

## Women in the Advancement of Avant-garde Culture: Galka E. Scheyer and the Promotion of Modern Architecture in California<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The relocation of Galka Scheyer, the renowned art dealer and American representative of the Blue Four, to California in 1925 had a significant, yet unrecognized, impact on the development of the region's early modern architecture. After multiple efforts to land commissions for Rudolph Schindler, her residence, designed by Richard Neutra and Gregory Ain, became a meeting place for artists and members of Hollywood's collecting community. Around 1935, Scheyer's unconventional house and gallery was both her trademark and a reflection of her own character as an art educator and facilitator. This paper explores the role Scheyer and some personalities of her closest art circles, particularly women, played in promoting modernist architecture. Influenced by Scheyer's enthusiasm for the emancipatory nature of avant-garde culture, figures like Marjorie Eaton became intertwined in numerous episodes of architectural *matronage*. Although their stories are of paramount importance for achieving a more inclusive understanding of California modernism, these women's contributions are frequently neglected in the canonical histories of modern architecture, in which Scheyer appears as an inopportune presence. Along with a critique of such inaccurate historiographical accounts, this essay focuses on Scheyer's agency in linking artistic concepts and contexts as part of her project to advance Californian architecture.

**Key Words:** women in avant-garde; Galka Scheyer; California modernism; art and architecture; matronage

### [es] Mujeres en el avance de la cultura de vanguardia: Galka E. Scheyer y la promoción de la arquitectura moderna californiana

**Resumen.** La llegada a California en 1925 de Galka Scheyer, memorable agente en Norteamérica de los *Blue Four*, tuvo un impacto tan significativo como desconocido en el desarrollo temprano de la arquitectura de la región. Tras múltiples esfuerzos para divulgar la obra de Rudolph Schindler, su vivienda, diseñada por Richard Neutra y Gregory Ain, fue lugar de encuentro para artistas y coleccionistas de Hollywood. Hacia 1935, su insólita casa-galería se convirtió en su marca comercial, en un reflejo de su personalidad como facilitadora y educadora artística. Este trabajo explora el papel de Scheyer, junto a personalidades de sus círculos artísticos, fundamentalmente mujeres, en la promoción

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de la arquitectura moderna. Imbuidas de su entusiasmo por la naturaleza emancipadora de la cultura de vanguardia, figuras como Marjorie Eaton participaron en diversos episodios entrelazados de *matronazgo* arquitectónico. Desafortunadamente, a pesar de su importancia para un conocimiento más inclusivo de la modernidad californiana, sus contribuciones han sido silenciadas en las historias canónicas de la arquitectura, donde Scheyer aparece como una presencia inoportuna. Frente a la inexactitud de tales relatos historiográficos, este artículo aborda la agencia de Scheyer para vincular conceptos y contextos artísticos como parte de su proyecto para impulsar la arquitectura moderna en California.

**Palabras clave:** mujeres y vanguardia; Galka Scheyer; modernidad californiana; arte y arquitectura; matronazgo.

**Sumario:** 1. Introduction. 2. From Bauhaus to the Bay Area. 3. Hollywood and the Olympian Celebration of Avant-Garde Art. 4. Heterodoxy and Pluralism. 5. Conclusion. References.

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## 1. Introduction

“Courage is contagious” was Galka Scheyer’s mantra (Scheyer, 1941, p. 20). With this idea in mind, in the spring of 1924, the soon-to-be famous art mediator, collector and American representative of the Blue Four landed in New York with the mission of making these European avant-garde artists known to the New World. Born Emilie Esther into a well-off Jewish family from Braunschweig’s industrial bourgeoisie, Scheyer (1889-1945) studied in Oxford and Paris and was trained as an artist (Wünsche, 2006). Yet as an art dealer and educator, she would devote herself to tirelessly promoting the work of her friends Lyonel Feininger, Alexej von Jawlensky, Vassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, all of whose art she revered as the very spiritual essence of modernism.

In May 1925, one year after her entrance on the American art scene, Scheyer set off for the West Coast in pursuit of new business opportunities. On her way to California, she and her usual travel companion, Gela Archipenko, the wife of sculptor Alexander Archipenko, made a stop in Chicago, where Frank Lloyd Wright’s disciple Barry Byrne showed them around. Scheyer’s relationship with Byrne, a connection made via Feininger, was most certainly the explanation for her initial contact with Austrian-born architect Rudolph Michael Schindler (RMS) and his wife Pauline in Los Angeles (Crosse, 2016), with whom she spent two hectic weeks in July. The unconventional architecture (Fig. 1A) and the vibrant cultural atmosphere of the house in Kings Road that the Schindlers had created together in 1922 were a revelation to her, even a stroke of luck.

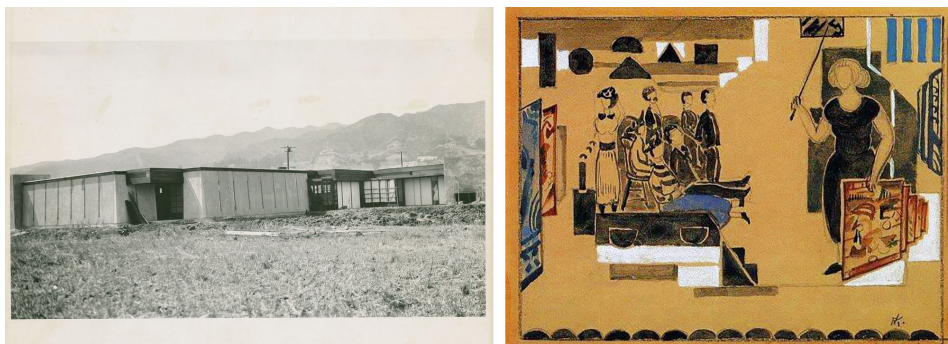


Figure 1. From left: Fig. 1A: R. M. Schindler (RMS), Kings Road House exterior ca. 1924; Fig. 1B: Peter Krasnow, *Recalling Happy Memories*, ca.1927, portrait of Galka Scheyer lecturing at Kings Road (courtesy of the gta Archives, Holding Werner M. Moser, ETH Zürich; courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena).

The couple introduced Scheyer into their West Hollywood circle, where she met future collaborators, such as the émigré architect Richard Neutra, the art scholar Anita Delano and the interior designer Herman Sachs, a kindred spirit who would assist Scheyer in her search for potential clients (Houstian, 1998). All these pioneers of art and architecture were members of a community who “gathered in solidarity, met as friends and lovers, and shared the excitement of making important breaks with tradition” (Deverell, 2003, p. 13) in the unique cultural geography of Southern California.

This essay delves into Scheyer’s manifold contributions to the architectural avant-garde within and beyond this local group. Notwithstanding her role as maven and patron of modernist architecture, the aim is to unearth other less explored ways through which this cultural agent catalyzed the formation of an architectural movement in California. Correspondingly, this paper investigates how Scheyer’s promethean efforts to mobilize and expand architectural culture were linked to her determination to use every resource, particularly architecture, to show how modern art could be a truly liberating force.

