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Tilting at Modern: Elizabeth Gordon's "The Threat to the Next America"

By

Kathleen LaMoine Corbett

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requirements for the degree of

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Andrew M. Shanken, Chair

Professor Kathleen James-Chakraborty

Professor Galen Cranz

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## Abstract

Tilting at Modern: Elizabeth Gordon's "The Threat to the Next America"

by

Kathleen LaMoine Corbett

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This dissertation addresses the ways that gender, politics, and social factors were exploited and expressed in the controversy surrounding the April 1953 *House Beautiful* editorial, "The Threat to the Next America." *House Beautiful's* editor, Elizabeth Gordon, wrote and published this editorial as a response to ongoing institutional promotion of experimental modern residential architecture, which fell under the umbrella of the International Style, a term that came from a 1932 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Gordon warned her readers that the practitioners of the International Style, which she deplored as "barren," were designing and promoting unlivable housing. She specifically condemned German immigrant architects Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, as well as French architect Le Corbusier. "The Threat to the Next America" was laden with terms and phrasing that exploited American fears of communism, which in that year were at a fever pitch due to the well-publicized "witch hunts" conducted by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Gordon's editorial provoked strong responses from architects, designers, and others. Some cheered her for standing up to institutions that many felt had deliberately excluded alternate threads of modern architecture and design from public promotions. Others damned her for endangering the careers of European immigrant designers by obliquely associating them with communism as McCarthyism swept the country. Many of the negative responses also revealed a high level of discomfort with the fact that a woman had inserted herself so vociferously into what had primarily been an internal debate in the heavily male-dominated field of architecture. Others were upset that a magazine so associated with mass consumption of household goods should speak out against architects who had carefully avoided the appearance of commercialization.

Those who had roles in the controversy surrounding the editorial were some of the best known figures in American modern design at mid-twentieth century. They included Frank Lloyd Wright, Douglas Haskell, Lewis Mumford, Jean and Harwell Hamilton Harris, William Wurster, and many others. By framing the controversy and the roles of these individuals in applicable historic and cultural contexts, it is possible to better understand how "The Threat to the Next America" affected Elizabeth Gordon's legacy, *House Beautiful's* ongoing interpretation and presentation of modern design, and public acceptance and non-acceptance of modern housing in the United States.



For Eleanor Heidenwith Corbett

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This project began as a paper for a seminar on the Bauhaus taught by Professor Kathleen James-Chakraborty in 2001. Her encouragement and guidance was one of the rocks upon which I stood as I transformed a term paper to a dissertation, as was her work on the Bauhaus. Despite our initial concerns that it was an “Oakland thesis” (as Gertrude Stein said of Oakland, “there’s no there, there”), it turned out to be a bigger story than we had imagined. So, first and foremost, I owe a profound debt of thanks to Kathleen. The other members of my committee also deserve my heartfelt thanks. Andrew Shanken, who stepped in to chair my committee when Kathleen went on to emerald pastures in Dublin, has been in all ways generous, and having him on board has led me to produce a much stronger work. Professor Galen Cranz, in addition to providing a theoretical cornerstone of my understanding of this story, has been patient and ever cheerful, and I thank her for that. I also thank Professor Laurie Wilkie, who stepped in when another committee member resigned from the University; she is a great thinker, a writer I look up to, and a dear friend. Other present and past faculty at Berkeley have been supportive, patient, and generous as well. I would like to especially thank professors Paul Groth, Nezar AlSayyad, Greg Castillo, and Michael Johns.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1953, as flowers began to bloom in Central Park, a very angry woman sat at a typewriter in an office high on Madison Avenue in New York and declared war on International Style modern architecture. Elizabeth Gordon, age 47 and in her eleventh year as editor-in-chief of *House Beautiful*, wrote and published “The Threat to the Next America” in the April issue, setting off a firestorm of pro and con letters and competing editorials defending and condemning her stance. Her fury at the ongoing institutional promotion of works of residential architecture that she felt were “barren” and “unlivable” would exacerbate tensions around modern architecture that had been ongoing for many years. The polemic provoked strong responses from architects, designers, and others. Some cheered her for standing up to institutions that many felt had deliberately excluded alternate threads of modern architecture and design from public promotions. Others damned her for endangering the careers of European immigrant designers by obliquely associating them with communism as McCarthyism swept the country. Many of the negative responses also revealed a high level of discomfort with the fact that a woman had inserted herself so vociferously into what had primarily been an internal debate in the heavily male-dominated field of architecture. Others were upset that a magazine so associated with mass consumption of household goods should speak out against architects who had carefully avoided the appearance of commercialization.

Paradoxically, “The Threat to the Next America” and the ensuing chain of events has been little studied, even while the past decade has seen the a great deal of growth in the scholarship of the history of architecture and design in the post-World War II (postwar) period.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Increasingly the period from the end of World War II until approximately the mid-1960s, is written as “post-World War II” in technical documents, in order to distinguish it from other periods of time following other wars and as a matter of technical accuracy. However, I have elected to follow what has been generally accepted

This scholarship is something for which there is a strong need. Academic architectural historians make it their business to discover and explain what buildings and places mean, and among those who rely on this body of scholarship are professionals in the field of historic preservation, who are tasked with deciphering and often preserving the built historic record. In the United States, these professionals think in terms of a pre-defined age limit for “historic” places, a 50-year mark stipulated by the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. As this 50-year rule has come to envelope the cultural landscapes of the postwar period, the volume of buildings and structures it includes has expanded enormously, encompassing residential, commercial, civic, and industrial landscapes that were built in the U.S. on a scale unheard of prior to World War II. This was a time when modernism was finding increasing acceptance in all of these contexts, and the landscapes of domestic modernism, such as enclaves of custom-designed housing and upscale modernist subdivisions that appeared in the 1950s, have today increasingly been subject to preservation efforts, often mounted by the residents themselves.

Because historic preservation efforts are, at their best, citizen based, the impetus for the study and preservation of postwar modernist architecture in the United States is linked to the rediscovery, in popular culture, of “Mid-Century Modern” styles. I use the term *styles* in the plural because the term really encompasses a spectrum of designs on the continuum of postwar modern architecture, and seems to now include even some buildings that were not considered modern in the postwar period. In today’s usage, “Mid-Century Modern Style” is jargon for a category of postwar architectural and interior design that resulted from changes in residential architectural forms and spatial arrangements, technological advances in mass production, unprecedented consumer demand, and heavy institutional marketing of modernist aesthetics, all of which led to a massive increase in the design and production of modernist architecture and furnishings. Yet so often those who document historic architecture (especially those who work in the field of historic preservation) find that they are required to think about modernism in terms of style, even though applying it as a useful concept is problematic.

Today’s shelter magazines that focus on modern design, such as *Modernism*, *Dwell* and *Atomic Ranch*, show a spectrum of style choices that have evolved from, at one pole, the “organic” modernism of Frank Lloyd Wright and his students and followers, and at the other pole from the Bauhaus-influenced architecture that was favored by the students and followers of European modernist architects (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius being the two most influential examples) who came to the United States to practice in the years before the outbreak of World War II. After the 1932 International Style Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), modern architecture was promoted by the professional architectural press as a logical and/or inevitable next step in the American way of living. As these “boosters” cast modernism as triumphant and inevitable, a backlash against modern architecture arose, its participants deriding modernist design as elitist, nonsensical, and un-American. This range of attitudes was strongly in play during the postwar years, as the nation stepped into an age that, although marked by imagery of a fearless tomorrow, was in reality fraught with anxieties about totalitarianism, communism, fascism, and nationalism. Many in the field of architecture and design fancied that their work was above the political fray, but with “The Threat to the Next America,” Elizabeth Gordon tapped the public’s fears and hit hard a collective nerve in the multiple, institution-centered communities of modern architecture.

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convention in designating this time period; throughout this dissertation, the term “postwar” applies to the period following World War II.

With this dissertation, I have two aims. The first is it to carefully examine, and to shed some light on, Elizabeth Gordon's possible motives in writing and publishing "The Threat to the Next America." The editorial might have passed for any other strong declaration about modern design—such declarations were frequent in the shelter press at mid-century—were it not for her rhetorical tone, which matched some of the most overwrought of the anti-communist writings of the Cold War. Gordon called the articles in the professional journals and the exhibitions at MoMA that promoted International Style architecture, "propaganda," saying that such promotion undermined the American people's confidence in their own taste choices, leading to "cultural dictatorship." She singled out European immigrants who had been connected to the Bauhaus, a German school of architecture and design that had closed in 1931, as being particularly culpable in creating "Bad Modern" design, which she claimed MoMA and other institutions were foisting on the American public. In so doing, Gordon opened herself up to blistering criticism from their champions and other supporters.

The story of Elizabeth Gordon and "The Threat to the Next America" is a lively and surprisingly complex one. I have tried to come at it with an open mind and with the attitude that there are no gods or monsters in this narrative. The story is useful to understanding the ways taste and consumption were formed and expressed in the postwar United States. As an arbiter of consumer taste at a time when the ground of material choices was seemingly in constant shift beneath the feet of U.S. consumers, Elizabeth Gordon helped to guide taste choices on a national scale (and eventually in Europe as well). Through her advocacy of climate control in housing, her establishment during wartime of *House Beautiful's* "Home Planner's Study Course," and the much more influential Pacesetter program, Gordon had far reaching influence on the landscapes of postwar housing. Yet she remains one of the most overlooked figures in the history of twentieth century housing, and this is at least partially because of the outrage in the architectural community over her campaign against International Style housing.

The second of my aims is to understand the many responses to the editorial that appeared, both in the press and in private correspondence. These are valuable for what they say about the publications in which they appeared, as forums of architectural discourse, and for what they say about the participants in those forums, their allegiances, and group memberships formed around aesthetics, taste affiliation, educational background, and ties to heroic figures in architecture culture like Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright. To accomplish these aims, I attempt to understand the complexities of the event through multiple lenses. These include the current theory and scholarship regarding the formation of taste and mass consumption in the postwar period, the historiographic accounts of the tensions over modern design in the postwar period, and sociological frameworks that help explain the actions and words of the architectural and design camps that, while they certainly predated Gordon's editorial, were starkly defined in the light of it.

Since the publication of "The Threat to the Next America," many scholars and critics of modernist design have given Gordon's motives as xenophobia or a desire to increase circulation. The editorial is often mentioned in architectural history and scholarship, but its impact and place in architectural discourse has been little studied. The bombastic tone of the editorial, as well as its seemingly deliberate exploitation of the anti-communist fears gripping the country at the time of its publication, have prevented its inclusion in the canon of postwar architecture literature: William H. Jordy, in his 1976 work, *American Buildings and their Architects: Vol. 4, The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, considered part of the core canon of



architectural history studies, referred to it only obliquely, calling the editorial part of the “vulgarization” of regional idealism, and Gordon’s related promotion of “American modern,” “flag waving.”<sup>2</sup> More recently it has been seen as somewhat “crackpot,” or at best an overreaction, by such important scholars of the discipline as Dianne Harris and Greg Castillo.<sup>3</sup> Such assessments are not inaccurate, but the story is more complex.

To unravel its complexities, I shall attempt to examine “The Threat to the Next America” as it is situated in three overlapping and interwoven historic contexts, all of which are important to understanding the events I attempt to document here. I do not discuss these contexts discretely, but utilize them throughout the story, which generally proceeds chronologically. First, by examining the political environment in which she and the other players on this stage acted, especially as it pertained to the actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and public anxiety around the Cold War, I am able to better understand the power of the charges of McCarthyism and xenophobia that were leveled against Gordon in the aftermath of “The Threat to the Next America.”

Secondly, I will attempt to situate “The Threat to the Next America” in the context of gender and consumption in the postwar period, both in mass consumption and in the more “rarified” context of the consumption of architecture by the avant-garde. By examining the institutional promotion of modern architecture, especially the media that marketed residential architecture and design (i.e., “service” magazines [the women’s and shelter genres] and professional magazines [the architectural trade journals]), I may better understand the media environment in which Gordon functioned as a member of her chosen profession. In an argument between camps of design, it is important to remember that Gordon and some of the most important of the other players on this stage were not designers; they were pundits and arbiters of taste. This story is not about the thing, but the idea of the thing. That is, it is about imagery and perceptions of architecture and design, much more than it is about built architecture and designed objects, which are the result of not only these kinds of imagery but many other factors as well.

Lastly, I will attempt to place the controversy within the history of modern architecture in the postwar period, a time when the acceptance of modernist design was both a symbol and a symptom of the United States’ new position as a world power. The ferocity with which Gordon was both vilified and lionized by architects and designers in the architectural press following the appearance of the editorial is a manifestation of the fact that, as suburban landscapes became the prevalent setting for new housing for U.S. families, a battle was already being fought for the right to steer public taste as it pertained to modernist design. By writing “The Threat to the Next America,” Gordon threw behind-the-scenes tensions among architects and designers into the open field of public discourse, angering many architects who felt the debate was not appropriate for such a forum, but belonged in a more restricted field of architect-peers.

A fourth area of consideration, so overarching in its effect that it cannot be considered as a discrete context but rather is an integral part of all components of this chain of events, is that gender and sexuality must be considered as part of the underlying cultural foundations of the motivations of members of both camps in the argument around “The Threat to the Next America.” That Gordon was a woman firing volleys at a group of male architectural

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<sup>2</sup> Jordy, *American Buildings, Volume 4*, 175.

<sup>3</sup> See Harris, Dianne, “Making Your Private World: Modern Landscape Architecture and House Beautiful, 1945–1965”; Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 112-115.

practitioners, to many of whom women's programmatic needs were an afterthought, had profound bearing on the way she was understood at the time.

In Chapter One, I provide background for both *House Beautiful* and Elizabeth Gordon and try to place *House Beautiful* in the context of women's and shelter magazines, understanding that these are neither synonymous nor are they entirely separate genres of publication. Believing that it is important to understanding her actions in 1953, I offer a both a brief history of the origins and early editorial mission of *House Beautiful*, and a biographical synopsis of Elizabeth Gordon's years prior to her employment there. Chapter 2 examines Gordon's early years at *House Beautiful*, from 1942 through 1950, including the magazine's response to consumer behavior patterns during wartime. It also documents the shift of *House Beautiful's* design focus from a broader traditional-to-modern design palette to one that almost exclusively promoted modern design—ultimately with an emphasis on Bay Area and Northwest regionalism, and examines the beginnings of *House Beautiful's* insertion of nationalism into its marketing of modern designs. Chapter 2 also chronicles the beginnings of Gordon's personal relationship with Frank Lloyd Wright, who would be important to *House Beautiful's* "brand" in the aftermath of "The Threat to the Next America." I also document Gordon and Wright's estrangement from 1950 to 1953 over her refusal to publish an article he proposed, an incident I believe is important to this story because it proves that he had no direct input into the editorial content of the April 1953 issue of *House Beautiful*, in which the editorial appeared.

Chapter 3 examines the April 1953 issue of *House Beautiful* for its thematic content, including a closer exploration of "The Threat to the Next America." In the chapter, I indulge in some speculation as to who among her professional contacts and circle of influence may have encouraged or informed Gordon's crusade, including Jean Murray Bangs Harris, T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, Joseph A. Barry, and Lewis Mumford. Because the issue that contained the "manifesto" of her campaign against International Style modernism is, by all logic, comprised of content that supports it, I also examine other articles and features that ran in the April 1953 issue. These include Joseph Barry's feature on architect John Yeon's Shaw House, an article on custom housing by Wolfgang Langewiesche, and Lyman Bryson's article on "The Next America."

Chapter 4 goes beyond the April 1953 issue to May of that year, in which *House Beautiful's* expose of Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House highlighted gender as a weapon on the battleground of modern domestic design. Employing Alice Friedman's work on Edith Farnsworth in particular, I examine the ways in which Farnsworth's gender was a factor in the design of the house, and also became a factor in the ensuing controversy over the house's functionality versus its status as a ground-breaking work of "pure" architecture. I also look at the way gender has been operative as a subtext in the ongoing historical narrative of the Farnsworth House, which has been presented in such a way as to elevate Mies and his quest for a "pure" architecture and to trivialize or even demonize his client, Edith Farnsworth, a trope that is still perpetuated by its current owner, the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine the response to Gordon's editorial in the professional press and also in other magazines outside of the shelter and architectural press, and also her reaction to them. These are understood primarily through published responses, including and especially the body of letters-to-the-editor published in *House Beautiful*, *House and Home*, *Architectural Forum*, *Progressive Architecture*, and *The AIA Journal*, as well as the editorials that ran in those magazines in response to Gordon's campaign. I also examine responses in the non-architectural press, such as newspaper accounts and *Harper's*. Which organs of the media favored which

“camp” of design, or which did not favor any but instead tried simply to position the debate in the context of the public good, is helpful to understanding the ways social and professional structures in the architecture profession were reflexive and/or self-generating. All of this leads to the ultimate question, did “The Threat to the Next America” make any difference? Have landscapes of housing in the United States, in the postwar period and in the decades hence, been affected by Gordon’s campaign against European modernism and the International Style? As rhetorical questions, these are likely unanswerable, but it is my hope to be able to shed some light on possible connections, and to further understanding of the place of this controversy in the history of architecture.

The research involved to understand this chain of events has consisted of consulting primary documentation, secondary sources, and a few scholars or others who are familiar with the story. Primary sources have included, first and foremost, the architectural and shelter periodicals that were the stages upon which the actors stood, especially *House Beautiful*, *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*, *Progressive Architecture*, the *AIA Journal*, *Architectural Record* and *Interior Design*. Other non-architectural magazines of the period, including *Harper’s*, *Fortune*, and *Business Week*, contained articles or advertising that pertained to either controversies around modern architecture or “The Threat to the Next America.” Numerous archives across the United States were contacted and accessed for correspondence and internal memos written to and by the historical figures discussed in this dissertation, and excerpts from some of this correspondence is included in these pages. Individuals who volunteered their recollections of Elizabeth Gordon include: James Lamantia, an architect who, in the 1960s, worked with Gordon on the remodel of Tavern on the Green restaurant in New York; Brooke Shearer Talbot, Gordon’s goddaughter; Brooke’s mother, Marva Shearer, who was Gordon’s good friend and who also wrote for *House Beautiful* in the 1940s and 1950s; and William Langewiesche, whose father wrote for *House Beautiful* under Gordon and who recalled her input into his family’s home.

Although many secondary sources were consulted and/or cited for this dissertation, several have been especially important to the framing of this research. Sociological works have enabled me to understand the motivations and responses of these actors in the larger context of individual and group behavior. To this end, sociologist Galen Cranz’s model of the formation of taste, which posits taste as the outcome of an equation of pragmatic and symbolic factors in the selection and arrangement of daily objects, is helpful to understanding the deep-seated objections many (including and especially Elizabeth Gordon) had to the common practice of depicting modernist architecture as stripped of furnishings or non-functional objects.<sup>4</sup> In tandem with this, historian Penny Sparke’s work on the history of gender and taste addresses the underpinnings of Elizabeth Gordon’s position on modern architecture and allowed me to credibly speculate about gender issues as they manifested throughout this chain of events.<sup>5</sup> Sociologist Garry Stevens’ model of the tiered realms of architectural production is also useful for understanding the ways the different camps formed and broke in this and other controversies surrounding modernism and its character in postwar architecture.<sup>6</sup> Both Cranz and Stevens rely on concepts of taste formation developed by French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, whose theories of *habitus* (the mechanism by which we internalize social structures and which in turn dictates practices, which

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<sup>4</sup> Cranz, “A New Way of Thinking about Taste.”

<sup>5</sup> Sparke, *As Long As It’s Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*.

<sup>6</sup> Stevens, *The Favored Circle*.

then create and reinforce social structures) and *doxa* (social structures which, generally accepted and unquestioned as natural, are in fact arbitrary) have helped me better understand the behavior of the actors on this stage.<sup>7</sup>

Histories that have been key to my research range from broader histories of art and architecture to much more focused histories addressing specific events, institutions, or individuals. Some histories were important to my understanding of the postwar period in the United States as a more general context and backdrop against which *House Beautiful* functioned to guide consumer taste choices. Historian Lizbeth Cohen's analysis of World War II consumer behavior, in which the *citizen consumer*, who understood a patriotic duty inherent in living with the restrictions imposed on wartime consumption, is juxtaposed with the *purchaser consumer*, who exercised the ability to consume outside of government-imposed restrictions, is helpful to understanding Gordon's pitchmanship and the early depictions of modern architecture in *House Beautiful* under her editorship in the WWII years.<sup>8</sup> Cohen also addresses the American mode of deferred gratification that was so prevalent during the war years, and can be easily understood as one of the important underpinnings of Gordon's early attitudes toward modernism in housing. Approaching this same idea of deferred gratification and anticipation during WWII from another angle is architectural historian Andrew Shanken, who examines architects, advertising, and wartime consumption patterns, elucidating the larger history of wartime urban planning, the intertwined cultures of architecture and consumer behavior, and architectural representation in advertising.<sup>9</sup>

Another set of historiographic works have been particularly useful for understanding the events and actors surrounding the establishment of modern architecture, and in particular European modernism, that gave rise to the controversy documented here. Kathleen James-Chakraborty's writings on the Bauhaus and its fundamental place in the history of modernism has been critical to my understanding of the crucial place those associated with the school held in the formation of design in the United States in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (in fact, this dissertation sprang from a paper I wrote for her seminar on the Bauhaus in 2001).<sup>10</sup> Architectural historian Greg Castillo's work has been helpful to my understanding of the role *House Beautiful* played in the selling of domestic modernism in Europe in the postwar period. Castillo offers the most in-depth scholarly look to date at Gordon and the role "The Threat to the Next America" played in positioning *House Beautiful* as a design studio selling American domesticity to Europeans.<sup>11</sup> Alice Friedman's analysis of the story of the Farnsworth House helped me enormously as I grappled with the ways gender underscored the events that unfolded around "The Threat to the Next America."<sup>12</sup> Friedman's work also held me aloft as I became aware that, as regards stories of place, the people who inhabit the places are as important as those who create the places, and that, astoundingly, this seems to be a relatively recent realization in architectural scholarship (outside of vernacular architecture studies). As Friedman writes the female client into the history of modern architecture, architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright's incisive examination of the

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<sup>7</sup> Stevens, *The Favored Circle*; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; *Distinction*.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*.

<sup>9</sup> Shanken, *194X*.

<sup>10</sup> James-Chakraborty, *Bauhaus Culture*.

<sup>11</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*.

<sup>12</sup> Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*.

systems of power that have been responsible for the exclusion of women in the modernist narrative has also been important to my research.<sup>13</sup>

A great many works were helpful to my understanding of the importance of certain key players on this stage. In particular, Robert Wojtowicz's insightful examination of the body of Lewis Mumford's punditry and the role it played in 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism was critical to my understanding of Mumford as a key behind-the-scenes figure in this story.<sup>14</sup> Not so behind-the-scenes was Frank Lloyd Wright, about whom an enormous body of scholarship exists. Some of the most useful of these works have been authored by Anthony Alofsin and also by Neil Levine, both of whose scholarship as regards Frank Lloyd Wright's seminal position in 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture was helpful to my own appreciation of Wright's work and subsequently his place within the chain of events chronicled in this dissertation.<sup>15</sup> Meryl Secrest's biography of Wright, as well as the admittedly less scholarly book, *The Fellowship*, brought many of the characters on this stage to life in a way that allowed me to understand their stories on an everyday, human level.<sup>16</sup>

And it is that understanding which is at the heart of my interest. History can always be interesting, if told in such a way as to make it so, but it is only important if it teaches us something about the way we live today. The history of Elizabeth Gordon and "The Threat to the Next America" may well have much to teach us in a time when the U.S. is the site of deep cultural, social, and political fissures—demonization of the "Other" has become such a pervasive trope in American culture that nearly anyone qualifies as a demon in someone's eyes. The battle over "The Threat to the Next America" was, at its core, a fight for the right to disseminate imagery of domestic utopias at a time when the very meaning of domesticity was undergoing profound transformations. By better understanding the complexities and vociferousness of this battle, I feel we can better understand the power those institutions still hold today, and the sway they have over our lives and those places we call home.

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<sup>13</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, "Women in Modernism"; *USA*.

<sup>14</sup> Wojtowicz, *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism*.

<sup>15</sup> Alofsin, "Frank Lloyd Wright and Modernism"; Neil Levine, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*.

<sup>16</sup> Secrest, Meryl, *Frank Lloyd Wright*; Friedland and Zellman, *The Fellowship*.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE WORLD AND THE WOMAN BEHIND “THE THREAT TO THE NEXT AMERICA”

“The Threat to the Next America” was published at a pivotal point in Elizabeth Gordon’s 22-year career at *House Beautiful*. Although her intent was ostensibly to warn American consumers away from a style or strain of modernist housing she claimed undermined individual taste choices, she marketed the issue in such a way as to indicate she was attempting to diminish the influence of European modernist designers who had established practices or otherwise gained influence in the United States during the Interwar years. She also positioned herself in competition for influence with selected other American arbiters of taste, ones who promoted what had become known (and is still often known) as the International Style. These competitors in taste arbitration included, in particular, Alfred Barr, Jr. and Philip Johnson at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and Douglas Haskell at the *Magazine of Building* (*Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*).

The editorial and the April 1953 issue in which it appeared—an issue centered around the theme “How You Will Live in the Next America”—strongly promoted a link between American entitlement, modernist style, and the large-scale consumption of mass-produced goods. The issue used as its thematic glue a recently published book by a well-known radio personality, educator, and executive at CBS, Lyman Bryson, who contributed an article on mass-produced household goods for the issue. Entitled *The Next America: Prophecy and Faith*, the book was well reviewed at the time, and revealed Bryson to be, as one reviewer noted, “. . . a staunch individualist . . . hostile to charismatically induced commitments to organization, leader, or nation as such.”<sup>1</sup> The book offered strong support for Gordon’s strenuous claim, in “The Threat to the Next America,” that her readers needed to have confidence in their own taste

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<sup>1</sup>Riesman, 387.

choices. To do this, she implored, they had to resist the dictates of those who declared those choices to have been made for them, as Philip Johnson had done in his preface to MoMA's 1952 *Built in USA* catalog when he quoted former museum director Alfred Barr, Jr., as saying that the "battle of modern architecture has long been won" and that the museum's ongoing promotion of modernist architecture was "simply the continuous, conscientious, resolute distinction of quality from mediocrity..." Johnson went on to write that such "proclamations" were the "prime function of [MoMA's] Department of Architecture and Design."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, they seemed to be. Architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright has observed that they still are—such pronouncements about architecture are one of the ways architectural institutions (i.e., museums, schools, publications, and organizations) preserve their authority, quelling criticism and casting those who do criticize or question into the role of "Other." Wright notes that these battles for the architectural high ground are characterized by the polarizing "we vs. they" verbal trope, with not only institutions of power but those who question them claiming the "we" position in this scenario. She points to the systematic veneration of "master" architects by these institutions as a method of excluding from the canon of the work of other categories of architects and designers, particularly women.<sup>3</sup> Wright's focus is on writing women back into the history of design, and while she makes a case for expanding the canon to include women architects and designers, I would argue her point one step further: that institutional veneration of "master" architects to the exclusion of great bodies of work in the historic built environment, has also done much to minimize the history of women's influence on architecture in their roles as clients and consumers.

In this vein, architectural historian Kathleen James-Chakraborty has shown that the profound transformation of American architecture and design in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was far more a result of socio-political and economic events, the Great Depression and the Second World War in particular, than it was the result of any promotion or taste arbitration on the part of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), even the International Style Exhibition of 1932.<sup>4</sup> According to James-Chakraborty governmental policies like New Deal programs, defense housing initiatives during WWII, and federal mortgage guarantees, such as those contained in the GI Bill, dictated architectural forms, defined possibilities, and informed the public's imagination to a far greater extent than "the flirtation of a handful of American architects with the white stucco boxes exhibited by Hitchcock and Johnson at the Museum of Modern Art."<sup>5</sup> Yet even 60 years after that exhibition, MoMA was touting it as having "figured prominently in the development of architectural theory and practice in the twentieth century."<sup>6</sup>

Today the exhibition seems best remembered as the origin of the term, *International Style*.<sup>7</sup> Amorphous as it now seems, the term carries weight with architectural historians and historic preservationists. The exhibition remains a significant moment in 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural history because it gave the American public its first concentrated look at the architectural innovations that were resulting from the shared ideas of European modernists, especially those associated with the Bauhaus, an important German school of architecture and

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<sup>2</sup> Hitchcock and Drexler, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn. "Women in Modernism," 2.

<sup>4</sup> James-Chakraborty, "From Isolationism to Internationalism," 153-170.

<sup>5</sup> James-Chakraborty, "From Isolationism to Internationalism." 156.

<sup>6</sup> Riley. *International Style : Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art*.

<sup>7</sup> Jordy, *American Buildings Volume 4*, 118.

design, which operated from 1919 to 1931 in Germany, and the American architects who both influenced them (Frank Lloyd Wright was included) and were influenced by them (Howe and Lescaze' Philadelphia Saving Fund Society building was a notable example). The exhibition book, written by Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, codified the principles of the International Style: volume over mass, order without symmetry, and rejection of ornament.<sup>8</sup> Anthony Alofsin has written that the exhibition gave MoMA (at that time a new museum), the credibility to bestow the “cultural imprimatur” on modern architecture and planning, but even by Hitchcock's own later admission, within a few years these principles were too restrictive to contain the ways that European modernism found expression in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Gwendolyn Wright writes that by calling the exhibition “Modern Architecture—International Style,” Hitchcock, Johnson, and Museum director Alfred Barr, Jr., “christened the project ... as if theirs was the only legitimate use of the term.”<sup>10</sup> In Europe principles of modern architecture were, to a great extent, formulated to address social conditions following the devastation of World War I; these principles were articulated in the International Congresses for Modern Architecture (CIAM), which had been founded in 1928. Yet at the International Style Exhibition, social program was “relegated to a back room ... overseen by Lewis Mumford and Catherine Bauer” who were vocal if not necessarily powerful advocates of housing reform.<sup>11</sup>

Two decades later, in 1953, as Elizabeth Gordon sat before a typewriter in a fit of pique and blistered what she called the “cult of austerity,” singling out especially the handful of well known immigrant architects formerly associated with the Bauhaus, she was writing from a position that was at least partially formed by the tension between two competing narratives as regarded the formation of domestic modernism. One was the narrative put forth by MoMA and such organs of the professional press as *The Magazine of Building: House and Home* and *Architectural Forum*, which put European modernism at the heart of the transformation of domestic architecture in the United States. The other was the narrative found in the built environment, written on the suburban landscapes of newly minted tract homes. Many of these cookie-cutter homes had modern elements, such as open plans that allowed for efficiency and ease in everyday living, but they also contained such traditional elements as gabled roofs (federal guidelines dictated that the flat roofs were too leaky for government subsidization), front porches, and repetitive, uniform siting on repetitive, uniform lots. In a 1945 article in *Harper's*, art and architecture critic Russell Lynes explained that modernism was fine for the workplace but not for homes, writing that “...we are likely—not being as rational as the modern architects would like us to be—to cling to the traditional.”<sup>12</sup>

This second narrative told the tale that housing in the United States was the result of market-based enterprise, peacetime applications of wartime technologies, and designer innovations that sprang from many sources, including the influence of a wide range of schools and imagery. James-Chakraborty notes that MoMA's sequel to the International Style Exhibition, the 1944 exhibition, “Built In USA 1932-1944,” curated by Elizabeth Mock, contained a dearth of buildings that bore any resemblance at all to those in the International Style Exhibition of 1932, and most owed more to Frank Lloyd Wright than to European influence,

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<sup>8</sup> Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*.

<sup>9</sup> Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism*, 83.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *USA*, 83.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn. *USA*, 83-84.

<sup>12</sup> Lynes. “Architects in Glass Houses,” 339.



having “little trace of the industrial imagery so crucial to buildings like the Bauhaus.”<sup>13</sup> Part of the story of the development of what James-Chakraborty has called this “alternative modernism” is the ability of architects in the postwar period to respond to regional considerations, both social and environmental, using expressions and solutions that grew from sources other than European influence, such as the Arts and Crafts movement.<sup>14</sup> This gave rise to regional modernisms, which were identifiable even in the postwar period. Architecture critic Lewis Mumford’s 1947 “Sky Line: Status Quo” column in *The New Yorker* identified a strain of modernism he called “the Bay Region style” that was not an imitation of mechanistic functionalism, practiced by “rigorists,” but was “a free yet unobtrusive expression of the terrain, the climate, and the way of life on the Coast.”<sup>15</sup> Mumford singled out William Wurster as a current practitioner of the “Bay Region style,” but others, including many featured by Elizabeth Gordon in the pages of *House Beautiful* such as Gardner Dailey, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Henry Hill, would also qualify. Other regions or geographic zones could claim their own regional modernisms as well. These included Paul Rudolph and Ralph Twitchell’s work in Sarasota, Florida, as James-Chakraborty has shown.<sup>16</sup>

Mumford’s declaration of an alternate narrative in the evolution of modern style was so disturbing to the proponents of European modernism at MoMA that the museum organized a symposium, attempting to address what it saw as a fissure in the narrative surrounding the origins of modernism. The symposium, called “What is Happening to Modern Architecture?”, devolved (according to Alfred Barr, Jr.) into a debate between “those who spoke in terms of style and standards, and those who denounced all labels and ‘isms’ as secondary to the problem of production.”<sup>17</sup> Mumford, as moderator and foremost representative of what Barr called “the upholders of the...new humanism of the ‘Bay Region’ school,”<sup>18</sup> somewhat obliquely identified what was perhaps the most salient issue at the heart of the matter: that the curators at MoMA felt it somehow their responsibility to “reign in” trains of thought that ran counter to their own narrative, saying “...I am not here to preach a sermon on the future in modern architecture. I am not competent to do so, in the first place. The fate of modern architecture rests in the hands of the living, who will create it, and of the society of which they are a part.”<sup>19</sup> The ongoing wrestling match over which “style” or aesthetic thread within modernism would triumph, seems to prove the point that modernism *had* triumphed. The argument had not become about destination, but rather about competing origin myths, i.e., which road the profession had taken to arrive at the place at which they found themselves, or if they had arrived at the same destination at all.<sup>20</sup>

Architectural historian Beatriz Colomina, documenting the growing acceptance of modern architecture and design following World War II, casts the phenomenon of the integration of modernism into American life as “the development of a whole new mode of operation.”<sup>21</sup> She notes: “Postwar architecture was not simply the bright architecture that came after the darkness of

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<sup>13</sup> James-Chakraborty, “From Isolationism to Internationalism,” 157.

<sup>14</sup> James-Chakraborty, Kathleen. “The Place of Regionalism...”

<sup>15</sup> Mumford, “The Sky Line: Status Quo,” 110.

<sup>16</sup> James-Chakraborty, “The Place of Regionalism...”

<sup>17</sup> Barr, et al., 4.

<sup>18</sup> Barr, et al., 4.

<sup>19</sup> Barr, et al., 19.

<sup>20</sup> James-Chakraborty, “From Isolationism to Internationalism,” 165.

<sup>21</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 6.

the war. It was the aggressively happy architecture that come out of the war...<sup>22</sup> *Imagery*, Colomina maintains, was in the 1950s “the new architecture,” and the most groundbreaking modern architecture in the postwar period (she uses Charles and Ray Eames and their house, built for *Art and Architecture* magazine’s Case Study program as an example) was built as a result of awareness of this transformation on the part of designers and architects.<sup>23</sup> Modern housing was shown repeatedly and from new angles in ads and features in a wide range of magazines, not all of them architectural or in the shelter press. Much of the imagery was much more futuristic than the great majority of the houses being built, excepting a few for an avant-garde clientele, and in general the public would have been unlikely to accept them; for example, in 1953 the general interest weekly, *Collier’s*, touted “factory made” housing in an article that showed a “house of the future” with moveable inside walls, with accompanying text featuring leading modernist architects like George Nelson and Walter Gropius advocating factory-built housing.<sup>24</sup>

But for all the futuristic imagery, which conjured some excitement but also apprehension on the part of the public, the on-the-ground reality was that factory-made and prefabricated housing was being built all over the country in suburban developments and planned communities, many of which were underwritten by the Federal Housing Administration.<sup>25</sup> It produced little cognitive dissonance, however, only large-scale demand. Some of the most successful developers, such as New Yorker William Levitt, were able to take advantage of revamped financial regulations that allowed developers to borrow money to build homes in advance of selling them to consumers, and for him and his colleagues prefabrication technology was an efficient means to a lucrative end—not for nothing has Levitt been called “the Henry Ford of housing.”<sup>26</sup>

Architecture’s relationship with imagery, a theme Colomina has repeatedly elucidated,<sup>27</sup> is important to the story of “the Threat to the Next America” because Gordon’s objections centered primarily on the imagery of buildings Gordon felt were being foisted on an insecure public, not on actual buildings, of which the Farnsworth House by Mies van der Rohe would be the only built example used to make the somewhat specious point. But, however specious, the point bears some consideration, for magazines that promote lifestyle choices of any kind trade in imagery, photographic, drawn or painted, or described textually, both in articles and in advertisements. These magazines rely on their ability to evoke their readers’ vicarious impulses, asking readers to place themselves in situations depicted for them. Gordon objected to the ways that photographs of interiors showed rooms stripped nearly bare prior to the shoot in order to better reveal architecture, a practice architecture photographer Julius Shulman noted was common, with some architects preferring the most minimal furnishing possible when their work was photographed (Figure 1).<sup>28</sup> Very likely they, as did Gordon, understood this to be contrary to the way American consumers actually lived. But, whereas they felt removing objects from photographs was a legitimate aesthetic choice, Gordon felt it to be dishonest—people had a right to have *things*, and to see such things in imagery that confirmed they were in good taste.

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<sup>22</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Moore and Carter, 70-73.

<sup>25</sup> cf: Wright, *Building the Dream*; Hayden, *Building Suburbia*; Baxendall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*.

<sup>26</sup> Baxandall and Ewen, 122.

<sup>27</sup> cf: Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, *Privacy and Publicity*, and *Cold War Hothouses*.

<sup>28</sup> Shulman, Julius. “Interview,” 46-47.

## FINDING AND DEFINING CONSUMER TASTE

Elizabeth Gordon intended “The Threat to the Next America” to be a defense of the American consumer’s need to gobble the fruits of mass production on a grand scale—a defense against the modernist philosophy encapsulated by Mies’ adage, “less is more.” To understand her journey to this point, it is worth examining the environment in which Gordon formed her professional persona and her public stance vis-a-vis consumption of architecture and household products. Were it not for Elizabeth Gordon, April 1953 might generally have been considered a point of relative calm in the world of discourse regarding the American home. Although some architectural institutions were promoting modern designs that many considered jolting, just as many considered them exciting. Consumers of domestic architecture in the United States, which included most citizens, were enjoying an unprecedented variety of choices in their home design, furnishings, and décor. Postwar demand for housing was high and would remain so, but in 1953 housing starts were finally beginning to catch up with demand,<sup>29</sup> and new technologies in mass production, some of them developed for defense purposes and finding new peacetime applications in consumer goods, let thousands upon thousands of young families each year fill their freshly built suburban homes with manufactured items small and large. After the belt-tightening years of the Depression and the rationing and delayed gratification of the War years, the Mr. and Mrs. American Consumer were happy to loosen their belts and shop—it was as much a patriotic duty as not shopping (through such activities as planting a Victory Garden) was in wartime.<sup>30</sup>

The items consumers would purchase were dictated by their taste, and this was not a simple matter of deciding which style or color best fit the room or the situation. Architectural sociologist Galen Cranz has posited that taste is a process used to mark and establish identities that are not only personal, but are also located in culture (including ethnicities and subcultures), class, gender, and age group. As regards material culture, the practice of assembling and integrating objects and qualities of objects, both the *pragmatic* (a chair, for example, which is necessary to not having to sit on the floor, but also is available in a wide variety of styles, colors, and materials, which can be chosen according to taste) and the *symbolic* (such as a painting or a wall sconce, which are also marked by style, color, and materials, but are not necessary to fulfill an everyday need) comprises a statement of taste.<sup>31</sup> Cranz’s model, “Taste = (Pragmatics + Symbols)Integrated Aesthetically,” establishes that taste is, then, both *selection* and *arrangement*.<sup>32</sup> By understanding taste as both a process and an outcome, we can better understand the values inherent in its operation as a conveyance of identity.<sup>33</sup> In the postwar period, as the palette of goods for selection widened exponentially, consumers looked to taste guides, which included shelter magazines, to inform their own “taste,” which could conceivably be critical to establishing their identity in a new community, be it a suburban tract development or custom-home enclave.

Cranz aptly points out that one especially useful aspect of her model is that it can be applied regardless of gender, as well as regardless of class, age, and ethnicity. Everyone

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<sup>29</sup> Demographia, *Housing Starts per 1000 Households, 1920–2008*.

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, 119.

<sup>31</sup> Cranz, 130-131.

<sup>32</sup> Cranz, 130.

<sup>33</sup> Cranz, 134.

arranges; everyone exercises/performs/creates taste. But historically, as historian Penny Sparke has shown, “taste” has been understood to be concerned with women’s selection and arrangement of domestic objects, and has been commonly demarcated as a gender-related construct.<sup>34</sup> But as an abstract concept, as Cranz has shown, taste is much more. The idea that taste is a critical cultural identifier has been (and still is) applied to areas of everyday existence that go beyond the concrete realm of household decoration and object selection, and is commonly applied to more ephemeral and/or perishable things like media choices, music, food, and drink. In 1990, a best-selling humor book entitled *The Encyclopedia of Bad Taste*, by pop culture documentarians Jane and Michael Stern (today best known for kitschy food travelogues), gave insight into the way that taste ages across generations. The Sterns cited as examples of “bad taste” consumer choices that were, in the postwar period, thought to be in good, or at least credible, taste. Accordion music, the Fontainebleau Hotel (Morris Lapidus 1954), bowling, and even Cool Whip come under the Sterns’ scrutiny as examples of “bad taste.”<sup>35</sup>

But Cranz’s idea that taste is a process contradicts this more established and ubiquitous conception of taste as an inherent quality, something that an individual either possesses or does not.<sup>36</sup> Yet this latter is an idea that was not only still operative as the Sterns conceived of taste in 1990, but was the more accepted conception of taste in the postwar period. Immediately following the end of the war, coinciding with rapid growth in selections in manufactured goods and a sudden and sharp demand for new housing, publications offering consumers help navigate this expanded material world abounded. These included books like the 1946 *How Good Is Your Taste?* (Figure 2), as well as an unprecedented number of women’s and shelter magazines that offered advice on taste choices in home decorating, clothing, music, food, and literature. *House Beautiful* conveyed the idea that taste was both genetic and gendered with its 1946 photo essay, “Is Your Taste Good Enough To Pass On to Your Children?”, in which photographs of women’s bedrooms were compared with photographs of their daughters’ bedrooms.<sup>37</sup> Countless other articles in this and other shelter and women’s magazines offered similar depictions of taste choices, often using celebrity homes and periodically—but not at all consistently—representing modern design as a desirable taste choice.

## WOMEN’S AND SHELTER MAGAZINES: PLACING HOUSE BEAUTIFUL ON A GENRE CONTINUUM

Although both terms are magazine publishing parlance for periodicals that offer images of and advice regarding ideal domesticity, and both genres have women as their primary gender demographic in readership, *shelter magazines* and *women’s magazines* are not synonymous. A great deal of overlap in content between the genres has historically existed and still exists, but shelter magazines have a narrower focus than women’s magazines, with content that more strongly emphasizes home style and decoration, as opposed to the broader range of topics presented in women’s magazines, such as fashion, health, beauty, child rearing, and marriage advice. Women’s magazines in the United States as a genre date to the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century, but the earliest was published quite a bit earlier, with the 1792 periodical, *The Lady’s Magazine and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge*. Although this publication did not last long, by the

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<sup>34</sup> Sparke, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Stern & Stern, 13-15 (Accordions); 54-56 (Bowling); 86-87 (Cool Whip); 122-123 (The Fontainbleau).

<sup>36</sup> Cranz, 131-132.

<sup>37</sup> Guinan, “Is Your Taste Good Enough To Pass On to Your Children?” 123.

outbreak of the Civil War more than one hundred magazines catering to women's interests had appeared in the United States, the best known of these being *Godey's Lady's Book*, which was established in 1848 and ran until 1898.<sup>38</sup> From the 1870s through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's magazines increased not only in the number of titles published, but also in circulation, as advances in printing technology and increased ease of postal delivery due to better rail service nationwide brought more of the magazines to women's hands. A group of magazines that emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading the field in advertising dollars and circulation, became known as the "Big Six" a list comprised of *Delineator*, *McCalls*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Pictorial Review*. Of these, *Ladies Home Journal* boasted not only the greatest circulation figure (almost one million in 1900) of the six women's magazines, but the greatest circulation of any magazine then published in the U.S.<sup>39</sup>

In their early years, the Big Six carried content that made them distinct from one another, but as time passed they became increasingly similar. *Pictorial Review*, *McCall's*, and *Delineator* first evolved from catalogs as fashion and pattern magazines, offering women the latest clothing styles and the patterns with which to make them. *Ladies Home Journal* began life in 1883 as a monthly supplement to *Tribune and Farmer* magazine, published by Cyrus Curtis and edited by his wife, Louisa Knapp (like Elizabeth Gordon, she did not use her married name professionally, although she did not attempt to conceal her married status; her byline read 'Mrs. Louisa Knapp'). *Ladies Home Journal* and its closest competitor at the time, *Woman's Home Companion* (founded in 1874), contained household and fashion advice, as well as poems and fiction, which were to become a staple of women's magazines in the long, bleak decades before the invention of television. Only *Good Housekeeping* began as a magazine devoted to the home, and as historian Mary Ellen Zuckerman notes, retained this focus more strongly than the others.<sup>40</sup>

Although there were many women's magazines published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Big Six proved to have the staying power to last well into or beyond the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* are the only ones of the six still in publication). As their circulation increased, so did their influence. Although today women's magazines are not as associated with political or social content, during the Progressive Era each of the Big Six was noted for its advocacy of a reform movement. Editorial crusades were popular and allowed readers to feel connected to larger movements. Most editors of the Big Six were reformers; for example, Edward Bok, editor of the *Ladies Home Journal*, was a strong advocate of pure food laws, and *Delineator's* Theodore Dreiser (editor from 1906 to 1909) began a strong child rescue campaign, matching orphans with foster homes.<sup>41</sup> This presentation of social and political agendas was part and parcel of the Progressive Era reforms that recast domesticity in terms of sound scientific management principles, disconnecting it from the association with moral virtue that characterized Victorian depictions of domestic life. Bok hired home efficiency expert Christine Frederick as Consulting Household editor at *Ladies Home Journal* (Frederick would go on to work for several women's magazines, ultimately, in 1929, authoring a book for advertisers on best practices in targeting women consumers).<sup>42</sup> In 1920, *Good Housekeeping* advocated strongly for the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act, which

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<sup>38</sup> Zuckerman, 1; Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream*, 82.

<sup>39</sup> Zuckerman, 27.

<sup>40</sup> Zuckerman, pp 5-18.

<sup>41</sup> Zuckerman, 85-86.

<sup>42</sup> Walker, Nancy. *Shaping Our Mother's World*, 107.

provided federal funding for women and children's health. Zuckerman notes that this was at least in part an attempt by publisher William Randolph Hearst to repair his reputation as a journalist after his perceived pro-German stance in World War I.<sup>43</sup>

Women's magazines tended to, in the words of magazine historian Luther Mott, "keep close to their readers."<sup>44</sup> From its inception in 1885, *Good Housekeeping* solicited contributions from readers in the forms of essay and recipe contests, and offered the then-handsome sum of \$25 dollars for household hints on pest extermination chosen for publication.<sup>45</sup> *Ladies Home Journal* also had a high level of reader interaction—Christine Frederick recalled getting nearly one thousand letters per week—and letters often determined the direction content would take.<sup>46</sup> Zuckerman notes that women's magazines both led and reflected societal changes in women's roles in the Progressive Era, "presenting a continuous flow of information about women's expanded sphere of activities and commentary about the effects of these transformations."<sup>47</sup> But there was no monolithic stance on many important women's issues. According to Zuckerman, of the Big Six, *Good Housekeeping*, *McCall's*, *Delineator*, *Pictorial Review*, and *Women's Home Companion* had editorial policies supporting women's suffrage. *Ladies Home Journal* opposed suffrage, although Edward Bok's predecessor and mother-in-law, Louisa Knapp Curtis, had supported it, and Bok made a practice of giving space to the opposing view, running a pro-suffrage piece by Jane Addams in 1910.

Historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan has used nonfiction material in the better-known women's magazines of the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century to examine what she has called "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home," or the myriad ways that the dissemination of such technologies as household electricity changed women's daily lives by affecting sea changes in methods of housework.<sup>48</sup> Cowan notes that depictions of homes lit by gaslight generally disappear by around 1918, but although electric light was convenient for all inhabitants of the home, its effect on women's daily routines was much less profound than, say, electric irons and electric washing machines. These mechanization-based changes led to (or were possibly also impelled by) the disappearance of household servants, another change that can be seen in the pages of women's magazines. Prior to World War I, women shown doing housework in the pages of the magazines were usually servants, but by the end of the 1920s servants were infrequently depicted, and housewives were shown doing most housework. This is corroborated by census statistics, which show nearly a 50% decrease in the number of domestic servants employed between 1900 and 1920.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to depictions of fewer servants and more housewives in ads and features, another way the decrease in domestic servants was evident in women's magazines was in the shift toward showing house plans without servant space, such as maids' bedrooms on the opposite side of the kitchen from family space, or separate staircases leading to the upstairs bedrooms. Women's magazines had long offered idealized or exemplary house plans, some magazines regularly and some as the occasional feature. Under Edward Bok, *Ladies Home*

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<sup>43</sup> Zuckerman, 186.

<sup>44</sup> Mott, 130.

<sup>45</sup> Mott, 130.

<sup>46</sup> Zuckerman, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Zuckerman, 87.

<sup>48</sup> Cowan, 372-385.

<sup>49</sup> Cowan, 378.

*Journal* ran a monthly column showing affordable house plans by famous architects (Frank Lloyd Wright was included on a number of occasions), an idea that was copied by *Delineator* and *Pictorial Review*.<sup>50</sup> Gwendolyn Wright attributes the great growth in circulation at *Ladies Home Journal* in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to Bok's model home program. Although ostensibly designed for the middle class, the houses were sometimes depicted with interior furnishings that were likely beyond the middle class reach, and frequently came with "Good Taste vs. Bad Taste" comparison graphics.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to the consistent presentation of middle class houses in the women's magazines, magazines in the shelter genre often presented houses that were designed and appointed for more affluent consumers, although this is not always the case. This also does not mean that the readership of shelter magazines was affluent, or consistently so, but the tongue-in-cheek term sometimes applied to the shelter press today, "shelter porn"—meaning imagery of houses and interiors that are beyond ones means but that one still desires—likely describes how many in the middle class viewed the homes and gardens presented in the shelter press from its inception. Shelter and women's magazines have in common that they contain domestic advice and present examples of decorating assemblages as worthy taste choices, but the shelter press has, historically and today, offered home design and décor as the core of each issue, whereas women's magazines have offered a much wider range of themes.

Accurate historical data about magazine readers' gender demographics is difficult to obtain, but current numbers can be understood to provide general indicators of the relationship between gender and affluence within readership. The following table lists a sample of women's and shelter magazines currently in publication, with the gender demographic of readership and the Median Household Income (MHI) of the readers, current as of 2009.

Predictably, the ratio of females to males in the readership of shelter vs. women's magazines shows a higher percentage of men as readers of shelter magazines, although women are still in the majority. Of the women's titles listed, *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* were two of the original Big Six women's magazines, which became known within the magazine industry during the postwar period as the "Seven Sisters" (i.e., *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Woman's Day*, *Family Circle*, and *Redbook*—*McCall's* is no longer published as of 2002).<sup>52</sup> It is noteworthy but not necessarily surprising that *House Beautiful's* and *Better Homes and Garden's* demographics lean more heavily toward women than do the other shelter magazines shown, despite that these two generally carry far less non-décor-related content than do *Ladies Home Journal* or *Good Housekeeping*. This can likely be attributed to the aesthetic of the interiors shown in *House Beautiful* and *Better Homes and Gardens*, which are geared toward symbolic objects and arrangements that, by design and color, might be considered to have more "feminine" appeal than do those in *Architectural Digest*, which shows a variety of styles but is narrowly focused on a level of affluence far higher than that of most of its readers (*Architectural Digest's* consistent features showing extravagant celebrity-owned interiors are intended to appeal to the best voyeuristic tendencies on the part of consumers). *House Beautiful* and *Better Homes and Gardens* also carry non-design features, such as recipes and craft ideas, indicting that *House Beautiful* today occupies a middle ground between women's magazines and shelter magazines.

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<sup>50</sup> Zuckerman, 82; Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the Dream*, 164-166.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the Dream*, 164.

<sup>52</sup> Zuckerman, 201-202.

*Dwell* and *Atomic Ranch* have a relatively high percentage of male readers. These two magazines focus exclusively on modern architecture and interior design, with occasional articles on architecture and design history or non-residential architecture, and depict architecture that can be interpreted as targeted at a middle class reader, although, as with *House Beautiful* in its early years, upper middle class is more accurate.

**Table 1. A sample of women’s and shelter magazines showing the gender ratio and median household income (MHI) of readers, for 2009.**

Magazine*	Reader Gender (female to male %)	Reader MHI
<i>Ladies Home Journal</i> Source: <a href="http://www.rja-ads.com">http://www.rja-ads.com</a>	93% : 7%	\$59,500
<i>Good Housekeeping</i> Source: <a href="http://www.ghmediakit.com">http://www.ghmediakit.com</a>	87.8% : 12.2%	\$60,981
<i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> Source: <a href="http://www.rja-ads.com">http://www.rja-ads.com</a>	80% : 20%	\$65,644
<i>House Beautiful</i> Source: <a href="http://www.hbmediakit.com">http://www.hbmediakit.com</a>	87% : 13%	\$72,049
<i>Dwell</i> Source: <a href="http://www.dwell.com/advertise/media-kit.html">http://www.dwell.com/advertise/media-kit.html</a>	59% : 41%	\$97,201
<i>Architectural Digest</i> Source: <a href="http://www.condenastmediakit.com/ad/circulation.cfm">http://www.condenastmediakit.com/ad/circulation.cfm</a>	55% : 45%	\$97,880
<i>Atomic Ranch</i> Source: <a href="http://www.atomic-ranch.com/advertise/media-kit.pdf">http://www.atomic-ranch.com/advertise/media-kit.pdf</a>	55% : 45%	[MHI not available; 38% surveyed earn 51-100K annually; 43% surveyed earn at or over \$101K annually]

\*All sources accessed October 29, 2010.

## THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL: A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS IN THE AGE OF DENS

As with women’s magazines, shelter magazines in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century sprang from a variety of backgrounds. *Better Homes and Gardens*, for instance, was founded in 1922 by former Secretary of Agriculture, Edwin Thomas Meredith, who also published *Successful Farming* magazine. Originally called *Fruit, Garden and Home*, it approached the household as a locus of agricultural production, and guided readers with practical suggestions for, among other things, fruit growing (the name was changed to *Better Homes and Gardens* in 1924).<sup>53</sup> *House and Garden* magazine was founded in 1901 by a group of architects in Philadelphia as a journal of architecture.<sup>54</sup> *Architectural Digest* was conceived with a similar architectural bent in 1920, as an annual publication showcasing selected upper class homes in southern California, and did not adapt its brand to its current format of showcasing celebrity homes until 1976.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Mott, *Volume V*, 36-37.

<sup>54</sup> Mott, *Volume IV*, 324.

<sup>55</sup> “AD History: Inside AD”



*House Beautiful* was founded in 1896 in Chicago by Eugene Klapp and Henry Blodgett Harvey. Magazine historian Frank Luther Mott, writing in 1964, noted that Klapp was an “engineer who had a flair for architecture and literature” and Harvey “also had a liking of such things along with some available cash.”<sup>56</sup> Their magazine was not initially targeted to the affluent, according to Mott, but was published with a principle that was declared in its first issue: “A little money spent with careful thought by people of keen artistic perception will achieve a result which is astonishing.”<sup>57</sup> *House Beautiful* appeared only three years after the 1893 Columbian Exposition, which exhibited a Beaux Arts style that was, at least in part, foundational to the City Beautiful movement (although, as historian William H. Wilson has documented, the exposition did not precisely give birth to the movement<sup>58</sup>). Although sharing a city of origin, *The House Beautiful* and the City Beautiful movement sprang from impulses both similar and disparate: the City Beautiful movement was the impetus for urban beautification programs, in which design of public space, such as buildings, parks, and boulevards, was “expressed as beauty, order, system, and harmony” but these were based on ornate, neoclassical models.<sup>59</sup> *The House Beautiful*, by contrast, reacted *against* revivalism and opulence, advocating instead for a more uncluttered and harmonious approach to architecture and interiors—in its early years, the magazine was marketed as “The Only Magazine in America Devoted to Simplicity, Economy and Appropriateness in the Home.”<sup>60</sup>

According to Mott, Klapp and Harvey took the title of their magazine, *The House Beautiful* (the definite article was not dropped until 1925), from a poem of the same name by Robert Louis Stevenson, published in his collection, *Underwoods*, in 1887.<sup>61</sup> The origin of the title, however, goes back much further. John Bunyan used “The House Beautiful,” taken from the New Testament of the Christian Bible (Acts 3:2), as an allegory for the Christian congregation in *The Pilgrims Progress*, published in 1678. Later, in the Victorian period, “The House Beautiful” saw quite a bit of use as a title, being evocative of the home as a place of beauty, comfort, and moral virtue, which was the central to Victorian ideals. The title was used in 1883 by Mark Twain for an essay in *Life on the Mississippi*, by Clarence Cook for his 1877 guide to furnishing a middle-class home at low cost, *The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks*, and again by Unitarian Universalist minister William C. Gannett in his 1895 schriff on domestic ideals, *The House Beautiful*.

This last is most noteworthy for the impact it made on Frank Lloyd Wright, whose uncle was a close friend of Gannett’s and who designed an edition of Gannett’s book for Auvergne Press.<sup>62</sup> Although Auvergne was not associated with Klapp and Harvey, Wright caught their attention, and his own home was featured in the third issue of the magazine’s “Successful Houses” section. Wright was at that time in the early years of building his practice, having in 1893 been let go from Louis Sullivan’s firm for moonlighting. *The House Beautiful* was the first to publish Wright’s designs in a popular magazine format, but it did not by any means have an exclusive. *Ladies Home Journal*, which published his work in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was undoubtedly much more responsible for building his reputation outside the profession than

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<sup>56</sup> Mott, *Volume V*, 155.

<sup>57</sup> *The House Beautiful*, December 1896, 1. Quoted in Mott, Vol V, 155.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Wilson, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Mott, *Volume V*, 155.

<sup>61</sup> Mott, *Volume V*, 154

<sup>62</sup> Secrest, 155.

was *The House Beautiful*, due to the former's far greater circulation numbers. Nevertheless, Wright's work continued to appear every few years in *The House Beautiful* until 1911. After that, it was not featured in the magazine again until Elizabeth Gordon highlighted his work in the article "Meet Frank Lloyd Wright" in 1946, beginning his long (but, as we shall see, interrupted) relationship with *House Beautiful* until his death in 1959.

Within a year of founding the magazine, Klapp and Harvey sold it to Herbert S. Stone, who according to Mott, continued to edit the magazine as Klapp and Harvey had envisioned it and "...was well fitted by talent and inclination to conduct such a periodical as *The House Beautiful*. He had an almost religious devotion to simple beauty, an abhorrence of display and blatancy in modern life, and a special interest in the development of new art forms and the revival of old ones as he found them within the framework of beauty and suitability."<sup>63</sup> Diane Maddex, an historian with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, has observed the progressive nature of Stone's editorial policy at *The House Beautiful*, which

favor[ed] not just restrained architecture but also popular democracy, public health, better urban housing, city planning, and women's rights. He presumed that most of his readers could not afford their own architects, so he pushed for standardization and mass production as a way to guarantee appropriate dwellings. Readers were advised to toss out their bric-a-brac and other fussy furnishings.<sup>64</sup>

Stone edited *The House Beautiful* for 16 years, leaving in 1913 but retaining an interest until his drowning death in 1915—he went down with the *Lusitania*, returning from a European vacation. Under him, *The House Beautiful* began a legacy of controversial crusades undertaken in the name of design. Mott documents in particular one campaign of 1904-1905, a series which ran under the title "The Poor Taste Of The Rich: A Series Of Articles Which Show That Wealth Is Not Essential To The Decoration Of A House, And That The Homes Of Many Of Our Richest Citizens Are Furnished In Execrable Taste." The series was illustrated with photographs of the interiors under scrutiny, and Stone did not withhold the names of those whose interiors were deplored.<sup>65</sup> In the first of the four part series, he excoriated the lavishly grotesque Bradley-Martin House (Figure 3), writing "some houses are so atrocious that they are valuable as warnings."<sup>66</sup> Another installment demonstrated Stone's profound aversion to taxidermy adapted for use as furniture.<sup>67</sup>

The magazine's first woman editor, Virginia Robie, recalled the series in a 1946 guest column in *House Beautiful* on the occasion of the magazine's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Robie was the magazine's sole paid staff writer in its earliest years and a loyal right hand to Herbert Stone during what she affectionately called "the Stone Age." Although "The Poor Taste Of The Rich" did not contain the political subtext that Gordon's "The Threat to the Next America" did a half-century later, it appears to have set a precedent for controversy in *House Beautiful*'s pages, and can be seen as a forerunner to Gordon's campaign against the International Style. Robie recounted the reaction the articles provoked:

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<sup>63</sup> Mott, *Volume V*, 156.

<sup>64</sup> Maddex, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Mott, *Volume V*, 157.

<sup>66</sup> Stone, December 1904, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Stone, January 1905, 14.

You can imagine the stir this caused. But when critics called it a piece of unethical, bad mannered editing in a newspaper article entitled “The Poor Taste of a Rich Publisher,” Herbert Stone replied, in an article called “Poor Taste and Morals”: Many people recognize good things when they see them and are astonishingly ignorant as to what is bad. This series of articles was designed to point out what is bad, and explain just why it is bad. The intention is as moral as can be. It is a great pity that many unguided persons will try to imitate the lavish furnishings of millionaires’ homes, unless someone shows them how ‘chenille’ they really are, and how, for a very much smaller investment, they can obtain better results.”<sup>68</sup>

*The House Beautiful* periodically featured fiction during the Stone years, but this did not necessarily mean it was reaching for a share of the traditional women’s magazine market; the focus ultimately remained on architecture and interiors. Robie noted that *The House Beautiful* eschewed other areas of domestic life embraced by women’s magazines, such as cooking and child rearing: “There were no recipes, no wine lists, no babies or dogs. [*The House Beautiful*] proved to be a voice crying in the wilderness of golden oak, of gingerbread carving, of cozy corners, of awful lamps and the rise of mission furniture. ‘Where can I find missionary tables and chairs?’ asked a man subscriber. ‘I want them for my den.’ It was the age of dens—few Daniels”<sup>69</sup> She also recalled that the magazine made a deliberate pitch to unmarried men: “Nor did we forget the bachelor. Besides showing him how to decorate his apartment, we even published fiction with the moral that the happiest bachelor (and, presumably, the best potential husband) is the one with comfortable ‘digs’ of his own.”<sup>70</sup>

As the magazine grew—it absorbed two other shelter magazines, *Indoors and Outdoors* (1908) and *Modern Homes* (1910)—so did its level of sophistication; color covers began in 1906, although full color on the inside pages did not appear until the late 1930s.<sup>71</sup> The offices moved from Chicago to New York in 1911. In 1912 it was purchased by G. Henry Stetson and Associates, who combined *The House Beautiful* with their monthly, *American Suburbs*, still retaining *The House Beautiful* as title and Herbert Stone as editor. Stetson, a Philadelphian, did not own it long; it was purchased by Atlantic Monthly Co. the following year. Atlantic Monthly Co., under MacGregor Jenkins, redesigned *The House Beautiful*, and it was Jenkins who promoted Virginia Robie to the position of editor.<sup>72</sup> Her first editorial, published in the April, 1913 issue (precisely 40 years before Gordon’s “The Threat to the Next America”) was an examination of the International Exhibition of Modern Art at the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment Armory in New York—the Armory Show.

Considered by historians to be a major turning point in American art—Peter Gay calls it “epochmaking”—the Armory Show was comprised of around 1,300 works of modern painting and sculpture, most of it produced by American artists. But the show provided flummoxed American attendees with their first good look at European modern art.<sup>73</sup> European artists included such luminaries as Degas, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Picasso, Matisse, and

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<sup>68</sup> Robie, “How We Did It In The Old Days,” 245-246.

<sup>69</sup> Robie, “How We Did It In The Old Days,” 243.

<sup>70</sup> Robie, “How We Did It In The Old Days,” 246-247.

<sup>71</sup> Mott, *Volume V*, 159.

<sup>72</sup> Mott, *Volume V*, 161.

<sup>73</sup> cf. Pohl, 320.; Gay, 162.

Kandinsky, with Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending A Staircase* generating the strongest reaction. Critical response to the show was generally fury—the *New York Herald* grouched, “The United States is invaded by aliens, thousands of whom constitute so many perils to the health of the body politic. Modernism . . . is imperiling the republic of art in the same way.”<sup>74</sup> The *New York Times* spat, “The Armory show is Pathological! It is hideous!”<sup>75</sup> But Robie was enchanted—perhaps predictably, as she had spent so much of her 13 years at *The House Beautiful* encouraging people to break out of traditional and Victorian-influenced molds. “Freakish many of them are,” Robie wrote of the paintings, “but wonderful, nevertheless; wonderful in their boldness, their daring, their audacity. How they smash old ideals! How they shatter old standards!”<sup>76</sup>

Robie only served as editor for two years—she left in 1915—but this short tenure for editors proved to be a pattern at the magazine. Only Ethel B. Powers, who served from 1923 to 1934, approached a tenure as long as Stone's, and hers was still only half as long as Elizabeth Gordon's 22 years. It was under Powers that the name was simplified to *House Beautiful* in 1925, and by the early 1930s it had a circulation of 100,000 and growing. In 1934, however, unable to withstand the financial battering of the Great Depression, *House Beautiful* was sold to the Hearst Corporation's International Magazines division. Hearst immediately merged it with another Hearst monthly, *Home and Field*, but again kept *House Beautiful*'s name, although for many years the cover carried the words “Combined with Home and Field” in small type beneath the masthead. Hearst returned *House Beautiful* to New York, and Powers was replaced as editor by *Home and Field*'s editor, Arthur Hiram Samuels, who was himself replaced in 1936 by Kenneth Stowell. But in 1941, Hearst Magazines installed an editor at *House Beautiful* whom Frank Luther Mott would later describe as “so well fitted for the position that she was to continue to fill it with distinction for many years,” Elizabeth Gordon.<sup>77</sup>

## MASS CONSUMPTION AND THE ROAD TO MCCARTHYISM

The 1920s, when Elizabeth Gordon established herself in adult life, attending college, teaching, marrying, and making critical early career decisions, was a decade that saw a significant expansion of the middle class in the United States. In addition to technological advances that brought about changes in the everyday production/consumption scenarios of domestic life, technological advances during the first decades of the twentieth century resulted in a sharp rise in the public's acquisition of such new products as automobiles and radios. Progressive Reform movements brought, among other things, an emphasis on scientific management in the home and a resultant emphasis on efficiency. This, in combination with a substantial decline in the employment of domestic servants, led to important changes in the ways many women used their time and occupied their homes.<sup>78</sup> The housing shortage at the beginning of the 1920s caused housing to be a focus of the federal government, and then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover sought to address the shortage and shore up the floundering construction industry, lending interdepartmental support to the Department of Labor's “Own

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<sup>74</sup> Pohl, 320.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Lynes, *Tastemakers*, 206.

<sup>76</sup> Robie, “The International Exhibition,” 147.

<sup>77</sup> Mott, 162-163.

<sup>78</sup> Strasser, 162-179.

Your Home” campaign.<sup>79</sup> Later, in a 1931 address to the Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, President Herbert Hoover reiterated the view that home ownership was a value, declaring, “To own one’s own home is a physical expression of individualism, of enterprise, of independence, and of the freedom of spirit.”<sup>80</sup> (By that year Elizabeth Gordon had made her decision to focus on housing as her primary area of journalistic interest, and it is conceivable, diligent researcher that she was, that she might have been in attendance).

The 1920s were also a decade during which Progressive Reform gave way to a deeper belief in free-market capitalism among the members of the expanding middle class. This, in concert with the rise in available consumer goods and a dearth of government regulation protecting consumers, led to a problematic number of dangerous and substandard products, unfair pricing, and false advertising. Historian Lizabeth Cohen notes that it was not until the Great Depression inspired what she calls the “second-wave consumer movement” that consumers came to be viewed as an identifiable interest group, on par with labor and business.<sup>81</sup> Cohen posits that, as New Deal programs helped economically weak groups organize to balance more powerful interests, the concept of the “citizen consumer” developed, and women’s groups like the American Home Economics Association, the American Association of University Women, and many others were at the forefront of the movement to protect consumer interests, advocating such reforms as stricter food and drug legislation, setting of standards for commodities manufacture, and even the creation of a new “department of the consumer.”<sup>82</sup>

Although it is speculation, these landscapes of burgeoning consumption in the 1920s and declining consumption in the early-to-mid 1930s may well have contributed to Gordon’s view, a decade and a half later, that consumers’ freedom of choice and their bank accounts needed protecting from the promoters of International Style architecture. If so, it then follows that her stance must also be considered in the more immediate context of mass consumption as it was being practiced outside her door as she wrote her now-notorious editorial. In the postwar period, shifting the nation from a wartime to a peacetime economy, a process known historically as “reconversion,” also meant reconverting consumers, who had had few windows of time to exercise spending power since the economic collapse of the Great Depression. Following World War II, as the plentiful defense-related jobs became peacetime manufacturing jobs, consumer spending was cast as a patriotic duty, and as Hoover believed years before, home ownership was central to that duty. Cohen notes, “...new house construction was the bedrock of the postwar mass consumption economy, both through turning ‘home’ into an expensive commodity for purchase by many more consumers than ever before and by stimulating demand for related commodities.”<sup>83</sup> In other words, purchasing the kinds of consumables that were featured and advertised in the pages of *House Beautiful* was something each citizen owed to the others to feed the economy.

In the first several years of the Cold War, the idea that mass consumption was patriotic was interwoven with American nationalism. To place “The Threat to the Next America” in this context requires an understanding of nationalism as Elizabeth Gordon might have experienced it, and as it infused her ideas about “American Style,” a term that appeared repeatedly in *House*

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<sup>79</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream*, 196.

<sup>80</sup> Hoover, 38.

<sup>81</sup> Cohen, 23.

<sup>82</sup> Cohen, 33.

<sup>83</sup> Cohen, 121-122.

*Beautiful* at the end of the 1940s and early 1950s. Scholars who purport to define nationalism disagree on a useful definition, but political historian John Fousek defines it as a “general phenomenon [that] may be defined as a way of thinking or “style of thought” through which individuals identify themselves as member of a nation.”<sup>84</sup> He narrows this to mean people who exalt their nation above others. Fousek notes that American nationalism differs from that found in other nations in that the U.S. was not founded on a common language or by a single descent or cultural group, nor do its citizens share a historical territory, but was instead founded on an idea, the “English tradition of liberty,” given concrete form by the political, social, and cultural events of the American Revolution and the Enlightenment.<sup>85</sup> Clifford Geertz, in his study of nationalism in Indonesia, points out that national ideologies tend to stand in starker relief in times of turmoil and change, and the 1940s were certainly such a period in the United States.<sup>86</sup> Fousek identifies as “American nationalist globalism” that ideology that combined the traditional American sense of what, in an earlier time, was called “Manifest Destiny” (i.e., the sense of “chosen-ness, mission, and destiny”) with the notion, emerging after World War II, that the whole globe was a properly within the realm of U.S. concern. This was framed repeatedly in the wartime rhetoric as the American struggle for freedom. Fousek notes that, by 1950, the notion of national loyalty became increasingly entangled with Cold War anti-communism, and both the Truman administration and the popular press frequently equated capitalism with freedom.<sup>87</sup>

The popular press was one of the primary vehicles for dissemination of the rhetoric of American nationalist globalism. *Life* magazine, in July 1945, published an editorial that reflected this theme: “Our nation is a great instrument for good, and power is safer in our hands than most. But that will be so only while we remember that our nation and our sovereignty are not ends but instruments. The purpose of American strength is to promote liberty and self government throughout the human race.”<sup>88</sup> Articles like this promoted free-market capitalism—for which “liberty” and “self government” were code—to American consumers. But political systems involving self government and “liberty” were too abstract for Europeans to apply to everyday modes of living in countries with war-devastated economies. These concepts were given concrete representation in the form of exhibitions, with model houses filled with mass-manufactured domestic products, something European consumers could view and project themselves into. Greg Castillo has explored these institutionalized efforts to promote American-style consumption patterns in Europe following World War II through such instruments as the Marshall Plan. He observes that postwar developments in mass production of housing and furnishings were exported as a way of establishing the United States position as a superpower, and that this was a key way in which the Cold War was waged. The exhibition of American domesticity became tool of propaganda, a tool used by the U.S. to “remove the ‘unpleasant odor’ that capitalism had acquired in much of the world...”<sup>89</sup> Trade fairs in Europe, mounted by American governmental and corporate organizations, presented multiple strains of American design in furnishings, appliances, and other objects to Europeans who lined up to see them by the score (although they were often discouraged by the unreachable American opulence displayed there). *House Beautiful*’s model home design for the 1955 Main Street USA exhibition in Paris

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<sup>84</sup> Fousek, 5.

<sup>85</sup> Fousek, 5.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Fousek, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Fousek, 7.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Fousek, 47.

<sup>89</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 123.

and Milan took a “lowbrow” approach, showing a mix of modern and more traditional furnishings, in a prefabricated house of the type that was populating middle-class suburbs across the country, with architecture and interiors test-marketed in Texas and designed in Indiana and Ohio—a move designed to increase exports.<sup>90</sup>

The linkages between mass consumption, patriotism, and free-market capitalism was constantly driven home to American consumers in the postwar period. If, with “The Threat to the Next America” and elsewhere in the pages of *House Beautiful*, Gordon insinuated to consumers the dangers of allowing communism to infiltrate the American way of life, she was truly subtle compared to other magazines at that time, including the most venerable of the Big Six. Dorothy Thompson, in her monthly column in the *Ladies Home Journal*, was far more overt in her anti-communist rhetoric than “The Threat to the Next America” was, although her warnings were more directly political and she addressed lifestyle issues more broadly than Gordon, whose focus was on architectural and interior design. Thompson’s column of June 1953, entitled “Communism is an Assault on Civilization,” detailed the ways in which communism contradicted the Ten Commandments. Thompson cast the fight against communism in cultural and social terms, just as Gordon cast the fight against International Style architecture in cultural and social terms, but Thompson used the more ephemeral specter of communism in general, contending that communists would, if allowed, drive society into “moral chaos.” In Thompson’s column, communists were credited with attacking liberty, law, and civilization itself;<sup>91</sup> in “The Threat to the Next America” the architects of the “cult of austerity” attack “comfort, convenience, and functional values.”<sup>92</sup>

At the time the aforementioned column by Thompson ran, only two months after “The Threat to the Next America,” anti-communist fervor in the U.S. was peaking. Many historians attribute the fear of Soviet aggression and the fear of communism at home to the Truman Doctrine, a package of aid to Greece and Turkey intended to stave off Soviet takeover of the two countries, which was introduced by President Harry Truman with a speech soundly condemning communism. Other historians see a less directly traceable link in American culture, as historian Richard M. Fried writes, with “a deeply rooted cluster of values shared by much of American society, a set of views antithetical to Communist doctrines and friendly to private property and political democracy.”<sup>93</sup> By the late 1940s, Senator Joseph A. McCarthy was building a notorious career on the back of the beast of American paranoia. He and the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) had mounted investigations that covered the country, investigating institutions like universities and labor unions, and even the United Nations, persecuting citizens who it contended had communist affiliations.

