
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Queering California Modernism: Architectural Figurations and Media Exposure of Gay Domesticity in the Roosevelt Era

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This paper examines three houses built for gay patrons on the California coast shortly before World War II. The first is the small structure that Harwell H. Harris designed for the future *Arts & Architecture* editor John Entenza in Santa Monica, completed in 1938; the second is this same architect's masterpiece in Berkeley, of 1941, which he created for his lifelong friend, Weston Havens; the third, by William Alexander, is in Laguna Beach, built in 1937 to accommodate the love triangle involving author-adventurer Richard Halliburton, Paul Mooney and Alexander himself. Notwithstanding their different requirements and scales, these dwellings can be understood as dramatic observatories which, protected from inquisitive gazes, strove to see without being seen. Although the care that went into ensuring their inhabitants' privacy might appear to conflict with the concern for making them objects of public seduction and media attention, both these strategies were inextricably intertwined. Yet, beyond the visual primacy in the organization of their interiors and the striking formal solutions to their exteriors, a comparative analysis of these houses and their physical and metaphorical modes of simulation, dissimulation and stimulation reveals the emergence of other spatial proposals, sensory invitations and symbolic registers which, as lines of flight of modernism, challenge normative ways of codifying identity, sexuality and queer affections.

Introduction

This essay delves into the projects, secret lives and promotional impetuses of three outstanding Californian houses that share a peripheral modernism,¹ a similar timeframe and the fact that they were intended for gay patrons.² All three structures were completed between 1937 and 1941, a five-year period marked by the social conservatism of the Great Depression and the political tensions leading up to World War II. Although each case is approached through the individual biographies, programmatic requirements, design strategies and material choices that contribute to the architectural mood of these homes, they are comparable in how they accommodate difference because they share both a clear chronological delimitation and physical and cultural geographies.

In the 1920s, in line with the burgeoning growth of major West Coast cities, prominent queer communities expanded in California, in areas such as West Hollywood, Los Angeles's Edendale and San Francisco's North Beach. Their members found ways of self-expression and collective action by exploring the farthest reaches of their metropolitan environments and seeking out the animated nightlife of these broadminded neighborhoods. Such evolution resulted in a subculture of gay men and

lesbians who gradually acquired a self-awareness of their world (D'Emilio 1998). The founding of the motion picture studios contributed decisively to the establishment of queer networks, which in turn galvanized Hollywood's creativity, and although unconventional lifestyles were accepted providing they remained behind the scenes, the sexual revolution and ambiguity of the Jazz Age were even reflected in movies intended for heterosexual audiences (Mann 2001).

However, after the country's economic collapse in 1933, a fierce backlash cast these cultural achievements into historical oblivion, in large part due to the general distress and nationwide condemnation of the social innovation – and its visibility – of the preceding decade. With millions of workers losing their jobs, Americans were fearful of the smallest perceived threat to traditional family values. In the turbulent interwar years, the hitherto progressive film industry reacted aggressively to a generation of early movies that had even portrayed love between men (Russo 1987). In the wake of Hays Code censorship, just as queer characters and talk of homosexuality were prohibited in films or relegated to pernicious stereotypes, nonconforming spaces became subjected to strict police control and harassment, banned from public view.

In the late 1930s, dominant social, cultural and legal institutions, such as marriage, compelled queer people not only to perform closeted identities in public but also to remain invisible in the supposed safety of their

homes. As hostility to queer social life escalated, they sought alternative ways to meet and subvert forms of regulatory surveillance. In such difficult times, unmarried men – particularly those of a certain age – were seen as uneasy presences, their houses objects of neighborhood suspicion. Under increasingly homophobic legislation that forced queer people to straddle multiple life-worlds simultaneously (Potvin 2014), home was converted into an ambivalent space for gathering and resistance, belonging and exclusion, affection and distance. It became the place of expression and self-repression for those who wanted to stand out but whose same-sex orientation and homosocial intimacy fell beyond the limits of normativity. Thanks to the power denoted by architecture's materiality and the meanings connoted by its spatiality, for some privileged gay men who could afford it, 'home was a way' to both 'fit in' and 'be different' (Cook 2014: 6).

Compared to other cultural fields, queer theory seems to have had a later and more limited impact on architectural history and its historiography. First, in the 1990s, a number of influential studies focused on the issue of visibility and pushed for a further assessment of how sexuality and gender intersect with space (Vallerand 2018). After the seminal *Queer Space* exhibition of 1994, and shortly after George Chauncey declared that there was no queer space, 'only spaces used by queers or put to queer use' (Chauncey 1996: 224), Aaron Betsky discussed the multivalent ways queer people – mostly white gay men – developed non-normative, 'ambivalent, open, leaky, self-critical or ironic and ephemeral' uses of space (Betsky 1997: 18), which his appraisal may have conflated too much with eroticism (Potvin 2014). Soon afterwards, investigations in queer scholarship dealt with the central, and unexplored, role of the inhabitant – commonly subsumed under the form of a generic user (Cupers 2013). Path-breaking research on the relationship between gender politics and modern design, such as that by Friedman (1998), Preciado (2000) and Bonnevier (2005), looked at some iconic houses of the Modern Movement through a queer lens – that is, 'queered' these houses – to reveal how their clients' unusual ways of living challenged modern architecture's paradigms. All these analyses instigated a fascinating series of case-specific research (for example, Adams 2010; Potvin 2014; Cook 2014) that explored how differently a number of queer individuals, because of and beyond their sexual orientation, have contested the normative bases of domestic architecture by destabilizing family values, socially fixed layouts, traditional material culture and the alleged yet highly unstable separation of private and public spheres that defines modernity (Sparke 2008) and on which gender is codified (Colomina 1996).

The domestic realm indeed is intrinsically far more public than it seems private. In addition, rather than a static frame, it is open to fluid meanings and experiences (Gorman-Murray 2019). Home is a permeable locus where identity is constructed via the constantly evolving, knotted relationship between political pressures and individual aspirations. It is linked to the socioeconomic status, norms and rituals sanctioning class culture and lifestyles. Accordingly, home is the result of a multi-layered legislation enforcing regulations and construction codes, as well

as advertising and commercial practices informing uses and esthetics. Moreover, domestic architecture depends on a variety of technologies which are all but politically neutral (Law 1991). It is thus a 'contested territory' (Latour and Yaneva 2008: 86), a 'political arena' (Jaque 2019) mobilizing complex networks of interacting agents, controversies and performances over time.

Building on the aforementioned scholarship, this essay explores three case studies connected by geographical, historical and typological premises. The objective is to contribute to the description of a more diverse history of California modernism than is presented by prevailing historiographical constructions, general assumptions, social bias and gender stereotypes (Hayden 1989). Using a comparative analysis, the essay also explores how these cases are rich individual expressions of visual, material and symbolic practices that, separated from great discourses, explain architecture through its very engagement with both the different nature and the requirements, both explicit and implicit, of their patrons. The aim of this comparison is to show how, in the quintessentially experimental pre-war Californian milieu, architecture provided opportunities for the formation and coding of unconventional houses created for or by queer men who 're-imaged and re-imagined the home' from their own alternative values while living lives 'imbricated in dominant, normative definitions of domesticity and masculinity' (Potvin 2014: 10).

Pre-war Houses and the Single Man

Each of the three houses discussed here was built for a single gay man and functioned as a public screen that protected his private life. Two of them were designed by the regionalist architect Harwell Hamilton Harris. The first one is John Entenza's small house in Santa Monica (1937–38) (**Figure 1**), which was the place where the future publisher-editor of *Arts & Architecture* (*A&A*) conceived his celebrated Case Study House Program. Entenza occupied this structure until 1949, when he moved to his brand new Case Study House (CSH#9) in nearby Pacific Palisades. The second, also by Harris, is the architect's masterpiece in Berkeley (1939–41). It was designed for John Weston Havens, heir to the fortune of one of the Bay Area's most prominent families. Havens enjoyed the anonymity of his aerial and secluded refuge for six decades, until his death in 2001. Finally, the third residence is the home that William – born Levy – Alexander created in Laguna Beach (1936–37) to accommodate the love triangle of the legendary traveler Richard Halliburton, Halliburton's editor and ghost-writer Paul Mooney and the architect himself. Halliburton spent scarcely eight weeks in his spectacular and expensive concrete Olympus, as he would soon embark on his final and ill-fated adventure.

An examination of all three houses and their photographic accounts reveals effective forms of camouflage, both material and metaphorical, which were interwoven with the wide exposure they received in the architectural press and other popular magazines. The visual and written narratives published on these homes suggest a smoke-screen for their domestic programs, conveying mixed messages through concurrent tactics of covertness and revelation to keep their 'open secret' safe (Miller 1985).

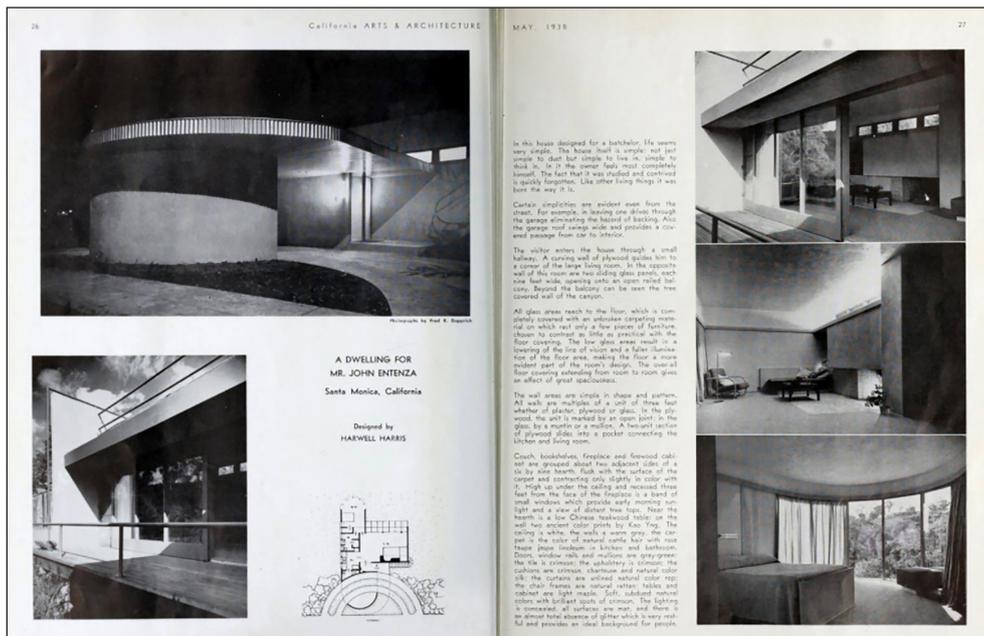


Figure 1: H. H. Harris's Entenza House in Santa Monica (1938) as featured in the two-page spread published by *California Arts & Architecture* ('A Dwelling for Mr. John Entenza', 1938).