## 2. From Bauhaus to the Bay Area

Upon her relocation to San Francisco, in August 1925, Scheyer began a busy program of lectures and exhibitions (Prophetess of the Blue Four, 1925), and she soon became a crucial actor in the Bay Area (Wünsche, 2006). The Schindlers’ network led her to the most radical artists of the region, mainly those connected with Edward Weston’s group—among others, Scheyer befriended the photographers Dorothea Lange and Imogen Cunningham; Lange’s husband, the graphic artist Maynard Dixon; and Cunningham’s husband, the printmaker Roi Partridge. Up until the founding of Grace Morley’s San Francisco Museum of Art in 1935, the Bay Area was still a small, conservative art center (Selz, 1996). However, Scheyer found unconditional support from these and other artists receptive to the European avant-gardes, such as the director of the Oakland Art Gallery, William Clapp, who was instrumental in providing Scheyer with both an exhibition space and contacts with various galleries on the West Coast. Encouraged by the positive reactions to her first extensive Blue

Four exhibition at Clapp's Oakland Art Gallery in May 1926, Scheyer organized a similar event at the Los Angeles Museum in the fall, having another run in December at the University of California, Southern Branch (the future UCLA), where she was assisted by her friend Annita Delano and the painter and future photographer Barbara Morgan, another modern art advocate who had recently joined the faculty at UCLA and would become one of Neutra's architecture students.

During her frequent visits to teach and exhibit in Los Angeles, Scheyer was active in the parties and cultural soirées that the Schindlers hosted in Kings Road. In their house, she earned a reputation for her heterodox lectures and mise-en-scènes (Fig. 1B). Scheyer communicated with her public in a very physical way, by displaying, one after another, a selection of paintings (Williams, 2017), which she moved through the space of the room, making the most of that ground-breaking architecture to create a climate of excitement for avant-garde art. In the summer of 1927, already firmly entrenched in the Schindler-Weston circles of artists and architects, Scheyer moved into the Schindlers' guest apartment in their Kings Road House.<sup>4</sup> For three months, she studied with Schindler those aspects of modern architecture that she could apply to her art lectures and to better market the Bauhaus-oriented Blue Four's work with a modernist clientele. She also used this period to begin establishing solid contacts in the Los Angeles art world of movie studios, galleries and collectors.

In August 1927, during her fortuitous stay at Kings Road, she witnessed the separation of Pauline and Rudolph Schindler, whose shadowy circumstances would most likely affect the decision of Philip Lovell, the renowned naturopathic physician and *Los Angeles Times* health columnist, to remove Schindler from the project of building his iconic house. Despite speculation about the professional and personal reasons behind such a decision (Marmorstein, 2002), scholars agree that Neutra was initially reluctant to take the place of Schindler, until Scheyer successfully interceded for him to take over the commission of the Lovell Health House. This interaction—described by Dione Neutra as “a tangle” worthy of “a Dostoyevsky story” (1986, p. 172)—led Robert Sweeney to remark that “Scheyer's presence changed the course of modern architecture” (2001, p. 103).

Early in 1928, back in San Francisco, Scheyer met Marjorie Eaton, then an art student, whom she would greatly influence, guiding both her artistic career and the creation of her own collection (Rindfleisch, 1981). Scheyer also passed on to Eaton her enthusiasm for modern architecture and for the architects she introduced to her. The correspondence in the Schindler papers at UC Santa Barbara reveals Eaton's efforts to land several commissions for Schindler in San Francisco, including the renovation of a house in Telegraph Hill to create her own studio and a project for her stepmother, Edith Cox Eaton, on a sloping lot overlooking the Bay.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Marjorie was always quick to write to Schindler whenever she met prospective clients and both Eatons tried to commercialize his pieces of furniture.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Galka Scheyer, letter to Rudolph Michael Schindler (RMS), May 1927. Schindler papers, Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara (henceforth ADC/UCSB). In her handwritten note announcing her long visit, Scheyer seems to want to reassure Schindler about her stay by letting him know that she had already discussed it with Pauline.

<sup>5</sup> Marjorie Eaton, letters to RMS, April 29 and May 15, 1930 (ACD/UCSB); Edith Eaton Cox, letter to RMS, May 8, 1929 (ACD/UCSB).

<sup>6</sup> In 1930, Marjorie Eaton eagerly wrote Schindler about another potential client she found for him, a new “aviator-engineer” friend, a Mr. Ewing, who was also a business promoter based in San Francisco and “ready to build



Upon Scheyer's return from her European tour, during which, in the summer of 1928, she spoke at the 6th International Congress for Art Education in Prague and visited the Blue Four at the Bauhaus's new headquarters in Dessau, Scheyer resumed her frantic pace of presentations in Northern California. In October, she lectured at the *Exhibition of Modern Art* at the Hale Brothers Department Store, organized by her sponsor, Clapp (*Exhibition on Modern Art Opens October 4, 1928*, p. 17). In the wake of the 1925 Paris Exhibition, the event was part of a burgeoning movement by big city department stores to educate the public about the new industrial arts and decorative objects coming onto the market. In the 1920s, the staging of furnished model rooms and demonstration houses in commercial buildings was a well-established practice in the United States, a tradition to which major modern art institutions, such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, would later contribute.

Having witnessed the Art Deco craze sweeping New York department stores—Macy's, Loeser & Co., Lord and Taylor, Wanamaker, etc.—on her way to and from Europe (Crosse, 2018), Scheyer was brimming with ideas to help market the work of the Blue Four and many other artists already in her orbit. She was particularly interested in the new techniques of retail design to capture the public's attention by immersing it in alluring atmospheres. Cognizant of the importance of advertising as an essential component of modern art and architecture, Scheyer aimed to promote both of them simultaneously.

She tried to persuade Hale Brothers executives to create a Schindler-designed model home within their San Francisco store as a way to display exclusive goods in an innovative, comprehensive fashion, which at the same time would educate the consumer about new modern interiors. In the Schindler papers is a blueprint of a temporary "modern house for Mme. G. E. Scheyer at Hale's" (Fig. 2A) designed as an installation around the perimeter of the building's patio. This model home would be accessible from the elevator and visited in a U-shaped tour across the living room, dining room and music room before leaving the exhibition through the nursery. Compared to most of Schindler's residential projects of the time, the spatial hierarchies of the floor plan appear to respond to the more traditional domestic values of the target public. Yet, despite the formality of the layout, the music room was envisioned as a versatile space for social gatherings, recitals, art exhibitions and lectures.

Although Scheyer was unable to convince Hale Brothers to take on her project, she did not abandon her ambition to broker a commission for Schindler in the Bay Area. She soon persuaded the council of the Oakland Public Library to consider Schindler for the modernization of the Oakland Art Gallery, which was then located at the Municipal Auditorium, on the southern shore of Lake Merritt. The board agreed to Scheyer's proposal to have Schindler prepare preliminary plans for converting the nearby boathouse into a new exhibition venue.

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on Telegraph Hill." She asked Schindler if he could arrange tours for Ewing of his Wolfe House on Catalina Island and Packard House in Pasadena, among other recently completed works. Marjorie Eaton, letter to RMS, summer 1930 (ACD/UCSB); Marjorie Eaton, letter to RMS, June 22, 1928 (ACD/UCSB).