It is important to make a distinction, however, between the virulent anti-communism that was tightly bound into American culture during the postwar period, and the “witch hunting” strategies of McCarthy and the HUAC, for the former did not necessarily equate to support of the latter, as Dorothy Thompson made clear. Thompson rose to journalistic fame reviling Nazis in the 1930s, and she replaced that enemy with communism in the 1940s.<sup>94</sup> As her writings in *Ladies Home Journal* indicated, she had no qualms about condemning communism, but felt that

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<sup>90</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 119-121.

<sup>91</sup> Thompson, 14.

<sup>92</sup> Gordon, “The Threat to the Next America” 127.

<sup>93</sup> Fried, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Kurth, 392.

the senator was a publicity hound. Thompson wrote, “the press, almost unanimously, hates McCarthy, but obliges him with the front page, and condemns him in an editorial.” The term McCarthyism was generally used by McCarthy’s critics, but as Fried notes, the term helped “copperplate” the link between the senator and the fight against communism in the minds of the public.<sup>95</sup> Institutions like the University of California required a loyalty oath of faculty, as did the Screen Actors Guild of its members, and there were many other institutions and unions that did the same, nervous not only about being linked in the public mind with communism, but about the wrath of the HUAC.<sup>96</sup> If, to those on the Right, communism was such a fearful specter that crusaders like McCarthy were turning over every rock to find Communists, by 1953 McCarthyism had ironically become such a specter to those whose leanings were more leftward.

Anti-communist sentiment, to a great extent, went hand in hand with mass consumption. According to the postwar popular press, America was leading the “free world,” and in large part this was leadership by example; to show the rest of the world the best way to live required living in the best way. As the United States recovered from the impact of the depression and the war, heading into the economic “boom times” that lasted well into the 1950s, a strong sense of entitlement concerning material goods formed among the American middle class. Part of the impetus behind this change in attitude towards consumption (beside the obvious fact that Americans had money and resources to spend it on) was the idea that such entitlement went hand in hand with the “return to normalcy” that architectural historian Andrew Shanken contends was associated with the end of the war and long-anticipated homecoming, which had at its metaphorical heart the ideal of “home” (i.e., domesticity). As Shanken puts it: “Even if the remembered prewar home sprang from an imagined past, its illusion offered the comforts of undisrupted conventions, a restoration of all that had been eroded by the displacements of war.”<sup>97</sup> With this came a rejection of much wartime planning (with which many modernist architects had been involved) for a postwar world, and of the social agenda that had lain at the heart of much of it.<sup>98</sup> As the free market’s ascendancy grew, so did the popular notion—thoroughly supported by the wags of anti-communist hysteria—that the social ideals that had been so important to much modernist thought were a gateway to totalitarianism and communism.<sup>99</sup> Modernist designers focused on commercial success. Castillo cites furniture designer George Nelson’s catchphrases—“There is a market for good design” and “Nothing is less consequential in the creation of a work of art than good intentions”—as “epitomiz[ing] a postwar modernism stripped of social idealism.”<sup>100</sup> James-Chakraborty views this transformation in consumer attitudes toward modern design and modern designer’s attitudes toward consumers another way. She observes that, although modernism never really dominated design in U.S. mass production, it presented consumers with goods that were efficiently produced and highly functional: “By converting consumerism into abstract art . . . it dignified the increased standardization that was the cost of the general rise in the postwar American standard of living.”<sup>101</sup>

A sense of entitlement and heightened awareness of individuality as an inherent American quality was richly at work in the entire April 1953 issue of *House Beautiful*, which

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<sup>95</sup> Fried, 132-133.

<sup>96</sup> Fried, 101-103.

<sup>97</sup> Shanken, *194X*, 192.

<sup>98</sup> Shanken, *194X*, 193.

<sup>99</sup> Shanken, *194X*, 192.

<sup>100</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 59

<sup>101</sup> James-Chakraborty, “From Isolationism to Internationalism,” 170.



featured a series of articles on the various aspects of materiality in “The Next America.” Like anyone, Gordon was a product of her time, and she wrote the editorial at a point in the United States’ history when the government was using the Cold War to drive actions in many areas of both international and domestic policy. On a more local scale, the Cold War was driving the everyday actions of individuals, who were building bomb shelters and orchestrating “duck and cover” drills in public schools. “The Threat to the Next America” was aimed at the middle-class American’s self image as the victorious citizen who, having sacrificed aplenty in wartime, deserved all that his or her money could buy in the postwar landscape of mass consumption. Gordon attributed values and characteristics to her readers that were aimed at their ideal self image: they were thrifty—a virtue they had gained in the Great Depression and during the war—and they were also in possession of an uncommon amount of common sense. In addition, they desired well-deserved comfort. She planted the seed in her readers’ minds that they were opposed by a “self-chosen elite” (a term she used in “The Threat to the Next America” twice) among architects and other designers who would inflict upon them something other than their desired and deserved way of life. Although Gordon stopped short of drawing exact parallels or connections, she makes heavy use of “they” vs. “you” pronouns, casting the “cult of austerity” and its followers as an “other” in the same way that Communists were cast in the writings of the Dorothy Thompson in *Ladies Home Journal*. Gordon declared that this group wanted to deprive Americans of their ability to choose their own housing styles, just as Communists wanted to deprive citizens of choices in areas like religion or the media. The best path of resistance was through the healthy exercise of common sense, as guided by *House Beautiful* and as applied to mass consumption.

Yet, while she catered to and took advantage of American xenophobia, that she singled out the Bauhaus school as a result of her own xenophobia does not appear to be the case. Rather, Gordon’s editorial was an attempt to promote her magazine and its message about depth and variety in American consumption patterns. To do this she invoked—but stopped short of directly aligning herself with—McCarthyism. Although Gordon may or may not have been herself politically conservative (accounts by those who knew her vary), she was clearly taking advantage of the political winds during a specific cultural moment.

#### **ELIZABETH GORDON: LIFE BEFORE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL**

It could never be said of Elizabeth Gordon (Figure 4) that she lacked ambition, or that she was in any way timid. She was a tall woman who carried herself with regal bearing, and even some who loved and admired her say she was “authoritarian.”<sup>102</sup> She sat at the helm of *House Beautiful* magazine for almost twenty-five years, and under her captaincy the magazine became one of the primary vehicles through which modern design was marketed to the American public, particularly in the postwar period. But, to amplify the metaphor, Gordon would not have seen her magazine as the ship with which she navigated the seas of public taste. Rather, she would more likely have seen public taste—men’s taste as well as women’s, but women’s in particular—as the ship and her magazine as the wheel with which she could steer it. Through the pages of *House Beautiful*, Gordon instructed her readers in ways of domestic arrangement that would

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<sup>102</sup> Bender, *New York Times*, August 4, 1965; Personal communication, James R. Lamantia and William Drummond, Interviewed April 13, 2007. Lamantia and Drummond were friends of Elizabeth Gordon’s from the mid-1960s until her death in 2000.

come to stand for the American way of life, i.e., the consumption of mass-manufactured goods on a large scale and the idea that material possessions are a sign of a successful and fulfilled life. Sparke notes that taste is the aesthetic vehicle through which domesticity is articulated;<sup>103</sup> given this, Gordon was decidedly steering the course of domesticity among the more devoted of her readers.

Gordon's personal drive may have been to some extent a product of the repressive environment in which she was raised, and her choice of field may be, at least in part, a product of the time in which she came of age. Born in Logansport, Indiana, in 1906 to Angie Gordon and her husband, Byron, a railroad scale inspector,<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Gordon's early years were marked by such events as World War I and the women's suffrage movement. What impact these had on her is unknown, as her later writings do not address them. In a Midwestern small town in the early decades of the twentieth century, a girl like Elizabeth would more likely have been affected by the impacts on domesticity of the Progressive Era reformers and the new and burgeoning field of Home Economics. Gwendolyn Wright notes that reformers during what would have been Gordon's formative years were having a profound effect on the ways housewives conducted business:

While their social goals often were based on conflicting values, public-health nurses, arts and crafts advocates, feminists, domestic scientists, and settlement-house workers favored the same simplified, standardized home to represent those values. Though a number of architects were experimenting with simplified forms, sometimes discarding historical styles in favor of pure geometric shapes, a broadly based popular interest in domestic architecture was, in large part, responsible for the sudden transformation in residential environments for middle-class Americans.<sup>105</sup>

But Gordon's own childhood home may have been slower to transform than many; by her own account, Gordon was raised in a very conservative household.<sup>106</sup> Her childhood home was headed by her stern and overbearing maternal grandmother, Anna E. Ball.<sup>107</sup> The family was Methodist, and closely adhered to the dictates of the Methodist Discipline. The house was Carpenter Gothic in style, and was built from a pattern book plan. It is possible, in her discussion of the house's turret, to catch a glimpse of how Gordon's later embrace of domestic simplicity and efficiency—an embrace that can easily be understood as having grown out of the changes to home environments advocated by Progressive Era reformers—came out of her reaction against the Victorianism that infused her childhood. This reaction may also be at the root of Gordon's later appreciation for modernist architecture and design itself. About her childhood home, she wrote:

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<sup>103</sup> Sparke, 74.

<sup>104</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900, Eel, Cass, Indiana; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, 1910, Logansport Ward 5, Cass, Indiana.

<sup>105</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream*, 161.

<sup>106</sup> In 1996 Indira Berndtsen, of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, wrote to Gordon requesting an interview for the Archive's oral history project. Gordon denied this request in a letter, but provided limited answers to Berndtsen's questions about her background and upbringing (Gordon to Berndtsen, September 17, 1996. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West).

<sup>107</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910, Logansport Ward 5, Cass, Indiana.

These houses frequently had a semi-tower, through which the stairs to the second floor ran. Nobody knew what to do with these semi-round spaces. They were really wasted space. My mother owned a spinning wheel and it became the sole possessor of our first floor “tower room.” It really wasn’t a room - just a bastard of a space. It looked its best seen from the outside. Never made sense - seen from the inside. It was mainly a place to dust.<sup>108</sup>

Her animosity toward turrets was really an aversion to gratuitous and useless elements in design, exactly the kind of spaces that modern designers like Frank Lloyd Wright were working to eliminate, as young Elizabeth was forming her awareness of the built environment.

In her college years, Gordon was able to move from the repressive atmosphere of her childhood to one that allowed her to explore and begin the intellectual development that would mark her adult years. Gordon told Taliesin’s Indira Berndtsen that the home of her youth was “quite obsolete in its values.”<sup>109</sup> When the family discovered young Elizabeth had attended a dance in her freshman year, she was summarily yanked from the un-named college and forced to continue her higher education through correspondence, an option that she resisted, as she put it, “loudly and clearly.”<sup>110</sup> Her grandmother acquiesced, and Elizabeth enrolled at the University of Chicago, a school that, while more liberal than the college Gordon had previously attended, appealed to her grandmother because it had no sororities. Gordon noted that the University of Chicago was very “freethinking,” but that her family was not aware of this when they chose it. To ensure her good behavior, Elizabeth’s mother was to accompany her to college and act as her chaperone. The chaperoning did not last long, however, because Angie Gordon, who had been a schoolteacher prior to her marriage at age 22, began to take classes and, Gordon wrote, “her schoolwork became more interesting to her than my soul’s salvation.”<sup>111</sup>

Gordon’s time in a “freethinking” environment seems to have enabled her to take a more non-traditional approach to married life as well. Gordon married Carl Hafey Norcross, a young man from Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1928.<sup>112</sup> Where they met and where they married is not contained in Gordon’s written accounts, and the couple does not appear on the 1930 census, either as a household or individually, indicating they may have been traveling abroad (although then as now the census was never truly complete). Although Gordon and Norcross were separated for many years during the course of their 51 year marriage, they never divorced, finally reuniting in their retirement years.<sup>113</sup> That she rarely mentions Norcross in either personal or professional correspondence probably speaks more to the extreme level of independence Gordon maintained than to the quality of her marriage. This independence is also evidenced by the fact that she continued to use her own name professionally at a time when such a thing was infrequently done and despite the fact that she did not begin to build a career until after her marriage (in her retirement years, however, she often went by Elizabeth Gordon Norcross).

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<sup>108</sup> Gordon to Berndtsen, September 17, 1996. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>109</sup> Gordon to Berndtsen, September 17, 1996. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>110</sup> Gordon to Berndtsen, September 17, 1996. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>111</sup> Gordon to Berndtsen, September 17, 1996. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West; U. S. Bureau of the Census. 1900. Eel, Cass, Indiana.

<sup>112</sup> Personal communication, Marva Shearer, May 10, 2007.

<sup>113</sup> Hill, 357-358; Personal communication, Brooke Shearer Talbot, April 28, 2006. Ms. Talbot’s mother, Marva Shearer, has a slightly different version of Gordon’s marriage to Norcross, and notes that they were sometimes forced by circumstance to live apart but had never separated as a clear choice (personal communication, May 10, 2007).

Added incentive to keep her name may have come from the fact that her husband and she had much in common professionally. Carl Norcross, Ph.D., was primarily an editor, although he also worked in city planning and was an airplane pilot. Norcross edited *Aviation Magazine* during the 1930s, and was a Major in the U.S. Air Force in 1941, when he authored the useful book, *Aircraft Blueprints and How to Read Them*, as well as other books on aviation. Norcross worked for Army Intelligence during WWII as a historian and pilot and was stationed in London. Marva Shearer, who wrote for *House Beautiful* in the 1940s and 1950s and maintained a lifelong friendship with Gordon, note that Gordon managed to take time from her editorial duties to travel to London during the war to spend time with her husband, whose duties included parachuting onto the English countryside with his only maps inscribed on the silk of his parachute.<sup>114</sup> Other of Gordon's own writings in *House Beautiful* during the war years indicate that Gordon spent time with Norcross at several of his posts. This gives some insight into the nature and quality of their relationship, as she was then in the earliest of her *House Beautiful* years, and time away from the magazine must have been precious indeed.

Marva Shearer also noted that Gordon also acquired her pilot's license during WWII. Gordon recounts her pilot training and initial flying experiences in the March 1945 issue of *House Beautiful*. The purpose of Gordon's undergoing pilot training was to augment an article on the possibility of private airplanes replacing automobiles in postwar America, and the subsequent impact on the built environment (e.g., "Airparks" replace parking lots and garages). According to Mrs. Shearer, Gordon continued to fly, utilizing this skill in the service of her own profession by flying over the rooftops of suburban housing developments and urban areas to see the forms those landscapes were then taking.<sup>115</sup> In the postwar period, however, Elizabeth Gordon's and Carl Norcross's professional lives took on an increased level of intersection. At the time "The Threat to the Next America" was published, Norcross was an associate editor at Time Inc.'s *House and Home*, established in 1952 as a sister publication of *Architectural Forum* (both were published under the collective title, *The Magazine of Building*). *House and Home's* focus was on the housing industry, and was directed not only at architects but at other professionals in the building trades, such as developers and contractors, as well. In February of 1954, Carl Norcross became *House and Home's* executive editor under editor Douglas Haskell (the same position Joseph A. Barry held at *House Beautiful*).

It appears, however, that either Norcross was not in agreement with his wife about her views concerning the International Style, or that he simply did not have much say over the editorial content, which was the province of editor Douglas Haskell. Despite her husband's position there, *House and Home* can be identified as having prompted Elizabeth Gordon's campaign, although she did not name the magazine (or any other) in "The Threat to the Next America." It also subsequently ran a pointed response decrying and trivializing Gordon's campaign, as well as several outraged letters to the editor.<sup>116</sup> John deKoven Hill, architectural editor at *House Beautiful* at the time, recalled that it was around the time of Norcross's early tenure as executive editor at *House and Home* that he and Gordon separated. The couple did not reunite until the mid-1960s, when Gordon retired from *House Beautiful*.<sup>117</sup> Yet to speculate that that Norcross was directly involved with the production of the articles that prompted "The Threat

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<sup>114</sup> Personal communication, Brooke Shearer Talbot, April 28, 2006.

<sup>115</sup> Personal communication, Marva Shearer, May 10, 2006.

<sup>116</sup> *The Magazine of Building: House and Home*, July and August, 1953.

<sup>117</sup> Hill, 358.

to the Next America,” and that this contributed to their separation, is unfair. The reasons Norcross and Gordon separated are not publicly known, and neither spouse left any documents that indicated them.

Carl Norcross served as *House and Home*'s executive editor until the end of 1962, and thereafter often appeared on *House and Home*'s masthead as a consultant, even after McGraw-Hill purchased the magazine in 1965. *House and Home* was, like *House Beautiful*, devoted to the promotion of modernist housing, although its readership was the builders and architects themselves. *House and Home* featured many of the same architects as *House Beautiful*, including John Yeon, and Frank Lloyd Wright's houses were periodically found in its pages; however, the professional magazine, unlike the shelter magazine, featured more traditional and commonplace ranch-style tract homes as well, and also published news stories on building-related social issues of the day, such as racial segregation in housing.

Late in her life, Elizabeth Gordon produced a number of unpublished autobiographical writings. One such unfinished memoir, “WHY have I lived to age 90 and been so healthy?”, written in 1996, was only a few pages long and read more like a series of short remembrances. Gordon was adamant about her keys to longevity: plenty of sleep, extra vitamins, a “very full mental and intellectual life,” which included professional success and world travel. She was particularly emphatic about appreciating the cuisines of other cultures, and noted that at age 88 she wrote a book called “Foods of Japan.”<sup>118</sup> She also provided a modicum of more detailed information about her professional life. Evident in the shrift was her desire to have a strong impact in any area of endeavor she chose: “I decided I wanted to make a contribution,” she wrote [emphasis hers], “. . . Meaning work that would be useful to the world.”<sup>119</sup>

Another short piece, “On Becoming an Editor,” was written as part of her unfinished and unpublished autobiography, *How Did I Get to be ME?*<sup>120</sup> Gordon seems to have written this about the same time as the above, and it provides a better glimpse into her conception of her own position in the world of shelter magazines and into her reasons for accepting the job at *House Beautiful*. In particular, one can glimpse the evangelical fervor with which she approached her role as arbiter of American taste:

My goal was to “spread the gospel” about what a truly good house should be. I’d had 10 years of exposure to what was being built for upper-class families. They were not asking for enough—by my standards.

They were not getting it because they did not know what a good house should be.

Those people who could afford to ask for more didn’t, because they hadn’t seen it, so they could not want it.

We had accepted too little as good enough.<sup>121</sup> [all emphasis hers]

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<sup>118</sup> Presumably this was in addition to *Cuisines of the Western World*, which Gordon authored and published shortly after her tenure at *House Beautiful* ended.

<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>120</sup> Curtis Besinger Collection, Kenneth Spencer Archives; this autobiography was in progress in 1995, when Elizabeth Gordon mentioned it in a letter to John deKoven Hill (Gordon to Hill, January 25, 1995. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.).

<sup>121</sup> Curtis Besinger Collection, Kenneth Spencer Archives.

At the beginning of her career, though, her decision to write about architecture, in particular about housing and design, was anything but emotional. Gordon wrote that she taught school in 1928, following her graduation from college, to raise money to support herself while she “survey[ed] all career choices”:

I decided I would be a writer. But I realized a writer must be expert in at least one field. So, after surveying all possibilities, decided there were not many experts about houses. So I decided to train myself about houses - while I earned my living working in other categories. I felt I could do anything that I really wanted to do. Had supreme self-confidence! Believed I could do anything I put my mind to.<sup>122</sup>

On the strength of a book by Edna Ferber about a young woman who found an exciting life working at a New York newspaper, she decided to do the same.<sup>123</sup> Gordon began as a copywriter in the promotions department at the *New York World*, and when that paper was sold she did the same thing at the *Journal*. She convinced the editor of the real estate section that she should write a column on home maintenance, and even though she knew very little about it, she chose her topics and researched well. Gordon claimed, “I was creating a new genre in newspaper writing.”<sup>124</sup> After two years she moved to the more prestigious *New York Herald Tribune*, for whom she wrote three columns a week on home maintenance, including reviewing new products, while working as a copywriter for an advertising agency. It was in this milieu that she learned to research and write with the speed and efficiency that was required in popular journalism, where breadth is more important than depth. “. . . I was learning how to learn about anything or everything - and to do it fast,” she wrote [emphasis hers].<sup>125</sup> She decided that *Good Housekeeping*, a Hearst publication, “needed help,” so she began proposing editorial ideas about home building, remodeling, maintenance.<sup>126</sup> Although her memory of the dates was vague, Gordon wrote for *Good Housekeeping* for eight years, beginning around 1934.<sup>127</sup>

At *Good Housekeeping*, Gordon learned a great deal about new housing and applied that knowledge to a consumer market that she was learning to understand in ever-greater depth and navigating with increasing adeptness. Architecture, building, and interior design articles in *Good Housekeeping* were slotted into a section of the magazine called the “Studio,” which was edited by Helen Koues, who was also the fashion editor. Koues’ association with *Good Housekeeping* covered more than twenty years, beginning before 1920 ending with her retirement in 1940. At *Good Housekeeping*, Koues began the practice of creating a complete furnished room for every issue, instead of recording rooms in existing homes, enabling the magazine to project a unified design aesthetic and value set to its readership. Gordon took this practice of depicting a magazine/studio-designed environment as an idealized set of taste choices with her to *House Beautiful*, using it most effectively after John deKoven Hill joined the staff as architecture editor in the aftermath of “The Threat to the Next America.”

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<sup>122</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>123</sup> Gordon does not name the book, but it was likely *Dawn O’Hara, the Girl Who Laughed*, published in 1911.

Ferber’s heroines probably held great appeal to Gordon. They were plucky, principled, Midwestern girls who left small towns to find success in larger cities.

<sup>124</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>125</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>126</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>127</sup> Curtis Besinger Collection, Kenneth Spencer Archives.

Gordon's work at *Good Housekeeping* was, until the last two months of her tenure there, unattributed, i.e., her articles ran without bylines and her name did not appear on the masthead. Despite the lack of association of her name with her articles, Gordon's voice in her *Good Housekeeping* articles is unmistakable, and the themes reflect some of the same concerns she would voice in her subsequent tenure as editor of *House Beautiful*, such as efficient, climate-appropriate design and materials. Even some of her rhetorical devices are consistent: In an article entitled "Insulation—and how to use it successfully," the anonymous author imagines a dialogue with her readers, just as Gordon does fifteen years later in "The Threat to the Next America." Compare: "Why," you say, "has there never been talk until now about condensation of moisture? Are the laws of physics changing at this late date?"<sup>128</sup> with Gordon's 1953 use of the same device in "The Threat to the Next America": "'Incredible!' you say, 'Nobody could seriously sell such nonsense.'"<sup>129</sup>

Eventually, though, Gordon's name would appear prominently. In the August and September, 1941, issues of *Good Housekeeping*, the two issues immediately following Helen Koues' departure, Elizabeth Gordon's name replaces Koues' as the author of the lead articles—"Americans want more windows" and "Americans want weather-wise doorways"<sup>130</sup>—although not as "Director" of the Studio, as Koues had been titled (below Koues were listed four male architectural "consultants," who in addition to providing architectural expertise, lent their maleness, which was important to *Good Housekeeping's* image as a vehicle of architectural promotion at a time when women were all but excluded for the field of architecture). Almost immediately after these two issues appeared on the stands, Gordon moved to *House Beautiful* (which the Hearst Corporation had acquired in 1934) and her name does not appear in *Good Housekeeping's* October issue. Gordon's articles for *Good Housekeeping* reflect an ethos of empathy with consumers, an ethos which would become even more evident at *House Beautiful*. At *Good Housekeeping*, her finger is on a localized and practical pulse, and her declarations have a concrete basis, being grounded in such factual elements as insulation and quantifiable fenestration. As she developed her leadership at *House Beautiful*, Gordon's empathy would be manifested more abstractly, with details like weather-wise doorways growing to larger and more far-reaching concepts like climate control.

Gordon noted emphatically that in her years at *Good Housekeeping* she provided finished copy and photographs: "I was self-generating - on all counts" [emphasis hers].<sup>131</sup> She was dissatisfied with Koues' level of knowledge about architecture and building (which was decidedly secondary to Koues' knowledge of home decorating, about which she was to continue to write and publish well into the 1940s), and despite the fact that the "Studio" section carried the names of male architectural "consultants," Gordon noted that she complained to Hearst management that there was little, if any, architectural expertise on the staff. This complaint appears to have coincided with Helen Koues' retirement in 1941, although it is not known if any connection existed. After Koues' retirement, Dorothy Draper (whose articles for *Good Housekeeping* written under Koues always ran with a byline) became head of the "Studio" section, leaving the level of architectural expertise at *Good Housekeeping* impoverished in

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<sup>128</sup> *Good Housekeeping*, February 1938, 52. The author is presumed to be Elizabeth Gordon, although the article carries no byline.

<sup>129</sup> Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America," 127.

<sup>130</sup> *Good Housekeeping*, February 1938, 52.

<sup>131</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

Gordon's eyes. Gordon wrote of Draper, "[she was] a well-known decorator who only did fancy hotel lobbies and ballrooms. She never 'got the drift' about what *Good Housekeeping* should be showing their readers."<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, what mattered most to Gordon was what she was able to take away from her experience at *Good Housekeeping*:

During all these several years, I was earning my living in an ad agency, and free-lancing ideas for *Good Housekeeping*—doing building and remodeling stories. Plus my three stories a week for the *Herald Tribune*. All this meant learning how to take meaningful photos and researching facts and writing about facts in clear, simple copy. And earning a very nice income. I never had any free time ...

RESULT: In 1940 I was made editor-in-chief of *House Beautiful* magazine, where I remained for 23+ years with great success. [emphasis hers]<sup>133</sup>

Elizabeth Gordon is to be forgiven if the years had made her memory a little fuzzy as to dates and the exact length of her 22 year tenure at *House Beautiful*, but even from the vantage point of her nineties, she was able to communicate the dedication with which she approached her work. Although self-taught as concerned matters of design and construction, she established herself professionally at a time when women as citizen consumers exercised profound influence. Although the idea of the citizen consumer remained strongly influential through the war, as Cohen has shown, this changed in the postwar years, as women's consumer activism diminished and with it their roles in the civic and public sphere.<sup>134</sup> The wartime content of *House Beautiful* reflects that Gordon was aware of the shifting status, roles, and responsibilities that women in her readership were experiencing as a result of the war, and reflects as well Gordon's firm grounding in the idea that women were active shapers of housing, both as it had been built before the war and would be built following the war, in the "someday" of consumer imaginings.

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<sup>132</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>134</sup> Cohen, 135-136.





**Figure 1. Julius Shulman's photograph of the Moore House (Richard Neutra, 1952, Ojai, California). Note that the ledge along the windows has been cleared of any items that could be interpreted as expressing the owner's identity. Only the books, the titles of which are not legible, represent symbolic objects. Source: Hines, *Richard Neutra an the Search for Modern Architecture*. 259**

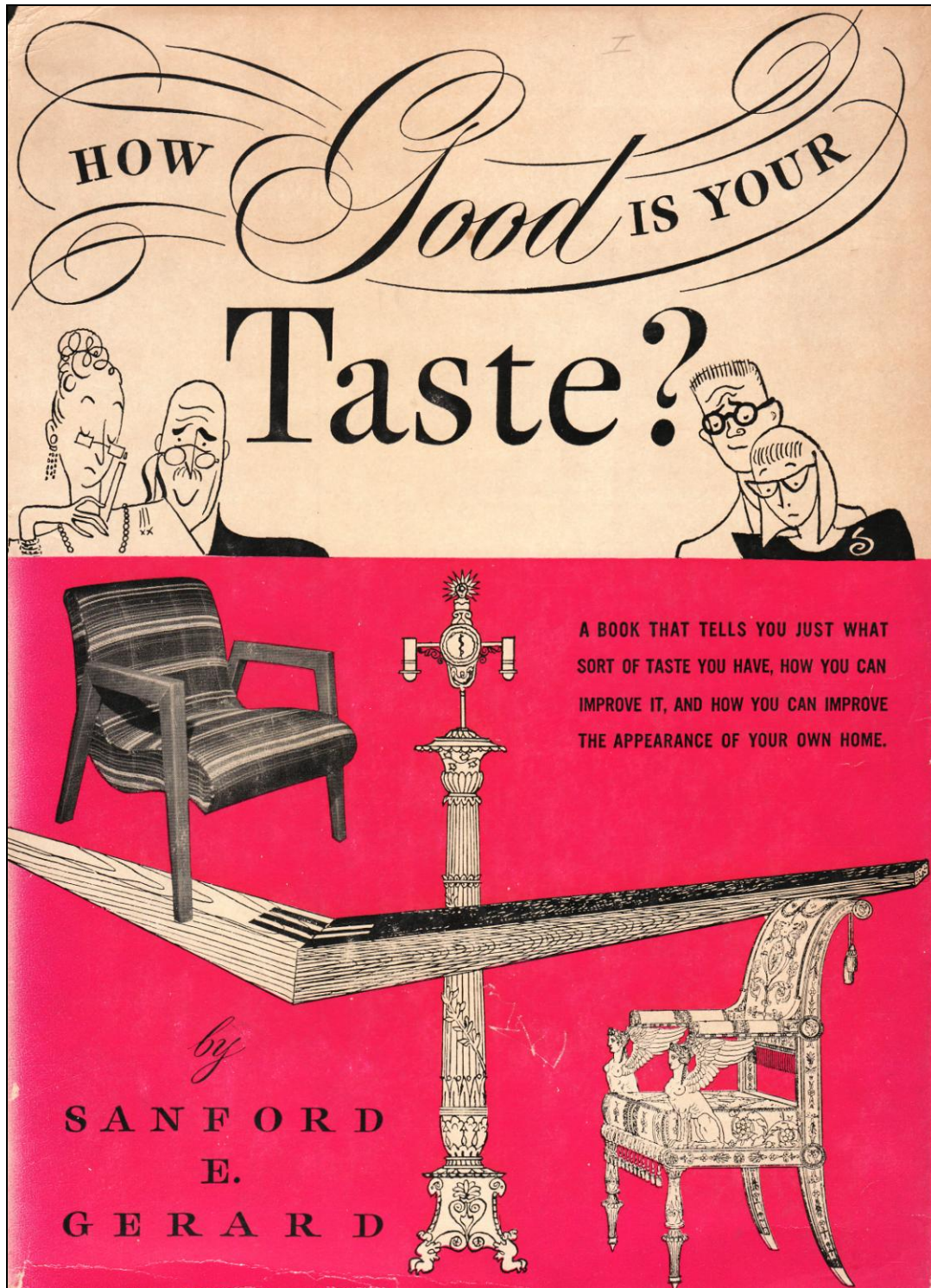
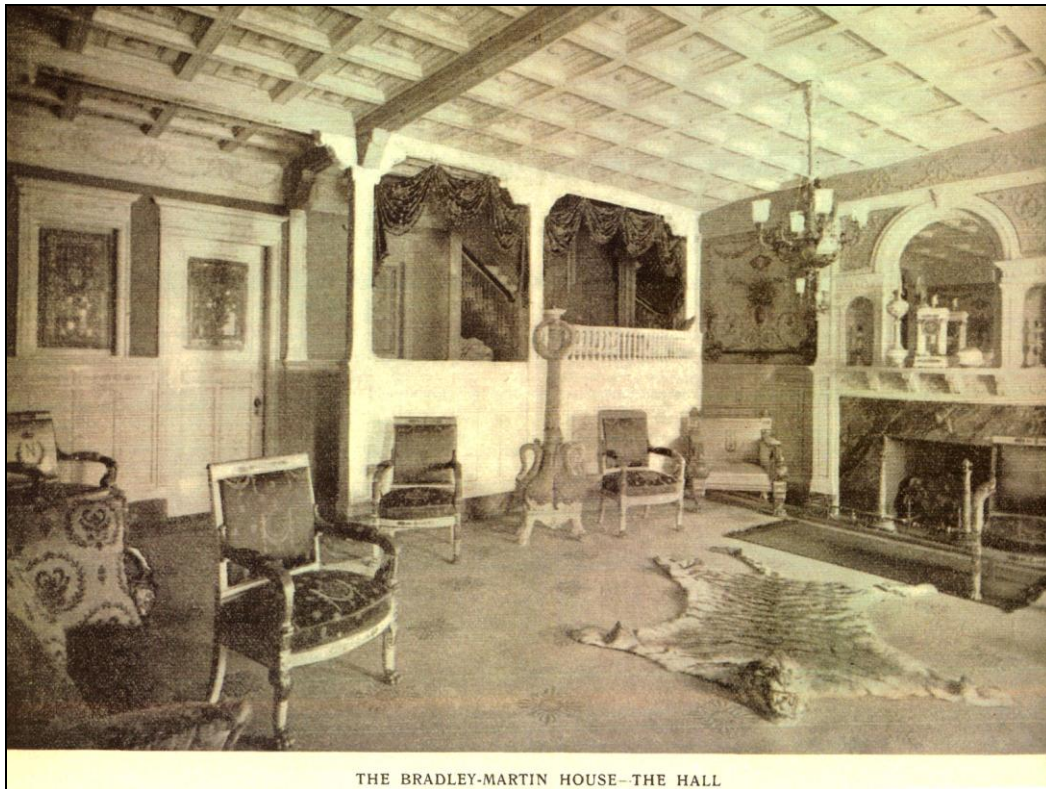


Figure 2. *How Good is Your Taste?*, by Sanford E. Gerard, was only one of the many guides helping consumers be tasteful in the postwar period.





**Figure 3.** One of the subjects of *House Beautiful's* first controversial campaign in the name of good taste, a room in the Bradley-Martin House. From Stone, "The Poor Taste of the Rich," *House Beautiful*, December 1904, 20.



**Figure 4.** Elizabeth Gordon, sometime in the 1950s. Photographer unknown. Source: Hantman's Auctions.

## CHAPTER TWO: PLANTING HER FLAG IN THE LANDSCAPE OF MODERNISM

On October 17, 1941, a tiny notice ran on page 18 of the *New York Times*. It read: “Miss Elizabeth Gordon, director of studio, building and decorating activities on the staff of *Good Housekeeping* Magazine, has been appointed editor in chief of *House Beautiful* Magazine.”<sup>1</sup> To many, if not most, of the modernist architects and designers who happened across it that day, it was likely not news that they thought to be of much consequence. *House Beautiful* was a shelter magazine with a relatively small circulation, and most of the designs it promoted were on the traditional side, although it did have the occasional foray into International Style modernism, such as a 1939 layout featuring the Ford House by Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, in Lincoln, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Elizabeth Gordon was likely not a familiar name; she had been a well-used but often uncredited housing writer at *Good Housekeeping*. Only in her last few months at *Good Housekeeping* had her name even appeared on its pages, as she briefly replaced interior design and fashion editor Helen Koues, who was retiring.

Overlooked as it may have been, Gordon’s appointment as editor-in-chief of *House Beautiful* was to come to have a far-reaching impact on American consumers’ acceptance of modern design in residential contexts. This chapter examines Elizabeth’s Gordon’s work and impact on *House Beautiful* from 1942 until 1950, a period which included the World War II years and the immediate postwar years. During this time Gordon shifted the magazines’ stylistic taste focus, from a range of traditional-to-modern styles to one that was grounded in modern design exemplified by the more “organic” approaches of Harwell Hamilton Harris, Gardner Dailey, and John Yeon. Architectural historian Dianne Harris has rightly called Gordon “the most passionate and notorious of the magazine’s editors.”<sup>3</sup> Her notoriety would stem from her

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<sup>1</sup> “Will Edit House Beautiful,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1941, 18.

<sup>2</sup> “Good Modern in an old New England Orchard.” 41-43.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, Dianne, 181.

1953 campaign against the architectural institutions promoting International Style architecture, but her passion for innovation in housing, selective as it was, would carry through her entire tenure at the magazine. In the postwar period, *House Beautiful* would be one of the leading shelter magazines presenting technological and design innovations in architectural, landscape, and interior design to American consumers, but it was selective in its presentation of modern architecture. Gordon would promote important concepts, such as “climate control,” which in *House Beautiful*’s parlance meant managing heating and cooling through architectural, rather than mechanical, means. As opposed to “climate control” as the term was often applied to HVAC systems, this went hand in hand with an expanded use of glass, open plans, and site plans that took advantage of solar trajectory and natural topography. The magazine would also, however, reject the advances toward architectural purity being produced by modern architects whose work was more emblematic of the International Style. *House Beautiful*’s Pace Setter Program, begun in 1948 as a counterpoint to *Art and Architecture* magazine’s Case Study Program, offered what has been called a “soft modern” alternative to the more overtly experimental houses of the Case Study series.<sup>4,5</sup>

Gordon’s 1941 move from *Good Housekeeping* to *House Beautiful* required that she adjust to the fact that her audience had suddenly, drastically, reduced in numbers. The circulation at *Good Housekeeping* was far greater in 1941 than that of *House Beautiful*, the former having a readership of about 2,000,000 and the latter about 200,000.<sup>6</sup> That this figure was to build over the next several years to 750,000 is a tribute to Gordon’s ability to widen the magazine’s appeal, but that it never went beyond 750,000 is due to the short-sightedness of the Hearst Board, to whom Gordon reported. Despite *House Beautiful*’s later tendency to sell out on the newsstands soon after it appeared, they would not allow a print run of more than 750,000 copies of any issue. Why this is true is not clear; John deKoven Hill, *House Beautiful*’s architectural editor from 1953 until 1963, spoke in a 1993 interview of Gordon’s many failed attempts to convince them to do otherwise, and it highlights the fact that, although she controlled most content and personnel issues at the magazine, Gordon was sometimes frustrated by having to defer to the higher-ups at the Hearst corporate level. Hill notes that most copies of *House Beautiful* were sold by subscription, but the Hearst board authorized print runs on newsstand sales only, and this was likely why Gordon’s attempts to convince them to increase print runs failed.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1941 Gordon must have been elated to get the job, and she cultivated a leadership style that left no question among those on her staff that the vision driving the magazine was hers, even if there were times she had to compromise with the Hearst board. In Hill’s account of working for her, he noted that editorial policy decisions at the magazine came from her:

I think the editorial policy would just have to be Elizabeth’s stand, and that would be the best kind of ongoing for American living, housing included, and definitely a creative ongoing, not a return to tradition, and that the best she and anybody else could do was hardly good enough for the American public. And it was hard to

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<sup>4</sup> Gebhard, 164.

<sup>5</sup> Penick, Monica M., 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Mott, Luther. *Volume V*, 141, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Hill, John deKoven, 312-315.

keep ahead of them, but that was certainly the goal: find the best, and the finest, and the thing that would do the most for the most people.<sup>8</sup>

This philosophy was reflected in Gordon's later memoirs, in which she declared that "the public was getting no real education about what a house COULD be and do. The shelter magazines were not giving their readers any standards to shop with or by." [all emphasis hers]<sup>9</sup> At *House Beautiful*, Gordon's mission was to set these standards for her readers: "*House Beautiful* was going to give readers more criteria for judging a house."<sup>10</sup> Gordon noted in these later writings that, at the time she became editor of *House Beautiful*, the public's attention to and desire for "authenticity" in period architecture was depriving them of the opportunity to understand truly functional homes. She echoed Frank Lloyd Wright's tenet that the plan of a house should dictate its exterior form: "The front façade has little to do with the value of a house. What happens behind the front wall is the crux of its operational value."<sup>11</sup> In fact, in the course of the next several years, Gordon was to shift the focus of the style of housing that *House Beautiful* promoted, embracing modernist architecture to a far greater extent than it had ever done. And by doing so, she would also shift the gender demographic of its readership to suit the times, targeting female readership during wartime, when male readers were in short supply, but later shifting focus to include a greater number of male readers, both in the architecture and design professions and more generally.

An examination of a sample of issues from the first few decades of the magazine reveals that *House Beautiful* addressed upper-middle-class readers, both women and men. As such, its succession of editors likely knew that the magazine's health depended on their ability to adapt to and understand trends in American modernity, and that the magazine needed to present to its readers the most up-to-date consumer goods and home technology. But until Gordon, this did not necessarily mean an embrace or promotion of modernist architecture, although modernist homes were periodically featured. Under Gordon's immediate predecessor, Kenneth Stowell, *House Beautiful* catered to a variety of tastes, all of them affluent, although much was made of the smaller house. One of the issues published under Stowell, the July 1937 number, was clearly aimed at both women and men, although the contrast between the ways the genders were targeted was stark. The male homeowner was courted with the diagrammatically illustrated "How Air-Conditioning Works," a lengthy piece discussing heating and cooling equipment, efficiency, and types of systems. The article was written and illustrated in detailed and technical language, language that would be more likely found in a building trades publication (Figure 5). Although many women were likely interested in and read it, it is unlikely that women were the readership Stowell envisioned for the article in 1937. Supporting both the new household heating and cooling technology and the message that understanding this machinery was the province of the household male was a prominent ad for Delco Frigidaire, showing a man explaining a large air conditioning unit to a young boy (Figure 6). The reader was obviously meant to imagine him extolling the air conditioner's virtues of function, efficiency, modern materials, smooth operation, and sleek design. By contrast, two pages previous, was the lavish

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<sup>8</sup> Hill, John deKoven, 307.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon, "On Becoming an Editor," Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, "On Becoming an Editor," Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, "On Becoming an Editor," Elizabeth Gordon Papers, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives. This idea is operational in Wright's work on many scales, and is discussed in scholarship as concerns the Robie House (1906-8) (cf. Jordy, William. "The Organic Ideal: Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House," in *American Buildings...*, Volume , 180-216).

photo spread “Silver in Good Hands,” which showed a tasteful (and very thorough—there are no fewer than three forks) place setting in use by immaculately manicured, very feminine hands (Figure 7).

This depiction of a dual gender paradigm in domesticity had a long evolution. Design historian Penny Sparke has examined the phenomenon of taste and gender, noting that as the public came to accept modernism and incorporate it into their taste choices, the terms *taste* and *design* became weighted with gender difference, the former being understood as a feminine province and the latter as masculine. This dichotomy has its roots in industrialization, as the locus of production of goods for domestic consumption shifted from the home itself to the factory. Domestic goods were no longer made by their users, but were “designed” for an abstract user unknown to the maker, eventually fixed in the designer’s and manufacturer’s minds as female. As *design* became associated with production, *taste* (i.e. the “psychological, symbolic, and aesthetic needs”) became associated with consumption.<sup>12</sup> In the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Victorian cult of domesticity added to this a moral element: the (feminine) home should be as different from the (masculine) workplace as possible, a place, as Gwendolyn Wright puts it, “of comfort, softness, and frivolity . . . private, contrasting with the frenzied activity of the skyscraper, which now symbolized the business environment.”<sup>13</sup> Early reformers like Catherine Ward Beecher, while not necessarily advocating a breach of the private and public spheres, inserted an industrial association into the ideal of the model home, which led to the Progressive Reform Movement.<sup>14</sup>

Sparke, too, weaves this history into her formulation of the evolution of taste, examining the beginnings of the Progressive Reform Movement in tandem with the effects of modernity, with its accompanying “preoccupation with rationality” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Such institutions as urban cooking schools, established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and exhibited at pageants of modernity like the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, were formed along a model that Sparke calls “stereotypically masculine . . . rooted in professionalism, efficiency, order, science, technological progress, and reason,” a model that strengthened as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed.<sup>15</sup> This association of progressive reform and scientific management—movements ironically begun by women and predicated on domestic activities that were thoroughly culturally ascribed to women—with masculine ideals was paralleled in the association of modernist architecture and design with masculinity. As Sparke articulates it, “the very concept of design, defined within modernism as a process determining the nature and forms of buildings and goods, grew out of . . . stereotypically masculine culture.”<sup>16</sup> Taste, by contrast, was implied as “a passive, almost unconscious, response on the part of the female consumer to this active proposition of the designer (usually male).”<sup>17</sup> Design was something one *did* (it was active; it was masculine), taste was something one *had* (it was passive; it was feminine).

Understanding, consciously or unconsciously, this idea of domestic consumption as inherently feminine, Elizabeth Gordon set about to more efficiently bring the fruits of mass production to women’s attention, thereby gaining some advantage over her competitors. One of

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<sup>12</sup> Sparke, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream*, 109.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream*, 161.

<sup>15</sup> Sparke 81.

<sup>16</sup> Sparke, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Sparke, 93.

the key ways she did this was by increasing the sheer volume of goods she presented, and by presenting them more audaciously than her competitors, with the “Window Shopping” section of the magazine. In 1964, Frank Luther Mott, a mid-twentieth century scholar of the history of magazines and periodicals in the United States, singled out the *House Beautiful*’s “Window Shopping” section, calling it “an outstanding feature of the magazine.”<sup>18</sup> He noted that the section had begun prior to *House Beautiful*’s 1911 move to New York, but that it was not until the early 1940s, under Gordon’s leadership, that it expanded to what was essentially a mail-order catalogue contained within the magazine, and was often more than 50 pages long (the above-mentioned July 1937 issue had a “Window Shopping” section of a mere three pages). But for all the quantity in this section, Gordon demanded quality. *House Beautiful* accepted no advertisements from manufacturers who were unwilling to fully refund the money of dissatisfied customers, and it demanded that shippers make delivery within two weeks.<sup>19</sup> It appears, then, that Gordon’s self-perception as a captain of American taste required her to be protective of her readers as well, for they performed their roles as consumers under her capable leadership.

Many of Gordon’s projects and stances during her years at *House Beautiful* indicate that she would not likely have taken the editorship with the intention of shifting the magazine’s reader demographic toward women, at least to a greater extent than women were already in the majority. Her efforts to have *House Beautiful* straddle the line between shelter and professional magazines required that she make some effort to appeal to men, not only the breadwinner-consumers, but also those architects and designers who relied on her magazine to inform them of trends in upper-middle class taste choices. A letter of endorsement for her 1987 honorary award from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) shows that her efforts were appreciated. It was written by Harwell Hamilton Harris, whom Gordon often featured in the postwar period, using his house for Wesley Havens in Berkeley, California, as a “best case” example of what a good modern house could be. He and his wife, Jean Murray Bangs, were close friends of Gordon’s, and he noted that while Gordon was in the editor’s chair, “Unlike other house and garden type magazines, *House Beautiful* became important reading for the architect, filling that most serious need: a magazine for the professional and non-professional alike.”<sup>20</sup>

Yet analysis of the first years of *House Beautiful* under Gordon’s leadership indicates that Gordon amplified efforts to increase female readership. This may well have been a response to the United States’ entry into World War II. Even though Gordon may have taken over the helm of *House Beautiful* at a moment when her position seemed full of possibility, she was only in her new job a few weeks before the lifestyles of American consumers, who had only just begun to spend again after the Depression, were turned on their collective ears: Just as the January 1942 issue of *House Beautiful*—Gordon’s first—was likely about to go to press, at the beginning of December 1941, Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor, and the country’s entry into the war was inevitable. As men rushed to serve in the military, women were left to make choices, often deferred choices, but choices nonetheless, about material goods for domestic consumption. As *House Beautiful*’s readership inevitably shifted to women, so did its content.

In fact, the United States had been indirectly participating in the war in Europe for many months. Congress had appropriated funds sufficient to increase manufacturing and industry, with defense production paramount, after the defeat of France in June, 1940. After the long forced

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<sup>18</sup> Mott, 164.

<sup>19</sup> Mott, p.164-165.

<sup>20</sup> Harris, Harwell Hamilton, letter to AIA [citation tk]



exhale of the Great Depression, the U.S. economy took a deep breath. War production fed the economy, leading to greater consumer demand, which in turn led to increased production of durable consumer goods, like refrigerators and automobiles. But with increased prosperity came inflation, and with the entry into the war came rationing and restrictions—and the deep breath quickly went right back out again. Elizabeth Cohen’s paradigms of the *citizen consumer* and the *purchaser consumer* had their inception in the Depression, with increased government involvement in the relationship between business and consumers, but this involvement was to be greatly intensified during the World War II years. Citizen consumers were, according to Cohen, “regarded as responsible for safeguarding the general good of the nation, in particular for prodding government to protect the rights, safety, and fair treatment of individual consumers in the private marketplace.” By contrast, purchaser consumers “were viewed as contributing to the larger society more by exercising purchasing power than through asserting themselves politically.”<sup>21</sup> As the war changed the landscape of consumption on the home front, women took on a greater role in the war effort through their roles as chief household purchasers than had been previously known in wartime. Cohen notes that:

The moral judgment of “good citizen” took on new, gender-specific meaning in wartime. Loyal male citizens were defined in productivist ways, “serving their country” by laboring in the military or, if not possible, in defense industries. Loyal female citizens were defined in consumerist ways, as keepers of the homefront fires through their own disciplined, patriotic market behavior as well as through the enforcement of high moral standards in others.<sup>22</sup>

Women’s ability to make do with fewer, substandard, or alternate goods became pivotal to the war effort. During the war, the citizen consumer was the dominant model—the free-market power of purchasing was replaced by the idea that self-sacrificing consumer behavior was critical to the greater good of society. The Roosevelt Administration created the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply (OPA) in 1941 in an attempt to control skyrocketing prices and manage product shortages, but it struggled without legislation to back it up until the Emergency Price Control Act of 1942, which set maximum prices and stabilized wages.<sup>23</sup> But even as American consumers adjusted surprisingly well to more government regulation of the market than ever before, they looked forward to a time when their virtuous consumption patterns would reward them with the houses and durables that were for the time out of reach. Andrew Shanken, observes that, although the war ended the Depression (defense-related growth brought substantial improvement to the economy even before the United States entered the war), it sublimated industrial capitalism into a “fervor for planning.” Planning for *comfort* took on unprecedented meaning to people who had suffered through the Depression and whose lifestyles were now compressed by government restriction. Comfort, although an abstraction, was promoted (through advertising in particular) as something that could be achieved in the postwar world.<sup>24</sup> It was the job of the shelter magazines such as *House Beautiful*, as well as other popular magazines, to keep this idea—and the material goods that would provide it—in the public eye,

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<sup>21</sup> Cohen, Elizabeth, *A Consumer’s Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Random House, 2003. 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Cohen, 75.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, 64-65.

<sup>24</sup> Shanken, *194X*, 57.

and to keep fueling hope on the part of the citizen consumer that she would be more fully exercising her purchasing power after the War's end.

Indeed, the war and its cornucopia of restrictions on consumer activity, as well as its profound impact on the daily lives of U.S. citizens, seems to have challenged conventional wisdom about the role of shelter magazines in popular culture. Instead of being devoted to telling consumers what kinds of goods they could and should be buying, and what kind of new advances in home heating and cooling they should consider for immediate installation in their homes, Gordon's first years at *House Beautiful* became as devoted to speculation—i.e., telling Americans what kind of design they were going to embrace when the War and all its rationing was finally over—as they were to what the public might embrace at the time. Under Gordon, few articles with such technical language as the aforementioned “How Air Conditioning Works” saw print, and this may have been a reflection of a shift in the gender of her readership. With many able-bodied men away from home and in uniform, and the rest of the country subject to shortages and rationing, the shelter magazines and their advertisers became adept at selling deferred gratification, and the market for this deferred gratification became the women who waited on the homefront. This is reflected in both advertising and in editorial content. The November 1942 issue carried the editorial, “There's a Great Day Coming,” in which Gordon promoted War Bonds. She wrote:

You have experienced the thrill of admiring the past ... But there is another kind of thrill—the thrill of admiring the future. I can assure you that it contains more good things than we have yet experienced in our lifetime ... Our present American economy and industry are loaded to the gunwales with potentials for better living... With this issue, House Beautiful is dedicating itself to the Future ... the Future that is promised by American industry and research, if and when we win the war...

... We invite you ... to walk with us into the days of your future. I always pays to dream, and now we cannot fight a winning fight unless we dream of a better world. House Beautiful is going to try to reveal the details of this better world to come with Peace.<sup>25</sup>

A sampling of ads that appeared in *House Beautiful* during the war also demonstrate this: General Electric asked the country to buy war bonds, to be used after the war as a down-payment on a house (Figure 8); Hotpoint Kitchens declared, “Buy war bonds today—an *electric kitchen tomorrow!*” (Figure 9); an ad for Wamsutta Sheets showed a woman—she wears a Women's Army Corps uniform—lovingly placing new sheets in a hope chest while gazing at the photo of her man in pilot gear (Figure 10). The caption read: “. . . here's hoping I'll soon be unpacking my hope chest Wamsuttas for that new home we picked out before you left.”<sup>26</sup> Ads seem primarily geared to women, and many to women whose men (like Gordon's) were fighting a war half a world away.

As World War II reduced the percentage of men in *House Beautiful*'s target demographic, Gordon proved adept at navigating the changes in her readership. Even Gordon's first issue of *House Beautiful* reveals the extent to which she had her finger on the national pulse. Although the January 1942 number had little textual content that reflected the impending entry of

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon, “There's a Great Day Coming,” 37.

<sup>26</sup> Ad for Wamsutta Corp., *House Beautiful*, May 1943, Inside front cover.

the United States into the war—a two-page spread with a photo of a traditional suburban house and a long poem extolling the virtues of “home” as concept for which “Men who love peace will fight and die . . .”<sup>27</sup> appears to have been the only reference—the cover of the magazine showed a uniformed man kissing a woman under the mistletoe in the reflection of a gilt-framed mirror. His army cap is on the seat, but the implication is clear: the man of the house is off to war. In a particularly conspicuous move, the magazine even changed its cover font: The magazine’s name, price, and issue date were now in blocky, military stencil, declaring its solidarity with soldiers and their families, whereas previously an elegant serif font had cast *House Beautiful* as an outpost of refined taste (Figure 11). The following issue of February 1942 also shows little of the war’s direct influence by way of content, as the articles were almost certainly chosen before Pearl Harbor was attacked, but Gordon’s declaration of the magazine’s new direction reflects the general “down to business” approach that the American public took to getting by during wartime; Gordon re-aimed the magazine with the citizen consumer in the cross-hairs. Her editorial “*House Beautiful . . . but Practical*” was something of a manifesto declaring that the magazine would now be “concerned with accomplishment of the best way of life by *practical* means, not glamorous theory.”<sup>28</sup> It also reflected Gordon’s ability to realistically assess her readership’s needs. The reborn and now-practical magazine would, among other items on the bullet list, “[tell] people what things cost when we show decorating,” and “[help] people live well on what they make,” a reflection that Gordon intended to bring real-world suggestions to the public, and that *House Beautiful* would be more concerned with the everyday realities of its readers’ lives than it would be with their fantasies. This signaled a departure from the Kenneth Stowell-led magazine, which was aimed more exclusively at the purchaser consumer and made more of the types of furniture and décor the average *House Beautiful* reader could probably rarely afford. A useful contrast between *House Beautiful* under Gordon and pre-Gordon is found in one of Kenneth Stowell’s last issues, October 1941, which featured as its central theme the elegant “Georgian Bride’s House.” This house, proposed for occupation by newlyweds, was a two-story brick affair in the Georgian style, and the rooms were elegant and large. Although the magazine called the house “small,” its actual square footage was nowhere mentioned, and the house had room for twin master baths, a maid’s room and maid’s bath (which were noted to be well-ventilated), and was sited on a large, carefully landscaped lot, with a lawn specially designed for games like croquet and badminton. The page highlighting the fabrics and treatments for one of the house’s two guest rooms even displayed a photograph of Rita Hayworth, should the newlyweds wonder who might be typical of their guests if this house were to be theirs. The house was furnished with items that would probably be well beyond the reach of most couples at the beginning of their acquisitive phase of married life, although the furnishings proposed, represented by both photograph and drawing, had no prices attached.<sup>29</sup>

Gordon’s vision of the magazine as primarily a vehicle of useful information for the middle class consumer, combined with the fact that the country was soon at war, meant a shift in editorial policy soon after she took the helm. She signaled this shift loudly and clearly in the April 1, 1942 editorial entitled “Our Time is Now,” which was clearly penned by Gordon although the byline is given as “the Editors.” In this brief polemic, which in tone foreshadowed “The Threat to the Next America,” she challenged her readers to accept the consumption constraints that war had brought and to make good lives and homes that are “fortress[es] of

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<sup>27</sup> “Home is all that a word can say,” 51.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon, “*House Beautiful . . . but Practical*,” 61.

<sup>29</sup> “Georgian Bride’s House,” 52-66.

Democracy” in the face of them. But just beneath the surface of the editorial were her own anxieties, and she seemed to be, at least partly, trying to convince herself:

Only the shallow-hearted and the foolish will deny that we have come upon a season of great and sweeping change, not only in our various outlooks but even in the minutest details of our ways of living. Just as we have had to revise our opinions, and look upon the faces of established traditions of thinking and doing to discover them altered, so do we find it necessary, in our personal surroundings and activities, to sacrifice and do without much that we had come to believe necessary, and to seek new methods of accomplishing our purposes.<sup>30</sup>

By the summer number of 1942, the bulk of articles in the issue were aimed at the middle class consumer. While *House Beautiful* still often catered to readers’ fantasies in articles like “Hollywood Provincial,” a photo essay on a budding movie star’s very homey and Early-American-furnished Cape Cod-style house,<sup>31</sup> the main thrust of the issue would be consistent for much of Gordon’s tenure: Living well and practically on a middle-class income. The common wartime theme was also evident in this issue: the magazine featured a notable upscale home, but it was conceptualized in terms of delayed gratification: “What Houses Will Be Like After The War” was a photo-and-essay spread about an existing house (as opposed to an idealized design), the modernist Kellett House by George Fred Keck, a Chicago architect who was strongly influenced by the Bauhaus and who only a few years before being featured in *House Beautiful* had been instrumental in bringing Laszlo Maholy-Nagy to Chicago to head the New Bauhaus.<sup>32</sup> The Kellett House, like most modernist houses in the U.S. at that time, was not designed with middle-class affordability in mind; its owner, William Kellett, was president of the Kimberley-Clark Company. Included in the design of the house were a number of innovations that the text notes “will be incorporated in our best houses of the future,” primary among them passive solar design and radiant floor heating.<sup>33</sup> The magazine’s discussion of these innovations as beneficial and worthy of nationwide emulation was one of the early examples of *House Beautiful*’s and Elizabeth Gordon’s advocacy of climate control in architecture. This was to become one of the magazine’s key campaigns over the next two decades; Gordon advocacy of climate control—now considered an important factor in “green” design—was nearly as adamant as her dislike for the International Style, but of course far less controversial. But no mention was made of owner Kellett’s status as a corporate executive, and servant space is not mentioned either, nor is it mentioned in the Hollywood starlet’s home, although it very likely existed in both houses.

The reduced representation of servants and servant space is another indicator that Gordon was shopping *House Beautiful* to a middle class demographic on a more practical level than Kenneth Stowell had. As servants all but disappeared from the employ of the middle class in the mid-twentieth century in the United States, so too they all but disappeared from the pages of *House Beautiful*. Nevertheless, two articles published in the 1940s seem to indicate Gordon’s awareness that domestic servants were not only still employed by at least some part of her readership, but were themselves a part of it. The November 1942 issue’s “There are Two Kinds

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<sup>30</sup> Gordon, “Our Time is Now,” 17.

<sup>31</sup> “We Call it: Hollywood Provincial,” 38-40.

<sup>32</sup> Keck, 137.

<sup>33</sup> “What Houses will be like after the war.” 30-31; Frank Lloyd Wright had used radiant floor heating earlier, but Keck eliminated some of the problems Wright encountered. Keck, 137.

of Maids,”<sup>34</sup> featured Gordon’s own maid, Theresa, and two other women modeling maid uniforms. The other article, entitled, “Wisdom is Where You Find It,” was an essay purportedly penned by “Hester Ann,” a domestic servant. This article addressed the “problem” of the domestic servant shortage, noting that servants were leaving their positions to take wartime factory jobs, and declaring that this would be less likely if servants were paid living wages, had better working conditions, and seemingly above all, were appreciated for their expertise.<sup>35</sup>

But generally, *House Beautiful*’s shift to the middle class reader was consistent and unrepentant. “House Beautiful but Practical” meant not apologizing for showing taste choices that most people could actually afford, instead of just aspire to. A few pages after the fantasy-feeding spread on the Hollywood starlet’s home in the Summer 1942 issue, a house designed and built for the middle class homeowner was affordably appointed in “A \$4,190.00 House Furnished for \$616.30.”<sup>36</sup> But in this issue, the best evidence of all that Gordon understood her readers to include the less affluent as well as the moneyed is “Decorations for Army Wives,” in which *House Beautiful* decorated an officer’s quarters at Fort Jay on what a second lieutenant’s wife could have afforded, with furnishings that fit into the couple’s 6,000 pound baggage allowance.<sup>37</sup> The magazine even provided plans for a furniture crate that, when it was no longer needed to ship a chest of drawers, could be converted into a bookshelf/desk and coffee table. Here, Gordon demonstrated her understanding of and sympathy with the profound changes in her readers’ lives the war would bring, and she mirrored the thrift, adaptability, and resiliency of the homefront in the magazine’s recommendations for home decorating under duress.

These kinds of articles were not unusual in the shelter and women’s publications during the war—features helping women cope with the facts of life on the home front were common centerpieces of wartime issues of both kinds of magazines. While *House Beautiful* generally focused on decorating as a coping mechanism, women’s magazines, with their broader editorial focus, presented a broader range of wartime domestic life. Women in the workplace, a phenomenon far more common during the war than it was before or after, merited attention in *Ladies Home Journal*’s article, “Meet the Berckmans: The Story of a Mother Working on Two Fronts.”<sup>38</sup> The story recounted the peculiar stresses wrought on a family whose wife/mother is employed in defense work. *Ladies Home Journal*, which was a notably conservative magazine, was also happy to shoo women back home after the war’s end, in January 1944’s “You Can’t Have a Career and Be a Good Wife,” in which women were told, “A marriage that survives twin careers is the exception; one that can thrive on a dual setup is a miracle.”<sup>39</sup> *House Beautiful* seems to have been less conservative in this regard, and in August of the same year it ran a piece by Lloyd Shearer entitled, “Should Men Do Housework?” in which the answer was a frank yes. Shearer noted that men had learned how to cook and clean in the Army, and “...in the final analysis, doing housework will not only broaden his talents and outlook but will make him an appreciative husband capable of understanding his wife’s home problems and finding out where in the devil his good money is going to.” Shearer did, however, place the blame for the fact that men have avoided housework on women; their wives just didn’t make it look all that attractive.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “There are Two Kinds of Maids,” 78-79.

<sup>35</sup> Hester Ann, “Wisdom is Where You Find It,” 11.

<sup>36</sup> “A \$4,190.00 House Furnished for \$616.30.” *House Beautiful* July-August 1942, 34-35.

<sup>37</sup> “Decorations for Army Wives,” *House Beautiful* July-August, 1941, 52-53.

<sup>38</sup> Walker, *Women’s Magazines, 1940-1960*, 37.

<sup>39</sup> Walker, *Women’s Magazines*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> Shearer, Lloyd. “Should Men Do Housework?”, 60.

In 1943, Gordon spoke to the military wives among her readership from a place of personal experience, aligning herself with the citizen consumers in her readership. With her own husband, Carl Norcross, in the Air Force, she penned a lengthy epistolary editorial, “The Triumph of Little Things,” for the May 1943 issue.<sup>41</sup> This editorial is significant because it so strongly revealed the mindset that was foundational to Gordon’s approach to her work, i.e., that her readers deserved to live well no matter what their income level, and (in wartime at least) no matter how dire the constraints on their lifestyles. The theme issue was devoted to the new brides of servicemen, and like most other issues promotes specifics in home décor. But Gordon’s “letter” was very short on promotion of specific merchandise and long (very long) on solid advice for young newlywed women trying to make decent lives for themselves and their husbands as they moved from post to post. She opened by declaring herself to be in their boat: her husband had returned from England and was stationed at the Air Force Tactical School in Orlando, Florida; Gordon was, as she put it, “just back from doing some private camp following.”<sup>42</sup> She noted that apartments were rare, and those that *were* available were less than desirable: “Finding more than one room is a distinct break, and getting a place with a kitchen of sorts is a miracle.” She went on to provide “do’s” and “don’ts” in a clear and practical voice. Some examples:

- Bring a trunk with little, lightweight things that “will let you dominate the shabby drabness of a furnished room”;
- Don’t count on being able to buy items, especially metal items, wherever you go;
- Bring your own coffee-maker, toaster, and hotplate. If you can’t buy them (and you probably won’t be able to) talk to your mother, or his mother. They’ll have a stove, and you probably won’t;
- Buy a bolt of dark green fabric. Dark green goes with most color schemes, and you can make drapes or slipcover the “cast-off assortment of furniture usually used to equip a furnished room.”
- You don’t know what kinds of beds you’ll have, so bring both a set of twin bedspreads and a double bedspread. Use the unneeded spreads for draperies.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, in her most poignant instruction to the war wives, Gordon told them not to spare or store the fine wedding presents. Here, she stopped short of giving voice to the very real fear that she and the military wives among her readers must have had, that their husbands would ship out and never return. Nevertheless, the subtext was clear:

Don’t think that just because you’ll be living in poor surroundings, under handicaps, that you should store your best wedding presents, and limp along on ten-cent-store china and glass and silver. That’s exactly what you shouldn’t do. Only *the most beautiful* [emphasis hers] things can rise and shine above the drab and dreary surroundings . . . What if they are likely to get broken! Better broken than never used. And I would feel that my husband should have the experience of

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<sup>41</sup> Gordon, “The Triumph of Little Things,” 35.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon, “The Triumph of Little Things,” 35.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon, “The Triumph of Little Things,” 100-101.

using our fine possessions. To live with your own beautiful things, in close daily contact, makes life richer and fuller. And that is little enough to give a man before he goes overseas to a soldier's life. No! No storage warehouse eclipse for my good things! Only the best is good enough for times like these, when the little moments, doing ordinary, routine things like eating breakfast together, are the ones we treasure the longest.<sup>44</sup>

Gordon's maternal tone was remarkably personal, and it offers a glimpse of Gordon's protective stance toward her readers that would come through with a much different tone and to a much different end a decade later in "The Threat to the Next America."

The May 1943 issue is also exemplary of Gordon's shift in target gender demographic in her readership. It has a dearth of articles aimed at men. Earlier, in the February 1942 issue, she introduced the "Handyman's Corner," billed as "A new department for the man of the house."<sup>45</sup> This move, while appearing to invite men into the magazine, in truth signaled a reduction in the content aimed at men. But the column only made one more appearance, in the April 15, 1942 issue.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps "Handyman's Corner" was killed because of tepid reader response, but whatever the reason, *House Beautiful* in wartime, more than ever, overlapped in thematic content with women's magazines, although fiction and fashions were still not part of the intersection. It was women who were the primary targets of the articles that offered in-depth advice on how to get by in wartime America, articles that strongly reflected Gordon's "House-Beautiful-but-practical" philosophy, geared to the citizen consumer. "What War Has Done to Life in the Kitchen," in the September 1942 issue, examined how metal and rubber shortages affected cooking practices, and suggested alternatives to tools that could not, for the time being, be replaced, or convenience foods that had been re-routed from the grocery stores to the Army's larders.<sup>47</sup> That same issue told readers "What To Do If You Heat With Oil," offering advice on having home oil-burning furnaces converted to coal-burners, in response to the wartime oil shortage. One of the articles most bent on making lemonade out of wartime lemons, though, was October 1942's "Blackout Blinds That Give Your Morale A Lift."<sup>48</sup> This two-page illustrated "how-to" article gave step-by-step advice on making blackout blinds, which were used to block interior light bleed from houses during air raid drills. The exterior side of the blinds was a heavy, opaque black fabric, but the interior face of the blind was to be quilted, festively appliquéd, or even dressed with ruffles, to cheer one during an otherwise disconcerting experience.

### ***HOUSE BEAUTIFUL GOES MODERN, NOT MODERNISTIC***

Although *House Beautiful* had featured modernist designs for several years before Gordon was on board, in the mid-1940s the magazine began a full-on discussion about the virtues and drawbacks of modern design in housing and became part of the attempt to claim modern architecture as an American phenomenon. Gordon knew, as did many in her field and

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<sup>44</sup> Gordon, "The Triumph of Little Things," 104.

<sup>45</sup> "Handyman's Corner," February, 1942, 59.

<sup>46</sup> *House Beautiful* was apparently doing some experimenting with publication schedule as well: Two issues of the magazine appeared in April of 1942, although this was the only time a bi-monthly schedule appears to have been attempted.

<sup>47</sup> "What To Do If You Heat With Oil," 63.

<sup>48</sup> "Blackout Blinds that give your morale a lift," 80-81.

allied fields, that there would be a profound housing shortage after the war and that it would take many years for supply to catch up with demand. From the thrust of the articles that appeared from 1942 through 1944, Gordon anticipated that consumers would have a good deal of influence over the style and form their housing took.

Gordon's early mentions of modern design were brief, perfunctory, and somewhat chilly. Generally, the styles featured in *House Beautiful's* well-appointed rooms were still traditional, with floral print upholstery and otherwise ornate décor. The October 1942 issue ran an article entitled "Colonial Furniture that will do everything Modern can do," touting versatility, stackability, and arrange-ability.<sup>49</sup> That the consulting architect on staff at the time was Julius Gregory, a New York architect some thirty years Gordon's senior, who specialized in Norman- and Tudor-Revival country estates, may have had something to do with the magazine's architecturally conservative stance. Nevertheless, during the early months of her tenure at *House Beautiful*, Gordon took a very cautious approach to modern aesthetics, although she embraced the technological developments, like those in the above-mentioned Kellett House, that went hand-in-hand with them. In between articles on design and "how-to" articles aimed at helping citizen consumers make the best of available goods in wartime, Gordon wove visionary editorials such as November 1942's "There's a Great Day Coming." Here, Gordon made a sales pitch for a 25-cent accordion file folder dubbed the "Bond Bank," in which readers could store their War Bonds and other important papers related to saving for a bright, peacetime tomorrow. She wrote:

There can be no doubt that the reward is worth the struggle. And the reward of a War Bond Investment Program is no nebulous or promissory thing, but a realizable, practical sum of money, which can be interpreted in terms of what we need to make a good life. It means new houses and lovely gardens, fast automobiles and prodigious refrigerators, heating plants that both heat and cool, more furniture, excitingly styled carpets, wallpapers, and paints, washing machines that do everything but talk, objects of art, delicate but durable "linens," enough closet space, more room to live and grow and be happy. In short, any or everything that the problems of the present make it necessary to postpone.<sup>50</sup>

Her anticipatory enumeration of material goods was a theme to which she would return many times in the coming months. In the December 1942 issue she warned readers, "Your Bathroom will be OBSOLETE after the War," with an accompanying graphic of a futuristic bathroom, reprinted from *Architectural Forum* and made of materials developed for the aviation industry.<sup>51</sup>

The short years between the end of the Depression and the funneling of resources to the war effort had not been enough time for housing starts to catch up with demand, and house building during the war was largely comprised of mass housing for defense workers. But with the end of the war, 15 million members of the U.S. Armed Services were to find themselves once again in civilian life, and by 1947 more than six million families were living in the homes of family or friends, and another half million were living in buildings repurposed for residential use, such as military salvage Quonset huts.<sup>52</sup> In anticipation of this, as the end of the war grew closer,

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<sup>49</sup> "Colonial Furniture That Will Do Everything Modern Can Do," 42.

<sup>50</sup> "There's A Great Day Coming," 37.

<sup>51</sup> "Your Bathroom Will Be Obsolete After The War," 58.

<sup>52</sup> Johns, 91-92.



Gordon and her staff set about spreading the picnic blanket of taste choices before the home-hungry American public.

*House Beautiful's* shift from purveyor of traditional and period styles to vehicle of modern architecture and interior design was, in the beginning, a tentative exploration, and she seems to have had a shifting idea of what the term "modern" meant. Gordon's first substantive discussion of modern architecture was March 1943's "If you thought you didn't like Modern."<sup>53</sup> Here, the thrust of the article was that modern style was nothing to be feared because modern design could include and be compatible with many more historicist styles. A companion photo essay carried the header, "Some Modern is really nothing but simplified Period," and showed furniture that had modern elements subtly worked into more traditional environments labeled "Regency" and "Empire." She seemed to be trying to accustom her readers to the word, while not jarring their sensibilities with actual modern design. It was in this photo spread that she first used "modernistic," a term she ambiguously applied to "the quality which alienated so many people when Modern was in its infancy."<sup>54</sup> She would use "modernistic" in later issues as a pejorative synonym for "bad modern," dismissing it as fashion, and not as the product of authentic innovation in architecture.

Gordon's definition of "Modern" as "not-Modern" was to give way in later issues to design that was more easily included in the category of modern design as it is commonly conceived today (see, for instance, *Atomic Ranch*). But it is important to remember that, at the time she was beginning this negotiation of terminological terrain, the battle among arbiters of taste to define what was "modern" was still very much ongoing, and the word was confusing at best for many members of the shelter magazine-reading public. Long before Gordon came on the scene, *House Beautiful* had featured Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie houses, but use of the term "modern" in connection with the houses did not refer to a stylistic choice as much as it did to other innovations, such as the open plan of the 1904 Darwin Martin House.<sup>55</sup> From the introduction of abstract expressionism at the Armory Show of 1913 through MoMA's International Style exhibition of 1932 and into the WWII years, modern art and architecture was commonly considered to be the province of an avant-garde taste culture that, while not necessarily wealthy, was at a significant remove from what popular culture historian Thomas Hine has called the "mass taste" culture of the middle class.<sup>56</sup> Until the early 1940s, modern architecture was not something most shelter magazine readers would have thought about as more than a curiosity.

In 1940, James and Katherine Morrow Ford's book, *The Modern House in America*, presented modern houses designed and built in the 1930s. The Fords articulated a definition of modern that was probably not as useful to the American public as it was to architects across the country who were learning about modern architecture. Modern houses, according to the Fords, were "consciously ignoring tradition and the expectations [it] imposes on façade and plan," and were "an outgrowth of a plan built about the interests, routine activities, and aspirations of the client and his family expressed in terms of materials employed."<sup>57</sup> The houses presented in the book showed a broad range of influences and regions, including those that Mumford would call

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<sup>53</sup> "If You Thought You Didn't Like Modern," 23.

<sup>54</sup> "Some Modern Is Really Nothing But Simplified Period," 27.

<sup>55</sup> Gay, 282.

<sup>56</sup> Hine, *Populuxe*, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Ford and Ford, 8.

Bay Region style seven years later, side by side with Bauhaus descendents like Gropius and Breuer's house for the authors in Lincoln, Massachusetts.<sup>58</sup> But with the war, and especially with the idealization of life after the war becoming a popular theme in the press, modern architecture would be defined for the public by many institutions, including and especially MoMA through such exhibits as 1944's "Built in USA." For *House Beautiful* to have ignored the kinds of innovations in housing that modernism brought about would have meant being left behind this important trend. Yet to jump immediately and wholeheartedly on the bandwagon would have meant alienating the faction of Gordon's readers who felt comfortable and grounded with more traditional and familiar styles of housing and decorating. Gordon needed to find a middle ground, and the "Modern vs. Modernistic" dichotomy was her formula.

