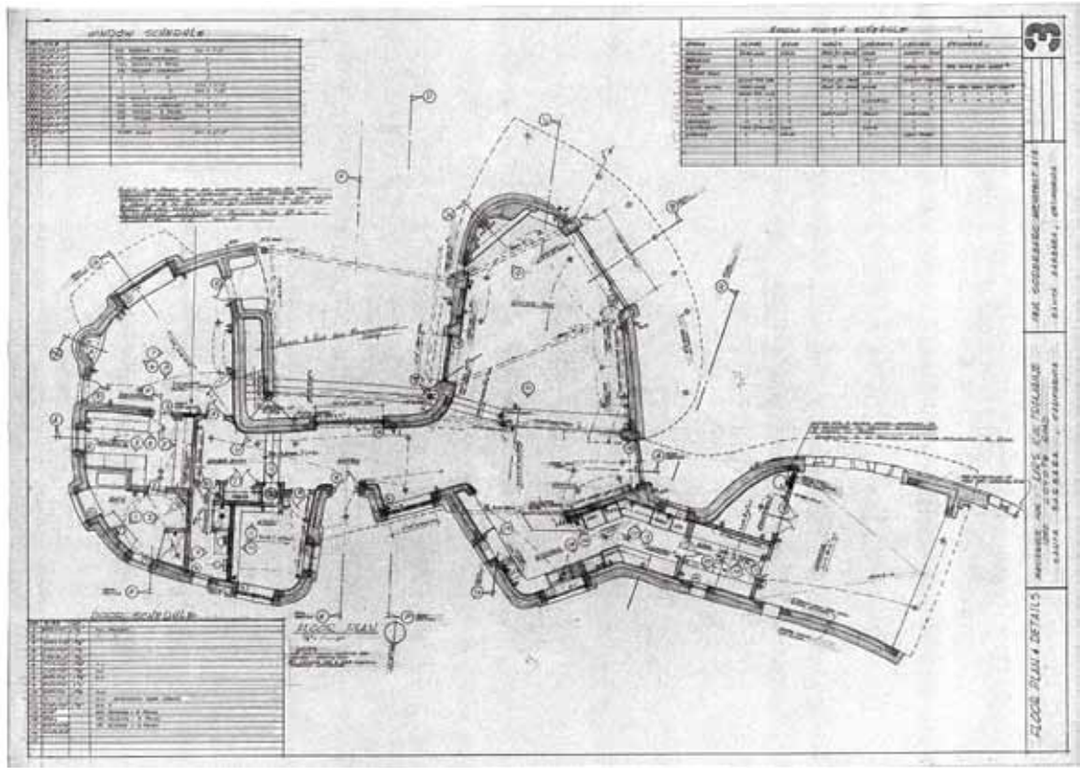
surrounding many early modern hospital and sanatoria buildings, for example the Purkersdorf Sanatorium, which Joseph Hoffmann designed in Neutra's hometown of Vienna between 1904 and 1905, and whose architecture was assumed to be crucial for healing processes.[1] Focusing primarily on the tradition of Sigmund Freud, Sandor Ferenczi, and Wilhelm Reich,[2] recent architectural historical analyses have paid careful attention to the role of psychoanalysis in Neutra's architecture. Taken as a whole, such consideration has enriched our understanding of Neutra's interest in the formation of physio-psychological environments as well as with the creation of metaphors for the inner spaces of the human mind.

The metaphorical reading appears to be more appropriate for the Katharine Tremaine house, not the least since Paul L. Soderburg was both an architect and a psychotherapist. According to Soderburg, Katharine Tremaine hired him as her architect, not as her psychotherapist, and as Soderburg suggests, designing a house and embarking on a therapy fundamentally differ, with the latter being "amorphous, non-directional, and never social in a pleasurable sense."[3] Still, from the client's perspective, the making of her own home was nothing short of a therapeutic endeavor. Initially, the house was conceived as a new physical base for her private life, but soon it came to play an important role in her growing

1 Leslie Topp, *Architecture and Truth in Fin-De-Siècle Vienna*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

2 Sylvia Lavin, *Form Follows Libido. Architecture and Richard Neutra in a Psychoanalytic Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), or Todd Cronan, "'Danger in the Smallest Dose': Richard Neutra's Design Theory," *Design and Culture* 3, issue 2 (2011), 165–182.