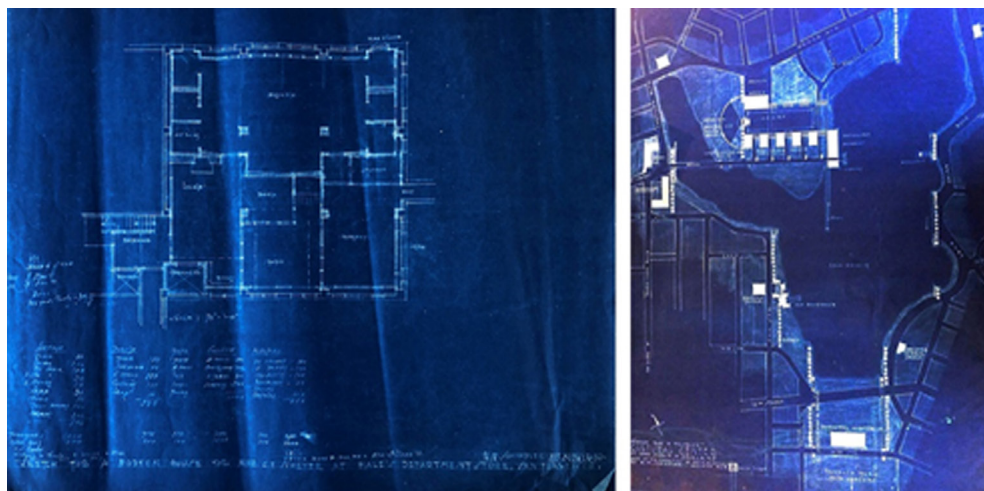


Figure 2. From left: Fig. 2A: RMS, “Sketch for a modern house” at Hale’s, San Francisco, 1928; Fig. 2B: RMS, “Sketch for a Cultural Center at Lake Merritt, Oakland,” January 1929 (courtesy of the Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, henceforth ADC/UCSB).

Scheyer also had to convince a reluctant Schindler to undertake the job. As she explained to him, although for the moment the institution was very short of funding, its president understood how necessary the need was, which “may mean for you a chance for the Million dollar building they are going to have sooner or later” (Galka Scheyer to RMS, December 1928, letter in the ADC/UCSB).

In January 1929, most likely influenced by Scheyer’s vision, the architect exceeded the scope of his commission and presented an ambitious master plan (Fig. 2B) for an entire cultural complex around the lake. It included an opera house, an open-air amphitheater, an aquarium, an academy of art, a music conservatory, a hotel and several commercial buildings, all organized along a system of perpendicular axes, creating a homogenous vision for the complex.

While waiting for the board’s decision, Scheyer let Schindler know that, with the help of Imogen Cunningham, she continued the promotion of his architecture in San Francisco. Yet, in her letter, Scheyer scolded Schindler because, despite everything she was doing for him, he barely reciprocated and was not completing the design tasks she had entrusted to him: “For life’s sake, stirr [sic] RMS and do something” (Galka Scheyer to RMS, January 1929, letter in the ADC/UCSB).

Despite Scheyer’s tenacity, her efforts to achieve commissions for Schindler failed to come to fruition until May 1929. That month in San Francisco, she met Harry Braxton, a gallery owner from Los Angeles, to whom she proposed a long-term collaboration. Upon hearing from her friend Gela Archipenko of Braxton’s success selling several of her husband’s pieces to the movie director Josef von Sternberg, Scheyer rapidly persuaded Braxton of the advantages of creating a new exhibition space in a prominent Hollywood location. As she explained to Schindler, although Braxton had Frank Lloyd Wright in mind, she managed to get Braxton to sign a contract with him for the design of an avant-garde gallery in a recently completed building, which was part of a commercial development financed by Cecil DeMille. Yet,

in letter dated May 30, Scheyer expressed again her disappointment with Schindler for his apparent disinterest in approaching new clients. She rebuked him, intimating that if it were not for her efforts, he would have missed such an important business opportunity:

I know a man who promised to write to me at once after seeing Braxton and to give me his reaction to him. No news and disappointment for the ‘breach of promise’... Well, Braxton came here, he had met you but you did not even let him know that you were a modern architect [...] You don’t deserve it but I did it for your work to say that your architecture is the one (Galka Scheyer to RMS, May 1929, letter in the ADC/UCSB).<sup>7</sup>



Figure 3. From left: RMS, Braxton Gallery at 1624 N. Vine Street, Hollywood, 1929, exterior and interior photos by Viroque Baker; and Blue Four Exhibition catalogue, Braxton Gallery, 1930. Scheyer’s promotional logo of the Blue Four might have influenced Schindler’s façade motif of four horizontal bars (courtesy ADC/UCSB; courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Peg Weiss papers).

Schindler, who had barely three months to complete the project, managed to maximize the existing 90 m<sup>2</sup> to house an exhibition space, store, print room, office and storage space. He laid out an interior perimeter of leaning shelves, which, as well as regulating its geometry, allowed the exhibition of works of varying formats, such as sculptures, paintings, photographs, books, etc. (Fig. 3). The wood and rubber paneling, the light grey paint, and the steel tube furniture presaged Schindler’s exploration into the streamline esthetic of the 1930s. Arthur Millier, the influential *Los Angeles Times* art critic, noted the striking contrast between the neutral background of the dark interior and the metallic clarity of the display furniture, whose finished surfaces he compared to the elegance and modernity of a zeppelin (Millier 1929).

<sup>7</sup> In her letter, Scheyer mentions her intention to travel to Los Angeles soon and to stay at the architect’s house in Kings Road. She also mentions picking up Schindler’s son Mark and bringing him down with her and Marjorie Eaton. This means they were stopping off in Carmel to visit Pauline on the way. Pauline Schindler made numerous trips to the Bay Area where she must have connected with Scheyer and Eaton, which can be gleaned from issues of her *The Carmelite* publications. It also means that Pauline and Rudolph Schindler were both interacting within the same circles despite their estrangement.

Likewise, Schindler solved the exterior in an intelligent and economical way: black oilcloth canvasses, stretched over a metal frame, served as advertising and stood out against the white wall of the existing Spanish Revival façade.

This space became a new artistic hub and its owners, Braxton and his wife, Viola Brothers Shore,<sup>8</sup> assumed the role that, in the previous decade, the Schindlers had played, with their house as a center for gatherings of the region's most progressive social and cultural groups. For Scheyer, it was a major turning point in her entrepreneurial career. Not only could she hold various Blue Four group or solo exhibitions in the Braxton Gallery, but she could reinforce her professional contacts with modernist collectors in Los Angeles, such as Josef von Sternberg and Walter and Louise Arensberg. Moreover, aware that in the middle of the Depression, Hollywood's film industry was one of the few thriving businesses that could provide a wealthy clientele, she soon decided to move to the area.

During that time, her almost continuous presence in Los Angeles allowed her to strengthen her professional ties with both Schindlers who, although separated since 1927, continued to collaborate professionally, often with Scheyer as an intermediary.<sup>9</sup> In early 1930, after staying for several years in Carmel, just south of San Francisco, the peripatetic Pauline Schindler returned to the city with plans to act as agent for some "contemporary creators,"<sup>10</sup> including the architects Richard Neutra, Kem Weber, Jock Peters, J. R. Davidson, Frank Lloyd Wright and his son Lloyd, as well as her estranged husband. After her failure to edit a monograph issue of *The Carmelite* devoted to the region's early modern architecture, which she planned to call "Contemporary Architecture of the Pacific Coast," Pauline Schindler's first order of business was to curate a traveling exhibition for the group. She was soon joined by Scheyer, who advised her on the catalogue, circulation and publicity for the show. Entitled *Contemporary Creative Architecture in California*, it premiered in April 1930 at UCLA. Most of the exhibitors in this seminal event would later figure prominently in the legendary modern architecture exhibition of 1932 at the MoMA.