In the August 1943 issue a new feature began: "*House Beautiful's* Home Planner's Study Course." This was a monthly series of articles, usually loosely organized around a theme in home ownership, that were aimed at readers who planned to build a house after the War, and encouraged those who didn't plan to, to do so. The first Home Planner's Study Course was introduced with a photo of an attractive young heterosexual white couple, him in uniform, seated on and in front of a floral-print sofa clearly intended to convey the couple's inherent good taste. They are surrounded by photos and magazine pages, with their "*House Beautiful* Bond Bank" accordion file conspicuously placed on the sofa. Gordon penned the introductory essay, pointedly telling her hopeful readers that they had been lax in their housing demands and could ask for more:

We have been content with adequacy when we should have been demanding perfection. While our technological capacities have been growing by leaps and bounds, our wants and sensibilities have remained relatively crude and primitive. Sentimentality and resigned acceptance mark the most characteristic attitude we have shown toward houses—rather than critical awareness. As a result we have failed to utilize technical advances waiting for our pleasure . . . So we believe it is none too early to start publishing all the best material we can find on the subject of acquiring a new house. We will keep you informed on all the technical and product developments—and they will be legion. We will bring before you the thinking of the foremost designers, architects, and industry leaders. Best of all, we will show you the top houses, representing the best in planning, designing, and materials, that have been built in the last few years. For it is only by knowing the best that we can do better. Last, but not least, we will try to help you translate your budget, your vision, your personal likes and dislikes, your hope of a better life into tangible, personal form. For we know that owning a perfect home ranks among life's riches, along with marriage and parenthood.<sup>59</sup>

In the series of short articles that followed, comprising the Home Planner's Study Course, Gordon continued to narrow and refine her definition of modern. She used a sample plan by consulting architect Julius Gregory as an example of a house that used passive solar heating, and which could be adorned with just about any style a consumer chose; the same house was drawn as both "Modern" (along the lines of Wright's early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Prairie Style, with a low-sloping roof, deep eaves, but missing many other elements such as a style of fenestration that

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<sup>58</sup> Ford and Ford, 49.

<sup>59</sup> "*House Beautiful* Bond Bank" *House Beautiful*, August, 1943, 42-43.

often characterized modern design) and “Colonial” (it seems to wear this skin much more comfortably). Gordon was, even at this early date in her quest to define modern architecture for the consumer, aligning *House Beautiful*’s definition of modernism with common sense and rationality, again targeting the citizen consumer. She was also minimizing the impact of modernism on her readers’ accepted ideas of housing by reducing it to an applied style: The “Modern” that Gordon was interpreting for the public was simply an alternate arrangement of ornament applied to a façade, not a reconception of domestic space, which was basic to modern housing and had been since the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup> Although Gordon would become a great advocate of changes such as open plans and the integration of the kitchen and children’s spaces into other family living space—changes that came about in much postwar housing and which came hand-in-hand with modernist design—she had not yet, in the early 1940s, made the connection between modernism and reorganization of space.

The article that followed the Modern vs. Colonial comparison was penned by Walter Dorwin Teague, an industrial designer best remembered today for slick, streamlined white Texaco gas stations and the Kodak Brownie Camera. It was in Teague’s article, “A Sane Prediction about the House You’ll Live In After the War,” that the magazine’s early attempts to cast “Good Modern” as “American Modern” were starkly evident. Teague forecast the character of postwar housing and made a nearly identical argument to the one Gordon would later voice in “The Threat to the Next America.” He disparaged the “machine for living” ideal, using key terms that Gordon was to use again ten years later: “[Americans] aren’t that kind of *austere* [emphasis mine], preoccupied, ant-like species. And please God, we never shall be”; “One thing we’ll turn thumbs down in is the ‘International’ conformity of modern design.”<sup>61</sup> Although Teague said at the outset that the use of local materials has been a feature of “any domestic architecture worth a tinker’s damn,” the rest of the article went on to predict the prevalence of mass-produced prefabricated housing in the postwar landscape.<sup>62</sup>

The following month, Gordon referred back to the “Modern vs. Colonial” article in the September “Home Planner’s Study Course,” and she began to more overtly layer politics into the modern-vs.-traditional style debate:

The house plans shown in the last issue of *House Beautiful* were designed to use solar heat. We showed how the plan could be styled either as Modern or Colonial. (A left-wing Modernist claims our Modern version, shown above, should be called ‘Compromise Modern,’ although no Colonialist has stepped forward to protest that our solarized Colonial was not authentic, indicating that the Traditionalists are not as much a cult as the Modernists are.)<sup>63</sup>

Here she was already endowing the modernists with cult status, although she did not distinguish between the schools of modernism as she would later, when she drew a stark line between the former Bauhaus associates and Frank Lloyd Wright.

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<sup>60</sup> Early documentation of these ideas can be seen in Frank Lloyd Wright’s Prairie Style houses. In other contexts, important changes in the arrangements of domestic space are evident in LeCorbusier’s Villa Stein de Monzie, Garrit Reitveld’s Schroeder House, and many other examples.

<sup>61</sup> Teague, 48.

<sup>62</sup> Teague, 49.

<sup>63</sup> “Home Planner’s Study Course,” 63.

But despite her September association of “Compromise Modern” with cultish left-wing politics in a seemingly pejorative context, the following month, October 1943, saw Gordon claiming the term in a surprisingly personal way, as she triangulated *Modern*, *Traditional*, and *Compromise*. Once again in the shelter of the “Home Planner’s Study Course,” she penned an editorial, “Your House is a Statement of Your Life,” in which she used religion as a metaphor for taste preference. “We have given these three architectural faiths the labels of ‘Traditional,’ ‘Modern,’ and ‘Compromise,’” she declared, showing interior and exterior photo examples of each. The Modern House, which she praised as “A pure example of Modern as it was practiced in the 1930s and early 40’s,”<sup>64</sup> fell clearly into the International Style category: clean lines, intersecting planes, flat roof. Although a small house by a lesser-known designer named Paul Doering, the influence of Richard Neutra was evident in the wrapped glazing, the cantilevered second-floor deck shade, and the overall horizontality (Figure 12).<sup>65</sup> The Traditional House was a stately, historic Colonial home in St. Louis. But the Compromise example was designed by *House Beautiful*’s Julius Gregory, and was the home of “Lt. Col. and Mrs. Carl Norcross, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.” Unbeknownst to her readers, it was Elizabeth Gordon’s own home. Although no plans were shown, the two photographs showed the home to be exactly what it claimed to be: a compromise between modern and traditional. The most prominent feature depicted was a full-length curved bay window, which embraces a tastefully and traditionally decorated seating area in the house’s interior. The copy accompanying the photo claims, “The Interior of Compromise houses generally have all the advantages of Modern—big windows, more sunshine, and light, open floor plans.”<sup>66</sup>

In subsequent issues for the duration of the war, Gordon’s stance toward modern design was at best ambivalent. Its popularity among architects seemed to perplex her, and she seemed to be groping for a way to reconcile her distaste with public demand. In the November 1943 issue she found a modern design she could point to as good architecture, the John F. McCarthy residence in Bel Air, California, by Burton Schutt (now best known for his 1947 Bel Air Hotel, also in Bel Air, California). Here, Gordon struggled to bring her internal conflict over modern design toward resolution. She told her readers that she herself had been “slugging away on the Modern team” until several years prior, when she chose to stand on the sidelines. Having once thought that modern architecture’s popularity could withstand the large amount of deplorable design that came with the movement, she now saw that the public needed to understand how “Modern” could fit their lives, and not the other way around, if they are to develop a liking for modern houses. “... [H]earth and home have a deeper significance than the mere materials or outline, and ... a style for the people must be by the people,” she wrote.<sup>67</sup> The McCarthy House was clearly not a middle-class home (the plan plainly exhibits live-in servant space and the kitchen is placed accordingly), and once again the roof lines had elements of Prairie Style, with deep eaves and low slopes, although the house was not overtly Wrightian. Gordon noted, “[its] proportions are strongly rectangular, not boxy,” as were, apparently, the modern designs she assumed her readers had become accustomed to hating.

For the few months following this series of forays into defining and criticizing modern design, Gordon was to focus her attention elsewhere. The “Home Planner’s Study Course”

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<sup>64</sup> Gordon, “Your House is a Statement of Your Life,” 68.

<sup>65</sup> Isenstadt, 105-117.

<sup>66</sup> Gordon, “Your House is a Statement of Your Life,” 69.

<sup>67</sup> Gordon, “Here’s Modern Nobody Can Object To.” 43.

turned away from questions of style and toward more practical matters (e.g., garage placement, storage space, innovations in building technology, proximity of children's play spaces to the kitchen).<sup>68</sup> On the occasions when the virtues (or lack thereof) of modern design were addressed, it was usually to juxtapose it with "Traditional," the latter standing for charm and the former for functionality. Even an April 1944 discussion of architectural style addresses modern design only in the broadest sense, although in a sidebar elucidating definitions for various design terms, Gordon pointed out that "modernistic" was "wrongly used to describe anything that hasn't a Traditional look. Actually 'modernistic' is the work used to describe *bad* Modern or *bad* contemporary design" [all emphasis and capitalization taken from original].<sup>69</sup> But again, little was consistent about exactly what Gordon saw as modernistic or "bad Modern," and the terms seem to have little clarity.

As the fortunes of the United States shifted overseas, the American public began to anticipate the imminent return of the soldiers to the domestic sphere. Allied advances in Europe in 1944, in particular the liberation of France in June of that year, gave many Americans hope that the war would be ending soon, and the public's eyes began to rise from the grindstone of the war effort to the sunny horizon that held the future of the country. The August issue of *House Beautiful* demonstrated that Gordon was among the hopeful, and that she was as prescient as ever in her choice of theme. The issue was openly and forthrightly directed at the male householder, with a front-cover declaration that read: "This issue is written ABOUT men . . . FOR men BY men" and a photograph of a man and woman lounging on a sunny deck overlooking a carefully groomed and decidedly professionally landscaped yard and pool (Figure 13). Even the back cover, which usually featured advertisements for household products or automobiles, was devoted to an ad for Kentucky Tavern Bourbon (Figure 14). This is noteworthy because, in the early 1940s, liquor ads could be interpreted to mean that men comprised a significant percentage of readership (*Ladies Home Journal* and many other women's magazines did not accept ads for alcohol at all). While liquor ads were common in *House Beautiful*, they rarely were placed so prominently. The bottle of bourbon and its companions, two icy mint juleps, rested on the strings of a tray made from a tennis racket. The ad also touted war bonds, and this combination seems to imply that masculine elegance and leisure would be a reward the returning GI could expect. And in fact, the bulk of the magazine was devoted to the homeward-looking soldier and his wants and needs from housing and domestic life after he comes marching home.

To promote the idea that the soldiers themselves were dictating their own requirements, *House Beautiful* sponsored an essay contest, advertised in the Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, offering a \$100 first prize, \$50 second prize, and three \$25 prizes to the GIs who could best describe "The Type of House I Would Like to Live In After the War."<sup>70</sup> The top three essays were published in the August issue, and to a man their authors presaged the postwar consumer's welcoming acceptance of war-related technological advances applied to housing. Imagination was the order of the contest: The first place winner arrived at his house in an "autoplane," landing in his driveway, and his house was awash with labor-saving devices and technology; even the good "china" was disposable. The house of his imagination had most of the key defining characteristics of the upscale modern styling that was to mark much domestic architecture during the postwar period, such as floor-to-ceiling glazing and eaves that

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<sup>68</sup> Gordon, "What People Want in Post War Houses," 60-61.

<sup>69</sup> "Do You Really Know What You're Talking About," 45.

<sup>70</sup> "The Type of House I Would Like to Live In After the War," 31.

encouraged passive solar heat. Second place went to the fellow who wanted an open plan, but with soundproof bedrooms and bathrooms and who wondered why people shrank from new ideas in architecture, when they craved newness elsewhere. The third place winner wanted a house on one level, no basement or second floor, with a “long, low, and large” living room. The kitchen he left to his future wife to design, but “one thing you can bet on: it will be modern.”<sup>71</sup>

Tied to these futuristic longings on the part of the homeward-bound soldiers, whom Gordon no doubt understood to be the largest share of the client base of most American architects and developers for years to come, was *House Beautiful's* re-imagining of domestic architecture. In this same issue, the crusade to define “Modern” was back on, with a nine-page article entitled “How to Judge Modern,” which led the reader through the 1939-1940 Weston Havens house in Berkeley, designed by Harwell Hamilton Harris (Figure 15).<sup>72</sup> Harris, who was to maintain a lifelong friendship with Gordon, in 1986 wrote a letter praising her work at *House Beautiful* in support of her honorary membership to the American Institute of Architects (AIA). In the letter, he stated that, under Gordon, “[*House Beautiful*] became a serious architectural influence . . . Unlike other house and garden-type magazines, *House Beautiful* became important reading for the architect, filling that most serious need: a magazine for professional and non-professional alike.”<sup>73</sup> Harris’s wife, Jean Murray Bangs Harris, was noted for her writings on Bernard Maybeck and Greene and Greene, and likely influenced Gordon’s understanding of the modern design’s aesthetic dichotomies as well as her nativist conception of modernism, both of which would later inform her presentation of “The Threat to the Next America.” Jean Harris served as *House Beautiful's* food editor and was to become a close advisor of Gordon’s through the early 1950s.

Jean and Harwell Harris were introduced to Gordon through the magazine’s architecture editor, James Marston Fitch, when they moved to New York during the war, and soon became friends. In the war years, when Harwell Harris’s work was first featured in the pages of *House Beautiful*, Harris was a well respected modernist architect, he was ambivalent about the International Style. Although he had great respect for the accomplishments of Gropius and Le Corbusier, he felt their work was sculptural, and lacked the vivifying elements that infused the work of Wright and Schindler, both of which had influenced him as a young man.<sup>74</sup> Gordon presented the Havens House as “a perfect example of the best in Modern architecture,” presenting “modern architecture” as an umbrella term with multiple understandings of “modern” underneath it, not a monolithic idea or event. The International Style was only one of these, and the Havens House (1939) was exemplary of another, one that exhibited more Wrightian influence (the Havens House has been compared to Wright’s Sturges House, built the same year), but which also shared what has been called “woody” characteristics with other work in the Bay Area by Gardner Dailey and William Wurster.<sup>75</sup> Gordon touted the innovations in the Havens House as exemplary of modern style in general: the difficult site in the Berkeley hills was indicative that modern architecture was flexible enough to be built anywhere; “Modern” was able to give you plenty of windows and privacy at the same time; built-ins, such as furniture and bookshelves, could offer color and texture while being functional. The kitchen of the Havens

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<sup>71</sup> “The Type of House I Would Like to Live In After the War,” 75.

<sup>72</sup> “How to Judge Modern,” p.49-57.

<sup>73</sup> Harwell Harris to the Jury for Honorary Members of the AIA, June 14, 1986, The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives.

<sup>74</sup> Germany, 77, 103.

<sup>75</sup> Gebhard, 178.

House was relegated to the continuation pages, possibly because it was presented in the “Man Issue,” but more likely because Havens was a single gay man and the kitchen would have been the domain of his servant (servant quarters were evident in the plan).

“How to Judge Modern” is significant to understanding the development of *House Beautiful*'s promotion of modern design, because it was here that she presented “Modern,” through the concrete example of the Havens House, as superior, at least in its possibilities, to more traditional, period-defined architecture. She chose a thread of modernism that—grounded as it was in nature-derived referents, represented an alternative to the “machine for living” ethos. Understood as aligned with, if not a prototype of, an emergent second Bay Region style (although Harris’s offices were in Los Angeles), the Havens House, designed at the end of the 1930s, represents a more “natural” modernism, which came to inform much of the housing built in the postwar period. Architectural historian David Gebhard observes that Harris’s design, in the Havens House and elsewhere, had “little to do with the image of the commonplace—the central theme underlying the architecture of the second Bay Region tradition.”<sup>76</sup> Harwell Harris himself noted this, positing the idea that regionalism could serve to restrict or expand architecture. In a 1954 address to the Northwest Regional Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, he said:

A region may develop ideas. A region may accept ideas. Imagination and intelligence are necessary for both. In California in the late Twenties and Thirties modern European ideas met a still-developing regionalism. In New England, on the other hand, European Modernism met a rigid and restrictive regionalism that at first resisted and then surrendered. New England accepted European Modernism whole because its own regionalism had been reduced to a collection of restrictions.<sup>77</sup>

The Havens House made a convert of Gordon, despite her earlier protestations and presentation of modernism as nothing more than one style choice among many. And it was a harbinger of her continued preference for the modernism that she would present as “American Modern,” i.e., that of the second Bay Region style, Cliff May’s California-based Ranch style, or the work of architects like John Yeon in the Northwest or Alfred Browning Parker in Florida or, in the mid-to-late fifties, Frank Lloyd Wright anywhere he happened to be working. Although she had, as had been demonstrated here, tried repeatedly to distinguish between “Good Modern” and “Bad Modern” (aka “modernistic”), and she would continue to do so until April 1953 and for some time after, the 1943 “How to Judge Modern” was the catalyst for Gordon’s conversion of *House Beautiful* to a vehicle for the promotion of a softened modernism in domestic architecture. The article is significant for another reason, which is that it supports the appearance of another designer who would have a continued association with Gordon and *House Beautiful*, and who would also be a player on the “Threat to the Next America” stage: furniture designer and author T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, who penned a preface to “How to Judge Modern,” an exercise in forecasting entitled, “Postwar Dream World or...Reality?”<sup>78</sup>

British furniture designer Terence Harold Robsjohn-Gibbings made his name in 1930's New York, reproducing ancient Greek furniture designs from bronzes and vase paintings he found at the British Museum. This discovery of design as an archaeological artifact may have

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<sup>76</sup> Gebhard, 178.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Treib, 37.

<sup>78</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings, T. H., “Postwar Dream World or...Reality?”, 48.

been the beginnings of his concern with the temporal nature of material expression. In his book, *Furniture of Classical Greece*, Robsjohn-Gibbings described his journey through this discovery:

On Greek vases I saw furniture that was young, untouched by time.  
Klismos chairs curved with the delicate grace of a new moon. Folding  
stools posed on deer legs. Lion claws of bronze supported tables.  
Vitality, surging through the human figures on the vases, surged through  
this furniture. I had wandered unsuspecting into a new world.<sup>79</sup>

Or rather, a very old one. Regardless, the museum-held furniture he saw in the 1930s had much in common with a growing body of work by modern designers who were rejecting the overwrought ornament and clutter of their forebears' Victorian parlors. It had clean lines and delicate curves, and showed best in rooms that were uncluttered and elegantly simple—i.e., modern rooms in modern homes. Beginning in 1937, Robsjohn-Gibbings based his design practice on these Greek forms, either through actual reproduction of Greek designs, or through original designs that attempted to capture the spirit of the classical furniture.<sup>80</sup> This “scholarly classicism” caught on with the jet set, and until the mid-1940s, Robsjohn-Gibbings' design practice included home interiors for clients such as Elizabeth Arden and Doris Duke.

World War II forced Robsjohn-Gibbings to close his New York studio, and he spent a good deal of the war writing, in an attempt to create a national reputation as an arbiter of taste. In 1944 Alfred A. Knopf—for whom he did design work and became fast friends—published the book that would make Robsjohn-Gibbings' reputation as a tastemaker in America, *Goodbye Mr. Chippendale*, which was part good-natured tweaking and part outright condemnation of the American thirst for antiques. In addition to showcasing Robsjohn-Gibbings' talent for knowing what was what about American furniture, the book also established him as a modern literary wit. Keeping in mind that publishers create target markets for authors by grouping them with other better-known authors whose work is similar, the sources of the book's jacket endorsements are revealing: Dorothy Parker welcomed him to the club, writing, “Mr. Robsjohn-Gibbings writes with a fine dismissive impatience that makes swift and stimulating reading.” Anita Loos danced, “Here is Mr. Whistler's 10 o'clock lecture in swingtime,” and *Architectural Forum* editor Howard Myers called the book “. . . a vivacious, generally devastating and timely warning for those who without it might walk backward into the brave, new world of tomorrow.” Harwell Hamilton Harris, whose wife, Jean, was one of the young author's close friends, called it, “the story of the Great Imposition. For a laugh, watch Mr. Gibbings help Mr. Chippendale to pack.”<sup>81</sup> In fact, “Gibby,” as he was known to his friends, dedicated his second book, *Mona Lisa's Moustache* (1948), in which he skewered modern Art, to Jean Murray Bangs, as well as his life partner, Carlton Pullin.

It was in the spirit of log-rolling and promotion, both of Harris and himself, then, that Robsjohn-Gibbings appeared in the pages of *House Beautiful* in the same year as his first book. Unlike Walter Dorwin Teague or other guest notables whose writings supported Gordon's positions on Modern design in other issues, Robsjohn-Gibbings' polemical essay was accompanied by a dramatic photo of himself, a handsome and cinematically lit full-length shot of

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<sup>79</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings and Pullin, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings and Pullin, 15-16.

<sup>81</sup> Jacket quotes under the heading, “What those in the know have to say about *Goodbye Mr. Chippendale*,” on the jacket flap for *Mona Lisa's Moustache: A Dissection of Modern Art*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947.



a disaffected and profoundly stylish man (Figure 16). His voice was acerbic and effete, and he began by scoffing at the fantasies of the citizen consumers, who had for the few years past patiently lived a life of scaled-back consumption with the understanding (promoted by *House Beautiful* among many) that the benefits of the war would ultimately outweigh the sacrifices. This push-button dream world, Robsjohn-Gibbings maintained, had been concocted by the imaginations of marketers, and in fact the architecture of the postwar world would not be defined by heliports on garage roofs, but by a new, indigenously American type of architecture, which had been growing since Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright began to design. It seems somewhat incongruous that Robsjohn-Gibbings did not actually mention the Havens house in his preface to it, but he laid the groundwork for the article nevertheless by writing about what he (and probably Elizabeth Gordon) perceived to be its parentage. Robsjohn-Gibbings understood Sullivan and Wright's works as signifying the inception of a truly democratic architecture, which no doubt Wright would have affirmed, and he painted a picture of their lonely voices crying in an architectural wilderness devoted to the Beaux Arts style: "It is easy now to see the road that lies clearly ahead, but fifty years ago these men were alone, battling to give democracy its birthright in architecture, while few heard their voices, and all went instead to spend their money in the architectural bazaars of London, Paris, Rome, and Madrid, and with their disciples in New York."<sup>82</sup>

It is ironic that, while Robsjohn-Gibbings depicted Wright as a forefather of indigenous American modern style, he implied that Wright's work was being carried on by others: "The people of America owe a profound debt of gratitude to the pioneers who have paved the way for all this—pioneers like Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, and their younger followers."<sup>83</sup> Yet in 1943, Wright had yet to design what were some of the most notable buildings of his long career. He was just beginning work on the Solomon Guggenheim Museum (finished in 1959, the year of his death), the spiral form of which he would explore further in 1950 in his house for his son, David Wright, in Phoenix. Wright was five years away from designing the Morris Store in San Francisco (1948), and a decade away from designing the Hagen House, also known as Kentuck Knob, in Pennsylvania (1953).<sup>84</sup> And it is also notable that Robsjohn-Gibbings used the Havens House to support the connection between Wright and democratic architecture as Gordon wished to promote it in the postwar years.<sup>85</sup> Harris's training largely took place under Austrian Richard Neutra, although even earlier Erich Mendelsohn was a notable influence as Harris contemplated a move away from a career as a sculptor and toward architecture. But it was a visit to Wright's Hollyhock House that most strongly impelled his decision to become an architect.<sup>86</sup> If one were to make a case for influence in the Havens House, both Neutra's and Wright's are arguably present. But the Havens House is anything but derivative and reflects more than any predecessor's hand Harris's own ability to provide unique and powerful solutions to the design problems he faced, both in accommodating his client's non-traditional lifestyle (Weston Havens

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<sup>82</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings, T. H., "Postwar Dream World or...Reality?", 88-89.

<sup>83</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings, T. H., "Postwar Dream World or...Reality?", 88.

<sup>84</sup> Kentuck Knob would later, in 1986, be acquired by Lord Peter Palumbo, the same collector of modernist landmarks who in 1972 purchased the Farnsworth House. Although Palumbo sold the Farnsworth House in the late 1990s, today he still owns Kentuck Knob, which is run partly as a house museum [See the Kentuck Knob official website].

<sup>85</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings, T. H., "Postwar Dream World or...Reality?", 85.

<sup>86</sup> Germany, 16, 21-25.

was gay and requested a high degree of privacy, as well as an interior badminton court<sup>87</sup>) and steep hillside site.

Harris and *House Beautiful* maintained a mutually beneficial relationship well into the 1960s, with the high point being Harris's design of the magazine's 1955 Pace Setter house. It is possible that, by the time the Harrises returned to California, about the same time Gordon ran the 1944 article on the Haven's House, they were influencing Gordon's stance on European modernism; Harris's biographer, Lisa Germany, notes that by this time, "they had begun to resent what they saw as the European 'attack on the individual,'" as Jean Harris put it, phrasing their objection in a way that mirrored the rhetoric Gordon would use in "The Threat to the Next America."<sup>88</sup> The following year it would be apparent just which "individual" Jean Harris felt was being attacked. In July 1945, Gordon published a brief biographical essay on Harris in the "People Who Influence Your Life" series, in which each month she ran a single page biographical essay on an up-and-coming designer, with a full-page portrait photograph by renowned Canadian portrait photographer Yousuf Karsh. Gordon put Harwell Harris squarely in the context of American architecture, and tied him to the image of the American-as-individualist throughout the article, even comparing him to Emerson and Whitman.<sup>89</sup> She declared, "Harris looks upon the free-standing, individually owned house as one of the brightest flowers of American culture," and ended, "To Harwell Harris, American culture (and therefore residential architecture) is based on a belief in the supreme importance of the individual man. He is convinced that a house tailored to your needs can give you a greater sense of your individual self, stimulate you to more productive living. He designs to that end."<sup>90</sup>

*House Beautiful's* assessment of Harris positioned him as an architect of the upper class, and the antithesis of another notable Bay Regionalist, William Wurster, who was featured in the same series the month prior (June 1945). If design linked to social program was somehow an attack on the individual, Wurster, who was that year designing Valencia Gardens, a multi-unit project in San Francisco for working class tenants funded by the U.S. Housing Authority, was guilty.<sup>91</sup> It was Wurster who would be mentioned by Lewis Mumford, in Mumford's controversial "Sky Line" column of October 11, 1947 in *The New Yorker*, as the architect whose work best represented the second Bay Region style—the style that he (Mumford) presented as the modern antithesis of the International Style. As Marc Treib has noted, Mumford pointed to Wurster as one whose buildings "...did not resemble factories or museums." This was their lesson.<sup>92</sup> That *House Beautiful* spotlighted Wurster in the "People Who Influence Your Life" series seems to indicate, however, that Gordon was not, at least at that time, concerned with the political implications of Wurster's designs for government-funded housing. Gordon wrote that he had an "ability to make Modern architecture acceptable to the layman," and she applied a very general understanding of modern architecture to his work: "He takes accepted basic shapes in architecture, keeps them free of their false faces and spurious ornamentations, thus abiding by the honest and good features that have been inherent in them since the beginning. Consequently, his houses do not look startlingly different, event though they are essentially Modern."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Adams, "Sex and the Single Building," 89.

<sup>88</sup> Germany, 105.

<sup>89</sup> Gordon, "People Who Influence Your Life: Meet Harwell Harris," 55.

<sup>90</sup> *House Beautiful*, "People Who Influence Your Life: Meet Harwell Harris", July 1945. 55.

<sup>91</sup> Treib, 187.

<sup>92</sup> Treib, 58.

<sup>93</sup> "Meet William Wurster." 69.

Wurster's work had been featured in *House Beautiful* in the 1930s (his design won the 1938 small house award), but even with his appearance in the "People who influence Your Life" series, his postwar association with the magazine would be infrequent.<sup>94</sup> In fact, he did not work extensively in single-family housing in the postwar period, although he and his partner Theodore Bernardi designed House #3 in the notable Case Study Program for *California Arts and Architecture* magazine.<sup>95</sup> The Harrises and Robsjohn-Gibblings, however, were to have long relationships with *House Beautiful* that lasted well into the late 1950's. Robsjohn-Gibblings' work, both written and his furniture designs, appeared in its pages. He would also become both critic and promoter of modern architecture with his 1954 book, *Homes of the Brave*. His next appearance in the pages of *House Beautiful* would be April 1946 when he, too, was included in the "People Who Influence Your Life" series.

If the "People Who Influence Your Life" series is notable for nothing else, it is as an indicator of Elizabeth Gordon's prescience. The architects and designers she featured were young or relatively so (generally they were in their early forties), and most became noted names in modern design. Gordon's heavy emphasis on Americans in the series could be considered an early indicator that she would, in issues to come, identify and promote an "American Modern" style; only British-born Robsjohn-Gibblings was *not* born in the United States. Beginning with furniture designer Edward Wormley in the March 1945 issue, the list included: Textile designer Dorothy Liebes (April 1945); furniture designer Russel Wright (May 1945); Wurster (June 1945); Harris (July 1945); industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss<sup>96</sup> (August 1945); architect Edward Durell Stone (September 1945); architect Gardner Dailey (October 1945); architect Samuel Marx (November 1945); interior designer William Pahlmann (January 1946); husband-and-wife architects Samuel and Victorine Homsey (February 1946); Robsjohn-Gibblings (April 1946); and finally, Frank Lloyd Wright (June 1946). Absent from the list are any of the architects associated with the International Style or the Bauhaus. Some of these individuals were at that time only beginning to develop their portfolios in custom housing in the United States, but some, like Richard Neutra, Pietro Belluschi, and Raphael Soriano, had by 1945 done significant residential work on the West Coast, and Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius had garnered some attention in the East with residential work. A few of the architects who did appear in the series, however, namely the Homseys, Dailey, and Stone, had designed houses in the 1930s that clearly showed Bauhaus influence and which were still receiving public notice (the Fords' popular book, *The Modern House in America*, included all three of these and was in its fourth printing in 1945).<sup>97</sup>

Frank Lloyd Wright's inclusion in this list is notable, because, although his stature was unquestionable, he had initially refused. Gordon contacted him in October of 1944, when she had conceived the idea of the series, asking him to sit for Karsh as part of "a series of personal profiles of great architects and designers that I want to run in *House Beautiful*." Wright replied, with uncharacteristic humility, "Dear Miss Gordon: I didn't know there were great architects. So I shall stay on the side lines an interested spectator. Thank you nevertheless for the inference.

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<sup>94</sup> Treib, 238-243.

<sup>95</sup> Smith, *Blueprints for Modern Living*, 45

<sup>96</sup> Arguably, time has proven Henry Dreyfus to have had the most profound influence on American life, of these designers. It was Dreyfus who designed the Honeywell round thermostat, the object around which more household arguments have centered than perhaps any other.

<sup>97</sup> Ford and Ford, 57, 108-112, 132.

My best as always to the *House Beautiful*.”<sup>98</sup> For Wright, “always,” as regarded *House Beautiful*, was a long span of time. He was featured periodically in *House Beautiful* from 1897 through 1911 (a 1913 issue showed details of some of his work, only crediting him in the photo captions),<sup>99</sup> but in the intervening decades leading up to his appearance in the “People Who Influence Your Life” series, he had been absent from its pages. It is possible that the magazine had not sought him out due to his well-publicized personal scandals in the teens and twenties, but another factor, as historian Peter Gay observes, was that the public’s preferences in architecture had regressed: “...it was not his notoriety so much as the startling recovery of tradition-ridden fashions for Tudor mansions...”<sup>100</sup> The professional press was more forgiving (or, more likely, less concerned with his private affairs); *Architectural Forum* had dedicated an entire issue to his work in 1938. Peter Blake wrote that the issue, as well as an article about Wright in *Architectural Forum*’s sister publication, *Life*, that year, “in effect rescued Wright’s career at a time when he was bankrupt, despondent, and generally at the end of his rope.”<sup>101</sup> Whether or not this is true, Wright for many years showed a preference for *Architectural Forum*’s depictions of his work, and may have been hesitant to step away from it.

Elizabeth Gordon was apparently able to change Wright’s mind about appearing in the series, probably in person or over the telephone, for his was the final profile. The tone of the copy was effusive, so much so that it seems almost tongue-in-cheek:

One of the healthiest egos in the world, handsomely encased in one of the healthiest bodies, is currently swaggering about Manhattan preliminary to building a museum [the Guggenheim]. Possessor of these attributes, as you may have surmised, is the greatest architect alive, Frank Lloyd Wright of Wisconsin, Arizona, and the whole, round world.<sup>102</sup>

That the initial correspondence between Gordon and Frank Lloyd Wright was cordial, and ultimately productive, was enough to pave the way for future exchanges. Gordon’s friend Marva Shearer recalls that although Gordon privately disliked Wright’s attitude that “the world owed him a living,” she was enthralled with Wright’s work.<sup>103</sup> Later that same year, in December of 1946, Gordon wrote and ran a long essay on Taliesin West, which she visited as research for the article, in celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *House Beautiful*.

As the war drew to a close, Gordon backed off her discussion of what did and did not constitute “good Modern” for several months, aside from the above-mentioned promotion of modernist designers (photos of their actual work do not accompany their biographies—not even Wright’s. Only their portraits by Karsh are shown). Although some of the houses shown in *House Beautiful*’s pages during the first half of 1945 were modern, their styles were of uncertain parentage, neither European nor Usonian or otherwise Wrightian, but occupying places along the wide spectrum in between. One example was the January 1945 modern/rustic log house with a

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<sup>98</sup> Correspondence between Gordon and Wright. October, 1944. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West; Diane Maddex has also documented the exchange.

<sup>99</sup> Maddex.

<sup>100</sup> Gay, 296.

<sup>101</sup> Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> “People Who Influence Your Life: Frank Lloyd Wright,” 77.

<sup>103</sup> Personal communication, Marva Shearer, May 10, 2007.

log addition that displayed modern elements, such as floor-to-ceiling glazing.<sup>104</sup> Both the January and February 1945 issues promoted small houses that reflected traditional tastes, by such designers as Royal Barry Wills, and seem to anticipate the Cape Cod, Ranch, and Minimal Traditional houses that would populate the bulk of the new suburbs in the immediate postwar years. Instead of a discussion of style, *House Beautiful* cast an interested eye toward the way technology would affect everyday life in the United States. Gordon's imaginings of the ways air travel would impact the public, including her own experiences with piloting, appeared in the March 1945 number, and the "Home Planner's Study Course" that month looked at the non-controversial issue of getting the most storage space from one's garage. It seems that, while modern designs were sometimes presented in the context of linking them to technological advances, this is not always the case; the two did not seem to be *necessarily* linked in Gordon's mind, although she made the connection when it advanced the thesis of the article.

Even after the War's end, *House Beautiful* under Gordon maintained a practical bent as it addressed the housing shortage. In the summer of 1945, immediately following VE day and with VJ day looming, *House Beautiful* announced a series of research contests to "determine how America wants to live."<sup>105</sup> The "Home Planner's Study Course" for August begins to heavily tout custom-built homes, and while the elements promoted as "The Five Earmarks of a Postwar House" are usually indicative of modern houses—e.g., more daylight, less specialized space, and increased flexibility in room function—the style shown in photos is not one that would be automatically identified as modern.<sup>106</sup> Although Gordon did not turn her back on modern design altogether, once again she seemed to promote it as only one aesthetic among a number of possibilities. Gordon welcomed the impending conversion of the citizen consumer to the purchaser consumer in a brief editorial in the October issue called "Are possessions a burden?" In it, she warned people not to be too attached to their possessions, not for any "less is more" reason, but because "Any month now you are going to be permitted to be a customer again—a customer for the luxurious, comfort-making things that typify the good life in America."<sup>107</sup> The same issue featured a Ranch style house designed by Cliff May, who was by this time appearing on the masthead as a building consultant.<sup>108</sup> Another indicator that Gordon and the *House Beautiful* staff were anticipating this shift was the sudden growth ads for mass-produced items in the Window Shopping section: in the August 1944 issue, the section was seven pages; in the April 1946 issue it was 30.

Through 1946, Gordon and *House Beautiful* seemed more preoccupied with helping the American public meet their housing needs at all than with steering them away from or toward one or the other type of modernist styling. Occasionally a notable modern house was featured, such as the Watzek House by John Yeon in the February 1946 issue, or developer Fritz Burns' exhibition house in Los Angeles in the May 1946 issue. The March 1946 issue offered a "Home Planner's Study Course" that was a smorgasbord of examples for those who wanted to build their own homes more literally, without contractors or developers, or even hired labor, but style was not presented as a factor. Architect Alfred Browning Parker's own stone house in Miami was

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<sup>104</sup> "Home Planner's Study Course," January 1945. Curiously, the term "Rustic Modern" has been coined by two architectural historians in Denver and is being applied to the 1970's shed style, which descended from Moore and Lyndon's 1964 Sea Ranch.

<sup>105</sup> "Contest Announcement: How Does America Want to Live?" *House Beautiful*, June 1945, 50.

<sup>106</sup> "The Five Earmarks of a Postwar House."

<sup>107</sup> "Are possessions a burden?" 81.

<sup>108</sup> "Home Planner's Study Course: Cliff May" 109-115.

given as an example of a house built by a young couple (Parker and his wife) “with their own hands.” Here, innovation in materials, form, and technology reveal a very modern house, but this did not rate mention as regarded style (the word modern does not appear in the text), although modernism in fenestration, plan, and form are clearly visible, with natural stone walls beside floor-to-ceiling glazing, in open spaces that flowed easily into one another (Figure 17).<sup>109</sup> Just as often the styles shown had strongly traditional elements, such as those in the same issue’s “They Built Without a General Contractor,” in which Tudor elements were applied to the façade of a brick house in which space was starkly specialized and arranged, and although the house as built was small, the plan for future additions even included servant space.<sup>110</sup> The September 1946, issue’s theme was the creative ways Americans had solved their housing problem, at least in the short term, until they could hire an architect and build a custom home. Featured are a secretary’s new Malibu home, ingeniously adapted from a recycled city bus (Figure 18); a barn remodeled to a cozy and spacious house by a Connecticut couple; and the very timely “A Home from a Quonset Hut.” (Figure 19)<sup>111</sup> This adaptive re-use, while noted to be “not ideal,” was perfectly acceptable as a solution to the housing shortage. As always, Gordon’s determination to help consumers make the best of adverse circumstances was clearly operative. But, more pertinent to the course of the magazine’s evolution as a vehicle of modern design, style was not at that time as important to Gordon as helping readers make do until they could build a custom home, in consultation an architect.

Like most shelter magazines, *House Beautiful* would ultimately pitch the houses that were out of reach for most members of the middle class. Gordon both disliked tract houses and accepted them as inevitable. As exemplified in the March 1946 issue, she went out of her way to present alternatives to mass housing to her readers. Less acceptable than custom homes, or even Quonsets or refitted school buses, as a solution to the housing shortage, homes in large developments were addressed in the October 1946, article, “What about Stock Plans?” One of the reasons given for the problematic nature of such houses is that they are designed for level lots, and lots, the shrift claims, are rarely level. The author was Miles Colean, *House Beautiful*’s “Building Consultant,” and the page was placed opposite an examination of Harwell Harris’s Blair House in Hollywood, California, as an example of a well-designed and interesting home built on a steep hillside, a feat that no preplanned or tract house could accomplish.

It was not until the year drew to a close that the “Good Modern” vs. “Bad Modern” argument began again, in the fiftieth anniversary issue of December 1946. Gordon made much of the magazine’s advanced age, and claimed for *House Beautiful* the distinction of being the oldest home magazine in America, despite that fact that *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies Home Journal* were both more than a decade older. Rather than deliberate exaggeration on Gordon’s part, however, this should be interpreted as an indicator that she understood *House Beautiful* to be of a different genre than its close competitors in the women’s magazine world. In fact, she was not wrong—*House Beautiful* was a shelter magazine, not a women’s magazine—and her efforts to market the magazine to men speak to her efforts to diminish *House Beautiful*’s identification with the women’s magazine genre and increase its appeal as a shelter magazine. Gordon stated in the issue’s opening editorial that she wished to show the progression of taste and domestic

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<sup>109</sup> “With their own hands, they built this house for \$1,200” 106-7.

<sup>110</sup> “They Built Without a General Contractor,” 110-11.

<sup>111</sup> “How a Secretary Solved the Housing Shortage,” 114-115; “If you can’t build . . . Remodel a Barn,” 117-119; “A Home from a Quonset Hut,” 120-122.

technology through *House Beautiful*'s pages over the years. To do this, she provided such articles as "From the Worst to the Best Room in the House," a look at kitchens from 1888 to 1946 (Gordon noted that the need for kitchen efficiency was at least partly due to the shortage of servants following World War I).<sup>112</sup> But rather than a retrospective, the issue was forward-looking, and in general the tone reflects the question, "what will tomorrow bring?" than the boast, "see how marvelous we've been." Her champions in the joust against European modernism were stalwartly at her side, even if they were sometimes used for other purposes: Walter Dorwin Teague's discussion of changes in automobile design was made apt by the fact that automobiles had also just turned 50; the furniture of T. H. Robsjohn-Gibblings was featured in a seven page full-color photo essay (his designs appeared on the issue's cover as well).

Robsjohn-Gibblings also penned a short story, "Dilemma: The Perils of Making a Cult of Modern," for the issue. The story depicted a hapless housewife, Harriet Folger, who is planning her "dream house." In it, Harriet's pretentious friend, Elise, lures her to a modern art gallery and tries to convince her to build a modern house. The architect Elise and her effete cousin, Cyrus, recommend is "Professor Karl Jünger." Cyrus gushes:

"By all means, Mrs. Folger. Go to Professor Jünger. He's the greatest exponent of the New Reality that we have in America. You've seen his Atlantis Tower in Leipzig, of course. He's building a copy of it in Taos, but this time he's using poured adobe reinforced with aluminum. We have the model here. Professor Jünger made it himself. . . It's extraordinary how he makes his models, Elise. He squeezes wet plaster between his hands while he's in a trance. The whole thing is done automatically."<sup>113</sup>

Robsjohn-Gibblings' association of European modernism with sinister mysticism, effete snobbery, and movements in art that have no relation to the honest needs and desires of the American public was pointed. The German immigrant and mystic professor of architecture seemed to be a composite of figures associated with the Bauhaus, many of whom, in the years leading up to World War II had come to the United States to teach or practice architecture. In particular, "Professor Jünger" could be interpreted as a reference to Walter Gropius, former head of the Bauhaus and then-chair of the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD), and the act of designing "while in a trance" may have referred to Johannes Itten, who was noted for the mystical currents in his Bauhaus teachings.

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue also prominently included Frank Lloyd Wright, with a long feature story on Taliesin West, and other more minor mentions in secondary articles. This would be the first of several issues over the course of Gordon's tenure at *House Beautiful* that would highlight Wright, but only the tribute issues of 1955, 1959, and 1963 would show his work in multiple articles and in depth. For the anniversary issue, in an article entitled "America Did it First," Wright's Amberg House, built in 1909 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was shown as the Prairie Style example of "American Modern" that informed postwar American modern architecture. Large windows under a deep gable overhang were shown to be the forebear of Bay Regionalist architect Gardner Dailey's similar move in the David House in San Francisco. The ribbon windows of the Amberg House were shown to be the forerunner of the ribbon windows in the Adams House, designed by Hugh Stubbins in Brookline, Massachusetts. Yet while Stubbins

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<sup>112</sup> "From the Worst to the Best Room in the House," 178-179.

<sup>113</sup> Robsjohn-Gibblings, T.H., "Dilemma: The Perils of making a Cult of Modern." 294.

was certainly aware of Wright, other influences appear to have been stronger. At the time the article appeared, Stubbins, who graduated from the Harvard GSD in 1935, was teaching there at Gropius' invitation. In a 1966 book, *Architects on Architects*, Stubbins discussed having been strongly influenced by Alvar Aalto, but does not mention Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>114</sup> Stubbins designed the house between 1935 and 1938, while in the employ of Royal Barry Wills, an architect usually noted for his Colonial Revival designs, which had also appeared in the pages of *House Beautiful*.

A second small article in which Wright appears echoed the “America did it first” theme, and was titled “The Best Modern has Roots in Our Own Soil.” Here, Gordon noted parallels in details, form, and massing in two American houses and two American barns. Again, the text foreshadowed “The Threat to the Next America”:

People like what they know. The familiar seems more desirable than the unfamiliar. That is why architectural styles, which are true expressions of the culture of a nation and an era, change slowly—almost reluctantly. It is also why most Americans have not responded kindly to the much ballyhooed International Style of Modern architecture, which was first imported from Europe in the 1920s.<sup>115</sup>

The architect whose work Gordon used to make her point, citing it as “truly American Modern,” was Italian immigrant Pietro Belluschi. Belluschi's Equitable Building, then under construction in Portland, is considered to be the earliest example of the sealed glass box tower closely associated with the International Style in the United States. This offers some context for the early phase of Gordon's crusade against the International Style, indicating that she was, at least at this point, not xenophobic but was instead was trying to place the modernist landscape—confusing and dissonant as it must have been for some prospective homeowners—in some kind of context to which the American public could relate. Understanding the value of the modernist rethinking of form and function, Gordon tried to provide continuity for a population that was, in the heady months following Victory, in love with the idea of a bright future. Surely, if Gordon had wanted to make a place in the new suburban developments for such favorite agenda items as climate control and privacy, the public would have to be accepting of modern design, and she probably perceived they would be if they understood it as an American style. The citizen consumer was a patriot, and no doubt Gordon understood the patterns formed during the war years would not change overnight.

The centerpiece of the issue was the twelve page photo-and-text love song to Taliesin West, Wright's “winter camp” in Arizona. Gordon had approached Wright about the article in August of that year, after a brief visit to Taliesin West. “It seems very fitting that we should publish a work of yours in our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue, inasmuch as we were the first magazine to publish your work so long ago,” she wrote to him.<sup>116</sup> She requested an extensive interview with Wright, the result of which would be the text accompanying the photos. Maynard Parker's photos showed the complex in its best desert light, and Gordon's text was effusive and poetic. She called Wright “The most influential design source of the last 50 years,” republishing the Yousuf Karsh portrait of a smiling, debonair, white-haired gentleman whose eyes twinkled like

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<sup>114</sup> Heyer, 220.

<sup>115</sup> Gordon, “The Best Modern has Roots in Our Own Soil,” 160.

<sup>116</sup> Gordon to Frank Lloyd Wright, August 1946, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.



Santa's (Figure 20), and called Taliesin West, "...a symphony composed of sun and shadow" (Figure 21).<sup>117</sup> Her commentary, while effusive, was also a relatively thorough assessment of the architecture: "Because desert sun is so bright, shadows are stronger and become real design dimensions. Mr. Wright has designed not only with stone, wood, and canvas, but has used sun and shadow as though they, too, were materials. The result is a constantly changing play of pattern that makes the design an ever-moving, living thing."<sup>118</sup>

Frank Lloyd Wright was more than delighted with the issue, and with the Taliesin West article in particular. "I have been crowned," he wrote to Gordon in a letter dated December 23<sup>rd</sup> of that year, a letter which gives a small bit of insight into the character of their interaction at the time of her visit:

The spirit of the whole number seemed to me (and to those around me) a very fine tribute indeed. We were all grateful. And then came the tastefully bound remarkable collection of Parker's photographs. Since nothing so generous had ever reached us by way of hitherto publicity we were delighted beyond measure. The tone of the whole magazine was enough to make me take back the disparaging remarks I made to you at Taliesin breakfast concerning publicity in general—"Fame impossible in our country. Only notoriety possible."

More power to "The House Beautiful." We wish you and your staff many happy returns for your efforts, and to you, Miss Gordon, our affections and heartfelt thanks.<sup>119</sup>

The issues of *House Beautiful* that followed December 1946 depicted substantially fewer traditional styles (e.g., Colonial Revival and Cape Cod) and more modern styles. Also steadily increasing was the emphasis on mass-manufactured goods (the "Window Shopping" section in the November 1947 issue was a whopping 97 pages). In keeping with Gordon's self-directed editorial policy, as described by John deKoven Hill, she offered what she perceived to be the best of "the new" to her readers. She was astute in discerning what that might be—the October 1947 issue was devoted to plastics, for example, and carried a multi-article spread with the subtitle "a way to a better more carefree life." Gordon herself wrote a piece touting the Tupper Corporation's stackable plastic bowls with tight-sealing lids.<sup>120</sup> While some types of plastics had been around for decades (Bakelite, for instance, had been invented and in use since in 1907), the postwar period saw an explosion in the varieties and uses of the materials.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps the issue that gives the best glimpse into Gordon's architectural taste and values is the September 1947 number, which centered around "The 12 Best Houses of the Last 12 Years." Eleven of the twelve houses were modern in design, although to varying degrees, and once again the International Style Adams House of Brookline, Massachusetts, by Stubbins and Wills, is featured, but this time as an example of good architecture, not as an example of fenestration derivative of Wright. Gordon noted that expensive homes or those on unusually difficult sites were excluded from the selection, so as to make it as useful as possible to readers in the market for custom housing. This is likely why Harris's Havens House is not on the list, but it is otherwise heavily weighted toward the West Coast and the Bay Area in particular; architects

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<sup>117</sup> Gordon, "One Man's House, 185-190.

<sup>118</sup> Gordon, "One Man's House," 190.

<sup>119</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright to Gordon, December 23, 1946, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

<sup>120</sup> "Plastics: A Way to a Better More Carefree Life" *House Beautiful*, October 1947, 127-

<sup>121</sup> "The History of Plastic." The American Chemistry Council.

included Wurster, Dailey, Yeon, Belluschi, Carl Koch, John Dinwiddie and Albert Hill, and Paul Thiry, Cliff May, and John Funk.

### TROUBLES WITH TALIESIN: THE SPLIT WITH FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Elizabeth Gordon afforded Frank Lloyd Wright and his work central position in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of the magazine. Although the content of the magazine prior to April 1953 seems to indicate that Harwell Hamilton Harris's work was more influential in her acceptance and promotion of modernism, Gordon's 1946 visit to Taliesin West was also, apparently a catalyst for her future stance toward modern architecture. Seven years hence, Wright would offer very public support of Gordon's crusade against the International Style, and her writings shared much with his in both tone and content as they condemned the International Style as damaging to American ideals. Surely Gordon knew of Wright's antipathy toward the European modernists; his feelings were no secret. That MoMA had included him alongside them—or rather, that MoMA had included *them* alongside *him*—in the 1932 International Style Exhibition was a particular sore spot, but his irritation had intensified with the ongoing institutional promotion of the works of architects from the Harvard GSD, Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, and others who stood under the International Style umbrella. Given this set of circumstances, it would be logical to assume that Wright's hand was in "The Threat to the Next America," or that at the very least he had encouraged her to write it. Yet the trail of their correspondence contained in the archives at Taliesin West provides evidence that Wright had cut off communications with Gordon in 1950, and that his telegram to her following the appearance of "The Threat to the Next America" was his first contact with her in three years.<sup>122</sup>

Following Wright's delighted reaction to Gordon's December 1946 spread on Taliesin West, Gordon and Wright maintained a cordial relationship. Other correspondence from 1947 was casual and friendly; in January Gordon requested an audience with Wright at Taliesin West for staff writer Wolfgang Langewiesche, whom she called one of the magazine's "key writers" (there is no record of whether this audience was granted), and in June of that year Gordon telegraphed birthday greetings to the architect.<sup>123</sup> But *House Beautiful* was not to feature Wright's work again that year, showing instead a preference for the much younger Northwest regionalist architect John Yeon in the February article, "Is Modern Architecture Mature?"<sup>124</sup> Also, more generally, 1947 found Gordon paying more attention to mass-produced housing than she had in the past. The May issue included companion articles by Lloyd and Marva Shearer recounting their personal travails in developer-built housing and decorating.<sup>125</sup> Gordon also continued to explore climate control in several articles in the course of the year. Although she tended to dislike developer-designed homes—she gave her opinion in the May issue, in a brief editorial entitled "The Awful Truth"<sup>126</sup>—she addressed them in a way that acknowledged that the bulk of her readership was probably choosing tract housing over more expensive custom

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<sup>122</sup> Letter from Frank Lloyd Wright to Gordon, October 24, 1950. The Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

<sup>123</sup> Gordon to Frank Lloyd Wright, 1947. The Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

<sup>124</sup> *House Beautiful*, Feb 1947, Vol 89 No. 2, 59

<sup>125</sup> Shearer, Lloyd and Marva, "The House and Hard Times of a Veteran," 119. Both Lloyd and Marva Shearer's work would appear in many future issues of *House Beautiful*, and the couple became close personal friends to Gordon and Carl Norcross. Elizabeth Gordon was godmother to the Shearer's daughter, the late Brooke Shearer Talbot, to whom this dissertation owes a great debt.

<sup>126</sup> Gordon, "The Awful Truth," 97.

housing. It seems that, having ended 1946 with touting Taliesin West as an aesthetic ideal, she turned her attention for 1947 to the waking world of the middle class purchaser-consumer.

In her September 1947 article, “The 12 Best Houses of the Last 12 Years,” Wright’s work is notable only by omission. The article’s time span covered houses built from 1935 to 1947, during which time Wright designed more than 40 private residences, but he is left off the list. It is possible that this slight escaped his attention, but not likely. Yet it appears he chose to ignore it; indeed, to Wright, being lumped in with architects whose work he considered inferior to or derivative of his own (a category that included all other architects besides himself) might have been worse than exclusion. But if Wright’s sensitive nature was chafed by his lack of appearances in the 1947 issues of the magazine, he did nothing to make Gordon aware of it. There is no record of correspondence between them from June of 1947 until April of 1950, when a chain of events led to what appears to be a break in their professional relationship.

The April 1950 issue of the magazine was themed “How to Live Comfortably in the Southwest,” and featured a lead article by Wolfgang Langewiesche that was primarily a discussion of the hot, dry, and relentlessly sunny climate of the southwestern United States and the ways in which architecture, both traditional and modern, had addressed or might address it.<sup>127</sup> A companion piece to the article was a photo essay featuring drawings of an unbuilt house by Phoenix architect Richard E. Drover, a house that to an extent showed some Wrightian influence in form, but otherwise was a much more pedestrian modern design. Materials and form exhibit characteristics that are similar to Taliesin West—natural stone and wood, rhythmic roof joists exposed both within and without—but otherwise the L-plan, clerestory windows, carport, and suburban lot-based site plan were more similar to the homes Joseph Eichler was building at the time in Palo Alto. In a year when Gordon’s focus had turned to houses that could be considered genuine options for her house-hungry readership, Drover’s design was a much more realistic choice than any of the desert homes Wright had designed, including and especially Taliesin West.

Wright, however, did not see it that way. He wrote a letter to Gordon proposing that she publish an article by him on the same topic, i.e., living in the Southwest, in which he would provide “epoch-making material” instead of the “merely silly makeshifts” *House Beautiful* had touted. He was forthright about his mercenary motives, beginning the letter, “What is the highest price the House Beautiful ever paid for a substantial contribution?” Wright outlined his plan, telling Gordon why *House Beautiful* would serve it. Ultimately, he attached a hefty price tag:

It occurred to me that all this imitation now flooding the country might start from scratch with a complete exposition by some authoritative source rather than to let the matter dribble from imitator to imitator. If the medium were a popular magazine like yours that would mean a thorough presentation of the idea in color and with plans, sections, and rendered perspectives of truly original character. I should say ten thousand dollars for the projection complete.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Three years earlier, Gordon had telegraphed Wright asking for an audience for Langewiesche, whom she called “one of *House Beautiful*’s key writers.” The telegram was dated Jan 22, 1947. The archives do not contain a response to it, and do not note whether or not Langewiesche ever met with Wright. If he did, it presumably would have added even more sting to Wright’s perception that *House Beautiful* had snubbed him in running Langewiesche’s article on Drover’s work (The Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty).

<sup>128</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright to Gordon, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1950. The Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

Ten thousand dollars would have been an astounding amount of money for any author to be paid for an article in a shelter magazine in 1947 (or in 2010, for that matter), and architects were rarely paid if their work was featured (some context for this can be seen in a 1952 letter from Gordon to architecture critic Lewis Mumford, in which she offered him \$300 for an article based on his recently published “Roots of American Architecture”<sup>129</sup>). Gordon responded a month later, explaining to Wright in her letter that the magazine would be featuring similar articles on climate control in other regions of the country, and it would be over two years before they would be able to address the Southwest again. “. . . the very fact that we have just had our little fling about the Southwest must make me say a sorry ‘no’ to your proposal,” she wrote. She tried to soften the blow with self deprecation and diplomacy: “Even though we are far from proud of the job we’ve been doing in this type of thing, it is gratifying to know that you had the time at least to notice it and to offer to try to help us improve our standards.”<sup>130</sup> But no is still no.

No further correspondence between them is recorded until later that year. But Wright did rate inclusion in the pages of the following month’s (May 1950) issue of *House Beautiful*. It is unlikely, though, that he felt flattered. This issue featured an exploration of the “New American Style,” and was one of several issues of the magazine that put domestic architecture in a nationalistic context. Wright was discussed in an article by architecture editor James Marston Fitch, but his work was presented in terms of the importance of the Prairie Style, not his more recent Usonian houses. The thrust of Fitch’s article was that the “creative center of gravity” in architecture had shifted over time, from the East (Henry Hobson Richardson was given as the exemplary architect for the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) to Chicago (where Louis Sullivan and Wright stood for the region’s former glory days) to the West Coast (where Charles and Henry Greene’s Arts and Crafts influence was defining), and was currently embodied in the works of such architects as William Wurster, Gardner Dailey, and Harwell Harris. Fitch narrated a timeline of modern architecture in the United States, and even noted the importance of European modernists, naming LeCorbusier, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Alvar Aalto as a group who influenced the generation of architects who came after Wright.<sup>131</sup> A companion piece written by Jean Murray Bangs discussed the importance of Greene and Greene’s work in greater depth, partially framing it in the context of *House Beautiful*’s climate control project: “Conscious adaptation to climate and site clearly shows in the work of Greene and Greene. The heat and glare of Southern California sunshine caused them to use white roofs which lower interior temperature several degrees. They used wide eaves designed to cut out the sun in summer while letting it shine in winter . . .”<sup>132</sup>

This must have been galling to Wright. By assigning the cutting edge of domestic architecture to younger men, and lumping Wright into a category of predecessors that included Henry Hobson Richardson and Greene and Greene, Fitch cast Wright as a past master, but not as a player. Only a month before, Gordon had turned down his proposal to write about architectural solutions to the “heat and glare” of the sunshine of the Southwest, giving the excuse that she had just been there, but with an architect whose work Wright found derivative of his own. Moreover, Wright might well have considered Richardson, who had been about 30 years Wright’s senior and had been dead for over six decades, to be his “grandfather” in the genealogy of architectural

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<sup>129</sup> Gordon to Mumford, June 23, 1952, Franklin Library Archives.

<sup>130</sup> Gordon to Frank Lloyd Wright, May 8, 1950. The Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

<sup>131</sup> Fitch “The New American Architecture Started 70 Years Ago,” 136-137.

<sup>132</sup> Bangs, “America has Always Been a Great Place for the Prophet without Honor” 139; 175.

development, Richardson having had profound influence on Wright’s architectural “father,” Louis Sullivan, and also on Wright himself.<sup>133</sup> As for Greene and Greene, although they were approximately Wright’s age (in their mid-eighties), their most noteworthy work had been completed by around 1914, and they had dissolved their firm by the early 1920s. Jordy writes that, in 1952 when the brothers accepted an AIA award, they had been retired for so long they “literally stepped out of history to receive the citations.”<sup>134</sup>

Fitch’s exploration of “New American Style” was, in essence, similar to that of Lewis Mumford in his controversial 1947 “Sky Line: Status Quo” column in *The New Yorker*. Mumford’s criticism of the “mechanical rigorists” promoted by Henry Russell Hitchcock and MoMA, and his praise of the Bay Region style’s “free yet unobtrusive expression of the terrain, the climate, and the way of life on the Coast,”<sup>135</sup> gave rise to a MoMA symposium, “What’s Happening in Modern Architecture?” in which the fissures over modern architecture were greatly exacerbated. The symposium found MoMA’s Alfred H. Barr, Jr., dubbing the Bay Region Style, “Cottage Style” and pointing out its parallels to Scandinavian, Swiss and British modernism.<sup>136</sup> As “mechanical rigorists” could easily be interpreted as code for architects who had Bauhaus parentage, panelists Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius took Mumford’s criticism personally, and voiced the strongest objections. Gropius said, “I was struck by the definition of the Bay Region Style as something new, characterized by an expression of the terrain, the climate, and the way of life, for that was almost precisely, in the same words, the initial aim of the leading modernists in the world twenty-five years back.”<sup>137</sup> Breuer, whose work Kathleen James-Chakraborty notes to be the closest of the MoMA “camp” to the Bay Region practitioners, was the most vociferous: noting that Sullivan “did not eat his functionalism as hot as he cooked it,” Breuer drew a line to Le Corbusier’s “machine for living” idea, saying, “[Le Corbusier’s] houses are much less machines for living than, for instance, the three thousand family housing developments of the West Coast, the same pseudo-prefabricated houses, hill up, hill down, in rigid rows or in rigid curves—though quite redwoody.”<sup>138</sup> The next summer, the museum offered a physical manifestation of their argument that American modern housing sprang from European precedent, with a prototype modern house displayed in the museum garden, designed by Breuer.<sup>139</sup>

Given Wright’s early association with *House Beautiful* and his lionization in its pages the previous year, to have *House Beautiful* so dismiss his timeliness and ignore his Usonian style vocabulary in the May 1950 discussion of American Style must have been mystifying, if not infuriating. Wright’s influence on a great many of the residential architects in the postwar period was undeniable and profound. By 1950 he had many followers among the shapers of suburban landscapes; the architecture firm of MacKie and Kamrath in Houston and designer-developer Edward Hawkins in Denver are only two notable examples of designers who were infusing Usonian elements into designs for suburban custom homes and upscale developments nationwide. *House Beautiful* continued obliviously rubbing salt in Wright’s wounds by making a case for the existence of an “American Style” in July of that year, with a Q&A-format

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<sup>133</sup> Jordy, *American Buildings, Volume 3*, 35-36.

<sup>134</sup> Jordy, *American Buildings, Volume 3*, 245.

<sup>135</sup> Mumford, “Sky Line: Status Quo” *The New Yorker*, October 11, 1947, 104-110.

<sup>136</sup> Barr, et al., 8. The symposium has also been examined by Mallgrave, 337.

<sup>137</sup> Barr et al., 11.

<sup>138</sup> Barr et al., 15.

<sup>139</sup> James-Chakraborty, *Bauhaus Culture*, p162-163.

exploration of it that addressed such questions as, “How do I recognize the American Style?” (answer: “You recognize it by its perfect blend of good looks and usefulness...”), and “Who is creating the American Style?” (answer: “Everybody! Designers, factory production managers, technical laboratory workers, chemists, architects, decorators, landscape architects, retailers, manufacturers... This style has no oracles, no dictators, no *fountainhead* ...”[emphasis mine]).<sup>140</sup> This last appears to be something of an oblique reference to Wright, who was the inspiration of the “rugged individualist” architect, Howard Roark, in Ayn Rand’s novel, *The Fountainhead*. Wright is noted to have loved the book, which was published in 1943, but which had been released as a movie the previous summer.<sup>141</sup>

The September 1950 number saw another Wright-less foray into American self-definition, with two companion articles by Jean Murray Bangs entitled “How American is Your Way of Living” and “What is a Truly American House?” For the former, a brief essay, Bangs seemed to hold efficiency and technological advances as the hallmarks of American living, and advanced a broadly abstract idea of what kind of living was American, saying, “The American house of today is that house which is most fitted to the life of today. But it is also a house which clearly expresses the fundamental American aspirations and ideals about the dignity of every man, which are still pretty much the same as they were in 1776.”<sup>142</sup> The companion piece described the “Truly American House” as a “house in which all the social and technical progress of the Twentieth-Century United States was put to work to serve the basic ideals of American life.”<sup>143</sup> The architects featured in the piece were Harwell Hamilton Harris and Henry Eggers. The explanatory content of these issues regarding the invented “American Style,” combined with the preference Gordon had shown in the April 1950 issue for Drover’s work over Wright’s as an exemplar of Southwestern climate control, would likely have had Frank Lloyd Wright on edge. But archival sources show that the November 1950 issue’s content was, apparently, the last insult Wright intended to endure at *House Beautiful*’s hands.

The theme of the November issue was “Naturalism” in architecture and decorating. Again, Jean Murray Bangs penned the lead article, with anthropologist Ralph Linton, who searched for the social-scientific roots of the public’s preference for “naturalistic” designs and materials in homes and home furnishings.<sup>144</sup> Bangs and Linton noted a shift in the consumers’ stance toward nature and architecture, from one in which homes were shelter against nature to one in which nature was “invited in” to the home. This shift was marked by changes in glazing styles (picture windows and floor-to-ceiling glass walls) and use of natural materials and colors. Bangs went on to provide, in a companion article, a timeline of twentieth century domestic architecture and its changing relationship to the natural world, comparing social conditions, material, forms, and color. In this timeline, Wright’s earlier work was again given far more emphasis than his postwar work; once more, the master was cast as a relic, his then-current work was not as relevant as his influence on other designers.

In a companion article, “This Isn’t The First Time We’ve Been In Love With Nature,” Bangs compared architecture, social conditions, materials, forms, and colors for three architectural periods: 1894–1918, 1919–45, and 1946–50. Wright was thoroughly credited in the

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<sup>140</sup> “American Style,” 36-37.

<sup>141</sup> Friedland and Zellman, 405-406.

<sup>142</sup> Bangs, “How American is Your Way of Living,” 161.

<sup>143</sup> Bangs, “What is a Truly American House” 81.

<sup>144</sup> Bangs and Linton, 191.

first category, a time when “period architecture was dominant, [but] an indigenous modern architecture was developing,” for his ideas that so heavily contributed to the development of modern architecture.<sup>145</sup> In the second and third categories, Bangs mentioned Wright as “still carrying on” in the category of “American Modern,” but she claimed that the style “all but went underground” until the later part of the second period, when (Bay Regionalists) Wurster, Dailey, Harris (unidentified as Bangs’ husband), Alden Dow (a former Taliesin apprentice), and the Samuel Homseys were “pursuing their own course in developing American forms.”<sup>146</sup> Bangs failed to mention that these architects were heavily influenced by Wright’s work. Although Harwell and Jean Murray Bangs Harris were noted “Wrightophiles,” it seems that here, Bangs stopped well short of Gordon’s lionizing rhetoric of the previous December.<sup>147</sup> Wright was more than an afterthought, but certainly he was not standing out much against the younger designers Bangs presented.

The November 1950 issue went on to demonstrate again Gordon’s preference for the Bay Region Style, with feature articles about the furniture of Edward Wormley, a house by Wurster Bernardi and Emmons with landscaping by Thomas Church, and an Eichler home designed by Anshen and Allen. Each of these feature articles was framed in terms of some quintessential quality related to “American-ness”: The Eichler home was sold as good design on a shoestring (Americans are frugal); the Wurster Bernardi and Emmons house combined both traditional and modern elements (“American Style” supercedes “period style”); and Wormley’s furniture embodied “Naturalism” because it was honest in its use of materials, with even the plastic sofa declaring its “intrinsic nature” (Americans prefer honest practicality in home furnishings). The issue is a skillful presentation of middle-class America to itself. At a time when the United States was testing the parameters of its role as a superpower abroad, *House Beautiful* was defining for the consumer the foundation upon which that role was built. The Swiss had their chalets, the Brits their Georgian townhouses, the French their Chateaux, and so the Americans deserved, and—to their surprise actually had!—an indigenous style, at least according to *House Beautiful*. And while Frank Lloyd Wright’s work was woven into that style, it was certainly not central to it.

Wright was livid. His ire is recorded in the letter he fired off to Gordon almost immediately upon reading the issue. Dated October 24, 1950, the missive is blistering. He began, “I have received a copy of your House Beautiful for November wherein my own work is prevaricated by way of Editorial-policy: a policy which (translated truly) means no more than salesmanship.” He went on to accuse Gordon of grouping him together with “conscienceless derivatives—the now many little boys who came along helping themselves (gratis) to what had cost a tragic lifetime of superlative effort on the part of Sullivan and myself.” Although in a couple of places the letter made little sense, such as when Wright accused Gordon of using other architects names “editorially . . . to ‘justify’ your use of the material.” the crux of his complaint was his strenuous objection to his ideas of organic architecture being recast as “Naturalism,” and that his work was now “... ‘a’, if not ‘the’ style.”<sup>148</sup>

Horried that he was so offended, Gordon scrambled to apologize. The four-page letter she wrote to Wright, dated December 5, 1950, was half comprised of long quotes from prior

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<sup>145</sup> Bangs, “This Isn’t The First Time We’ve Been In Love With Nature,” 194-195.

<sup>146</sup> Bangs, “This Isn’t The First Time We’ve Been In Love With Nature,” 194-195

<sup>147</sup> Germany, 55.

<sup>148</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright to Gordon, October 24, 1950. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

articles, including and especially the June 1946 “Meet Frank Lloyd,” reminding Wright that there was no publication more worshipful of him than *House Beautiful*. “That we should offend you in even the slightest degree is an overwhelming tragedy to me. And that we have caused you distress is a crime for which we can never forgive ourselves,” she wrote. The long quotes from the magazine’s tributes to Wright are chosen to highlight his influence on future generations of architects, “. . .to make clear,” Gordon wrote, “the obligation that all present-day architects owe you.”<sup>149</sup> The subtext of the catalogue-like letter was clearly that the last magazine in the world at which Wright had cause to be angry was *House Beautiful*. But Gordon did not address, nor did she directly apologize for, Jean Murray Bangs’ article on “Naturalism” and her timeline of American domestic architecture. Clearly, architects whom Wright saw as “conscienceless derivatives” who stole from his “tragic lifetime of superlative effort,” Gordon and Bangs understood to be good designers, whose work showed Wrightian influence but ultimately was their own.

Gordon’s apology was not enough to mend the fence. Wright made no reply. The Taliesin archives contain no further correspondence between Gordon and Wright on this issue or any other until April of 1953, when Wright re-established their relationship—one that was to deepen into a personal friendship that lasted until Wright’s death in 1959—following the publication of “The Threat to the Next America.”

Where the lines were drawn, in Elizabeth Gordon’s mind, between the International Style and “Good Modern” is unclear. As in the case of the Adams House by Hugh Stubbins, in the 1940s Gordon sometimes presented International Style houses as “Good Modern,” although without calling them “International Style” (*The Magazine of Building’s* editor, Douglas Haskell, would pointedly note this inconsistency in the pages of *House and Home* following the appearance of “The Threat to the Next America”). In fact, as demonstrated in Gordon’s September 1947 “The 12 Best Houses of the Last 12 Years,” some of the architects whose work was found to be praiseworthy in the WWII and postwar years, designed houses that showed strong International Style influence in the interwar years. But 1950 saw Gordon seeming to have generally settled on a preference for the Bay Region style, as articulated by Lewis Mumford and influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright. It is this paradigm that she continued to promote in the years to follow, through the Pace Setter program and also more generally, leading up to her presentation of Japanese-influenced architecture, “Shibui,” in 1960, for which a house by Gardner Dailey was used to demonstrate the benefits of incorporating Japanese elements into American designs.<sup>150</sup>

In effect, Elizabeth Gordon’s evolution as an editor at *House Beautiful* throughout World War II and in the few years reflects not only her leadership style, but also her sense of citizenship. As the country faced the grim impacts of war rationing, and private house building ground to a near halt, “Good Modern” vs. “Bad Modern” design was hardly a pressing issue. In these early war years, Gordon supported her readers as citizen consumers, both through advice concerning taste formation under the duress of rationed material goods, and emotionally, speaking to them as one war wife to hundreds of thousands of others. As the war dragged on, she pointed her readers toward the horizon of the war’s end. Around 1943, as the public looked

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<sup>149</sup> Gordon to Frank Lloyd Wright, December 5, 1950. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

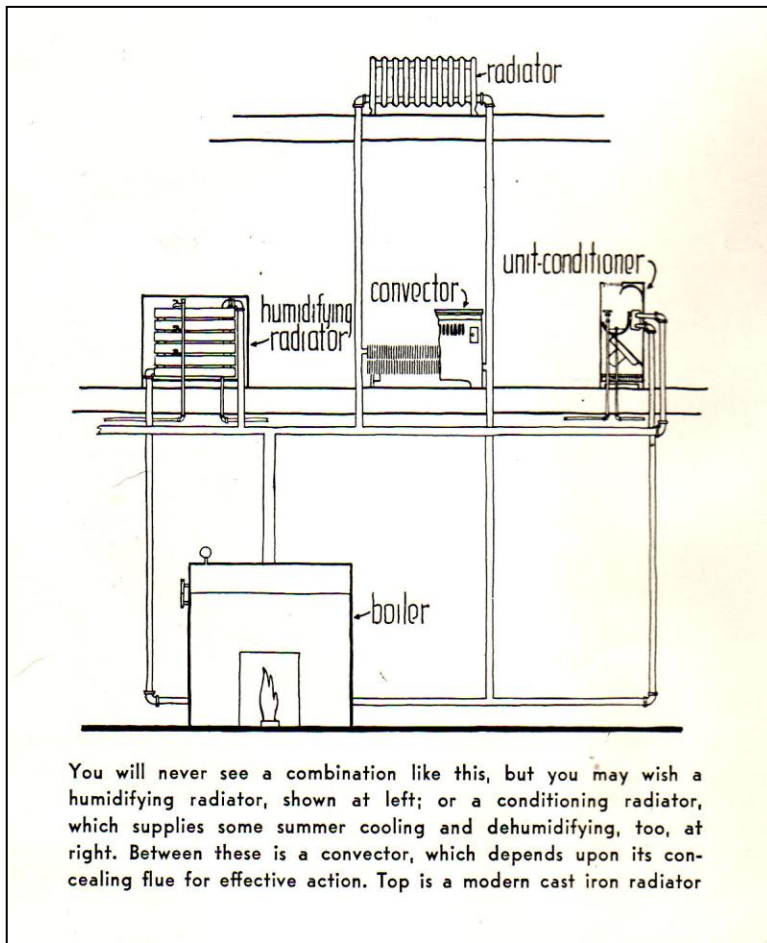
<sup>150</sup> Besinger, 120-126.



forward, Gordon did too, presenting modern architecture as a vision for tomorrow—a vision that could be golden or grim, like America’s future—and echoing the anticipatory attitude that infused countrywide planning for the war’s end.<sup>151</sup> After the war’s end, and as government restrictions on building were lifted, Gordon used “Good Modern” and later “American Style” as code for an ideal way of life, which she told her readers Americans had earned and to which they were entitled. By the early 1950s, Gordon seems to have seen modern architecture’s association with the International Style as a connection she would need to sever in the minds of her readers, if she were to achieve her goal of offering the American public all it deserved in housing.

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<sup>151</sup> Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*; Shanken, 194X.



**Figure 5. Illustration from “How Air Conditioning Works.” *House Beautiful*, July, 1937, 38.**



Figure 6. Delco-Frigidaire Ad. *House Beautiful*, July 1937, 2.