The study of these well-publicized projects, which dealt with public and private politics of *coming out*, assesses the extent to which modern homes at the time functioned as devices that constrained and hid – literally placing out of view – the personality of their owners. Conversely, it also investigates the forms architecture took when, rather than suppressing identity, it provided not only shelter for non-heteronormative orientations but shelter that, in the case of these upper-middle-class patrons, was also a sophisticated setting for both individual and social representation in the various worlds in which queer people lived simultaneously. As all of them were young, college-educated white men who benefited from the opportunities and relative freedom that both their status and California's cultural environment offered, the entwined relationship between queerness and class – a parameter, like race or age, on which masculinity relies deeply – becomes crucial to this study. Not only do wealth, education and social connections create a shield, but a great deal of queer architectures have frequently been passed off as the oddities of upper classes or celebrity culture.

Finally, within the processes of negotiation and commitment of which architecture is made, the role that architects played apropos their homosexual clientele cannot be ignored either. While Harris was extremely sympathetic to his patrons' requests – although, unlike Alexander, he was not gay – there is little information about how his two clients communicated their needs and instructions to him. As Entenza's papers disappeared after the editor became romantically involved with a mysterious young man, few sources, other than Harris's own account, the investigation by Lisa Germany (2000) and perhaps the unreliable writings of Esther McCoy, shed light on Harris and Entenza's bumpy relationship. As regards sources for the history of the Havens House, Harris's wife, Jean Murray Bangs, became close friends with Havens, and their correspondence is a substantial

one. A graduate in economics from Berkeley, she was a critic and an activist and had a great influence on her husband's career. She came to know Havens during her research stay at Berkeley, when the house was under construction. Their letters, written with a familiar tone, show that she mediated between patron and architect. She was also involved in the design process, assisting on site decisions, mainly concerning furniture, about which Havens was very interested. However, no testimonies from the original inhabitants document the experience of living in these houses, so this investigation rests primarily on oral histories, archival evidence, visits to these well-preserved structures and the analysis of both architecture and its coverage in printed media.

Entenza's Set

In 1932, attracted by the Hollywood industry, Entenza, an aspiring playwright and cinema lover, settled in Los Angeles, where he worked for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer until 1936. At that time, film studios were pioneering visual experimentation (Esperdy 2007) through idiosyncratic interpretations of recent architectural achievements on the screen (Albrecht 2000), which facilitated Entenza's first exposure to languages of modern art and the design of stage sets. He knew of his future architect through the publicity Harris's houses received in *California Arts & Architecture* (CA&A). The Harrises, who would help Entenza to establish himself professionally, were very close to several editorial networks, including this influential Los Angeles-based periodical. In 1937, aware of the media's fascination with the architect, the young writer commissioned Harris to build his first residence on the small plot he owned in picturesque and gay-friendly Santa Monica Canyon. Entenza wanted a house to attract the attention of Los Angeles cultural circles, which to him required an image of sheer modernism. On Entenza's insistence, Harris built it with an emphatically International Style vocabulary,

which was an exception to the architect's own modern lexicon within the California Arts and Crafts tradition.

Harris drew on the lessons of his mentor Richard Neutra, from whom he had learned everything concerning publicity. This explains such features as the ironic references to the Josef von Sternberg House (1935) in the corrugated steel fascia of the carport (Germany 2000). To tie the modernity of the house with the modernity of the vehicle, the carport not only provided a solution for the car's movement on a steep slope, but it was an architectural gesture. Its crisp combination of the metallic shine, white surfaces and curving lines of Streamline Moderne showcased the space dedicated to Entenza's 1935 Ford. The fact that this house was such a conspicuous exception to Harris's regionalist idiom indicates that he responded to Entenza's requirements from a primarily scenographic approach. This approach is particularly evident in the night view of the house in **Figure 1**, which, under artificial light, acquired the intended character of a Hollywood film set.

The house, an impassable barrier to Entenza's neighbors, was designed to keep separate its owner's two distinct lives, the social and the solitary (Harris 1965). Due to the small budget, the house was built with the usual Californian wood framework, then plastered and white-washed, which combined with its geometrical purity evoked the European avant-garde. While the *masculine* character of the exterior surfaces masks Entenza's private identity and projects his public persona, inside the house comfort and privacy prevail. Also, as is typical in Harris's designs, the layout is meticulously organized to compensate for the lack of space. Thus, the façade's abstraction gave way, in the interior, to Harris's characteristic palette of natural colors and warm lighting. This created a domestic quality that challenged every stereotype of

those masculine spaces that a man of his position ought to like, according to Adolf Loos's homophobic outburst against decoration (Colomina 1996) or according to the equally gender-biased etiquette advocated by Emily Post at the time.

A Haven of Rest

Havens's home in the Berkeley hills, which was completed just days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, earned Harris the recognition of being one of the most genuinely Californian designers. Both Harris and Havens, who were the same age and shared a progressive spirit and similar cultural regional values, established a friendship that would last their entire lives. Havens asked for a domestic refuge in which he could surround himself with the beauty of his design collection and with his books and his friends. Harris created a secret paradise whose architectural expression on the exterior was so simple yet so spectacular that it distracted the viewer's – or reader's – attention from its interior.

An article in *House Beautiful*, which praised the house 'as a perfect example of the best in Modern architecture', stated that Havens 'gave his designer two main orders: to use the high sloping (but difficult) site and to use the view in every room' ('How to Judge Modern', 1944: 49–50). The response to these conditions is best explicated through the project's inspired cross-section (**Figure 2**).

To distance the house from the street and achieve four exposures for it, Harris made a deep cut in the slope and generated a sunken courtyard, on the base of which a horizontal platform accommodated a badminton court. On each side of the courtyard he placed two structures (**Figure 3**). The first, of only one story, houses the garage and the housekeeper's apartment. Accessible from the street, it is tight against the cliffside. A six-and-half-meter-long

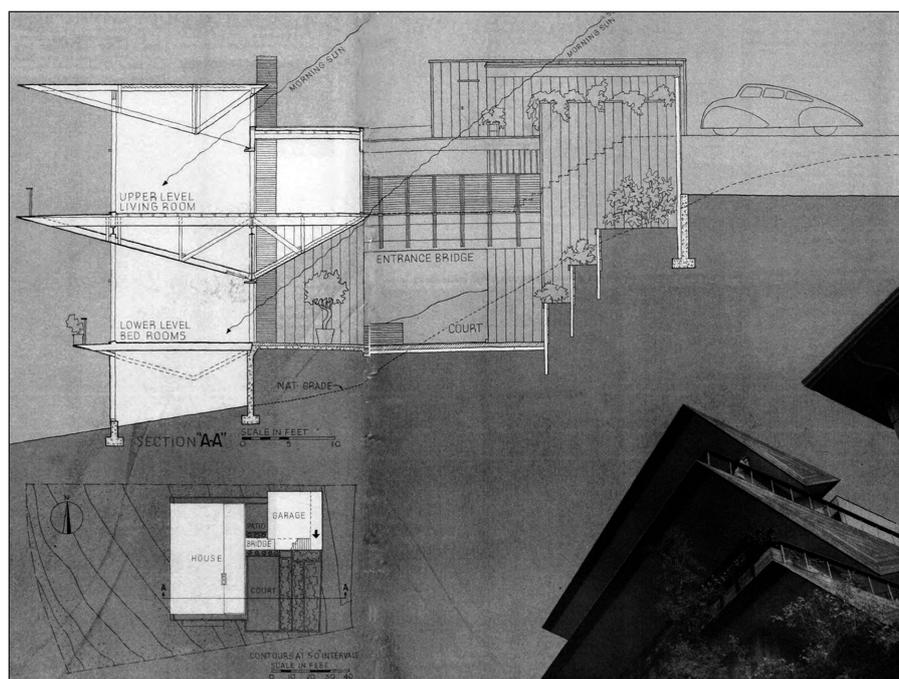


Figure 2: H. H. Harris's Havens House in Berkeley (1941). Layout featuring cross-section drawing and Man Ray's 1942 photograph ('Berkeley Hillside House', 1943).

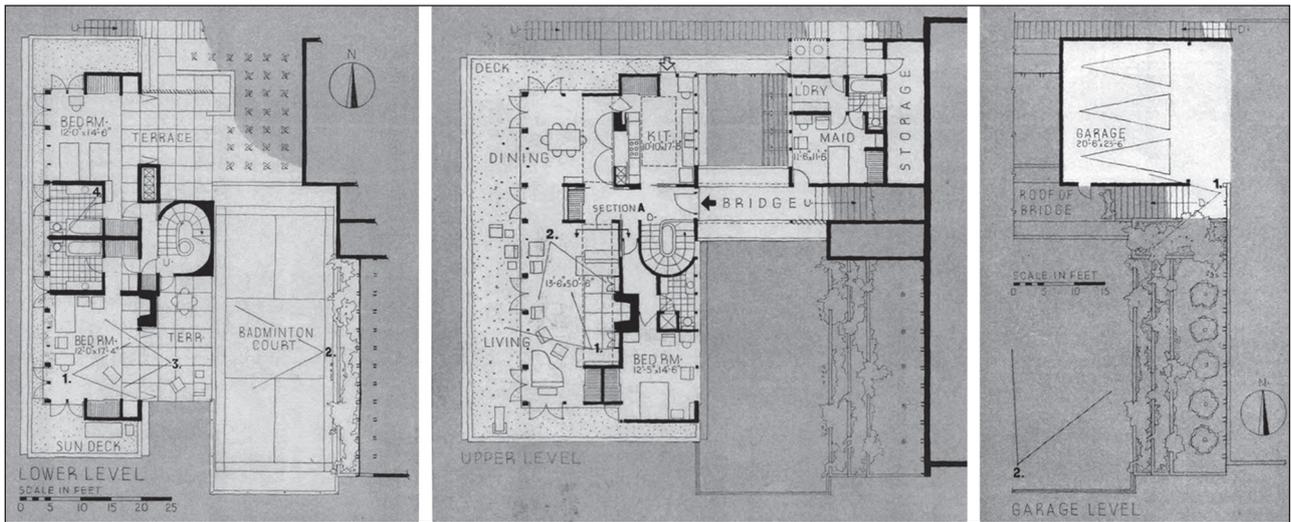


Figure 3: H. H. Harris's Havens House in Berkeley (1941). From left: lower, upper and street level floor plans ('Berkeley Hillside House', 1943).