In February 1931, after seven months on a collecting expedition in Southeast Asia with Gela Archipenko, Scheyer returned to San Francisco. During her brief stay in the city, Scheyer befriended Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, who were in residence there (Wünsche, 2006). She told them enthusiastically about Schindler's work and the couple invited her to visit Mexico soon. In March, Scheyer moved again into the Kings Road House determined to make Los Angeles her permanent home. For several months, she rented the wing formerly occupied by Clyde and Marian Chace (who along with Rudolph and Pauline Schindler were the four members of the original household). It was an independent two-studio apartment with a garden adjacent to the two other studios where Schindler continued to live. Over the summer of 1931, she savored the freedom of her new life (Fig. 4). She turned floors, walls and ceilings of her Kings Road apartment into a display of paintings by the Blue Four and other artists, a display she often reorganized for her personal enjoyment but also for public

<sup>8</sup> The Braxtons also commissioned Schindler to design their new home in Venice Beach, one of his most noticeable exercises of "space architecture" (Schindler, 1934). Yet even while it was on Schindler's drawing board, the couple divorced and gave up on this project.

<sup>9</sup> Galka Scheyer to RMS, ca. winter 1929 (ACD/UCSB). Scheyer refers to Pauline's preparation of a monograph on modern architecture, in which she encourages Schindler to take part.

<sup>10</sup> Pauline G. Schindler, contract draft to represent and promote the work of local "contemporary creators," March 10, 1930 (ADC/UCSB).



showings. She arranged her collection in very personal, unconventional ways,<sup>11</sup> placing expressionist masterpieces in relation with design objects, modern furniture and classical works of non-Western art, like her treasured Balinese sculptures.



Figure 4. Galka Scheyer at Kings Road, ca. 1931 (from left: legacy of Nina Kandinsky, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, MNAM/CCI, Centre Pompidou, Paris; courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Peg Weiss papers).

Through her acquaintance with Rivera and Kahlo, in the fall of 1931, Scheyer curated the exhibition *Los Cuatro Azules* at the National Library of Mexico. During her time in the country, she continued raving about Schindler, which she told the architect in a letter handwritten in German and sent from Mexico City:

Dear RMS, I got a letter from Pauline. I assume that the letter was written without your consent. Please, let me know about it. Diego Rivera is having a modern house built here [Juan O’Gorman’s Rivera-Kahlo house and studio]. I will tell you about it in person. In November, he will travel to New York. Later on, he plans to live in Hollywood. I have told him a lot about my house [in Kings Road]. He is very interested in seeing your work. (Galka Scheyer to RMS, October 27, 1931, letter in the ADC/UCSB).<sup>12</sup>

Scheyer’s symbiotic relationship with Schindler, whom she affectionately named the “honorary fifth” member of her group,<sup>13</sup> was fruitful in this period. Scheyer’s

<sup>11</sup> The continuous spatial reorganization of her collection, as well as the display of artworks in every exhibit she curated, was a major concern for Scheyer, both for esthetic and commercial reasons. Years later, once established in Hollywood, Scheyer also explored alternative ways to arouse the interest of her new audiences in the film industry. Among her marketing techniques was the hosting of events in her own house and in the houses of movie stars like Marlene Dietrich (Wünsche, 2010). Scheyer was aware that, hanging on Dietrich’s walls, the paintings that she lent her friend would attract the attention of visitors desirous of emulating the tastes of Hollywood celebrities.

<sup>12</sup> Authors’ translation. Pauline Schindler’s letter mentioned by Scheyer is revealing her ambivalent, if not sometimes tense relationship with Schindler’s wife, especially after the art dealer moved in with Schindler. Scheyer most likely referred to a communication in which Pauline let her know about her intentions to return with her son Mark to Kings Road and to “administer the property.” In that note, Pauline also expressed her desire to send Scheyer a new lease “so that things will be in good order between us” and to find ways of grappling with “problems arising” between them, such as the common use of the gardens and the only kitchen of the Kings Road double house. Pauline Schindler, letter to Galka Scheyer, October 15, 1931 (ADC/UCSB).

<sup>13</sup> Galka Scheyer, letter to RMS, April 12, 1931 (ADC/UCSB).



love of modern architecture was enhanced by that association with Schindler, who undoubtedly benefited from her connections and experience as a modern art promoter and critic.<sup>14</sup> Yet by living together, their personal relationship gradually deteriorated. Scheyer requested a number of modifications to her apartment that the architect would not always agree to make, such as painting the existing concrete walls in colors or the addition of curtains. The Schindler papers contain numerous requirements from his tenant, from the creation of wood picture frames and pieces of furniture for Scheyer to never-ending lists of maintenance problems. The tone of her requests soon abandoned cordiality and the complaints began, for example, reprimanding him for the lack of comfort and reminding him that she was not a Bohemian, to which Schindler replied with some irritation that she did not live in a hotel and that “your rent does not entitle you to any services and I do not intend to act as your janitor” (RMS to Galka Scheyer, July 15, 1931, letter in the ADC/UCSB).

The architect, who, like Scheyer, was always short of money, kept track of all of the expenses she incurred. Schindler scolded Scheyer for her late payment of rent and for using certain amenities, to the point of admonishing her for leaving the lights on or talking too much on the telephone. This back and forth of complaints and bills led to a spiral of disaffection,<sup>15</sup> which would last for years, conveyed in strongly worded letters in which Schindler calls on her to settle her debts by presenting him with a painting by Alexej von Jawlensky that she had left at Kings Road.<sup>16</sup> The historiography of architecture tends to ignore these apparent trivialities, but often, the sometimes awkward and prickly nature of human relations may better explain the winning or losing of a commission than any grand architectural narrative. In this case, their deteriorating relationship would explain why, after a decade of trying to secure projects for Schindler, Scheyer did not give the commission to build her own house to her old friend.

### 3. Hollywood and the Olympian Celebration of Avant-Garde Art

At the end of 1932, Scheyer visited her family in Germany for the last time. Three months after the election of Hitler as *Reichskanzler*, the economic boycott of the Jews in April 1933 precipitated events and, feeling in danger, Scheyer decided to return to California as soon as possible. In May 1933, after spending several days with Kandinsky in the waning Bauhaus of Berlin, she set off for America with 250 paintings in tow.

<sup>14</sup> David Gebhard (1997) has written that the presence of Scheyer’s avant-garde painting collection at Kings Road may have influenced Schindler’s brief excursions into architectural expressionism of the time.

<sup>15</sup> RMS, letter to Galka Scheyer, July 19, 1933 (ADC/UCSB). In his letter, Schindler berated Scheyer for not having paid him for the design and execution of a picture frame despite the many modifications she asked him to make to it.

<sup>16</sup> RMS, letter to Galka Scheyer, September 12, 1934 (ADC/UCSB). Addressing his old friend as “Madame Galka Scheyer,” Schindler requested written confirmation of the telephone conversation in which she would have offered him a painting she left in his house in payment for the \$20 debt that, according to the architect, Scheyer still owed him; otherwise, he claimed, he would take her to court. Although the letter ended with a more conciliatory tone expressing Schindler’s desire to see Scheyer’s new home soon, the fact he had not visited it for some months after its completion speaks volumes about his complicated relationship with both Scheyer and Neutra at the time.

Many exiled artists, collectors and gallery owners in difficulties were sending their works to the United States. Beginning in 1933, the North American market was flooded with modern art coming from Europe, which made its sale all the more difficult to a public who was largely interested in local movements, like realism and regionalism, and, in the case of California, in Mexican muralism (Wünsche, 2010). After living in America for so many years, Scheyer was still a dealer without a gallery. Feeling that the only option for her art business was to create her own space, where she could present herself very differently from her competitors, she pursued the idea of building a house-gallery-studio as a matter of utmost urgency.