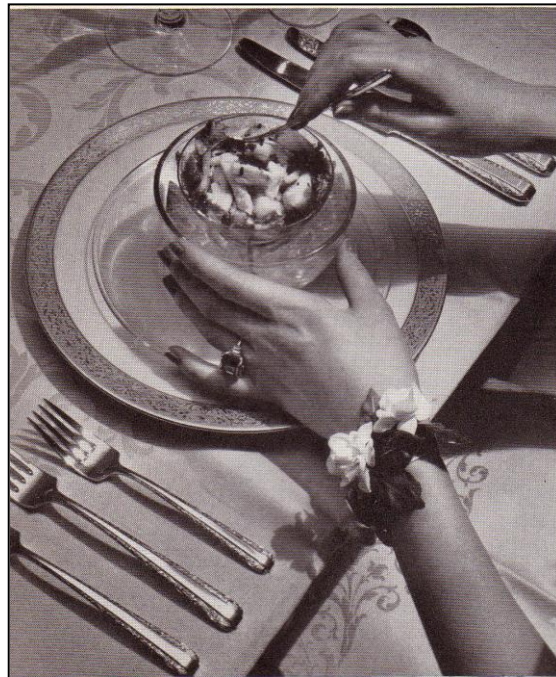
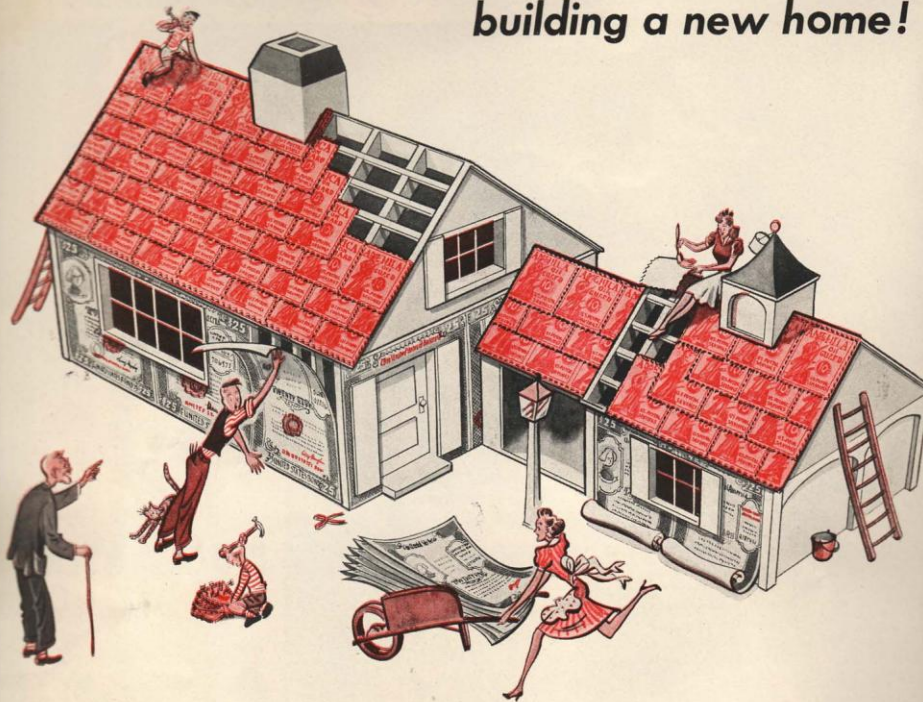


Figure 7. Woman's hands. *House Beautiful*, July 1937, 30.

Look... the Smiths are  
building a new home!



Stamp by Stamp and Bond by Bond—the Smiths are building for the future. Buying bonds to bring Victory nearer . . . building for a prosperous peace.

To the Smiths, Home means freedom, happiness, comfort and security . . . the fruits of Victory. More power to the Smiths! And to the millions of patriotic American families whose "all-out" purchases of War Bonds and Stamps are helping to win the war . . . and insure a prosperous America after the war.

**AFTER VICTORY—THE HOME YOU HAVE ALWAYS WANTED!**

Look at it this way. U. S. War Bonds and Stamps are common sense savings . . . Four dollars at maturity for every three invested now. After Victory, your Bond purchases can be used as part payment on the kind of a home you have always wanted . . . with everything in it that makes a real home. Act today—buy Bonds and save—your nation and your future both depend on it.

APPLIANCE AND MERCHANDISE DEPARTMENT, BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

**GENERAL  ELECTRIC**

**DEDICATED TO THE SERVICE OF AMERICA'S HOMES**

The General Electric Consumers Institute at Bridgeport, Conn., is devoted to research on such wartime home problems as: Nutrition • Food Preparation • Food Preservation • Appliance Care • Appliance Repair • Laundering • Home Heating and Air Conditioning. Bulletins and booklets are available through your G-E Appliance Dealer, or from G-E Consumers Institute, Dept. HB5-3.



Take in on Frazier Hunt and the News every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday evenings over C. B. S. On Sunday night listen to the "Hour of Clifton," over N. B. C. See Newspapers for times, stations.

Figure 8. General Electric Advertisement. *House Beautiful*, May 1943, 10.



# We're Buying WAR BONDS... And How!



EVERYBODY at our place is pitching in and getting all the War Bonds he possibly can! Dave and Sis invest over ten percent of their pay—and I squeeze every penny I can out of the household budget for my bond bank! We all want to help end this war in a hurry and get back to normal living again. Then we can have that Hotpoint Electric Kitchen we've been counting on. And of course the more money we lay aside now the more labor-saving appliances we'll be able to afford when peace comes.

## LOOK What They're Going to BUY US!



**FOR HOMES COSTING \$6,000**  
 The Parrot Kitchen is designed for homes costing as little as \$6,000 and is completely electric, with Hotpoint Range, Refrigerator, Dishwasher, Sink and Hotpoint Steel Cabinets.



**FOR LOW COST HOMES**

**FOR HOMES COSTING AS LITTLE AS \$4,000**

Hotpoint Electric Kitchens including Range, Refrigerator, Sink and Steel Cabinets have been installed in numerous homes costing only \$4,000. The cost of a Hotpoint Electric Kitchen averages about 10% of home-building costs.

### Tomorrow Is Worth Saving For

- The money you put in War Bonds today not only helps hasten Victory but also gives you the means to enjoy the great advancements in living that will surely follow. You know, our scientists are learning a lot of amazing things making war materials. They're finding cheaper ways of doing things better. So

- imagine how much finer—and less expensive—our homes of the future are bound to be! Hotpoint Electric Refrigerators—Ranges and Dishwashers and other home equipment will be improved unbelievably... So buy War Bonds! Remember that every three dollars you invest now will bring you four dollars at maturity.

### BUY WAR BONDS TODAY—An Electric Kitchen Tomorrow!



- At the touch of a switch, garbage disappears—dishes are washed hygienically clean. The Hotpoint Automatic Electric Dishwasher and Disposal do your disagreeable work like magic!



- Ample storage facilities provided by the Hotpoint Electric Refrigerator will enable you to save money by buying food in large quantities at low prices.



- Meals taste marvelous—are better for you, too—when you cook on a Hotpoint Electric Range. For healthful vitamins, minerals as well as the savory, natural juices do not waste away!

#### HOME PLANNING FILE

Now is the time to start your plans for a new home. Save notes and clippings in Hotpoint's Home Planning File—9 x 12 inches, heavy boxboard, ten filing divisions, plus folder for recording War Bond purchases. If your electric company or dealer cannot supply you, send 25 cents in coin or War Stamps today for your Home Planning File.



Edison General Electric Appliance Co., Inc.  
 5612 W. Taylor Street, Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find 25 cents, for which please send me Home Planning File.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

**ELECTRIC Hotpoint KITCHENS**

Figure 9. Ad for Hotpoint Kitchens. *House Beautiful*, May 1943. Back cover.



*Here's hoping, Captain Jim, that all this will be over sooner than you expect. . . Here's hoping that I'll soon be unpacking my hope-chest Wamsuttas for that new home we picked out before you left.*

Wamsutta *Supercal*\* sheets and pillowcases are made for use, and lots of it — to give long, happy years of service to the people who own them. . . Wamsutta's carefully planned combination of fine-

ness, smoothness, and strength has been achieved and maintained for this purpose.

So we are hoping too, Lieutenant, that you will be using those *Supercal* sheets before long . . . and that we at Wamsutta can go back to making enough of them for all of the other brides who want "The Trouseau Sheet of America" for their homes. WAMSUTTA MILLS, New Bedford, Mass.

★ ★ BUY WAR BONDS ★ ★



*Wamsutta* SUPERCAL SHEETS  
Springfield Blankets . . . Wamsutta-Somerset Towels

Figure 10. Ad for Wamsutta Sheets. *House Beautiful*, May 1943. Inside front cover.

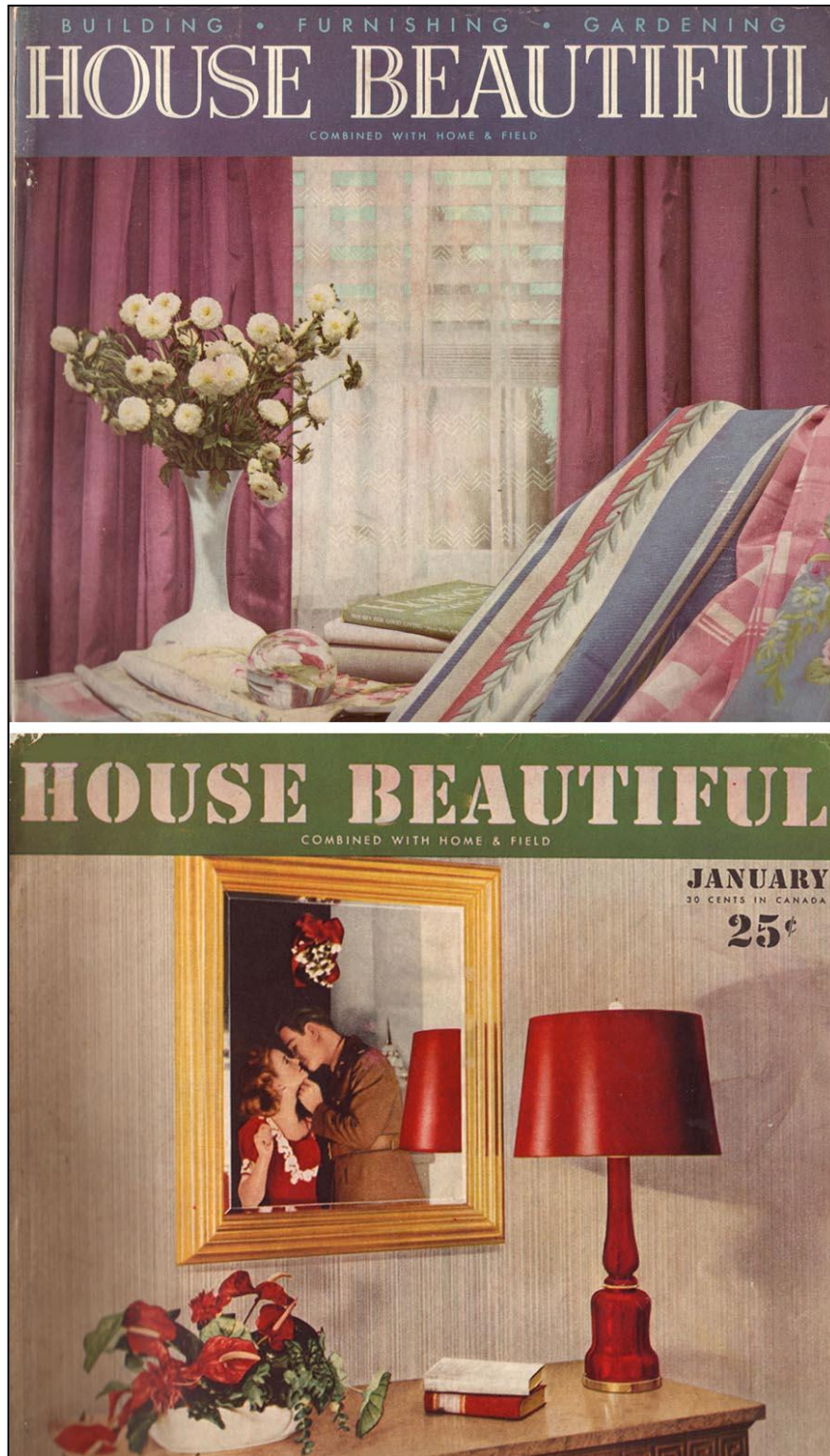


Figure 11. *House Beautiful* changed the font of the magazine's cover following the United States' entry into World War II. Compare October 1941's cover (top) to the cover of Elizabeth Gordon's first issue, January 1942 (bottom).



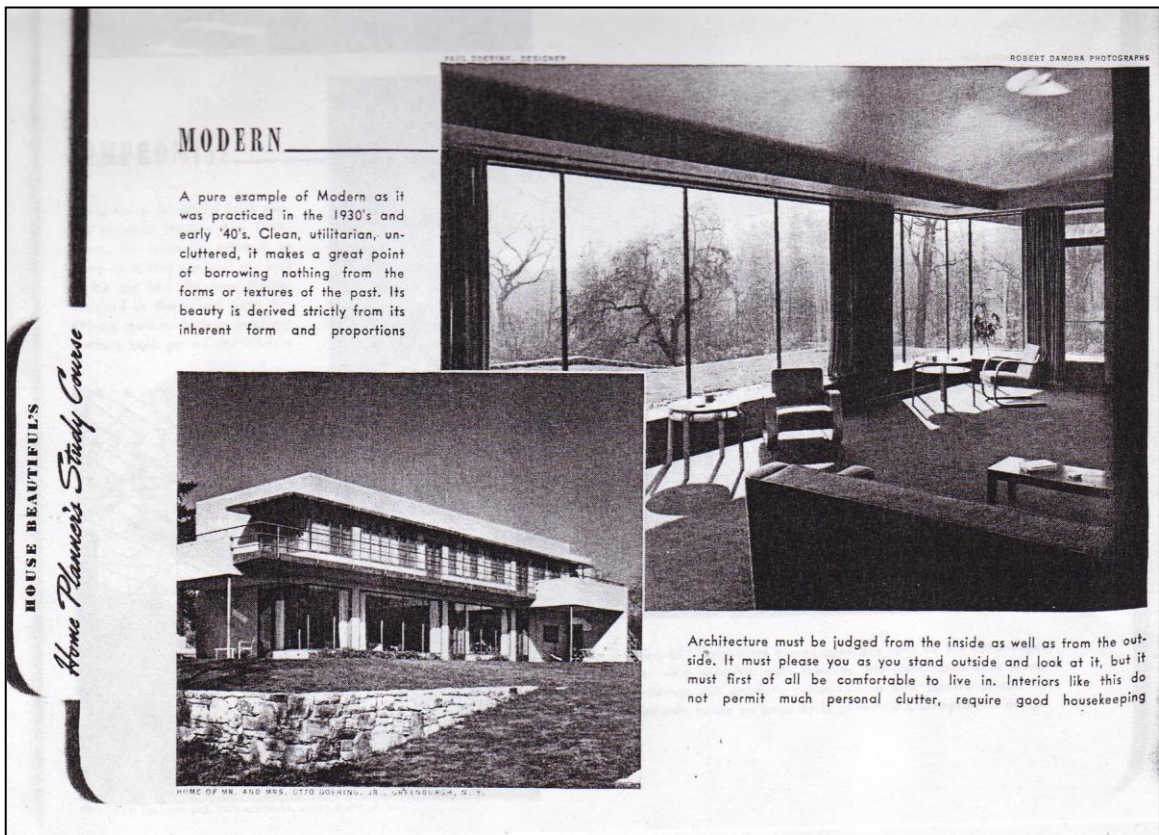


Figure 12. Modern house by Paul Doering, *House Beautiful*, October 1943, 68.





Figure 13. Cover of the August 1944 “Man issue” of *House Beautiful*.

T H E A R I S T O C R A T O F B O N D S

With its quality and character still the pride and trust of the same Kentucky family after 73 years, the choice of Kentucky Tavern by those who serve this fine liquor is indeed a Master Stroke of hospitality.  
Glenmore Distilleries Co., Incorporated, Louisville, Ky.

T H E R E ' S O N L Y O N E B E T T E R B U Y I N B O N D S . . . W A R B O N D S

**Figure 14.** Liquor ad on the back cover of the August 1944 “Man issue” of *House Beautiful*. While liquor ads were not uncommon in the magazine, this one was unique for its prominent placement and masculine theme.





Figure 15. A page from the August 1944 *House Beautiful* article “How to Judge Modern,” which featured the Weston Havens House by Harwell Hamilton Harris (page 55).



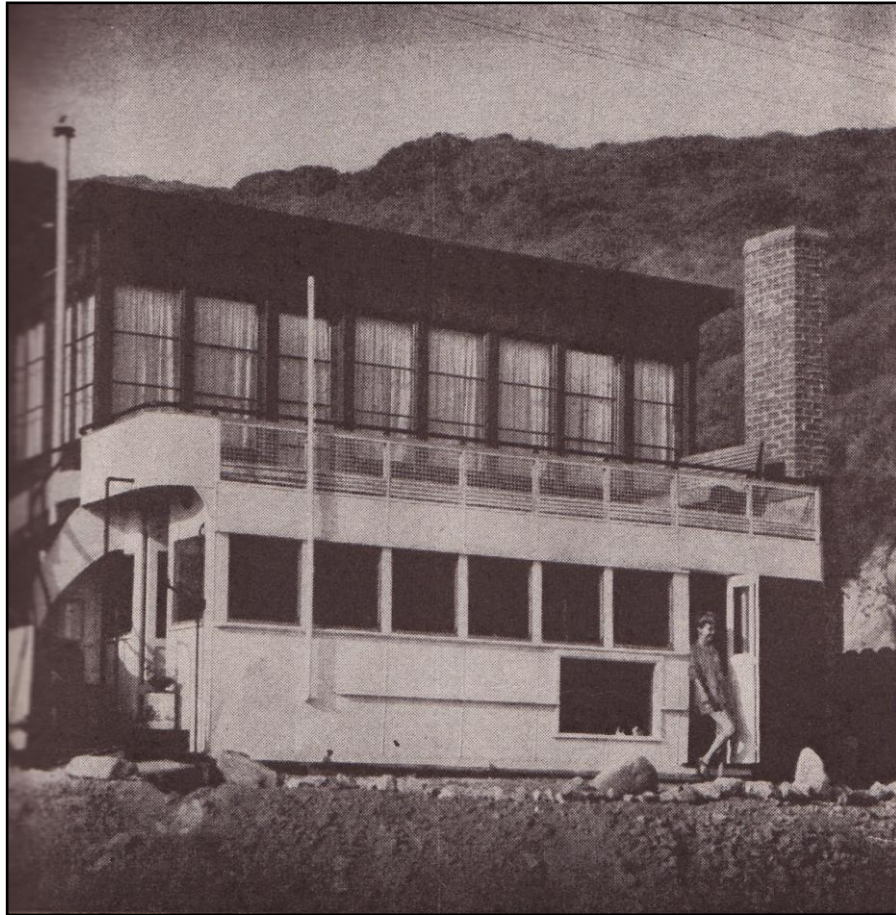


Figure 16. T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings. Source: *House Beautiful*, August 1944, 48.



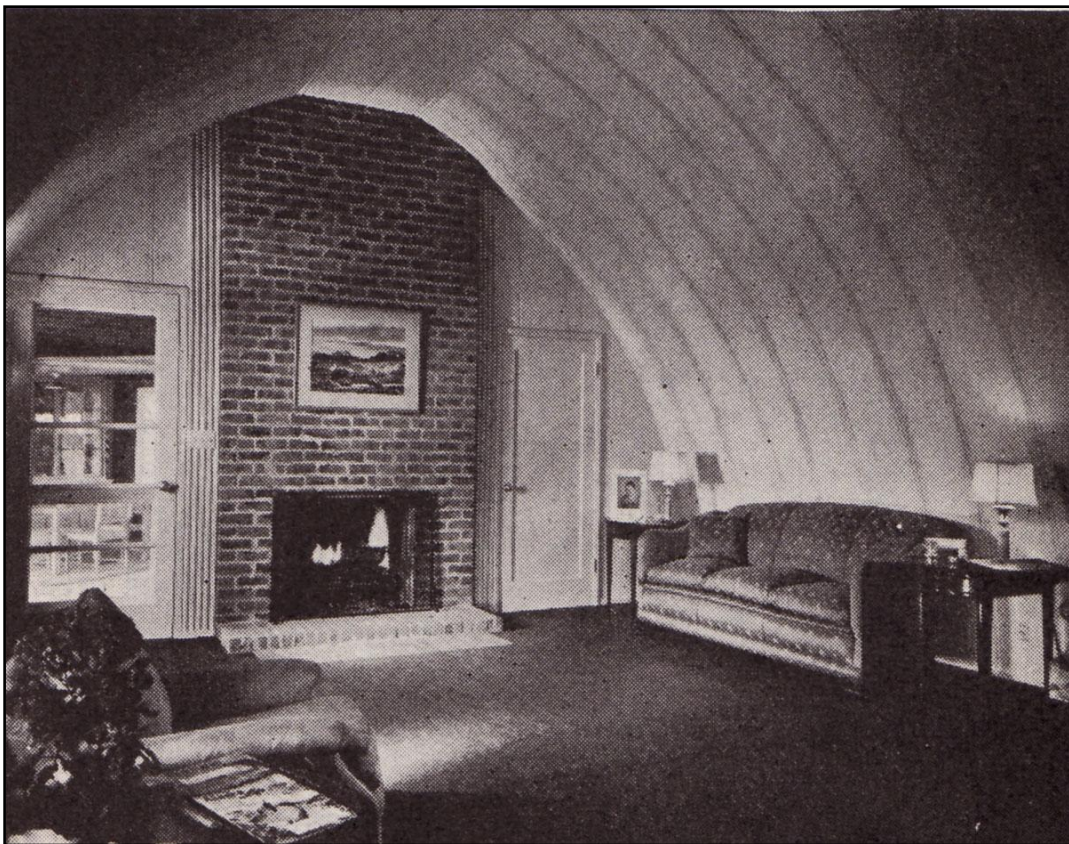
Figure 17. Florida Architect Alfred Browning Parker's house in first appearance in *House Beautiful*. The house featured modern design elements in tandem with locally available materials. *House Beautiful* March 1946, 106-107.





**Figure 18.** In a 1946 thematic issue on innovative answers to the postwar housing shortage, “How a secretary solved the housing Shortage” told of a young single woman who, with the help of her contractor father, adapted junked double-decker bus into a residence. The wood frame two-story ‘annex’ on the rear of the house was built by the pair. Source: *House Beautiful* September 1946, 115.

**Figure 19.** The interior of a home adapted from a military salvage Quonset hut, featured in the September 1946 thematic issue on innovation in solutions to the postwar housing shortage. Source: *House Beautiful* September 1946, 121.





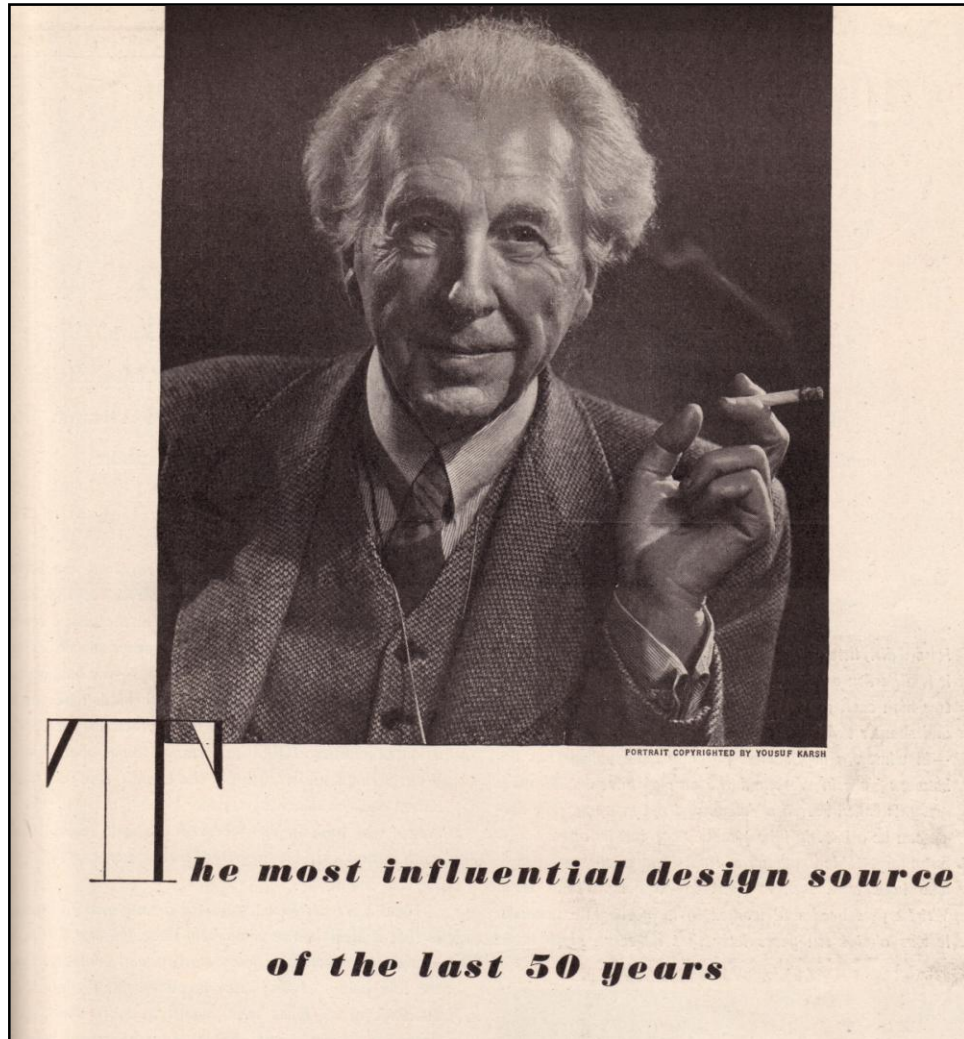
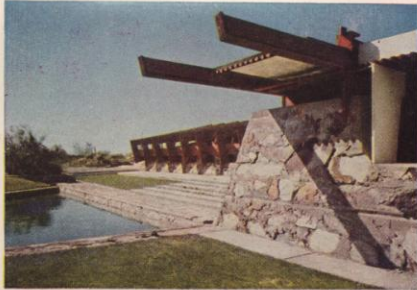


Figure 20. Frank Lloyd Wright, as photographed for *House Beautiful* by Yousuf Karsh. This photo accompanied *House Beautiful's* December 1946 feature article on Taliesin West, which was the first prominent feature on Wright's work in the magazine's pages since 1911 (page 185).





Shadow is as important a design element in the buildings of this desert camp as the structural materials themselves.



Even the shadows made by the steps play their part in the moving symphony of pattern. Unshaded, the steps show their texture.



One of the many terraces which use the structure as both windbreak and sunpocket for warmth.

This is Wrights' private terrace outside their sleeping quarters. Main living terrace beyond.

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL, DECEMBER, 1946

*. . . a symphony  
composed of  
sun and shadow*



**Figure 21. Photographs by Maynard Parker, from the *House Beautiful's* article on Taliesin West. December 1946, 190.**

### CHAPTER THREE: THE APRIL 1953 NUMBER

Elizabeth Gordon's decision to write and publish "The Threat to the Next America" in April 1953 was a pivotal point in her tenure at *House Beautiful*. By becoming a polemicist and provocateur in opposition to the International Style (however ill-defined it was in the pages of her magazine), she stepped squarely into a debate that had hitherto been generally confined to the field of architecture, with any commentary outside the field coming from culture-commentary magazines like *The New Yorker* or *Harper's*. Her actions directly and indirectly threw a harsh spotlight on the tensions and disagreements within the architecture profession surrounding the participation of architects and designers in the fields of mass consumption, and also on women's authority to participate in the discourse of modern design. In the 1940s, Gordon had promoted *House Beautiful* in the public eye as a source of expertise on modern (or contemporary) style, using terms like "Good Modern" vs. "Bad Modern" and "American Style" to stake out the magazine's brand. With the April 1953 editorial, *House Beautiful* intruded on a tight circle of professional architectural periodicals, to the dismay of many editors, architects, and other designers who saw no place of intersection between these publications and the shelter press. For them, architecture periodicals addressed design, and were where they debated issues pertinent to their work and livelihoods, lauding or criticizing one another from places of knowing. Shelter magazines, in their eyes, presented taste choices to the public who needed help making those choices, and were lumped together with women's magazines. For many architects and others who flung themselves into the fray during Elizabeth Gordon's campaign, this battle belonged on the field defined by the former type of publication, and they felt *House Beautiful* fell decidedly into the latter category.

"The Threat to the Next America" also provoked a strong backlash in part because it was perceived to have raised the specter of communism in relation modern design. Today, in the early years of the twenty-first century, communism has been replaced by terrorism as the

scarecrow of Western Civilization. To the eyes of the twenty-first century reader, “The Threat to the Next America” seems like over-the-top rhetorical posturing. Even today—as it was at the time of its publication—the editorial continues to be condemned for Gordon’s exploitation of Cold War-style rhetoric in a context in which it was misapplied.<sup>1</sup> In writing such fraught text as “...for if we can be sold on accepting dictators in matters of taste and how our homes are to be ordered, our minds are certainly well prepared to accept dictators in other departments of life,” Gordon abstracted a parallel between housing and politics in a way that was unusual in a shelter magazine, yet it was remarkably similar to writing found in the aligned genre of the women’s press.

From their inception, women’s magazines contained editorials with political content, often advocating (or not) legislation and social changes related to Progressive Reform and its allied agendas, such as women’s suffrage. In the postwar period, as the Cold War intensified, these impulses turned toward promoting mass consumption and American entitlement. At about the same time “The Threat to the Next America” ran, Dorothy Thompson was writing a monthly column for *Ladies Home Journal* comprised of such essays as “Communism is an Assault on Civilization.” Thompson, considered to be one of the nation’s most influential women and a well-known journalist both before and during WWII, was famous for, among other things, her strong anti-Nazi stance. Although she did not endorse McCarthyism (in later columns she decried it), in the aforementioned column she sharply contrasts communism with Christianity and juxtaposes the Biblical Ten Commandments with a list she calls “The Ten Commandments of Communism,” which includes such sensationalized items as “Kill if the party selects for you that task” and “Encourage libertinage and sexual license.”<sup>2</sup> Although, generally, consumption patterns in the postwar United States were very much linked to traditional family life, which was (and in many U.S. subcultures still is) commonly held to be the moral center of the country, the only direct connection in Thompson’s list to usual shelter magazine interests is her observation that communism has no respect for property rights (#8: “Never respect the property rights of others”). The ownership of private property was considered to be a hallmark of a free society, and it was also heavily touted in postwar America as a moral virtue. Historian Nancy Walker, in her book *Shaping Our Mother’s World: American Women’s Magazines*, points out that women’s magazines, more than any other type of mass-circulation periodicals, promoted the “American way of life, from menus for Fourth of July picnics to advertisements for washing machines. With the kitchen and its female inhabitant the ‘heart of the home,’ women were implicitly on the front lines of the battle against Soviet aggression.”<sup>3</sup> This imagery was concurrent with the promotion of home ownership by business groups like the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and government agencies such as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and was central to the postwar housing boom.<sup>4</sup> This boom in turn fed the manufacturing industry, whose advertising dollars drenched the pages of the shelter magazines.

It was in the shelter press’s best interests, then, to add their voices to the chorus of opposition to communism and in favor of American individualism, but most managed to do so without politicizing design and designers themselves. With “The Threat to the Next America,” Elizabeth Gordon plunged beyond that boundary. The editorial stopped short of directly

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<sup>1</sup> cf., Harris, Dianne, “Making Your Private World”; Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 112-115.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, Dorothy. “Communism is an Assault on Civilization,” 11-13.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, *Shaping our Mother’s World*, 193.

<sup>4</sup> Baxandall and Ewen, 106-107.

equating the International Style with communism; the words “communist” or “communism” did not appear in the editorial itself, although Gordon did make a point of noting in a sidebar that one former Bauhaus director, Hannes Meyer, was a communist. Although the sidebar contained some of the most alarmist points related to the editorial, even listing “warning signs” of International Style modernism, whether or not the editorial itself was intended to reflect national political currents seems to be a matter of interpretation. Compared to Dorothy Thompson’s essay in *Ladies Home Journal*, which was extremely direct in condemning communism, “The Threat to the Next America” was ambivalent.

Yet it is inarguable that Gordon employed language that was clearly intended to alarm her communist-wary readers. Very early in the editorial she wrote:

These arbiters make such a consistent attack on comfort, convenience, and functional values that it becomes, in reality an attack on reason itself.

“Incredible!” you say. “Nobody could seriously sell such nonsense.”

My considered answer is this. Though it *is* incredible, some people *are* taking such nonsense seriously. They take it seriously because this propaganda comes from highly placed individuals and highly respected institutions. Therein lies the danger.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, however, a close reading of the editorial seems to defy the assumption that Gordon intended to exploit anti-communist hysteria. She contrasted the image of the courageous individualist with that of the mindless follower, and throughout the editorial she equated “Freedom” with capitalism, a connection commonly made by the mass media. She juxtaposed this imagery with its antithesis, i.e., slavish allegiance to a dictatorial authority, a characteristic linked with communism in the imagination of the postwar American public. Gordon wrote:

Break people’s confidence in reason and their own common sense and they are on the way to attaching themselves to a leader, a mass movement, or any sort of authority beyond themselves. *Nothing better explains periods of mass hysteria or various forms of social idiocy than the collapse of reason, the often deliberate result of an attack on people’s self-confidence.* [emphasis mine]<sup>6</sup>

This passage can be easily understood, as many of her critics did, as Gordon drawing a parallel between avant-garde modernist architectural imagery—which much of the American public found to be jarringly different than their deep-seated ideas about what housing should be—and fascist or communist movements. Yet her words could be just as easily have been interpreted as drawing a parallel to the actions of such *anti-communist* institutions as the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and its leader, Senator Joseph McCarthy. In a later editorial, in the October 1953 issue, she objects to comparisons between her stance and McCarthyism, writing, “We decided to expose the International Style knowing that some would accuse us of adding to the hysteria of today, which we too decry; of engaging in the current pastime of name calling, which we despise...”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon, “The Threat to the Next America,” 127.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon, “The Threat to the Next America,” 127.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon, “Does Design have Social Significance?” 313.

McCarthy and the HUAC were, at the time Gordon's editorial appeared, gaining momentum as they destroyed the lives and careers of hundreds of Americans with (usually) baseless accusations of communist affiliation, grandstanding for political gain as they played on public anxieties around the Cold War. Historian Richard Fried notes that these anxieties were not just political, but also had deeper roots in the public's reaction against an accelerating modernity and the rapid cultural change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: "Many such changes occurring in the neighborhood, the nation, and the world, could, consistent with the strength of America's anti-Communist consensus, be attributed to Communist scheming. . . . Thus a profound cultural aversion to communism also underlay McCarthyism."<sup>8</sup> It should also be noted that *McCarthyism* was, at this time, a term coined not by supporters of McCarthy and the HUAC, but by their critics. As Fried notes, it became a blanket term for any overzealous stance or activity that compromised civil liberties.<sup>9</sup>

Gordon abstractly generalized about individualism and the disastrous consequences of the lack of it, and finally came around to pointing out (but not naming) a specific movement of modern design. It is in this passage that she frames the argument that "design has social implications," a phrase she would put to use in later speeches and editorials:

If people don't trust themselves and their own judgment, then they turn helplessly to leaders, good or bad. And they can only recover the good, sensible life when they recover their senses and discover again that, by and large, the ultimate hope for mankind is the application of reason to the world around us. This *rediscovery* leads individuals to their own declaration of independence against the frauds, the over-publicized phonies, the bullying tactics of the self-chosen elite who would dictate not only taste but a whole way of life.

So you see, this well-developed movement has social implications because it affects the heart of our society—the home. Beyond the nonsense of trying to make us want to give up our technical aids and conveniences for what is *supposed* to be a better and more serene life, there is a social threat of regimentation and total control. *For if the mind of man can be manipulated in one great phase of life to be made willing to accept less, it would be possible to go on and get him to accept less in all phases of life* [emphasis hers].<sup>10</sup>

Gordon has made the connection between mass consumption and a greater social good, and she reinforced these ideas by calling the modernist architects whose work she so thoroughly disliked "the cult of austerity," placing them in a sinister context that would have resonated with readers who understood communism to be sinister, but also, perhaps, to readers who understood the fundamentalist patriotism inherent in McCarthyism to be sinister. This passage reflects an attitude that remained part of Gordon's worldview throughout her life and was echoed in her late-in-life writings, in which she told of her attempts to alert the public to the fact that they deserved more than the "minimal tract" houses that were so prolific in postwar subdivisions across the country.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Fried, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Fried, 133.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America," 127.

<sup>11</sup> cf: Gordon, "On Becoming an Editor," Curtis Besinger Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library.

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR “THE THREAT TO THE NEXT AMERICA”

In “The Threat to the Next America,” Gordon’s opening tone is urgent and immediate: “I have decided to speak up” implies that she has been finally, but suddenly, goaded into action, and that the camel’s back has held its last straw. Yet this belies the careful planning and marketing that was behind the editorial and its placement in the April 1953 issue. The tone also ignores that Gordon had been attempting to steer the course of modernist housing—and had been severely critical of some of it—since 1943. She had, in fact, been speaking up for a decade. Her dichotomization of modern design into “good vs. bad” categories began almost as early as her discussion of modern design itself. The August 1944 photo essay, “How to Judge Modern,” which extolled the virtues of modern design as embodied in Harris’s Havens House, is not the earliest mention of “Modern” in *House Beautiful*’s pages, but it stands out as the start of Gordon’s attempt to claim the front-runner spot in the race to sell modern architecture to the public. Writing, “*House Beautiful* is very desirous of establishing this simple fact: that there is both good and bad Modern architecture. Once that fact is accepted we will hear no more ill-considered talk that says, ‘I don’t like Modern.’ For what American can reject something which can produce a better way of life?” Gordon was clearly attempting to cajole her readers into accepting new ideas in housing.<sup>12</sup> During the interwar years, modernism had found architectural expression in the domestic sphere through a handful of wealthy clients, but the middle class was still, by-and-large, choosing from Craftsman, Cape Cod, and other revival styles available to them through pattern books and other mail order sources.<sup>13</sup> Gordon felt that modern design could bring consumers more of what they, as emergent victors, deserved but did not know to ask for, and that these elements could be built into the designs of modern houses far more easily than older, traditional designs could be adapted for them.

A good example of *House Beautiful*’s advocacy of modern design solutions for middle-class housing needs is the November 1950 feature on Eichler Homes.<sup>14</sup> Built by merchant-developer Joseph Eichler in subdivisions that dotted the San Francisco Bay area as well as southern California, around 11,000 houses were designed by the architecture firm of Anshen + Allen and also by the partnership of A. Quincy Jones and Frederick Emmons.<sup>15</sup> Eichler Homes were to become emblematic of modern housing design in a middle class context. Although at \$12,650 the Eichler house depicted was somewhat more expensive than a house in Levittown (\$7,990 in 1949<sup>16</sup>), *House Beautiful* staff writer Frances Heard noted that it sat in a development of 300 houses ranging in price from \$9,400 to \$15,000.<sup>17</sup> She outlined the “...things that count most toward real living value”: *Climate control*, which in *House Beautiful*’s definition meant managing heating and cooling with architectural, not mechanical means, was accomplished through careful site planning; *Privacy*, that life-enhancing quality so important to the self-defined individual and his or her family, was accomplished by losing the front-facing picture window ubiquitous in tract housing and orienting the house away from the street, with glazing facing the terrace and fenced back yard instead; *Easy operation without servants*, the hallmark of

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<sup>12</sup> “How to Judge Modern,” 71.

<sup>13</sup> Hayden, *Building Suburbia*. 97-127.

<sup>14</sup> “Making a Little Go a Long Way,” 210-215.

<sup>15</sup> Buckner, 108-111.

<sup>16</sup> *New York Times*, March 7, 1949. Quoted in Nicolaidis and Wiese, *The Suburb Reader*, 261.

<sup>17</sup> “Making a Little Go a Long Way,” 210.

a relaxed postwar lifestyle, could be achieved through modern design elements like the stainless-steel-top serving bar dividing the kitchen from the dining area, releasing the housewife from “the heavier chores of serving” (Figure 22)<sup>18</sup>

Note the disconnect between the imagery associated with the modern home and the reality of living in one, a disconnect that was to become a recurrent theme in postwar modern housing regardless of price or client’s class. This schism in upper-class housing is exemplified by the battle between Dr. Edith Farnsworth and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe over her house in Plano, Illinois, but it existed in housing for the middle class as well. Architectural historian Annmarie Adams has compared the presentation of ideal life as promoted by Eichler Homes, Inc., with actual life in an Eichler home in Terra Linda, California. What was touted as privacy-enhancing in the site plan, high fencing, and “the general turning of the Eichler houses away from the street” was subverted by the occupants, in particular the children, who chose to play in the street instead of in the rear courtyard. The children also tunneled under the fences into the yards of their friends. Although the master bedroom of the house had a sliding glass door, the children’s bedrooms were cramped and poorly ventilated. When the dining area off the open kitchen proved too small, the family placed a larger, free-standing table in one half of the larger multi-purpose room, in effect reducing the amount of flexible space for a permanently designated purpose. Built on slab, it had no basement, and was severely lacking in storage space.<sup>19</sup>

Although Eichler Homes are coveted today among mid-century modern aficionados,<sup>20</sup> in the postwar period they seem to have been beset by some of the problems Russell Lynes predicted in *Harper’s* in his 1945 essay, “Architects in Glass Houses.” Lynes addressed the lack of storage space: “[modern architects] are forcing us to become men and women of decision, always ready to make up our minds whether we should throw away those outmoded galoshes, that outgrown kiddie-car, that unsuccessful oil portrait of grandfather...”; and the south-facing glass, which allowed for passive solar heating in winter: “The architects assume that we all want—or ought to want—all the daylight we can get ... but it disregards the fact that for some people, enough is enough.”<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, although Lynes argument foreshadows Gordon’s by about eight years, he is criticizing all modern architecture, not just one strain of it. Yet his complaints mirror hers rather closely, and ultimately even the kinds of houses she found to be “Good Modern,” such as the Eichler home, carried many of the same flaws she pointed out as less than desirable in her earlier discussions of “Bad Modern.”

## COMRADES IN ARMS

Like many who are—or at least see themselves—at the forefront of cultural trends, Gordon likely surrounded herself with like-minded thinkers. Journalist William Langewiesche, son of *House Beautiful* contributor Wolfgang Langewiesche, recalls that she was a member of a salon-like social circle in the 1950s, of which his parents were also members, a group that would meet socially and discuss pertinent issues of the day.<sup>22</sup> While she may have drawn support for her battle from their numbers, it is not fair to assume that all other members of the “salon” would

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<sup>18</sup> “Making a Little Go a Long Way,” 212.

<sup>19</sup> Adams, “The Eichler Home,” 164-178.

<sup>20</sup> cf, “Eichler Homes of San Francisco and Marin County.”

<sup>21</sup> Lynes, “Architects in Glass Houses” 342.

<sup>22</sup> William Langewiesche, personal communication, September 25, 2009.

have been lockstep in agreement with Gordon as concerned her views on modern design and European modernism in particular. But the fact that she belonged to such a group indicates that she likely sought support for her point of view, and may have had to argue for it even before she wrote the editorial. Although the archival record is likewise sparse as concerns correspondence between Gordon and those with whom she had a kindred opinion of the International Style, some extrapolation is possible. Three notable figures among those who took opposing stands to the ways International Style design was being marketed at the time were either employed by or were contributors to *House Beautiful*: Jean Harris (aka Jean Murray Bangs—like Elizabeth Gordon, she used her maiden name professionally), T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, Joseph A. Barry, and Lewis Mumford. With the exception of Jean Harris, Gordon’s personal relationship with these individuals is not known, but they have in common that they had, not long before 1953, expressed reservations about European modernism in housing. This, and the inclusion of their works in the pages of *House Beautiful*, give some foundation to the speculation that they may have directly or indirectly encouraged Gordon’s decision to pen “The Threat to the Next America.”

### ***Jean Murray Bangs Harris***

Jean Harris’s advocacy of Gordon’s stance, if not her approach, is documented in the several articles on modern design she wrote following the war.<sup>23</sup> A 1948 *Architectural Record* article consisting of excerpts from her book on Maybeck, peppered with references to Maybeck’s place as one of the foremost and definitive American architects, carried a photo caption comparing his domestic work to Bay Region architect Gardner Dailey’s: “*Our one glimpse into the Chick House ... shows a stately grace, a bold use of component forms (fireplace in a glass wall) that makes one think of Mr. Gardner Dailey.*”<sup>24</sup> Jean Harris’s objection to this mention is referred to in a letter to her from stockbroker Gerald M. Loeb, who in discussing the *Architectural Record* article concurs: “I emphatically agree with you – I do not like the mention of Gardner Dailey.”<sup>25</sup> At the time, Jean Harris’s husband was designing a pavilion in Connecticut for Loeb, a building that evinced strong Craftsman influence infused with overtones of Japanese traditional design—in fact, its form and style were, in miniature, strongly reminiscent of Maybeck’s 1910 First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Berkeley. Bernard Maybeck had designed a house for Loeb’s mother, and memories of this connection prompted Gerald Loeb to provide grant funding through the University of California at Berkeley for Jean Harris’s book on Maybeck (which was never completed). Loeb initially desired to offer the grant through the Museum of Modern Art (although a native of San Francisco, Loeb was by that time a New Yorker), but Jean Harris objected on the grounds that MoMA’s privileging of European modernism was in conflict with the character of Maybeck’s work.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Germany, 154. Attempts to locate private correspondence between Jean Harris and Gordon were unsuccessful for this project, but what correspondence of Harris’s that was located reveals that she was fiercely protective of her research and work on Bernard Maybeck, even to the point of objecting to any comparison between him and the Bay Area regionalist’s work (of which Gordon was fond), other than her husband’s (Jean Harris to Jeffrey Limerick, July 5, 1977. Alexander Architectural Archive).

<sup>24</sup> Bangs, “Bernard Ralph Maybeck, Architect, Comes Into His Own: Notes from a forthcoming book on Maybeck.” 72-79.

<sup>25</sup> Gerald M. Loeb to Jean Harris, February 10, 1948. Alexander Architectural Archive..

<sup>26</sup> Germany, 115-116.



If Gordon's xenophobia is a matter for interpretation, this is less the case with Jean Harris. A March 12, 1949, letter from her to design photographer William Helburn that was mostly about a potential article in *Architectural Record* contained this aside: "Did you notice Mr. Breuer's interview in the New Yorker? If that isn't a typical example of the cynical German disregard for truth I never saw one."<sup>27</sup> An examination of the interview, which was one of the New Yorker's "Talk of the Town" pieces for the March 5, 1949 issue, finds Breuer interviewed regarding his demonstration house at MoMA, then under construction in the Museum's garden. The source of Harris's accusation of prevarication is difficult to discern. Although some might take issue with his claim that flagstone is durable and easy to clean, this is a matter of subjective judgment. More likely Jean Harris found less than truthful his claim that "Modern architects don't like severity in a house ... Perhaps we did once, but we don't any more. Little by little, we've learned how to use the old natural materials—stone, unpainted wood—in fresh ways. We've learned to make houses that grow gently out of the land and will weather and become more beautiful with age."<sup>28</sup> Whether or not Breuer's houses or any other modern architect's became more beautiful with age is another subjective judgment, but Breuer was, in fact, by 1949 using unpainted wood to a greater extent in his domestic designs than he had earlier, when he was in practice with Walter Gropius, and the house he built for himself the year prior, in New Canaan, was a good example.<sup>29</sup> Yet to Mrs. Harwell Hamilton Harris, whose husband had elevated the use of unpainted wood to the sublime in his Havens House a decade earlier, Breuer's claim that modern architects were discovering natural materials "little by little" would have seemed uneducated at best and disingenuous at worst. Accusing him of lying, she apparently saw the worst in his statement.

Known to be a firm Republican and, in the words of Harwell Harris's Austin colleague, Colin Rowe, "frenziedly isolationist," Jean Harris was, according to Rowe, advising Elizabeth Gordon. Rowe was first introduced to Jean Harris at about the same time "The Threat to the Next America" was published. He recalled:

... the advice which Mrs. H. was transmitting to *House Beautiful* was of a distinctly embarrassing kind. The so-called International Style was an assault on American values; the cult of Mies van der Rohe, very prevalent down in Houston, was part of the same insidious plot; and, therefore, it should not be surprising that about this time *House Beautiful* published an article with a prominent caption reading: "They are taking away your birthright for *this*."<sup>30</sup>

Peter Blake, in his memoir *No Place Like Utopia*, also recalled that Jean Harris was allied with Gordon in the "Threat to the Next America" controversy. But Blake disassociated Harwell Harris with the controversy, noting parenthetically, "Her husband, a decent and quiet gentleman, did not join in his wife's and Miss Gordon's campaign."<sup>31</sup> (Interestingly Blake, who was employed by the *Magazine of Building* in 1953, did not mention Gordon's husband, Carl Norcross, who was his coworker.) Nevertheless, Harwell Harris had a long association with *House Beautiful*, which had given him a great deal of much-needed publicity at a time when he was at the threshold of positioning himself professionally in the postwar period. If he did not

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<sup>27</sup> Jean Harris to William Helburn, March 12, 1949. Alexander Architectural Archive.

<sup>28</sup> "American Gift," 26-27.

<sup>29</sup> cf: Earls, 35-41.

<sup>30</sup> Rowe, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 175.

share Gordon's and his wife's open dislike of European modernists, he had, in the issues following the end of the war, allowed himself to be a poster boy for *House Beautiful's* dichotomization of "Modern" and the magazine's ambiguous identification of "American Style."<sup>32</sup> In the magazine's profile of Harwell Harris for its July 1945 issue, Gordon seems to have found it best not to categorize him as a modernist at all, but instead claims him for the nation; the word "modern" does not appear, but Harris's work is noted to be "... in the great tradition of American architecture, a design medium which is as vital and genuine an expression of the American spirit as the works of Emerson or Whitman."<sup>33</sup>

### **T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings**

A second possible person of influence in Gordon's war on "Bad Modern" was Jean Harris's friend T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, who first appeared in *House Beautiful* in August 1944 feature on the Havens House. His subsequent appearance in the "People Who Influence Your Life" series in April of 1946, allowed Robsjohn-Gibbings to articulate his dislike of European modernism, and in it we see a foreshadowing of Gordon's complaint in "The Threat to the Next America":

Gibbings dislikes "Modern" to be applied to his work, for he feels the term still suffers from the stigma of skyscraper bookcases and vast, low-slung chairs. Although he concedes much progress has taken place since the contemporary idiom first made its bow in American decoration, he nevertheless holds that a European ghost still haunts the scene, the ghost of a Modern room with chromium furniture, a cactus plant and some abstract paintings, "all looking like the anteroom of a boiler factory," as he puts it.<sup>34</sup>

Following the successes of his first two books, *Goodbye Mr. Chippendale* (1944) and *Mona Lisa's Moustache* (1948), Robsjohn-Gibbings became known for his advocacy of a "genuine American modernism," one noted by art historian Daniella Ohad Smith to be "founded on a return to early furniture forms and domestic culture as an assertion of local [read: "national"] identity."<sup>35</sup> In 1953, as Gordon planned her publication of "The Threat to the Next America," Robsjohn-Gibbings—by then chief designer at Widdicomb Furniture Company, a Grand Rapids, Michigan, firm that specialized in mass-produced, high-end furniture—would have been putting the finishing touches on his newest book, *Homes of the Brave*, a satirical look at modern architecture and various of its associated design trends. In this work, which appeared within a year of "The Threat to the Next America," it is possible to see the exchange of ideas between Gordon and "Gibby."

Robsjohn-Gibbings categorized what had come to be known as International Style, which he presented as German and Corbusian, as (respectively) "*Modernismus Modern*" and "*Machine-for-Living Modern*" and included them as only two of many modern styles (some of these being "*Moderno Modern*," "*Back-to-Nature Modern*," and "*Movie Modern*") to which he was

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<sup>32</sup> Germany, 105; "How to Judge Modern" 49-57; "People Who Influence Your Life: Meet Harwell Harris." 54-55.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon, "People Who Influence Your Life: Meet Harwell Harris," 55.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon, "People Who Influence Your Life: Meet Robsjohn-Gibbings," 108.

<sup>35</sup> Ohad Smith, Daniella. 2008. "Crafting a Modern Home for Postwar America," in *The Journal of Interior Design*, Vol. 34, No. 1. 53.

complimentary or derisive, depending on his affinity for the style. Although his approach took into account the diversity of strains within modern design to a far greater extent than Gordon's black-and-white "Good Modern" vs. "Bad Modern," it can be understood that Robsjohn-Gibbings had something to gain if the American public were to reconceive the popular notion of just what was "modern," moving away from the concept of the anti-historicist and toward a modernism that was flexible enough take advantage of the historical precedent and do it with grace and invention. As one of the foremost designers of mass-produced furniture in the postwar USA, Robsjohn-Gibbings would have had a stake in the public perception of "Good Modern" and their willingness to open their homes and checkbooks to designs that stood in the in-between ground between historicist (but not traditional) and modern. Ohad Smith has noted that Robsjohn-Gibbings was among the first to "clarify a new direction in design being taken at the same time by the promoters of postmodernism in architecture."<sup>36</sup>

Robsjohn-Gibbings was an agile writer with a sharp wit and talent for extending metaphors to the point of startling effectiveness, something that likely endeared him to both Jean Harris and Elizabeth Gordon. In the "*Modernismus* 'Modern'" chapter of *Homes of the Brave*, he aims his pen at the Bauhaus. Examining the history of modern design in post-World War I Germany, he juxtaposed the German reaction to postwar design with the French, painting the Germans as militaristic. This was aimed at Walter Gropius, in all likelihood, as Gropius had a military history and had served in the Prussian army during World War I.<sup>37</sup> To the post-world War II American reader, however, the image would have invoked the image of the jackbooted Nazi thug, as inappropriate as that was:

The modern decorators of France were specialists in luxury. In Germany a completely different type of man had appeared to take command of architecture and building ... the *Bauherr* was suggestive of the Prussian militarist transformed into an architectural academician ... [and] was determined to bring a new order into German life by means of a disciplined new style for all building. The past built on marching armies was over and done; henceforward it would be architecture and technocracy that would click their heels.<sup>38</sup>

Acknowledging Frank Lloyd Wright's influence on the designers of *Modernismus* modern, he notes that "Wright's concept of individuality was useless to them,"<sup>39</sup> but "under the streamlined coverings, nevertheless, were Wright's early forms. It was Wright in goose-step."<sup>40</sup> For anyone familiar with the history of the Bauhaus and the demise of the school due to the ascendancy of the Nazi Party, the Nazi imagery might be confusing. But the accompanying illustration by Mary Petty clarifies that the Bauhaus is, in fact, his intended target. It shows a woman seated at a vanity in a bedroom of distinctly Bauhaus-inspired design, from the tubular chrome footboard to the geometric textile area rug to the spoof-on-Kandinsky painting on the wall (Figure 23).

Robsjohn-Gibbings further skewers the "cult of austerity" in his "Machine-for-Living Modern" chapter, which is aimed at Le Corbusier and the functionalism behind such dwellings as Unite d'Habitation and, on a smaller scale, Villa Savoye and Villa Stein-de Monzie. Robsjohn-Gibbings' idea in this chapter was to steer Americans away from such functionalist

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<sup>36</sup> Ohad Smith, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Giedion, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings, *Homes of the Brave*, 44.

<sup>39</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings, *Homes of the Brave*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings, *Homes of the Brave*, 47.

ideas and toward the rich consumerism he felt they deserved. Again, Robsjohn-Gibbings plays the theme of European modernism as the antithesis of individuality:

The elevations arise, the strict patterns of efficient living already locked in the foundation still further tightened by walls, windows, and roofing... The parts, like those of a machine, are put together so that the finished assemblage will make the people inside hum or purr or throb as they go about their well-planned lives...

...In the face of such inexorable reasoning, what layman has the temerity to whimper of his odd personal preferences?<sup>41</sup>

At the time *Homes of the Brave* appeared to interpret European influence on modern design for American consumers, American taste paradigms were being disseminated in European exhibitions as part of the Marshall Plan in what Greg Castillo has called “trade fair diplomacy.”<sup>42</sup> *House Beautiful* was to be a participant in the 1955 “Main Street USA” Exhibit, mounted by the Office of International Trade Fairs (an agency formed by the Eisenhower Administration to proffer American consumption patterns after McCarthy and the HUAC decimated the ranks of the agencies previously assigned the job, in their attempts to ferret out communists among federal employees).<sup>43</sup> The Main Street USA exhibit peddled interiors that “reflected a conscious exercise in down-market advertising in the belief that aiming low would yield increased exports.”<sup>44</sup> But earlier, in 1951, the Mutual Security Agency (MSA) mounted an exhibition entitled “We’re Building a Better Life,” which was shown in West Berlin, a city that lent itself particularly well to showcasing American consumer culture because it had been reconstructed following the war into a “city divided into two ideological showcases.”<sup>45</sup> This exhibit was designed to highlight the latest in American domestic design, and much of the smorgasbord it displayed was from the International Style repertoire, but without the social ideals that had characterized European modernism’s early development.<sup>46</sup> The exhibit relied heavily on furniture shown in MoMA’s 1950 “Good Design I” exhibition, which was curated by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., whom Castillo notes, “manifested an increasingly transnational approach to home design.”<sup>47</sup> “We’re Building a Better Life” showed a modernism that was more “cutting edge” than *House Beautiful*’s interiors for the Main Street USA exhibition a few years later, with “Good Design” alumni like George Nelson, Charles and Ray Eames, Florence Knoll and Eero Saarinen, whose work had been showcased at MoMA.<sup>48</sup> Although the MoMA exhibition also included T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, he is not known to have been included in “We’re Building a Better Life.”

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<sup>41</sup> Robsjohn-Gibbings, *Homes of the Brave*, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 119.

<sup>43</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 118.

<sup>44</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 120.

<sup>45</sup> Castillo, “The American ‘Fat Kitchen’ in Europe,” 39.

<sup>46</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 64.

<sup>48</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 65.

### *Joseph A. Barry*

In the works of a third member of Gordon's possible circle of influence is a clue to this perception that Corbusian functionalism denies individuality. Joseph Barry, who joined *House Beautiful* as executive editor in August of 1952, although he performed editorial duties at the magazine prior to that time, met and interviewed Le Corbusier for his 1951 exposé about the life of an expatriated American in Paris, *Left Bank, Right Bank*. Barry had worked as a Paris correspondent for Newsweek from 1946-1949, and was Paris Bureau Chief for the New York Times Sunday edition from 1949 to 1952, when he joined *House Beautiful*.<sup>49</sup> As with Harris and Robsjohn-Gibbins, Barry's writings for *House Beautiful* were fully supportive of Gordon's anti-International Style stance (his article in the April 1953 issue is discussed later in this chapter), but his chapter in *Left Bank, Right Bank* is an early indicator that he understood Le Corbusier's design philosophy to be a poor fit for Americans.

Written as *Unité d' Habitation* at Marseille was near completion, Barry interviewed Le Corbusier and then attempted to understand his ideas through the lens of the new apartment structure and its new residents. He walked the reader through the model apartment, noting those things that Americans (and many French people) would find to induce cognitive dissonance, such as the master bedroom open to the living area below (a common feature in today's urban loft apartments). Bathrooms had no natural light, a feature Le Corbusier explained saying, "Why do you want sunshine in the bathroom when you are in it only in the morning and at night?" As for the lack of privacy in the open bedroom, the architect countered: "No privacy? My apartments are for young people who have a different ethic than the French or American bourgeoisie. Everybody will be in the salon together or everybody will go to bed."<sup>50</sup> For balance, Barry interviewed 14 Marseillais, all of whom are somehow associated with the *Unité d' Habitation*. Only one, Barry noted, would like to live there, and he worked for Le Corbusier.<sup>51</sup> But few of the objections, save for the open bedroom and lightless bathroom, were related to the building's design. Most were rooted in the interviewees' inability to understand the need for the building—why accommodate density when the population isn't all that dense? Marseille wasn't Paris, after all, and there was plenty of space. Why a building that relies so heavily on electricity when the country still experienced day-long power outages frequently?

Barry wrote as a journalist writes, and he also interviewed the residents of another Le Corbusier-designed apartment building, one which the architect owned and in which he also resided. They all noted that they appreciated the glazing and the sunlight it afforded and wouldn't want to live anywhere else, although Barry also noted in one interview that the building doesn't easily accommodate children.<sup>52</sup> Barry's interviews with student residents of Le Corbusier's Swiss Pavillion at the Sorbonne reveals that, although the light is good, the summer heat and winter cold make the rooms nearly uninhabitable.<sup>53</sup> One can easily imagine that, for Elizabeth Gordon, reading the book in 1951, the message would be that Le Corbusier did not value privacy or children and had no concept of that most obvious virtue of any modern housing,

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<sup>49</sup> Riley, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Barry, *Left Bank, Right Bank*, 168.

<sup>51</sup> Barry, *Left Bank, Right Bank*, 167.

<sup>52</sup> Barry, *Left Bank, Right Bank*, 172-173.

<sup>53</sup> Barry, *Left Bank, Right Bank*, 174.

climate control. That Barry would have taken those ideas away from his encounter with the architect would likely have made him a prized member of Gordon's team.

### *Lewis Mumford*

As Joseph Barry was coming aboard at *House Beautiful*, Gordon was establishing a business relationship with another much better known writer who had also shown little tolerance for the International Style, architecture critic Lewis Mumford. Mumford kept his distance from the furor surrounding "The Threat to the Next America," following the editorial's publication, at least as much as Gordon and Douglas Haskell allowed him to; however, it is in a letter from Gordon to Mumford that further evidence of "The Threat to the Next America's" long gestation is found.

Mumford had been on the record as having strong reservations as regarded many of the tenets of what he called "mechanical rigor" in architecture—in a 1947 issue of the *New Yorker*, in his "Skyline" column, he coined the term "Bay Region style" to express his favor for the more relaxed modernism that was appearing in the Bay Area of northern California. He preferred it over machine-for-living functionalism, which he called "old hat."<sup>54</sup> While Mumford defined the Bay Region style broadly enough to include Bernard Maybeck, he only pointed to one then-practicing architect as exemplary of the style, William Wurster. Mumford had a personal connection to Wurster, as Wurster had married Catherine Bauer, Mumford's former lover. It was this column that led to what architectural historian and Mumford scholar Robert Wojtowicz has called the first major reassessment of the 1932 exhibition, by way of the symposium, "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" at MoMA the following spring.<sup>55</sup> The symposium was moderated by Mumford and in addition featured the other original organizers of the 1932 exhibition on the International Style, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, as well as other noted architects and critics, including Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Eero Saarinen, ensuring more than adequate representation of European modernism. It is not known if Elizabeth Gordon was in attendance (as a *New Yorker* and an arbiter of architectural taste it seems very possible, and in 1947 she and the museum were not yet at odds), but if so this event may have reinforced in her mind a causal link between MoMA and the mechanical nature of the International Style. What correspondence of theirs is available indicates Gordon was a reader of Mumford's "Sky Line" column, and she considered him an ally in spirit if not in direct intention.<sup>56</sup>

In 1952, Gordon had acquired the rights to excerpt Mumford's upcoming book, *The Roots of American Architecture*. The edited version of the work ran in the October 1952 issue of the magazine, under the heading "Where Did the Contemporary American House Come From?" The rest of the issue was devoted to defining "American Taste," and Gordon made it clear that Americans could come to expect almost anything, as the new American Taste was eclectic and free-form: In a two-page spread Gordon gives readers ten "new characteristics of the age to come in American homes and home furnishings. Her list anticipates some of the defining traits of what

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<sup>54</sup> Mumford, "The Sky Line: Status Quo." 104-110.

<sup>55</sup> Wojtowicz, *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism*, 109; James-Chakraborty, "From Isolationism to Internationalism" 162-163.

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Gordon to Lewis Mumford, June 23, 1952. Lewis Mumford Papers, The Franklin Library Archives.

is today acknowledged to be classic mid-century modern designs, such as: “#9—Watch for the increasing importance of outdoor spaces around the house” (read, private courtyards, patios, and back yards); “#4—Watch for the great popularity of nature colors in both indoor decorating and outdoor use” [this often bore out in the color palettes chosen in mid-century custom homes]. But in the last item, #10, Gordon makes it her point to contrast “FREE TASTE” with “doctrinaire cults” [caps in original], which is her code for European modernists: “Watch how people are exercising FREE TASTE, mixing good things, regardless of the rules. They are bringing together things they like from all periods, all countries, and all cultures. This means the end of attempted fashion dictatorship, of rules about “authentic” combinations, of doctrinaire cults loaded with do’s and don’ts. *Anything good goes.*” [emphasis in original]<sup>57</sup> That Gordon was encouraging people to form and trust their own taste choices (while strongly encouraging them to adopt those shown in her magazine) is not unique to her message. It could be seen in other shelter and women’s magazines as well. But it is somewhat notable that Gordon was promoting taste as a process. Whereas many other arbiters of taste understood it as something one possessed, Gordon was here discussing taste in terms of arrangement—an active model instead of the passive model of taste, and one more in line with current theories of taste formation.<sup>58</sup>

It was with the October 1952 number in its formative stages that Gordon established a channel of communication with Mumford, whose presence in the October issue lent more than a little credibility to her effort to distinguish American design as an organic and unique entity, despite that, as William Jordy has noted, many of the tenets and ideas of the modernism she presented came from the Europeans.<sup>59</sup> In a letter from Gordon to Mumford, dated June 23, 1952, she wrote that Joseph Barry would be joining the staff, and that it was he whom she had entrusted with cutting Mumford’s manuscript for publication in the magazine. She went on to ask him an important question. Referring to an article of Joseph Barry’s she would like to run, in which Barry described a tour of “the best and the worst” modern houses in the United States, Gordon wrote, “My legal department says it would be libelous to Mies van der Rohe and that we will have to cut out the juiciest parts of it. I hate to do it, for if we cannot quote the actual experiences of the owners who live in these bloodless houses, how can we ever make clear ... what the alternatives are that they must choose between.” She went on to ask:

...I have been wondering how you manage at The New Yorker to say some of the things you say of a negative nature. Does their legal department work over every nuance of your copy to see that there are no grounds for action in it? Or is there some overall legal precedent which permits anyone to do negative criticism?

I want very much to get into real architectural criticism [emphasis hers], so that we may expose some of the nonsense that is going on in high-placed design circles. The false values that seem to be spreading and growing, and which are regularly publicized in effective publications and by powerful museums, really need a strong counter-influence. So I am girding for open battle. Any guidance you may want to offer on how to conduct our policy in this ticklish matter will be highly appreciated. And if you want to add your voice to ours in the form of articles, I would jump at the chance.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Gordon, “The New Taste Trend,” 173-174.

<sup>58</sup> Cranz, “A New Way of Thinking About Taste,” 130-136.

<sup>59</sup> Jordy, *American Buildings, Volume 4*, 175-176.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Gordon to Lewis Mumford, June 23, 1952. Lewis Mumford Papers, The Franklin Library Archives.

Gordon attempted, with this letter, to hire Mumford as a consultant, an offer he did not accept, although as no correspondence from him to her was discovered for this project, it is not known if he considered accepting. He did not appear in future issues as a consultant, but he remained a contributor, even in the aftermath of “The Threat to the Next America.” This letter is illuminating, because it demonstrated that Gordon was strategizing ways to position herself and the magazine as an opposing force to the International Style, or in her words, “girding for open battle.” And in it we also see her concern for the consumers of new modern housing—she is still the lioness protecting her cubs, as she was in wartime. It also clarifies that the battle with the International Style was hers, not one prompted by her superiors at Hearst, on whose behalf a legal department was insisting on caution. Gordon was not yet ready to take off the rhetorical gloves. That would involve further preparation.

### PROMOTING “THE THREAT TO THE NEXT AMERICA”

Because the April 1953 number was an unusual issue, directly articulating a grander vision for America in a way that was beyond the role of typical shelter magazines, it received more advance marketing than was usually given to individual issues of the magazine. It was no doubt intended to broaden the readership base, and Gordon made it a point to market the issue in ways that would facilitate that. The Hearst Corporation took out a three-quarter page ad in *Business Week* that carried a header screaming, “The current threat to the Next America!” (Figure 24). The ad goes on to provide a “teaser” from the editorial, and then explains to *Business Week*’s predominately male and white-collar readership why they might find the April issue of *House Beautiful* not just interesting, but crucial:

So begins our Editor’s challenging article . . . It tells how a small but influential clique would lead a cult of austerity with the slogan of “less is more.” It shows how this clique is foreign to native design and hostile to the reasonable desire for comfort and convenience in the American home. It proves the real and present danger of this threat to the rich promise of our expanding industry.

*The April issue is important to you, because your business is providing comfort and convenience, because you design and produce the objects that enrich our living. The clique that HOUSE BEAUTIFUL now openly opposes is aimed directly at you. It is as damaging to you as it is harmful to the people you are trying to serve.*

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL believes that a high standard of living is our greatest contribution to the history of man. It recognizes that American industry has made this possible. It is dedicated to raising the standard of American life even higher, not cutting it back to the bare wall and empty floor.<sup>1</sup>

By taking her battle to *Business Week*, Gordon widened the campaign’s boundaries beyond the pages of the architectural and shelter press, bringing it to what Douglas Haskell, editor of *The Magazine of Building*, called “The Chamber of Commerce”—meaning the advertisers, both hers and his. His anger at this action is evident in his correspondence in the months following the appearance of “The Threat to the Next America,” and Haskell apparently understood her

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<sup>1</sup> *Business Week*, April 4, 1953. McGraw Hill Publications.



editorial to be, if not a threat, at least a direct attempt to damage the financial health of the publications (*Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*) that he edited.

Gordon also advertised “The Threat to the Next America” in the *AIA Journal*, which quoted the editorial (in addition to *House Beautiful*’s ad) in their May 1953 issue. Ads for *House Beautiful* continued to appear in the journal for the remainder of the year, although after August the ads no longer promoted follow-up articles connected to “The Threat to the Next America.”<sup>2</sup> On a more private scale, Gordon sent a “warning letter” to Thomas Creighton at *Progressive Architecture*, indicating she was not only interested in selling as many copies of the April issue as possible (and in building circulation outside her usual readership demographic), but that she had an investment in the editorial’s generation of controversy as a way of boosting circulation.<sup>3</sup>

Although “The Threat to the Next America” and its impact has not been extensively studied by architectural historians, it frequently rates mention in historic accounts of postwar architecture, with Gordon’s motivation is usually given as xenophobia or a desire to increase sales. In his memoir, *No Place Like Utopia*, architect and former editor of *Architectural Forum*, Peter Blake, called the editorial a “sleazy maneuver evidently intended to build circulation.”<sup>4</sup> This stance overlooks the fact that a substantial part of a magazine editor’s job is exactly that: to build circulation. Under Gordon’s editorship *House Beautiful*’s circulation nearly quadrupled. Blake wrote the editorial off as an example of the Hearst Corporation’s McCarthyism, but his account did not address the possibility that Gordon’s criticisms were authentically motivated by her assessment that certain modernist architects were serving their clients poorly.

If Gordon’s claims were a cynical attempt at style assassination in the interest of promoting her magazine, then her ethics might rightly be called into question. But the support her editorial generated *within* the architecture profession indicates that many architects working in the postwar United States felt she had made a long-overdue point. Possibly, to Gordon, what Blake called a “sleazy maneuver. . . to build circulation,” was an honest attempt to bring these professionals into a conversation from which she and they believed they had been excluded. Nevertheless, that she accused European modernists of a disconnect from the American public’s housing wants and needs, implying that they were somehow un-American, was a tactic that makes charges of xenophobia and cynicism—then and now—perfectly understandable, as those qualities were so present in her editorial. Yet to focus only on them, as her detractors generally did and have done, is to overlook many other factors that contributed to the controversy, in particular the way that gender played out in the gatekeeping inherent not only in the pages of *House Beautiful* but in the actions and words of other publications and players as well. The first step in gaining a fuller understanding of these factors must be to place “The Threat to the Next America” in the thematic micro-context of the April 1953 issue, in which it was only one of several articles that told *House Beautiful*’s readers, “How You Will Live in the Next America” (Figure 25).

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<sup>2</sup> *AIA Journal*, Vol. XIX, No. 6 through Vol. XX, No. 2; It is possible that the journal’s advertising contract mandated purchase of a year’s worth of ads, or that this was simply the contract that *House Beautiful* negotiated with the *AIA Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> Although this letter was not discovered to be contained in any archive searched for this dissertation, Creighton refers to and quotes the letter in his editorial response to it, discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*. Blake was associate editor of *Architectural Forum* at the time “The Threat to the Next America” appeared, and would later serve as managing editor from 1961 to 1964 and editor –in-chief of the magazine, following Douglas Haskell’s retirement in 1964.

## THE APRIL 1953 ISSUE

Generally, the theme of a particular issue of a national magazine is decided several months in advance of its publication, and no evidence exists to indicate that the April 1953 issue of *House Beautiful* was an exception. “The Threat to the Next America” was clearly the centerpiece of the issue, and the other articles in general were arranged and written to support Elizabeth Gordon’s contention. The issue followed a typical structure for issues of *House Beautiful* at that time, with the feature articles related to the particular theme of the issue found about halfway through and bookended by supporting or non-related articles and departments, as well as advertising. Gordon often penned a supporting editorial introducing the central articles, although it was usually shorter and not as thunderous as “Threat to the Next America.” In a 1995 interview, former *House Beautiful* architecture editor John deKoven Hill noted that in 1953, when he joined the magazine’s staff, Joseph Barry and Marion Gough usually wrote most of the feature article copy, which Gordon then edited, but that she was alone in deciding the magazine’s direction.<sup>5</sup>

Hill was hired at *House Beautiful* soon after—and largely because of—the publication of “The Threat to the Next America.” He replaced James Marston Fitch, who resigned in protest of the editorial. Fitch’s resignation is the only known instance of internal dissent within *House Beautiful*’s staff around Gordon’s campaign. An architect who became a well-known advocate of historic preservation after studying the ways in which “slum clearance” was destroying historic urban fabric in cities, Fitch was working at *Architectural Forum* in 1949 when Gordon hired him to direct *House Beautiful*’s Climate Control project. Fitch and his wife left the United States immediately after his resignation from *House Beautiful*, but this was less a direct response to “The Threat to the Next America” and more a result of the greater climate of fear building in the country around the activities of Senator McCarthy and the HUAC. He recalled:

I resigned from the editorial board of *House Beautiful* in the spring of 1953. The decisive issue was, of all things, whether the Gropian/Miesian/Bauhaus version of modern architecture was “communistic,” hence somehow un-American, while that of the San Francisco Bay region which the magazine editorially supported was safely “American.” I had argued for months against such an absurd posture, but realizing that the magazine, as the high-style end of the Hearst empire would inevitably be drawn into the red-baiting frenzy, I decided that I had no choice but to resign in protest. Cleo and I sold our recently completed and much publicized house, lock, stock and barrel, including the flowers in bloom in the garden and the pictures on the walls and sailed on the France on the very day that the Rosenbergs were executed for alleged conspiracy.<sup>6</sup>

The April 1953 issue appears to have been knitted from the yarns of a number of sources related to design, social thought, history, and technology. The book that Gordon drew on to provided the title and surficial underpinnings for her presentation of the “Next America,” Lyman Bryson’s *The Next America: Prophecy and Faith*, was released in early 1952. Although

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<sup>5</sup> Hill, 282.

<sup>6</sup> Fitch, *Selected Writings*, 16-18

Bryson's book was not an overt argument against communism or the Soviet Union, it warned of the dangers of the "secular trend toward socialism," and Gordon seems to have seized on its thesis as the thematic framework for her attack on the International Style.<sup>7</sup> Bryson, a professor at the Teacher's College at Columbia University, was also a public intellectual and minor celebrity. He was a frequent host of "U.N. Casebook," a 1948 current events television show that examined events concerning the United Nations. Bryson built his book around the central claim that "... the present battle for democracy, for the chance to develop as persons by the experience of choice and consequence, is between individuals and collectives. The collectives are the mass organizations that are progressively dominating different phases of our civilization."<sup>8</sup> His line of rhetoric, which indirectly encapsulated the trope of the brave and patriotic American individualist juxtaposed with the hapless victim of Soviet communism, seems to also hearken to the writings of the early Arts and Crafts Movement, with their emphasis on individual craft as an antidote to dehumanizing mass production. But Bryson stopped far short of outright rejection of industrialization.