Figure 4: H. H. Harris's Havens House in Berkeley (1941). View of access door and staircase from the foyer. Photo: Maynard L. Parker, 1944 (courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California).

footbridge leads to the second structure, which is the main section of the Havens House. It is a two-story building consisting of three stacked, inverted triangular trusses. On the upper level, the living, library and dining areas open to a terrace that wraps the house around to allow the fullest view of San Francisco Bay. In a parallel strip, the staircase separates the kitchen from a guest room. On the lower level, two bedrooms open to a balcony that spans the length of the house to take advantage as well of the fantastic westward view. These two bedrooms can also be accessed and connected via the courtyard, so that when their glass doors are folded, indoor and outdoor living spaces fuse completely. Likewise, the ceilings of each level slant upward and outward, opening the space within to the outside. This architectural solution provides shade from the high summer sun to the level below, while

holding the warmth, in the downward-slanting ceiling, from the lower winter sun.

The layout of the bedrooms lacks any hierarchy, as Annemarie Adams points out (Adams 2010). It is an inversion of the conventional script of middle-class interiors, where the master bedroom takes precedence over the others, and the parents' nighttime space often occupies a separate zone or looks onto distinct areas. Instead, three bedrooms — the two on the lower floor and the one on the upper floor — are almost equal in size, and all open to the badminton court; Havens used the south chamber on the lower floor, which is a bit larger than the other two and only different in the presence of a chimney.

Another interesting way the house plays with inversion is in the placement of the birch and plywood staircase leading down to the two bedrooms. Although this

element should not be so effortlessly accessible to visitors, it appears as soon as one opens the front door to the upper level. While a strategically placed redwood closet visually blocks the passageway to the public areas, the staircase's curving geometry and its perfect wooden finish create a tactile invitation to continue downward (**Figure 4**).

The courtyard, provided for physical activity and sun bathing, also acted as an evening lounge. Protected from the chilly north breeze and indiscreet gazes from the street, it was the house's most secret area. Nevertheless, it induced a private exchange of glimpses and glances from the bedrooms. An early cross-section of the house, published on the cover of the March 1940 issue³ of *CA&A*, shows various domestic scenes occurring in different areas, like a gay figuration of a doll's house (**Figure 5**). All the figures in these scenes are male (Adams 2010), and their relaxed homosocial performances suggest that the backyard oasis of the badminton court might be more than a sport court. It seems to be a space for body-centered, hedonistic rituals in which semi-nude men may have represented clandestine desires.

In 1943, an article in *Architectural Forum* remarked on the originality of the lower floor. While the plan of that floor is mostly open, not only are the bedrooms enclosed, but the bathroom and closet of each room is set against the same adjoining wall, forming 'a very effective sound barrier' ('Berkeley Hillside House', 1943: 86). Yet the arrangement of the bathrooms back to back, while blocking sound, did not form a spatial boundary. On the contrary, it allowed the glances of the rooms' occupants to meet. Each bathroom contained a wall-to-wall mirror that reflected, through the large windows that effectively created transparent walls in bathrooms and bedrooms,

the balcony connecting the rooms (**Figure 6**). Thus the mirrors became key devices in the articulation of queer space (Betsky 1997), creating another spatial relationship between the two apparently closed off spaces.

The badminton court area, because of its lack of 'a clear domestic function' (Adams 2010: 89), could be read, as Adams suggests, as an 'ante-closet', using the term coined by Henry Urbach – the space before the closet 'where one selects clothes', that is, an ephemeral, liminal 'space of changing' and 'self-representation' (Urbach 1996: 70). However, since the bedrooms – the metaphorical closet – and the court – the ante-closet – are united as one, this category can apply to the entire lower level (**Figure 7**). As an ante-closet, its space creates fluid connections between the sport court and the intimate retreat of the bedrooms, which can be turned into spaces for secret gatherings against the impressive backdrop of the Bay Area.

Harris said of his building that it was 'a sky house more than earth house' ('How to Judge Modern', 1944: 50) and Jean Harris playfully dubbed it 'Havens Above' (Germany 2000: 90). Likewise, the architect called it a 'sky house for eagles' to refer to his idea of the house in flight. Yet, opposing this aerial notion, he also revealed that the Havens House was simultaneously conceived as a 'cave for moles', an expression coined by Harris himself (Harris 1965: 48). Thus, the recurring metaphor of the closet first associated by literary scholarship to a fragment of the house to which the queer symbolically retreats is sublimated here through a spatial conception of the whole house as a cave. Despite seclusion, the inhabitant could live a richer life there, because 'if the closet implies repression', Adams says, 'the mole's cave suggests a certain comfort in isolation' (Adams 2010: 88).

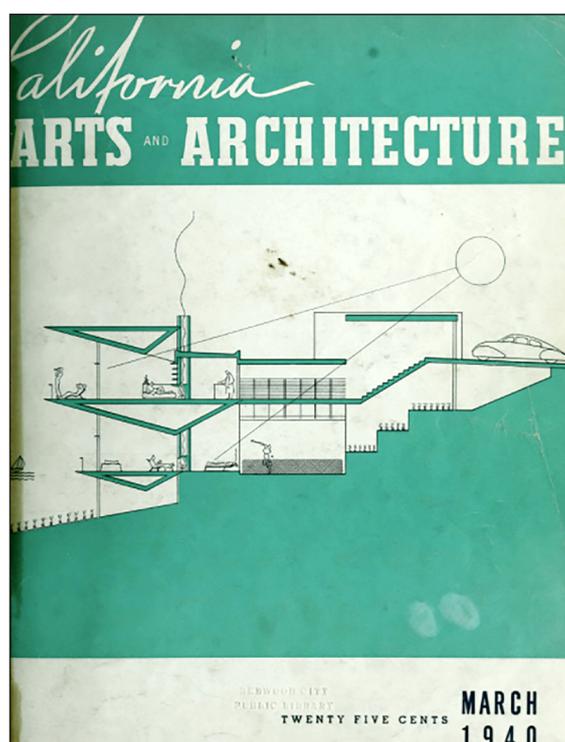


Figure 5: H. H. Harris's Havens House in Berkeley (1941). Cover of the March 1940 issue of *California Arts & Architecture* featuring the house's iconic cross-section. This was John Entenza's second issue as caretaker editor but his first solitary cover and contribution to his future magazine.



Figure 6: H. H. Harris's Havens House in Berkeley (1941). Owner's bathroom. Photo: Maynard L. Parker, 1944 (courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California).



Figure 7: H. H. Harris's Havens House in Berkeley (1941). View of the badminton court and footbridge. Photo: Maynard L. Parker, 1944 (courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California).

Mark Wigley has posited that the first private space was the man's study: 'an intellectual space beyond that of sexuality'. The study, being historically restricted to men, ultimately evolved from a locked writing desk within a chamber to a designated space, 'a "closet" off the bedroom', being indeed, 'the first closet' and the home's true center (Wigley 1992: 347). In the Havens House, the disposition of a desk in front of a single bed in the owner's room reveals that it was a space devoted to both relaxation and work. Something comparable happens in the rooms of the Halliburton House, where custom-made desks of sycamore, the only significant furniture in the house, contrast with the severity of concrete, as discussed later. Similarly, in the second home Entenza commissioned for himself, the study can be read as a closet within a closet, which becomes the center of gravity in a house whose most public space, the living room, is controlled from the editor's king-size bed (**Figure 8**).

It is also enlightening to recall Katarina Bonnevier's queer criticism of Eileen Gray's E.1027 Villa, whose living room, defined by the presence of a large bed, accommodated various public and private functions. Bonnevier interprets Gray's salon as a 'boudoir', a multifunctional space for rest, study, meetings and even parties, charged with 'feminine connotations' and 'sexual pleasure' (Bonnevier 2005: 166). Similarly, Havens's own bedroom is an ambiguous space (**Figure 9**). It is the most intimate yet also the most public space in the house. Furthermore, if the boudoir is the first domestic room devoted exclusively to women, and the study is an utterly masculine space, there is a performative fluidity between these two categories in Havens's bedroom: the ante-closet becomes studio and boudoir, a space concurrently inside and outside the closet. Thus, the textual metaphor of the closet works not just linguistically (Brown 2000) to describe 'the structure of gay oppression' (Sedgwick 1990: 71); it also 'elicits performances that are not defined or confined by discursivity alone' but are irrefutably situated, corporeal and spatial acts (Potvin 2014: 211).

Therefore, in addition to the role of the visual, explored by early queer scholarship, in places identified as queer, other sensual/sensory experiences, especially touch, contribute to Harris's design of a comfortable domestic space. According to both performativity theory and

phenomenology, queer identity is constituted through the contact or orientation with other people and things. Sara Ahmed (2004) claims that the formation of the subject depends upon impressions and thus, in a process involving the interrelation between body and matter, both physical and psychological comfort and pleasure emerge through the encounter with surfaces.

In the Havens House, the subtle treatment of interior surfaces and the combination of both natural wood and industrial materials reveal a rich tactile sensibility that refers to the body through haptic impressions. Correspondingly, the innovative indirect lighting and particularly the refined balance between natural ventilation



Figure 9: H. H. Harris's Havens House in Berkeley (1941). View of the owner's bedroom and studio. Photo: Maynard L. Parker, 1944.



Figure 8: Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen's CSH#9. View of Entenza's bedroom from the sitting area showing the upper level sliding wall both open and closed. Photo: Julius Shulman ('Case Study House', 1950).

and the warm-air heating system⁴ are other ways through which the house unobtrusively involves its inhabitants in a pleasant experience of the physical and physiological qualities of the space. As Adams writes, the heating system of the Havens House is indeed a good example of 'corporeal participation'; it is 'an extremely luxurious system, designed for a specific body effect: a constant cycle of warmed skin cooled by fresh air' (Adams 2010: 89). Luxury becomes a matter of paramount importance, the result of a comprehensive understanding of space, comfort technologies and a Semperian conception of wall dressing. Further evidence of Harris's and his client's interest in the materiality of the house's surfaces is the prominence, among other elements, of book walls, floor matting, curtains filtering light and views, translucent ceilings, green skins blurring the courtyard's limits and decorative panels, like the painted doors linking the kitchen to the dining room.

Although the kitchens of the houses examined are all closely connected to the dining rooms, and all of them were equipped with modern technology, the only truly versatile kitchen was Havens's (**Figure 10**). Two concurrent systems of sliding and folding partitions, designed to hide the kitchen or open it fully, allowed a variety of social performances, from very formal gatherings, where food would be prepared by an invisible domestic service, to informal meetings with friends and intimate dinners, where the host could create a pleasant environment by preparing the food himself and taking part in the conversation from the kitchen. This kitchen could also function as a panoptic space controlling most areas of the house and beyond. Its highly specialized, cockpit-like furniture, such as the pass-through buffet that provides ease of operation between the kitchen and dining room, the wooden cabinets, as well as the carefully arranged table settings,

speak volumes about Havens's domestic experiences as a true man of leisure.

Finally, everything in this house, from its recognizable inverted gables to its most hidden rooms, was in fact an eloquent game of inversion and opposition: openness against spatial compactness, drama versus intimacy, light and dark, up and down, privacy and publicity.