Prior to the creation of her own place, apart from her sojourns at Kings Road, she stayed for some periods of time at Frank Lloyd Wright's Freeman and Storer Houses. While looking for the right architect for her new home, and also while the house was under construction, she was invited by Harriet Freeman to live in the guest apartment of the Freemans' famous residence in Hollywood that Schindler had redesigned. However, Scheyer's opinion of Wright's textile block houses was not very high. She complained about the lack of space and poor light conditions of that "basement," where it was impossible to properly show her impressive holdings, including her collection of modern paintings, let alone appreciate them against the "frou-frou" of the concrete blocks (Wünsche, 2006, p. 220).

Scheyer had first wanted to commission J. R. Davidson to design her house. In fact, as part of her busy networking activity, she would later introduce J. R. Davidson to his friend and client, Ruth McClymonds Maitland, a prominent collector who encouraged Davidson to take over the renovation work on her home that George Howe had designed (McCoy, 1984). Scheyer knew the future Case Study House architect very well, mainly through her friendship with his wife, Greta Wollstein, a German designer, but the Davidsons temporarily moved to Chicago, and Scheyer preferred to deal with someone at closer range. According to Scheyer's confidante, the artist Lette Valeska, Scheyer's purpose was to create an innovative space, and so Richard Neutra, the "most modern architect" in California—as he advertised himself—must have appeared as a natural choice to her (Hines, 2005).

In Los Angeles, plots were still affordable in the Hollywood hills area, chosen by Scheyer for its proximity to the social and cultural centers of the city but out of the way enough to captivate visitors with its idyllic surroundings. In the summer of 1933, through Neutra's help, she was able to purchase her dream lot: a steep hillside site, for only \$150, at 1880 Blue Heights Drive—Scheyer managed to receive permission from the city to both name this new street and to choose her home number in reference to the Blue Four (Wünsche, 2006).

No longer able to count on financial help from her family, once again Scheyer's ambitions were stifled by her chronic budgetary limitations. The total cost of the house, completed in less than a year, was only \$3,500, of which a large part went toward land development costs, including the cutting of a steep road access (Brown, 1938).<sup>17</sup>

Unlike other Neutra clients, Scheyer was a long-time user and promoter of modern architecture and was fully aware of her needs and means. Prioritizing what she

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<sup>17</sup> The house was paid for through a loan from the Federal Housing Administration that allowed Scheyer to take on a mortgage of just \$30 a month, insurance and taxes included, that is, less than half of what she paid Schindler for the rent of his Kings Road apartment.

considered essential, Scheyer focused her attention on the gallery space as the very core of her house, whose other spaces she would gradually finish as funds became available. Yet Scheyer's confidence and clear ideas about what her project should be would earn her more than a few clashes with her architects, first with Neutra and, later, with his young disciple Gregory Ain, who helped Neutra on the project from the beginning.

Standing on the peak of one of the highest mountains in the Santa Monica range, the house was organized across two levels. On the lower floor, a Balinese mural on the garage wall acted as an open vestibule leading to a staircase. It linked the lower porch and the upper entrance hall, conceived as a sculpture gallery. On the first floor, laid out parallel to the slope, Neutra placed the higher-ceilinged space of the gallery, which was flanked on the access side by a small kitchen, a bathroom and a dressing room and, on the opposite side, by a fireproof studio that could serve both as a bedroom and a place for storing artworks. The gallery, which was used as both an exhibition space and a lecture room, was also a space in which to conduct various domestic activities, and thus used as a living room and a dining room. The long wall facing the terrace was completely glazed, providing an impressive panorama of the mountains, the city and the ocean. The boundary between interior and exterior space was blurred by the sixteen feet of a sliding glass door opening onto this balcony. Because the goal of the glazed wall was to provide unobstructed views, not only were large sheets of plate glass used but the expanse was also built "with no muntins and metal frames as thin as possible," as the write-up of the house in *Architectural Forum* stated (House for Galka Scheyer, 1935, p. 236). At the upper level of the plot, a footbridge perpendicular to the slope led to the roof terrace where, before Ain added his extension to the house, there was a light pergola, recalling Neutra's demonstration house at the 1932 Vienna International Werkbund Exhibition (Fig. 5).

Depending on the occasion, Scheyer made free use of all the rooms of the house, as is documented in the numerous photographs of her daily life that she sent to the Blue Four. This extraordinary versatility, which challenged the normative bases of the usual domestic programs assumed by most of the modern homes intended for middle-class families, was in tune with other houses that Neutra built for independent single women, such as that of art teacher Constance Perkins (1955). Like Scheyer, Perkins preferred to sacrifice her own comfort in favor of a larger lounge-studio where she could work, receive visitors, give lessons to her students and even sleep, a mix of functions not easily accepted by the municipal authorities.

Although Scheyer wrote about the pleasure she gained from the night view of Los Angeles at her feet and from seeing her paintings filled with the morning light, she asked Neutra for fewer windows in favor of a larger wall surface for exhibiting paintings. While the architect did not give in to this in principle, they seemed to arrive at a compromise, according to the architectural historian Thomas Hines (2005; 2010): the adoption of a series of removable panels for insertion over windows, which almost doubled the available walls without permanently closing off the breathtaking view. However, this solution "to increase the exhibition space" (House for Galka Scheyer, 1935, p. 236), is not visible in any of the existing images of the house, and neither are the necessary profiles to receive such panels, which leads us to conclude that it was a system so basic and impractical that, despite the publicity describing it as a highly sophisticated solution, it may never have been used.

2. HOUSE FOR GALKA SCHEYER, SANTA MONICA RANGE



**PROBLEM:** The house stands in the peak of one of the highest mountains in the Santa Monica Range. It has a view of the Pacific Ocean. Frequently after big rains and interesting cloud formations. As much glass as possible on the ocean side was installed, as well as a balcony for use when weather permitted. The owner is a collector of modern art, and requires a maximum of wall space for hanging pictures, as well as a fully equipped workshop in which to store her pictures.

The gallery, most important room in the house, serves as living room, dining room, and exhibition space for the owner's collection of pictures by Klee, Kandinsky, Picasso, etc. One large glazed opening extends the length of the room, and access to the terrace is provided by a sliding door 16 feet long. To permit an unobstructed view large sheets of plate glass were used, with no muntins, and metal frames as thin as possible. The conflicting requirements of maximum glass area and wall space were each satisfied by the adoption of panels which could be set over the glazed openings when it was necessary to increase the exhibition space. The other elements of the house are simple, consisting of a small kitchen, dressing room, and bath, but are quite adequate for the owner's needs. A roof garden is connected with the knock-off top of the mountain, and the building's two lower stories open on three patios. Cost: under \$3,000, or about \$2.75 a square foot of net floor area.

RICHARD J. NEUTRA, ARCHITECT, GREGORY AIN, ASSOCIATE



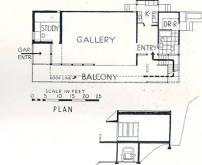
BALCONY



DETAIL, GARAGE AND STUDY

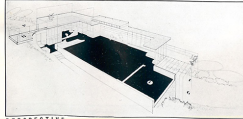


GALLERY



PLAN

SECTION



PERSPECTIVE

CONSTRUCTION OUTLINE

**FOUNDATION**  
Wet-masonry 1:8 1/2% Riverside Portland Cement Co.  
Cotta Foot-Off cement paving No. 10 with reinforcing Waterbury-Paine's by The Parrot-Six Companies, Inc.