3 Email Paul Soderburg to author, April 3, 2013.



Plan of the Katharine Tremaine House
Image courtesy of Paul L. Soderburg, Architect.

interest in the inner, spiritual dimensions of human life. Within the realm of American domestic architecture, the intertwined histories of the two Tremaine houses exemplify the increasing therapeutic turn of mainstream culture in the period after the Second World War as documented in the writings of observers such as David Riesman, Philip Rieff, and Christopher Lasch.[4]

Warren Tremaine and Katharine Williams married in 1935. Tremaine's father had been on the board of General Electric and owned several other businesses including ranches in Arizona, which Warren managed in the 1940s. Williams's family had been in the lumber business in Louisiana, affording her financial independence for her entire life. The couple lived in Arizona after the wedding, moving to Montecito, a wealthy enclave at the outskirts of Santa Barbara, in 1944. The following year, the Tremaines commissioned the house by Neutra after reading about his work in contemporary magazines. By that time, Neutra often employed the tactic of merging house and surrounding into a spatial continuum. To this end, he dissolved his houses into almost stand-alone pavilions linked by glazed corridors—covered, but otherwise open walkways, terraces, and patios. These architectural means continuously directed the gazes of inhabitants away from the interiors of the homes, and towards the surveying of the immediate and wider environments. One of the first houses conceived in this manner was the Nesbitt House (1941–1942) in Los Angeles, with the most prominent one being the Kaufmann House (1946–1947) in Palm Springs. The Tremaine House was of similar stock; indeed,

4 David Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd. A Study in the changing American Character*, abridged and revised by Todd Gitlin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic, Uses of Faith after Freud* [1966] (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissim. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978).

Southern elevation of the Katharine Tremaine House
Photograph © John Waggaman, by permission of Noreen Waggaman.

the initial plans for the last two houses were drawn up around the same time in 1945.

The house is located on a secluded site in the lower foothills of Montecito where the clients had purchased roughly sixteen acres of land. Neutra placed the house on higher ground in the north-east corner from where it overlooked a sloping meadow. The basic post and beam structural system contrasts with the gnarled oak trees; the palette of materials—exposed concrete, local natural stone for walls, room-high exterior walnut louvers, and terrazzo flooring inside and out—temper any reading of the house as an overly radical modernist statement. The pinwheel floor plan intersects shorter north and south wings with longer ones on the west and east. The shorter wings accommodated private quarters, a guestroom, library, and main entrance; the eastern one housed service spaces and staff rooms; and the western one extended the living room, the hub of the home, into the garden by means of a fifty-six foot long elevated terrace with changing rooms underneath for a swimming pool that would remain unbuilt.[5] Further, the residence comprised such details as floor-to-ceiling moveable glass screens, permanent ventilation openings underneath the roof slab, and a mitered glass corner in the master bedroom behind which tree trunks appeared almost to grow into the house. Beside the terrace an outdoor dining area opened the home to the exterior.

The Katharine Tremaine house was almost the exact opposite of this earlier residence. Following her divorce, Tremaine wished for a house without angular corners or dead ends. This specification responded to one stairwell in the Neutra house, originally intended to lead to a proposed second floor, and expressed her desire to let her post-divorce life flow with feelings unimpeded by physical restraints and limits.[6] Located high above the city of Santa Barbara the new

5 Today's swimming pool is a design by a different architect in a location other than the one Neutra had planned for.

6 Email Paul Soderburg to author, April 3, 2013.

View of the Katharine Tremaine House
Photograph © John Waggaman, by permission of Noreen Waggaman

home was designed to take a range of views into account. Soderburg's plan also closely interlocked indoors and outdoors while keeping both realms clearly separated. Windows framed views without dissolving entire walls into glass. Hand-made adobe bricks, evoking pueblos from the American south-west, faced exterior walls made from concrete block masonry and underlined the protective character of the house. The flat concrete roof enhanced that character, appearing as an unfamiliar plane lowered onto pre-existing adobe walls, squeezing in some areas through openings in the walls to shade windows, pierced in other points by chimneys made of adobe brick. Inside some rooms, the ceilings gently billowed inwards as though a canvas hung from the surrounding walls. The F-shaped house accommodated two distinct zones: the first was the living room with adjacent dining area and kitchen, its more open-plan suitable for entertaining larger groups of guests; the second was the private quarters of the client. An intimate outdoor terrace linked both areas. A fireplace in the living room added warmth to the interior; tree trunks, freestanding or as ceiling beams, contributed a rustic-natural note, and a pond and various gardens designed by Katharine Tremaine provided focal points around the perimeter of the house.

The care with which both architects integrated their designs into the sites establishes the environment as a common ground of the two houses. It also illustrates the central position that the "environment" occupied during the last century for much of Californian architecture even though the meaning of the term was subject to perpetual redefinition. Etymologically, environment signifies the world surrounding man as is implied, for example, by the German word *Umwelt*, a combination of *Welt* (world) and the prefix *um-* which indicates something that surrounds. The German term was apparently introduced as such in the late 1900s by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll when he considered the ways different animals experienced the same physical environments.[7] Subsequently, the term would also come to influence areas such as Gestalt-psychology. In the mid-twentieth century, early environmental studies often originated in studies of physio-psychological responses to environmental stimulations. In this understanding, *Umwelt* is an important term in Neutra's architecture.