Domestic Monument

Halliburton was one of the greatest celebrities of his time. Like Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart, he had flown over oceans and continents. He had climbed the world's most iconic mountains, dived in Chichen Itza's sacred cenote, and swum across the Panama Canal and the Hellespont to test his fame against that of Lord Byron. He turned these and other romantic adventures into vibrant accounts that earned him a fortune. As a quintessential modern myth, Halliburton's controversial persona was somewhere between a dauntless Greek hero and a dashing and loved-by-the-media Hollywood star.⁵ He was 'a messianic sort of figure to legions of worshipful adolescents' (Root 1965: 18), marriageable women and closeted gay men who waited with bated breath for each article, book or lecture on his latest travels. Whether it was to eschew their dreary existence during the Great Depression or live vicariously through Halliburton's exotic life, Americans loved his wanderlust.

When not exploring the world, Halliburton commuted between New York and Los Angeles, whose gay culture and lifestyle he secretly savored. Charles E. Morris has studied the conflict in Halliburton's double life by examining his tales of intimate meetings with men and the way these companions are clandestinely introduced in his adventures through the guise of comradeship. Morris calls him a 'sexual fugitive' and links this condition to the elusive



Figure 10: H. H. Harris's Havens House in Berkeley (1941). Night view of the kitchen's pass-through buffet from the dining room. Photo: Maynard L. Parker, 1944 (courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California).

narrative of his travels (Morris 2009: 129).⁶ Because his popularity hinged on a heteronormative code, Halliburton had to pass as heterosexual — and did it so successfully that *Esquire* magazine posthumously dubbed him ‘the last playboy’ (Weller 1940).⁷

Passing as heterosexual is a ‘technology’, says Ahmed, that ‘entails the work of concealment’ to ‘produce an effect of comfort’, not for the subject who does the concealing and who is always at risk of being caught out, but rather for those who comfortably inhabit the space of normativity (Ahmed 2004: 167). For this reason, Halliburton’s accounts of himself⁸ regularly feature beards, pretexts ‘that bolstered and perpetuated the assumption among devotees that he was straight, and kept at bay those who suspected otherwise and might endanger his secret’ (Morris 2009: 125). His bearding, Morris elaborates, was a tactical mode of ‘closet eloquence’, a rhetorical repertoire that camouflages and confounds queer subjectivity by heteronormative apparitions while also conveying ‘surreptitious meanings to a collusive audience cognizant of the wink’ (Morris 2009: 125). Thus, despite the historical demands that forced gay public figures, such as Halliburton and his Hollywood acquaintances, to cover their queer lifestyle through heterosexual plots,⁹ their stories and their homes were constantly disclosing precisely that which they were meant to conceal.¹⁰

At the beginning of the 1930s, when Halliburton arrived in Orange County, he underwent a crisis of identity. For some time, he had been working with Paul Mooney, a gay writer with whom he had developed a fruitful editorial association. For his part, Mooney had just met Frank Lloyd Wright’s disciple William Alexander, whom he soon introduced into the gay social circles Mooney shared with Halliburton. Mooney, who did not have exclusive

relationships, began a romantic affair with both men, and the three became friends. Laguna Beach in Orange County was then an unspoiled coastal enclave, a bastion of freedom for artists and bohemians, including a small gay community that highly valued the sense of isolation from Los Angeles, about an hour’s drive away. Halliburton became enamored of a majestic cliff overlooking both Aliso Canyon to the northeast and the Pacific Ocean to the southwest. Eventually he managed to purchase the plot, which was adjacent to Mooney’s property. As he traveled the world, Halliburton dreamed about ‘a house on this spectacular ridge’, a place ‘radiating drama and beauty’ (Halliburton 1940: 384, 386) where he could relax away from the limelight. Although the project was merely a fantasy for years, most likely due to his attachment to his conservative Tennessee family, whom he never wanted to alienate by outing himself as a gay man, imagining his home ‘seemed to have “grounded” him psychologically’ (Denzer 2009: 323). Finally, in 1936, on Mooney’s advice, Halliburton confided his vision for the cliff site to Alexander, who was then just 27 years old. However, the architect responded not to the person but to the persona, designing a house that was, like Halliburton’s character, romantic and theatrical. Alexander’s project of a concrete Shangri-La for the seclusion of the three of them reflected not the adventurer’s true personality but rather how the world, and in particular, the architect himself, regarded Halliburton (Wells 2007). Mooney, a more realistic man, pushed for their residence to be ironically nicknamed ‘Hangover’, a pun alluding both to its cantilevered structure and to his own alcohol addiction.

Two simple volumes of reinforced concrete articulate the structure. The taller one is organized in three levels (Figure 11). On the main floor, the kitchen and dining

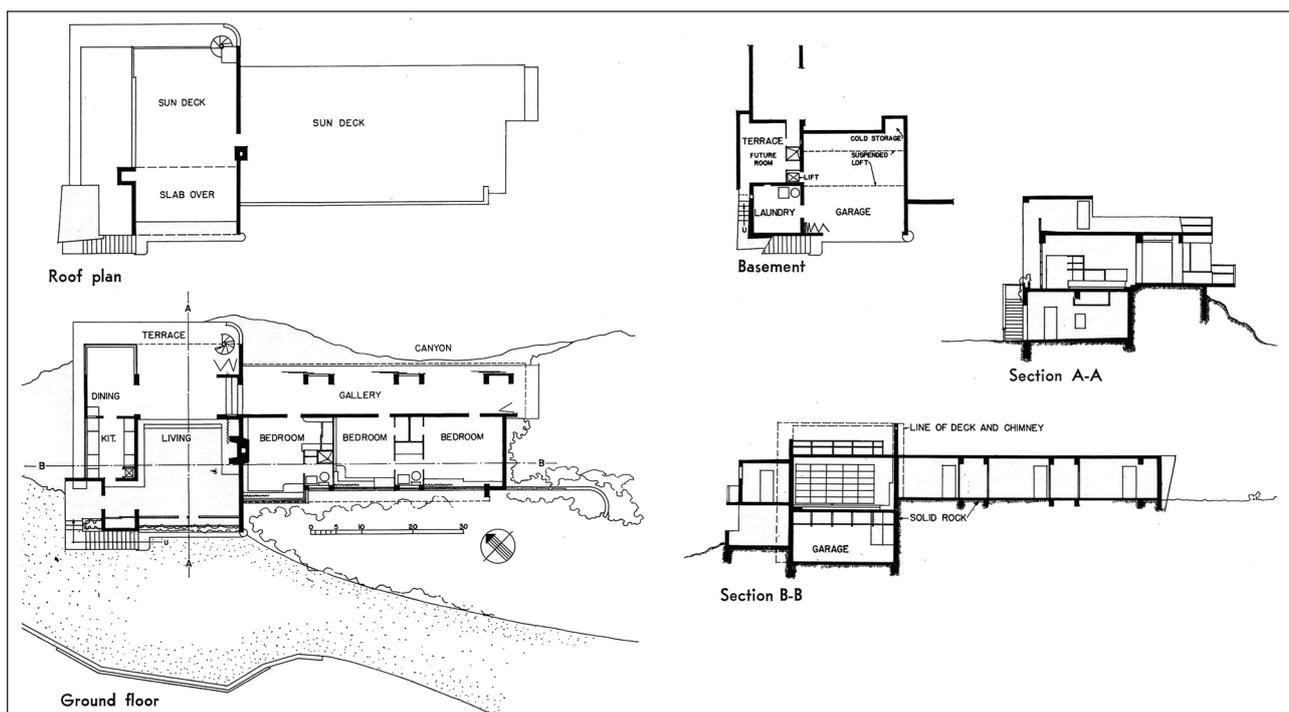


Figure 11: William Alexander’s Halliburton (Hangover) House (1937). Floor plans and sections from *Architectural Record* (‘House for Writer Affords Privacy and Spectacular View’, 1938).

room form a narrower strip adjoining the living room, which opens onto a terrace. This indoor-outdoor living area facing both the ocean and the canyon gives access to a long gallery that is part of a second box, set perpendicular to the first; three bedrooms lead off from the gallery. The garage is located under the lounge and, on the third floor of the taller box, a concrete pergola and a deck create a solarium with a clear view of California's southern coast, all the way to Mexico. The en suite arrangement of the three bedrooms, which are accessed through the gallery, recalls rooms connected by a long hallway, perhaps because of Halliburton's fascination with hotels, where he spent a great deal of time. Although the three chambers are all similar, Halliburton's, closest to the living room, is larger, with a bay window and his own bathroom and dressing room, while Mooney and Alexander shared a bathroom. Significantly, both Mooney's and Alexander's rooms were usually marked as 'guest bedrooms' in publications. Yet the shared bathroom subtly

inverts this apparent hierarchy, since it contains the only bathtub in the house, suggesting collective use. Slight differences occur in the built-in furniture of the bedrooms, each being a sort of male writer's 'room of [his] own' (**Figure 12**). This furniture consisted of an office desk, bookcases and a mirror, except for Halliburton's bedroom where, instead of a mirror, there is a world map as a reflection of his persona. Also, there are variations in the four beds designed by Alexander, of which only his and Halliburton's were double. These features point to the hierarchical role played by the users of each space; not only are the rooms an expression of their professional relationship – and their respective contributions as patron, designer and facilitator of this house – but they most likely acted as a public camouflage for their private romantic attachment.