**FRAME CONSTRUCTION**  
Douglas fir interspersed with exception of reinforced sills  
Masonry construction  
Concast block for structural study. Tiles by Dilling, McBean & Co.

**EXTERIOR SURFACE**  
Stucco—masonry cement plaster, Columbia brick  
Stucco—concrete glass supporting porch overhang—J. S. Steel Co.

**DOOR AND WINDOW FRAMES**  
"Dymond" aluminum type steel sash and sliding door, 16 feet long, by Dymond Metal Products Co.

**GLASS**  
Libbey-Owens-Ford double strength grade A.

**ROOF**  
Gutters } Galvanized iron—No. 1  
Down spouts } "Kemper" by American Rolling Mill Co.  
Composition shingles paper—"Paine's" composition roof by The Parrot-Six Companies.

**EXTERIOR PAINT**  
Oil paint by National Lead Co. for exterior  
Sash—"Alcoa" aluminum paint.

**LATH AND PLASTERING**  
Lath—No. 8. Green oak covered Rock-Island and 1/2" Columbia lath. Plaster—"Empire" hardwood plaster.

**INTERIOR WOODWORK**  
Birch and mahogany—vertical grain Douglas fir.

**INSULATING**  
Outside walls—Celotex lath, Ruff-Corona under composition roof.

**INTERIOR FINISHES**  
Floor and trim—gray shingle stain by National Lead Co.

**DOORS—3 coats eggshell enamel by National Lead Co.**  
Sash—"Alcoa" aluminum paint. Wallpaper—Kaiser.

**WIRING**  
Cable—American Steel & Wire Co. Switches—General Electric Co.

**LIGHTING**  
Sockets—"Light Control" lenses. Switches—Blue Ridge Manufacturing Co. diffusing glass.

**FLUCCING**  
Kitchikan. Sink—Kaiser Co.

**STOVE—"Magin"—American Stove Co.**  
Refrigerator—General Electric Co.

**BATHROOM**  
Fixtures—Kaiser. Sinks—Crompton Mfg. Co. Tiles—Dilling, McBean & Co.

**PIPING**  
Piped wrought iron pipe by Reading Iron Co.

**HARDWARE**  
Locks for interior and exterior doors by Schlage Lock Co.

Figure 5. Richard Neutra, Galka Scheyer House as featured in *Architectural Forum* 62, October 1935, pp. 236-237.

In fact, contrary to other Neutra homes from the same period, such as his Beard House (1934), where the architect tried to promote new industrial technologies, for Scheyer's house, due to budgetary restrictions, Neutra had to use a combination of commonly available materials. He resorted to both the most advanced, like the steel window frames and tensors, and the most traditional, like brick and wooden structures. He painted the exposed structural supports, as well as the interior walls, in light grey and silver tones, a strategic way to simulate modern materials (Harris, 1979) in the black and white publicity photographs.

Scheyer, however, unlike Neutra, did not understand architecture in terms of visual codes. Influenced by Schindler, she saw modern architecture as a means to facilitate new spatial and art practices and thus other ways of living fully. While Scheyer envisioned her home gallery as a complex architectural device producing multiple art and life experiences, Neutra's drawings (Fig. 5) prioritized his own formal architectural values over those of art. Aware of the potential for paintings to interfere with the space of the house, much like Le Corbusier was with his Maison La Roche (Rice, 2007), Neutra conceived a compositional solution where painting would be resigned to frontality and artworks become mere decorative presences. His cut axonometric views are more about revealing construction processes and technological innovations than about capturing the distinctive character of the house. Tellingly, the only walls that are not drawn in his perspectives are those intended for paintings (Fig. 5). Also, the rudimentary system proposed to exhibit paintings, which simply consisted of stringing a steel wire from wall to wall, speaks volumes about Neutra's disregard for the very issue of the hang that was so important to his client.





Figure 6. From left: Fig. 6A: Galka Scheyer on her house's construction site; Fig. 6B: Wolo Trutzschler, *Caricature of Galka Scheyer* (as a gardener), ca.1935 (courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Peg Weiss papers; courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena).

Although the house was not yet complete, in February 1934, Scheyer moved into her new home, where for some months she lived as if camping while providing a modicum of the construction labor herself to further keep costs down. Even though she expressed her fatigue and discomfort at living in a half-finished house (Wünsche, 2006), her inexhaustible energy and passion for the project is palpable in the photographs portraying her having fun while supervising the construction site, driving a bulldozer or joking with the workers (Fig. 6A).

She also involved herself in the creation of the garden, which she personally planted (Fig. 6B). Over the years, her plantings of banana trees, mimosas and bougainvillea grew until they enveloped her house, finishing its architecture, and even assuming some of its functions. For example, the eucalyptus in front of the south façade filtered the light from paintings better than the small cantilever roof of the windowed gallery, which was clearly insufficient for contemporary museum standards to protect artworks from the sun's radiation.

After Scheyer's house was completed, Neutra made sure that both the local and international architectural press published it. Between 1934 and 1938, it appeared in at least a dozen publications worldwide.<sup>18</sup> In December 1935, the project was covered by the San Francisco-based *Architect & Engineer* magazine in an issue guest-edited by Scheyer's friend Pauline Schindler herself (*A Mountain-Top Residence for Madame Galka Scheyer*, 1935). That very year, it was also included in the monograph exhibition at the MoMA, *Contemporary Architecture in California*, which, as its title reveals, could not have ignored Pauline and Scheyer's almost homonymous show from 1930.

<sup>18</sup> Contrary to Walther Fuchs's statement (2020) that there are barely drawings of the Scheyer House, a great deal of graphic information is available, both archival records and published materials, since Neutra's project was featured in many international journals. Along with Arthur Luckhaus's photographs of the built structure, floor plans, sections and perspective diagrams of Scheyer's residence were included, among other periodicals, in *Casabella* (January 1935, p. 18), *Architects' Journal* (February 1935, p. 341), *Architecture* (August 1935, pp. 95-96) and the Japanese magazine *Kokusai Kenchiku* (March 1936, p. 60).



Scheyer's house, a "home-gallery-church of advanced art" (Sandback, 1990, p. 123), was open at all times for shows, lectures (Millier, 1934, A8), viewings and parties. It soon became a gathering place for architects, artists and prominent members of the Los Angeles community of collectors. In her new home, where nature and plenty of avant-garde masterpieces surrounded her, Scheyer used architecture as the ideal setting to carry out her mission. Her house also became her trademark, since her personality, her lifestyle and her modernist residence merged into one. As Isabel Wünsche (2006, p. 229), elucidates: "The energetic woman with the unusual home at the top of the mountain soon became an attraction in Hollywood circles. A visit to Scheyer's place promised real adventure, particularly in light of Scheyer's driving and the unpaved road."

Among her habitual guests were actors, such as Greta Garbo, Charles Laughton, Edward G. Robinson and the Marx brothers, and directors such as Fritz Lang and Josef von Sternberg, the latter a contact who would indeed provide Neutra with the commission for his spectacular house in San Fernando Valley. In addition to this selected group, who were as rich as they were erratic in their tastes, Scheyer was visited by all sorts of people, from reputable gallerists, such as Earl Stendhal, to young artists on small budgets, like John Cage, who were interested in acquiring works by the Blue Four and for whom Scheyer readily reduced prices by substantial amounts (Sandback, 1990).