One of the earliest architectural historians who pointed towards the importance of the environment for Californian architecture was Harold Kirker who transferred Frederick Jackson Turner's discussion of an American frontier into the architectural history of the nineteenth-century Californian. California's architectural frontier was defined by colonists shaping "an architecture representative not of conditions on the new frontier but of older and distant societies from which they

7 See *Semiotica* 134 (2001) issues 1–4, special volume on Jakob von Uexküll.

emigrated."[8] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, revival styles were no longer inspired by the eclectic memories of immigrants but by rather by California's own Spanish colonial past.

Looking at mid-twentieth century California, Wayne Andrews briefly touched upon the environmental roots of the contemporary architectural flourishing of the state, arguing that many Americans moved to California from the late 1940s onwards because they were "bored by the environment of their native states…. At least that is one explanation for the phenomenal architectural development of California—certainly climate is not the only factor responsible for the experimentation rife in Los Angeles and San Francisco."[9] Thus, for Andrews, the environment was an enabling force that invited experiments, rather than limiting them as Kirker's emphasis on memories of immigrants might suggest.

The notion of the environment as a site of experiment and innovation comes close to the one that underpinned the American frontier as originally discussed by Frederick Jackson Turner in the late 1890s. Locating the frontier as the ever westward shifting "meeting point between savagery and civilization"[10] Turner described life at the frontier as the close interaction with the environment in order to produce for oneself most of what was needed for survival: "[A]t the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man…. Little by little he transforms the wilderness." Eventually, frontier man "builds his cabin … put[s] up hewn log houses with glass windows and brick or stone chimneys…, mills, schoolhouses, courthouses, etc." [11] These continuous acts of making did not simply replicate traditions and objects from the pre-immigration past of frontier man. Instead, they wrested genuinely American products from the environment,[12] while also transforming frontier men and women into Americans regardless of their country of origin.[13] By making his own environment, man ultimately made himself.

Thus re-defined, California's architectural frontier can be understood as the act of making one's house while also shaping one's own persona. This special type of frontier lasted for most of the twentieth century even if, at times, it was transformed into myth or commodity. Early in the twentieth century, buildings like the Lovell Beach house (Newport Beach, CA, 1926) by Rudolf Schindler and the Lovell Health House (Los Angeles, CA, 1929) by Richard Neutra were not just modernist designs, but projects conceived with the intention to transform man into Modernism's New Man. This idea resurfaced later in Californian counterculture, which thrived on the assumption that by building one's house man would remake himself.[14]

The two Tremaine houses stood at a comparable intersection of environment, the act of building a home, and the making of a new man, or in this case, woman. In a letter to Neutra from 1948 Katharine Tremaine referred to the process of erecting the first house as one of working with the architect.[15] Her 1992 autobiography begins with a small vignette that retrospectively links the building of the Montecito home with the death of a good friend. Here, the focus rests on the physical labor the workmen invested into the Neutra-designed house: "[I]t was interesting to watch the stone masons handling the stone during building. They sat on the ground with the stone between their legs, chipping away with a wedge-like instrument as in the time

8 Harold Kirker, *California's Architectural Frontier. Style and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* [1960] (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1986), xxvii.

9 Wayne Andrews, *Architecture, Ambition, and Americans. A Social History of American Architecture* [1947] (New York: Free Press, 1955), xix.

10 Fredrick Jackson Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', in Fredrick J. Turner, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 31–60.

11 Ibid., 33, 45.

12 Ibid., 34.

13 Ibid., 34, 47.

14 Art Boericke and Barry Shapiro, *Handmade Houses. A Guide to the Woodbutcher's Art* (San Francisco: Scrimshaw Press, 1973).

15 Letter Mrs. Warren Tremaine to Richard Neutra, April 23, 1948 (Box 1491, Folder 2 "Tremaine Warren, Correspondence 1947–1955, undated," Richard and Dion Neutra Papers (Collection Number 1179). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Main living space in the Katharine Tremaine House
Photograph © John Waggaman, by permission of Noreen Waggaman.