If [a cultural revolution] succeeds, it will be the creation, by its own members, of a national community in which energy is more and more shifted from material and practical anxieties to the doing of things for the sake of greater human experience. It will be the recapture, by a whole free people, of the primitive wisdom that industrialism has almost destroyed. In this new phase, wisdom will use industry as the servant of a better life. . . *and it is part of our recovered wisdom to know that we live not to pile up comfort nor ornaments, but for the quality of experience itself* [emphasis mine].<sup>9</sup>

This last sentence seems to run counter to the happily pro-conspicuous-consumption stance espoused by the shelter magazines in the postwar period. Yet in the April issue of *House Beautiful*, Bryson finds a way to rationalize large-scale acquisition of small-scale products. The article he wrote for the issue, "The Greatest Good—and Goods—for the Greatest Number," contained a thesis that was essentially the same as his book: i.e., the broadest range of choices allows for the fullest expression of individualism. But, as he translated it for the readers of *House Beautiful*, the logical outcome of free choice was now the freedom to choose from the widest possible array of mass-produced goods. Bryson opened with a bullet list...

- § You will have a greater chance to be yourself than any people in the history of civilization.
- § As a nation we shall enjoy a market filled with the beautiful and the practical.
- § As individuals we shall be inspired to grow to the fullest of our personal possibilities.
- § And together we shall all reach new heights in the enriched quality of our daily life.<sup>10</sup>

...and went on to continually iterate and reiterate the connections between consumer choice and mass consumption: "[Free choice] is the reason . . . that we need to keep our market places and

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<sup>7</sup> Bryson, *The Next America*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Bryson, *The Next America*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Bryson, *The Next America*, 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Bryson, "The Greatest Good—and Goods—for the Greatest Number" 112

our displays and our merchandising of the materials for the making of homes as rich and varied as possible.”<sup>11</sup> The article was illustrated with photos and details, including price and manufacturer, of mass-produced items such as café curtains from the North American Lace Company, glassware from Libby Glass Co., and dishtowels (shown creatively adapted for use as place mats, bar towels, and kitchen curtains) from Martex.<sup>12</sup> *House Beautiful’s* header associated with the dishtowels was a direct iteration of the magazine’s link between mass consumption and societal good: “The Social Significance of a Pretty Dishtowel” implied that a housewife who cared if such material goods were pleasing, was serving not only her family or her own aesthetic sense, but was in fact performing a greater service to American society as a whole: the pretty dishtowel equaled a comfortable stable home, which equaled a greater good served. The tone of the article was entitled and political:

The American idea of culture is democratic. We demand, for every man woman and child, liberal access to what is beautiful and true. That is good but not enough. *We demand also the right and the opportunity for everyone to share in the actual creation of his own culture, because that is where he will find and develop his best self.*” [emphasis his]<sup>13</sup>

Its stridency accelerated, reflecting the “circle-the-wagons” mentality associated with McCarthyist rhetoric:

We do not suspect political or ideological invasion of our homes by way of design or decoration. Yet it is indeed possible...The eternal vigilance which has always been the price of freedom is needed now on many fronts; in politics, in international affairs, in the protection of science and thought and liberal independence. The claws of suppression are never drawn back very far into their sheaths.<sup>14</sup>

Although later in the article Bryson allowed that, “It is also true that ideas need not originate in the United States of America to be welcome to our homes,”<sup>15</sup> the inference was in place. In the postwar United States, language like “invasion” and “eternal vigilance” was fraught with the anxiety of the public who, despite their rising incomes and the distractions provided by their new material possessions, still feared that nuclear annihilation was as close as lunchtime. At the end of the article, Bryson firmly sowed the seeds of xenophobia when he declared, “Some modern designers want to rear modern Towers of Babel and call them 'machines for living.' They may be expressing ideas that fit the spirit of some Europeans who are weary of trying for freedom and are seduced by totalitarian simplicities.”<sup>16</sup> This is a obvious reference to Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation* at Marseilles, which had been finished in that year, and the architect’s attempt to create and apply a universal formula that would simultaneously house, heal, and regenerate the war-fractured societies of Europe. The statement seems to reflect the self-serving ideals behind the export of American domesticity to Europe under the Marshall Plan.<sup>17</sup> By invoking a biblical symbol of disharmony, it also supports a belief common in the

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<sup>11</sup> Bryson, “The Greatest Good—and Goods—for the Greatest Number” 113.

<sup>12</sup> Bryson, “The Greatest Good—and Goods—for the Greatest Number” 113-115.

<sup>13</sup> Bryson, “The Greatest Good—and Goods—for the Greatest Number” 172.

<sup>14</sup> Bryson, “The Greatest Good—and Goods—for the Greatest Number” 172.

<sup>15</sup> Bryson, “The Greatest Good—and Goods—for the Greatest Number” 173.

<sup>16</sup> Bryson, “The Greatest Good—and Goods—for the Greatest Number” 173.

<sup>17</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 16-17.

postwar U.S., that the single-family home as the core of the American way of life was somehow God-ordained, and that to live otherwise was to embrace an atheistic, discordant, and constricted life.<sup>18</sup>

In this and in other ways, the April 1953 issue of *House Beautiful* was imbued with the self-conscious superiority that so infused the image of the entitled victor that the United States was projecting in the postwar period, an image that was marketed to the public over and over in the mainstream press.<sup>19</sup> But to be fair, it also reflected the cultural optimism that marked the 1950s—optimism that explains why, today, so many in conservative culture in the U.S. claim such nostalgia for a time that they identify with abundance and moral simplicity, despite that a great many Americans were daily living the consequences of society’s deeply encoded sexism, racism, and homophobia. Geographer Michael Johns notes that the 1950s were the last time when such systematic cultural institutions as strictly defined gender roles and racial segregation were recognized by society as natural, and were generally recognized and accepted. Johns describes an “overall cultural coherence that was “...manifest in a nearly blind faith in progress, a strong sense of patriotism, a forward-looking attitude that lacked nostalgia, a prevailing dress code, a homogeneous mass market for consumer goods, and a process of assimilation so absorbing that writer Philip Roth remembers it as a period of ‘fierce Americanization’.”<sup>20</sup> The April issue reflected this, founded as it was on prognostication, and it positioned itself as a sort of “crystal ball,” attempting to predict what would be coming as the 1950s continue to unfold. Many of the articles in the April issue charted increases in overall spending on household goods and rightly credited the trend as a sign of the nation’s economic health. Other feature articles more directly addressed architecture and design. All of the articles address the “Next America” theme, and to varying degrees most shore up Gordon’s “The Threat to the Next America” thesis.

The issue’s featured house was displayed in an article entitled, “The Next America will be the Age of Great Architecture,” written by executive editor Joseph A. Barry. This article was clearly a support piece for Gordon’s editorial. Barry rhapsodized about the Shaw House (Figure 26), designed by a *House Beautiful* favorite, Oregon architect John Yeon, as “pointing the architectural way to an age of humanism.” This article contained the contrast of “Good Modern” with “Bad Modern” that had been a recurrent theme in the magazine in the 1940s and was to appear often over the next year in Barry’s articles. Barry also invoked the Cold War: “A free man’s home of the future will be his palace and here is the style for it.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, the house was described by the architect as utilizing his “palace style” (as opposed to his “barn style,” discussed below, which he employs in other works), and Barry used this to advance Gordon’s argument against the International Style:

With [the palace style], a ringing note of gaiety and exuberance is once again sounded, a revolt declared against the poverty-stricken clichés of doctrinaire International Stylists with their machine forms and concrete cubes. It announces a new enrichment in American life, a vital creative force that scorns the dogmas of the new academicians, a warmth and sympathy for the individuality and high spirits of the free man.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Johns, 108-109.

<sup>19</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 16-22.

<sup>20</sup> Philip Roth to Terry Gross, Fresh Air, National Public Radio, May 8, 2000. Quoted in Johns, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Barry, “The Next America Will be the Age of Great Architecture” 123.

<sup>22</sup> Barry, “The Next America Will be the Age of Great Architecture,” 196.

Barry concluded with an affirmation of American independence and superiority: “[Yeon] proves, with the Shaw house, that the next American democrat can be a lord of life, if he studies, chooses, and builds the architecture for it.”<sup>23</sup> With language that recalled Gordon’s description of Harwell Hamilton Harris, in the “People Who Influence Your Life” series of 1945-46, Barry portrayed Yeon as the archetypal rugged individualist: “He is an example of American genius, lonely, isolated, nourished by the region he was born in.”<sup>24</sup> Barry also gave a list of Yeon’s non-American influences, including Swedish and Chinese architecture, but neglected to mention the influence of European modernists like Mendelsohn, even saying: “...the European attitude of keeping nature at heel, or as a backdrop for formal, aloof geometry, seemed to [Yeon] strained and strange.”<sup>25</sup>

Scholars of modern architecture generally place Yeon’s work in the Northwest Regionalist tradition, and he is especially noted for his use of natural materials in conversation with the landscapes surrounding his projects. Architectural historian David Gebhard drew a parallel between Yeon’s work (as exemplary of Northwest Regionalism) and the Bay Region’s Gardner Dailey, who had also made frequent appearances in *House Beautiful*.<sup>26</sup> As such, Yeon was an apt choice as the featured architect for an issue that was an outright rejection of International Style architecture. A native Oregonian, Yeon was nearly as famous for his work as a conservationist as he was for his architecture. He had traveled abroad as a young man and had been strongly influenced by the work of European modernists, in particular Erich Mendelsohn.<sup>27</sup> Something of a “lone wolf” in his architectural practice, Yeon eschewed employment with firms and rarely employed draftsmen of his own, but he would occasionally set up shop in a larger architectural office in order to take advantage of personnel and equipment when working on sizable projects. Yeon’s most famous residential work, the 1937 Watzek House, was designed in the Portland office of A. E. Doyle and Associates, a firm for which Yeon’s good friend and noted modernist architect Pietro Belluschi was the principal designer. Although Belluschi had virtually nothing to do with the design of the Watzek House, he was for several years thereafter often mistakenly credited as its architect. Unfortunately, Belluschi tended to leave this misconception uncorrected, in the interest of keeping the Watzek House in the Doyle portfolio. Architectural historian Meredith Clausen notes that, although the perpetuation of this error resulted in the end of Yeon’s and Belluschi’s friendship, the Watzek House was transformative to Belluschi’s work; evidence of its influence can be seen clearly in such works as Belluschi’s Coates House (Tillamook 1941-46).<sup>28</sup> Whatever Belluschi might or might not have done to claim the Watzek House as his own, *House Beautiful* had no problem in correcting the misconception, attributing the house to Yeon. The house was featured in the magazine’s February 1946 issue in an article, which does not mention Belluschi, that Gordon penned herself.<sup>29</sup>

Yeon’s place in the history of modern architecture is largely marked by his Barn Style, which is roughly characterized by the use of unpainted native woods on the exterior (often board-and-batten siding), pitched roofs of low slope, and the sense that the house belongs in the forest. But the Shaw House featured in *House Beautiful* was a distinct departure from this

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<sup>23</sup> Barry, “The Next America Will be the Age of Great Architecture,” 196.

<sup>24</sup> Barry, “The Next America Will be the Age of Great Architecture,” 194.

<sup>25</sup> Barry, “The Next America Will be the Age of Great Architecture,” 196.

<sup>26</sup> Gebhard, 177.

<sup>27</sup> Deering.

<sup>28</sup> Clausen, 90-96; 110.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon, “One of the Great Houses in America,” 80.

aesthetic (Yeon himself later observed that this house “veer[ed] toward post-modernism”<sup>30</sup>). The house was replete with historic referents, among them the sweeping, low-pitched hipped roof form with the slightly flared eaves, the nearly cartoonish French Blue color of the exterior panel siding (common in modernist high-rise spandrels, but not in residential contexts), and the low-slung reach of the house’s form, which invoked Wright’s Prairie Style. The rhythmically repetitious modular exterior paneling in the porch support columns, light as they were, recalled the Greek Revival. Although the arrangement of spaces in the house’s interior was more open and less specialized than Yeon’s Watzek House, the kitchen was still partitioned from the living and dining areas, and the house, as palatial as it seemed in exterior photos, was really rather small and geared to privacy; the house’s two bathrooms could only be accessed through the bedrooms, and the only other toilet was accessible through the utility room.

In a 1983 interview with Marion Kolisch for the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Art, John Yeon made no mention of the controversy surrounding “The Threat to the Next America” and the use of his work as a weapon in Elizabeth Gordon’s battle. In 1953, Yeon was at odds with Pietro Belluschi, whose work was closely linked with other work in the U.S. categorized as International Style, but this was related to the professional tensions described above, not disagreements about architectural style or aesthetics. Belluschi’s 1948 Equitable Building, in Portland, incorporated so many of the tenets of the International Style that it is considered to be among the first International Style commercial buildings in the United States. But another designer featured in the April issue was vocal in his objection to Gordon’s inclusion of his work in a blanket damning of designers for which he had respect.

Lawrence Halprin’s garden for Dr. and Mrs. Wayne Caygill in Orinda, California, was the subject of a short photo spread and article entitled, “The Garden of the Next America is an Outdoor Room.”<sup>31</sup> This is one of the few pieces in the April issue that does not make mention of the International Style. Yet *House Beautiful’s* garden editor and the article’s author, Dr. Joseph E. Howland, nevertheless employed sweeping generalizations about the way Americans used their outdoor space: “Our gardens are designed for living, not for display. They are outdoor rooms, complete with walls for privacy and paving for floors—and like the indoors, they are planned for servantless upkeep.”<sup>32</sup> Halprin’s Caygill Garden fits well in the bullet-list description Howland provided of what the “Next American” garden was. Among the points: it is low on plants (“Today gardens are for *people*. Plants are used for structure and decoration where non-living material wouldn’t be as useful”); it is an extension of the house’s interior (“Today’s garden is actually a part of the house itself . . . The garden is planned from the outside *out*, not as foundation greens to be viewed from the street”); and it is not meant for display (“It is *not* space exposed to the neighbor’s view”) [all emphasis his].<sup>33</sup> The garden of the Next America, or at least the Caygill Garden, is an exemplar of the regionalism that *House Beautiful* was and would continue to promote, i.e., design that follows very specific parameters, but is presented as the logical outcome of the exercise of free choice and good taste.

Although the article on the Caygill Garden, as noted above, does not link “Next America” garden design to Gordon’s crusade against the International Style, Halprin exhibits his awareness that guilt is often by association in a letter to *House and Home*, published in the September issue,

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<sup>30</sup> John Yeon interviews, 1982 Dec. 14 - 1983 Jan. 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>31</sup> Howland, “The Garden of the Next America is an Outdoor Room,” 148-9.

<sup>32</sup> Howland, “The Garden of the Next America is an Outdoor Room,” 148.

<sup>33</sup> Howland, “The Garden of the Next America is an Outdoor Room,” 174.

in which he addresses *House and Home*'s June article, "Let's Include Everybody In" (see Chapter 4), a lengthy article written in response to "The Threat to the Next America." Halprin adamantly distances himself from Gordon: "I would like you as well as everyone else to know that I do *not* repeat *not* subscribe to *House Beautiful*'s policy in this crusade and did not know my Caygill garden was to be used in this context"<sup>34</sup> [emphasis his].

The other feature article about architecture runs with a curious disclaimer or caveat. "The Next American House by a Man Who's Going to Build One," by *House Beautiful* stalwart Wolfgang Langewiesche, had a small-print introduction explaining that Langewiesche was chosen for the assignment precisely because he was "an outsider" and did not normally write about housing; rather, Langewiesche was a noted aviation writer.<sup>35</sup> But his being chosen to author the article was also likely due to his "insider" status in Gordon's world: He and his wife were old friends of Elizabeth Gordon and Carl Norcross, and in later years she was to have a strong influence on the design and decoration of his Lakefield, Connecticut, house.<sup>36</sup> Langewiesche visited several notable examples of modern houses around the country, attempting to establish if modern housing had taken a clear direction. "*House Beautiful* does not endorse his interpretation in all details. We think he puts the American house into somewhat of an economic and stylistic straight jacket . . . but despite such points of disagreement with him, we think his report will be of interest as he has written it."<sup>37</sup> Langewiesche went on to describe modern housing as he learned about it on his trip, and his description read rather more as if he is describing a sports car: "The Next American House is small, loaded with extras and conveniences, and very efficient."<sup>38</sup> The article was lengthy, and Langewiesche highlighted in great detail the features of which he approved. Some of these details were in line with houses like the Farnsworth House; for instance, Langewiesche heartily approves of extensive use of glass.<sup>39</sup> But he, too, takes his obligatory jab at International Style when it comes to siting [emphasis his]:

That's how *this* kind of modern house differs from the "International" modern house imported from Germany. That sort of modern house sits in the landscape, and among ordinary American houses, like a strange foreign body. *This* kind of modern house, home-grown, fits in anywhere. I've seen one sit on the coast of Maine, near typical New England houses. There was no clash. It seemed to be just another rock.<sup>40</sup>

Other articles that addressed "The Next America" were less overtly nationalistic, but still reflected common themes of the time. The cooking article, "In the Next America Nearly Everyone will Cook Like a Connoisseur," by food editor Virginia Stanton, touted advances in rotisserie grilling, reflecting the growing fondness people in the postwar period had for outdoor cooking made more pleasant by the increasing orientation of new houses away from the street and into the back yard. "Music in the Next America," by Richard Williams was a praise-song to

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<sup>34</sup> "Letters" *House and Home*, September 1953, 170.

<sup>35</sup> This was not strictly true, as Langewiesche had frequently contributed articles about climate control to *House Beautiful* since the late 1940's.

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication, William Langewiesche, September 25, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon, "Preface to The Next American House by a Man Who's Going to Build One," *House Beautiful*, April 1953, 135.

<sup>38</sup> Langewiesche, Wolfgang, "The Next American House by a Man Who's Going to Build One," 136-137.

<sup>39</sup> Langewiesche, Wolfgang, "The Next American House by a Man Who's Going to Build One," 201.

<sup>40</sup> Langewiesche, Wolfgang, "The Next American House by a Man Who's Going to Build One," 202.



new technology in music, describing how “tape phonographs” will give home listeners in The Next America better quality sound, and how “binaural” sound (a 1950s music industry buzzword for *stereo*) was in the development stages but far too expensive to be afforded by the average consumer. This article, interestingly, stands out from the others in that it contains a prescient imagining of a significant future development, the DVD: “Would it not also be possible to invent a combination of record and home movie, so that as you played a recording of *Carmen* you could watch the action on film?”<sup>41</sup>

In addition to all of the aforementioned articles is a two-page art history lesson entitled “Cubism and the International Style,” detailing the misplaced influence the work of Piet Mondrian had on the architects of the “cult of austerity.” Notably, J. J. P. Oud, who was not mentioned in “The Threat to the Next America,” has here joined the “cult,” of Mies, Gropius, and Le Corbusier. This is likely because in the 1932 International Style exhibition, MoMA presented these men as the “four leaders of modern architecture,”<sup>42</sup> yet although Oud was still practicing in Holland at the time, he had no presence in the United States. The short article makes note that Cubism, under the “brilliant brushes of Picasso and Braque” was “perfectly understandable in its time—which is early 20<sup>th</sup> century—and in its place—on two-dimensional canvas.”<sup>43</sup>

In sum, the April 1953 issue of *House Beautiful* was a cohesive yet multifaceted backdrop in front of which Gordon could metaphorically stand as she delivered her wake up call to the nation. In the weeks and months following the publication of “The Threat to the Next America,” Elizabeth Gordon became many things to many people. To architects and other designers who saw no danger in the International Style, she was irrational and vindictive. Those who agreed with her had a variety of reasons, but a fairly common theme was the feeling that International Style architecture was simply not good architecture on both functional and aesthetic levels. To them she was Athena.

### “THE THREAT TO THE NEXT AMERICA”

More than a half century of distance from the world in which Gordon wrote “The Threat to the Next America” has cast “The Threat to the Next America” (Figure 27) (Appendix A) in a much different light than Gordon’s readers, at least many of them, likely understood it at the time. Those in the design world understood her to be a champion or a gadfly, depending on their perspective. It was a long piece—over 3300 words—and the anger and indignation that underlay it are evident throughout. But examining the editorial in the context of postwar consumption patterns is revealing; Gordon was, in fact, standing in the camp of conventional wisdom, which held that the economy of mass consumption was the key to maintaining the country’s new superpower status. Lizabeth Cohen notes that, in the postwar period, citizen consumers again became purchaser consumers, and consumption became a civic duty, “. . . the purchaser as citizen who simultaneously fulfilled personal desire and civic obligation by consuming.”<sup>44</sup> The

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<sup>41</sup> Williams, 103.

<sup>42</sup> Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*, 48.

<sup>43</sup> “Cubism and the International Style,” 240-241.

<sup>44</sup> Cohen, 119.

public was discouraged from saving excessively, in the belief that spending fed the engines of mass production, which fed wages, which resulted in a healthy economy in the USA.

This attitude is reflected and doubtless partly motivated Gordon's ridicule, in "The Threat to the Next America," of Mies' famous quote, "less is more," which she calls "mystical.' She does not elaborate on what exactly she thinks is mystical about the idea, nor does she seem interested in exploring what Mies actually meant by the aphorism, which he later clarified as having "the greatest effect with the least means."<sup>45</sup> It is possible that, by "mystical,' she was referring to the element of mysticism that infused the early Bauhaus curriculum, in particular in the teachings of Johannes Itten, but this is unclear. At the time Gordon wrote the editorial, there was not a great deal of material published in English about the Bauhaus, although a 1938 exhibition book published by MoMA gave brief explanatory glosses, peppered between primary documents written by Gropius and Herbert Bayer and copious illustrations.<sup>46</sup> The exhibition book noted Itten as the first teacher of the Preliminary Course, but made no mention of the Eastern Mazdaznan philosophy (a belief system based on Zoroastrianism and centered on meditation and ritual) that informed his teaching.<sup>47</sup> But the editorial's sidebar, which gave the "warning signs" of International Style architecture, also warned readers that Walter Gropius and Mies were practicing architecture in the U.S.(Figure 28)<sup>48</sup>

More likely, Gordon connected Mies' "less is more" to mysticism based on the somewhat lopsided history presented in T. H. Robsjohn-Gibblings' 1948 book, *Mona Lisa's Mustache: A Dissection of Modern Art*, in which Robsjohn-Gibblings described a strong occultism that was inherent at the Bauhaus, although Itten was absent from the account:

The curious observer of today, turning up the half-forgotten and half-observed records of the Bauhaus teachings, will find many singular revelations as to how the occult and the esoteric may be applied to architecture and industrial design...From 1919 the Bauhaus was almost entirely under the mystic influences of the expressionistic creed. Kandinsky was teaching his belief that artists must listen and obey the 'mysterious voice that guides their brush and measures the design and the color.' Klee, sitting hunched over with his back to the class, gave lectures on painting based on his own 'automatic' experiences and his researches into the art of primitive people, children, and the insane.<sup>49</sup>

Rose-Carol Washton Long observes that it was partly this openness to the metaphysical qualities of expressionism that made Kandinsky attractive to Walter Gropius, who hired him to teach at the Bauhaus in 1921. Yet Gropius attempted to minimize these aspects of the Bauhaus teachings in order to deflect accusations of bohemianism.<sup>50</sup> After Mies' appointment as director in 1930, an even greater emphasis was placed on scientific and rational approaches, with attention to art and its spiritual aspects decreasing even further.<sup>51</sup> If *Mona Lisa's Mustache* was, indeed, the source of Gordon's misconception that "less is more" carried some kind of mystical meaning, she provided a critical leap on her own, as any mention of Mies is missing from Robsjohn-Gibblings'

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<sup>45</sup> "Less is More," Time Magazine, June 14, 1954.

<sup>46</sup> Bayer et al.

<sup>47</sup> Droste, 46. Mazdaznan philosophy

<sup>48</sup> Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America,"129.

<sup>49</sup> Robsjohn-Gibblings, *Mona Lisa's Mustache*, 206.

<sup>50</sup> Washton Long, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Washton Long, 60.

account of occultism at the Bauhaus. Regardless, by assigning the adjective “mystical,” she stripped the playfulness out of the phrase. Rather than the wryly oxymoronic catch-phrase Mies intended, “less is more” becomes, in Gordon’s hands, sinister and obtuse.

Another decision of Gordon’s also works to throw an ominous cloud over the editorial. Throughout, Gordon infers and implicates and is most often indirect. Gordon goes on to damn, but not name, “. . . *some* museums, *some* professional magazines for architects and decorators, *some* architectural schools, and *some* designers” as the promoters of “less is more.” Whether she does this as a rhetorical device or because the legal department at the Hearst Corporation insisted she not name names is unclear. Her letter to Mumford the previous June indicates she had on previous occasions been constrained by the lawyers, who likely feared a libel suit.<sup>52</sup> Regardless, for those in the architecture and design professions at the time, these institutions and individuals would not have needed naming. For the readers in the general public, that Gordon shrouded the insinuations in mystery likely made them all the more chilling.

“... *some* museums ...”

By *some* museums, Gordon really meant one: the Museum of Modern Art. MoMA and Elizabeth Gordon existed in close proximity on a daily basis. From her office it was only five short blocks to the Museum and attending relevant exhibitions would have been easy for her and her staff. Moreover, Gordon was a well known collector of modern textile art, and her collection included works by many well known Scandinavian and American artists.<sup>53</sup> One artist in particular is notable for the heritage of her training: Lenore Tawney, creator of several pieces in Gordon’s collection, studied at the Chicago Institute of Design under former Bauhaus associates Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and weaver Marli Ehrman. Ehrman, who trained a generation of American students following her immigration to the U.S., had her own connection with MoMA, having won first prize in the Museum’s 1941 “Organic Design” competition.<sup>54</sup> Although Tawney’s work contained in Gordon’s collection was produced in the 1960s, it was even then marked by a notable Bauhaus influence.<sup>55</sup> A better known alumna of the Bauhaus, Anni Albers, was the subject of the first textile art show at MoMA, in 1949, and it is very possible that Gordon was in attendance.<sup>56</sup> Although it is not known exactly when Gordon’s interest in modern textiles began, in 1952, she ran a series of feature articles in *House Beautiful* by Hungarian modernist Mariska Karasz, who was again featured in the magazine in 1961. Karasz’s work comprised a substantial portion of Gordon’s textile collection.

Although Gordon and MoMA may have had similar taste in textiles, they were far apart in architecture, and MoMA was in some ways the “clubhouse” for a group of architects Peter Blake would later confess were “clannish.”<sup>57</sup> In his memoir, *No Place Like Utopia*, Blake noted that most of the architects who belonged to the Modern Movement (as it was conceived of and promoted at MoMA in the postwar period) were associated with the Harvard Graduate School of

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<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Gordon to Lewis Mumford, June 23, 1952. Lewis Mumford Papers, The Franklin Library Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Gordon donated her collection to the Cooper Union Museum, now the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, in New York, NY; *The Wonders of Thread: A Gift of Textiles from the Collection of Elizabeth Gordon*, Exhibition Catalog, 1964. New York: Cooper Union Museum.

<sup>54</sup> Weltge, 178.

<sup>55</sup> Weltge, 183.

<sup>56</sup> Weltge, 166.

<sup>57</sup> Blake, *No Place like Utopia*, 145.

Design (GSD), although MIT, Yale, and a few other notable (but notably eastern) schools were represented. Blake, who in the mid-1940s was on the staff of the museum's architecture and design department, wrote, "We were a very small group, and we all knew one another."<sup>58</sup> In one telling passage, Blake enumerated some of the historical influences on the group's design ethos, and the sense of purpose and entitlement with which they viewed their own place in architecture:

We felt that everything that had happened in the visual arts since the early 1900s supported and reinforced our kind of 'modern' aesthetic: the cubists had laid the groundwork, as had the pioneers of Russian Constructivism and Italian Futurism... We had absolutely no doubt that we were on the right track; and we thought that people like Lewis Mumford (who challenged much of our dogma in the name of humanism) and a few surviving classicists were sweet and sentimental holdovers from an earlier time—and obviously out of touch.<sup>59</sup>

Established in 1929 as a vehicle to present modernism in art to the public, MoMA had been the birthplace of the term "International Style," with the 1932 exhibition, "Modern Architecture: International Style." This show, curated by Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson and strongly supported by then-director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (who coined the term "International Style" for his preface to the catalog), was key to MoMA's future promotion of the International Style, and it has been historically conceived as the seminal presentation of the work of the architects of the Bauhaus and the architecture of the Modern Movement in the United States. In 1969, Jordy cited the exhibition's catalog for its effect as the defining document for International Style architecture, writing, "...its readers were increasingly justified in feeling that the volume presented, not what the International Style was *as of 1932* [emphasis his], but simply what it was in the timeless present."<sup>60</sup> James-Chakraborty writes that, although the exhibition "launched the International Style in the United States," its transformative effect on architecture in the U.S. is a myth; economic, political, and social factors wrought by the Great Depression and World War II had a far greater impact than this exhibition did on the forms modern architecture would take in the postwar period.<sup>61</sup> She notes that "Bauhaus-associated architects, designers, and artists succeeded in the United States in exact proportion to the degree to which they or their supporters could inscribe their work into specifically American conditions."<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Gordon was mounting her campaign based on the premise that their work was impossible to thus-inscribe, but by the time she wrote "The Threat to the Next America," MoMA's International Style exhibition was two decades, a severe economic depression, and a world war in the past. Gordon was reacting to a much more recent MoMA exhibition, the 1952 "Built in USA: Post-War Architecture" show, which was an important step in the museum's ongoing efforts to present International Style architecture's continual relevance to the American public, and which was itself a sequel to another such exhibition by the same name.

The 1944 "Built in USA: Since 1932," presented near World War II's end, brought the public up to date on significant architectural works built since the 1932 International Style exhibition. It was designed and organized by Elizabeth Mock, the curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at MoMA from 1942 to 1946. The show offered a retrospective of

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<sup>58</sup> Blake, *No Place like Utopia*, 144.

<sup>59</sup> Blake, *No Place like Utopia*, 146.

<sup>60</sup> Jordy, "The Aftermath of the Bauhaus in America: Gropius, Mies, and Breuer," 495.

<sup>61</sup> James-Chakraborty, *Bauhaus Culture*, 157.

<sup>62</sup> James-Chakraborty, *Bauhaus Culture*, 153.

modern architecture's impact in the United States, using Hitchcock and Johnson's 1932 exhibition as a starting point, and showcased the best modern design as it appeared through the Depression and World War II. Gwendolyn Wright notes that Mock's exhibition provided both "a sequel and an antidote" to the 1932 International Style exhibition, advocating modern architecture that "embrac[ed] the challenges of science and industry without neglecting those of environmentalism, emotions and community life."<sup>63</sup> Certainly the 1944 exhibition celebrated modern architecture in a broader range of contexts than either its predecessor or its successor—James-Chakraborty notes that the buildings bore little resemblance to the 1932 exhibition's fare, yet ironically are today noted to have descended from the same wellspring of European design, essentially codifying the 1932 exhibition's influence.<sup>64</sup>

Predictably, given the political, cultural, and socio-economic landscape in the United States at the time, the 1944 exhibition featured fewer houses (14 out of 46 buildings/structures depicted) and more multi-family housing. Government-funded housing was a staple of the exhibition, including projects like William Wurster's Valencia Gardens in San Francisco, the Farm Security Administration's Chandler Housing in Chandler, Arizona, and worker housing in Woodville, California, both designed by Vernon de Mars and Associates, as well as bridges, civic buildings, academic and educational buildings, and commercial and industrial buildings. The 1944 exhibition seems to have been mounted to inform and appeal to industrial and civic architecture consumers of 1944, not residential consumers, who were still hobbled by the wartime economy and restrictions. But few of the houses in this exhibit would have ruffled feathers at *House Beautiful*: Frank Lloyd Wright accounts for three of the 14 houses in the exhibition, with Fallingwater in the lead position and Taliesin West placed opposite Burnham Hoyt's Red Rocks Amphitheater in Morrison, Colorado—possibly a deliberate move to avoid comparisons between Taliesin West and other domestic architecture and to showcase in tandem work that incorporated natural sandstone *in situ* as an architectural material. And the "regional style" houses of the northwest coast were represented by *House Beautiful* favorites John Yeon, whose Watzek House appeared in the exhibition, and Gardner Dailey, whose Owens House also appeared.

Mock's careful analysis, in the text of the catalogue, recounted the public's aversion to early modernism. But rather than condemn the aversion as backward or provincial, an attitude which was implied in the successor show six years hence as Hitchcock and Drexler declared victory for modern architecture with rhetoric peppered with battle imagery, she was instructive and empathetic. Nine years in advance, Mock's words seem to anticipate and address the concerns and accusations Gordon articulates in "The Threat to the Next America":

People had long found it convenient to disregard Frank Lloyd Wright, but the newest way of building they found positively offensive. Here were none of the safe, familiar things. How could one ever form a sentimental attachment for these "overgrown garages," these "cardboard boxes on stilts," these "cold white factories"? How indeed? This was the honest reaction of people who had never learned to look *directly* [emphasis hers] at a building, or a painting for that matter, with the intervention of a story. They wanted historical verisimilitude first of all, expressed as quaintness or grandiloquence. In this the American was no different

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<sup>63</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *USA*, 149.

<sup>64</sup> James-Chakraborty, *Bauhaus Culture*, 157.

from the Frenchman or the German. Ironically, here was a style which, more consciously than any other in history, was directed towards the improvement of the comfort and convenience, health and happiness of society as a whole, yet there has probably never been an architectural movement more deeply distrusted by the public.<sup>65</sup>

Mock went on to offer an analysis of modern architecture that examined it in terms of its potential to address social problems (housing activist Catherine Bauer, who was also Mock's sister, served on the board of the exhibition), climate needs, cultural considerations like privacy, and physical problems posed by site and setting. One imagines that, although Mock might not have endorsed Gordon's stance of nine years later, her cogent analysis and eloquent reasoning had an impact on Gordon in 1944, as Gordon's crusade for "Good Modern" was beginning.

Beatriz Colomina has written of the year 1949 as being pivotal to modern domestic architecture in the United States, although she notes that as late as 1996 Philip Johnson was giving 1923 as the year modern architecture really began. Colomina observes that for Johnson, whose conception of modern architecture had firm roots in Europe, this was no doubt the case. Key events in Europe in 1923 were plenty and included: the publication of Le Corbusier's *Vers Un Architecture*, from which sprang the "machine" ethos; Mies' project for a Glass Skyscraper and his concrete house project; the De Stijl exhibition of architectural models in Paris was that year.<sup>66</sup> But the effects on domestic architecture in the United States from these and other events of 1923 were not as profound as Johnson imagined them. In 1949, however, "the eyes of the architectural world shifted direction," and instead of the USA looking at Europe, the rest of the world looked to the USA for architectural innovation.<sup>67</sup> MoMA would have much to tout: Mies' Farnsworth House and Philip Johnson's Glass House were underway, and on the West Coast the Case Study program begun by John Entenza's *Art and Architecture* magazine had yielded a number of notable works, with the Eames House (#8) completed that year. These, however, were part of the avant-garde architecture that was still just a collection of novelties to the house-hungry middle class. But MoMA had something up its sleeve for them, too.

Following the 1948 symposium, "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" in which heretic Lewis Mumford had suffered a dressing-down at the hands of Alfred Barr, Marcel Breuer, and Walter Gropius, MoMA commissioned Breuer to design a prototype modern house, which the museum built and displayed in its adjacent sculpture garden (Figure 29). That the suburban commuter was likely not an art collector was of little consequence to this exhibit, for viewers found the most interesting object in the house to be the television, which was also designed by Breuer, with an early version of a remote control.<sup>68</sup> The house was intended, as James-Chakraborty points out, to support the museum's contention that the International Style was as applicable to middle-class housing as it was to skyscrapers, a point MoMA had not effectively made since Mock's departure from the staff. Publicity for the house stated, "the plan of the house is closely fitted to the requirements of a typical American family."<sup>69</sup> In the above-quoted interview in *The New Yorker*, Breuer spoke of the project's purpose of bringing modern housing to the wary public, claiming territory in design innovations that had already been settled

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<sup>65</sup> Mock, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 24.

<sup>67</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 24.

<sup>68</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 23.

<sup>69</sup> James-Chakraborty, *Bauhaus Culture*, 163.

and developed by Frank Lloyd Wright and other modernists whose work Mumford spoke of as more “humane.”

The exhibition house was enormously successful, with over 70,000 visitors, but it was not always well received critically. Architect Frederick Gutheim, writing for the *New York Herald Tribune*, noted such design flaws as the placement of the parents’ bedroom and the children’s bedroom at opposite ends of the house (Figure 30), which was decidedly not as “family friendly” as it appeared in MoMA’s promotional materials.<sup>70</sup> Gutheim particularly disliked that the parent’s bedroom, on an upper level, was open to the living/dining area below, leaving the bedroom susceptible to “noise and smells.” Gutheim noted several other flaws as well, although he did not appear to have noticed as a flaw the open balustrade beneath the rope handrail of the staircase (Figure 31). Anyone sufficiently able to imagine this feature in combination with small children would have found it hair-raising, and it lends some support to *House Beautiful’s* contention a few years later, in the May 1953 issue, that such design was hostile to women, for it was to women that the safety of children in the home was culturally assigned.<sup>71</sup> Gutheim summarized:

This house has one thing that will be seen in few other exhibition houses—good taste. It is a work of art. But it is also a house, and it has been called a house for family living. By that standard it falls short of other houses, perhaps not as handsome or as well built but better planned. Several years ago the museum issued a useful book *If You Want To Build A House*, by Elizabeth Mock. Before commissioning Mr. Breuer to design their house, someone on the museum staff would have done well to read at least the first chapter.”<sup>72</sup>

But Mock had been “gentled into the shadows” (i.e., fired) with the return of Philip Johnson to the museum in 1946.<sup>73</sup> It was under Johnson’s watchful eye that MoMA mounted the 1952 exhibition, “Built in USA: Post-War Architecture,” which was curated by Henry Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler. The young Drexler had only recently joined the department at Philip Johnson’s invitation—prior to this he had been a furniture designer and architecture editor at *Interiors* magazine.<sup>74</sup> The advisory committee for the exhibition was a ‘who’s who’ of editors in the professional architectural press: Thomas Creighton, editor of *Progressive Architecture*, as well as Charles Magruder, managing editor of that magazine; Peter Blake and Douglas Haskell, respectively associate editor and editorial chairman of *The Magazine of Building* (*Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*) as well as Perry Prentice, who was then editor-in-chief and publisher of the same; John Entenza, editor of *Arts and Architecture* and “father” of the Case Study Program in the Los Angeles; and Frank Lopez and Joseph Mason, respectively senior associate editor and executive editor of *Architectural Record*. The committee also featured a smattering of academics: Talbot F. Hamlin, of the School of Architecture at Columbia University; Joseph Hudnut, Dean of the Graduate School of Design at Harvard; and G. Holmes Perkins, Dean of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania. Only one woman served on the committee—Elizabeth Mock.

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<sup>70</sup> Colomina, 23; Driller, 184.

<sup>71</sup> Barry, Joseph A. “Report on the Battle between Good and Bad Modern.”

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Driller, 184.

<sup>73</sup> Franz Schulze, *Philip Johnson*, 173-174.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Giovannini, “Arthur Drexler, 61, Authority on Architecture,” Obituary in the *New York Times*, January 17, 1987, section 1, page 15.

In contrast to Mock's text for the 1944 exhibition, Hitchcock and Drexler's 1952 "Built in USA" took a more "gloves off" stance toward public distrust of modernism. Where Mock's depiction of modern architecture was that of a beautiful and sensible answer to the problems posed by American life, Hitchcock was more inclined to declare victory: "Today there is no further need to underline the obvious fact that what used to be called 'traditional' architecture is dead if not buried."<sup>75</sup> To Hitchcock, who conceived of architecture at the grander scales of civic and large commercial buildings, this was true. But for housing it was something of an overstatement, given that most of the Cape Cod and Minimal Traditional houses being built for large-scale suburban developments like Levittown were more rooted in the traditional than in the modern. To Gordon, who hated these "little houses of ticky tacky" and who felt the public deserved better—to the point of making it her business to observe how Americans chose to house themselves by piloting her own plane over the newly-built all-the-same rooftops—this statement must have seemed a wild ivory-tower pontification. Deserved or not, Hitchcock would have been easy for Gordon to categorize as a member of the "self-chosen elite."<sup>76</sup> Hitchcock was in charge of selecting the buildings included in the exhibit, and of the 19 private residences included, none could be found in the San Francisco Bay area, although the architecture of the Harvard GSD was heavily represented, with houses by Marcel Breuer, Philip Johnson (2), and John Johanson. Hitchcock shrugged off the omission: "Regional tactfulness, so to say, might have suggested, particularly as regards private houses, the inclusion of examples from more parts of the country than are here represented. But such considerations would defeat the purpose of the book and the exhibition, which is to show the best that is being built as far as that may be done within a very limited compass."<sup>77</sup>

The catalog also featured Arthur Drexler's essay analyzing the individual buildings (unlike Mock's 1944 exhibition, this exhibit was comprised entirely of buildings) presented in the exhibition examined the pieces generally in terms of style, largely ignoring program, which he seemed to view as incidental, in keeping with the Miesian view that buildings should be able to adapt to many functions and would probably have to over time. His discussion of Mies' Lake Shore Drive Apartments included the statement: "At its most rewarding, Mies' architecture states a problem with the clarity of revelation, and these imposing glass boxes glittering on Chicago's strand are three-dimensional diagrams of the type multi-story vertical building. *In this particular case they are dwellings* [emphasis mine]."<sup>78</sup> Program was beside the point; in discussing the houses in the exhibition entirely in terms of their architectural merits, he paid no attention to their role as places of inhabitation. This was particularly true of his discussion of the Farnsworth House, a building that was central to Gordon's anti-International Style crusade over the coming months. Drexler spent two long paragraphs discussing the Farnsworth House as an example of the relationship between space and structure, even going so far as to describe it as "a quantity of air caught between a floor and a roof,"<sup>79</sup> but he did not address how it functioned *as a house*. At that cultural and chronological moment this was a matter of some contention, with Mies' client, Dr. Edith Farnsworth, and the architect embroiled in an active lawsuit over cost overruns and the house's functionality. In fact, Elizabeth Mock, in her essay for the "Built in USA" exhibition of

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<sup>75</sup> Hitchcock and Drexler, eds., *Built in USA: Post-war Architecture*, 11.

<sup>76</sup> Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America," 127.

<sup>77</sup> Hitchcock and Drexler, eds., *Built in USA: Post-war Architecture*, 11.

<sup>78</sup> Hitchcock and Drexler, eds., *Built in USA: Post-war Architecture*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Hitchcock and Drexler, eds., *Built in USA: Post-war Architecture*, 21.



eight years prior, anticipated exactly the privacy issue that was so contentious in the Farnsworth House:

Modern houses are now more apt to be articulated on the basis of group function—living sleeping, cooking—rather than on the basis of the real unit—the person. On the other hand, the constantly changing needs of family life must literally be met with flexibility, and a one-story house with an independently supported roof and readily adjustable full-length partitions would have many advantages. Such construction has been successful in many public buildings, but its domestic use has rarely gone beyond the project stage. Flexibility and privacy must somehow be reconciled.<sup>80</sup>

Gordon's mention of the Farnsworth House in "The Threat to the Next America" is confined to one sentence: "I have talked to a highly intelligent, now disillusioned, woman who spent more than \$70,000 building a 1-room house that is nothing but a glass cage on stilts."<sup>81</sup> But even this single sentence, in close examination, is revealing: If, presumably, Gordon did not know Farnsworth personally prior to contacting her for the editorial, they still would have had much in common, given that they were both from the Chicago area, both had an acute interest in modern design, and both were successful women in male-dominated professions. The cost overruns associated with the Farnsworth House were a matter of public record, but Gordon's succinct description of the house as "a 1-room house that is nothing but a glass cage on stilts" is as dismissive of the architecture as Drexler's "in this case it is a dwelling," is dismissive of program. To Drexler, the partition-less house is sublime space between planes; to Gordon it is a free-standing \$70,000 studio apartment. The term "cage" is likewise contextual: in Gordon's usage, it implies captivity and display, as if the house were a zoo exhibit. Yet Drexler describes another house in the 1952 exhibition, Case Study House #8 by Charles and Ray Eames, as "a two story metal cage," referring only to the fact of the steel frame's geometric simplicity.

**"... some professional magazines, some architectural schools, and some designers..."**

To understand which organs of the professional architectural press Gordon meant in her condemnation, "*some* professional magazines for architects and decorators," is slightly more challenging. Although today the number of architecture periodicals in the United States has dwindled considerably, in the immediate postwar period an architect's mail carrier was kept busy. *Architectural Forum*, *Progressive Architecture*, *Architectural Record*, and *Arts and Architecture* were all competing for the professional designer's subscription dollars, and all had demonstrated a commitment to showcasing modern design. In 1952, *Architectural Forum*, which was owned by Time, Inc. and led by Perry Prentice and Douglas Haskell, attempted to hone its competitive edge by splitting the portion of its content that was marketed to residential architects, builders, and developers into a separate magazine, *House and Home*, and publishing both under the umbrella title, *The Magazine of Building*. A series of articles run in its early issues indicate *House and Home*, far more than *Architectural Forum* or any other architectural trade magazine, may have been the publication that was the primary target of Gordon's wrath.

Although all of the above-mentioned magazines had periodically featured houses Gordon might have found objectionable, they had a broader focus that included non-residential

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<sup>80</sup> Mock, 20.

<sup>81</sup> Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America," 129.

architecture, enabling them to promote the architects of the “cult of austerity” in contexts, like churches, commercial buildings, and civic buildings, for which Gordon had no objection to the International Style.<sup>82</sup> But in the months leading up to April 1953, *House and Home*, with its residential specialty, showed a preference for architecture that could claim the Harvard GSD as its lineage, and also that which was touted by MoMA. The January 1953 issue featured the Payson House by Serge Chermayeff, located on the coast of Maine. Gordon charged, in “The Threat to the Next America,” that these nameless promoters of International Style were “...praising designs that are unscientific, irrational and uneconomical – illogical things like whole walls of unshaded glass on the west, which cause you to fry in the summer, thus misusing one of our finest new materials.”<sup>83</sup> At least as it appeared in the *House and Home* photographs, the Payson House would have been guilty as charged. Erected in 1950, the house has large glass doors and a glass exterior wall, all unshaded and all facing west. Today, the house is considered to be sufficiently architecturally significant that in 2005 it merited placement on the National Register of Historic Places; however, in 1950 it might well have seemed jarring to its neighbors, as modernist houses often did, especially given that, according to the article in *House and Home*, it replaced a three-story nineteenth-century mansion that the area’s citizens held dear.<sup>84</sup> As a long, white, rectangular flat-roofed box, the Payson House is as spare as its predecessor on the site would likely have been ornate.

The January issue of *House and Home* also devoted several pages to another kerfuffle in the world of postwar modernist housing discourse—although this one lacked the animosity that surrounded Gordon’s editorial—the modernist incursion into the quaint New-England-village landscape of New Canaan, Connecticut. This incursion and the article addressing it, entitled “What’s Going on in New Canaan,” featured (although not exclusively) houses designed by the “Harvard Five”: Philip Johnson, Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes, John MacLane Johanson, and Landis Gores, architects who had settled in New Canaan and, with a handful of other architects, were quickly and successfully turning it into a modernist enclave. The publicity this group was generating at the time also cast a spotlight on Walter Gropius’ Harvard GSD, where they had met—Breuer as faculty and the rest as students—in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Adding another dimension of connection to the group, both Noyes and Breuer had been associated with Philip Johnson at MoMA.

The local antipathy toward these New Canaan dwellings had devolved into a competition of satiric verse in the local newspaper, the *New Canaan Advertiser*, a phenomenon that *House and Home* examined as a means of promoting the houses in question. The *House and Home* article came out strongly in approval of the modernist dwellings in the small New England suburb, but also highlighted the objections so many of the townsfolk had to the unaccustomed forms, as a way of casting these objections as ridiculous. As telling as the objections was the format with which *House and Home* addressed them, a kind of “Myth vs. Fact” structure of argument (e.g., “Question: Do only cranks live in modern houses? Answer: Modern-house owners seem no more and no less cranky than other suburbanites.”)<sup>85</sup> But the verse sent to the *New Canaan Advertiser* (partially reprinted in *House and Home*) is perhaps the best view into

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<sup>82</sup> Marva Shearer noted that Gordon personally liked the Seagram Building in New York a great deal (personal communication, May 10, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> Gordon, “The Threat to the Next America,” 126.

<sup>84</sup> “Twentieth Century House for a Nineteenth Century Landscape,” 109.

<sup>85</sup> “What is Going On in New Canaan?” 134.

the minds of those more conservative townsfolk who found the houses abhorrent and ridiculous. Not only were they beset by houses that to them did not look all that much like houses (Marcel Breuer's first house was often likened to an open drawer), but they were also beset by a plague of tourists eager to view these wild experiments in domesticity. The original poet-objector, a stockbroker named Lewis Mack who wrote under the name "Ogden Gnash-teeth," penned the following, in response to Philip Johnson's address to the local chapter of the Kiwanis Club:

I see by the Advertiser of March 6, Page 7, Column 4,  
That Mr. Philip (Glass House) Johnson, with modesty galore,  
Lets the Kiwanis in on the secret that New Canaan has become  
world famous  
(He should have said notorious) because he and Eliot Noyes and  
Walter Gropius  
And Landis Gores and John Johanson and Marcel Breuer and  
probably more as equally obnoxious  
Have graciously condescended to settle here and ruin the country  
side with packing boxes  
And partially opened bureau drawers set on steel posts and  
stanchions  
An architectural form as gracious as Sunoco service stations.  
It seems to me there are about seventy-nine hundred out of our  
eight thousand population  
That wish to hell that Harvard and the Modern Art Museum  
Had provided padded cells for their brilliant graduate architects,  
Complete with air-conditioned functions and cantilevered sundecks  
Windowless, doorless, charmless and escape-proof.  
We wouldn't care if Cambridge or 53<sup>rd</sup> Street were covered with  
one big flat roof  
So long as Breuer, Gores, Johnson, Noyes, Johansen  
Were under it instead of in the station next to heaven.<sup>86</sup>

"What's Going on in New Canaan" was heavy with quotes from concerned locals about the relative merits of the modernist works in the village. A sampling of five real estate brokers queried about how modernist houses were affecting New Canaan's real estate values showed that they varied widely in their assessments, but *House and Home* pointed out that the modernist houses were selling for well more than they cost to build. But the magazine neglected to address

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<sup>86</sup> Mack, Lewis. March 13, 1952. *New Canaan Advertiser*. Quoted in Earls, 164.

the effect these houses, which trod heavily on the historic landscape of the village, would have had on the values of the more traditional properties, the Cape Cods and Colonials that made up the majority of New Canaan's housing stock, and the value of which relied at least to some extent on their quaint and picturesque visual context.

New Canaan made a return appearance in the February 1953 issue of *House and Home*, with an article focusing on Eliot Noyes' Bremer House, which featured a recessed ground-floor core surrounded by pilotis (Figure 32). This architectural move was common to a number of large scale International Style works, like Mies' Lake Shore Drive Apartments, Belluschi's Equitable Building, or the Ministry of Education Building in Sao Paolo, Brazil. On a domestic scale, its parentage could more clearly be seen in Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, a fact pointed out by *House and Home* and by Noyes himself in the article, with an accompanying photo of the Villa Savoye that is virtually identical to the one used in Gordon's denunciation *House Beautiful*.<sup>87</sup> The article's title, "This Stilt House is Practical," is itself an echo of early *House Beautiful* headers on modern houses and in particular Gordon's 1943 motto, "House Beautiful ... but Practical," an indication that the battle to depict modernism as something more grounded than a self-indulgent and rather elitist style of avant-garde housing had filtered into the professional press.

The article following *House and Home*'s examination of the Noyes House was a short look at MoMA's "Built in USA: Postwar Architecture" exhibition. It carried the header, "Do these pioneer designs foreshadow the look of tomorrow's popular house?"<sup>88</sup> *House and Home* provided a photomontage of the 19 houses shown in the exhibit, noting that these were examples of experimental designs that had proven to be successful. Like Drexler, however, *House and Home* judged success by artistic standards and did not address whether the designs succeed programmatically, as living spaces. Gordon's accusation, "*They are promoting unlivability, stripped-down emptiness, lack of storage space and therefore lack of possessions,*"<sup>89</sup> may be tracable to the interiors shown in these pages, and by extension (although the photos are not duplicates) to the interiors shown in "Built in USA: Postwar Architecture."

In fact, the "stripped down emptiness" seen in the photographs of the modern interiors was sometimes a goal, according to an exhibition insider. Julius Shulman, whose photographs appeared in both the 1952 MoMA exhibition and *House and Home*'s discussion of it, remembered having dinner with Elizabeth Gordon and Carl Norcross at their home, within a couple of years following the appearance of "The Threat to the Next America." Shulman recounted that Gordon gave him a dressing-down because his work was, in her words, "cold."<sup>90</sup> In the interview, conducted in 1990 for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, Shulman says that the houses he photographed often had furniture and other objects removed from them in advance of photo sessions, in order to emphasize the architecture over the interior decoration, and that this supported the "less is more" ideal that the architects whose work he photographed were trying to achieve:

... I see my early pictures how we furnished the interiors, influenced by Soriano, influenced by the modernists like Neutra, who believed less is more ... I used to

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<sup>87</sup> "This Stilt House is Practical," 120; Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America," 128. Both photos appear to have been acquired from MoMA.

<sup>88</sup> "Built in USA," *House and Home*, February 1953. 122.

<sup>89</sup> Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America," 126.

<sup>90</sup> Shulman, 56.

take furniture out of houses ... This is why, at her house that night, Gordon was angry with me, because she was implying—not just insinuating—the simple fact that my work—which was being so widely published with books and magazines all over the world, work with Neutra and that kind of architectural design philosophy--my work was naked because the architects didn't want to show well-furnished interiors. . . . It created the nakedness that she, Elizabeth Gordon, was condemning from an editorial, shelter magazine point of view: How does the great American public live?<sup>91</sup>

Although *House Beautiful* was as likely as *House and Home* or any of the other magazines that Shulman worked for to show artificially decorated rooms (i.e., rooms decorated expressly for the photograph, with furniture and items not belonging to the resident), Gordon and her staff strove for a representation that reflected a consumerist ideal, with books, ashtrays, and other knick-knacks carefully placed, as opposed to the clean-surfaced architectural ideal portrayed in the professional press. Understood through Galen Cranz's model of taste as the process of integration and assembly of symbolic and pragmatic objects, in *House Beautiful's* representation, symbolic objects (which tend to be identified with decoration and with female "taste") were in place and unapologetically represented, whereas in the Shulman-photographed interiors the emphasis was placed on pragmatic objects (objects that were identified with function, or male "design"), and symbolic objects were seen to interfere with the presentation of the architecture and deliberately excluded from the representation.<sup>92</sup> Not only was the Shulman-style mode of architectural photography an obstacle to the promotion of mass-produced symbolic objects, it was an obstacle to including what was commonly understood as women's aesthetic contribution to the home.

"The Threat to the Next America" was a battle cry on a hostile field, in which the dominant soldiers belonged to overlapping infantries—MoMA's Philip Johnson, Alfred Barr, and Arthur Drexler; *The Magazine of Building's* Douglas Haskell and Peter Blake; Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer and their progeny at the Harvard GSD. Given the time in which it appeared, Elizabeth Gordon's editorial can be partly understood as playing to public anxiety around communism. This anxiety appears to have informed not only the fraught way in which she presented the International Style as anti-American, but it infused many of the other articles in the April 1953 issue of *House Beautiful* as well. Whether or not Gordon intended to court charges of McCarthyism is a matter for debate. What she did do, unarguably, was remove all ambiguity from *House Beautiful's* presentation of modern architecture, staking out a territory of imagery that excluded "the Modern Movement" as it was then understood by those who claimed to be a part of it, and claiming it for the regional variations that offered the more informal modernism preferred by "such sweet and sentimental holdovers" as Lewis Mumford. In the course of the few months following the publication of the April issue, these dominant soldiers, who understood themselves to be the primary stakeholders in the public's perception of modern architecture, were to make themselves loudly known, vilifying, decrying, and patronizing Gordon. Gordon would also have her champions—a surprising number of them—among designers who felt she spoke for them. In particular, one elderly architectural "cowboy," Frank

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<sup>91</sup> Shulman, 59-60.

<sup>92</sup> Cranz, 130-131.

Lloyd Wright, would gallop to her defense after three years of icy silence toward *House Beautiful*. If Gordon's goal was to place *House Beautiful* squarely in the architectural profession's crosshairs, thereby establishing it as a publication as significant in the residential design world as any other, the coming months would tell if her strategy worked.

# Making a little go a long way

(continued)

**Anshen & Allen**  
Architects and Site Planners

**Eichler Homes**  
Builders

Furnished especially for *HOUSE BEAUTIFUL*  
by **Robert M. Kasper**



*Redwood plywood paneling* is a quality material unusual to find in a house in this price range. See what a warm background it makes for simple furnishings, how it reflects the new trend in American taste for natural materials. Yet easy maintenance makes it a real economy for both builder and owner, despite higher first costs of the materials.

*Ease of operation* without servants takes careful planning, but not necessarily dollars and cents. A serving bar like this one with its stainless steel top helps you retain the pleasant custom of meals in the dining room, but releases you from the heavier chores of serving. Window over sink serves as a convenient lookout on visitors approaching house.

**Figure 22. Kitchen and dining area of an Eichler Home. *House Beautiful* November 1950, 212.**



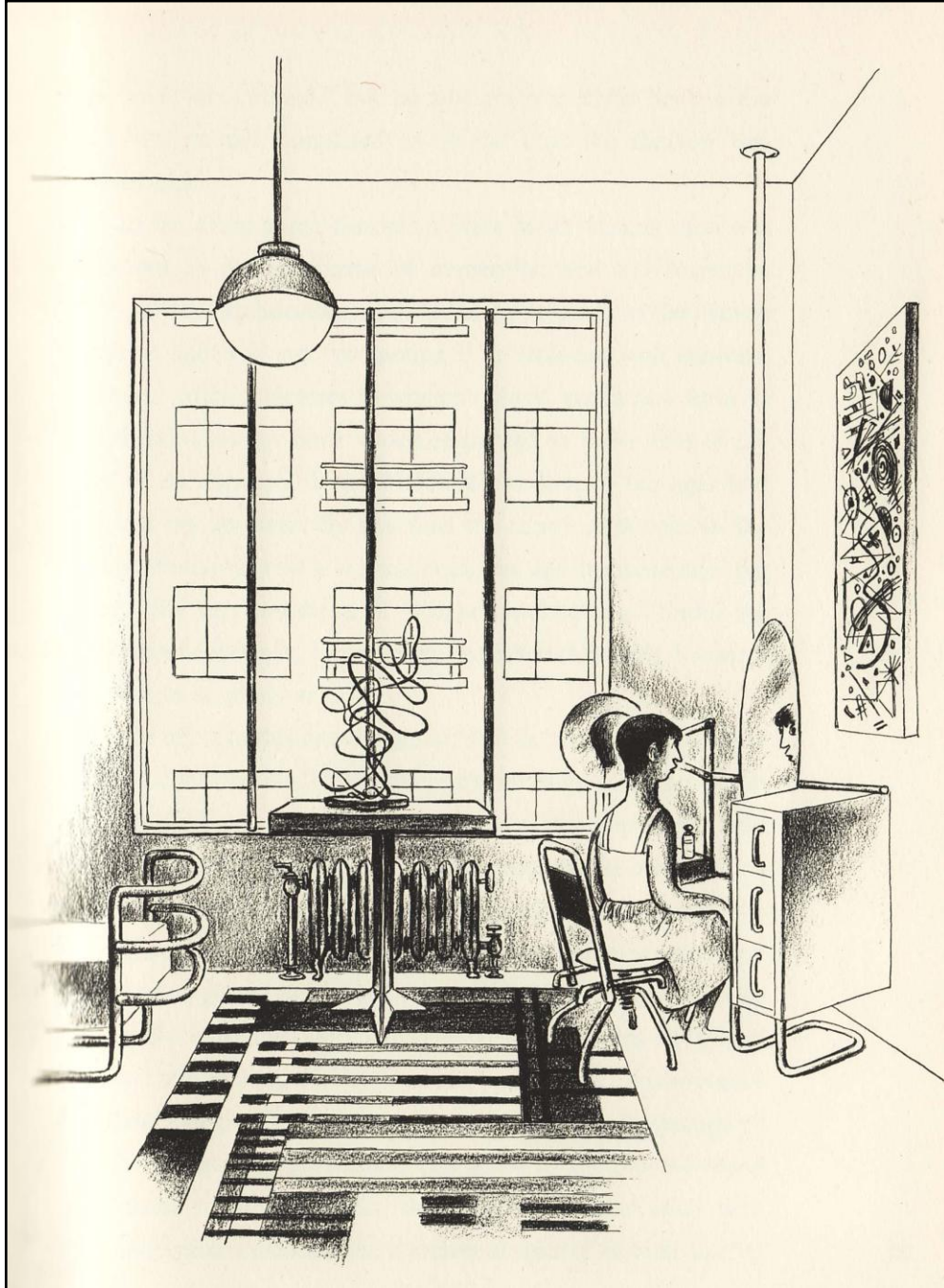


Figure 23. "Modernismus" Modern, as illustrated by Mary Petty for T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings' 1954 dissection of modern design and its many manifestations. *Homes of the Brave*, 45.



# *The current threat to the Next America!*

“Something is rotten in the state of design . . . After watching it for several years, after meeting it with silence, HOUSE BEAUTIFUL has decided to speak out.

“Two ways of life stretch before us. One leads to the richness of variety, to comfort and beauty. The other, the one we want fully to expose to you, retreats to poverty and unlivability.”

So begins our Editor’s challenging article in the April issue (on newsstands March 18). It tells how a small but influential clique would lead a Cult of Austerity with the slogan of “Less is more.” It shows how this clique is foreign to native design and hostile to the reasonable desire for comfort and convenience in the American home. It proves the real and present danger of this threat to the rich promise of our expanding industry.

*The April issue is important to you, because your business is providing comfort and convenience, because you design and produce the objects that enrich our living. The clique that HOUSE BEAUTIFUL now openly opposes is aimed directly at you. It is as damaging to you as it is harmful to the people you are trying to serve.*

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL believes that a high standard of living is our greatest contribution to the history of man. It recognizes that American industry has made this possible. It is dedicated to raising the standard of American life even higher, not cutting it back to the bare wall and empty floor.

The April issue of HOUSE BEAUTIFUL is the most important in our 57 years of publishing. We urge you to read it.

## *House Beautiful*

572 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Figure 24. Advertisement for “The Threat to the Next America,” *Business Week* April 4, 1953, 59.

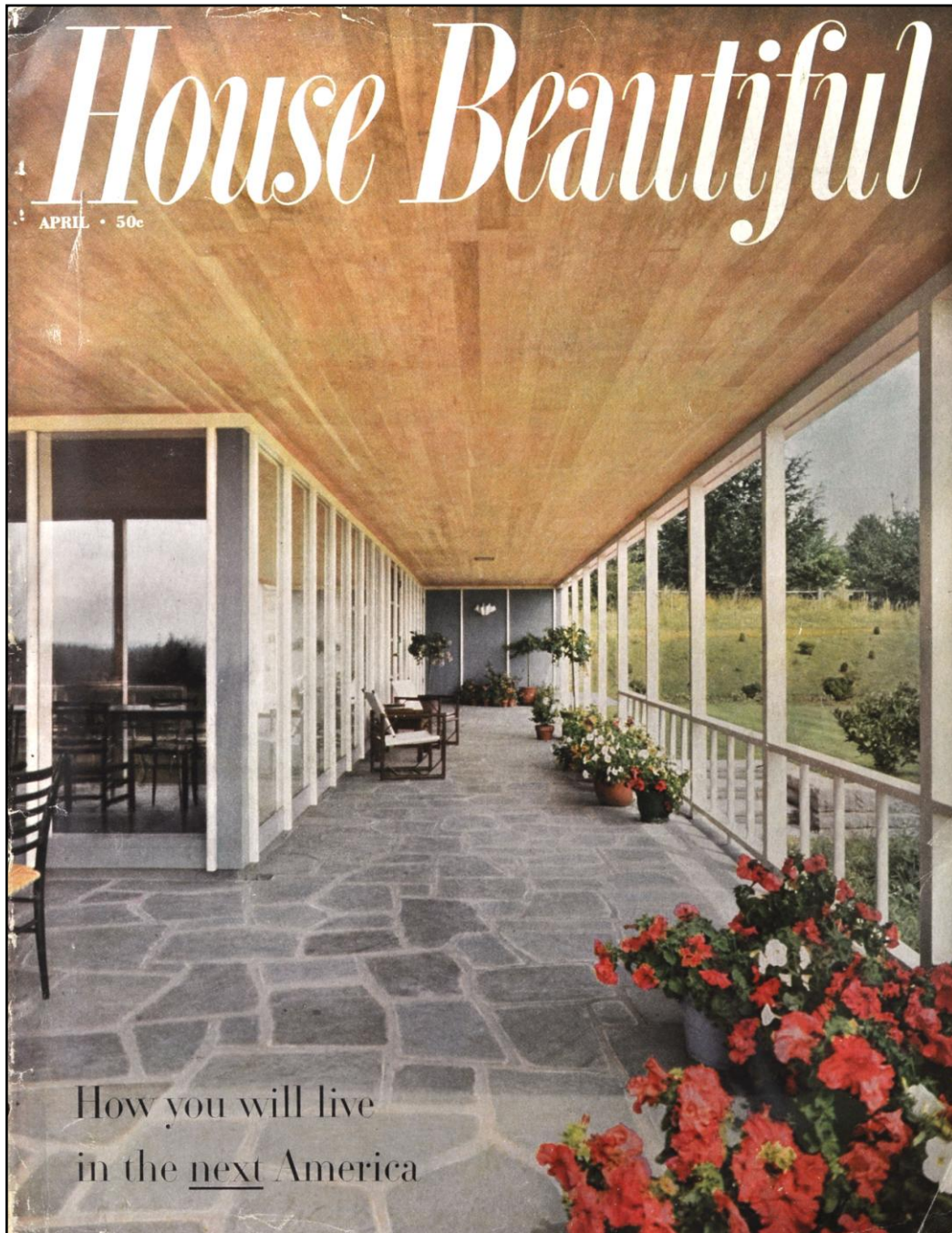


Figure 25. The cover of *House Beautiful*, April 1953.





**Figure 26. The antidote to the International Style, John Yeon's Shaw House, 1952. *House Beautiful*, April 1953. 121.**

# THE THREAT

# TO THE NEXT AMERICA

By Elizabeth Gordon, Editor

I have decided to speak up.

In this issue, devoted to the wonderful possibilities for the better life in the Next America, I must also point out to you what I consider to be the threat to our achieving the *greater good* which is clearly possible for us, if we do not lose our sense of direction and independence.

What I want to tell you about has never been put into print by us or any other publication, to my knowledge. Your first reactions will be amazement, disbelief, and shock. You will say "It can't happen here!"

But hear me out. You may discover why you strongly dislike some of the so-called modern things you see. You may suddenly understand why you instinctively reject designs that are called "modernistic." For you are right. It's your common sense speaking. For these things are bad—bad in more ways than in their lack of beauty alone.

Here is the story, in its bluntest terms.

**There is a well-established movement, in modern architecture, decorating, and furnishings, which is promoting the mystical idea that "less is more."** Year after year, this idea has been hammered home by some museums, some professional magazines for architects and decorators, some architectural schools, and some designers.

They are all trying to sell the idea that "less is more," both as a criterion for design, and as a basis for judgment of the good life. **They are promoting unlivability, stripped-down emptiness, lack of storage space and therefore lack of possessions.**

They are praising designs that are unscientific, irrational and uneconomical—illogical things like whole walls of unshaded glass on the west, which cause you to fry in the summer, thus misusing one of our finest new materials. Or tricks like putting heavy buildings up on thin, delicate stilts—even though they cost more and instinctively worry the eye. Or cantilevering things that don't need to be cantilevered, making them cost more, too. A strong taint of anti-reason runs through all of their houses and furnishings.

No wonder you feel uneasy and repelled!

They are trying to convince you that you can appreciate beauty only if you suffer—because they say beauty and comfort are incompatible.

They are trying to get you to accept their idea of beauty and form as the measure of all things, regardless of whether they work, what they do to you, or what they cost.

They are a self-chosen elite who are trying to tell us what we should like and how we should live. And these arbiters have such a narrow, often ignorant, con-

ception of the good life that only non-human, low-performance things get their stamp of approval. **These arbiters make such a consistent attack on comfort, convenience, and functional values that it becomes, in reality, an attack on reason itself.**

"Incredible!" you say. "Nobody could seriously sell such nonsense."

My considered answer is this. Though it is incredible, some people *are* taking such nonsense seriously. They take it seriously because this propaganda comes from highly placed individuals and highly respected institutions. Therein lies the danger.

For if we can be sold on accepting dictators in matters of taste and how our homes are to be ordered, our minds are certainly well prepared to accept dictators in other departments of life. The undermining of people's confidence is the beginning of the end.

Break people's confidence in reason and their own common sense and they are on the way to attaching themselves to a leader, a mass movement, or any sort of authority beyond themselves. Nothing better explains periods of mass hysteria or various forms of social idiocy than the collapse of reason, the often deliberate result of an attack on people's self-confidence.

If people don't trust themselves and their own judg-

ment, then they turn helplessly to leaders, good or bad. And they can only recover the good, sensible life when they recover their senses and discover again that, by and large, the ultimate hope for mankind is the application of reason to the world around us. This rediscovery leads individuals to their own declaration of independence against the frauds, the over-publicized phonies, the bullying tactics of the self-chosen elite who would dictate not only taste but a whole way of life.

So, you see, this well-developed movement has social implications, because it affects the heart of our society—the home. Beyond the nonsense of trying to make us want to give up our technical aids and conveniences for what is *supposed* to be a better and more serene life, there is a social threat of regimentation and total control. **For if the mind of man can be manipulated in one great phase of life to be made willing to accept less, it would be possible to go on and get him to accept less in all phases of life.**

I can hear you say: "How can people collaborate for their own discomfort and frustration?"

Believe it or not, some people do, because their own self-confidence has been shaken. Not very many, fortunately, but enough so that I can clearly see the aberration growing. (Please turn the page)

Something is rotten in the state of design—and it is spoiling some of our best efforts in modern living. After watching it for several years, after meeting it with silence, *House Beautiful* has decided to speak out and appeal to your common sense, because it is common sense that is mostly under attack. Two ways of life stretch before us. One leads to the richness of variety, to comfort and beauty. The other, the one we want fully to expose to you, retreats to poverty and unlivability. Worst of all, it contains a threat of cultural dictatorship

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL, APRIL, 1953

Figure 27. "The Threat to the Next America" carried a screaming headline, much larger than the ordinary header for Gordon's editorials. *House Beautiful* April 1953, 126-127.

### THE INTERNATIONAL STYLE

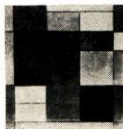
You can recognize the International Style by a combination of these characteristics (remember **some** of the first 7 may occur in good modern architecture):

- Flat roofs.
- Smooth surfaces.
- Walls that look like Mondrian compositions (rectangles within rectangles, see below).
- Cubist structures on stilts (steel or concrete).
- Favoring of stark black and white although occasional use of 2 or 3 primary colors.
- Abhorrence of ornamentation and decoration.
- Elimination of partition walls so that a house tends to be one public room with open areas for sleeping, eating, playing, etc.
- Maximum use of glass without any corrective devices for shade or privacy.
- Disregard for site and climate, whether on desert or in city with few or no protective measures against sun, heat, cold, rain.
- Emphasis on collective, 'block-house' apartments, built according to above characteristics.

### THE BAUHAUS

A school of design for poster art, architecture, furniture and the like, started in Weimar, Germany, in 1919 by Walter Gropius (now a practicing architect in the U.S.). He was replaced as director by Communist architect Hannes Meyer, who gave way in 1930 to Mies van der Rohe (also practicing architecture here). Bauhaus style is part of "International Style" (above). Bauhaus furniture design has a "clinical look": sterile, cold, thin, uncomfortable.

### MONDRIAN



Bauhaus and International Stylists design houses, furniture to look like typical Mondrian compositions (left): flat, banded, carefully asymmetrical rectangles of very few colors. Painter Mondrian was key figure in Dutch school of Cubism called *de Stijl*.

Figure 28. Sidebar included in "The Threat to the Next America." *House Beautiful*, April 1953, 129.





**Figure 29. The 1949 prototype at the Museum of Modern Art, House in the Museum Garden, designed by Marcel Breuer. Source: Driller, *Breuer Houses*, 180.**

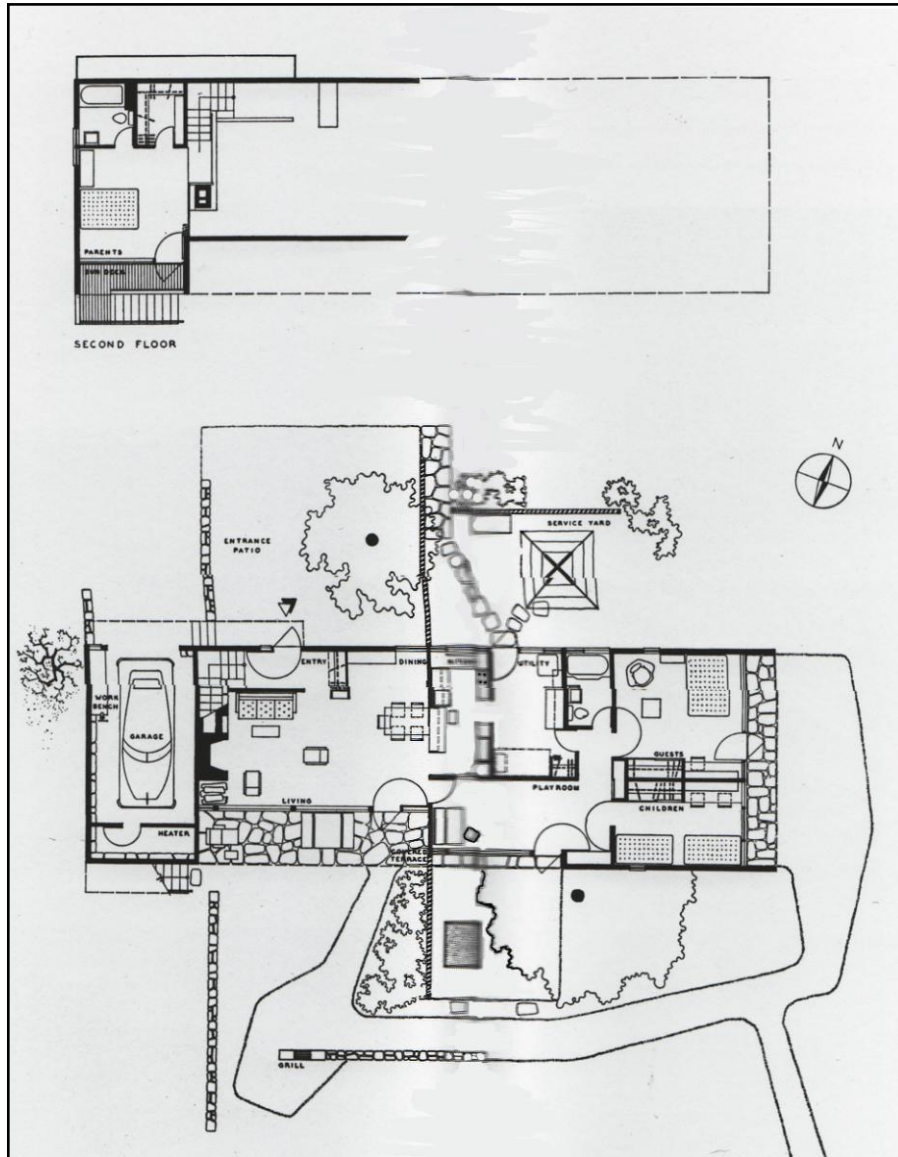


Figure 30. Plan for the House in the Museum Garden, designed by Marcel Breuer. Source: Driller, *Breuer Houses*, 182-183.