Certainly, her house allowed the organization of the most varied of events, but the preparation of all these activities involved a great deal of work, so the alleged flexibility of Neutra's exhibition space required a lot of effort on her part. In March 1936, in a collective letter to the Blue Four, Scheyer detailed such a struggle:

What does it mean to give lectures in my home? Hanging pictures, so splendidly, so lovingly, each related to the others. Picking them up myself and then returning them [...] Hanging takes an entire day. Cleaning, filling the house with flowers, a second, the lecture a third, and cleaning up afterward, a fourth (Wünsche, 2006, p. 256).

The need for this continuous metamorphosis of the space explains why, from the first photographs taken by Arthur Luckhaus to her own snaps, the house transmits a sensation of disorder or temporariness. The gallery is always portrayed with few pieces of furniture—a mattress which makes do as a sofa, a few foldable chairs and a table—dispersed around an empty space with little comfort, whatever was necessary to facilitate a transformation from domestic to exhibition space, from classroom-workshop to conference room.



Figure 7. Galka Scheyer with Lyonel and Julia Feininger during their visitation to her Hollywood house in June 1936 (courtesy of Harvard Art Museums).

It is interesting to compare the architectural photographs released by Neutra with those that show the true reality of the house. Luckhaus's exterior images (Fig. 5), seen as abstract models on a landscape still without vegetation, and the icy interiors he portrayed (Fig. 5), which seem to emulate industrial photography (Alcolea, 2009), are the images on which Neutra sought to generate his prestige. In counterpoint, the photographs taken by Scheyer or her friends are not the usual image of a Neutra interior, as their emphasis is entirely on the ordinariness of everyday life. For example, when, in the summer of 1936, Feininger and his wife, Julia, visited Scheyer—the only occasion on which she was able to welcome one of the Blue Four—their pictures show a happy woman entertaining her friends, being photographed with them in the most carefree of situations, chatting on the balcony, joyfully working and even cleaning up (Fig. 7).

Julius Shulman's photographs of Ain's addition are not among the best taken by the celebrated architectural photographer, who at the time was still learning his craft. Far from his brilliant compositions of the 1940s and 1950s, Shulman's clean photos, without people in them, contrast with the portraits of Scheyer taken by her childhood friend Lette Valeska in the same spaces. In many pictures, she appears sunbathing, gardening—two of her favorite pastimes—and even dangerously posing in the window frames (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. Galka Scheyer in the second floor apartment added by Gregory Ain, photos by Lette Valeska, ca.1938 (courtesy of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena).

Some of these photographs, like the one in which she is standing in a bathing suit atop the edge of the cantilever, smiling at the camera (Fig. 8), predate by more than a decade the photographs of Charles and Ray Eames perched on the structure of their new house in Pacific Palisades, a first act of occupation that Beatriz Colomina (2007) associates with the beginning of the couple's never-ending process of celebrations. Scheyer also anticipated such celebrations by publicly bringing together the enjoyment of modern art and architecture with the experience of daily life, an idea she put forward in her presentations and lectures, such as the popular one called "Art, Life and the Blue Four."

#### 4. Heterodoxy and Pluralism

The visit of the Feiningers further strengthened Scheyer's resolve to extend her house and add a guest apartment. Yet she did not call on the architect with whom she had most recently worked; instead of Neutra, she turned to Ain, who took this commission as an opportunity to set up an independent practice (McCoy, 1984).

Hines intimates that Scheyer's "tense relationship with Neutra" was one reason for her decision, and another was that the architect was tired of their "numerous confrontations" and her telephoning "at all hours of the day and night" (2005, pp. 138-139). However, Scheyer was not the only client who, for whatever reason, after fighting "tooth and nail and mortar" with Neutra, managed without him in future alterations to their homes (Sandback, 1990, p. 123).

Gregory Ain's second floor addition to Scheyer's house, which she had envisioned from the beginning as a place destined for visits from the Blue Four, included a small living room, a studio, a bedroom, a bathroom, a kitchen and an independent entrance. A building permit was obtained on November 13, 1936, and the new apartment was finished in June 1937. With very limited means, Ain achieved a design that took full advantage of the scarce existing surface space by integrating furniture, a clear Schindler influence. Following Scheyer's instructions more than his own wishes, he reproduced the plan of the balcony from the floor below to completely open up the rooms, including the bathroom, where it was possible to shower among the eucalyptus.

In contrast to the modernity of the volumes of this additional apartment, the construction was a traditional wood frame and stucco. The plywood panels for the interior walls were arranged according to the four-foot module, also characteristic of

Schindler. In their careful subdivision, Ain integrated a discreet steel rail for curtains which, in this case, also served to hang Scheyer's paintings, solving this particular problem with a more elaborate detail than that of Neutra's in the main gallery.

Hines displays some reticence with respect to this intervention: "Ain's competent, but boxy, addition sacrificed the building's horizontal serenity for a less compelling vertical orientation" (2005, p. 139). However, such a consideration of architecture from the only point of view of form ignores both its spatial condition and the needs of the user, which are downgraded in favor of image. In addition, this criticism overlooks the interweaving of the building with its surroundings that Ain's perspectives clearly show—his drawings were based on the idea that the rapid growth of vegetation made a complete view of the house impossible, and only fragments of it could be glimpsed through the trees.

During the construction on Scheyer's addition, Marjorie Eaton visited often, and her meetings with Ain planted the seed for her own commission of him, in 1939, to design a new home and art space for her in Palo Alto. Eaton's family had purchased the historic complex of the Juana Briones de Miranda Ranch in 1925, to which she wanted to add her own place. Eaton discussed with Ain her desire to build in adobe, both because it was a relatively inexpensive material and because it reminded her of much happier times living and painting in Taos, a city infused with the spirit of the land and the cultural values of the Southwest. She must also have heard directly from Ain about his boyhood experience building with adobe while living with his family at the ill-fated socialist colony of Llano del Rio. This had been designed in 1914 by feminist architect Alice Constance Austin in the Mojave Desert (Hayden, 1976). Among other formative experiences in that planned and egalitarian social landscape (Davis, 1990), Ain had participated as a child in the construction of community buildings in adobe, such as the youth club house.



Figure 9. Gregory Ain, Eaton Adobe House in Palo Alto, isometric perspectives (left and right) and floor plan (middle), September 1939 (courtesy of ADC/UCSB).

Eaton's single-story house was organized on a gentle slope and its directions naturally aligned with the pre-existing grove of almond trees. Unified under a single shed roof, it was composed of a living room-alcove space connected to a kitchen and, on the opposite side, of a bedroom and a bathroom opening to a private patio. Another, lower volume held a guest room and the garage (Fig. 9). In the mid-1950s, Ain added a small outdoor amphitheater adjoining the rear patio, which served both as a rehearsal area for Eaton, who was by then transitioning to an acting career, and a performance space for entertaining her guests (Fig. 10C).

Over 5000 adobe bricks were made on site for the walls of the house (Fig. 10A). One of Ain's most significant contributions was his modern interpretation of an old building technique, of which Edith Cox Eaton's ranch provided interesting historical



examples. In the Mesa Alta property, he found an unusual but effective case of traditional reinforced adobe construction consisting of a mixed system of mud bricks and redwood panels. Ain combined adobe walls with embedded wooden supports, which he secured with horizontal metal bars every four courses. This technique improved the already good natural insulation of adobe and solved the material's two most important drawbacks: the erosion of its surface and poor structural response to earthquakes.

