El SFMA, el MoMA y la codificación de la arquitectura de la región de la Bahía de San Francisco (1935-1953)

**SFMA, MoMA and the Codification of Bay Region Architecture (1935-1953)**

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Resumen: Este artículo investiga el desconocido programa de exposiciones de arquitectura del SFMA durante la etapa fundacional de su primera directora, Grace Morley. Su pionera difusión de la arquitectura de la Bahía como respuesta al contexto geográfico y cultural de la región ofreció a los críticos del Este una nueva perspectiva de la modernidad californiana. Análogamente, el estudio de la colaboración SFMA-MoMA durante el comisariado de Elizabeth Mock examina el conflicto de percepciones e intereses entre ambas costas conducente a la histórica exposición de 1949 Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region. Epítome de los debates de posguerra, esta culminaba un infatigable esfuerzo promocional iniciado años antes de que el conocido artículo de Lewis Mumford en The New Yorker desencadenara, en 1947, una encendida controversia acerca del “Bay Region Style.” Contrariamente a la creencia de que el SFMA reaccionó tardíamente al simposio del MoMA de 1948 organizado por Philip Johnson para rebatir a Mumford, aquella exposición fue la consecuencia de una efectiva agenda regionalista que logró exponer, educar y/o seducir a algunos de los más influyentes actores del panorama norteamericano con la idea de una Escuela de la Región de la Bahía profundamente preocupada por cuestiones sociales, políticas y ecológicas.

Palabras clave: Arquitectura de la región de San Francisco; exposiciones SFMA y MoMA; alianzas Morley-Bauer-Mock; California y la crítica del Este; conflictos culturales Costa Este-Costa Oeste.

Abstract: This paper addresses the under-recognized implications of SFMA’s early architectural exhibition program. Conceived under founding director Grace Morley, a series of pioneering events first presented Bay Area architects’ work as interdependent with the region’s rich geographical and cultural context, offering new lens through which Eastern critics prompted to re-evaluate California modernism. Among these shows, the 1949 landmark exhibition Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region would epitomize the postwar discussions upon the autonomy of American modern architecture. Correspondingly, by exploring SFMA-MoMA exchanges during Elizabeth Mock’s curatorship, this essay aims to examine the conflict of perceptions and intentions between the country’s two Coasts that brought about the 1949 show as part of a well-orchestrated campaign that had begun years before Lewis Mumford’s 1947 New Yorker piece triggered a controversy over the existence of a “Bay Region Style.” Contrary to prevailing assumptions that this exhibition was a delayed reaction to the 1948 MoMA symposium organized by Philip Johnson to refute Mumford’s arguments, it was the consequence of an effective regionalist agenda whose success was, precisely, that many influential actors in the United States were exposed, indoctrinated and/or seduced by the so-called Bay Region School’s emphasis on social, political and ecological concerns.

Keywords: Bay Region architecture; SFMA & MoMA exhibitions; Morley-Bauer-Mock connections; California and Eastern criticism; East Coast-West Coast cultural conflicts.

El SFMA, el MoMA y la codificación de la arquitectura de la región de la Bahía de San Francisco (1935-1953)
**SFMA AND THE EARLY PROMOTION OF BAY REGION ARCHITECTURE**

In 1935, when the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMA) opened its doors, it was the only museum on the West Coast devoted solely to modern art. Thanks to the extraordinary talent and commitment of its founding director, Dr Grace McCann Morley, by the mid-1940s, it had already secured its position as the country’s second museum of its kind, only surpassed by the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA).

Grace Morley, who ran SFMA until her resignation in 1958, was a habitué of San Francisco’s most progressive groups, with which she teamed up to promote a wide-ranging collaboration between the international avant-garde scene and local movements. Morley “believed passionately in cultural democracy” and aimed to make modern art available to everyone. In her struggle to involve SFMA’s audiences into the many fields and intersections of contemporary creation, she presented and discussed modern art achievements through a multiplicity of media, which included design, architecture, planning, photography, television, and the launching of the first regular art film program at an American museum.

Notwithstanding her reputation and professional network, Morley had to overcome a number of significant financial, geographic, and philosophical challenges, “especially as a woman working outside the East Coast art establishment.” Evidence of her promethean efforts to champion modernism is that, during her first years, she managed to mount dozens of exhibitions and to host a wide range of educational talks, gallery tours and modern art courses. Morley also maintained an active participation in several art associations and public organizations, such as the American Federation of Arts (AFA), where she was elected Vice-President. After World War II, when SFMA gained prominence and she became an expert of global influence, she dedicated herself to high-profile international programs such as the endeavor of constituting UNESCO.