Main living room in the Katharine Tremaine House, looking south
Photograph © John Waggaman, by permission of Noreen Waggaman.

of Christ, tiny bits flaking away until the stone had reached the desired shape."[16] For the second house, young local men were hired in order to make on site the necessary adobe facing bricks. The romanticism of the new home rising from the ground via the physical efforts of young workers ended abruptly when the lay-builders responded to the task by interpreting the architectural plans rather than following them to the letter. Consequently, the entire workforce was laid off and a construction firm hired to erect the home according to plan.[17]

The trajectory of the relationship between architecture and the therapeutic—established through an understanding of the act of building a house to be as much about creating a home as about making, or remaking, one's persona—was well captured by David Riesman and Phillip Rieff in their report on the increasing psychoanalytically-driven inward-turn of the American upper and middle-classes in their pursuit of happiness. Riesman identifies the transparent modernist mid-twentieth century architecture as the perfect abode for the other-directed modern man who existed by and for the impressions of fellow human beings: "He lives in a glass house, not behind lace or velvet curtain."[18] Rieff picks up this thread at the moment when the social status that came with life in mid-twentieth century domestic architecture no longer sufficed and therapeutic alternatives appeared increasingly attractive: "Wealth may define status, or enhance a role in the social system. Analysis may supply the energy an ego needs to strengthen the control over the deceits lodged in the unconscious by the failing means through which salvation was purchased, in the inherited culture."[19] Taken together, these passages shed light on the shift from the transparent and extroverted, Cartesian first Tremaine house to the earthen, more freely shaped second one. Here, too, one locates echoes of the client's upended private life, marked by divorce and a gradual separation from Montecito's culture of money-eyed leisure.

Often adopting the role of what one could call an architectural psychoanalyst, Neutra usually probed deeply the conventions of the day-to-day lives of his clients in order to design architectural environments that would constantly stimulate physio-psychological responses in the dwellers and thus improve their well-being. In the case of the Tremaines, this therapeutic environmentalist approach was only partially successful, as by the time the house was completed, the couple had moved back to Arizona. There, Katharine Tremaine opened up a children's store; an enterprise she enjoyed and that developed well. When, in 1954, Warren D. Tremaine pondered relocating again to Montecito, his wife dreaded giving up her business as she confessed in a letter to Dione Neutra.[20] Mrs. Neutra, from her side, expressed joy about the intended return to Montecito and proposed that appropriate civic activities could keep her friend adequately occupied.[21]

The second Tremaine house was the result of an initial encounter of architect and client at an anti-war protest in downtown Santa Barbara. For the newly-divorced Katharine Tremaine, the house was part of a radical re-organization of her personal and her public lives, both of which were from then onwards dedicated to social, environmental, and community causes. Some earlier patterns, however, did persist. Shortly after the new house was completed, she moved for private reasons away from Santa Barbara. She later returned to the new house, but only after Soderburg had reduced its size to better fit yet another turn in her private life. While she maintained her activist involvement with liberal causes, Tremaine grew increasingly fascinated with the inner dimensions of human existence; a yearning that eventually led her to *channeling*, a popular spiritual activity in the counterculture of the 1970s and 1980s. This interest developed roughly in parallel with the planning and building of the new house and she soon held regular discussion sessions at the new home for a group of fellow spiritualists. In her own channeling sessions, Tremaine learned about her earlier incarnations, including her life in ancient Egypt as the "mate of a master builder who understood … using from nature to provide shelter." Tremaine then tells about stones holding "the warmth of Mother Earth" and how she "designed—verbally, through … ideas—courtyards and areas around the buildings under construction by the mate."[22] In addition to providing her with a new home, the making of the new house became for Katharine Tremaine a metaphor for her newly found spiritual quest.

Unearthing the micro-histories of the two Tremaine houses serves to reconstruct the frayed nexus that once existed between them and in so doing historicizes the Neutra-designed house, which has for many years been inaccessible to historians and which exists in the architectural-historical imagination almost solely through Julius Shulman's photographs shot upon its completion. To see this house alongside its younger, rebellious sibling—the second, destroyed Tremaine house—is to witness a crucial turn in the way that modern architects in California conceived of design and the environment. Reunited with their inhabitants, these two houses narrate the restless interplay between architecture, the environment, and the therapeutic; a relationship that has nourished much of California's modern architectural history.

16 Kit [Katharine] Tremaine, *Fragments. My Path through the 20th Century* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 1992), 9–10.

17 Email Paul L. Soderburg to author, September 1, 2011.

18 David Riesman, "1961 preface," in Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*, xlii.

19 Rieff, *Triumph of the Therapeutic*, 39.

20 Letter Katharine Tremaine to Dione Neutra, not dated [c. early 1954] (Box 1937, Correspondence Folder 5 "Tremaine Warren and Kit: 1953–59," Richard and Dion Neutra Papers (Collection Number 1179). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

21 Letter Dione Neutra to Katharine Tremaine, March 27, 1954, (Box 1937, Correspondence Folder 5 "Tremaine Warren and Kit: 1953–59"). Richard and Dion Neutra Papers (Collection Number 1179). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

22 Tremaine, *The Butterfly rises*, 86–87.