**Figure 31. Interior of the 1949 prototype at the Museum of Modern Art, House in the Museum Garden, designed by Marcel Breuer. Source: Driller, *Breuer Houses*, 185.**



**Figure 32. Eliot Noyes' Bremer House in New Canaan, 1951. Photographed by Ben Schnall for *House and Home*. Source: Earls, *The Harvard Five in New Canaan*, 2.**

## CHAPTER FOUR: HOUSE BEAUTIFUL MEETS DR. EDITH FARNSWORTH

*“I wish we could paint this house green all over the place.”*

— Ana Li McIlraith, 4, viewing a photograph of the Farnsworth House, April 15, 2001.

In writing and publishing the editorial, Elizabeth Gordon pushed *House Beautiful* up against, although not across, the line that separated the shelter press from the professional press; the magazine has consistently remained a stalwart of the shelter genre. Nevertheless, defying this boundary may have, at least in part, been her intention. By attacking men who were at the peak of their fame in the field of architecture, she transgressed multiple boundaries: she obliquely inserted nationalism and Cold War politics into the field of architecture; she transgressed gender roles by criticizing heroic male practitioners in a field that at the time was almost entirely a male province; and she blurred the line between architecture-as-art and architecture-as-industry. It is the reactions to the last of these that illuminate an important distinction within the practice of architecture at that time.

Sociologist Garry Stevens has articulated this last boundary as dividing the field of *building*, which is comprised primarily of people who are concerned with the *mass production*, from the field of *architecture*, whose practitioners are concerned with what he calls *restricted production*. Architects work in both fields; this model understands the former, who are grouped with developers, engineers, and others concerned with mass production of housing, as subordinate to the latter, who design buildings intended to serve a single client.<sup>1</sup> According to Stevens, this model is closely tied to social stratification and is inherently hierarchical. He states:

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<sup>1</sup> In the domestic sphere, this would be the client desiring to build a custom home. Outside the domestic sphere clients might be commercial or institutional. For the purposes of this discussion, I address only residential architecture.

“... the field of architecture is responsible for producing those parts of the built environment that the dominant classes use to justify their domination of the social order. Buildings of power, buildings of state, buildings of worship, buildings to awe and impress. [emphasis his]”<sup>2</sup> Monumentality aside, this idea can be applied to custom-built modern housing in the postwar period, which was on a different scale often designed to “awe and impress” in that it emphasized the architect’s artistic ability, as well as the owners’ avant-garde status as people who placed a high value on that ability. These houses, although often quite small by today’s standards, displayed both the architect’s and the owner’s social and cultural capital and at times membership in the avant-garde. Although the definition of this avant-garde is problematic—Beatriz Colomina challenges that it even existed as a useful concept in the postwar period<sup>3</sup>—architect and author Peter Blake’s memoirs demonstrate that there was, in the postwar period, a group of designers who quite openly subscribed to the idea that such an avant-garde was operative and dominant and that they were it.<sup>4</sup> Although social and cultural capital are tools of dominance within the field of architecture, they are not openly acknowledged as such. Stevens goes on to note:

... this essential function of justifying the domination of the dominant proceeds without either architects or clients being aware of it. Indeed, architecture is able to fulfill this function only if people are not aware of it, if it is misrecognized as a purely aesthetic endeavor. Architects believe—must believe—that their projects proceed in an aesthetic world, that they are indifferent to the games played in the field of power, that only artistic issues are at stake.<sup>5</sup>

As the term serves this model, Stevens bases his definition of *field* on Bourdieu’s, meaning “a mutually supporting set of social institutions, individuals, and discourses.”<sup>6</sup> Stevens contends that each field has a capital specific to it and architecture is no exception. Through this framework, the architects in the field of restricted production who responded to “The Threat to the Next America” would have perceived the stature of Mies, Gropius, and Le Corbusier somewhat differently than those architects in the field of mass production; although the latter would have likely been aware of the stature of the Europeans, they would likely generally not have held this stature in as high a regard as the architects of restricted production. Certainly, the architects in the field of restricted production perceived them very differently than those *House Beautiful* readers who were not associated with design fields. And because (Stevens notes this, too) architects who gain fame and honor within their field are not necessarily the most successful in their practice—Mies and Wright often struggled to secure a steady flow of commissions—artistic success is not necessarily attached to financial success; in fact, they have been seen as somewhat mutually exclusive. Although they overlap, temporal (i.e., professional) capital and intellectual capital exist on different continua.<sup>7</sup>

While they may not have been conscious of the dominance hierarchy within their profession, those in the field of architecture codified their separation from those in the field of building. In 1949, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) passed, by a wide margin, “Rule

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<sup>2</sup> Stevens, 86.

<sup>3</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 144-147.

<sup>5</sup> Stevens, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Stevens, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Stevens, 90.

#7,” which stated without equivocation that “An architect shall not engage in building contracting.”<sup>8</sup> In 1952, Walter Gropius publicly questioned this restriction, taking a stand against Rule #7 in an essay in *Architectural Forum*, in which he exhorted architects to become more involved in the building process. Architects, he said, needed to act as team leaders for the engineers, builders, industrialists and scientists who were other players in the field of building.<sup>9</sup> For Gropius, this was consistent with his philosophy of integration of art with craft, which had informed his pedagogy both at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) and earlier, at the Bauhaus.<sup>10</sup> Although Rule #7 was in place for many years following Gropius’ statement, many architects sent letters to the magazine supporting his position. But few, if any, took the stance that to be so involved would be lucrative and that increased earning potential should be an architect’s right, as with any business owner. Alfred Browning Parker, a modernist architect from Florida whose work would be prominently featured in the pages of *House Beautiful*,<sup>11</sup> voiced support, but this seemed based in an even fuller realization of the architect’s elite status: “We have overlong ignored our ancient professional birthright as ‘master of crafts’ ...” he wrote.<sup>12</sup>

This perception of an “ancient professional birthright,” while having deep roots within the profession of architecture, was changing in the postwar period, and Gropius’ protest against Rule #7 was a sign of this change. Andrew Shanken has written of the tradition within the profession of “rising above the ‘low’ world of commerce,” even though the business of architecture required architects to know and to function within the commercial world.<sup>13</sup> But during World War II, as architects became integral to planning the postwar world through professional organizations, government agencies, architecture periodicals, and more public vehicles of promotion such as museums and shelter magazines, the lines that formerly bounded their abilities to promote themselves were increasingly challenged and blurred.<sup>14</sup> Architects entered the commercial world through their abstraction as cultural icons in visionary corporate advertising during the war, both reinforcing the image of the master of crafts in the public imagination and compromising that image within the profession by associating it with salesmanship.<sup>15</sup>

Yet while the image of the archetypal architect as hero to the houseless masses was promoted repeatedly in the professional press, some architects, who relied on an avant-garde clientele in the postwar period, understood their work to be primarily an artistic endeavor and client needs and desires to be secondary. Understood through Stevens’ model, these architects of restricted production would have perceived “The Threat to the Next America” not only as fraught with xenophobic overtones, but as coming from someone *who did not have the right to carry it out*. Although Elizabeth Gordon consistently promoted architects who worked in the

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<sup>8</sup> “The Standards of Professional Practice, With Interpretations,” American Institute of Architects, 1961.

<sup>9</sup> Gropius, “Gropius Appraises Today’s Architect,” 111.

<sup>10</sup> Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism*, 135-6.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Browning Parker was the architect of *House Beautiful*’s Pacesetter House for 1954.

<sup>12</sup> “Letters” *Architectural Forum*, July 1952, 74. Although Gropius two months later resigned from Harvard to concentrate full time on his own architectural practice, a move made necessary when the administration at the University enacted budget cuts that severely impacted the GSD staff, there is no hard evidence that his stance on integration of craft was in any way connected with his planned return to private practice and a desire to make it more lucrative.

<sup>13</sup> Shanken, “Breaking the Taboo,” 406.

<sup>14</sup> Shanken, *194X*.

<sup>15</sup> Shanken, *Breaking the Taboo; 194X*, 10.

field of restricted production, *House Beautiful* and other shelter magazines played an even more significant, if indirect, part in mass production. The majority of the people who bought newly built homes in the postwar period did not live in custom-designed houses with architect-designed built-in furnishings, but lived in developer-designed suburban homes and bought mass-produced furniture in furniture stores. For them, the purpose of the material goods and buildings shown in the pages of *House Beautiful* was to inform their selection of mass-produced goods, i.e., to guide their choices as consumers and to help them form their expressions of taste and identity.

Gwendolyn Wright has written of the disconnect between architects and builders in this period, noting that architects often took an elitist stance toward developers' more traditional designs and were scornful as well of FHA design guidelines, which were hostile to houses with strongly modern designs or design elements, leaning toward the more traditional ranch style.<sup>16</sup> Wright notes that these houses, in general, were smaller than the suburban houses built in the 1920s, but their single level designs and more open plans gave the illusion of spaciousness, which doubtless contributed to their popularity. Yet given the choice between a larger older house and a smaller new house, the vast majority of the U.S. population in the postwar period preferred the new house. Suburban homes in large developments met this desire, and the developers often surveyed potential buyers to decipher what elements they were hoping for in their new homes, an approach that was markedly different from the attitude toward function taken by some of the architects of restricted production.<sup>17</sup> In her analysis of postwar suburban architecture, Wright frequently notes the advantages the new suburban homes had for women, who no longer had to trudge up and down stairs to go from living to sleeping areas of the house, or who could supervise playing children through picture windows. According to the literature of the time, Wright notes, even the husband's architectural needs were the responsibility of the wife: "In marriage guides like *Women Today* (1953) and *Building a Successful Marriage* (1948), the attentive wife was advised to give her husband a place apart from the children."<sup>18</sup>

Houses that could provide the open plans that were so conducive to easing the burdens of housework, as well as places apart from children in which to sequester one's husband were signs of a shift from verticality to horizontality, both in architecture and planning, that had been a hallmark of suburban development since the 1920s. This shift was in great measure brought about by increased automobile ownership, which allowed for expansion and decreasing urban density.<sup>19</sup> In the postwar suburbs, residents would become increasingly dependent on their automobiles, as locales of commerce dispersed from city centers to suburban nodes.<sup>20</sup> This "car-house relationship" was one in which developers provided the housing (the purchase of which was funded by the FHA, which meant that modernist influence in architecture was minimized), and such legislation as the Interstate Highway Act provided for the construction of roads that laced the developments and led motorists to and from the cities they surrounded.<sup>21</sup> Hayden observes that cars and houses had another important link in the minds of consumers: the idea that one might "trade up" to a better car in a couple of years was easily transferable to the idea that one might do the same with housing. This idea was also encouraged by government action: "Those families [in the 1950s] who owned houses were encouraged to spend more with the

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream*, 249-251

<sup>17</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream*, 249-251; 253.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream*. 255.

<sup>19</sup> Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*, 48-49.

<sup>20</sup> Johns, *Moment of Grace*, 105-106

<sup>21</sup> Hayden, Dolores, "Building the American Way," 273-290.

“mansion subsidy,” because tax deductions for mortgage interest rose with the cost and size of the house.”<sup>22</sup> It was here that modernism came into play in housing designs for the middle class to a greater extent, because although such houses were still small by today’s standards—a modern house by Alfred Browning Parker featured in the June 1953 issue of *House Beautiful* was 1,878 square feet—they were still larger than the FHA-funded “starter homes” that populated the suburbs built in the late 1940s.

Elizabeth Gordon certainly understood that, although it was the designer (builder or architect) who decided the arrangement of spaces within houses such as this, it was up to the woman of the house (if there was one, and there usually was) to make the home a success or failure. Because the design of a home began on a drawing board, Gordon would have known that her best bet for promoting successful residential design that gave the American public—and particularly American women—what she felt they deserved in housing, was to argue for architecture on the basis of architecture. To present her argument as one based in women’s needs would be to retreat farther into the stereotype of the women’s magazine. *House Beautiful* would go on, the following month, to make the argument that International Style and the “cult of austerity” were a disaster for women, but for this article Gordon left the heavy lifting to a man.

#### **THE FARNSWORTH HOUSE: EXPLOITING GENDER IN THE NEXT AMERICA**

Illuminating the ways in which gender played a role, both in the motivation for and the responses to “The Threat to the Next America,” is a complex undertaking. Gender was one filter through which Elizabeth Gordon’s attack was seen by architects in the field of restricted production, but it was also a filter through which she and her allies—both in and outside of *House Beautiful*—understood the “cult of austerity’s” dismissive attitudes toward women. In the May 1953 issue, Executive Editor Joseph Barry examined this attitude in the form of an interview with Chicago physician Edith Farnsworth regarding her weekend house in Plano, Illinois, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. By assigning the article to Barry, Gordon avoided the perception that she and Edith Farnsworth were a two-woman hand-wringing party. But she clearly understood the Farnsworth House as built proof of the “irrational” nature of International Style homes; she used the term in “The Threat to the Next America,” writing: “They are praising designs that are unscientific, irrational and uneconomical—illogical things like whole walls of unshaded glass . . . thus misusing one of our finest new materials.” Her example of the glass wall as irrational could have been as easily applied to Serge Chermayeff’s Payson House in Maine as it was to Mies’ Farnsworth House. For all the rationality that was supposedly inherent in the International Style, Gordon understood it to have gone so far that it had come full circle—the Farnsworth House was so rational that it was irrational. The continuum had bent back around and met in the middle.

To appreciate the way in which gender, as an issue, manifested in the controversy, it helps to examine the attitudes within the profession of architecture toward women architects and also toward women consumers. As a magazine aimed at the greater body of American consumers of housing, not the designers, *House Beautiful* necessarily targeted women (although not exclusively). Since the war years the content of the magazine had generally reflected the understanding that it was women householders who had the greatest influence on the form and

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<sup>22</sup> Hayden, “Building the American Way,” 278. Hayden also notes that, over time, this would lead to an increase in average square footage of new housing, from 800 square feet in 1950 to 1,200 in 1970, to 2,100 in 1990.



contents of the home; however, as the housing industry slowly began to meet demand with supply, the forms and financing of family housing became as important as the interior arrangements of space and décor. Couples were making taste choices involving their new homes together, and although within their own four walls many of these couples may have blurred gender lines when it came to architectural and décor decisions, spheres of influence were still perceived to be sharply divided along them, and Gordon was by reputation placed within the feminine sphere.

By contrast, professional architectural periodicals, which were uniformly edited by men, generally reflected the fact that the vast majority of architectural practitioners were male. Although in the early 1970s, affirmative action in education and increasing awareness of the gender gap in architecture eventually led to efforts on the part of the AIA and academic institutions to work towards something approaching gender parity in the profession, in the early 1950s women accounted for less than five percent of graduates from U.S. architecture programs.<sup>23</sup> Many of these female graduates did not go on to practice, so the ratio of women to men actually practicing architecture in those years was even lower. Although, as Gwendolyn Wright has shown, noted women designers were present and active in modern architecture at mid-century,<sup>24</sup> professional publications like *House and Home* and *Architectural Forum* rarely included the work of women designers. To actually understand these magazine's editorial stances toward gender differences and the roles of women in the production and marketing of architecture, stances which were to play a role in the response to "The Threat to the Next America," it is useful to examine advertising content.

Because advertisements communicate idealized images, whether of a space, object, or self, to the viewer/reader, images of people in advertisements shown in magazines that market architecture can be understood to reflect not only the readers' general understanding of gender roles and participation in the design professions, but also the advertisers' understandings of those elements. The following table offers a comparison of people depicted in display ads (i.e., those advertisements that feature attention-grabbing imagery and large or varied typefaces) in the February 1952 issues of *Architectural Forum*, *House and Home* and *House Beautiful*. Although admittedly a small sample, this comparison can still be construed to indicate a strong reflection of the dominant cultural paradigm as it was at work in the fields of architecture and design in the early 1950s:

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<sup>23</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 298. Degrees in architecture and related services conferred by degree granting institutions, by level of degree and sex of student: Selected years, 1949-50 through 2007-08."

<sup>24</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, *USA*; "Women in Modernism." Wright notes that she has made a concerted effort to point out women designers in every phase of her chronology of modern architecture in the United States.

### Gender Roles depicted in display advertisements, February 1952

		<i>Architectural Forum</i>	<i>House and Home</i>	<i>House Beautiful</i>
<b>Men</b>	skilled laborer	11	6	2
	professional (suit)	11	9	2
	architect in shirtsleeves	4	1	--
	consumer (domestic)	--	4	4
	other	3*	-	5**
	<b>Total men depicted</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Women</b>	consumer (at home)	2	15	19
	consumer (not at home)	--	4	1
	servant	1	--	--
	secretary	3	--	--
	other	--	--	6***
	<b>Total women depicted</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>26</b>

Note: Although *House Beautiful* had many more ads than the other two magazines, most of its display ads related to home furnishings generally depicted unoccupied rooms. The number of ads showing people in each publication was roughly comparable (35-40) for this comparison.

\* consists of men shown at work in professions unrelated to building.

\*\* consists generally of men shown in recreational pursuits or photographs of paid product endorsers.

\*\*\* consists generally of women shown in recreational pursuits or photographs of paid product endorsers.

Generally, ads in *Architectural Forum*, which targeted the professional architect and builder for all types of buildings, depicted far more men than women. Those men who appeared were shown in work-related roles, and those women who appeared were as likely to be secretaries (in ads showing products that serve business environments) as consumers or as end-users (i.e., homemakers shown making product selections, or in one case, a female domestic servant). By contrast, *House and Home*, which targeted the designers and builders of residential architecture and also the consumers, showed a more even ratio of men to women, acknowledging women's roles in domestic decision making and also acknowledging that women were included in the magazine's readership. *House Beautiful's* ads were more heavily weighted toward the woman reader. Ads that showed male consumers tended to show them in a heterosexual couple, or in some recreational endeavor in the company of women (presumably their wives). But none of the three magazines' ads depicted women in any kind of professional capacity as regards design—female designers were simply too aberrant to be trusted by consumers and therefore could not be used to sell products.

Although Elizabeth Gordon was a professional woman with a well-established career, unlike women designers, within the field of shelter magazine journalism her gender did not, in the 1950s, make her exceptional. At that time, women editors were often at the helm of women's magazines, so being a woman in a shelter magazine environment did not make her suspect. Doubtless it also contributed to her protective stance as regarded her readers, even when they were outside the boundaries of "normal" societal roles for their gender. As previously discussed,

Gordon was notably protective of the young war brides among her readership during the war, and it stands to reason that this protective stance would extend to all women, including one of a very different type but whom Gordon saw as prey of one member of the “cult of austerity,” Dr. Edith Farnsworth.

In “the Threat to the Next America” Elizabeth Gordon leveled a number of ambiguous charges at the architects of the International Style. She was long on generalized accusations but short on specifics, writing, for instance, “I have examined personally many of the bad modern houses which have been lyrically praised by the prophets of the “cult of austerity,” and have heard their owners describe their shortcomings and dissatisfactions (Owners are reluctant to “talk for publication” until they can sell their houses to someone else.)”<sup>25</sup> As her earlier letter to Lewis Mumford indicated, Gordon was likely prevented by the legal department at Hearst from condemning specific works by name. But, perhaps because the Farnsworth House was already the subject of litigation and Edith Farnsworth’s dissatisfaction with the house was already a matter of public record, Gordon was able to avail herself of a needed concrete example of the “cult of austerity’s” sins against their clients.

Gordon referred to Farnsworth only obliquely in “The Threat to the Next America,” and the Farnsworth House was not mentioned elsewhere in the April issue, but the following month *House Beautiful* ran a much longer exposé and interview with Edith Farnsworth. In “Report on the Battle between Good and Bad Modern,” Joseph Barry was on the front lines penning the article, which was partially comprised of long quotes from Dr. Farnsworth, discussing the impact of the architecture on her life as a seasonal resident of the house. Using the Farnsworth House as the case study for “Bad Modern,” Barry juxtaposed it with praise-worthy houses by other well-known architects such as Gardner Dailey, Anshen and Allen, and Henry Eggers, all of whose work *House Beautiful* had featured in past issues.

In her interview with Barry, Farnsworth cited a litany of problems she had with the house, but if she addressed the financial issues involved it did not appear in the article. Barry stated at the outset that she and Mies were in litigation over cost overruns, but he waved away the lawsuits as irrelevant to *House Beautiful’s* argument (“Our concern is with the livability of the house”).<sup>26</sup> Not that the lawsuit wasn’t deemed newsworthy by other vehicles of the press; *Newsweek* ran an exposé about it, characterizing it as a “split in the world of design between the moderate humanists and the strict geometricists.”<sup>27</sup> Farnsworth’s difficulties as they were presented to *House Beautiful* lay in the functional nature of the house as a house. As simple as the house looked on paper, Barry noted, living in it, even on weekends, presented a number of complex problems: the tightly built house had few operable windows, and the subsequent poor ventilation and air circulation caused problems with the fireplace, which could only be used when the entrance door was open; the five-foot-high walls of the partition closet were a foot shorter than the statuesque Farnsworth herself. “Mies talks about ‘free space,’” she told Barry, “but his space is very fixed. I can’t even put a clothes hanger in my house without considering how it affects everything from the outside. Any arrangement of furniture becomes a major problem, because the house is transparent, like an X-ray.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon, “The Threat to the Next America,” 129.

<sup>26</sup> Barry, ““Report on the Battle between Good and Bad Modern,” 266.

<sup>27</sup> Barry, ““Report on the Battle between Good and Bad Modern,” 266; “Glass House Stones” *Newsweek*, June 8, 1953, 90.

<sup>28</sup> Barry, “Report on the Battle between Good and Bad Modern,” 270.

Farnsworth felt as if she were on constant display, and her choice of an x-ray as a metaphor to describe this feeling can be seen as natural; this technology was part of her everyday toolkit. But the metaphor takes on another dimension in its application to modern architecture. Beatriz Colomina has written of the coincidental developments of modern architecture and x-rays, and as it applies to the Farnsworth house this metaphor has yet another dimension: Mies had written of “skin and bones” architecture and his structural systems as “skeleton[s].”<sup>29</sup> Colomina maintains that this is “a deep-seated philosophy of design deriving from medical discourse and inseparable from it.”<sup>30</sup> She goes on to elucidate the connection between modern architecture and health as a programmatic concern, noting that European avant-garde architects in the U.S. in the 1920s made such connections in their work in such projects as R. M. Schindler’s Lovell Beach House and Richard Neutra’s Lovell Health House.<sup>31</sup> But the Farnsworth House was not designed to enhance Edith Farnsworth’s health. Colomina aptly notes another connection between the glass house and the x-ray—that of surveillance. “The open plan,” she writes, “eliminat[ed] individual private spaces inside the house, but the picture window and the glass wall exposed everything to the ruthless public gaze.”<sup>32</sup>

Architectural historian Alice Friedman’s comparison of the Farnsworth House in with Phillip Johnson’s Glass House, in New Canaan, Connecticut, sheds light on how gender and sexuality played a role in these two seemingly similar houses. Johnson’s house, according to Friedman, is a tightly controlled male space, inhabited by the designer himself, who has inscribed a strong sexual element not so much in the house but in its antithesis, the deeply private Guest House. Friedman also notes that Johnson had his choice of environments—Glass House or Guest House—whereas Farnsworth had no retreat within the house save the bathrooms. The Farnsworth House keeps the inhabitants on display, self-consciously moving through an elevated, conspicuous space.<sup>33</sup>

Their centrality in the surrounding natural landscape and visual permeability give both houses a terrarium-like quality when viewed from without. However, the effect of the Farnsworth’s House’s 5.5 ft elevation above ground level, in contrast to the Glass House, is that the Farnsworth House also resembles a stage. Built in a floodplain, the house’s raised design has many times saved it from flooding (although several floods—including a disastrous one in 2008—have been so severe the height was insufficient), but the design of the interior creates spaces in which inhabitants are displayed against the central core as backdrop. Contrast the exterior photographs of the Farnsworth House and the Glass House, and it becomes apparent that, at least insofar as they naturally direct the camera lens, the Farnsworth house draws the gaze to a much greater extent than the Glass House (Figures 33 & 34). Even interior photos of the Farnsworth House tend to look toward the core of the house, as opposed to the views of nature to be had from within. Although both houses have a theatrical quality, in the Farnsworth House it is easy to conceive that the house’s inhabitant becomes the subject of the imagined gaze, visible through the transparent “fourth wall” of the proscenium-like setup. Friedman notes this, observing that “rather than actually enabling outsiders to satisfy their curiosity about what went on inside (as the Farnsworth House did), the Glass House screened, distorted and overtly denied

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<sup>29</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 153.

<sup>30</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 153-154.

<sup>31</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 164-169.

<sup>33</sup> Friedman, 127-156.

visual access through the landscaping of the hilly site and by a series of architectural devices...<sup>34</sup> In her interview with Joseph Barry, Farnsworth said that "...in the house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert." The house, because it was designed to be a vehicle of display, has forced her to be hyper-conscious of her imagined audience.

Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey wrote in the 1970s of the cinematic concept of the *male gaze*, i.e., the idea that cinematic images of women are presented in a way that assumes the viewer is male, and that women are thus objectified and sexualized by the lens.<sup>35</sup> The Farnsworth house is not a movie (not that the story isn't cinematic enough), but Edith Farnsworth's reaction to the effect of the glass walls invites the comparison. Did Mies *intend* to use his art to sexually objectify Farnsworth, in the way that a male film director uses the camera lens as a substitute for his own eye as he views women on the other side of the camera? Or was this paradigm so deeply ingrained in the social and gendered interaction between Mies and Farnsworth that it happened in the absence of any conscious decision? I would argue the latter: by designing what he and many others, then and since, understood to be "pure" architecture, he seems to have objectified Farnsworth only unintentionally; transparent walls were intended to remove the visual barrier between human-nature and wild-nature, inviting natural beauty into the interior. In this regard the house is profoundly successful.

Many speculated at the time that Mies and Farnsworth were romantically involved, although as Friedman notes, this is not documented in Farnsworth's diaries and there is no proof of it; Farnsworth had strong attachments to male mentors, but most of her close relationships were with women.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, in the throes of their legal battle, Mies himself indulged the rumor that her anger stemmed more from his spurning of her than in her dissatisfaction in her house. Mies' biographer, Franz Schulze, has perpetuated this. Schulze quotes Mies as saying ("ungallantly," according to Schulze, but he does not question Mies' accuracy), "the lady expected the architect to go along with the house."<sup>37</sup> Schulze goes on to point out that Farnsworth was not classically physically attractive, implying that she was unworthy of Mies' romantic affections, if this was indeed the correct characterization of their friendship: "Edith was no beauty. Six feet tall, ungainly of carriage, and, as witnesses agreed, rather equine in features..." Schulze accompanies the description with a photograph of Farnsworth taken at approximately age 70, about 25 years after the house was built. The implication seems to be that somehow the homely Farnsworth was fooling herself if she thought Mies could have been attracted to her, or that, if they had been sexually involved, the relationship could have continued. Schulze observes that her lack of physical beauty probably led her to "[cultivate] her considerable mental powers. Doubtless it was these that attracted Mies to her in the first place and in turn persuaded her that he was a great talent in his own right."<sup>38</sup> Schulze here applies a time-honored double standard, which is that physical beauty is necessary for single women to be considered successful, but for men wealth, power, and/or genius will do. Likely, the fact that Farnsworth was willing to pay him and that Mies desperately needed a residential commission in the United States was more important to him than her physical appearance.

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<sup>34</sup> Friedman, 152.

<sup>35</sup> Mulvey, Laura, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Screen*, Vol 16, No. 3, Fall 1975, 6-18.

<sup>36</sup> Friedman, 133-134.

<sup>37</sup> Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe*, 253.

<sup>38</sup> Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe*, 258.

Although Schulze wrote Mies' biography 25 years ago, even more recently other scholars have presented Farnsworth's marital status as more pertinent than her accomplishment: In a 2009 paper for the Chicago Literary Club, architect Donald von Fennig Wroblewski presented the Farnsworth House's history, introducing Mies' client as "...a 41 year old spinster, Dr. Edith Farnsworth..." only after which Wroblewski described her as a renowned physician.<sup>39</sup> All, however, agree that Farnsworth was severely intelligent. The daughter of a wealthy Chicago lumber baron—her family lived only a few blocks from what would later be the site of Mies' Lake Shore Drive Apartments<sup>40</sup>—Farnsworth had entered medicine after deciding not to pursue a career as a professional violinist. At the time she was interviewed by *House Beautiful* about her Plano weekend home, she had turned her considerable talents to research and teaching and was a nationally recognized nephrologist and associate professor of Medicine at Northwestern University. Friedman observes that, although the doctor's connection to Mies was "a profound emotional and intellectual" one, it was likely not a sexual one. Yet if not physically attracted to Mies, Farnsworth was very attracted to the idea of modern design and its spiritual aspects as Mies presented them to her. When a model of the house was included in an exhibition of Mies' work at MoMA in 1947, Farnsworth attended the opening. Friedman relates that Farnsworth was "proud of the project and her role in it" quoting her as writing, "I was happy as I boarded the train back to Chicago, reflecting that our project might well become the prototype of new and important elements of American architecture."<sup>41</sup>

Had the house been built as the model projected it at the time, it would have had, at least partially, exterior walls that were translucent instead of transparent, with frosted glass affording considerable privacy in a large portion of the house. Certainly this would have helped prevent Farnsworth's personal anxiety as she performed the role of inhabitant, but it might also have detracted from the pure "space within planes" element of the architecture as viewed from the outside. But the contrast between the house as modeled in 1947 and the house as built in 1951 gives us some idea of the transition that must have also taken place in the relationship between the architect and his client—that Mies' attitude towards Dr. Farnsworth shifted from partnership to exclusion as his desire for architectural purity became paramount. As Friedman notes: "Principles of design and form, rather than programmatic or even typological concerns, always came first. Thus, while Farnsworth may have been, for Mies, an entertaining companion and a committed partisan, as a client she represented a means to an architectural end."<sup>42</sup>

In analyzing the controversy surrounding the Farnsworth House, Friedman uses the case to illustrate her larger thesis, which is that the houses designed for independent women disproportionately populate the most significant modern residential works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that, although the reasons are complex and vary across her case studies, this is largely so because, by removing many of the programmatic considerations that surrounded traditional women's space as prescribed by the dominant culture, architects like Mies were freer to explore the artistic potential contained in their work. In fact, Mies admitted as much.<sup>43</sup> To augment Friedman's contrasting the Farnsworth House (i.e., a house designed by a noted modernist [and heterosexual] male architect for an independent [presumably heterosexual] female client) with

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<sup>39</sup> Wroblewski, "A Little House in the Country."

<sup>40</sup> United States Federal Census. Year: 1930; Census Place: *Chicago, Cook, Illinois*.

<sup>41</sup> Friedman, 134.

<sup>42</sup> Friedman, 138.

<sup>43</sup> Friedman, 15; 134-135.

the Glass House/Guest House (i.e., a house designed by a gay architect for himself) it is worth examining recent discourse regarding a third house, also built outside the heteronormative mainstream and also designed for a gay man and by a noted modernist architect. In a recent article for *Buildings and Landscapes*, Annmarie Adams explores the Havens House—the same house used by *House Beautiful* in August 1944 to promote “Good Modern”—addressing the social and sexual elements inscribed in it as a standard bearer of “queer space.”

Adams notes that Havens had only two demands as Harris began his design process: the house had to have a badminton court and it had to be built overlooking the adjoining houses.<sup>44</sup> As Man Ray’s famous photograph of the house reveals (Figure 35), the latter demand not only gave the Havens the optimal view of the city below and the Bay beyond, but also gave the house full immunity from neighbors’ prying eyes. Although its west side is wide open to the view of the San Francisco Bay, with full glazing, the house is completely private because it sits high above the houses next to it. Adams also notes that, unlike houses designed for traditional families, in which the parent’s bedroom is larger than the children’s or the guest bedrooms, Havens’ bedrooms are “nonhierarchical,” or all about the same size, which she takes as another clear indicator Havens had no interest in the life of the dominant heteronormative culture. Yet while a “master bedroom” of significantly larger size than secondary bedrooms was sometimes featured in interwar modernist house plans, this was not always the case. Two houses of the same vintage shown in the April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1941 issue of *House Beautiful* clearly show that while some variance in bedroom sizes existed, there was not a clear disparity between children’s and parent’s bedrooms, although as in the Haven’s House, servants always got the short-shrift in bedroom space (Figure 36).

Not surprisingly, the Havens House’s ability to simultaneously provide openness and seclusion was among the qualities that Elizabeth Gordon and *House Beautiful* extolled in their 1944 essay, “How to Judge Modern,” devoted to the Havens House. Area by area and angle by angle, Gordon dissected the house, presenting it, in text and photographs, as emblematic of the virtues that modern architecture had the potential to impart. That the house was not designed to serve a traditional family was of no concern to her (the kitchen was relegated to the continuation pages), but she touted emphatically that it was designed to serve the man for whom it was built—the person who hired the architect. Crucial to this, she explored the Havens House entirely for what it could say to prospective clients of modern architects, not to other modern architects. She related: “Both the owner and the designer wanted to create a house whose beauty stemmed not from the elaboration of its details, but instead from the coordination of its parts and its appropriateness to Mr. Haven’s tastes and way of life.”<sup>45</sup> She spoke almost presciently to her later complaint about the Farnsworth House, the lack of privacy afforded by the glass walls:

One of the commonest complaints of people who have seen only bad examples of Modern architecture is that they wouldn’t want to ‘live in a fishbowl.’ The large areas of glass, they think, are synonymous with the public gaze. But they fail to realize that an expert architect, who really knows how to handle Modern, can create privacy even though he plans whole walls of glass ...<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Adams, Annmarie. “Sex and the Single Building,” 87.

<sup>45</sup> “How To Judge Modern,” 50.

<sup>46</sup> “How To Judge Modern,” 51.



Gordon also makes an allusion to sexual privacy, addressing the fact that such a thing requires not only visual seclusion, but also some degree of acoustic seclusion: “Privacy from the outside world is only one kind of privacy. There must also be retreat and seclusion from other people in a house. Each bedroom on the lower floor is especially well insulated from noises that might be made in the adjoining room.”<sup>47</sup>

By focusing the article on what the house does well for its client, Gordon allows the house to speak to the broader advantages of modern architectural elements as they could appeal to any client and any lifestyle, not just to those elements that support concerns which might be specific to heteronormative family culture, such as children’s play space in convenient proximity to kitchens or at a distance from “Dad’s” den. In Gordon’s presentation of the Havens House, modern is represented by innovative solutions to problematic sites, seamless transitions between indoor and outdoor spaces, natural colors and materials. In this context, the Havens House is praiseworthy because it offers an imaginative solution to (Gordon of course leaves this unsaid) a homosexual client aiming to devise a living space that accommodated both his social and his private lives.

In fact, it was not the first time that Gordon had presented, in the pages of *House Beautiful*, queer space as an exemplar of innovation. In the June 1943 issue Gordon praised an apartment remodel undertaken by a male couple in New York City, retailers Luke Kelly and John Scoville. In the article, which Gordon titled, “God Gave All Of Us Imagination But Only Some Of Us Use It,” Gordon describes the couple’s solution to adding light and more usable space to a small “railroad flat”—a dwelling type so-named for its resemblance to a railroad car, often having a long hallway with rooms along one side—and uses an accompanying graphic that contrasts “before” and “after” plans, showing the formerly cramped four bedroom apartment converted to a cozy one-bedroom unit.<sup>48</sup>

Among the reasons the Havens House is exemplary of queer space, according to Adams, is because while it contains an unusually deep degree of privacy and seclusion, it also strongly displays Havens’ social standing as a scion of a prominent Berkeley family—in Adams’ words, “. . . the house is a public spectacle.”<sup>49</sup> The Havens House shares these characteristics with Johnson’s Glass House/Guest House, which displays unequivocally its designer/owner’s membership in the avant-garde while also strongly accommodating the secrecy and seclusion necessary to gay male sexuality at the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, providing a comfortable and even erotic environment for it. By contrast, in removing the elements of acoustic and visual privacy from the interior of the Farnsworth House, Mies in effect denied Edith Farnsworth’s ability to be sexual in what was supposed to be her place of seclusion—a place ironically called her “pleasure pavilion”—the term *pavilion* itself implies display—by one of Mies’ staunchest champions, architect Peter Blake. Blake saw *House Beautiful*’s condemnation of the Farnsworth house as rooted in the fact that it was not built to serve a traditional family, which he believed to be the only kind of house the magazine was concerned with.<sup>50</sup> That the magazine had so strongly promoted the Havens House, as well as other examples of non-heteronormative dwellings, shows Blake’s belief to be a misconception.

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<sup>47</sup> “How To Judge Modern,” 51.

<sup>48</sup> “God Gave All Of Us Imagination But Only Some Of Us Use It,” *House Beautiful*, June 1943, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Adams, 85.

<sup>50</sup> Blake, *The Master Builders*, 231.

Although “pleasure pavilion” may have been what Mies had in mind—Farnsworth claimed he originally wanted to furnish the house with pink suede Barcelona chairs, which Farnsworth vetoed because they would “make the house look like a Helena Rubenstein studio”<sup>51</sup>—in the face of actual corporeal aspects of a female presence, he blanched. Friedman relates the subtext of Mies inclusion of a guest bathroom in the house:

Despite the pronouncements about freedom, Mies let it be known that the provision of a “guest bathroom” at the Farnsworth House was meant to keep visitors from “seeing Edith’s nightgown on the back of the bathroom door.” Ultimately, this piece of women’s clothing, this emblem of femaleness, sexuality, and the body, had to be hidden away precisely because it served as a reminder of the very things that Mies (and mainstream culture generally) wanted to deny.<sup>52</sup>

As Mies turned away from Farnsworth as a client and relegated her to the role of patron, her needs had less and less consequence. In fact, she claimed to Joseph Barry, “there was no thought of me at any time.”<sup>53</sup> In the end, he denied her sexuality (which, whatever her inclinations, was apparently in no way enhanced by pink suede furniture), and this denial has been presented as somewhat justified, at least by one of his more important biographers, because she was single, smarter than most men and unafraid to show it, and not physically attractive by the standards of the dominant culture.

Gordon, in “The Threat to the Next America” editorial itself, did not overtly portray the International Style as hostile to women, at least to a greater extent than she understood it to be hostile to any American. It was Joseph Barry, in the article for which he interviewed Farnsworth, who observed of the architects of the International Style: “Their austerity, far from improving the soul, impoverishes the spirit. They starve themselves in the midst of American plenty. They make life so hard for woman by scoffing at modern aids for her comfort, labor-savers for her time, that one might conclude women are the object of their attack.”<sup>54</sup> These are strong and damning words, and the implication that Mies was somehow attacking Farnsworth, while consistent with the general tone of *House Beautiful’s* attack on the International Style, no doubt contributed to the objections many had to the magazine’s stance, including those who in principle agreed with them but found the tone of their contentions to be counterproductive. No evidence is available to indicate that Mies was attacking Farnsworth through the design of the house. But the history of the house over time does indicate that, as many have noted, his aim was to reach a pure and spiritual goal in the design of the house, and that Farnsworth’s concerns were secondary or even tertiary.

Yet despite her anger at Mies’ cost overruns and arrogance, the house ultimately became the weekend place she first had in mind. Edith Farnsworth owned her glass house for 20 years. In her journal she recounted the early days in the house, and the many trespassers whose goal was to have a closer look at the house and inadvertently Dr. Farnsworth herself: ‘Shirts fluttered from behind trees, cameras clicked, and heads encircled my ‘sleeping space’ as I awoke in the morning.’<sup>55</sup> Yet she also recounted the moment when the house became a home to her, and a place she loved and shared with her friends. It was a moment in which Farnsworth can be seen to

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<sup>51</sup> Friedman, 143.

<sup>52</sup> Friedman, 143.

<sup>53</sup> Barry, “Report on the Battle between Good and Bad Modern,” 266.

<sup>54</sup> Barry, “Report on the Battle between Good and Bad Modern,” 273.

<sup>55</sup> Farnsworth, Edith. “Journal” 12.

be an unusual woman who revels in the life of the mind, sharing her dinner with a stranger—an eminent Scottish art professor who came to see the house—in whom she finds a kindred spirit, discussing literature and the horrors of the war. She becomes aware of the soul-satisfying ability the house has, not just to bring natural and spiritual beauty inside its walls, but to bring about moments of comfortable connection such as this:

Mr. Michael Jaffe came late one afternoon and I liked him well enough to share a chicken with him for supper. By that time I had a proper woodpile and the firelight brought out the shadows of swelling buds on the black maple at this end of the terrace. We talked about [British author] Cyril Connolly and his “Unquiet Grave” and the collapse of the review *Horizon*. “Do you remember the terrible story of the oil slick—in the Baltic, wasn’t it, that trapped the seagulls so that they couldn’t get off the surface, and the boys who stoned them from shore? I think that was in the last issue of *Horizon*.”

“That became the most famous story of post-war writing. The oil slick was of such dimensions that it could only have come from a torpedoed sunken tanker, so the anecdote was full of tragic overtones. No one of my generation will ever forget it.”

As of that evening, passed in the company of a stranger who shared not only the chicken, but Connolly in his pervading angst and his fascinating anecdote and the swelling buds and the stoned and dying birds—the glass house took on life and became my own home.<sup>56</sup>

It is worth remembering that Farnsworth deliberately chose to build a house that was uniquely modern and experimental. That Farnsworth made a life in medicine may have played a part in this, and it is ironic that its effect on Farnsworth was anxiety producing; as Colomina writes, “The x-ray house challenges the body it exposes; the healthy occupant becomes distressed.”<sup>57</sup> It is also worth remembering that she had social connections, prior to meeting Mies, with others associated with modern art and architecture, in particular the artist Hugo Weber, who taught at former Bauhaus professor Laszlo Moholy-Nagy’s Institute of Design (the “New Bauhaus”) in Chicago.<sup>58</sup> In addressing what she perceived as flaws, Edith Farnsworth took material steps to personalize the house, installing exterior screens on the west side of the porch to keep the sun off the house, and presumably also for privacy. She also raised the hearth, which Mies had insisted be at floor level.<sup>59</sup> As Mies had made no provision for automobiles in the site plan, she also constructed a 2-car garage on the property, situating it out of view of the house. In 1972, Dr. Farnsworth put the house up for sale, and it was purchased by Lord Peter Palumbo, a wealthy collector of modern architecture who also owned houses by Frank Lloyd Wright (Kentuck Knob) and Le Corbusier (Maison Jaoul). Lord Palumbo, a fan and friend of Mies’, hired Mies’ grandson, architect Dirk Lohan, to perform renovations, oversee the replacement of the

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<sup>56</sup> Farnsworth, Edith. “Journal” 12-13.

<sup>57</sup> Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, 165.

<sup>58</sup> Her journals indicate that Farnsworth’s romantic affections were more likely inclined toward artist Hugo Weber than Mies. She recounts how Weber would arrive at her apartment smelling of “soap and Swiss snows” and how fond of him her poodle was.

<sup>59</sup> National Historic Landmark Nomination: The Farnsworth House. 6.; Khan, 154; Farnsworth noted Mies’ insistence that the hearth sit directly on the travertine floor in her with Joseph A. Barry for *House Beautiful*. Barry, “Report on the Battle Between Good and Bad Modern,” 270.

deteriorated roof, and update climate control systems. Although the hearthstone was kept in place, Dr. Farnsworth's screens were removed. Lord Palumbo placed Mies-designed furniture in the house as well, something Farnsworth had resisted.

Today, the house appears as Mies had envisioned it, and it is a monument to his vision of pure architecture as no other of his buildings can be considered to be, for it serves no other purpose. Now owned and operated as a house museum by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), in the current owner's narrative Edith Farnsworth herself is in some ways absent from its history. Although her journal is transcribed and available in the resources section of the Museum's website, the web page devoted to the history of the house gives no biographical information about Edith Farnsworth beyond mentioning her name as Mies' client, with a link a photograph of her. Mies is better served, however, with an 850-word biography on the page, in which his body of work beyond the Farnsworth House is discussed at length.<sup>60</sup> The NTHP continues to promote the probable myth that Edith Farnsworth's lawsuit was based in her supposed romantic spurning: in a 2004 article about the Farnsworth House in the NTHP's *Preservation* magazine, architecture critic Paul Goldberger re-insinuates that their involvement was romantic and that Farnsworth sued Mies in anger over, not only the cost overruns, but "alleged defects" in the house<sup>61</sup> (such as, perhaps, the defect in the roof that left approximately two inches of water standing on the floor soon after Farnsworth assumed occupancy). Although the National Historic Landmarks nomination, written in 2003, noted that the house had been well maintained, Goldberger claims that Farnsworth allowed it to deteriorate, and even accuses her of "abandoning Mies' creation," presumably because she chose to retire in Italy and before she left, in 1972, sold the house to Lord Palumbo. Goldberger seems even to resent that the Farnsworth House bears her name, despite the fact that it is an accepted convention to use the original owner's name to denote an historic property.<sup>62</sup> In a much more recent article in the November/December 2010 issue of *Preservation*, Edith Farnsworth is again under scrutiny, this time noted to have had little respect for the house because she stained the interior paneling a color more to her liking, had "pedestrian" furniture, and left "the sink piled high with dirty dishes."<sup>63</sup>

Although there is little point in speculating how the story or the design of the Farnsworth House might have been different if Edith Farnsworth had been male, what is clear is that her gender and her status as a single woman has strongly influenced how the history of the Farnsworth House has been written. Edith Farnsworth has been, and still is, variously portrayed as the villain (as Paul Goldberger does in his narrative for the NTHP), a gullible dupe of *House Beautiful* (as Peter Blake wrote),<sup>64</sup> and a spurned would-be lover (as Franz Schulze portrays her in his biography of Mies).<sup>65</sup> There appears to be a dearth of evidence supporting any of these contentions, but what can be said—and what Friedman has shown—is that if her gender played

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<sup>60</sup> *The Farnsworth House*, "History: The Farnsworth House / Mies van der Rohe."

<sup>61</sup> Farnsworth, Edith. "Journal" 14.

<sup>62</sup> National Historic Landmark Nomination: The Farnsworth House; Goldberger, Paul. "Farnsworth: The Lightness of Being," 36-39.

<sup>63</sup> Wills, Eric. "Sixteen Sites to See: Farnsworth House," 38-40.

<sup>64</sup> Blake, *The Master Builders*, 234

<sup>65</sup> The story of the Farnsworth House has also recently been told in a play, *The Glass House*, by Chicago filmmaker and playwright June Finfer. The play is unpublished, but a review in *The New Yorker* by Paul Goldberger (April 30, 2007) relates that the play shows Edith falling in love with Mies, and that as their conflicts over the house grew Mies left the relationship and returned to his longtime partner, Lora Marx.

any role in the design of the house, it was that it likely made it somewhat easier for Mies to ignore her concerns and focus on his ideal of “pure architecture.” Gender is also a factor in most accounts of Lord Palumbo’s occupancy of the house: Palumbo is depicted as its hero and savior both for hiring Mies’ grandson to restore the house in 1972, and for furnishing the house with Mies-designed furniture, whereas Dr. Farnsworth had used her own furniture.

The attitude that clients’ wishes were secondary to artistic concerns was not unique to Mies, and could be seen elsewhere in the architecture of restricted production. But it was epitomized in a 1953 speech to the Central States District Conference of the AIA by Philip Johnson, then director of architecture and design at MoMA, who advocated prioritizing the artistic aspects of architectural design over the client’s needs and wants. In a small article in the November 1953 *Architectural Forum*, entitled “Clients Thwart Architects, Central States Session Told,” Johnson was quoted as saying:

Too many times an architect takes the attitude that his client can call the tune because he’s paying the piper. Often the client gets in the way of an architect’s creative ability...An architect’s first duty is to his art. The real art of architecture is monumentality—something that will make you gasp...This is what every architect has to think about when he picks up his pencil...You can’t get this artistic experience by simply following the client’s wants. Your client is not an artist. If he were, he probably wouldn’t have come to you for assistance.<sup>66</sup>

Johnson’s arrogant tone was bound to be perceived as anti-consumer, and as such it predictably got some play in the mainstream press. His quote also appeared the following month in *Time* magazine, but the heading, “Fair Warning,” carried a very different import for the reader than *Architectural Forum*’s “Clients Thwart Architects...” *Time*’s title was intended to red flag avant-garde architectural design for any reader who might be, like Farnsworth, considering hiring such a designer.<sup>67</sup> If Gordon and her supporters felt that “Bad Modern” was the result of architects turning their backs on the wants and needs of the client, Johnson seemed happy to fan the flames of the conflagration by confirming their complaint’s validity.

By publishing Joseph Barry’s piece on the Farnsworth House on the heels of “The Threat to the Next America,” Gordon and *House Beautiful* threw a harsh light on a cultural divide within the profession of architecture. A strong current of belief was afoot that to be professionally viable meant embracing modern architecture as it was presented by the foremost of the institutions that marketed modernism, i.e., MoMA and the professional architectural press. Yet not all architects subscribed to or were comfortable with this idea. Additionally, the editorial and Barry’s article on the Farnsworth House can be understood to have struck a nerve insofar as gender played a role in the imagery of modern architecture. Although women were in the minority of respondents, most felt that Gordon was speaking for them, or that she was speaking for those architects who were more sympathetic to their needs in housing.

The debate would play out in the pages of the professional and mainstream press over the months to follow, as editorials, articles, and letters to editors defined allegiances. As clients,

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<sup>66</sup> “Clients Thwart Architects, Central States Session Told” *Architectural Forum: The Magazine of Building*. Vol. 99, No. 5, November, 1953. 58.

<sup>67</sup> “Fair Warning” 84.

critics, and other stakeholders stepped forward, spilling the debate outside of the profession and into the more public realm where many felt it did not belong. The camps of modern architecture into which the respondents fell is sometimes starkly clear. But also notable are letter-writers' reactions based on other factors, such as the high stakes of living in a country that was becoming increasingly swept up in anti-communist anxiety, or the belief that modern architecture ran counter to a healthy economy. The next chapter examines the articles, editorials, letters to the editor, and behind-the-scenes correspondence written in response to "The Threat to the Next America."



Figure 33. Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, 1951. The five ft. elevation of the house on columns, as well as the "backdrop" of the internal core give the house the look and feeling of a theatrical stage. Photo source: *The Farnsworth House*, National Trust for Historic Preservation website, <http://www.farnsworthhouse.org/photos.htm>, accessed December 5, 2010. Plan source: Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, 135.

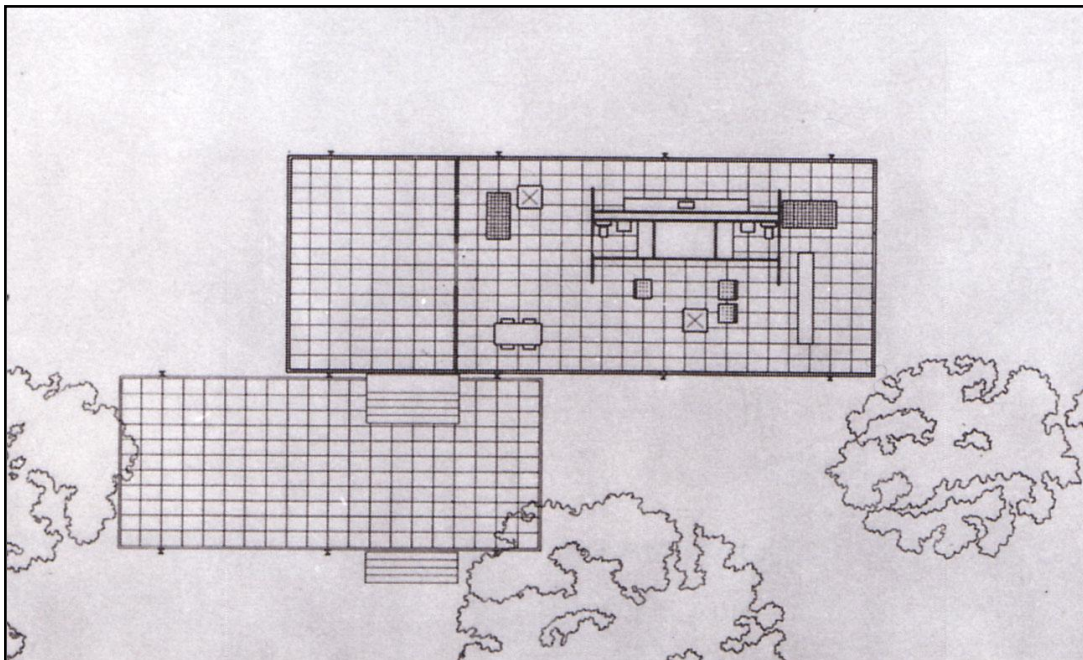
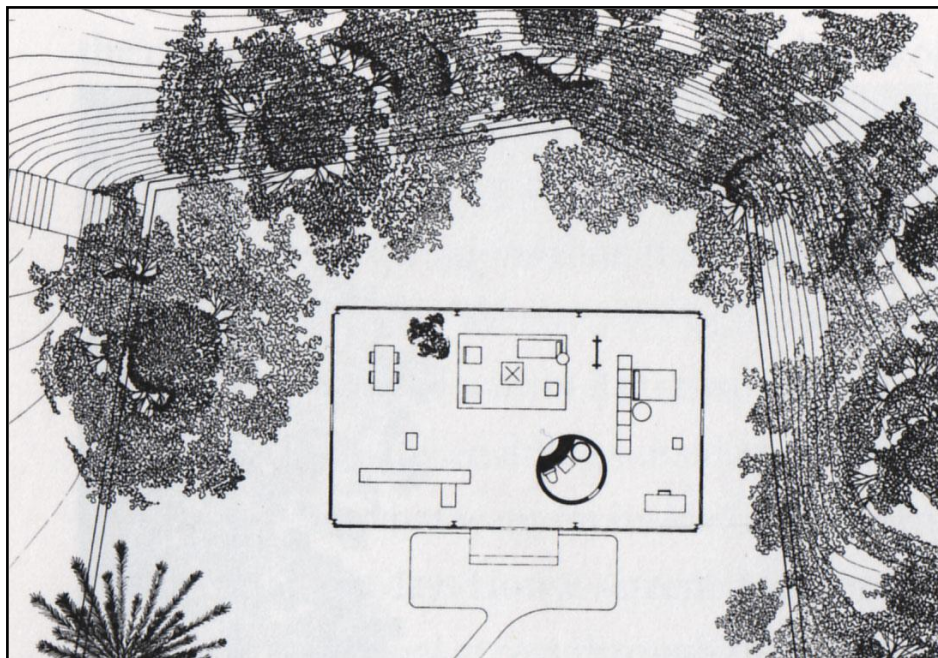


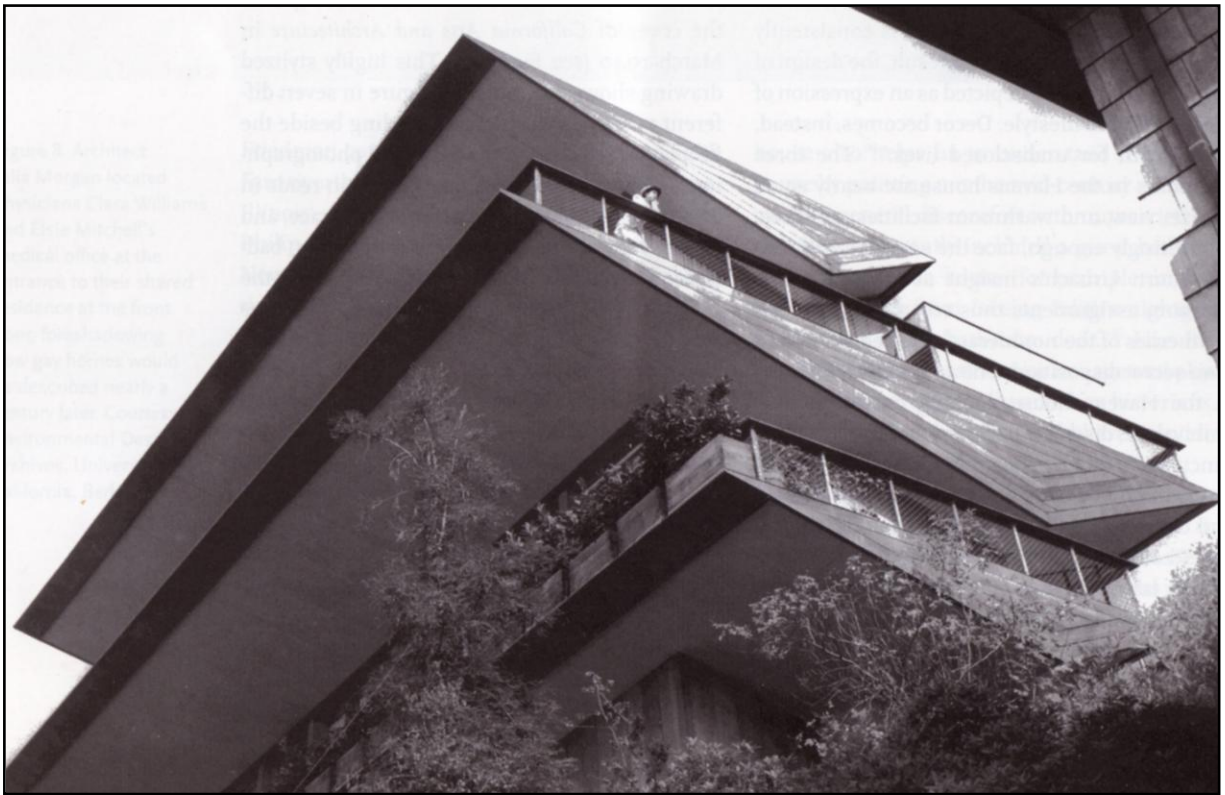




Figure 34. Photograph and plan of Philip Johnson's Glass House, New Canaan, CT, 1949. Although the house is a transparent as the Farnsworth House, it is situated at ground level and the interior plan is less simplified, which minimizes the element of display when viewed from outside the house. Source for photograph: [www.sensingarchitecture.com](http://www.sensingarchitecture.com), accessed December 5, 2010. Source for plan: Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, 154.



**Figure 35. Photograph of Harwell Hamilton Harris's Weston Havens House, 1941, taken by Man Ray. Source: Adams, "Sex and the Single Building," 92.**





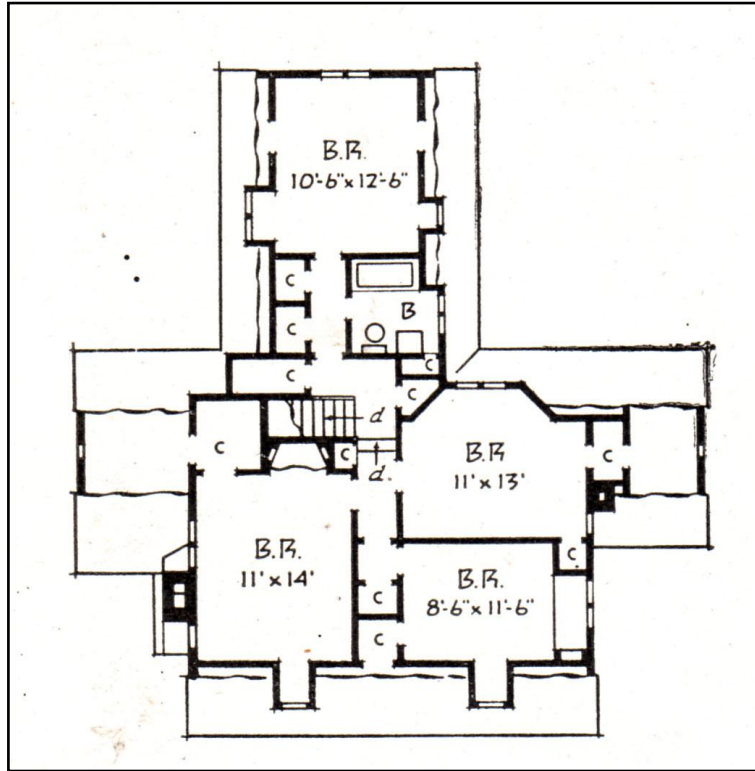
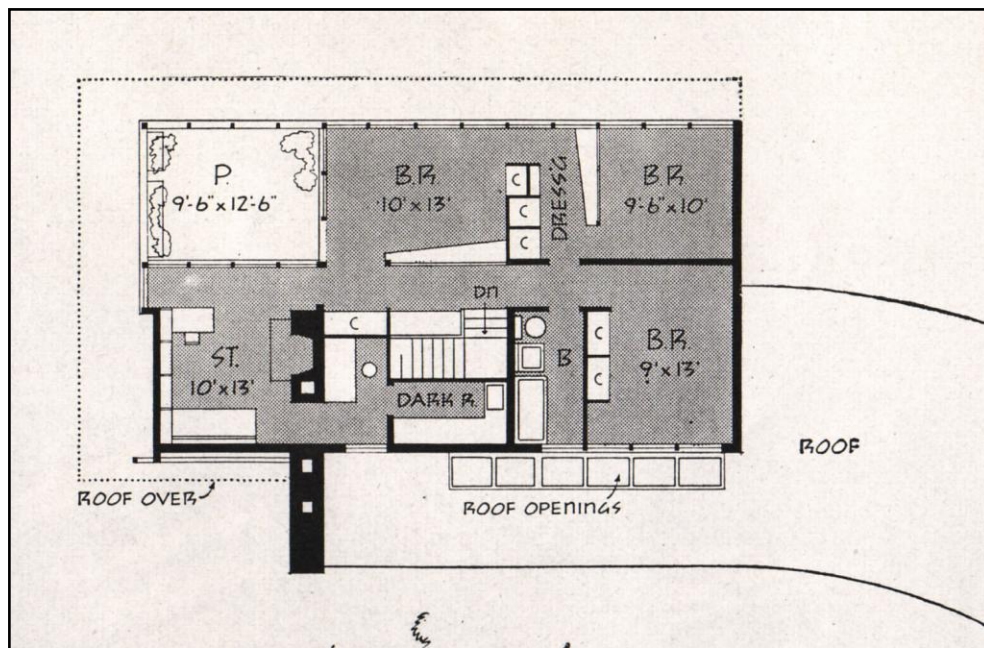


Figure 36. Two 1941 plans for bedroom areas of homes featured in *House Beautiful* as designed for family living. In both plans, no single bedroom is clearly a “master” bedroom, and while bedroom sizes vary, the difference is not pronounced. *House Beautiful* April 1941, 51 (top) and 58 (bottom).



## CHAPTER FIVE: KNOCKING THE PRETTY LADY OFF THE SOAPBOX BEAUTIFUL

It is a law of physics that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and this could well serve as a metaphor for the reaction to “The Threat to the Next America.” Although some critics were temperate in tone, many of the letters, articles, and correspondence matched Gordon’s rhetoric in intensity, and the sheer volume of reactions indicates the significance Gordon’s editorial had to those who felt their livelihoods might be affected by it, for better or worse. There was reason to be nervous. At the time “The Threat to the Next America” appeared, architects, interior designers, builders, and others in the field were anticipating an intensification in the competition for clients. Housing starts, which had hit a zenith in 1950 at 44.4 units per 1000 households, had begun to slow and by 1952 had fallen to a “mere” 33.0 units per 1000 households.<sup>1</sup> Although new subdivisions continued to appear on previously undeveloped land and prosperous clients still commissioned “dream homes,” the rate at which these events occurred was, by 1953, beginning to slow. In tandem with this, the economy had entered a recession, and although it was to quickly recover, this was the first time since the war’s end that economic indicators had not pointed up. Members of the field of building, upon whom the mass consumption economy depended, were surely and understandably nervous. Even though they might not normally have given such credence to a magazine they perceived to be geared toward the female consumer, they also understood as well as anyone that women were the primary spenders of the disposable household dollar, and that women’s influence was best not underestimated.

Agree with Gordon or disagree, those in both the fields of mass production and the field of restricted production had stakes in the argument. The vehicle they had most easily available to

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<sup>1</sup> Demographia, *Housing Starts per 1000 Households, 1920-2008*. Keeping this in perspective, the rate of housing starts during the worst year of the Great Depression, 1933, was 3.0 per 1000 households. More recently, in 2008, it was around 12 units per 1000 households.

them for individual response in a public forum was the time-honored letter to the editor. The import of letters to the editor as discourse has been little studied, but sociologists have observed them as vehicles that carry individual opinion into a simulated public forum, creating a substitute for open public discussion in a non-technologically enhanced arena.<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Habermas credited the meeting places of the bourgeois, such as coffee houses or salons, as giving rise to the public sphere and the concept of “the public.” By the postwar period, the boisterous salon or coffee house as a public site for exchanging ideas had long disappeared, but in newspapers, magazines, and journals, letters to the editor provided a substitute of sorts, allowing readers to register anger, interest, gratitude, delight, or provide information to other readers, although the letters were, then as now, subject to the mediating hand of the editor. Media and cultural studies scholar Karin Wahl-Jorganson has shown that editors of print media, acting as gatekeepers to the public forum, select letters based on four criteria: relevance, brevity, entertainment value, and authority.<sup>3</sup> Letters appearing in the stakeholder periodicals regarding the controversy around “The Threat to the Next America,” appear to have been chosen with a strong preference for the last criteria, with letter-writers comprising something of a “who’s who” in the world of modern architecture in the postwar period.

Although not to be overestimated as a contributing factor to the volume of letters and telegrams, letters to the editor were one of the few ways that individual architects, who were at that time prohibited from advertising by the standards of conduct stipulated by the AIA, could insert their identities into a professional forum.<sup>4</sup> Andrew Shanken has written of the “taboo” on advertising by architects as rising from the tradition of architecture as a profession the dignity of which would be compromised by its association with “the ‘low’ world of commerce.”<sup>5</sup> Although during World War II this rule was bent considerably by the practice of featuring architects and their work in ads for other vehicles of the industry, such as materials manufacturers (Shanken uses as a notable example the appearance of a series of well known architects in advertisements for the United States Gypsum Company in 1941).<sup>6</sup> In the absence of specific architects, an abstracted image of an idealized architect was sometimes used, especially in ad campaigns in the architectural press that advised the public against attempting to build a home without hiring one.<sup>7</sup> But for many architects who were lesser known, letters to the editor provided an avenue to comment or take a stand on an issue raised or article presented in an architectural publication, clarify his brand, deride his fellows, praise his heroes and/or their work, all within a mediated forum populated by his or her peers.

Because they were thus utilized, letters to the editor are useful tools for examining who, both in the design fields and among consumers of custom-built housing, felt moved to respond to “The Threat to the Next America.” In the months following the April and May 1953 issues of *House Beautiful*, as the controversy around Gordon’s editorial and Barry’s exposé on the Farnsworth House raged, editorials and articles appeared in the more important professional architectural publications. These responses, such as *House and Home*’s “Let’s Include Everybody In” and *Architectural Forum*’s “Criticism vs. Statesmanship in Architecture,” in combination with *House Beautiful*’s editorial content, prompted many in the design profession

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<sup>2</sup> Perrin and Valsey. “Arguing in an Anonymous Public: Writing and Reading Letters to the Editor.”

<sup>3</sup> Wahl-Jorgenson, “Understanding the Conditions for Public Discourse.”

<sup>4</sup> AIA, “The Standards of Professional Practice.”

<sup>5</sup> Shanken, Andrew. “Breaking the Taboo,” 406.

<sup>6</sup> Shanken, “Breaking the Taboo,” 421-422.

<sup>7</sup> Shanken, “Breaking the Taboo,” 424-425.

and related fields to take pen in hand. The body of letters chosen for publication in *House Beautiful*, *Architectural Forum*, *House and Home*, *Progressive Architecture*, and the *AIA Journal* in the months following April 1953 is large, and they run a gamut in stance and tone. Some are important to this story because they were written by notable actors on the stage of conflict as regards modernism and its expression in the postwar period. Others come from people who were not design professionals, but whose words represent social and cultural attitudes that were forming, or in the process of being formed by, that same conflict. Carefully examined, these letters shed light on the readers of those magazines, their stances toward International Style architecture, *House Beautiful*, and Elizabeth Gordon herself.

The letters are enlightening for many reasons. They provide a glimpse into the personalities of some of the major and minor players in the postwar fields of architecture, building, and manufacturing and the associated fields of architectural criticism and discourse. They also provide insight into the ways better known practitioners in the field of architecture understood the boundaries and dichotomies within the field at the time. Third, the letters often underscore the gatekeeping inherent in the field, especially as regards gender. This last factor is not only evident in the published letters to the editor, but is also amply visible in unpublished correspondence of one who met Elizabeth Gordon on the print battlefield: Douglas Haskell, editor of Time Inc.'s *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*.

Although Gordon was not in the habit of publishing letters to *House Beautiful*, she made an exception in the case of the response to “The Threat to the Next America” in order to demonstrate the large number of supporters she had, felt she had, or wanted to claim she had. Gordon published letters of response to “The Threat to the Next America”—both for and against her stance—in *House Beautiful* in the June and July, 1953, issues. The June issue contained 31 letters, published under the heading “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America.’” Twenty-two of these applauded her, seven of the others opposed her stance, and two maintained a rather neutral stance, noting essentially that she had a good point but was overreacting. The letters came from a cross-section of people in fields related to art and architecture, although only nine were from practicing architects or those on the faculties of university architecture departments, and of these nine only three were written in opposition to Gordon’s editorial. The following month’s issue for July contained about the same number of letters (29), but was much more heavily weighted toward architects; all but four of the letter writers were practicing architects or architects who held faculty positions at universities. Of these 24, only five were opposed to her stance. Later, in the October issue of that year she published one more—a letter of protest signed by no fewer than 30 architects or their associates, almost all of whom were practicing in the San Francisco Bay Area and many of whom were associated with the College of Environmental Design at Berkeley.

## LETTERS TO HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

Introducing the letters in the June issue, Gordon noted that, of the “hundreds and hundreds of letters and wires,” they were “running about 85% in hearty approval. The remaining 15% is divided between those who say we are flogging a dead horse and those who say we are attacking the greatest designers and architects alive.”<sup>8</sup> She went on to note that she was including

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<sup>8</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 28.

a disproportionate number of letters opposed to her stance, even though “they virtually—and not so virtually—monopolize the pages of other magazines.” She manipulated font to indicate the formats of the missives, publishing telegrams in all capital letters, to preserve the sense of urgency, communicating to her readers that the responders felt her editorial warranted an expedited response, it was that significant.<sup>9</sup>

Gordon led with a telegraphed statement was from one who would be a key player in the battle in the coming months, and who would also have a hand in forming the course of *House Beautiful's* design ethos for the next decade. It crowded:

SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED, DID NOT KNOW YOU HAD IT IN YOU. FROM NOW ON AT YOUR SERVICE.<sup>10</sup>

. . . and was signed “Godfather.” For her readers, most of whom would not have been familiar with this self-bestowed appellation, Gordon disclosed the sender’s identity: Frank Lloyd Wright. Omitted in the published version of the telegram, dated March 24, 1953, was his promise,

SENDING YOU THE LATEST FROM MY STANDPOINT.

an allusion to an essay he was to send a few days later—one which he had already sent to the professional press—in which he juxtaposed the International Style’s shortcomings with his own far superior Organic architecture.<sup>11</sup> Gordon was elated. This was the first communication she had had from Wright since their falling out in the autumn of 1950. She wired him the next day:

DEAR GODFATHER, SO GLAD ALL IS FORGIVEN. I HAVEN’T LIKED BEING IN THE DOGHOUSE. EVERYTHING THAT WENT BEFORE WAS OF ONE PIECE WITH THIS BUT I GUESS I DIDN’T MAKE IT CLEAR EVEN TO THOSE I WAS TRYING TO SUPPORT. CAN HARDLY WAIT TO GET WHATEVER IT IS YOU ARE SENDING. THANKS FOR YOUR VERY ENCOURAGING WIRE.<sup>12</sup>

The fence, which had been breached for two and a half years, was mended. In the months to come, Frank Lloyd Wright was to become her champion, and in the years to come, she would be his, devoting whole issues to his houses and (perhaps most important to the infusion of Wrightian design aesthetics into the magazine’s stylistic view) populating her staff with his former apprentices. Most significant of these was John deKoven Hill, who replaced James Marston Fitch as *House Beautiful's* architecture editor after Fitch resigned in protest of “The Threat to the Next America.” Hill had been an apprentice at Taliesin from 1938 (he was only 18 when he appeared at Spring Green) until he was “delivered” to Gordon by Frank and Olgivanna Wright in 1953. Hill became Gordon’s good friend, protégé, and even for a time her lover, despite that he was gay and many years her junior. Predictably, he was not accepted by the avant-garde members of the gay clique in the New York art community, who at the time were likely united in horror at Gordon’s campaign against the International Style. In a later interview,

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<sup>9</sup> A note on formatting: The all-caps font of the telegrams has been preserved here, in order for the reader to more easily distinguish telegrams from typed letters. Additionally, all telegraphed letters to the editor that appeared in publication are offset and double-indented, despite that they may be less than four lines long. This is to help the reader more easily distinguish them from letters of private correspondence, which are also referred to in this chapter and which are not offset and additionally indented unless they are longer than four lines.

<sup>10</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 28

<sup>11</sup> FL Wright to Gordon, March 24, 1953. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon to FL Wright, March 25, 1953. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.



Hill observed, “you’d think [being gay] would have made them fun, but it didn’t.”<sup>13</sup>

By hiring Hill, Gordon was able to intensify *House Beautiful’s* image and brand as a bearer of “good modern,” and this was crucial if she were to regain widespread credibility as an architectural tastemaker, a reputation which had been damaged with those who thought she had gone too far. Of the other letters published in the June issue, Gordon selected from a cross-section of people in architectural and other design-related fields and also included letters from those whose opinions might have had an impact for other reasons. Immediately beneath Wright’s telegram was a fragment of a letter from architectural critic Lewis Mumford, who wrote: “That April issue of yours is full of rich fare; and the point that you yourself make about the irrational nature of so much modern design, and the authoritarian way in which it has been put over, might well be emblazoned in gold ...”<sup>14</sup>

Nature writer Joseph Wood Krutch, who had been published in *House Beautiful’s* March issue, tells her, “I hope you will keep at it.” Designer Pipsan Saarinen Swanson (daughter of Eliel and sister of Eero) and her husband J. Robert Swanson wired:

HATS OFF TO YOU FOR YOUR ARTICLE . . . WE HOPE THIS WILL START A GENERAL MOVEMENT AGAINST ‘THE GANG’.<sup>15</sup>

Some letters and telegrams of opposition published in the June issue seem to have been selected for their venom. W. E. Ross, of Jackson, Mississippi, managed to object to Gordon’s educational level, personal bias, rhetorical consistency, lack of transparency, and even sex, all in two furious telegrammed sentences. He did not even acknowledge her position as editor, addressing his telegram to some imagined superior:

YOUR ELIZABETH GORDON IS AN UNINFORMED MASTERPIECE AND HER SO CALLED ARTICLE ON DESIGN IS REALLY NOTHING BUT MASS OF SELF-CONTRADICTION INSINUATIONS AND VITUPERATIONS. WHY DON’T YOU HAVE THIS BIGOTED FEMALE EDUCATED BEFORE YOU LET HER PREACH FURTHER.<sup>16</sup>

Of the architects who responded, both in support and in opposition, most took positions that were clearly in line with their portfolios and their positions on modern design. San Francisco architect Henry Hill protested what he saw as shameless capitalism written between the lines of the editorial, wiring:

SHOCKED THAT YOU COULD MAKE SUCH AN ATTACK ON GROPIUS AND MIES VAN DER ROHE FOR THE OBVIOUS PURPOSE OF SELLING ‘POSSESSIONS’.<sup>17</sup>

Henry Hill studied at the University of California, Berkeley and had obtained his Master’s in architecture under Walter Gropius at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) in 1938 before returning to the Bay area to practice. His designs were largely residential, and he has been noted for his infusion of International Style into the Bay Region modernist vernacular, as well as his use of a color range that extended beyond the typical modernist palette. Although he partnered briefly after his return to San Francisco with Erich Mendelsohn and John Dinwiddie, Hill’s most notable work was accomplished in partnership with John Kruse, with whom he

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<sup>13</sup> Friedland and Zellman, 485.