The use of the house's large gallery is enigmatic (**Figure 13**). It has almost the same surface area as the three bedrooms which, when completely open, would

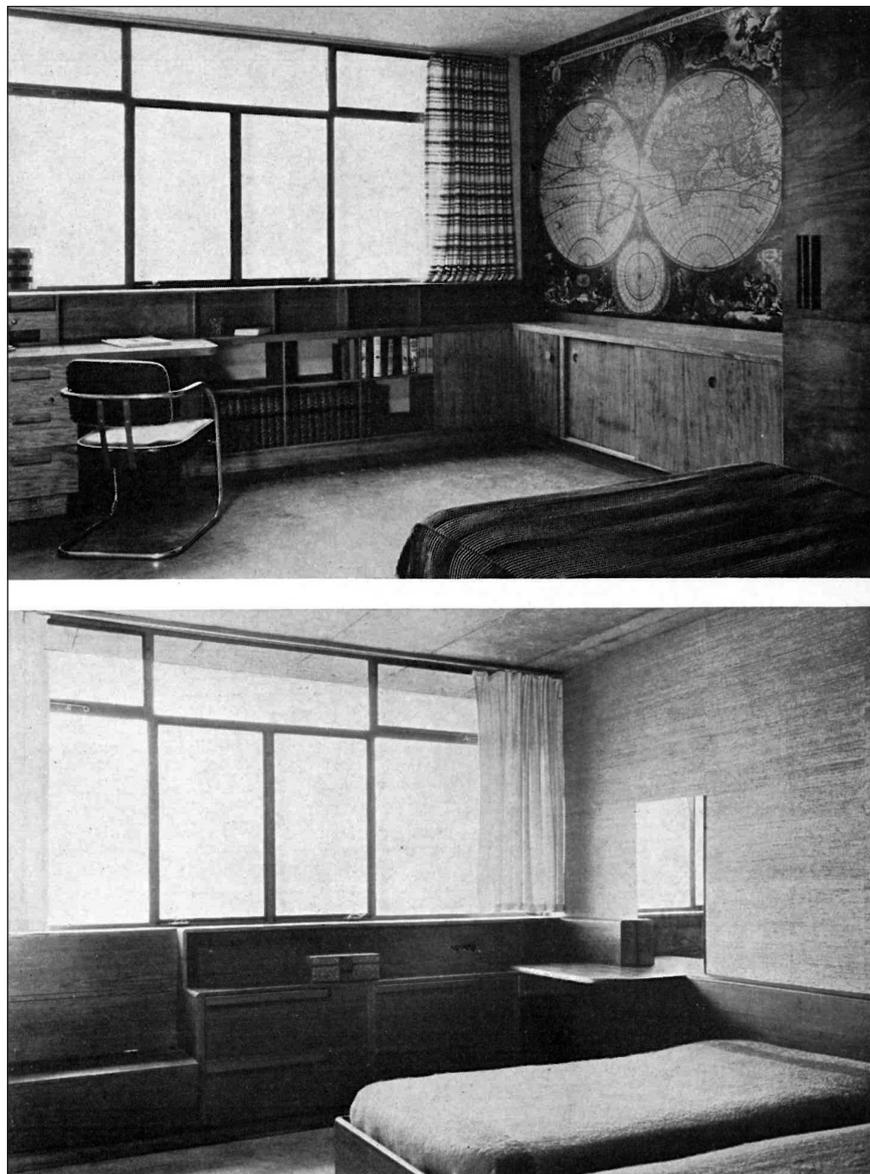


Figure 12: William Alexander's Halliburton (Hangover) House (1937). From top to bottom: Halliburton's and Mooney's bedrooms as published in *Architectural Record*. Photos: George Haight, 1938 ('House for Writer Affords Privacy and Spectacular View', 1938).

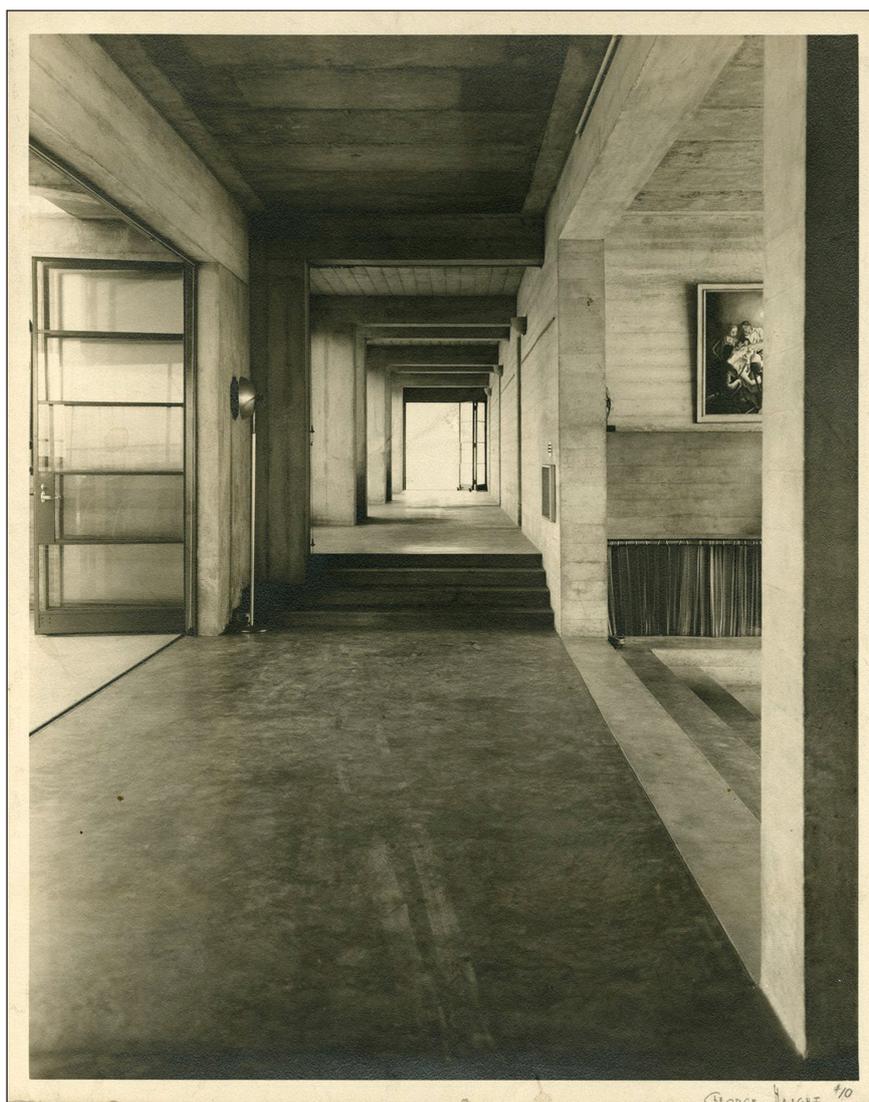


Figure 13: William Alexander's Halliburton (Hangover) House (1937). View of the bedrooms' gallery from the dining room. Photo: George Haight, 1938 (courtesy of the Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara).

function together with this passageway as a modern loggia over the canyon, echoing the communion with nature achieved by the Californian tradition of sleeping porches. Yet this passage, too wide for a corridor, can be read as a collective, undefined room of transparent and translucent walls capturing the morning light and ready for nonchalant spatial relations and furniture arrangements. Opposing the uncertain character of the gallery is the most specific and intimate space of the house – the one that truly accommodates the body – the concrete and glass dining room (**Figure 14**). Conceived as a light-filled breakfast nook, it was the ideal spot for sitting closely together, as in the stern of a small boat, 'orientated around' the table, making it central (Ahmed 2006: 116), to cohere as a family.

Constructing Halliburton's house was a real feat, considering the extra effort required because of its remote location. Mooney and Alexander were charged with overseeing the work while Halliburton traveled the country lecturing to keep up with the demands of an uncontrolled budget. Although Alexander gave pragmatic reasons for

using concrete – resistance to earthquakes and termites, fire prevention – it was completely outside the Californian building tradition, added to which was the problem of finding workers with minimum qualifications to grapple with the material in the middle of the Depression. In contrast with the project's luxurious concept, surviving photographs show inexperienced laborers in precarious conditions, most of them desperate migrants in search of opportunities for better lives. Critical difficulties in the management and execution of the work at one point quadrupled the original estimate, a situation that almost spelled the end of their project and their personal relationship.

Even though the house was a tectonically difficult project for a young architect, and even though the outcome was one of 'the most elegant and pure concrete modern houses ever built' (Wells 2007), Halliburton, who was more concerned about the idea of home than the structure itself, does not seem to have appreciated the complexity and achievements of Alexander's design. Still, his mountain-top sanctuary had cast a spell over him, as

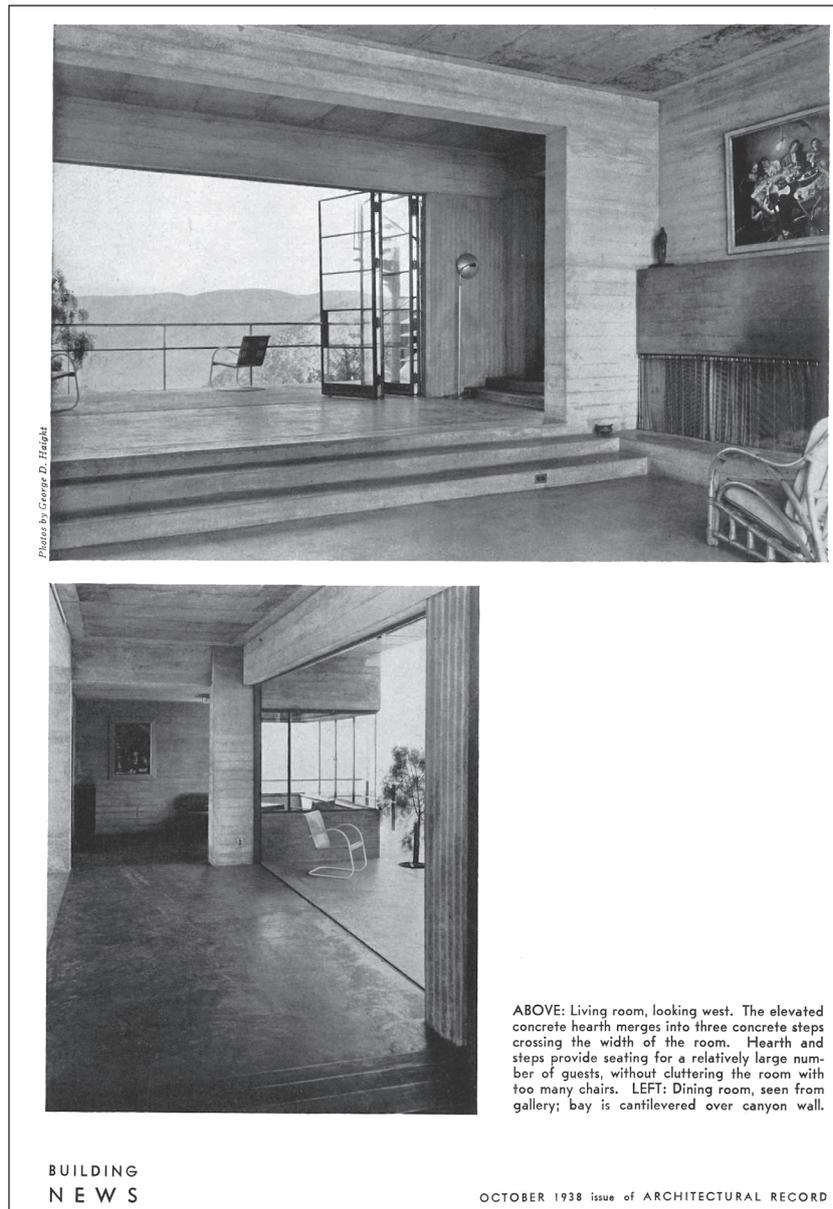


Figure 14: William Alexander's Halliburton (Hangover) House (1937). From top to bottom: Views of the living room and main terrace and dining room's glazed bay and cantilevered terrace from the gallery, published in *Architectural Record*. Photos: George Haight, 1938 ('House for Writer Affords Privacy and Spectacular View', 1938).