The existing photographs of Scheyer's visits to Eaton's construction site show her fascination and involvement with her friend's venture (Fig. 10B). It lasted throughout much of the 1940s, because Eaton was strapped for funds. Yet she was so happy with the result that, years later, she asked Ain for further extensions, at a time when the architect had become internationally renowned for his 1950 Exhibition House at the MoMA Art Garden, which speaks volumes about his versatility as a designer.

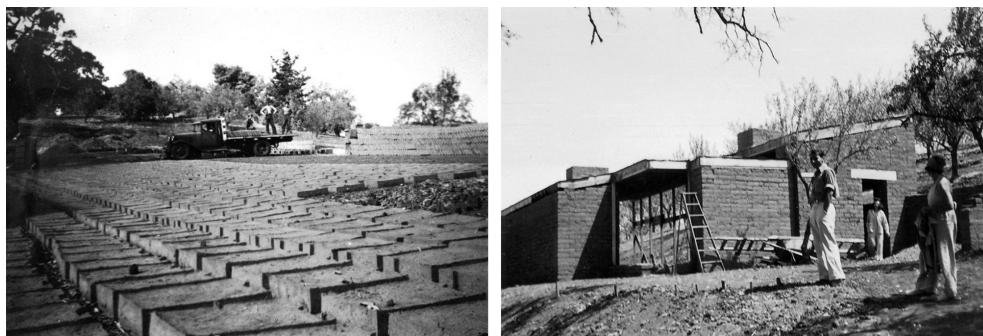


Figure 10. Gregory Ain, Eaton Adobe House. From left: Fig. 10A: bricks drying in the sun in preparation for construction, ca. 1940; Fig. 10B: Scheyer (in foreground) and Eaton's visit to Eaton construction site, ca. 1940; Fig. 10C: outdoor amphitheater in the 1950s (courtesy of Susan Kirk).

In this house, many mutual friends of Scheyer and Eaton—artists such as Lucrecia Van Horn and Louise Nevelson—spent long periods of time. Contrary to other conventional middle-class programs of modern architecture, Eaton initiated a family-like arts colony around the idiosyncratic Briones home on the hill. This community flourished for most of the central decades of the 20th century, encouraging women in the arts and challenging racial barriers amid the *de facto* segregation and increasing conservatism that accompanied Cold War fears in the South San Francisco Bay Area (Rindfleisch, Hom and Sherman, 2017).

Despite all this, the Eaton Adobe House is so little known that it is not even mentioned in Anthony Denzer's monograph on Gregory Ain. This conspicuous omission raises more historiographic questions than it answers. Eaton's home did not respond to any of the codes identifying the architectural traditions of Southern California and the Bay Region, yet this anomaly does not seem reason enough for its oblivion. On the contrary, the house represents the multiple social, building and landscape concerns of the architect, which become more interesting in light of contemporary values already present in this work: adaptability to the changing conditions of the life of its inhabitants, social and environmental sustainability, political commitment and a deep understanding of material culture.



## 5. Conclusion

Tireless traveler, avid connoisseur and communicator, Scheyer was one of the principal agents of early architectural modernism in California. Aware that education is inspiration, Scheyer creatively linked artistic concepts, cultural contexts and proposals from other disciplines, such as architecture and especially that of her house, to show how content and container could come together in resonance. She considered architectural space not only a medium by which to live a fulfilling life but also a message in itself. Her expansive presentations contributed to creating their spatial framework by directly interacting with the architecture, the exhibited works and other modern media. For example, Scheyer traveled around with boxes containing paintings and several leather cases with heavy glass negatives mounted on metallic frames, which she projected in order to enclose the audience within images during her talks (Williams, 2017). Among the avant-garde photographs, paintings, sculptures and other art manifestations that she projected, architecture itself occupied a privileged space. For this reason, Scheyer frequently turned to the photos of the buildings she most admired, such as those of Schindler's works taken by Edward and Brett Weston, whose architectural photography, like the structures it represented, she helped promote (Parra-Martínez, Crosse and Olivares-López, 2021).

Nevertheless, despite Scheyer's intelligence and magnetism, or perhaps precisely because of it, this fierce champion of avant-garde architecture who challenged the conventions of modern space was also an uncomfortable presence for some of her contemporaries. She was a truly independent woman but, in a man's world, her strong character and direct manners attracted reproach (Wood, 1988). Furthermore, as Wünsche's studies (2006, 2010) have shown, Scheyer fit the image of neither the emancipated bohemian woman of the 1920s nor the respectable housewife, unlike many of the leading American art collectors and patrons of modernism.

Yet Scheyer's exhibitions and events in California were a magnet for women artists, teachers and critics, as well as women collectors and curators. In her architectural circles, female figures, including Pauline Schindler, Harriet Freeman and Freeman's sister Leah Lovell and Scheyer's friend Marjorie Eaton, from who she was inseparable, gave a new meaning to the term *matronage*. Not only were these women clients who commissioned houses that were fundamental to California modernism, but they had the capacity to mobilize affections and to weave the networks that most contributed to creating the cultural environment in which such architectural masterpieces were possible.

Unfortunately, records of the much-neglected contributions of these women patrons and facilitators are, for the most part, inaccurate and biased in the canonical accounts of modern architecture, in which Scheyer herself often appears as an inopportune and annoying woman who exasperated the architects she hired. In the 1930s, clear ideas and a strong character were valued as remarkable qualities in a man, but they were usually considered as socially unacceptable flaws in a woman. However, contemporary studies cannot simply continue to accept these prejudices without further criticism. In this sense, it should be noted that, although Ain remembered Scheyer as "an intelligent, educated woman" (Denzer, 2008, p. 48), Neutra's and Ain's biographers have not hidden a pejorative discourse about her figure, insisting, perhaps without sufficient distance, on Scheyer's depiction as an "eccentric" (Hines, 2005, p. 96), "volatile" (Hines, 2005, p. 138), "very difficult to get along with,"

“highly neurotic woman” and a “very demanding,” “utterly impossible” client (Denzer, 2008, p. 48).

In the history of 20th-century architecture, there are few cases of houses commissioned by women in which, when such courageous clients requested modern spaces where they could develop equally unusual ways of life (Friedman, 1998), patron and architect easily reached an agreement. Gender biases have usually led male architects to demonstrate who was in control, of both the project and its narrative. This has resulted in the unfair treatment of women in inconsistent or slanted accounts that, as Colomina notes, reduce women to a sort of ghost presence, “everywhere present, crucial, but strangely invisible” (2018), whose oblivion impoverishes our understanding of architecture.

Architecture is always a contested ground and a process of persuasion, negotiation and commitment of its many agents (Friedman, 1998; Parra-Martínez, Gutiérrez-Mozo and Gilsanz-Díaz, 2020). Architecture is thus perhaps too contingent and yet, paradoxically, it is this condition–contingency “implies contact,” and it is through contact that ideas, determination and emotions spread, as Sara Ahmed explains (2004, p. 18)—that bestows its legitimacy and transforming power upon a collective practice. Without the role Scheyer played, not as an architect but as an essential catalyst for innovation, without the agency of this “dynamo of energy,” as Edward Weston called her (1966, p. 151), the path taken by modernist architecture in California would have been a very different one.

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