<sup>14</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 28.

<sup>15</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 28.

<sup>16</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 29.

<sup>17</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 28.

worked for forty years, and Hill was noted later in life to credit Frank Lloyd Wright with having a greater influence on his work than did Gropius.<sup>18</sup>

Architect Donald H. Honn of Tulsa, Oklahoma, wrote: “Madam: How can someone in your position know so little?”<sup>19</sup> Noted in Tulsa for his modernist house designs, Honn was the chief architect for Lortondale (1952-53), a Tulsa subdivision that had much in common architecturally with smaller modernist suburban developments in other parts of the country, which were employing relatively affordable, innovative modernist design as an antidote to the pedestrian postwar tract houses.<sup>20</sup> At the time of Honn’s response to “The Threat to the Next America,” Lortondale was well underway. Although, at more than 500 homes, Lortondale was planned to be larger than most modernist subdivisions, only 240 were built, probably due to the FHA’s reticence to revise their underwriting standards to accommodate elements of modernist architecture.<sup>21</sup> Honn’s own home in the subdivision, which carries many of the hallmarks of International Style, with floor-to-ceiling glass walls and visible steel framing, was featured in *Better Homes and Gardens* in 1963.

Likely a more significant protest than either Honn’s or Hill’s, at least in Gordon’s eyes, came from one who had had a long relationship with *House Beautiful*, William Wurster, Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, who had been featured in the 1945 “People Who Influence Your Life” series in the magazine. More importantly to Wurster’s reaction to “The Threat to the Next America,” Wurster had, in 1947, become the “poster boy” for the Bay Region Style, which was defined by Lewis Mumford, in his “Sky Line” column in the *New Yorker*, as more “native and humane” than the “sterile and abstract” modernism being practiced by “those... who imitated Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe and Gropius...”<sup>22</sup> Mumford’s juxtaposition led to an inquisition, mounted by the architecture department at MoMA, in the form of a symposium entitled “What’s Happening to Modern Architecture?” At the symposium, Mumford was given a dressing down by MoMA’s former director, Alfred Barr, as well as Harvard’s Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, who said “If ‘human’ is considered identical with imperfection and imprecision, I am against it.”<sup>23</sup> Wurster’s biographer, architect Marc Treib, recounts that although Wurster was not in attendance, “he and his architecture were castigated in absentia”; Alfred Barr dismissed the Bay Region style as “the International Cottage Style,” which although a clearly pejorative term, was inherited with “basic livability, comfort, and attractiveness” that seduced clients away from more “forward-looking” designs.<sup>24</sup>

Wurster’s work in modern design—his own and those of his students—had strongly

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<sup>18</sup> Weinstein, “Flamboyant Modernism: Henry Hill’s Stellar Taste and Love for the Arts is reflected in the homes he designed,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

<sup>19</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 93.

<sup>20</sup> Today, many of these subdivisions are again popular and valued for their mid-century modern appeal.

Neighborhood associations often have websites devoted to the designs of the houses and landscapes, as well as to the architectural history of their neighborhood. Increasingly, postwar subdivisions that are acknowledged for their distinction in design are being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. See [www.lortondale.com](http://www.lortondale.com) to view Honn’s work.

<sup>21</sup> “Lortondale: A Vision of the Future.” Lortondale Community Neighborhood Association.

<sup>22</sup> Mumford, Lewis, “Skyline: Status Quo,” 110.

<sup>23</sup> James-Chakraborty, “From Isolationism to Internationalism,” 162-163. Quote from Barr et al., “What is Happening in Modern Architecture?” 15.

<sup>24</sup> Treib, 58, 75.

affected the landscapes of modernism in the Bay Area. Either alone or with his associate Theodore Bernardi, Wurster's work was exemplary the Bay Region style, and with Bernardi he was the architect of many houses that were notable examples of modern design in the postwar period, including Case Study House #3 in La Cañada, near Los Angeles (1945). It is evident from the article about this house in *Arts and Architecture* that Wurster had a very different attitude toward the role of the client in architectural practice than architects like Philip Johnson, who saw them as funding organs for the artistic endeavor of architecture. Wurster was quoted in the magazine as saying, "[Architects] very often feel that they must determine their client's surroundings, not only down to the last ashtray, but down to the last petunia ... We, on the other hand, have always questioned whether an architect could, or really should, encompass the life of the client so completely."<sup>25</sup> At the time of the 1948 symposium at MoMA, Wurster, whose residential work had been largely the result of his San Francisco practice, was living in Cambridge as the head of the architecture school at MIT. Likely he found this division among residential modernist architects distressing. On one hand, he and Lewis Mumford maintained a friendship, which sprang from his wife, Catherine Bauer's, long association with Mumford.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, as his Case Study house demonstrated, Wurster had an investment in his work being understood as viable in a market that he knew would increasingly favor modern design, and his work being derisively described as "International Cottage Style" would have been less than helpful in that regard. Wurster had no investment in being once again juxtaposed with Gropius and Breuer, and his defense of them in his letter to *House Beautiful* made that clear. Wurster pulled no punches in his response to Gordon's editorial, writing: "...no article which is written with so little compassion, tolerance, or real understanding can serve as a basis for serious architectural discussion..." [ellipses as published in *House Beautiful*]<sup>27</sup> He copied the letter to *Architectural Forum/House and Home* and also to *Progressive Architecture*, both of which published it unedited. In their pages it read:

Dear Miss Gordon: In our hall, heading your article is a description which the students have attached. It is short. I quote: 'McCarthyism invades Architecture.' I agree with this and would add that no article which is written with so little compassion, tolerance, or real understanding can serve as a basis for serious architectural discussion."<sup>28</sup>

The full text of the letter reveals that, by declining to publish the first half of Wurster's letter, Gordon in effect had censored Wurster's accusation of McCarthyism. If it was a conversation she meant to start, it was apparently not one she cared to continue. But Wurster had reason to be sensitive to veiled and unfounded accusations that communism lurked in the shadows of modern architecture. Still smarting from a controversy centering around the refusal of many of the faculty at the University of California at Berkeley to sign loyalty oaths as a condition of employment (he and his wife, housing activist and fellow faculty member Catherine Bauer, had both signed the oath), Wurster had only two months prior been suddenly stripped of his U.S. Military security clearance and was to be thereafter denied military and federal contracts. The reason given was that he had belonged to organizations (some of which he had never heard of) that were friendly to the Communist Party. Bauer was likewise accused and that

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<sup>25</sup> *Arts and Architecture*, July 1945, 28. Quoted in Smith, 45.

<sup>26</sup> see Wright, Gwendolyn, "A Partnership, Catherine Bauer and William Wurster," 188-189.

<sup>27</sup> "More Readers Mail on: 'The Threat to the Next America'," 94.

<sup>28</sup> "P/A Views," 175.

year would be forced to fight mightily to clear her name.<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Gordon may not have cared for the accusation that she had delivered McCarthyism to architecture, but for the School of Architecture at Berkeley it had already come.

Other protests were inconsistent in the grounds for their opposition. Architect George Howe wrote sarcastically, “Grandmother, what big teeth you have!” Howe, with his partner William Lescaze, had designed one of the earliest International Style skyscrapers in the U.S., the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society (PSFS) Building (1932). Howe was at the time of his letter serving as chairman of the Department of Architecture in the School of the Fine Arts at Yale University. Affecting cattiness as a tactic to trivialize the tone of Gordon’s editorial, Howe teased her insinuations of communism:

Until you disclosed the cheering facts I did not know how extensively the ideologies of our foreign agents, Mies, Gropius, and Le Corbusier, had infiltrated the American consciousness. You mention, as belonging to the “Party” those guilty of “cantilevering things that don’t need to be cantilevered.” These cannot be Mies or Gropius, who prefer stilts. ... Last (and worst), editors of “Trade Journals” and directors of Avant-Garde Museums” you say, have joined the “Party.” To whom *can* you refer?”<sup>30</sup>

To be fair, Gordon does not use the term *party* in “The Threat to the Next America.” Howe’s use of the term, however, was intended to call out her veiled implication. Evident in the portions of the letter that were edited out for publication, however, is Howe’s understanding that some kind of disconnect or opposition between shelter magazines and International Style architects existed. He wrote, “The “Party’s” campaign to overthrow the Women’s Government of Good Taste by force has been going on for a quarter of a century ...” and closed, “In conclusion, I suggest that the Women’s Government of Good Taste, in opposition to “Less is More”, adopt as its slogan “More (advertising) is Less (art).”<sup>31</sup>

Peter Blake was, at the time he wrote a letter of response to *House Beautiful*, on staff at the *Architectural Forum* (he would later become its editor-in-chief, in the 1960s). Blake called Gordon’s editorial “a threat to freedom in America,” and wrote,

We are plagued by many fears today, and fear—in individuals and in nations—generally produces stupidity and cruelty. The dark hint and the shrill note of alarm may help increase a magazine’s circulation at such a time, and so may the smear. But these devices are neither intelligent nor very kind, and they tend to backfire in the end. After all, let it not be said in your epitaph—: Here lies House Beautiful, scared to death by a chromium chair.<sup>32</sup>

Blake believed wholeheartedly in the reformative aspects of modernism, and although he himself had attended the University of Pennsylvania to study architecture, he was firmly aligned with Philip Johnson, Marcel Breuer, and others who were associated with the Harvard GSD.<sup>33</sup> Blake never forgave Gordon for smearing the architects he so revered. He would later recall the incident in his 1993 memoir, *No Place Like Utopia*, as a “sleazy maneuver evidently intended to

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<sup>29</sup> Oberlander and Newbrun, 259-261.

<sup>30</sup> “More Readers Mail on: ‘The Threat to the Next America’,” 93.

<sup>31</sup> Howe to Gordon, March 27, 1953, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

<sup>32</sup> “More Readers Mail on: ‘The Threat to the Next America’,” 93.

<sup>33</sup> Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 175; 144-45.

build circulation” and called Gordon “combative.”

Another letter reinforces the cultural divide between architects and the public, pointing out that Gordon had misled those who could not be expected to know any better. Edward Farrell, a Los Angeles architect who in the 1940s had been an associate of Richard Neutra, employed a tone so condescending that Gordon placed it at the top of the July issue’s letters, presumably to reinforce her point that International Style architects understood their clients to be hapless dupes. Farrell wrote: “Your article is most irresponsible and insidious when your audience is considered. A readership of architects has the background to evaluate your line as I have done, but the general public can only take your words for a responsible report.”<sup>34</sup>

Yet not all who found Gordon’s battle objectionable were architects. At least one woman—one who lived in a Miesian modern house—took great exception to the claim that Mies and his followers and advocates were dictatorial, came to the discussion solely as a consumer. Mrs. Stanley G. Harris, Jr. of Glencoe, Illinois, wrote in a letter published in the July issue:

I have just read your article, and I would like to enter a strong protest on behalf of that style which you brand as cold, barren, austere, and unlivable.

We live in a house designed by James Speyer, Associate Professor of Architecture at Illinois Institute of Technology. We have a couple of very lively boys, and after two years all our illusions are intact. We are completely happy, satisfied, and comfortable—and this in spite of breaking a few of the rules . . .

In the seven years since we first started planning our house we have naturally seen a great deal of Mr. Speyer and a certain number of the other men on the faculty of the architectural school, including Mr. Van der Rohe. I can assure you that they seem to have no desire to be cultural Svengalis...<sup>35</sup>

That A. James Speyer’s 1951 Harris House showed clearly Mies’ strong influence is to be expected. Speyer studied with Mies’ at the Armour Institute of Design, later the Illinois Institute of Technology, and although Speyer spent the war years serving in the military, he returned to teach at IIT and opened his own practice in 1946. The Harris House was his first major residential commission.<sup>36</sup> It has certain elements in common with the Farnsworth house: full floor-to-ceiling glazing in much of the house, the white-painted steel frame, strong rectangularity, open interior spaces, and economy of size (Figure 37). But the artistic elements of the house are at ease with its programmatic elements in ways the Farnsworth house is not. Bedrooms had half-height exterior walls with operable windows above for ventilation. Interior spaces featured partitions and full-height walls—including a long, curved interior wall—to define and mask interior space. The Harris House was in all ways modern, but the plan reveals that the kitchen was not open to the living and dining areas. It was, in fact, servant space; a maid’s room lay immediately adjacent to the kitchen. As it turns out, the Harrises may have been quite typical as families went, but they were not middle class.

Of the 12 total letters of protest published in *House Beautiful* in the June and July issues, eight could be described as coming from professionals within what Garry Stevens has described as the field of restricted production or, in the case of Mrs. Harris, their clients. Three other letters

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<sup>34</sup> “More Readers Mail on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 7.

<sup>35</sup> “More Readers Mail on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 8.

<sup>36</sup> Schulze, Franz, “Speyer’s Life and Career,” 8-9; Speyer, 105-107.

and telegrams did not carry identifying information regarding the professions of the authors, or the stake they had in the issue, but the letters, like W. E. Ross's, were furious. Arnold C. Anderson of Beverly Hills, California, declared in a telegram that he had never read anything "so revoltingly undemocratic" and demanded that his subscription be cancelled. Only one was clearly identified as someone outside the field of restricted production: lumberman James F. Klutz of Concord, North Carolina, wrote "... anyone familiar with the work of the architects which you mentioned was truly shocked at the article."<sup>37</sup>

Letters in support of Gordon's stance represented a broader base in her readership. The number of supportive letters from women was remarkably high (seven total) in comparison to the responses in opposition, for which Mrs. Stanley Harris, Jr. was the only female respondent. The letters from women appear to have been chosen for their authority. Some women represented design professions, although Taliesin apprentice Cornelia Berndtson, who wrote jointly with her husband Peter, and Rose Connor of Pasadena were the only architects among them. Other women included: Swanson and her husband, Robert, who added his name to her letter; Ruth Austin, Associate Professor of Applied Design at Purdue University; and Jo Bull, editor of *Colorful Living* magazine in Chicago. Mrs. Lelah H. Stoker of Chicago did not indicate a profession or affiliation, but declared that she was purchasing a subscription and recommending the magazine to others.<sup>38</sup>

But of the letters of support written by women, the most notable is that penned by Emily Genauer, the art and architecture critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, who saw nothing xenophobic in Gordon's editorial—or if she did, she did not say so—but rather echoed Gordon's sympathy for artists and designers who "feel they have no chance for exhibition unless they work according to the preconceived notions of a group of museum directors ... If the artist is confused, you can imagine what happens to the public."<sup>39</sup> Genauer might be thought to be the first to protest Gordon's use of Cold War fears of totalitarianism against International Style architects, as she had some experience exposing anti-communist fervor as detrimental to the arts. In a 1949 expose for *Harper's*, entitled "Still Life with Red Herring," Genauer told the story of Congressman George A. Dondero's (R-Michigan) attempts to prevent the inclusion of modern and abstract paintings in an exhibit at a Naval hospital in New York. Dondero, whose sympathies lay strongly with Sen. Joseph A. McCarthy and McCarthy's anti-communist crusade, equated modern art with communism, and publicly accused Genauer of communist sympathies. In 1949, following an interview with Dondero she conducted as art critic for the *New York World-Telegram*, Genauer was told by its publisher, Roy W. Howard, that she was paying too much attention to artists who were associated with Communists, a case in point being Pablo Picasso. Genauer, who was an award-winning critic (she went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished art criticism in 1974), resigned her post with the *World-Telegram* and was immediately hired by the *Herald-Tribune*. There, one of her first assignments was to write an obituary for Mexican painter Jose Orozco, who was a communist. Genauer recalled that "she knew she had come to the right place" when the editor, Whitelaw "Whitie" Reid, told her that the

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<sup>37</sup> "Public Opinion on: 'The Threat to the Next America,'" 95.

<sup>38</sup> Attempts to ascertain if any professional or consumer-oriented affiliation might have prompted Lelah H. Stoker to write were unsuccessful. Mrs. Stoker did become somewhat famous, though. The following year, on April 8, 1954, she observed a flying saucer over Lake Michigan. She called the Coast Guard, but their attempts to apprehend the hovering disc failed. "1954 UFO Chronology," The National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, <http://www.nicap.org/waves/1954fullrep.htm>. Accessed September 28, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> "Public Opinion on: 'The Threat to the Next America,'" 91-92.

politics of the artist were not his concern.<sup>40</sup> In “Still life with Red Herring,” which appeared about that same time, in the September 1949 issue of *Harper’s*, Genauer noted the strong parallels between the Soviet belief that all art was a weapon of propaganda and should support the state and Dondero’s belief that American artists should demonstrate loyalty to the United States Government, and that the burden of proof of loyalty was on the artist. She wrote, “It is a paradox, and a frightening one, to behold an elected representative of the people naively and inadvertently following the Moscow line about art, and demanding that the communist techniques of constraint be applied to American artists and critics.”<sup>41</sup>

Remembered today as a strong advocate of lesser-known modern painters,<sup>42</sup> Genauer had a contentious relationship with the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). This was at the heart of her letter of support for “The Threat to the Next America.” Art historian Serge Guilbaut has written of Genauer’s failure to include the works of the avant-garde modernists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko in her 1948 book, *Best of Art*, as “the last-ditch effort to stop the rising tide of abstract expressionism,” noting that she instead favored more “traditional” artists such as social realist Gregorio Prestopino and lesser known abstract expressionist Philip Guston, who in later years transitioned to a more representational and cartoonish form of expressionism.<sup>43</sup> But a controversial 1944 article that Genauer wrote for *Harper’s*, entitled “The Fur-Lined Museum,” in which she was blisteringly critical of MoMA and its former director, Alfred Barr, Jr., generated a tempest in the New York art community.<sup>44</sup> In it, Genauer charged that MoMA’s permanent collection was heavily populated by “Sure Things” (i.e., pieces that it “inherited” from its founders and which were now more accepted as classics), and “Shockers” (which Genauer defined as “. . .the fantastic, the precious, the bizarre, and the decadent, which excite the crowd that might be called the Café Society of the Arts”<sup>45</sup>). As art critic for the *New York World-Telegram*, Genauer’s word carried enough credibility that her article prompted a 16-page internal memo at MoMA refuting her criticisms line by line.<sup>46</sup> The following September, *Harper’s* editor, Frederick Lewis Allen, wrote of the vigorous defense that Barr had received in the form of letters from readers and especially from fellow directors of art museums, quoting one in particular as declaring that “under his guidance [MoMA] grew into a powerful educational force in the United States.”<sup>47</sup>

While Emily Genauer supported Gordon out of agreement with Gordon’s stance that MoMA heavily promoted certain architects and styles at the expense of others, she may have also had some empathy for Gordon as a woman with the courage to take a stand against powerful organizations like MoMA and Time Inc. Others, who supported Gordon, in particular architects, did so for a mix of political and aesthetic reasons. Houston architect Karl Kamrath was more than laudatory in his letter published in the July issue and outright insulting to those she was taking to task:

You have my congratulations for what I consider the best written expose of

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<sup>40</sup> Kluger, 469-70.

<sup>41</sup> Genauer, “Still Life with Red Herring,” 91.

<sup>42</sup> Worth, *New York Times*, August 25, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Guilbaut, 183.

<sup>44</sup> Lynes, *Good Old Modern*, 254-258.

<sup>45</sup> Genauer, “The Fur Lined Museum,” 133.

<sup>46</sup> Lynes, *Good Old Modern*, 257.

<sup>47</sup> “Personal and Otherwise,” 408-412.



synthetic flat-bosomed (?) [this question mark was presumably inserted editorially by Gordon] architecture yet produced. Your ability and courage to put into words what I am sure so many of us deeply feel provides a tremendous lift and inspiration. It should make the Mies and Gropius boys bury their heads in their shame, but they probably will not because most of them do not even have the ability to comprehend you.<sup>48</sup>

Kamrath also had a revealing request:

. . . Harwell Harris has invited me to make the commencement address to his June graduating class at the University of Texas . . . Your “Threat to the Next America” is the best possible message I could deliver to these young hopefuls and with your permission, I would like to use it.

Kamrath’s familiarity with Harwell Harris may be an indicator that he was an advocate for Gordon at the behest of the Harrises, but this cannot be definitively established. With his partner Frederick James Mackie, Karl Kamrath was one of the earliest designers of modern buildings in Texas. Following a 1946 meeting with Frank Lloyd Wright, Kamrath’s work became a devoted emulation of Wright’s Usonian style. Among his better known Usonian-influenced buildings are the George P. Mitchell House (1963) and the Walsh House in Bunker Hill Village (1963).<sup>49</sup> Yet he was one of Gordon’s strongest champions, as he also wrote letters defending her to *Progressive Architecture* and *The Magazine of Building*. Kamrath’s letter to *Progressive Architecture* noted that “F.L.W. will really give Miss Gordon’s beginning a jet-propelled shove in June or July *House Beautiful*.”<sup>50</sup> This betrays Kamrath’s “insider” status insofar as Wright was concerned, a connection that may have been made through Jean and Harwell Harris. Because Kamrath was a prominent architect in his region and Gordon no doubt appreciated his support, it may have been she who gave him the “inside scoop” on Wright’s forthcoming essay.<sup>51</sup> In his letter to *Progressive Architecture*, he again declared that he intended to use “The Threat to the Next America” as a theme in his commencement address to Harris’s graduating class at the University of Texas at Austin, and noted that he had spoken to many architects about “The Threat to the Next America,” and that they were “overwhelmingly in favor.”<sup>52</sup> His support for Gordon in no way diminished his professional standing with those he considered his peers: In 1955, Kamrath was elected as a fellow in the American Institute of Architects and was later elected president of the Houston Chapter of the AIA, also serving as chair of the AIA’s Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial committee from 1960 to 1962.

Other modernists who had little demonstrable Wrightian influence were also lauding Gordon. Paul Laszlo, a Hungarian Jewish designer and architect who had fled Nazi Germany in the late 1930’s, wired from his offices in Beverly Hills, California:

AFTER READING THE ARTICLE “THE THREAT TO THE NEXT AMERICA,” I CAN ONLY

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<sup>48</sup> “More Readers Mail on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 7

<sup>49</sup> “Karl Fred Kamrath” The Handbook of Texas Online. A Digital Gateway to Texas History, Texas State Historical Society: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fka15>. Accessed November 26, 2010.

<sup>50</sup> “P/A Views,” July 1953, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Kamrath’s collected papers do not contain correspondence from 1953. (finding aid available at Texas Archival Resources Online: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utaaa/00065/aaa-00065.html>. Accessed September 13, 2010.)

<sup>52</sup> P/A July 1953, 9.

SAY THREE CHEERS FOR MISS GORDON.”<sup>53</sup>

It is possible that Laszlo’s support of Gordon was influenced by his own personal sympathies with the anti-Communist faction active in the U.S. political landscape at that time. Much of his work in the 1950s was rooted in national defense contracts and Cold War anxiety. Among his more noted unbuilt designs was a bomb shelter, commissioned by the U. S. Air Force. Laszlo also conceived a futuristic underground city called “Atomville.” His work, distinctly modern but well outside either the functionalist strain that evidenced Bauhaus sensibilities or the “organic” impulse that characterized Wright, had at that time found a following among celebrities and politicians like Ronald Reagan, Barry Goldwater, Debbie Reynolds, Barbara Stanwyck, and William Wyler. *Time* magazine, in the August 18, 1952 issue, called him “The Millionaire’s Architect,” because his clientele was so heavily peopled by celebrities who could afford opulence.<sup>54</sup>

Another enthusiastic respondent was Bruce Goff, then-chairman of the School of Architecture at the University of Oklahoma. Unlike his fellow Tulsan, Donald Honn, who as noted above was appalled at Gordon’s campaign, Goff was delighted. His response, however, seemed to be more rooted in nationalism than it was in his wariness of International Style modern design:

We are particularly grateful for your stand as it is one up for our side here at The School of Architecture of The University of Oklahoma, where we are stressing creative individual development for our students so they will be able to produce a vital and indigenous architecture for our people, place, time, materials, and spirit. We have the only architectural school free from foreign entanglements, but we are not ignorant of them.<sup>55</sup>

Goff had, at the time of his letter, recently completed a work of startling invention, which would also become one of his best known, the Bavinger House in Norman, Oklahoma (Figure 38). Built around a spiral as the central structural element, the house’s design was an abandonment of traditional plan form, although Frank Lloyd Wright had similarly adapted spiral plans in other contexts, such as the Guggenheim, the Morris Store in San Francisco, and his 1950 design for a house for his son, David. In another departure, Goff used a great many materials—ship parts, coal slag, and even airplane parts—that had been salvaged from non-architectural contexts.

Goff’s work at the Bavinger House (and many of his subsequent projects) is, in its way, as reliant on elements of surprise and fluid movement through space to create a sense of new architectural territory as Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye was more than twenty years before (although, apart from this and their shared use of nautical elements, the houses have little else in common). If Goff was promoting “creative individual development” in his students, he was certainly setting an example along those lines. Goff began his career in architecture at an unusually young age—he was working in an architect’s office at age twelve (the Fair Labor Standards Act, which governed child labor laws, was not passed until 1938). By the time he was 21, he had designed twelve buildings. His biographer, David DeLong, writes that his early influences had a wide range: Frank Lloyd Wright was his earliest inspiration, and Louis Sullivan, Gustav Klimt, Antonin Gaudi, Eliel Saarinen, and even the International Style all played a role in

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<sup>53</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 95

<sup>54</sup> “Rich Man’s Architect,” *Time*, August 18, 1952.

<sup>55</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America,’” 92.

his long development as an architect.<sup>56</sup> Especially notable as an influence was Eric Mendelsohn, whom Goff was to invite to Tulsa as a guest speaker at the University. Through his experience in World War II as a Navy Seabee, he began to experiment with found and salvaged materials, demonstrating a genius for incorporating these into expanded designs for otherwise rote military structures.<sup>57</sup> Goff emerged from the war with a reinvented approach to his work, and it is the resultant designs for which he is now best known.

Yet despite his allegiance to Gordon's side of the controversy, Bruce Goff's work was a far cry from the more restrained modernism promoted in the page of *House Beautiful*. Like the Farnsworth House, his residential designs were often the objects of public curiosity; the press afforded them at the time carried such headlines as "Dome Shaped House Has All Aurora Staring,"<sup>58</sup> and "Consternation and Bewilderment in Oklahoma."<sup>59</sup> DeLong's thorough bibliography of Goff's works as they appeared in the press reveals very few shelter magazine articles, although he often was featured in the professional architectural press and also in the architectural periodicals of other countries. In fact, it is unclear exactly what Goff meant when he wrote, "We have the only architectural school free from foreign entanglements," for at exactly the same time his letter ran in *House Beautiful*, Goff was spotlighted in the German publication *Baukunst und Werkform*, which devoted its July 1953 issue to him.<sup>60</sup>

Architects and non-architects alike congratulated Gordon for protecting the consumers of new and custom-designed housing. Henry H. Saylor, editor of the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* and former editor of *Architectural Record*, wrote, "It certainly is heartening that someone at last has the courage to speak out, and thereby give some assurance to the thousands who sit meekly by and see these things happen but have not the courage to disagree."<sup>61</sup> Perhaps this was an instance of reciprocal back-scratching, as Gordon had taken out advertisements for *House Beautiful's* April 1953 issue in the pages of the *AIA Journal*. But Saylor, a venerable figure in architectural criticism and an advocate of traditional designs (he had championed the 1938 neo-classical design of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.), was willing to make the claim that a great many members of the American house-buying public were too timid to stand up for their own tastes and inclinations in housing choices. He was not alone in this. Many letters published in *House Beautiful* voiced similar concerns on behalf of the supposedly cowering consumers of modern architecture. Another non-architect, Ruth Austin, Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Design at Purdue University, warned of the supercilious attitude of the architects of the International Style, pointing out the causal relationship between their arrogance and the timidity of the public, "the bad thing about these people who are followers of the 'less is more' theory is that they are so sure of themselves and so dictatorial in their manner. Many of them act with such a superior air that they intimidate people who feel that they are not well-informed and not qualified to make decisions for themselves."<sup>62</sup>

The letters in *House Beautiful* also became, to some extent, a forum on the Farnsworth House. Roger Allen, a prominent Michigan architect who designed most of the buildings on the

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<sup>56</sup> DeLong, 3.

<sup>57</sup> DeLong, 72.

<sup>58</sup> *Chicago Daily News*, July 10, 1950 (Ford House). Cited in DeLong, 366.

<sup>59</sup> *Life*, June 28, 1948, 24 (Ledbetter House). Cited in DeLong, 366.

<sup>60</sup> DeLong, 367.

<sup>61</sup> "Public Opinion on: 'The Threat to the Next America,'" 29.

<sup>62</sup> "Public Opinion on: 'The Threat to the Next America,'" 93.

Central Michigan University campus, wrote from Grand Rapids with a comedic flair and a clear dislike for Mies and his substantial cost over-runs:

When I read “The Threat to the Next America” it was so exactly what I have been thinking that I said to myself, “Roger ... you have been writing articles in your sleep under the nom de plume (Fr., meaning name with plume) [*sic*] of Elizabeth Gordon ... I am sick and tired of the idea that a house is a glass box. I am sick and tired of the idea that one room is better than six rooms. And I am especially sick and tired of the witless reiteration by his followers of the views of Mies van der Rohe, some of which seem to me to be highly bogus ...

The future of Architecture does not involve the creation of glass tanks which, by moving out a frugal six pieces of furniture and the baby’s crib, can be filled with water and rented out to Esther Williams for a re-take of “Neptune’s Daughter.” Nor will it be any \$70,000 version in steel, concrete and glass of a non-representational design by Piet Mondrian. I like Mondrian’s designs as pure design, but if they have anything to do with Architecture, why stop where they did? Let them follow Mondrian a little further.

One of the last things he did, according to a show of his work the Museum of Modern Art presented some years ago, consisted of a canvas on which he had placed colors of various tones, which he then covered with patches of Scotch tape. By pulling off pieces of tape here and there, he created a design. Let us follow this idea to its logical architectural conclusion. Let us build a house that way. There must be some way to make Scotch tape cost \$70,000...<sup>63</sup>

From outside of the field of architecture came a round of corporate “bravos!” from individuals whose interests and livelihoods were rooted in the manufacture and sale of the “mere possessions” Henry Hill decried. The last page of letters in the June 1953 issue of *House Beautiful* contains several from executives of manufacturers or department stores. Lawrence Whiting, President of the American Furniture Mart in Chicago, William Brenner, President of the National Association of Furniture Manufacturers, W. E. S. Griswold, President of W. & J. Sloane, a New York department store—each praised Gordon and “The Threat to the Next America” lavishly. James M. Ashley, Director of Public Relations at the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company, makes an ominous parallel:

Because I have read disturbing reference material by the school you take to task, I followed your reasoning without hesitancy. I only wonder whether your audience as a whole may really believe that such a school actually exists. The idea that anyone can seriously advocate practices which fly in the face of reason is hard for a people steeped in the American tradition to grasp. I think that is the reason we never really believed in Hitler. He was preposterous.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, Ashley and his employers may well have had a stake, at the time, in discouraging at least one of the “practices which fly in the face of reason,” the floor-to-ceiling glazing that was becoming increasingly popular in modern houses. Only a few years before, Libbey-Owens-Ford had lost a contract to make the plate glass windows for Pietro Belluschi’s Equitable Building, in

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<sup>63</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America’,” 93

<sup>64</sup> “Public Opinion on: ‘The Threat to the Next America’,” 95.

Portland, Oregon, because the company was unable to manufacture thermopane glass in the large sizes demanded by the building's design. The contract was given to Pittsburgh Plate Glass instead.<sup>65</sup> Given this state of affairs, it may be reasonable to guess that Libbey-Owens-Ford, in addition to selling glassware to housewives, had an investment in encouraging architectural design that relied less on outsized plate glass walls, and more on picture windows and traditional casement and double-hung windows, which were standard in the large postwar suburban housing developments in which Cape Cod and Ranch styles prevailed.

### CRITICISM VS. STATESMANSHIP: RESPONSE IN THE ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

To read the letters in the pages of *House Beautiful*, one would imagine that those in the fields of architecture and design were largely in agreement with Gordon. Certainly, Gordon could fairly claim support from numerous like-minded architects and practitioners in aligned fields. But many architects saved their opinions for letters to architectural periodicals, which were swift to publish editorials and articles that, in addition to Gordon's claims that the American public was being force-fed International Style modernism, also questioned her qualifications to make such a judgment of condemnation. A few, like Karl Kamrath, swam against the tide of opinion in the professional press to defend her, but the preponderance of letters published were opposed, although few took exception to the nationalistic undercurrent contained in "The Threat to the Next America."

Although Time Inc.'s twin progeny, *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*, were the primary objects of Gordon's ire at the architectural press, a third professional architectural publication took a keen interest from the sidelines. In the May 1953 issue of *Progressive Architecture*, an issue otherwise almost entirely devoted to the design of airport terminals, editor Thomas Creighton took Elizabeth Gordon to task in his "P.S." editorial column. Creighton, a Beaux Arts-trained architect who had taken over the helm of *Progressive Architecture* in 1946, published in full his personal letter to Gordon, in which he carefully pointed out the dangers inherent in what he and many others saw as her rather unsubtle linking of International Style modernism and communism. Creighton cited the note that Gordon had sent along with the copy of "The Threat to the Next America" issue, to him and presumably to the others to whom she sent a warning of her campaign. Thus, his readers were made aware that Gordon had thrown the stones well beyond her own pond, making sure her editorial would be read and felt in circles beyond the usual shelter magazine readership. "I have finally broken out and said what I think," she wrote. "A person cannot be mad so long without finally exploding. I'll be interested to hear your reaction..."<sup>66</sup>

And Creighton did react, although his reaction was measured. His response politely pointed out what he saw as hypocrisy inherent in "The Threat to the Next America," and the dangers of Gordon's playing on the American public's fears of the Cold War. He wrote: "The unfortunate juxtaposition in a boxed statement on one page of the names 'Walter Gropius ... Communist architect Hannes Meyer ... Mies van der Rohe' will add further to the false belief, fixed in some quarters, that 'Modernism' and Communism are synonymous." Creighton wrote that numerous architects had contacted him with worry that the series would do harm, although

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<sup>65</sup> Clausen, 170.

<sup>66</sup> Creighton, 234.

he did not say harm to what (presumably these architects' careers and the landscapes of modern architecture that were appearing in such pockets as New Canaan). Admonishing Gordon for inconsistencies in the issue, Creighton criticized the interior by Edward Wormley, depicted in the photograph accompanying "The Threat to the Next America," included one of Wormley's less successful and derivative coffee tables ("...a rather ugly table which is quite obviously inspired by Isamu Noguchi)." Creighton also noted that the Shaw House by John Yeon was not Yeon's best work (decades later the Shaw House was considered one of Yeon's best, even by Yeon himself).<sup>67</sup> Creighton compared the Shaw House with Mies' Tugendhat house, which Gordon used as an example of "bad" modernism," and found Yeon's work badly wanting. Gordon's criticism was "picky," according to Creighton, but he then went on to say that her criticism of architectural style is not the point. Rather, she completely missed that the architects whose work she finds so objectionable were great architects. Creighton shook his metaphorical finger at her: "...the fact remains that very little of what *House Beautiful* has published in recent years could have been designed without the pioneering, fighting, lecturing and teaching of Le Corbusier. It might be instructive to take a typical issue of your magazine and examine each piece of design you show for its debt to the people you are throwing overboard". This is an idea that Douglas Haskell at *House and Home* would use the very next month.<sup>68</sup>

But Creighton tempered his damnation with agreement, although it was faint and buried deep in the editorial. "It is perfectly possible to take apart a great deal of Mies's recent work, beam by beam, and point to its functional inadequacies and its façadist approach to architecture," he wrote, "and yet, as one architect said to me yesterday, "If Mies had never done anything but the Barcelona Pavillion, he would still be one of the greatest architects of our time." And he softened his criticism with some praise:

Under your leadership *House Beautiful* has been doing a very important job very well, in the program you have sponsored of designing to climate, and translating climatic design principles into comfortable, smoothly-functioning houses. I agree that it is shocking so much of this research is ignored by architects who are more interested in abstract composition than in the day-to-day life of a family. I agree that students in too many schools of architecture, following the pattern of hero worship which is the inevitable component of learning great new things about basic design, are emulating the work of the abstractionists and ignoring sociological, climatological, and even emotional findings that are equally exciting discoveries of our time.<sup>69</sup>

He followed this by noting that *House Beautiful* was just as guilty of the autocratic promotion of taste as the "self-chosen elites" of whom Gordon warned. "With the violence of your attitude in the present issue, aren't you running the risk of becoming just as dictatorial?" he asked. After seeming to agree with Gordon that Mies' work at the Farnsworth House and the Lake Shore Drive apartments had elements of design that even Creighton found questionable, he pointed out that whether or not he thought "the abstract beauty of the design [in these structures]... is enough to excuse its faults" was a matter entirely up to him—his choice. "Certainly, I do not think it is part of a 'social threat of regimentation and total control,' as you apparently consider it."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Creighton, 234; Yeon, 42-43.

<sup>68</sup> Creighton, 234

<sup>69</sup> Creighton, 234.

<sup>70</sup> Creighton, 234.

The letters of response in the following issue (June 1953) of *Progressive Architecture* largely addressed not Creighton's editorial, but Gordon's attack itself. Most came from better-known architects in the field of restricted production, and were far longer than those that appeared in *House Beautiful*. In addition to letters to his own magazine, Creighton published two letters that were addressed to *House Beautiful* but had been copied to *Progressive Architecture*. One of these was the unedited version of William Wurster's letter to *House Beautiful*, described above. The other letter sent to *House Beautiful* and copied to *Progressive Architecture* was from Olindo Grossi, Chair of the Department of Architecture at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. In it, Grossi voiced his dislike for John Yeon's Shaw House, calling it "pseudo-progressive" and "too repetitive." Grossi's letter to *Progressive Architecture* is also distinct as the one which most clearly and directly called out Gordon's veiled connection of European modernism with communism:

Also disturbing within the general attitude of your article is the bringing in of ideas that are not germane to the criticism of architecture. You even note that a modern foreign architect was a Communist, at a time when people are rightly fearful of Communism. Actually, I believe, you will find contemporary architecture behind the Iron Curtain more like Yeon's than like that of the leading modernists.<sup>71</sup>

Presuming that Grossi did send his letter to *House Beautiful*, Gordon elected not to publish it, even in abridged form. This is curious, as Gordon had no qualms about publishing letters of outrage from other academic architects, such as Wurster and George Howe of Yale. However, of the letters she did publish, none expanded their displeasure beyond the April issue's editorial content and criticized the depicted work of one of the featured designers, as Grossi's did. In addition, Grossi's letter, like the portion of Wurster's letter deleted for publication in *House Beautiful*, calls out Gordon's insertion of communism into the discussion of International Style architecture. That his letter was not chosen for publication in *House Beautiful* may be another indicator that Gordon was turning away from ownership of this implication.

Serge Chermayeff, then on the faculty of the School of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was predictably damning of Gordon, noting that "...Miss Gordon's zeal is not matched by her knowledge of either history or architecture." He made a veiled reference to a prior attack on the International Style, although he withheld specifics, saying only "I recall that only recently an equally vitriolic, again characteristically topical "smear technique" and misinformed attack was launched against us ...". Chermayeff was a friend, colleague, and admirer of both Mies and Gropius, and by "us" he presumably meant architects whose work fell into the category of European modernism.

Former MoMA director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. wrote a lengthy and angry letter lambasting "The Threat to the Next America," calling it "preposterous." In addition to the content of his letter, just the fact that Barr wrote it is noteworthy because, although Barr wrote to *Progressive Architecture* and another letter for the September issue of *House and Home*, both addressing Elizabeth Gordon's editorial, he did not write to *House Beautiful*, indicating he did not likely feel Gordon belonged in the discussion of modern architecture. In *Progressive Architecture*, Barr defended glass box houses generally, noting that Johnson's house had both curtains and storage space, but made no mention of the Farnsworth House. Barr rightly pointed out that the houses

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<sup>71</sup> "P/A Views," June 1953, 172.



Gordon used to illustrate “The Threat to the Next America” were more than 25 years old, and he also noted that Yeon’s Shaw House owed much of its detail in materials and furnishings to International Style architectural precedent. He reminded *Progressive Architecture*’s readers that Gropius and Mies came to the United States because “Hitler’s chauvinistic tyranny put an end to their professional careers,” and goes on to imply a chilling comparison between Hitler’s denunciation of modernism and Gordon’s: “Hitler denounced [Gropius’ and Mies’] work because it was modern, flat-roofed, international, un-German—and involved (he shrieked) with a conspiracy to undermine the good, old, German way of life. Soviet authorities have followed suit.”<sup>72</sup> Barr closed his letter with a plug for MoMA, observing that “There is a great variety of modern architects to choose from, as the recent *Built in U.S.A.* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and the accompanying book amply demonstrated.”<sup>73</sup>

Hugh Stubbins generally agreed with Creighton (he did not specify precisely on which points), but allowed Gordon some agreement on modern furniture, writing “It is, for the most part, uncomfortable—but no more uncomfortable than the stuff that filled every furniture store 15 years ago.” But Stubbins followed this with a more subjective assessment: “Yet the uncomfortable modern furniture is, for the most part, easier on the eyes.”<sup>74</sup> Stubbins objectivity about modern design approached ambivalence, and this may have been rooted in his architectural focus, which by the early 1950s had begun a shift away from single-family residential work and was focused on apartment, public, and corporate architecture. At 41 years of age at the time he penned the letter, he was a young man with a young practice and was teaching at Harvard, a post he retained throughout his career. Hugh Stubbins was looking to the future, noting later in his letter: “American architecture has gained much from Le Corbusier, Gropius, Frank Lloyd Wright, and others—but that doesn’t mean we are to stop right there.” He goes on to quote Eliel Saarinen, saying that Saarinen, “when asked which of his buildings he considered his best, once replied, ‘My next one.’”<sup>75</sup> Stubbins indeed had his best and most important work ahead of him, and would go on to design some of the most noted skyscrapers of the 1970s.

Although Eliel Saarinen had passed away in 1950, his children were on opposite sides of the controversy. Pipsan Swanson and her husband supported Gordon, but her brother, Eero, was found empathetically cringing in the pages of *Progressive Architecture*. Offering no analysis of Gordon’s editorial itself, he wrote: “I feel all of this must be terribly embarrassing for Yeon and Wormley, who are really very good designers. I can’t imagine anybody wanting to have their work published in her magazine while this hate campaign is going on.”

Other responders to *Progressive Architecture* who praised Creighton’s velvet-glove response were:

- architect George C. Rudolph, who called it a “very considerate and adequate answer to Elizabeth’s recent tirade against” but also allowed as how “it is good to have the faults of certain ideas forcefully exposed”<sup>76</sup>;
- architect Donald Barthelme, Sr. of Houston, who wrote a brief letter calling Creighton’s response “tops.” Barthelme would go on to become an award-winning designer of

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<sup>72</sup> “P/A Views” June 1953, 9-10.

<sup>73</sup> “P/A Views” June 1953, 9-10.

<sup>74</sup> “P/A Views” June 1953, 10.

<sup>75</sup> “P/A Views” June 1953, 12.

<sup>76</sup> “P/A Views” July 1953, 9.

schools, and throughout his practice and after would teach in the architecture departments at both Rice University and the University of Houston<sup>77</sup>;

- Fred Bassetti, an architect from Seattle who had graduated from the Harvard GSD in 1946, and who wrote “You have said all the things that should have been said to Miss Gordon, and you said them in just the right way”<sup>78</sup>;
- architect Anthony Ellner, Jr. of Clemson, South Carolina, who wrote sarcastically, “Lest this new ‘wave of the future’ should sweep on, I am preparing designs in Pre-Columbian adobe and painted deerskin which should be free of foreign taint by anyone’s standards.”<sup>79</sup>

These letters had in common that they generally came from younger men or men with young practices who would go on to establish themselves as noted architects on a national or regional scale, although their work was generally non-residential.

In contrast to the several letters sent by women to *House Beautiful*, only one letter from a woman appeared in *Progressive Architecture*. Patricia C. Scott, a student at the Rhode Island School of Design, seemed to be genuinely concerned with Elizabeth Gordon’s mental state. She wrote:

I believe you have touched on the crux of her trouble when you quote the letter she wrote you stating how mad she has had finally become and her need for exploding. Nowadays, most of us know that the question of an extraordinary reaction of any type to a given stimulus lies within ourselves. Calling the designing of ... the exponents of the International Style the stimulus, we see that the majority of us (fortunately for our peace of mind) can look on it and, as you say, take pleasure and knowledge from the parts we like, but at the same time acknowledging or even profiting by their flaws without experiencing an extreme reaction of annoyance similar to Miss Gordon’s.

In order that Miss Gordon may give her readers less personally biased articles I suggest that she should search within herself and if necessary seek help to find out why these pioneering men and their influences are affecting her so personally and causing such a violent emotion.<sup>80</sup>

In contrast with her male counterparts in the letters pages of *Progressive Architecture*, Scott stepped outside of the realm of design as concerned her reaction to Gordon’s editorial and Creighton’s response. Her view reflected a rudimentary working knowledge of behaviorism, the then-dominant psychological school of thought, as advanced in the early 1950s by psychologist B. F. Skinner and others. Scott’s letter also best epitomizes the bafflement that appears in some of the letters, especially those by women, at the idea that International Style modernism was being foisted on consumers. Of the women who weighed in *as consumers*, most appeared perfectly capable of taking or leaving International Style modernism, as they saw fit. It is notable that Scott’s name appears at the end of the letter as “(Mrs.) Patricia C. Scott,” (no male letter-writers carry the title “Mr.”). With the parenthetical insertion of her title, Patricia Scott is called

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<sup>77</sup> “P/A Views” July 1953, 9.

<sup>78</sup> “P/A Views” July 1953, 9.

<sup>79</sup> “P/A Views” July 1953, 9-10.

<sup>80</sup> “P/A Views” July 1953, 12.

out as a wife and consumer—more than just a design student—and her position to assess the controversy is enhanced, not diminished, as Gordon’s standing as a critic of architecture was diminished by her gender.

Although only Houston architect Karl Kamrath stepped up as Gordon’s staunch defender in its pages, with the exception of *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*, no other professional journal gave the “Threat to the Next America” controversy as many column inches as did *Progressive Architecture*. *The Journal of the AIA*, edited by Henry Saylor, quoted what their staff perceived as the most salient passages from the editorial in the May, 1953, issue’s “They Say” department. The quotes selected highlight Gordon’s claim that both designers and consumers were afraid to speak up and contradict the purveyors of International Style modernism, and the passage stating that “Reason is your best safeguard from following blindly the would-be ‘artistic dictators.’”<sup>81</sup> The following month the Journal ran a short opinion piece by Richard Philipp, FAIA, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, entitled “It’s Odd, But Is It Art?” In it, Philipp was critical of the trend toward picture windows (although the glazing style was more characteristic of the commonplace Ranch Style homes than in the types of modern housing to which Gordon objected). He quotes Gordon’s coining of the phrase “abandonment of reason” to describe what he calls the “ultra modern.” One of the best regarded residential architects of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Milwaukee, Philipp and his partner, Peter Brust, had the largest architectural firm in that city in the 1920s. Philip’s endorsement of Gordon belies a generational reaction against modern design—at the time his words were published in *The Journal of the AIA*, he was 78 years old, and his long and successful career had been built on distinctly traditional designs.

*Architectural Record* responded only obliquely, in the form of a series of quotations, published in the June 1953 issue, by better-known architects taken from past issues of the magazine. Introducing them, the magazine noted that they “add up to a rather remarkable statement of architecture’s new goals.” Included were some of the better known architects who had weighed in on the letters pages of *House Beautiful* and/or *Progressive Architecture*, such as William Wurster, Pietro Belluschi, and Henry Hill. Frank Lloyd Wright was given much more space in the same issue with published excerpts from a diatribe on the International Style entitled “In the Cause of Modern Architecture,” which Wright had sent to *Architectural Record* and other professional magazines.

Following the appearance of “The Threat to the Next America,” Wright also sent “In the Cause of Architecture” to Elizabeth Gordon, and it is, essentially, the same piece *House Beautiful* was to run in their July 1953 issue, under the title “Frank Lloyd Wright Speaks Up.” In the piece, Wright contrasted International Style with Organic architecture, singling out Johnson and Mies for a special drubbing. He wrote, “Old man BOX merely looks different when glassified, that’s all. But the more the box is glassed the more it is evident as the box. No new ideas whatever are involved. The old sham front has had its face lifted.”<sup>82</sup> For Wright, Gordon wove together two different essays he had sent to her, resulting in a piece that read with much greater coherence than that which ran in *Architectural Record*. She visited him in Scottsdale, bringing with her a photographer, and the resulting photograph that ran with “Frank Lloyd Wright Speaks Up” shows him looking wise, earnest, and half-smiling behind his drafting table, his drawings pinned up behind him. Contrasted with the grave-looking headshot that ran with his

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<sup>81</sup> Philipp, “It’s Odd, But Is It Art?”, 219.

<sup>82</sup> Wright, Frank Lloyd, “Excerpts from ‘The International Style’ by Frank Lloyd Wright,” 12; Wright, Frank Lloyd, “Frank Lloyd Wright Speaks Up” 87.

missive in *Architectural Record*, this depiction of him presents a far more noble man—a full reminder that he was, well into his eighties, still a vibrant designer. Wright, however, disliked the photo, wiring Gordon: PICTURES SEEMS A BITTER OLD MAN BUT OLGIVANNA LIKES IT AND SO DO YOU THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME.<sup>83</sup> But to appease him, Gordon also included a shot of Wright on horseback, a photograph he himself requested and provided.

Although “Frank Lloyd Wright Speaks Up” and “The Threat to the Next America” share a common scarecrow in MoMA, Wright has no qualms about naming the museum outright (it is possible that the Hearst legal team prevented Gordon from naming it outright, but may have felt differently about a guest editorial). Wright calls the exhibition shrift, *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture*, “... propaganda for the rising tide of mediocrity. If you intelligently examine it, you will find that it betrays the term ‘organic architecture,’ feeding on it as a parasite.”<sup>84</sup> MoMA’s director, Rene d’Harnoncourt, responded with a press release that denied any “sinister motives” and provided some context for their promotion of the International Style:

Twenty years ago the Museum first applied the term International Style to a kind of architecture which, partially under Mr. Wright’s influence, was emerging simultaneously in several different countries. As described by the Museum, the International Style was characterized by light and spacious volumes rather than by heavy masses, by fresh exploration of function and structure, and by a sense of order enriched by beauty of proportion and perfection of technique rather than by superficially applied ornament. The Museum believes that several architects associated with it have done highly individual and magnificent work.<sup>85</sup>

Wright and Gordon’s correspondence in the weeks leading up to his July piece was more than affable—no animosity on his part lingered following her rejection of his 1950 proposal on Southwest architecture—and it is here that their friendship can be seen to truly bloom. In his first letter to her following his “Godfather” telegram immediately following “The Threat to the Next America’s” publication, Wright dipped a cautious toe into the waters of a future relationship with the magazine. He wrote: “Our meeting was long ago. Meantime we have both been growing up. So sometime when I come to the Big Market I want to see you and talk with you again. I am more faithfully yours for America now, next (and abroad) than you are for me. But, we’ll see. Meantime my hat is in my hand and I greet you ...” Gordon flattered back. She was younger (at only 47), very attractive, and absolutely willing to court the elderly man in order to gain his presence in her magazine’s pages. “I only regret,” she wrote him, “that I lost, or temporarily misplaced! my contact with your great strength and purpose. But that is past and now the present and future look infinitely more cheerful.” The controversy would cement their relationship, and with the Wrights’ subsequent bestowal of John deKoven Hill on *House Beautiful*, Taliesin would become an important part of *House Beautiful*’s design foundation.

Most notably, John deKoven Hill and Elizabeth Gordon, as a team, would turn the magazine into a design studio in itself, and even export *House Beautiful*’s aesthetic overseas by furnishing a prefabricated house in 1955 for the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Office of International Trade Fairs’ “Main Street USA” exhibit. Greg Castillo recounts the excruciating

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<sup>83</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright to Elizabeth Gordon, May 9, 1953. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>84</sup> Wright, Frank Lloyd, “Frank Lloyd Wright Speaks Up,” 88.

<sup>85</sup> Museum of Modern Art, press release dated June 19, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Collection. This was released prior to the appearance of Wright’s essay (under any name applied to it) in *Architectural Record* or *House Beautiful*.

detail with which *House Beautiful* exported a carefully chosen middle class American design and domesticity:

*House Beautiful* staffers at regional offices in Lafayette, Indiana and Toledo, Ohio, selected interiors and furnishings for two prefabricated houses supplied by a consortium that included Scholtz Homes, the National Homes Corporation, the National Association of Home Builders, the Producer's Council, and the Prefabricated Home Manufacturer's Institute. The Main Street home interiors were assembled in the United States, photographed for publication, dismantled, and shipped to Europe, and finally reassembled on site, where the original arrangements were re-created down to the placement of ashtrays and decorative accents. Wall-hung photographs showed the home in use by an American model family as it gathered in the living room listening to music on the hi-fi, or greeted neighbors across the backyard.<sup>86</sup>

Castillo goes on to note that the interiors depicted were distinctly low-brow as modernist interiors went and were "better suited to Lafayette and Toledo than Milan or Paris," and the accompanying photographs verify it. Certainly they display little Wrightian influence, but the aim of the exhibition was to increase U.S. exports of mass produced goods, not just to promote a design aesthetic.<sup>87</sup>

*House Beautiful* would continue to present a wide range of residential architecture and pursue the climate control and Pacesetter programs it had developed in the years leading up to "The Threat to the Next America." But by offering Frank Lloyd Wright a press vehicle in which to declare his own architectural agenda, Elizabeth Gordon cagily established *House Beautiful* as the organ by which Wright's housing designs would thereafter be presented to the American public.

### ***Including Everybody In: Architectural Forum and House and Home***

The professional architectural press had a big stake in keeping Frank Lloyd Wright happy, and none had a bigger stake than *Architectural Forum*, which until 1953 was Wright's primary vehicle of promotion in the professional press. *Architectural Forum* had published two issues, one in 1938 and another a decade later in 1948, devoted entirely to Wright's work, and his articles and buildings were prominent in the pages of a great many of the issues in between and since. Although many editors found him difficult on a personal level, all recognized his genius and influence and took pains to elevate him appropriately within the profession. Peter Blake recounts Wright's ire at discovering an unpublished and uncomplimentary review of Wright's *Autobiography*, written by then-junior-staffer Blake. The review was jettisoned and another more flattering review, written by George Nelson, ran in the magazine.<sup>88</sup> But unlike *Architectural Record*, who gave Frank Lloyd Wright's apoplectic essay on the International Style a page and a half of excerpts, and *House Beautiful*, which ran the essay prominently and with flattering photographs, *Architectural Forum* did not run it at all. Editor Douglas Haskell, who had long been a fan, if not a champion of Wright and Organic architecture, privately

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<sup>86</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 119.

<sup>87</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 120.

<sup>88</sup> Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 45-46.

worried that Wright had fallen victim to a “Messianic complex,” and pronounced the essay too bitter to run.<sup>89</sup> In a letter to Wright in April of 1953, *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home* publisher Perry Prentice wrote, “You are so far above this short-lived furor over the international style that people will only wonder why you came down from high Olympus to throw poison at pygmies.” He added “There is far more bitterness than I think you can realize in what you have written... The bitterness lies across the page like a murky glass, making it hard for your reader to see through the bitterness to what you are trying to say.” Prentice went on to make a surprising suggestion, one which ran counter to *Architectural Forum*’s “exclusive” with Frank Lloyd Wright:

... I can only advise that you send it to House Beautiful, which is launching what it calls a crusade against the international style and the foreign architects who have come to America to practice. I am sure Elizabeth Gordon would be more than delighted if she could use you to help build her fire, though I must say I did not think her April issue did anything like justice to the tremendous part you have played in the creation of American architecture.<sup>90</sup>

If Prentice’s respect for and investment in Wright was too great for him to publish Wright’s essay and be party to revealing him to be a bitter curmudgeon, editor Douglas Haskell had no such qualms about portraying Elizabeth Gordon and *House Beautiful* as ridiculous. Haskell’s responses appeared in both *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*, and letters of reader response appeared as well. He began in the May 1953 issue of *Architectural Forum*, with a tempered single page editorial entitled “Criticism vs. Statesmanship in Architecture.”<sup>91</sup> As Haskell’s public response to “The Threat to the Next America,” it asked “Who can really declare that his or her preferences represent ‘free taste’ but yours are part of a conspiracy to subvert the nation?” Haskell used the editorial to both deny a myopic allegiance to the International Style and to throw his own flattery at Wright—who by that time was threatening to sever his relationship with *Architectural Forum* due to perceived inaccuracies in the magazine’s reporting of his Price Tower—noting, “Surely no reader has missed the top position assigned in *Architectural Forum* to the ripe achievement and thought of that dean of the world’s architects, Frank Lloyd Wright.”

Letters in response to the “Criticism vs. Statesmanship...” were generally congratulatory, and the following month Haskell fired another more biting volley in response to Gordon’s ongoing salvos, this time in *House and Home*. Haskell’s article, “Let’s Include Everybody In” took careful aim at *House Beautiful*’s argument that European modernists were offering sterile and unusable designs to the American public by showing, side by side, photographs taken from the pages of *House Beautiful* touting notable design elements by American architects with photographs of similar, earlier elements in the work of other more venerable architects, most of whom are either European or Frank Lloyd Wright (Oscar Niemeyer and Bernard Maybeck are also represented, but with only one sample apiece compared to Wright’s six). His lead photo comparison was the most damning: Haskell compared *House Beautiful*’s April cover, of the covered patio of John Yeon’s Shaw House, with a similar shot of the entrance to Mies’ Barcelona Pavilion (Figure 39). The rhythmic divisions of the interior wall, the similar depth, and the perspective of the photograph make the comparison seem apt, although the buildings

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<sup>89</sup> Secrest, Meryl, 552.

<sup>90</sup> Perry Prentice to Frank Lloyd Wright, April 3, 1953. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Getty.

<sup>91</sup> Haskell, “Criticism vs. Statesmanship,” 97.

themselves were extremely different and, when viewed from any other angle, the similarity between the two spaces would likely diminish or disappear. Haskell offered no fewer than 29 comparisons, citing the issue and page numbers for the *House Beautiful* photos, and including the works of Anshen and Allen contrasted with Le Corbusier's (Figure 40), Elroy Webber with Marcel Breuer (Figure 41), and Henry Eggers with Frank Lloyd Wright (Figure 42).<sup>92</sup>

The text with the article was brief, conversational, and had a congenial tone that was absent in Haskell's private correspondence on the topic. Haskell was careful to appear the gentleman. He began by noting that the free exchange of ideas was fundamental to living in a free society, and that the Soviet architects were forced to stick to native ideas. Good ideas come from all over the world, and to prove it he said, "We took the past year's issues of a popular women's magazine—*House Beautiful* (circ.: 630,000)—and went through these back numbers to see where many of the ideas shown originated." He noted that *House Beautiful* did not decide until 1947, "to follow the leadership of the professional press and [consistently] promote good modern architecture,"<sup>93</sup> overlooking that Gordon was promoting such works as the Havens House as early as 1944. He compliments Gordon, calling her "*House Beautiful's* able and dynamic editor," and then focuses on her list of 10 style trends from *House Beautiful's* October 1952 issue, using examples to demonstrate that most were not new at all. He closes:

... the best possible house has got to be an "international" house, in the sense that its ideas will be coming from all over the world, And just as America was made by people from all over the world so the American house will emerge from a melting pot of ideas.

So we say with apologies to Mr. Sam Goldwyn: "Let's include everybody in". And let's repay the compliment paid more than 40 years ago to our Frank Lloyd Wright, a prophet without honor in his own country then, whom the Germans and the Dutch were the first to recognize for the genius he was and is. Let's repay that compliment whenever we can, to those who were denounced by their native dictators (of taste and of politics) and who came to the US, the traditional haven of free men and free ideas.<sup>94</sup>

In the summer of 1953, Haskell published a total of 34 letters in response in either the July issue of *Architectural Forum* or the August issue of *House and Home*. Eight of these appeared in both publications. Some came from those who had also written to *Progressive Architecture*, but only one letter came from one who was also published in *House Beautiful*. In a letter that ran in the July 1953 issue of *Architectural Forum* and the August 1953 issue of *House and Home*, George Howe—who had written to Gordon, "Grandmother, what big teeth you have!"—noted more soberly, "The general response to Miss Gordon's article is really shocking, whether in fury for or against. A nation that can take such nonsense seriously has come to a dangerous psychological pass." Although his letter to *House Beautiful* was flippant in tone, his more serious letter to *Architectural Forum* indicated that Howe felt he was contributing to a conversation of his peers—fellows in the field of restricted production. Indeed, he was. Of the 35 letter writers to *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*, only three made their living in some way other than as architects. Two of these, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and Lewis Mumford, carried clear

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<sup>92</sup> Haskell, "Let's Include *Everybody* In," 108-115.

<sup>93</sup> Haskell, "Let's Include *Everybody* In," 108.

<sup>94</sup> Haskell, "Let's Include *Everybody* In," 115.



authority within this group to weigh in on the controversy despite their lack of design credentials. Contrast this with *House Beautiful*, which had 62 letter writers (60 letters—two were written jointly) in June and July of 1953, but only 31 (50%) came from architects.

Another letter writer to *Architectural Forum* had a much closer connection to Wright. Architect John Lloyd Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright's son, wrote decrying the scourging of architects by one another. Although the letter is somewhat obtuse, Wright the younger seemed to be of the "pox on all their houses" mindset. After first asking how the public might trust doctors or lawyers who were as proprietary and backbiting as architects had become, he goes on to say, "Are we architects practicing a profession or are we members of jealous unethical cliques for the purpose of merchandising building constructions and foisting upon the public our little selves; and don't we know that we too will pass?" He closes with a short series of rhetorical questions: "Too much of the publicity concerning architects and architecture these days causes me to wonder: 1. Where is the client? 2. What is an architect? 3. And who is God?"<sup>95</sup> John Wright's relationship with his father was enough to explain his asking these questions—the title of his biography of Frank Lloyd Wright, published in 1946, was *My Father Who is on Earth*—but as Philip Johnson so capably demonstrated in his 1953 address to the Midwest Chapter of the AIA, for many architects the client had become a secondary concern to their own artistic aims. Architects on both sides of the controversy generated by "The Threat to the Next America" had earned reputations for discounting clients' wishes, and Frank Lloyd Wright was known for it—Lewis Mumford had famously recounted the story in which Wright had excoriated a client for adding some of his own furnishings.<sup>96</sup> As for the other two questions, John Lloyd Wright may have searched long and hard for the answers, but this is not a matter of record.

Only one letter was written by a woman, who offered a consumer's standpoint. Mrs. Betty Benjamin weighed in as a happy resident of a modern house, but allowed that, as a client of former Taliesin apprentice Abram Dombor, who had designed her very Wrightian house in Cincinnati, Ohio, she was all for free choice in the matter: "I love my house and would have no other, but there are many FLLW (*sic*) houses which offend my eye [she does not specify which ones], and I can think of no more delightful sight than Mies van der Rohe's twin towers on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago."<sup>97</sup>

Although it is not known how many letters of response were received by *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home*, the ones published appear to have been selected, like *House Beautiful's*, for their authority. Some, like Royal Barry Wills, were venerable members of the profession. Three letter writers (Julius Ralph Davidson, John Rex, and Campbell and Wong) had designed houses for John Entenza's Case Study Program. MoMA's "Built in USA Exhibitions" in 1944 and 1952 had exhibited the work of 10 of the letter writers (Donald Barthelme, Robert Carson, Gardner A. Dailey, William Ganster, George Howe, Robert A. Jacobs, Nathaniel Owings, John Root, Paul Rudolph, and Ralph S. Twitchell). Others on the list had produced notable works of modernist architecture and would go on to produce more. One of these, Eliot Noyes, was a member of the "Harvard Five," a group of Harvard GSD graduates that included Philip Johnson, and who were controversially inserting modern architecture into New Canaan, Connecticut, building a series of experimental modern homes for themselves and a handful of avant-garde clients. Responding to "Criticism vs. Statesmanship in Architecture," Noyes wrote

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<sup>95</sup> "Letters," *Architectural Forum* July 1953, 62.

<sup>96</sup> Mumford, "The Sky Line: Status Quo," 109.

<sup>97</sup> "Letters," *House and Home*, August 1953, 54; "Letters," *Architectural Forum*, July 1953, 70

(in a letter run in both magazines), “Your reply to the pretty lady on the soapbox beautiful is a masterpiece. It would have been easy to be destructive about the *House Beautiful* article. Your reply is more effective because it is constructive—and also perceptive, accurate, adroit and kind.”<sup>98</sup>

As with Noyes’ letter, sexism in the language of many of the letters was thinly veiled. Robert Carson, who had been senior architect for the Rockefeller Center Building (for Reinhard & Hofmeister, Corbett, Harrison, & MacMurray), wrote “I am aware of the somewhat hysterical blasts that occasioned your article. Of course I agree with you.”<sup>99</sup> John Rex, designer with his associate Sumner Spaulding of Case Study House #2, wrote, “After reading a recent edition of a “Women’s Magazine” I stifled a yawn—such inaccurate, hypocritical reporting, and half truth are deserving of little mere—and then I picked up your magazine. Thanks to your efforts a new form of architectural McCarthyism has been revealed.”<sup>100</sup>

Not all letters cheered Haskell. Royal Barry Wills, best known for his early 20<sup>th</sup> century Colonial Revival housing designs, although his style later moved into modern territory when Harvard GSD graduate Hugh Stubbins worked for his firm in the 1930s, wrote, “I think that [Gropius and Mies] are great architects; they have pioneered an architectural revolution and won but that doesn’t mean we have to subsist on abstract architecture the rest of our lives.”<sup>101</sup> And Karl Kamrath, addressing “Let’s include Everybody In,” was again in the trenches on Gordon’s behalf, but now a tinge of xenophobia infused his argument:

Your comparative illustrations are wonderful and point up the fact that perhaps the only original architect is one who has a book no one else has. ... What I don’t like is what I see in the way of architecture as a direct result of the influence of European architects (who so alertly first recognized the genius of FLLW [*sic*]), but now perpetrate upon our countryside a rash of steel, wood, and glass boxes. As free men in our country, they have a perfect right to design as they wish, but I am continually amazed that so many Americans fall for their flat and shallow mediocre solutions.<sup>102</sup>

That so many well known members of the profession had such strong opinions on the matter and chose to express them in *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home* may, in fact, have been the result of some orchestration on the part of Douglas Haskell. In a July 1953 letter to Frank Lloyd Wright, Elizabeth Gordon wrote, “Haskell has sent out a form letter, asking for mail on their pages that tried [*sic*] to show that we don’t know what we are doing.”<sup>103</sup> Although it is not known how many, if any, of the published letters were so solicited, Douglas Haskell’s collected papers at the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University contain a handful of correspondence that indicates Haskell did, indeed, attempt to rally key supporters to address “The Threat to the Next America.” One example came from Vernon DeMars, whose designs for Farm Security Administration housing had been featured in MoMA’s 1944 Built in USA exhibition, and who was in 1953 on the faculty of the School of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. While DeMars’ letter did not support Gordon, he did echo

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<sup>98</sup> “Letters,” *Architectural Forum*, July 1953, 62; “Letters,” *House and Home*, August 1953, 46.

<sup>99</sup> “Letters,” *House and Home*, August 1953, 46-47.

<sup>100</sup> “Letters,” *House and Home*, August 1953, 60.

<sup>101</sup> “Letters,” *House and Home*, August 1953, 60.

<sup>102</sup> “Letters,” *House and Home*, August 1953, 58, 60.

<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth Gordon to Frank Lloyd Wright, July 9, 1953. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

some of her concerns, writing, “Yet now for the first time on any scale among the practitioners of the new architecture there is a growing concern for a more human kind of design, a search for the baby that was thrown out with the bath water, a desire on occasion for ornament, richness, complexity even. If Elizabeth Gordon will relax a little she will see her “Next America” all in due time.”<sup>104</sup> Haskell did not choose DeMar’s letter, dated July 13, 1953, for publication in either *Architectural Forum* or *House and Home*. The August 1953 issue of *House and Home* was the last that contained multiple letters addressing “Let’s include Everybody In,” and DeMars’ letter may have arrived after the issue had gone to press. But there was one person whom Haskell seems to have been dogged in his determination to procure a response to Gordon, one particularly credible voice in the field of postwar architectural discourse: Lewis Mumford.

### COURTING MUMFORD

While the published letters for and against Gordon’s stance in “The Threat to the Next America” offer some insight into attitudes toward women and shelter magazines on the part of those associated with the field of restricted production in architecture, Douglas Haskell’s unpublished correspondence is particularly enlightening in this regard. Although their offices were only a nine block walk down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue from each other, Gordon and Haskell might well have been on different planets when it came to their perceptions of their respective magazine’s roles in the field of architecture. One memo, from Haskell to *Architectural Forum* publisher Perry Prentice regarding the Green House by Campbell and Wong, shows that Haskell saw *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home* as set apart from the shelter magazines, which they were, but also that he perceived shelter magazines as somewhat bothersome: “House and Garden is coming out with this the month ahead of us, but we were not too averse to doing the Yeon house a month behind House Beautiful which has even more circulation than House and Garden has, so I don’t think the interference is crippling.”<sup>105</sup> He went on to express dismay that *Architectural Record* was to run an article on a house by Paul Thiry, and that *Architectural Forum* didn’t get to it first, indicating that for Haskell competition with a shelter magazine constituted a mere “interference,” while direct competition for content with another professional magazine would be more problematic, causing *Architectural Forum* to change plans as regarded featured works.

Yet Haskell’s ire at Elizabeth Gordon seemed to belie the idea that he saw shelter magazines as merely “interference.” His response to her cry for “battle” was to meet her on the field of journalism, thus lending credibility to her crusade despite his efforts to the contrary. In print, his tone was measured and gentlemanly, but his personal correspondence betrays the extent of his anger. Passages from a letter to architect and *Architectural Forum* contributor Frederick Gutheim, then on the faculty of the School of Architecture and Design at the University of Michigan, are particularly enlightening regarding Haskell’s attitude toward Gordon’s gender and his perception that she had intruded uninvited on the discourse surrounding the strains of modern architecture. Haskell wrote:

... The poisonous thing about Liz is not only that she attacks individual architects—and being a sadistic female chooses those men who might be expected to have the fewest defenders—but that her technique dethrones the architecture

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<sup>104</sup> Vernon DeMars to Douglas Haskell, July 15, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

<sup>105</sup> Memo, Douglas Haskell to Perry Prentice, April 16, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

profession as a whole. If shrieking women are to be the arbiters of architectural taste, burying the names of the architects whose houses they publish, and exalting themselves as dictum givers, architecture is in for a bad time. ...

You will find of course that she is thoroughly [*sic*] confused and that her readers are thoroughly confused, and observers tell me she thoroughly confused the Chamber of Commerce [by this Haskell means the business leaders in the design industry, who constituted some of the larger advertising accounts at both his and Gordon's magazines]... Not being exactly an intellectual heavyweight, Liz is pretty badly confused herself.<sup>106</sup>

Haskell's letter devolves into gossip; he goes on to call out the more personal aspects of the Mies-Farnsworth controversy, and his tone and argument reiterate the popular "Edith scorned" rumors associated with Mies and Farnsworth's relationship (Haskell takes a judgmental stance as to the perceived adulterous aspects of the relationship, and Mies' long-dormant marriage becomes somehow Farnsworth's concern; in fact, Farnsworth and Mies' "romance," if such there ever was, would have taken place during an interruption in Mies' relationship with Lora Marx). Haskell also supports the narrative that Edith Farnsworth's dissatisfaction with the house is somehow associated with her being less than classically beautiful:

This is of course just for your private information, but more than one Chicago source has told me what a warm atmosphere there was between Edith Farnsworth and Mies in the early days (it seemed so to me when I went there with them on [an] early inspection trip) and that there were personal feelings involved in this fracas [*sic*] which have nothing to do directly with architecture. She seems not to have thought very much about Frau Mies back in Germany. Of course you recall how proud Edith was to have her house on the regular tour of the AIA convention in Chicago, at the same time that she was wrapping up the brickbats she was gong to throw at the architect. The proper study for this age is psychopathy. You may recall also George Howe's comment that a gal with knees like that who insisted on wearing shorts had no business in that house to begin with.<sup>107</sup>

Haskell also, in the same letter, makes clear that he understands Gordon's crusade to be based in competition for advertising dollars: "... that our space salesmen regularly hear about all this from the advertising agencies is significant."<sup>108</sup>

His hackles thus raised, it was likely with some surprise that Haskell read Lewis Mumford's letter of support in *House Beautiful's* June issue. The men were old friends, and Robert Wojtowicz has noted that, particularly in their earlier years as architecture critics—Mumford at the *New Yorker* and Haskell at the *Nation*—they were "close to one another in both outlook and circumstance."<sup>109</sup> Despite their friendship, the two had disagreed as regarded modernism, particularly in housing. Haskell had, in 1931, proposed that mass production could provide solutions to low-cost housing needs, a stance that Mumford criticized as naïve in the absence of appropriate urban planning measures, writing that "...if the mechanized house is placed upon the market before appropriate community and regional plans are made for it, the

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<sup>106</sup> Douglas Haskell to Frederick Gutheim, May 9, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

<sup>107</sup> Haskell to Gutheim, May 9, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

<sup>108</sup> Haskell to Gutheim, May 9, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

<sup>109</sup> Wojtowicz, "Lewis Mumford and American Modernism," 77.

result will be the same drab, inefficient and nasty environment that the speculative builder creates today.”<sup>110</sup> But Haskell also appreciated Mumford’s moral vision: Following the publication of Mumford’s *The Culture of Cities* in 1938. Haskell’s review of the book noted that “In this moral certainty as to values and aims lies a great source of Mumford’s leadership and power...”<sup>111</sup>

Haskell immediately wrote to Mumford, asking about the rest of the obviously shortened letter and noting, “Miss Gordon’s attack must have given you satisfaction in echoing your sentiments about what you yourself consider to be deficiencies or dangers in today’s international architecture.” Haskell pointed out the political nature of Gordon’s attack, adding that he agreed with William Wurster’s letter to *Progressive Architecture*. He informed Mumford that Gordon both “took her piece to the Chamber of Commerce” and that she also “spread the news to the advertising agencies.” This act, in particular, Haskell connects to McCarthyism. He had not, in his letter to Gutheim, drawn any connection between Gordon and McCarthyite tactics, but he draws out this comparison for Mumford:

... when the attack was published, it included the exact McCarthy technique of guilt by association, and in a particularly repugnant fashion. She mentioned among the directors of the Bauhaus the “Communist” Meyer, but she very carefully—I repeat very carefully, for she was very fully informed—neglected to put dates on the beginning and end of his term. As you well know, he served for somewhat less than a year, and, as you also well know, Gropius asked Mies to step in and put an end to the nonsense, which is what was done.<sup>112</sup> For Liz to use this episode as a weapon against Gropius and Mies is a tactic of a kind that cannot be described in polite society... Your idealisms, Lewis, are being badly misused by very cunning people.<sup>113</sup>

Haskell went on to say “I take it from your recent writings that whereas I think [the different strains of modern architecture] are all branches of one tree, you think Wright is right and Mies and Gropius are wrong,” and to request that Mumford write a letter for publication in *Architectural Forum* disassociating himself from Gordon’s campaign, not on the grounds of disagreement with her as regards architectural style, but on the grounds that such discourse should be approached in an above-board manner.<sup>114</sup>

Yet it appears that Gordon’s actions were not the only ones not necessarily “above board.” The above passage is enlightening for another reason that has little to do with her editorial or Mumford’s possible role in it—it sheds some light on the prevailing narrative surrounding the history of the Bauhaus, as it was described in the U.S. during the postwar period. Haskell himself was apparently misinformed, for he underestimated the length of time Hannes Meyer served as director of the Bauhaus by about half. In fact, Meyer directed the Bauhaus from

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<sup>110</sup> Mumford, “The Flaw in the Mechanical House.” Quoted in Wojtowicz, “*Lewis Mumford and American Modernism*,” 124.