Halliburton wrote to his mother: 'I never saw a house so far away from man and so close to God. The peace and serenity of that canyon at my feet is enough in itself to make me relax and dream' (Halliburton 1940: 386).

Alexander befriended Ayn Rand in the 1930s. He claimed that she visited Hangover House shortly after its construction (**Figure 15**) and that it had inspired passages in *The Fountainhead*, published in 1943. According to Alexander, some descriptions of the Heller House in the book match Halliburton's house, and Rand's hero was actually Alexander (Max 2007). In the opening scene of the novel, the architect Howard Roark is introduced as he stands naked on the edge of a cliff surveying the panorama of the valley below. Joel Sanders calls Rand's depiction of the architect's virile body in this passage a presentation of 'an ideal man'. Roark's self-absorption, Sanders intimates, epitomizes the narcissism of a well-established

male tradition in Western architecture, from Vitruvius to Le Corbusier, architects who, in their attempt to legitimize the principles of design practice, turned architecture and masculinity into mutually reinforcing ideologies (Sanders 1996: 11–12). If, as Alexander declared, Rand's fictional character was modeled after himself, and not after Frank Lloyd Wright, as is commonly alleged, it would be ironic that despite the author's homophobic bias, the novelist's inspiration for such a Promethean figure resulted from the compilation of a gay architect with his gay client's ethos.

Visual Regimes

All three houses can be analyzed as watchtower structures impenetrable to hostile scrutiny. As safe observatories, they were articulated from the premise of seeing without being seen. Beatriz Colomina maintains that architecture is not merely 'a platform that accommodates the viewing

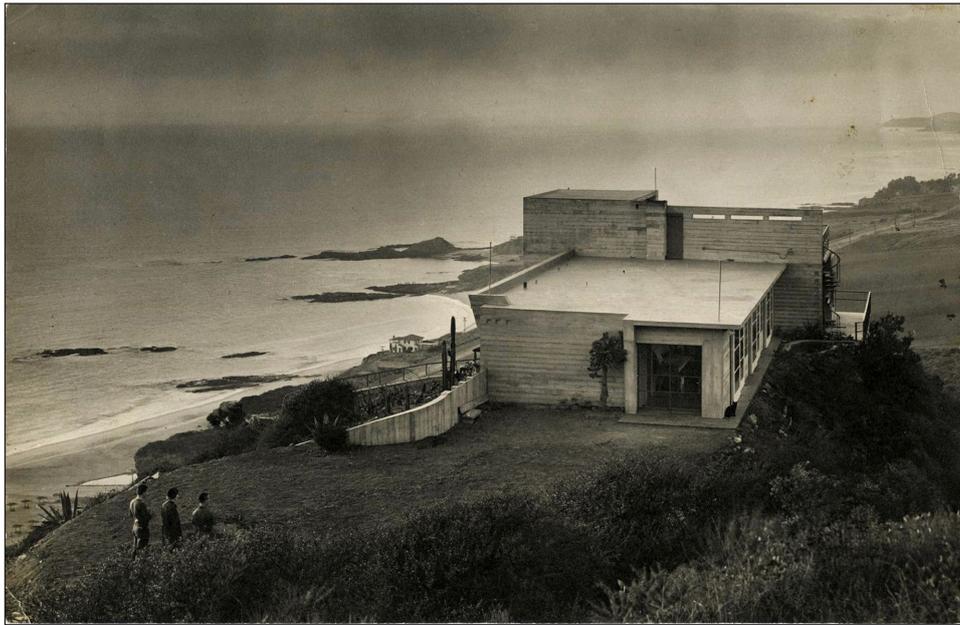


Figure 15: William Alexander's Halliburton (Hangover) House (1937). View from hillock on the southeast side. According to Halliburton's biographer Gerry Max (2007), figures in the foreground might be, from left to right, Paul Mooney, Ayn Rand and William Alexander. Photo: Carl Ziegler, 1937 (courtesy of the Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara).

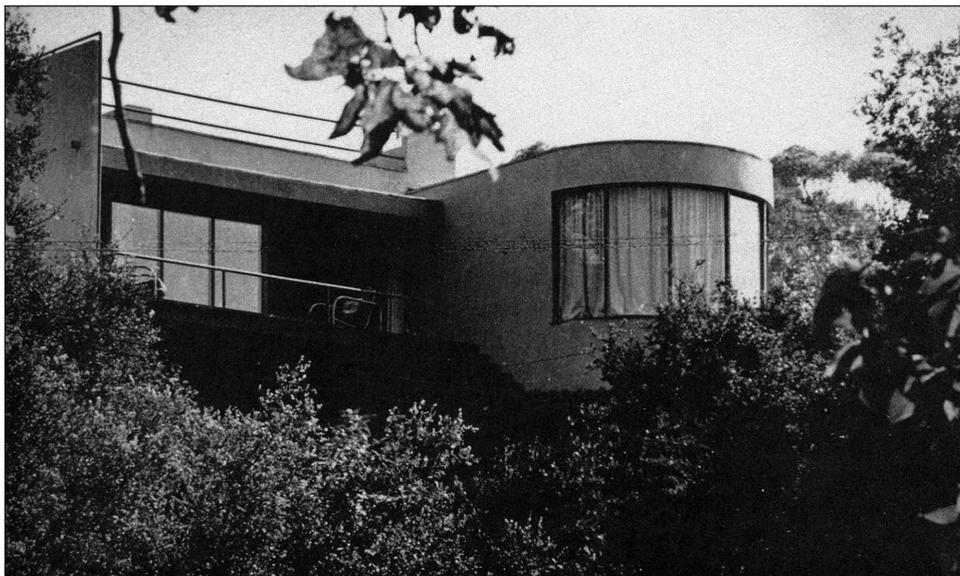


Figure 16: H. H. Harris's Entenza House in Santa Monica (1938). View from the canyon. Photo: Fred Dapprich, 1938.

subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject' (Colomina 1996: 250). Thus, the publicly repressed identity of the patrons of these houses is spatialized through the gaze by means of a psychological-spatial apparatus of visual control which must be understood in terms of power. Physically demarcated by their ground levels, platforms and walls and visually secured by scopic strategies, architecture both protected and empowered their unconventional inhabitants (Friedman 2015), providing them with privileged viewpoints.

In Santa Monica, Entenza's house features a blind northeast façade on the street. Its pergola leads to the doorway where the visitor is compelled to make a double turn,

which makes intrusive gazes impossible. Conversely, the house is completely open to the garden and the canyon on the opposite side. Entenza's bed operated indeed as a panopticon from which the editor overlooked the panorama of the ravine, as the glass arc of his bedroom wall glided dramatically 'into the trees like a space-age observation deck' (Germany 2000: 66) (**Figure 16**).

Unlike other Harris's houses, the redundant visual protection of the Havens House interior would not be so much about maintaining personal autonomy but about safeguarding a non-normative identity. Judging from the many architectural strategies used to maximize privacy, it seems that the domestic space was concealed out of

real paranoia. From the street, a blind wall makes access difficult. Once past the fence, a staircase and a V-shaped wooden footbridge were designed so that uninvited people cannot look down into the court (**Figure 17**). Additionally, in the hall, a freestanding cabinet wall yet again blocks the view, forcing visitors to find their way around it. Consequently, not only is this house understood from how the gaze is manipulated but also from the orienting or disorienting experiences created in relation to that gaze.

Anticipating its ideological postwar crusade against glass houses, the abovementioned article in *House Beautiful* of 1944 observed that a common bias against modern architecture was its association with living in a ‘fish bowl’ – Americans thought that large areas of glass were synonymous with the public gaze. Most likely inspired or written by Elizabeth Gordon, who was close to the Harrises, the article celebrated the architect’s ability to create privacy even though half of the house’s walls were made of glass and the property was surrounded by neighboring structures. Harris’s strategy, the article said, was to design projecting balconies to ‘screen any inquisitive gaze – intercepting it just as effectively as would a wall’ (*How to Judge Modern*, 1944: 53).

The central theme of the Havens home, a paradoxical combination of isolation and projection, sprang from the premise of privately enjoying its magnificent vista. The architectural form (triangular prisms) and materiality (glass walls) do not simply frame the view. In Harris’s words, the house ‘projects the beholder into it’ (*Berkeley Hillside House*, 1943: 78). There are virtually no limits. Even at night, the gaze is not trapped by the glass surface. By lighting the exterior soffits of the soaring overhang (**Figure 18**), the expanses of glass wrapping the house remain transparent; ‘note absence of interior reflections’, remarked an article in *House and Garden* (*Scene from Above*, 1944: 56).

Finally, in Alexander’s Hangover House, control over any exterior gaze was guaranteed by its very location, detached from the world on its clifftop location (Max 2007). For Halliburton, ‘who loved standing on top of things, usually mountains’ (Wells 2007), there was no other option than to build his house at the highest possible point, up above all his future neighbors, thus securing unobstructed views in all directions.

Media, Codes and Symbolic Interactions

Not only were design strategies important for enacting protection from and power over the immediate surroundings of these houses; in the space provided by architectural photography, professional periodicals and shelter magazines, among other media, these projects also negotiated access of the public gaze to their interiors, which entailed finding ways to theatricalize that which was otherwise secret.

Perhaps Entenza demanded an indisputably ‘masculine and smart’ house because he did not want to be associated with the ‘soft’ version of modernism he found in the houses of Harris’s previous clients, most of whom were women living in wooden structures featuring low-pitched

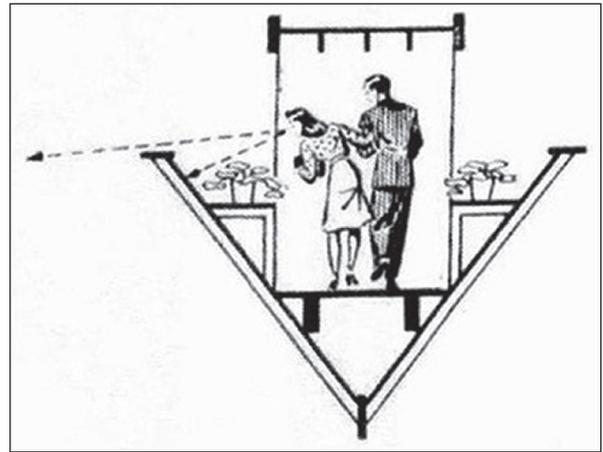


Figure 17: H. H. Harris’s Havens House in Berkeley (1941). Diagram of the footbridge explaining the impossibility of looking down (*‘How to Judge Modern,’* 1944).



Figure 18: H. H. Harris’s Havens House in Berkeley (1941). Night view of the balcony and living room overlooking the panorama of San Francisco Bay below. Photo: Maynard L. Parker, 1944 (courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California).

roofs. In July 1937, when *CA&A* introduced ‘this beach house for a bachelor playwright’, the article emphatically affirmed, ‘so here it is, as smartly turned out as the season’s new cars, and a man’s house, every inch of it’. Revealingly, the publicity of the house compared it to a new-style car as a status symbol of the upper-middle-class heterosexual bachelor (*‘Residence for John Entenza,’* 1937: 33). Months

later, when his residence was completed, *CA&A* insisted on the cliché of an unrestricted masculinity, unfettered by domestic obligations, stating that the house was necessarily casual and ‘simple’, like the life of a single man (‘A Dwelling for Mr. John Entenza’, 1938: 27). Considering Entenza’s complex character and enigmatic existence, forged by multiple personal conflicts – such as his anti-semitism and sexual orientation (Tigerman 2003) – nothing could be farther from the truth.

A comparison of the messages about Entenza’s first and second houses shows an evolution in the construction of his public persona, always associated with his domestic architecture. In December 1945, in an *A&A* piece announcing his new residence in Pacific Palisades (CSH#9), the hedonism and amateurism of youth has given way to the maturity of the recalcitrant bachelor who, already in his forties, presented himself as a refined man, a lover of modern design, a film buff and a gourmet cook, with a new house that would be the center of an enviable social and intellectual life. Nevertheless, although his now consolidated reputation as an editor obliged him to turn his back on the isolation of his first house, Entenza would maintain a bastion of privacy at the very heart of the house: a small study where he could be alone ‘with matters and concerns of personal choosing’, a place for concentration and work. It had ‘neither windows nor skylight’; it was literally a dark room, around which orbited the other spaces and activities of the house (‘Case Study Houses 8–9’, 1945: 44). Tellingly, whereas every nook and cranny was exhaustively documented and published in Entenza’s magazine – from the kitchen’s sink area to all bathroom fixtures – the editor’s studio was kept out of sight, the only space of the house that was neither photographed nor shown to the public. Again, both spatially and metaphorically, it would function as a closet within a closet which was neither strictly concealed nor revealed.

The abovementioned emphasis on the exterior language of Entenza’s first house, designed by Harris, shifted to the interior atmosphere of his second house, designed by Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen. There are very few images of the interior of the editor’s first house in Santa Monica. The more numerous exterior pictures of the later CSH#9, however, seem irrelevant compared to the fame architectural photographer Julius Shulman achieved for its indoor space. It was planned and furnished as a demonstration house, a set to be visited, photographed and disseminated by the print media. Shulman’s eye-catching photographs published in the central spread of the July 1950 issue of *A&A* reveal a painstakingly orchestrated interior where all elements are put on display to promote both Entenza’s own status as an avant-garde connoisseur and the desirability of his distinctly Southern California lifestyle. Yet, despite his claim for a democratization of modern taste, the editor’s set resulted from the symbiosis between an elitist consumer culture and *ad hoc* design. Entenza’s alliance with modern furniture companies established a strong conceptual and visual connection between the trailblazing interiors he published in his magazine and the products it publicized (Theocharopoulou 1999). His genius for generating prestige for himself and

his protégés was obviously associated with his talent for picking the best designers to arrange his exquisite settings, but also with his ability to use their creations as background for continuous performances of heterosexual integrity and influential masculine power.

Entenza’s use of the modern interior to fashion visual and material culture is reminiscent of John Potvin’s (2014) argument about Noël Coward’s stage-set modernism. In the acclaimed interiors that Entenza and Coward created – respectively, home as a setting to publicize modernism and the representation of the modern home within the theatrical space – both, as arbiters of style, provided new ways for their generation to imagine domesticity. Ironically, their modern figurations rested on the ambivalent allure, yet the impenetrable ‘mask of glamour’, a term that had entered ‘into popular and visual vocabulary in the 1930s’ (Potvin 2014: 213), mainly due to Hollywood studios, to denote a captivating combination of elegance, strong character and delicacy, but also the aura of mystery and the dangerous fascination of the untold inherent in periods of sexual and gender oppression (Wilson 2007).

In the Havens House, the desire to safeguard privacy was also reflected in publications. Like Neutra, Harris was obsessed with how the house was represented visually. Yet, instead of exercising control over photographers, he sought more interpretative coverage and tried out various approaches, inviting authors as different as Roger Sturtevant and Maynard Parker to capture the house’s ambience through their cameras. Nevertheless, the images that immortalized the building were Man Ray’s iconic photographs taken in 1942, particularly the shot from the lowest level of the plot, shown in **Figure 2**, where any reference to the ground is missing. Man Ray wanted to excite the viewer’s imagination, so he took the picture around noon, when the sun completely illuminated the inverted gables of the southern façade while casting deep shadows, an effect that contributed to the idea that this ‘sky house’ was floating in the air. Making use of ellipsis and a tight diagonal composition, he conveys the tension that exists between the building and its setting, compelling the spectator to speculate on the meaning of a photograph whose information is deliberately incomplete. There are no traces of Havens in Man Ray’s photographs, either. Instead, the artist portrayed his partner Juliet Browner and the architect himself, who took the place of Havens to perform a plausible domestic scene for the public eye. They are shown in two different photographs featuring opposing points of view which the observer must put together to read the whole as a lived interior.

In August 1937, fifteen months after breaking ground, Hangover House was complete. It first appeared, as yet unfurnished, on the front page of the November issue of *CA&A* (**Figure 19**), a magazine that, despite what Entenza’s circles claimed, was already a privileged source of information before he took over (Crosse 2010). Subsequently, other publications would cover the house, insisting on its desirable combination of privacy and fabulous views. In an article published in October 1938, *Architectural Record* focused on the unusual materiality of the house. It applauded the feat of its structure and building solutions,

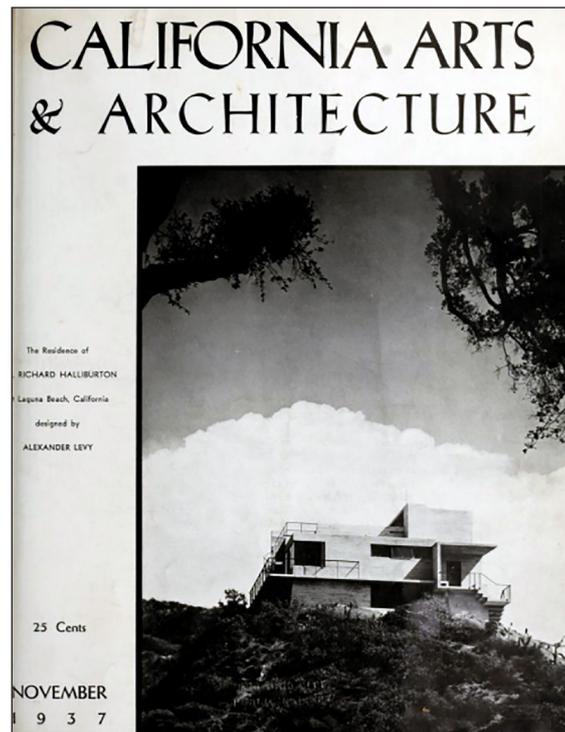


Figure 19: William Alexander's Halliburton (Hangover) House (1937). Cover of the November 1937 issue of *California Arts & Architecture* featuring a view of the north side of the recently completed house. Note the architect is presented as "Alexander Levy".

admiring the fact that the walls, floors and ceilings were in continuous concrete with diverse finishes. The magazine also extolled the house's technological achievements and practical solutions, like the dumbwaiter connecting the garage to the kitchen and the roof, which again were associated with the effortless life of the wealthy male bachelor. Given the isolation of Halliburton's home, the magazine's description of 'soundproofed' walls and doors 'insuring privacy to the two writers who lived here' is intriguing, however ('House for Writer', 1938: 48). Thus, *The Record* revealed part of the true program of the house, although its emphasis on the professional relationship that linked its inhabitants created a pretext for the confirmed bachelors who dwelt atop the hill.

Whereas in the two Harris houses the treatment of interior surfaces was essential to their inhabitant's comfort, the concrete's harshness in Alexander's Hangover House did not seem conducive to the satisfaction of the body. Yet concrete reinforced the symbols that nourished Halliburton's spirit. In that rock-solid fortress, as suggested by its monumental retaining wall, concrete was strong enough to provide protection for the intimacy of his private life. Concrete was long-lasting, like the family home he was eager to forge with his friends. Furthermore, it was modern, and in its association with the recently completed Hoover Dam landmark (Wells 2007), to the American psyche it symbolized progress. Finally, concrete is a timeless material, like the stones of the temples that crowned the peaks where horizon chaser Halliburton felt truly alive (Max 2007).

A plethora of symbols and codes can be inferred from early photographs of the Hangover House. For instance,

in a 1938 picture of the living room (**Figure 20**), among the books and personal items on the wooden shelves, are two small figures of iconic sailors. Not only do these hyper-masculine stereotypes embody Halliburton and Mooney's vocation and the spirit of their ongoing sailing adventure but they also contribute to an emerging gay imagery and aura of intense sexuality (Baker and Stanley 2003) that was to engross such queer artists as Jean Genet, Reiner Fassbinder, Tom of Finland and David LaChapelle. Alexander cherished sailor clothes and service caps, as shown in historic photos featuring him as a vessel captain supervising the construction work. The sensory and literary landscapes of the sea were certainly strong presences in the house: incomparable views of the ocean, and its sounds, smells and stories inundated Halliburton's mountaintop. In the 1938 photograph in **Figure 20**, a precious 1930 Random House edition of *Moby Dick*, one of his favorite fictions of men tossed into the sea, also stands out. The book was elegantly illustrated by Rockwell Kent, whom Mooney and Halliburton most likely admired for his ideals of freedom and homoerotic masculinity embodied in his classicizing woodcuts of naked athletic men at sea, and who, like them, was also a writer, a seafarer and gay. The symbolism of *Moby Dick* opens a variety of interpretations that permeate both Hangover House and Halliburton's hapless ship. Among the novel's most recurrent themes are the impressiveness of nature, friendship, masks as prisons of a socially constructed reality, fate and, of course, the whaling ship *Pequod* as a symbol of doom, echoing in the house that ultimately cost Halliburton his life.¹¹

In March 1939, a few days before Halliburton and his *Sea Dragon's* crew vanished at sea, Victor Fleming finished

shooting *The Wizard of Oz*. The film, which embraced 'the odd and the unique' and celebrated a non-heteronormative place where 'eccentricity and singularity' were privileged values (Pugh 2008: 220), would become a landmark in the history of gay culture. It ended with Judy Garland's revelation that 'there is no place like home'. Ironically, this famous line was also the same that ended Halliburton's bestselling book, *The Royal Road to Romance* (Halliburton 1925; Max 2007). As a queer figuration of Joseph Campbell's model of the mythological hero (Campbell 1949), had Halliburton completed his last journey, he might have finally returned home from his fictional world with a renewed appreciation for the extraordinary house he had built and the ordinary domestic life he was determined to begin there.