<sup>111</sup> Haskell, Douglas. “The City, Past and Future,” review of *The Culture of Cities*, *Nation*, 23 April 1938, 478. Quoted in Wojtowicz, “*Lewis Mumford and American Modernism*,” 140.

<sup>112</sup> See Droste, 166; 199-200; 248; Washon Long, 59–60;

<sup>113</sup> Douglas Haskell to Lewis Mumford, June 2, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

<sup>114</sup> Haskell to Mumford, June 2, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

March of 1928 until July 1930 (about two and a half years), when he was succeeded by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. In addition, Mies had little to do with Meyer's dismissal, although Droste indicates that Gropius may have played a behind-the-scenes role.<sup>115</sup> This action that was taken by the Dessau municipal authorities due to their discomfort with Meyer's and a group of Bauhaus students' support for local communist activities, support which was drawing considerable heat in the form of unfavorable articles in the right-wing press in Dessau in 1930, a time when the National Socialist Party was well on its way to power. Although Haskell does not name the source of his misinformation in his letter to Mumford, Kathleen James-Chakraborty has shown that, following his immigration to the U.S. and his appointment at Harvard, Walter Gropius worked to:

...purge the history of the school he had founded of those elements least likely to be accepted by Americans. Expressionism and socialism, and with them the important contributions made by Johannes Itten and Hannes Meyer, were eliminated in favor of focusing upon an aesthetic that was justified as the logical artistic response to mass production. According with cold war politics, this narrative eventually proved to have enormous appeal, not least because it validated key American institutions, from Harvard University to the State Department.<sup>116</sup>

The narrative of the history of the Bauhaus as being somewhat inseparable from the history of Walter Gropius began much earlier than the Cold War. It was reinforced in the first good look the American public had at the school's principles and output: the 1938 MoMA exhibition, *Bauhaus, 1919–1928*. In the preface to the exhibition shrift (which was edited by Gropius, along with his wife, Ise, and Herbert Bayer), MoMA's director, Alfred H. Barr, wrote that the exhibition was "...for the most part limited to the first nine years of the institution, the period during which Gropius was director. For reasons beyond the control of any of the individuals involved, the last five years of the Bauhaus could not be represented."<sup>117</sup> Yet in his book on the history of the Harvard GSD, architectural historian Anthony Alofsin notes that Barr was, in fact, distressed at Gropius' attempts to "impede an objective assessment of the Bauhaus," by removing key elements of the school's history from the exhibition.<sup>118</sup> Interestingly, Alofsin's book also perpetuates Gropius' selective construction of the history of the school, in which he distanced himself from the National Socialist Party: Alofsin states that "...criticism from local craft unions, art academies, and the far right of the National Socialists resulted in Gropius' resignation from the Bauhaus—though the prospect of large-scale architectural commissions also entered into his decision."<sup>119</sup> Magdalena Droste's history of the Bauhaus tells a different story, that Gropius resigned in the wake of a number of internal problems at the Bauhaus, and fully expected his successor, Hannes Meyer to make significant changes.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, as Winfried Nerdinger has shown, after the National Socialists came to full power in 1933, Gropius did what he could to obtain commissions from the Nazi government, as did many architects in Germany at that time.<sup>121</sup> It seems that, had the National Socialist Party been sufficiently powerful in 1928 to

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<sup>115</sup> Droste, 166; Weltge, 115.

<sup>116</sup> James-Chakraborty, "From Isolationism to Internationalism," 154.

<sup>117</sup> Bayer, et al., 6-7.

<sup>118</sup> Alofsin, *Struggle for Modernism*, 162-163.

<sup>119</sup> Alofsin, *Struggle for Modernism*, 131.

<sup>120</sup> Droste, 162.

<sup>121</sup> Nerdinger, 142-143.

apply pressure for Gropius to resign, the party might also have been able to prevent the appointment of an acknowledged Marxist as his successor.

If he was aware of it, Lewis Mumford did nothing to correct Haskell's misinformation regarding the history of the Bauhaus. Mumford replied to Haskell from Paris, where he complained of being at some remove from the affair. He told Haskell that Gordon had published the letter—which he had not seen and which was apparently a fragment of a personal note he had sent to her—out of context and without his permission. But the content of his letter fragment in *House Beautiful* indicated he clearly had read the April issue, and he declined Haskell's offer to print what would be tantamount to a "retraction" of his support for Gordon, on the grounds that he was unable to remember what exactly he had said in the original note. He was also hesitant to sever his relationship with *House Beautiful*, which he said had exercised "good judgment in valuing my work and printing it without changing a comma!" In fact, his article, "The House with an Interior," ran in the same June issue of *House Beautiful* in which his letter appeared.<sup>122</sup> But Mumford wrote, "Because of what you tell me, my last article for them may turn out to be my last indeed." Mumford went on to attempt to clarify, for Haskell, his position on modern architecture, which was something of a reiteration of his controversial 1947 New Yorker column:

As for the work of Le Corbusier, Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe, I think it performed a useful function in its time and I have a great respect for many of their achievements: my point is that the modern movement, which has its roots in a far older past than the International Style, has many branches and that the mistake of Johnson and people like him is to consider their particularly favored branch as the main trunk. For me, Wright is no more the main trunk than is Le Corbusier.<sup>123</sup>

But this clarification, Mumford was careful to note, was not for publication; he politely declined Haskell's offer of the opportunity to correct the supposed misconception that he had joined Gordon's campaign.

Haskell wasted no time in bringing Mumford up to speed, sending him a copy of Mumford's letter in *House Beautiful* as well as a copy of "Criticism vs. Statesmanship in Architecture." He asked Mumford to comment on the latter, repeating that Mumford would be only on the side of civil discourse in the field, not stating his agreement with one publication or the other. "It would at least be your opinion on the side against McCarthyism," he wrote. But Mumford saw no reason to defend himself if he was, in fact, not guilty. He turned Haskell's criticism of Gordon's "guilt by association" device back at him, replying:

Though the three sentences in my letter, without the qualification of the context and of private conversations with Miss Gordon, gave a distorted view of my attitude, there is nothing like blanket endorsement of her article in them—still less approval of any xenophobia. Why then is any statement necessary? Chiefly because, it would seem, a few articles of mine, written without respect to Miss Gordon's "campaign," have appeared in *House Beautiful*. Surely this is guilt by association with a vengeance. The mischief and malice of McCarthyism have indeed gone far if those who oppose it feel that I am now under an obligation to

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<sup>122</sup> Mumford, "The House with an Interior," 128-130.

<sup>123</sup> Mumford to Haskell, June 8, 1953, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.



“clear myself.” In the light of my whole life and teaching, such a special profession for this special occasion, seems to border on the absurd.<sup>124</sup>

But of Haskell’s editorial, Mumford said in closing, “As for your *Architectural Forum* editorial, it seemed to me admirable in tone and temper and philosophy, & I congratulate you on it.”

At last, Haskell had something he could use, by way of recovering Mumford for what he perceived as the saner strain of discourse. He wrote back immediately, asking if he could publish Mumford’s closing sentence as a letter in *Architectural Forum*, and attempting to calm him: “The only reason for asking that you make a statement is that perfectly normal people were saying, ‘Did you see that Lewis Mumford has joined Liz Gordon’s campaign?’”<sup>125</sup>

Mumford assented in a note dated July 25, 1953. By that time, the August issue of *Architectural Forum* would have been in subscribers’ hands. Mumford’s one-sentence letter ran in the September issue, along with a hand-washing addendum from Haskell reading: “This is the last letter *Architectural Forum* will print on the subject of its May editorial.—Ed.”<sup>126</sup> Mumford did not make good on his threat to never again offer his work to *House Beautiful*; his article “The Philosophy of Storage” appeared in the August 1954 issue, some time after the controversy around “The Threat to the Next America” had somewhat abated. He did, however, write two Skyline columns on Frank Lloyd Wright that November and December. In these he was both laudatory and uncharacteristically critical of Wright, with whom he had a longstanding friendship. In the second of the two, he focused partly on Wright’s recent writings, although he did not mention “In the Cause of Architecture” by any of its names. But there is little doubt of that to which Mumford was referring:

While Wright is sound in asserting the American architect’s freedom from colonial servility, it is another thing for him to denounce architects of European origin, such men of integrity and humane understanding as Gropius, in language (and thought) that should be reserved for morbidly isolationist journals. The America First streak in Wright is a coarse, dark vein in the fine granite of his mind, and it has kept him from learning as much as he might have from those who by taste and temperament and training most differed from him.<sup>127</sup>

Wright was, predictably, furious at this and other criticism contained in the two columns. Although the two men repaired their friendship to an extent, it never fully recovered, a story which is documented in their correspondence.<sup>128</sup> Haskell noted Mumford’s “scolding” of Wright in a letter to Walter Gropius, in 1953, and related his own role in acquiring Mumford’s statement in *Architectural Forum*:

...Incidentally, I am very proud of [Mumford] for joining at last with all good men in scolding Frank Lloyd Wright for his attacks on the men that have come to the United States from Europe.

I am proud, too, that I had some share behind the scenes in bringing this about. When *House Beautiful* published a letter, or rather part of a letter from

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<sup>124</sup> Mumford to Haskell, June 21, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

<sup>125</sup> Haskell to Mumford, July 15, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

<sup>126</sup> “Letters,” *Architectural Forum*, September 1953, 74.

<sup>127</sup> Mumford, “The Sky Line: A Phoenix Too Infrequent – II,” 125.

<sup>128</sup> Pfeiffer and Wojtowicz, *Frank Lloyd Wright + Lewis Mumford: Thirty Years of Correspondence*.

Mumford which seemed to praise her attack, I wrote to Lewis and asked him whether this really represented him. He said he had never given permission to Miss Gordon to publish such a quotation and, moreover, that he had not understood the real background of her campaign.<sup>129</sup>

Although it is unlikely that Mumford was in the dark about Gordon's beliefs about the International Style and its promotion by MoMA, *Architectural Forum*, and *House and Home*—she had flatly told him of her plans in her 1952 letter—he may not have realized the extent to which she would find a rhetorical common ground with Wright's isolationism. Almost certainly, Mumford would not have endorsed any advocacy of McCarthyism, if he had believed such a tendency on Gordon's part existed.

### SPILLING OUT OF THE FIELD: COMMENT IN THE NON-ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

The controversy around “The Threat to the Next America” was largely confined to the field of architecture, and in particular the architecture of restricted production. One response from the design field stands out for its particular vehemence, however, and indicates that Gordon was not necessarily able to expect support from quarters from which she might have expected it to come. Harry V. Anderson, editor and publisher of *Interior Design*, was likely someone Gordon understood as an ally. Anderson had founded the magazine in the 1930s and its pages make apparent that he generally favored traditional design themes for those wealthy enough to afford interior designers. In his March 1953 issue Anderson ran an opinion piece by architect Foster Rhodes Jackson with the self-explanatory title, “A House is not a Machine for Living In.”<sup>130</sup> Jackson was a young architect (in his forties), who had lived briefly at Taliesin, studying with Frank Lloyd Wright from 1944-46, and whose work relied on natural materials and forms in ways that demonstrate Wright's influence.<sup>131</sup> Coming from the Wrightian camp, Jackson performed as expected; he claimed the origins of European modernism for Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, and openly criticized the architects of the International Style: “...they developed only one tiny phase of Sullivan's ‘form follows function.’ The deplorable part of it all is that they thought they had attained the ultimate.”

Given this piece, Gordon was likely delighted when the May 1953 issue of *Interior Design* responded to “The Threat to the Next America” in a way no other magazine did: Anderson requested and received permission to reprint the editorial *in full*. But he also gave equal time to the opposing side, in the form of a rebuttal by furniture designer and manufacturer Clifford Pascoe. Pascoe had close ties to MoMA; he had provided much of the furniture for the new museum building in 1939.<sup>132</sup> A businessman first and a designer second, in 1940 Pascoe had been involved in an international venture with Alvar Aalto called Artek Pascoe, for which Pascoe had been in charge of manufacturing and selling Aalto's designs in the United States. When the war made trans-Atlantic communications with Finland difficult, Pascoe took advantage of Aalto's inability to provide oversight of the operation. He manufactured “streamlined” versions of Aalto's designs, building a brisk business until Aalto arrived in New

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<sup>129</sup> Haskell to Walter Gropius, December 15, 1953. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.

<sup>130</sup> Jackson, 88-89.

<sup>131</sup> Hess and Weintraub, 203-211.

<sup>132</sup> Widman, et al., 205

York for a surprise visit, surmised the situation, and sued him.<sup>133</sup> But Pascoe continued to have friends in important places. In the years after the war, Pascoe's company, "Modernmasters," produced a number of successful designs, including a chair that was featured in the 1952 "Good Design" exhibition at MoMA.<sup>134</sup>

But however questionable his business ethics, Pascoe's response to "The Threat to the Next America," demonstrates his passion as a defender of modern design. Pascoe eviscerated Gordon with a vigor that even her most obvious opponents in the architectural press did not approach. He called her "incredibly irresponsible, occasionally vicious, and frequently factually incorrect," and noted that her pointed singling out of Mies and Gropius, "now both men in their 70's" (Mies was 67, and Gropius would have been 69 when Pascoe's counterpoint hit the stands), was "more worthy of Senator McCarthy (as was her reference to one of the Bauhaus directors, Hannes Meyer, as a 'Communist architect') than the chief writer of a responsible journal.... Why does Editor Gordon feel able to drop the Iron Curtain on the modern movement...?"<sup>135</sup> Pascoe also outdistanced Gordon's other critics by hauling *House Beautiful's* readers themselves into the muck: ridiculing the "Romantic-Type Modern" he claims she advocated, he wrote:

The only explanation I can find for this oddly stagnant approach is to examine the public to which Editor Gordon addresses herself. This, I think, is the clue. The readership of her magazine tends to be an economic minority, a small upper middle class group which has very little realistic kinship with how millions and millions of Americans actually will live in the 'next America.' As the readers of this magazine accumulate money and position, their conservatism tends to increase...<sup>136</sup>

"The Threat to the Next America" and ensuing commentary was all designed to hit a nerve with the public, and so it did. Outside the professional design press, it was less vociferously reported, but it was still news. Predictably, the trade journal *Retailing Daily* reported on it, running a short piece authored by Louis Goodenough and Lazette Van Houten, who was the wife of modernist architect Victor Gruen (whose work was profoundly significant in the arenas of free-market capitalism. His 1954 design for an enclosed shopping mall in Edina, Minnesota was the first enclosed mall in the United States). The newspaper emphasized the polarizing nature of Gordon's editorial, but the extent of the article available from the archives showed little bias for or against Gordon's stance.<sup>137</sup>

The mainstream press found the controversy newsworthy. *The Washington Post* ran a brief article that, interestingly, contained the only on-record response by Philip Johnson, who was at that time heading the Department of Architecture at MoMA. It said:

...In an interview in her office Miss Gordon, an energetic crusader for better living, made it clear she is not against all modern design, but she is against what

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<sup>133</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Mature Years*, 110-113.

<sup>134</sup> Pascoe's chair for Modernmasters has been noted to bear an uncanny resemblance to a more expensive chair designed earlier that year by Paul McCobb (See Goldstein, Jonathan, "A Tale of Two Chairs").

<sup>135</sup> Pascoe, 81.

<sup>136</sup> Pascoe, 111.

<sup>137</sup> Goodenough, Louis and Lazette van Houten, "Magazine Article Stirs Controversy." *Retailing Daily*, April 13, 1953, p. 1. Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library. Unfortunately, the continuation page of the article is missing from the archive.

she terms the cult of austerity. She feels there is a movement in design which is promoting “the mystical idea that less is more” ...

Architects and designers and retail sources asked by this newspaper to comment on Miss Gordon’s article showed wide disagreement. Some refused to comment. Philip C. Johnson, director of the Department of Architecture and Design for the Museum of Modern Art, said “Miss Gordon has brought to a head a lot of points going around in people’s minds.” He feels it is timely to reexamine the “classics of modern architecture” such as the interior by Mies van der Rohe and the house by LeCorbusier illustrated in the magazine. Johnson said it was a pleasure to have *House Beautiful* magazine step out boldly on controversial issues.”<sup>138</sup>

*The New York Times* reported on “The Threat to the Next America” only indirectly, in an article on Gordon’s May 7, 1953, speech to the Home Fashion League in New York. The article focused on the content of Gordon’s talk, quoting her as saying “Design for the home has social significance because it has social consequences. ... Either we go toward the development of individualism and individual differences, or we go toward collectivism and totalitarian control,” she warned. The article also paraphrases Gordon as noting particularly “the influence of that architectural style known as ‘international,’ which she condemned as ‘an ideal form of architecture for would-be dictators.’”<sup>139</sup>

*Harper’s*, which had championed Emily Genauer’s criticism of MoMA and published Genauer’s exposé of Congressman George Dondero’s McCarthyite agenda in restraining modern art, had published “Gently Sirs,” in editor Frederick Lewis Allen’s “After Hours” column, written under the pseudonym “Mr. Harper.” The piece was a short, sharp critique of *House Beautiful’s* campaign. Allen did not come to criticism by way of architectural discourse; unlike Haskell and Creighton, he stood well away from the necessity for diplomacy. Yet he understood *House Beautiful* to be exemplary as shelter magazines went:

First of all, let me shield myself by asserting that I yield to no one in my admiration for *House Beautiful*. The magazine is a “service” publication in the best sense of that abused term. ... *House Beautiful’s* April number was built around a book—Lyman Bryson’s *The Next America*—which admirably mixes vision and hope of a dawning age in which individuals will be themselves and be damned to tyrants. But in the same issue *House Beautiful* discovers Sin.

Although often tongue in cheek, his critique minced no words; he called *House Beautiful’s* attempts to split modern design into “good” and “bad” camps “preposterous,”<sup>140</sup> Allen aptly pointed out that much of the popularity of the styles at which Gordon rails is market-driven:

One of Miss Gordon’s arguments—elsewhere amplified by Mr. Barry—is the socioeconomic one that allies the International Style with collectivism, poverty, and the innate hatred of comfort. One has the impression that it is somehow a subversion of the prosperous, fun-loving, democratic spirit ... However you interpret it, this is the most palpable balderdash. As Miss Gordon may be

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<sup>138</sup> “Editor Assails Austerity in Modern Décor” *The Washington Post*, April 5, 1953.

<sup>139</sup> “Home Design Held of Social Import” *The New York Times*, May 8, 1953.

<sup>140</sup> Allen, 94-95.

reminded the next time she tries to buy a little black dress, elegant simplicity is expensive. For myself, if I ever overcome my present lack of possessions sufficiently, I can think of no greater luxury to afford than one of Mies's Barcelona footstools—which will go on being costly and handsome, no matter how loudly shouted at, until someone produces an economical copy.<sup>141</sup>

Over at the offices of *Architectural Forum*, Douglas Haskell was delighted, but somewhat concerned that Allen had portrayed *Architectural Forum* and *House and Home* as opposing *House Beautiful* on the grounds of taste, when in fact, he wrote, their only grounds for opposition was their inclusiveness.<sup>142</sup> He wrote a letter to “Mr. Harper,” expressing this concern as well as his congratulations, but for whatever reason *Harper's* did not run it.

If Elizabeth Gordon expected the outcry in opposition to her campaign, she did not publicly say so. Although the “Good Modern” vs. “Bad Modern” dichotomy would continue to appear in *House Beautiful's* pages, she did not again utilize, at least to nearly the same extent, the rhetoric of the ongoing anti-communist fervor as a bludgeon against the International Style. In the months following the appearance of editorials and letters in reaction to her campaign, she stood by her position. But her articles and correspondence indicate that she was not comfortable with having so-aligned herself with McCarthyism, and she realized with dismay that by obliquely employing the metaphor of International Style architecture with communism, she had failed to make her point. The attention given to “The Threat to the Next America,” both in the world of architectural discourse and by the media in general, threatened to hang on Gordon a reputation for xenophobia. Even if she had earned it, it was not one she cared to carry.

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<sup>141</sup> Allen, 95.

<sup>142</sup> Haskell to Eric Larabee, June 11, 1953, Douglas Putnam Haskell Papers, Avery.



Figure 37. Photograph and plan of the Stanley G. Harris House, A. James Speyer, 1950.  
Source: Vinci, A. *James Speyer*, 15-16.

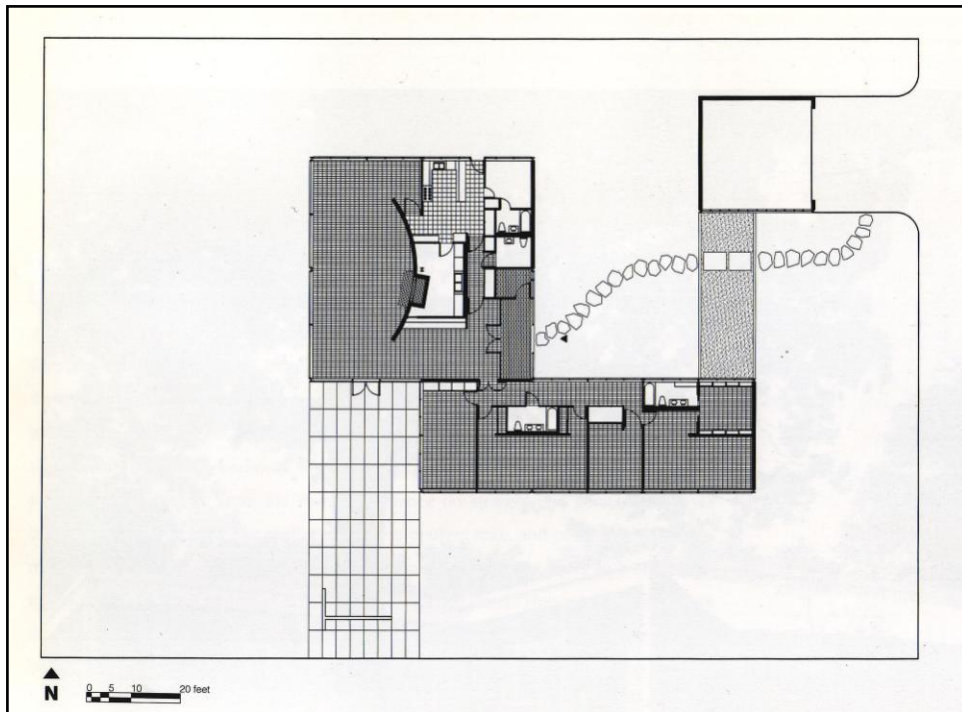


Figure 38. Section drawing of the Bavinger House, Bruce Goff, 1950. Source: DeLong, *Bruce Goff: Toward Absolute Architecture*, 110.

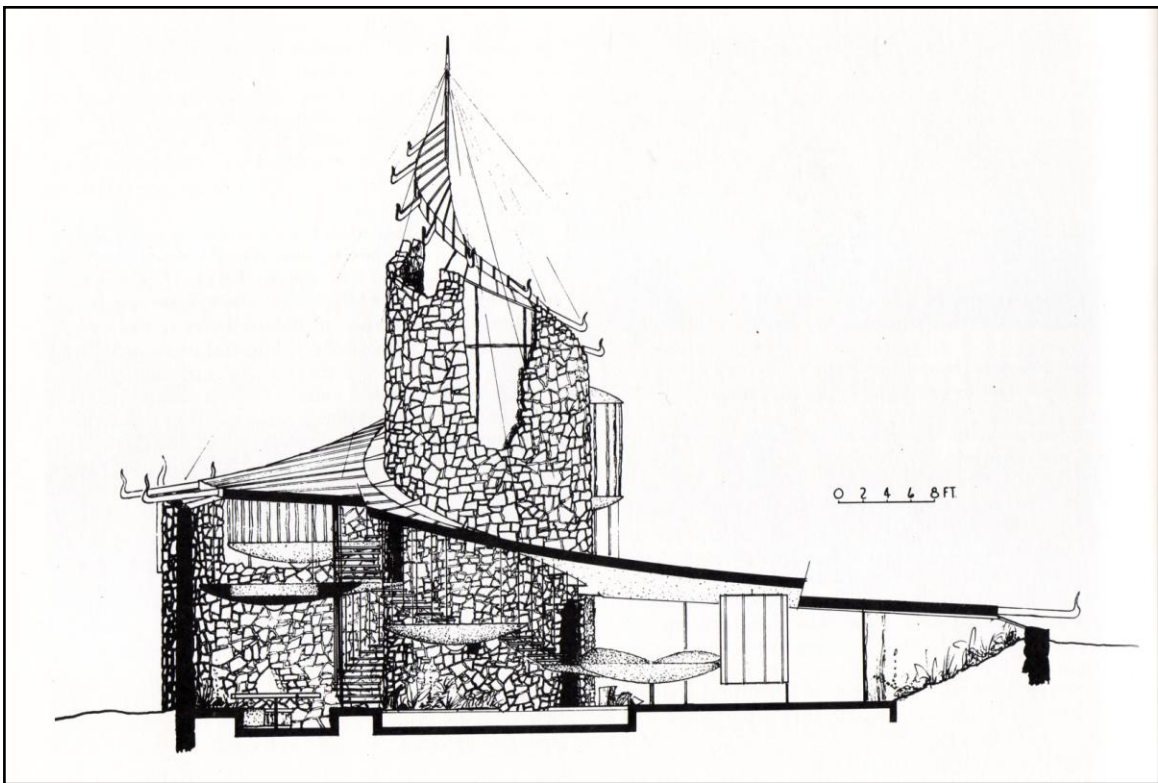
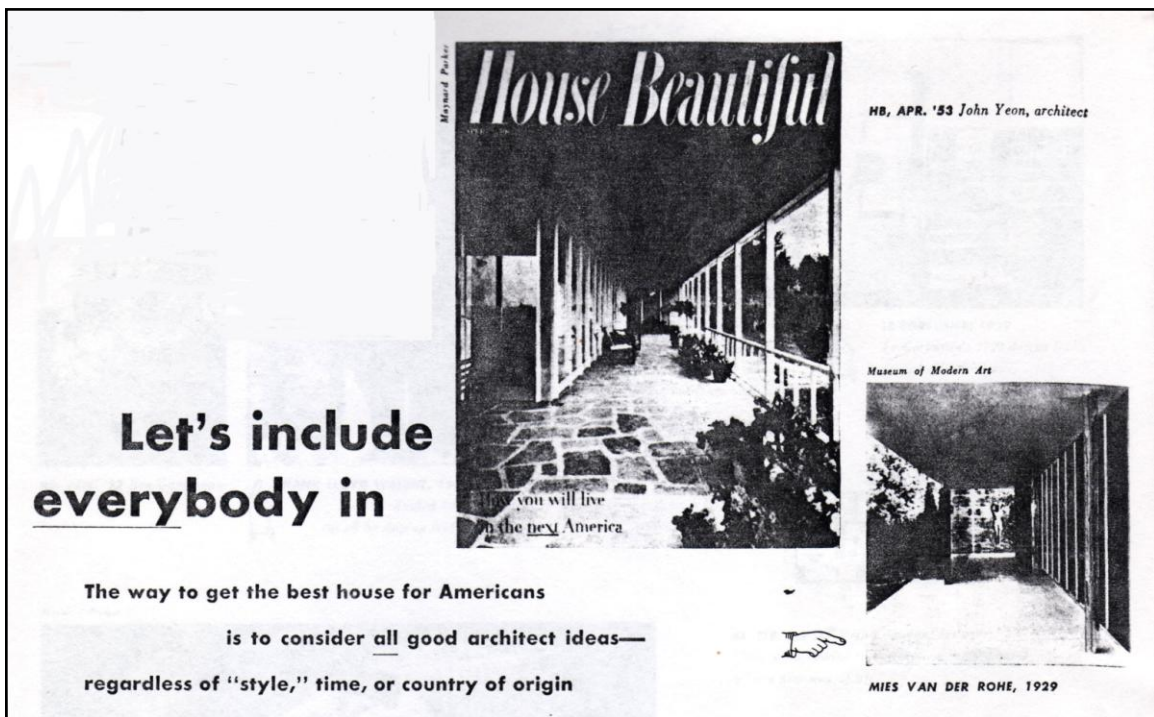
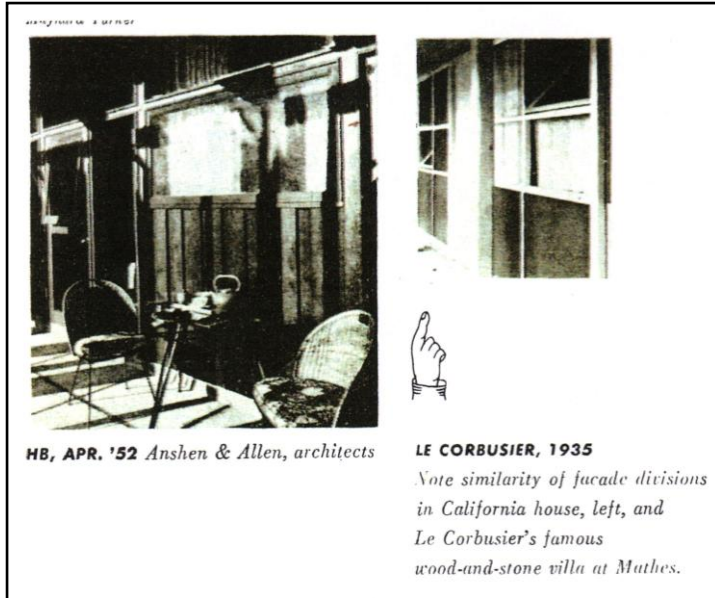




Figure 39. Title graphic of Douglas Haskell's article, "Let's Include *Everybody In*," in *House and Home*. The graphic compares *House Beautiful's* April 1953 cover, showing the covered patio of the Shaw House by John Yeon, with Mies' 1929 Barcelona Pavilion. Haskell uses

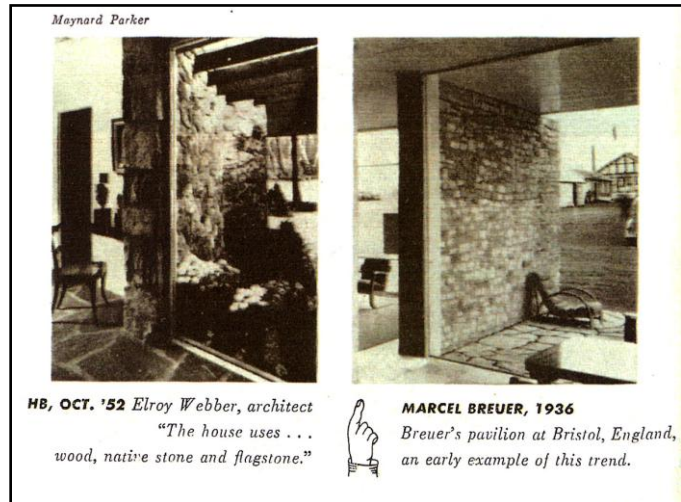
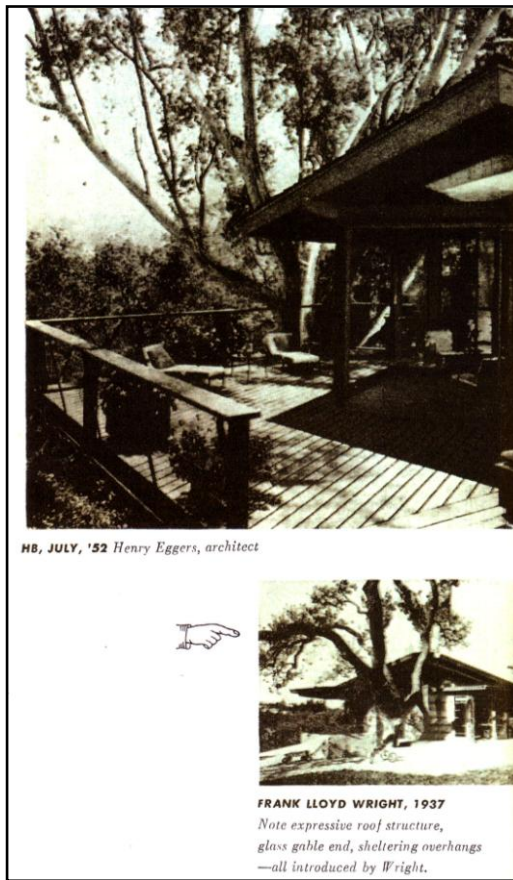


this comparison to imply hypocrisy on Elizabeth Gordon's part, but although the photographs are similar, the buildings could not have been more different. *House and Home* June 1953, 108.



Douglas Haskell's "Lets Include Everybody In" compared images of details in work recently shown in the pages of *House Beautiful* with images of details in less recent work by the "masters." Source: *House and Home* June 1953, p. 110.

**Figure 40. Comparing Anshen & Allen to LeCorbusier. *House and Home* June 1953, 110.**



**Figure 41. Comparing Elroy Webber to Marcel Breuer. *House and Home* June 1953, 110.**

**Figure 42. Comparing Henry Eggers to Frank Lloyd Wright. *House and Home* June 1953, 110.**

## CHAPTER SIX: OUT OF THE CROSSHAIRS AND INTO THE AFTERMATH

It must have seemed to Elizabeth Gordon, in the months following April 1953, that “The Threat to the Next America” also threatened to define her tenure at *House Beautiful*, overshadowing the Climate Control program, the Pace Setter program, and anything else she might undertake in the future. Yet, on the wings of the cheers and in the face of the pointed barbs, Gordon stood by her message. Although much of what took place outside the printed page is not known, she refined her argument in a speech, entitled “The Responsibility of an Editor,” she delivered that June at the Press Club Luncheon of the American Furniture Mart in Chicago. She later adapted the speech for print as a longer editorial, “Does Design have Social Significance,” for the October 1953 issue later that year. The speech and editorial reiterate many of the same points made in “The Threat to the Next America,” but it is clear that Gordon was attempting to clarify her meaning, which had been muddled by the nameless accusations and oblique references contained in “The Threat to the Next America.”

Gordon certainly paid a price for the battle she waged. The campaign drove out at least one key member on her staff, architectural editor James Marston Fitch. It may also have taken a toll on her personal life; John deKoven Hill recalled that it was not long after 1953 that she separated from her husband, Carl Norcross, who was employed at *House and Home*.<sup>1</sup> What correspondence of Gordon’s that is available consists of letters between her and Frank Lloyd Wright, who attached his own crusade against the “glass box boys” to hers immediately following the April 1953 issue. In a letter dated June 18, 1953, he asked her, “How does the upset roll — Plans for the “big show” proceed?”<sup>2</sup> By this he meant her speech, for the American Furniture Mart was, certainly, a “big show.” It was at this annual extravaganza, which Gordon

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, 351.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright to Elizabeth Gordon, June 18, 1953. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

and many of her staffers attended every year, that the furniture manufacturers rolled out their newest and best designs.<sup>3</sup> This event would have been the largest gathering of her peers and colleagues, and Gordon surely saw such chance to address so many of them in one place as an opportunity to fire another salvo. But she did not seem so intent on ratcheting up the pitch of the battle as she did in clarifying what she meant to say in the first place.

As she addressed her fellow editors, Gordon was initially self-effacing as she acknowledged the controversy, saying, “Heaven knows, I have thundered enough and I have certainly invited the lightening!... Sometimes I feel almost responsible for all the rain we’ve been having this spring.” But she reiterated most of the points she made in “The Threat to the Next America,” although she toned down the bluster. She told her audience:

I feel fully responsible for my part in exposing design, design for architecture and design for living, to a new scrutiny by the rational eye. There is some bad modern design which I have tried to analyze in terms of elementary common sense. I have tried to unwrap this school of design from the ritualistic jargon that has mystically clothed it and present its naked philosophy in the language of the layman.<sup>4</sup>

She did not see the issue in terms of broad consumer choice. Her responsibility was to the reader and to the necessity of selection: “There must be selection, if for no other reason than for space. Therefore, there must be principles of selection.” She sees selection as a service, which she and her staff provide the reader, who pays for this service upon purchasing the magazine. It comes to light, in her speech, that Gordon feels as if those who objected to her stance missed her point, which she felt was that International Style houses did not meet *House Beautiful’s* criteria of “function, structure, and beauty” (this is, of course, a translation of the Vitruvian principles, “*Utilitas, Firmitas, Venustas*,” but Gordon does not burden her readers with the Latin).<sup>5</sup> Among what could be many reasons they missed it is the fact that Gordon did not make mention of these criteria until near the end of “The Threat to the Next America,” and it is entirely likely that those who were incensed simply did not read that far.

Whether or not her argument in the June speech and October editorial had stronger legs when more calmly and rationally made—albeit a great deal less famously—is somewhat beside the point. No doubt those who agreed with her still agreed, and those who objected still objected. But certain key points and phrases do address some aspects of the controversy. Evident in the speech is a reflection of the genuine fear that many across the political spectrum were voicing in those years; those on the right feared communist incursions, and those on the left fearing McCarthy and the HUAC’s oppression and witch hunts. Gordon comes down on the side of “humanism”:

America and the Western world, if not the whole world, is at a fateful fork in the road. Either we continue to go forward to a new humanism in our political and social life or we head for totalitarianism and total control. Either we progress toward a new and revived emphasis on human values or we move toward a sterile,

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<sup>3</sup> Hill, 369.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon, “The Responsibility of an Editor,” Speech to the Press Club Luncheon of the American Furniture Mart, June 22, 1953. Thomas Church Collection, Environmental Design Archive, Berkeley. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon, “The Responsibility of an Editor,” 4.

abstract, almost geometric stylization that would end the rich promise of contemporary life.<sup>6</sup>

She went on to make some attempt to remove the ambiguity around the potential for interpretation of her stance as McCarthyism: “We decided to expose the International Style knowing that some would accuse us if adding to the hysteria of today, which we too decry; of engaging in the current pastime of name calling, which we despise...”<sup>7</sup>

Gordon replied to Frank Lloyd Wright’s inquiry about the “rolling upset” in a letter dated July 9, 1953, a few weeks after her speech (she included a copy for his assessment), she wrote:

The controversy was much talked about at the recent furniture market in Grand Rapids and Chicago, and nearly every speaker referred to it positively or negatively. More speakers made negative remarks, though, if you want the tally...The Big Point is very hard to put over: that design has social consequences and, therefore, eventually possibly political consequences. We Americans are very naïve on this point, even though art is widely used as a propaganda medium in Mexico and in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Gordon’s thesis, “design has social consequences,” was not so radical or even very debatable. In her October editorial, she encapsulated it in a sentence that was probably a given to most architects among her readers and was and still is at the root of much social theory pertaining to architecture: “For *how men build determines how they live—and how they live influences, sometimes determines, how they think and act*” [emphasis hers].<sup>9</sup> It may be questionable whether or not her readers found this point all that salient or even interesting, but it seems that it was not directed at them. There was one more letter to the editor Gordon would print the following October, and the editorial, “Does Design Have Social Significance?” was her reply to this letter.

The letter to the editor in the October 1953 issue was group letter signed by no less than 30 architects or design professionals from the San Francisco Bay area. It is not known who among the signers organized the missive, but the lead signatures are John Carden Campbell and Worley K. Wong, who had sent a prior letter to *House and Home* commending Haskell’s article, “Let’s Include Everybody In,” in which he graphically, but with little regard to context, pointed out the inconsistencies in Gordon’s ideas. Some signers of the letter who had already weighed in, in previous letters to *House Beautiful* or the professional press, were Henry Hill, William Wurster, and Lawrence Halprin. The list featured some other notable names in San Francisco Bay area design, and a great many who were associated with the Schools of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. Among them were: Wurster’s partners, architects Theodore C. Bernardi and Donn Emmons; landscape architect Garrett Eckbo; architect George Rockrise and his wife, Margaret; landscape architect Robert Royston; architect and photographer Esther Born (her husband and business partner, Ernest Born, was absent from the list); landscape architect Kathryn Stedman (noted for her work for Eichler Homes); photographer Roger Sturtevant; landscape architect Asa Hanamoto; architect Rex W. Allen; architect John W. Kruse. Notably absent was another Berkeley architecture and design faculty

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon, “The Responsibility of an Editor,” 6.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon, “The Responsibility of an Editor,” 13.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Gordon to Frank Lloyd Wright, July 9, 1953. Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon, “Does Design Have Social Significance?” 230.

members Vernon DeMars, who had written Douglas Haskell in regard to Gordon's editorial the previous July. Catherine Bauer, wife of William Wurster and close friend of Lewis Mumford, also elected not to sign the letter for unknown reasons.

The letter was a four-point protest against Gordon's political insinuations in "The Threat to the Next America," and all four points addressed the perceived xenophobia in the editorial. In sum, the letter rejected: 1) the idea that any art or architecture could lead to totalitarianism, 2) that art works should be evaluated on the basis of any political criteria, 3) the "implication that all 'good' art has its roots in America and all that is European is subversive, perverted or sick"; and 4) the letter pointed out that, while Gordon had a right to criticize art in any of its expressions, she also had a responsibility to be fair and reasonable.<sup>10</sup>

In its way, the letter appears to have been the result of something like the child's game of "telephone," in which one child whispers into another child's ear, and that child repeats it in the same fashion to another child, and that child to another, until it comes back to the original whisperer in an amusingly altered form. The "October letter" responded to an editorial that seems to have been distorted through multiple stages of interpretation (e.g., Gordon did not imply that all good art was American or that all that was European "subversive, perverted, or sick"). But the fact that such a letter had been circulated and sent indicates that someone on the list cared deeply about presenting a united front for San Francisco Bay area architects and designers in the face of the Gordon's allegations. As many of the architects on the list were associated with the Bay Region style, in particular William Wurster, they seem to have been eager to minimize the schism between themselves and the architects of the International Style—a schism that had been identified by Lewis Mumford and widened by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius, and others at the 1948 symposium at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

In addition to running "Does Design Have Social Significance?" in reply to the October letter, Gordon also published a short retort by Frank Lloyd Wright. Carrying the heading "For a Democratic Architecture," the piece is less a cohesive statement and more a litany of outbursts about art and architecture. No reader familiar with Wright could be blamed for seeing senility between the lines, and some have speculated that Wright was no longer, by this time, in full possession of his faculties.<sup>11</sup> Yet Wright's private correspondence with Gordon was coherent enough, and it would be for the rest of their friendship. The archives of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, at Taliesin West contain evidence that the "statement" was dictated, or perhaps sewn together from a conversation between Wright and Gordon: Two envelopes from the Plaza Hotel in New York, where Wright stayed whenever he was in the city, are covered in notes, written in Elizabeth Gordon's hand, and include verbatim a great many of the points in Wright's published statement.<sup>12</sup>

*House Beautiful* continued to address the intertwined questions of what constituted "Good Modern," "Bad Modern," and "American Style" over the course of the next year. Finally, in the May 1954 issue, Joseph A. Barry somehow managed to both prematurely and presciently pronounce "Modern" dead.<sup>13</sup> It was the victim of the "modernist cult" who "disposed of it in a

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<sup>10</sup> "Letter to the Editor," *House Beautiful*, October 1953, 312.

<sup>11</sup> cf., Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 175.

<sup>12</sup> Document No. 1502.001.015, Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Taliesin West.

<sup>13</sup> Barry, "Is Modern Dead?" 152-157.

formula” and “embalmed it as a style and a fashion.” But lest its foes start dancing a grave-top jig, Barry pronounced “traditional” dead as well. What was left? “Everything we like!”<sup>14</sup> The article was an apparent attempt to salvage *House Beautiful*’s ability to present modern architecture and design to its readers, without caving to the definition of “Modern” that had become the dominant narrative (interestingly, this is one of the first articles in which *House Beautiful* does not, as a matter of course, capitalize “modern”). It included a multi-page photo spread of rooms tastefully and modernly furnished in T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings designs (his book, *Homes of the Brave*, had just been released), and recalled the “Next America” issue of the year before:

But the word *modern* is becoming so identified in architecture, for instance with the few publicized buildings of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Gropius, and in furniture with the molded plywood [a reference to Eames chairs], wire mesh, basket seat, non-support, hosed-down effect that we’re sorely tempted to give the word *modern* to museums as part of their permanent collections.”<sup>15</sup>

*House Beautiful* suggested an alternative: *post-modern*. But Barry is ambivalent, and asks for reader input. *Post-modern* appears not to have stuck, and did not come into use in the field until sometime later.

*House Beautiful* was not the only vehicle of the press to question the temporal validity of the International Style. *Architectural Forum*, it turns out, had beaten them to the punch by quite a bit. The magazine ran an article in the September 1953 issue entitled, “After The International Style — then what?”<sup>16</sup> Written by architect Robert Woods Kennedy, whom David Gebhard called “the advocate of the ‘soft’ Cottage Style,”<sup>17</sup> it advocated jettisoning the term *International Style* in favor of the equally oblique “Directivism.” Letters in response—both of them—were uniformly derisive.<sup>18</sup>

Elizabeth Gordon stayed at *House Beautiful* for another eleven years, retiring in 1964. In the course of the decade between “The Threat to the Next America” she hired Taliesin apprentice Curtis Besinger to work beside John deKoven Hill, and Besinger ultimately replaced Hill as head editor of the architecture department. Her obituary in the *New York Times* noted that she left the magazine in anger over the increasing ability of advertisers to dictate editorial content,<sup>19</sup> but John deKoven Hill acknowledged that she was frequently battling the Hearst Board over financial issues, and that members of the board had been periodically unhappy with her, in particular over her insistence on depicting Japanese design.<sup>20</sup> In 1965, Gordon put her culinary talents to good use when she authored a decidedly “international style” cookbook, *Cuisines of the Western World*. The cookbook was devoted to the cooking of the Mediterranean, France and Northern Europe, Mexico, and Central and South America. In the forward, she noted that she had omitted Germany, Britain, and the United States, the reason being that Britain and Germany were the

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<sup>14</sup> Barry, “Is Modern Dead?” 152.

<sup>15</sup> Barry, “Is Modern Dead?” 157.

<sup>16</sup> Kennedy, 130-131.

<sup>17</sup> Gebhard, David. “Royal Barry Wills and the American Colonial Revival.”

<sup>18</sup> “Letters,” *Architectural Forum*, November 1953, 74-75.

<sup>19</sup> Iovine, Julie V. *New York Times*, September 17, 2000, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Hill, 313,



principal culinary parents of American cooking, and to highlight these countries would be unnecessary.<sup>21</sup>

Although the date is uncertain, Gordon left New York in the late 1960s or early 1970s. She reunited with Carl Norcross and the couple moved to Adamstown, Maryland. There, they lived in a thoroughly traditional two-story Colonial house.<sup>22</sup> In 1972, Gordon wrote the catalogue copy for an exhibition on Scandinavian design, which toured the United States. For this she received a silver medal signed by the four Scandinavian countries, and was made a member of the Order of the Lion by the Finnish government. Her goddaughter Brooke Shearer Talbot recalled that she wore the medallions at “every opportunity.”<sup>23</sup>

One more award would be important to Gordon, for with it came some degree of vindication. In 1986, 45 years after she began her work at *House Beautiful*, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) made Elizabeth Gordon an honorary member. Her name was placed in nomination by Curtis Besinger. In his letter to the AIA making a case for her award, Besinger wrote of the Climate Control Project, the many articles featuring Thomas Church, the Pace Setter program, her continued promotion of Frank Lloyd Wright, Bernard Maybeck, and Greene and Green, as well as her promotion of “awareness of environmental concerns, well before such concerns became political.” But lastly, Besinger stood behind “The Threat to the Next America,” as his mentor Frank Lloyd Wright had 33 years before:

Her prescience and courage in challenging the stultifying domination of the ‘modern’ movement in April 1953...She did this 13 years before Venturi challenged the modernist dogma in *Complexity and Contradiction*, (1966) which Arthur Drexler in his preface describes as opposing “what many would consider Establishment or established opinion; 21 years before Peter Blake confessed to the *Follies of Modern Architecture* (Atlantic, Sept., 1974); 24 years before Jenks announced that “modern architecture” had died in his *Language of Post-Modernism* (1977) and 28 years before Tom Wolfe cashed in on his best seller, *From Bauhaus to Our House*.<sup>24</sup>

Edgar Tafel and Charles Montooth, who also sent letters, were likewise associated with Taliesin. But in general the endorsers on the 22-man list—which was populated entirely by architects, with 15 letters of endorsement and 7 “comments” conveyed by a means other than the post—seem to agree that whether she was right or wrong, her accomplishments outweighed the controversy.

Harwell Hamilton Harris wrote of the “inestimable value of the Climate Control project to professionals and non-professionals.” His letter shows the influence of his wife, Jean Harris, as well. He cites: “[t]he discovery of the architecture of other lands, the re-discovery of prophets of our own forgotten past, (the turn-of-the-century work of Greene and Greene, Barnard Maybeck, and the early work of Frank Lloyd Wright, etc.)”<sup>25</sup> Henry Eggers also wrote, “She

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<sup>21</sup> Gordon, *Cuisines of the Western World*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Brooke Shearer Talbot, personal communication, April 28, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Iovine, 50.

<sup>24</sup> Curtis Besinger to the Jury for Honorary Members, September 1914[sic], 1986. The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives.

<sup>25</sup> Harwell Hamilton Harris to the Jury for Honorary Members, AIA. June 14, 1986. The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives.

really has a passionate interest in the subject and has been most effective in presenting the proper view of the value of the architect.”<sup>26</sup> Robert Mosher, who had spent some time with Besinger on the staff of *House Beautiful* in the late 1950s, wrote that she was “a leader, a pioneer, a courageous woman with the energy, determination and the ability to inspire the American people in their quest for a more fulfilling life.”<sup>27</sup> Other better-known designers sending accolades were Gardner Dailey, Robert Anshen, Nathaniel Owings, John Lautner, and Vladimir Ossipoff.

Charles H. Kahn, professor in the Architecture Department at the University of Kansas, looked back at the controversy around “The Threat to the Next America,” writing, that it was this issue that “seemed to stand in the way of Ms. Gordon’s full acceptance by the architectural fraternity.” He went on:

It is now 35 years since that famous and, admittedly for the time, somewhat intemperate attack on the anointed standard bearer of modern architecture [Hahn was not specific who he meant by this, but likely he meant Mies]. What is for me most interesting is to reread that article in the light of the present polemic in our profession which identifies the same failings in so-called modern architecture that she articulated, albeit to replace that flawed stylistic bias with another, equally flawed, media anointed style. Were she still active, I can imagine Ms. Gordon railing against so-called Post Modernism with an article only slightly revised from the 1953 original. We would certainly accept such an article with a great deal more equanimity than we as a profession did in 1953.<sup>28</sup>

Another notable letter came from Alfred Browning Parker, the Floridian whose designs had been favorites of Gordon’s through the 1950s, and who had designed the first of the Pace Setter houses. Parker wrote that this was not the first letter he had written to this effect. In 1964 he and Miles Colean, the economic writer for the *House Beautiful* architecture department, had put forth Elizabeth Gordon for the same award, and were put off until 1965, when they tried again. That year, Parker was told that the AIA board ““did not favor Elizabeth Gordon as an honorary member’...In retrospect, the negative response to an Honorary AIA Membership for Elizabeth may have been due in part to her criticism of the Farnsworth House designed by Mies van der Rohe near Chicago...This did infuriate many of Mies’ followers (and at that time they were a powerful lot).”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Henry Eggers to the Jury for Honorary Members, AIA. June 12, 1986. The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Mosher to the Jury for Honorary Members, AIA. August 13, 1986. The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives. **Note:** Robert Mosher was not a Taliesin Fellow. This very common mistake has been repeatedly used to support the claim that in the 1950s *House Beautiful* became an “outpost” of Taliesin (cf., Diane Maddex, *Frank Lloyd Wright’s House Beautiful*; Hession and Pickrel, *Frank Lloyd Wright in New York*). Architect Robert K. Mosher, of San Diego, worked at *House Beautiful* in New York during a sabbatical from his practice, from 1955-1957. Taliesin Fellow Byron “Bob” Mosher, who was instrumental to Wright’s work at Fallingwater, left Taliesin in the 1950s and established an architectural practice in Spain (personal communication, Margo Stipe of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, December 3, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Charles H. Kahn to the Jury for Honorary Members, AIA. August 18, 1986. The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Browning Parker to Ms. Maria Murray, AIA. May 1, 1986. The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives.

Italian architect Bruno Zevi, editor of *L'architettura*, and author of *Toward an Organic Architecture*, a book which utilized some of Frank Lloyd Wright's principles to address postwar reconstruction in Italy, recalled forthrightly:

I have known Elizabeth quite well during the years she was editor of *House Beautiful*. Sometimes, I have disagreed with her, especially when she would label as "Fascist" those who were for the International Style. I also resented the Nationalistic flavour she was giving to every house she considered "American." However, her cultural contribution was quite positive...

I still keep in my library the *House Beautiful* issue published immediately after the death of Frank Lloyd Wright. I believe that, even in this occasion, Elizabeth did a work better than any other magazine editor in the world, including myself.

At the time I knew her, there were many people who hated Elizabeth Gordon. They thought that she was "Fascist." But now time was gone by, and we can be all more objective.<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation with two stated aims: first, to discover why Elizabeth Gordon wrote "The Threat to the Next America," and second, to understand the editorial and its responses for what they say about the historical, social, and political environments in which they were written. In pursuing these goals, I have uncovered a story that is breathtakingly complex—far more so than I would have anticipated—and much of which may still be hidden in the myriad threads with which it is woven. Elizabeth Gordon was not an architect or designer, although she had a keen eye for both and in later years would consult professionally in the role of interior designer. She was a journalist, a critic and commentator, an analyst, and an alarmist. The fires ignited by "The Threat to the Next America" were both deliberate and inadvertent. As Bruno Zevi pointed out in 1986, the objectivity afforded by hindsight may allow a more nuanced understanding of not only Elizabeth Gordon's motives, but those of all the players on this stage.

With "The Threat to the Next America," Gordon inserted herself into three different spheres, all of which were electrified with tension. I believe she did this knowingly, but without a full understanding of the repercussions that would follow. She chose to employ fraught statements like "Break people's confidence in reason and their own common sense and they are on the way to attaching themselves to a leader, a mass movement, or any sort of authority beyond themselves," and terms like "totalitarianism," "self-chosen elite," and "dictators." In doing so she trod heavily in political territory, and deliberately conjured visions of surveillance and oppression, with which the news media were already inundating the public, as McCarthyism infested governmental, educational, and cultural institutions across the country. While Gordon did identify former Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer as a Communist, I believe if she had meant to align the International Style with communism, she would have done so more directly—others in her field, Dorothy Thompson being the standout, had no qualms about invoking communism as the bogeyman of American domesticity. But Gordon did not differentiate if the International

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<sup>30</sup> Bruno Zevi to the Jury for Honorary Members, AIA, June 10, 1986. The American Institute of Architects Library and Archives.

Style was a potential vehicle of communist or fascist oppression. To her, the difference was academic—both threatened the ability of people to apply their own individual taste choices, which she maintained were founded in “common sense” and “rationality,” to their housing.

Yet to those whose allegiances or affiliations made them possible targets of McCarthy and the HUAC, the difference was enormous. These individuals saw her argument as coming from within a powerful corporation—Hearst—whose newspaper division had shown itself utterly willing to foment anti-communist sentiment.<sup>31</sup> Some, like William Wurster, had been personally subjected to the scrutiny of the McCarthyite witch hunters. Further, the attempts of right-wing politicians like Rep. George Dondero to align modern art with Communists were well known in art and architecture circles, thanks to such exposés as Emily Genauer’s “Still Life With Red Herring” in *Harper’s*. Gordon’s subsequent attempts to quietly distance herself from accusations of McCarthyism and her decial of it in her October 1953 editorial, “Does Design Have Social Significance,” indicates that she did not anticipate that she would be so-associated. Moreover, that a great many of her readers within the design and architecture professions, including Emily Genauer, did not see the connection between “The Threat to the Next America” and McCarthyism as overt or deliberate (even though as in the case of Bruce Goff they may have seen it as aligned with their own nativist beliefs or tendencies), reinforces this view.

That the postwar period was a time in which mass consumption and the scope of selection in material goods of all kinds reached new and undreamt-of heights is more than well researched and documented. Thomas Hine has called the decade from 1954 to 1964 “one of history’s greatest shopping sprees.”<sup>32</sup> Gordon’s fears that totalitarianism might result from International Style houses is easy for us, today, to find a bit ridiculous, for in the postwar landscape of mass consumption, totalitarianism would have been hard pressed to make inroads regardless of its architectural footing. But today we have the benefit of hindsight in understanding mass consumption and its capitalist foundations as an insurmountable counterforce to communism. As Greg Castillo has shown, the threat really ran the other direction, as the calculated creation of an “East bloc analogue of the West’s postwar consumer stimulated material desires and a sense of entitlement within an economy characterized by fluctuating shortages, destabilizing late-socialist societies.”<sup>33</sup> But in 1953, democracy’s firm footing in the piers of postwar mass consumption was less perceptible. For Gordon, who formed her worldview in years of Progressive Reform, economic depression, and two world wars, ongoing consumer choice was as fragile as peace, ergo the bolded closing sentence of “The Threat to the Next America”: **Don’t let them take it away.**

A second ongoing conflict into which Gordon inserted the argument against the International Style was that of the tensions between consumer culture and architecture culture, in which gender provided a heavy set of baggage. With architecture as a field, particularly the architecture of restricted production, so male-dominated in the postwar period that women practitioners were more an aberration than a minority, the discourse on modern architecture in the U.S. had few women participants. Those women who had participated, like Elizabeth Mock of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), had been promoters, not detractors. In Mock’s case, even she was sent to the outer rings of the discussion by Philip Johnson and others who had “staked a claim” on the presentation of postwar modern architecture (although some, like Frank

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<sup>31</sup> Fried, 97.; Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 175.

<sup>32</sup> Hine, *Populuxe*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 205.

Lloyd Wright, might have found “jumped the claim” more apt). The dominant narrative, as it was promoted by MoMA and the professional press, was that of a heroic, masculinized modern architecture, in which European modernists were often (but not always) the masters. As Gwendolyn Wright has astutely observed, the way museums and other architectural institutions celebrate “masters” and “masterpieces” suggests “a precipitous drop from this ethereal realm to the nadir of mediocrity.”<sup>34</sup>

“The Threat to the Next America” was directed at domestic consumers, not designers, and as advertising in the service magazine industry reflected, those consumers were gendered female. While practitioners in the architecture field had no problem with women in the shelter press advocating *for* modern architecture, the language contained in many of the responses to “The Threat to the Next America” and the ensuing editorials and articles in the professional press reflects that many felt Gordon’s gender made her an unwelcome intruder in the discussion:

- “*House Beautiful has long stood as the Queen of Gadgeteers...*” (Ralph S. Twitchell, *House and Home*, August 1953);
- “*Your reply to the pretty lady on the soapbox beautiful is a masterpiece.*” (Eliot Noyes, *House and Home*, August 1953);
- “*I am aware of the somewhat hysterical blasts that occasioned your article.*” (Robert Carson, *House and Home*, August 1953);
- “The shrill notes recently heard seem to center on the “box”...” (Paul Rudolph, *House and Home*, August 1953);
- “Grandmother, what big teeth you have!...” (George Howe, *House Beautiful*, July, 1953).

Further, by revealing the specifics of Edith Farnsworth’s problems with the design of her house, Gordon exposed as flawed the work of one of the foremost of modern architecture’s masters, Mies van der Rohe. Even then, the house was heavily touted, having been featured in *Architectural Forum* and in an exhibition at MoMA in 1947. Yet, although the architectural press had reported Dr. Farnsworth’s lawsuit against Mies, which was primarily about cost overruns, it had not called into question the ways in which the design addressed program, save to say the house was obviously not designed for a family.<sup>35</sup> *House Beautiful*’s advocacy for Farnsworth underscored that Gordon’s dichotomization of “Good Modern” and “Bad Modern” was not intended to address modern architecture as *art*, but as *dwelling*, i.e., whether or not it was useful and life-enhancing to consumers, be they middle class or wealthy, suburban or avant-garde. For Gordon, in the absence of *Utilitas*, *Venusitas* was completely beside the point.

This extended even to the imagery of the architecture, as Gordon’s objections to “stripped down” modernism was also about the practice of purging the “unnecessary” objects of daily life prior to an interior being photographed for professional magazines.<sup>36</sup> Recalling Cranz’s model of taste formation, “Taste = (Pragmatics + Symbols)Integrated Aesthetically,” *symbolic* objects serve solely to represent such aspects of an individual’s identity as group affiliation, relationships to family and community, and also are generally important to conveying taste cultures and

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<sup>34</sup> Wright, Gwendolyn, “Women in Modernism,” 2.

<sup>35</sup> Blake, *The Master Builders*, 231; “Farnsworth House,” *Architectural Forum*, October 1951, 156-62.

<sup>36</sup> Shulman.

identification.<sup>37</sup> *Pragmatic* objects, such as chairs, serve a function, in addition to having physical attributes that convey taste identification. In the imagery of modern architecture in the mainstream media, removing symbolic objects worked, in effect, to marginalize women. This was in one part because these objects represented mass consumption in the domestic sphere, which was culturally understood to be female practice. It was also because these objects were typically shown in an *arrangement*, the production of which was also interpreted as female practice. Although *House Beautiful* was read by design professionals, including architects, its imagery was aimed at the female majority of its readership, whose behavior as consumers supported the magazine's advertisers. By contrast, another magazine aimed not at architecture professionals but at male consumers, *Playboy*, also periodically featured articles on modern design in the postwar period. In its pages, the modern interior was shown idealized, in an artist's impressionistic rendering, while photographs of the mass-produced pragmatic objects (i.e., furniture) displayed in the drawing, abstracted the pieces from the room. This removed any "feminine" association that would have resulted from depicting photographs of the objects themselves arranged in a domestic context (Figure 43).

The third ongoing conflict into which Gordon inserted herself by publicizing "The Threat to the Next America" concerned the tensions between schools of modern architecture and their regional expression across the country. These tensions were greatly exacerbated by the 1948 MoMA symposium, "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" Although the symposium got press coverage through MoMA, it had not been the stuff of the shelter press, and the tensions between the International Style and other schools or strains of modern architecture was an internal debate in the field. Elizabeth Gordon interrupted this debate. Her "Good Modern" vs. "Bad Modern" juxtaposition, which had been ongoing since the 1940s, had demonstrated that *House Beautiful* would promote a more "organic" modernism (such as Harris's Havens House), but not more overtly experimental work (such as that going up at the time in New Canaan). Despite this, she had likely been easy for powerful institutions publicizing modern architecture, like MoMA, to ignore. That she was not welcome in the conversation was clear when MoMA's Alfred H. Barr, Jr., addressed her editorial in both *The Magazine of Building* and *Progressive Architecture*, but did not, apparently, write a letter to *House Beautiful*; he would engage in discourse *about* her but not *with* her. Illuminating the split between the International Style and the Bay Region style, Barr articulated the case for the avant-garde: "Some prefer a completely accommodating architect whose chief goals are comfort and *Gemuetlichkeit*... Others prefer an architect who will provide surroundings of a greater elegance of form, or consistency of style. If they hire him, they may have to make some concessions."<sup>38</sup> Barr has at once excluded Gordon from the discussion and thrown into stark relief the schism between regionalism and MoMA-sanctioned modern architecture.

Yet, just as the architectural establishment at and around MoMA railed at Gordon for transgressing the established boundaries within discourse, MoMA also transgressed a boundary between avant-garde modernism and middle-class domesticity. It did this with its 1949 prototype house project, in which a house for "the typical middle-income American family" was designed by Marcel Breuer and constructed in the museum's sculpture garden, with the paying public parading through. Intended to educate the public as to the possibilities of modern housing, the project was not unique in MoMA's efforts to sell mass consumption. Its 1952 "Good Design"

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<sup>37</sup> Cranz, 130; Sparke, 9-11.

<sup>38</sup> "P/A/ Views" June 1953, 9-10.

exhibition later did the same for mass produced furniture and other objects. Driller notes that by choosing Breuer, “the museum may have been attempting to counter nationalist prejudice against architects born outside the USA...”<sup>39</sup> Perhaps it was. But the house was heralded in the mainstream press as an innovative departure from the earlier white-block forms of the International Style because it contained, in Breuer’s own words, “. . .the old materials—stone, unpainted wood—[used in] fresh ways” and could “grow gently out of the land.” Breuer, and the museum’s architecture department, were shifting *toward* the modernism that Lewis Mumford had more than a year earlier called “that native and humane form of modernism . . .the Bay Region style,” while claiming it for their own.<sup>40</sup> As James-Chakraborty points out, MoMA “encouraged Americans, especially on the East Coast, to forget that such dwellings were not a fashionable new import from Europe.”

Imagine, then, Elizabeth Gordon watching these events from her Madison Avenue aerie several blocks away from MoMA’s 53<sup>rd</sup> Street fortress. It had been some five years since she had presented these same attributes in Harwell Harris’s Havens House as the gifts of modernism to consumers of architecture, writing in layman’s language, “Modern uses the natural beauty and colors of materials,” and “Modern blends outdoors and indoors unobtrusively.”<sup>41</sup> It is somewhat understandable that Gordon might have conceived the 1950 campaign defining “American Style” not from some xenophobic impulse, but to counter MoMA’s (and Breuer’s) narrative, which held that these qualities were new developments in modernist residential architecture. As this narrative gained dominance, Gordon turned up her volume as well, but by linking “Good Modern” to “American Style,” she invited charges of, in William Jordy’s words, “flag waving.”

Was Elizabeth Gordon a nationalist and a xenophobe? Her record indicates that she was not: Although, as Castillo has so capably documented, she was an enthusiastic participant in the project to bring American domesticity to Europe,<sup>42</sup> she also brought the world to American consumers. In the pages of *House Beautiful*, Gordon was a frequent advocate of the absorption of taste cultures of France and South America, and in 1960 she famously devoted two full issues to Japanese design aesthetics. Following her departure from the magazine, she was instrumental to an important presentation of Scandinavian design to the United States. Her global approach to gourmet cooking reflected her preferences in design (heavy on the Japanese, French, and Scandinavian, with Mexican and South American thrown in for heat). It is unlikely that “The Threat to the Next America” resulted from xenophobia, although it appears to have been pitched in a way to appeal to those who were so-inclined.

Had Gordon kept a cooler head for the April 1953 number, as she did the following October with her follow-up editorial, “Does Design Have Social Significance?”, interpretations of xenophobia and “flag waving” might not have hounded her legacy, which is that of a profound influence on some of the best in postwar residential design. Also, had she chosen to wage her campaign after Senator McCarthy had been discredited, which would not happen until the following year, her allegiance to McCarthyism would have been less easily imagined and her vilification harder to justify. Had Elizabeth Gordon been a man, she might have been dismissed as a crank, as some did Frank Lloyd Wright, or thought wrongheaded, as many thought Lewis Mumford was. But she may have also been, like them, more quickly forgiven, because she would

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<sup>39</sup> Driller, 181.

<sup>40</sup> Mumford, “Sky Line: Status Quo,” 100.

<sup>41</sup> “How To Judge Modern,” 49-57.

<sup>42</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 119-122.



have been understood to belong in the conversation.

Today, in 2010, American consumers are at quite a remove from the dust-up around “The Threat to the Next America.” Unlike much of its postwar competition, *House Beautiful* is still in publication, although the shelter magazine genre is now more populated and more specialized than at any time in its history. But *House Beautiful* only incidentally portrays modernist works; following Elizabeth Gordon’s retirement in 1964, the magazine returned post-haste to more traditional taste territory and stayed there. Since Gordon, *House Beautiful* has stood well away from polemics about design, despite its history as a wagger of campaigns in the battles for taste. The International Style and the Bauhaus did have one other notable moment in the spotlight as the stuff of controversy. In 1981, journalist Tom Wolfe regurgitated “The Threat to the Next America” in a longer and more exploitative form with his amply over-appreciated book, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (this controversy has been incisively dissected by architectural theorist Ulrich Schwarz).<sup>43</sup> But today articles on Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus co-exist comfortably in the pages of shelter magazines that specialize in modernism, although the modernist aesthetic is still generally the province of the upper-middle class (Figure 44). Indeed, as for the claim that “the battle for modern architecture has been won,”<sup>44</sup> even a cursory glance at most of the single-family residential housing stock built in the last decade for the American middle class reveals that this was never the case for residential architecture.

What is Elizabeth Gordon’s legacy for the landscapes of housing in the United States? In truth, “The Threat to the Next America” did little to dissuade consumers, if such was their desire, from employing modernist architects whose work drew deeply from European modernism—thankfully so, for some of the best and most innovative residential architecture of the postwar period came from that well. Nor did the editorial itself do much to reintroduce “indigenous” influence into the narrative of postwar American modernism. Far more influential in this regard was Gordon’s introduction of regional modernism to consumers through the works of such architects as Alfred Browning Parker, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and John Yeon. As important, she brought Frank Lloyd Wright before the mainstream of American consumers in a way he had not enjoyed since before World War I, allowing Wright a popularity and reputation with the mainstream public that the professional press was, by nature of its closed circle of discourse, unable to bestow. Third, her Climate Control Project is now increasingly understood to be an important antecedent to what we now call “Green Design” (unrelated to “The Threat to the Next America,” perhaps this is the most significant of her achievements).<sup>45</sup> If these things can be considered to be her legacy, then Elizabeth Gordon has had a profound influence on how we live, here in the Next America.

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<sup>43</sup> Wolfe, Tom; Schwarz, 190-261.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, in Hitchcock and Drexler, 8.

<sup>45</sup> See “When Mid-Century Modern was Green, A Climate-wise House for the Missouri River Valley by Architect David B. Runnells.”

Figure 43. The abstraction of pragmatic objects as from arrangements that included symbolic objects reinforced the masculine association in modern designs, as shown in this idealized interior from “Playboy’s Weekend Hideaway,” *Playboy*, April 1959, 54.





**Figure 44. The shelter press today is more specialized than the genre has been historically. The International Style and Frank Lloyd Wright coexist comfortably in the mainstream narrative of modern architecture, as these pages from the same issue of *Modernism* magazine demonstrate. Fall 2009, 38-39 (above) and 66-67 (below).**



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#### **APPENDIX: UNSIGNED LETTER TO DOUGLAS HASKELL**

The following is a transcription of letter, the only known copy of which is a carbon held in the archives of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Arizona. Although contained in the collection of documents acquired from Elizabeth Gordon, it is not signed and the author is unknown. While it is addressed to Douglas Haskell, then managing editor of *The Magazine of Building*, it is not contained in Haskell's archives at the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University.

It is included here with the permission of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

**Transcribed Letter (H134C07)**

*[Transcription from copy by Kathleen Corbett]*

June 23, 1953

Mr. Douglas Haskell  
Architectural Forum / House and Home  
9 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York 20, N.Y.

Dear Doug:

You asked for this, see that you print it in full—

Sirs:

It would not be difficult, by following your pictures-lifted-out-of-context technique, to “prove” almost anything. Miss Gordon’s now notorious editorial deserves more thoughtful treatment. She has raised number of questions of serious import to modern architecture and the architectural profession, questions which might well have been raised long since in the professional press.

Unfortunately, in so doing she has also set up a number of straw men, and much of the discussion of her editorial to date has been limited to the pleasant task of knocking them down. Intentionally or unintentionally she has managed to create the impression that what she calls “bad” modern architecture is the work of “foreign architects,” and even somehow bears a terrifying red label. This, of course, is nonsense. But much of what she has said about the architecture itself is not.

Thus when Miss Gordon opines: They (some museums, some professional magazines, some designers) are praising designs that are unscientific, irrational, and uneconomical—illogical things like whole walls of unshaded glass on the west, which causes you to fry in the summer, this misusing one of our finest new materials,” her syntax leaves something to be desired, but her assertion deserves investigation. And when she goes on to charge that: “They (the same ‘they’) are trying to get you to accept their idea of beauty and form as the measure of things, regardless of whether they work, or what they do to you, or what they cost,” she is correctly identifying, in my opinion, a significant trend in architectural thought—a trend towards formalism which has had the kind of backing she asserts.

Some years ago I was privileged to be present when Phillip Johnson was showing his glass-walled house—then under construction—to group of home builders, housing experts, and so on brought together by LIFE. After the builders had nosed around a bit, Phillip ascended a pile of still-to-be-laid paving brick on the unfinished floor and offered to answer their questions. Question number one, it turned out, was “What about the heat loss?”

The architect smiled his engaging, hesitant smile. “It’s . . . it’s terrific,” he confessed, with every sign of being rather proud of the fact, or at least of the bombshell effect this admission had on his down-to-earth audience.

Now, I do not dispute (nor, I believe, would Miss Gordon) this very talented designer's right, in building for himself, to indulge in any fancy he desires, for aesthetic or any other reasons. But when an unsuspecting client is handled in much the same way, as was Dr. Farnsworth in her house by Mies van der Rohe, other and more serious issues are raised.

According to Dr. Farnsworth (as quoted in the May issue of House Beautiful), "the cost of heating is incredible. I only occupy the house on weekends and keep it at 55 degrees during the week, but it took 800 gallons of oil one month at close to [*illegible*] cents a gallon! I pay more for heating my week-end house than for my four-room apartment in Chicago."

Truly, as the Magazine of Building commented in presenting the house, "It has little to say ... to those who concentrate on climate control and scientific management of environment." Or as Dr. Farnsworth put it (ibid): "In the summer the air gets hot and stuffy. The only natural ventilation comes from both ends of the house—there is no ventilation from any of the sides (sic), although they are completely of glass. We need an air filtering system, but there is no longer room in the utility core. And when everything in the core is in operation, the noise is enormous. You hear the furnace kicking on and off, the blower exhaust going, everything at work."

It is the essence of formalist thinking that such things are justified—not, simply, mistakes—if only the cause of beauty ("pure design") is served. And this proposition rests, in turn, on the conception that beauty and utility necessarily conflict. On the basis of such logic, architecture becomes a matter of choosing between beauty (defined in purely visual terms) and utility.

Only on such a basis is it possible to justify The Magazine of Building's description of the Farnsworth House as a "work of art of supreme integrity, unity and perfection." As a visual experience (on paper, I have not seen it in reality) I believe it to be all, or almost all, you have claimed it is. But if, as Dr. Farnsworth says, it makes her feel "like a prowling animal, always on the alert" (ibid), what then of its emotion-provoking properties, not to mention its more mundane shortcomings?

The art of building has many aspects, not all of which can be rendered by expert photography. The proper function of architectural publications, in my opinion, is to bring out the many-sidedness of these problems, and not to beat the drums for a one-sided "cult-ish" approach as you did in your presentation of this particular example of conscious formalism.

While teaching valuable aesthetic lessons formalist architecture, blindly accepted, threatens to stultify and discredit modern design. *House Beautiful's* editors, in my opinion, are to be commended for pointing out this danger, and for the following statement, quoted from their May issue and quoted by them, in turn, from a lowly layman, the satisfied owner of a modern house: "Consider the problems first of all. The creative will grow out of the problems, The solutions will give you an originality that nothing else can. You must figure out the details of what will work and still achieve design. That's greatness. Design is not a surface quality. It's the ideal solution of a given problem."

Louis Sullivan was more succinct, but it does no harm to have his meaning spelled out every so often.

Sincerely,

[*Initials illegible*]

cc: Elizabeth Gordon