In December 1939, *Look* magazine discussed Hangover House for the last time in a piece eloquently entitled 'The House that Richard Halliburton Built... And Never Lived In'. His premature death interrupted the house's

dissemination in the press, leaving it shrouded in mystery. The house was also enhanced by various games of smoke and mirrors. For instance, Halliburton prohibited the architect from signing this project under his true family name, Levy, demanding that he adopt his first name, Alexander, to conceal his Jewish ancestry. Halliburton himself would change the actual year of his birth, 1899, to 1900, so that he could present himself to the world as a man of his century (Wells 2007).

After Halliburton's disappearance, his parents quickly got rid of the house that symbolized all that they hated about their son's life. Simultaneously, they donated to Princeton University a selection of documents to underpin the memory of Halliburton's heteronormative persona. As Michael Blankenship (1989) claims, Halliburton's father was instrumental in this and other subsequent episodes of erasure, mostly when Wesley Halliburton published his son's 'autobiography' (1940), compiled from over a thousand letters home, severely edited. It was told from



Figure 20: William Alexander's Halliburton (Hangover) House (1937). View of the entry foyer from the living room. Photo: George Haight, 1938 (courtesy of the Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara).

'a father's homophobic love', which excluded the name of Paul Mooney and many other men who for almost two decades were part of Halliburton's 'sexual exile' (Morris 2009: 140).

Conclusion

The three houses examined oscillate between the control and opacity of their interior and their public display. In 1930s, when queer subjectivities were forced to remain hidden and same-sex orientation was primarily structured by 'its distinctive public/private status, at once marginal and central, as *the open secret*' (Sedgwick 1990: 22), the untold could only be compensated and restored through continuous performative activity (Preciado 2000). Accordingly, as part of the political regime of simultaneous concealment and disclosure that dominates the topographies of closeted spaces, the ceaseless publicity surrounding these three houses was precisely the greatest guarantee of their privacy: a sort of closet eloquence. The print media thus operated as another 'middle space' between the public and the private spheres where the secret was hidden in plain sight, being so obvious and yet so opaque that messages could only be deciphered if read with the proper keys.¹²

However, beyond the preeminence of the controlling – and also voyeuristic – gaze in the articulation of their (private) interiors and the exercise of recodification of their (public) exposure, these houses share the emergence of other sensory stimuli, spatial relations and symbolic registers that, as lines of flight of modernism, would challenge prevailing ways of codifying identity, sexuality, pleasure or nonconforming affections. Their analysis reveals the importance of domestic space to the well-off gay men who were responsible for such astounding yet relatively unknown examples of California modernism. Their histories cannot be fully explained without considering the anxieties of queer orientation that produced them. Yet, although these houses worked as masks for their inhabitants' identity, they also empowered them, opening their lives to liminal experiences, agencies and enactments within and beyond normative constraints.

These houses are the result of sociopolitical pressures and individual subjectivities reacting differently to the disorienting experience of compulsory heterosexuality (Ahmed 2006). Entenza's house can be interpreted, therefore, as a space for public assertion and self-promotion disguising personal and personality conflicts; Havens's home as a place for voluntary seclusion and secret enjoyment; and Hangover House as the sublimation of Halliburton's passing performances. As such, they have been analyzed as a set (Entenza), a refuge (Havens) and a monument (Halliburton). Thanks to the cushion provided by class, all three men were able to negotiate privacy and intimacy through the possibilities offered by both architecture and architectural photography and other media, resorting primarily to language (Entenza), materiality (Havens) and symbolism (Halliburton). Correspondingly, their houses would be reflections of a public man who projected himself through his close collaborators' creative work (Entenza); a private man of whom very little is

known and who remained silent in the safety and comfort of his retained paradise (Havens); and a fictional character who created both a literary hero (Halliburton) and a fortress, like the Wizard of Oz, to protect himself and his friends from the world he went on to conquer.

Epilogue

Notwithstanding the widespread linguistic and literary representations of the interwar years' queer-lived realities which have stressed their 'closetedness' (Sedgwick 1990: 3), as George Chauncey convincingly explicates, the fact that at that time queer people 'did not speak of *coming out* of what we call "the closet" but rather of *coming out into* what they called "homosexual society", or the "gay world"', evidences that this society was 'neither so small, nor so isolated, nor, often, so hidden as "closet" implies' (Chauncey 1994: 7). As Chauncey clarifies, both the origins and meaning of the expression have been misunderstood; its contemporary sense (*coming out of*) conveys the assumption that it was the closet itself – a space 'designed for the retention of secrets that placed its users at constant risk of shameful revelation' (Breward 2019: 190) – from which queer neophytes were forced to emerge. This distinction would imply a radically different geographical and phenomenological interpretation of the pre-Stonewall era, since gay life was already not so much a closet as an entire world with complex interactions (Brown 2000). Accordingly, the three homes addressed in this essay stretched beyond their physical limits to act simultaneously as private and public spaces interacting with multiple, intertwined social spheres. If the Entenza House was designed for the eyes of Los Angeles and Hollywood avant-garde circles, and the Havens House was inspired by a deep sense of belonging, the Hangover House, like Halliburton's accounts, was embedded in a range of gay codes and beards connected to a concealed society of which the adventurer was actively a part. While moving concurrently between both a clandestine and a dominant culture (Chauncey 1994), architecture enabled these men to recognize themselves in the interstices of that very culture *into* which they *came out*. For this reason, as expressions of their *open secret*, these houses, far from the canonic constructions of the Modern Movement, seem fragile constructs teetering on the edge between 'public lives and private queers' always at risk of complete exposure and public disturbance (Potvin 2014: 210). They are, finally, unique narratives of both professional success and personal struggle that gesture toward queer worlds covertly inscribed between the lines of architectural historiography.

Notes

- ¹ The term 'peripheral' is used here to refer to the recurrent pre-World War II historic and historiographic disregard of California's idiosyncratic modernism, which has long been (mis)interpreted through the prism of Eastern criticism (Parra-Martínez and Crosse 2019).
- ² In the 1930s, most 'gay' people did not consider themselves 'homosexual' or 'queer', as they had simply no words to describe their stigmatized same-sex orienta-

tion. Although there is no satisfactory rule for choosing among these adjectives outside of a post-Stonewall context, 'gay' became preferable for being free of clinical connotations (Sedgwick 1990). As for the umbrella term 'queer', it is used as an all-inclusive designation notwithstanding its varying meanings — ranging from being merely synonymous with LGBT+ to a term of great political force. Chiefly to highlight that 'queer' homes are so much the consequence of other forms of articulation and expression of domesticity than the mere spatial outcome of their inhabitants' sexual orientation. Thus, the use of this word is informed by the insightful, yet elusive definition posited by Halperin (1997: 62): 'Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant'.

³ The Harrises had introduced John Entenza to their friend, *CA&A*'s publisher and editor Jere Johnson, who needed an assistant during her maternity leave. Yet, soon afterwards, Entenza maneuvered to gain ownership of the publication under shady circumstances. This would prompt his falling out with his former architect, which had later CSH Program ramifications (Harris 1985). This issue meant Entenza's first solo cover and the beginning of a thriving editorial venture. As for Harris, it facilitated his projection toward national media but marked as well a turning point in his relationship with the magazine (Crosse 2010).

⁴ In winter, warm air is transported by vertical pipes into the triangular roof's plenum chambers, which enable the ceilings to radiate heat down onto the inhabitants; in summer, high temperatures are compensated by letting the cool breezes of the Bay naturally move through the house.

⁵ To his skeptical critics, including *Time* magazine and many fellow Princeton alumni, Halliburton was a *poseur* who could not have written his own books, let alone perform the foolhardy stunts he described.

⁶ As Morris further elucidates, a precarious combination of sexuality, celebrity and dissatisfaction 'forged Halliburton's passing motive', which would explain 'why his public persona was exigent and fragile, and therefore fugitive'. Halliburton's wanderlust, Morris writes, 'was queer: he desired to travel and he traveled for desire' (Morris 2009: 129).

⁷ Over the 1930s, middle-class male-oriented magazines, such as *Esquire*, documented the shift from a Victorian masculinity, which valued moral integrity, to a modern paradigm centered on the construction of one's personality and public appearance (Pendergast 2000). In this context, the tribute it paid to Halliburton, which was ambivalently entitled 'The Passing of the Last Playboy', is eloquent. The magazine criticized his anachronistic, flamboyant character as too romantic for the Great Depression. Yet, opposing those who condemned him for being an eternal sophomore and charged him with falsification, that is, for passing, *Esquire* stated that Halliburton might not have been a literary hero, but he was a champion of unrestricted freedom who traveled for his own independent pleasure (Weller 1940).

⁸ Eloquent proof of his concern to avoid any suspicion of him being gay is that, although in the interwar period the term 'gay' had yet to acquire its current connotation and continued to be used with dominant meanings such as 'merry', 'bright' or 'carefree', Halliburton seldom used this word, as he preferred 'lively' (Max 2007: 4).

⁹ For instance, in the mid-1930s, when rumors persisted in Hollywood about actors Cary Grant and Randolph Scott's romantic relationship, instead of hiding their lifestyle, they simply posed for fan magazines which featured them as merry 'bachelors' sharing a beach house. The couple was photographed in domestic homosocial bliss, laughing in the pool, reading at home or working out together, sure that their openness would challenge every suspicion.

¹⁰ Halliburton's, Grant's and other Hollywood beard stories are reminiscent of the contemporary British case of Charles Laughton, a gay actor, and Elsa Lanchester. Elizabeth Darling (2018) has analyzed their Wells Coates-designed apartment in London, explaining how Laughton and Lanchester, as his 'beard' that allowed him to pass for heterosexual, negotiated celebrity and respectability through domestic performances and a constant exposure of their home, meticulously controlled to secure their reputation.

¹¹ Most Halliburton biographers agree that the exorbitant sum of money invested in the Hangover House led him to propose the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition's organizers build and sail a Chinese junk from Hong Kong to San Francisco. This desperate venture was perhaps the only opportunity he had to recover his finances, revive his fading fame and capitalize on the publicity of what would be his last but grandest escapade (Blankenship 1989). To do so, Halliburton first had to mortgage his house. Then, a series of unfortunate episodes forced him to postpone the voyage. Moreover, his inefficient modifications of the classical junk's design, alongside his failure to find an experienced crew proved fatal when his ship encountered a violent typhoon near the International Dateline.

¹² This process of visual and spatial cyphering of the architectural closet would intensify during the political repression of the late-1940s, culminating at the peak of the Lavender Scare in the extreme paradigm of the glass house (Preciado 2000), as transparent as an X-ray.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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