Surprisingly, in the field of architecture, Morley’s far-reaching activity still remains unexplored. Amongst her earliest contributions, in February 1937, she produced Contemporary Landscape Architecture, a major show devoted to modern landscape design, being the first of its kind ever mounted internationally. It was assembled and curated by Morley herself, counting on the assistance of her closest architectural circles, mainly landscape architect Thomas Church and architects Ernest Born, Gardner Dailey and William Wurster, who held central positions in the event. On the occasion, she also invited experts of national and international reputation, such as Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Richard Neutra, who contributed respective essays to her exhibition catalogue. Morley’s decision to present a coherent body of local practices in landscape design responded to an intelligent strategy to align her interests with San Francisco Bay Area residents’ appreciation of the region’s dramatic natural settings and unique lifestyle. Similarly, her groundbreaking 1940 planning exhibition Space for Living (Figure 1), which she entrusted to Telesis, engaged her fellow citizens in proposals of smart urban growth relying on thoughtful land usage, natural preservation and regional integration, decades before the coining of terms like environmentalism or sustainability.

The first great architectural exhibition held at SFMA was premiered on September 30, 1938. It was organized under the stewardship of the Northern California chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and was timed to coincide with its local convention in October. The show, which was entirely devoted to Bay Area architecture and focused primarily upon single-family homes, began a series of formatice architectural actions which would contribute decisively to the process of codification of Bay regionalism.
As Morley’s priority was to make SFMA’s architectural program an educational challenge, William Wurster, chairman of the exhibition, put local architect and graphic artist Ernest Born in charge of designing the show. Bringing Morley’s vision to life, the public’s curiosity was prompted by an itinerary along the walls of SFMA’s North and West galleries, which were covered with a sequence of plywood panels laid out on a sawtooth plan. Yet, Born had to grapple with “strenuous resistance from the AIA,” and many of the participants, as he refused to privilege any individual. Instead, he decided to present the ensemble of the forty selected works in an unprecedented “systematic, uniform” manner. Born’s enlightening and outstanding installation not only promoted for the first time a clear image of the Bay Area as a coherent architectural region, but also set an exceedingly high design standard for future shows (Figure 2).

Including this, Ernest Born put on three major architectural exhibitions at SFMA with tremendous popular and critical success. The second, Architecture Around San Francisco Bay (AASFB), came in the spring of 1941, being a prewar mirror of his third and most cited 1949 exhibition Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region (DASFBR), which would become a pivotal moment in the ideological debates on regionalism and modern architecture in America.
After an East Coast preview at the New York Architectural League,\textsuperscript{18} the 1941 show was mounted at SFMA to take full advantage of the AIA National Convention at nearby Yosemite National Park in May (Figure 3). Then, SFMA, along with local galleries such as Gump’s San Francisco, joined forces to undertake a busy presentations and lectures program anticipating the full-scale AASFB exhibition in June. These events were extensively promoted to secure the presence of Bay Region architects both inside and outside SFMA’s halls around the time visitors arrived in California for the conference, being enthusiastically received by both the professional press and shelter magazines.

As a leading cultural manager, Morley worked closely with architectural media, including the two most significant California-based magazines, California Arts & Architecture and Architect and Engineer.\textsuperscript{19} Morley’s connections also facilitated the national coverage of SFMA’s exhibitions in Architectural Forum and AFA’s Magazine of Art,\textsuperscript{20} which proved instrumental in the publicity of the region. Thus, it is possible to track down the beginning of various systematically organized campaigns to promote Bay Region architects since, at least, the launching of SFMA’s architecture exhibition program.\textsuperscript{21} From 1938 to 1941, in a series of Pencil Points articles,\textsuperscript{22} critic Talbot Hamlin conveyed his interest in the residential design of the Bay Region and applauded William Wurster and Gardner Dailey’s “sincere simplicity.”\textsuperscript{23} Mumford’s April 30, 1938 “Sky Line” piece indicates that, then, Wurster was already on his radar screen. In 1938, both Hamlin and Mumford independently agreed to the importance of the vigorous regional expressions that were “blowing” East Coast’s “metropolitan pride.”\textsuperscript{24} This promotion was reinforced by the August 1938 Pencil Points issue devoted to Wurster as the titular head of San Francisco Bay’s “soft” modernism.\textsuperscript{25}

Wurster’s recognition increased after his marriage to prominent housing expert Catherine Bauer in 1940. Soon afterwards, a consistently maintained collaboration between Life and Architectural Forum boosted his public notoriety. In 1944, Wurster was appointed

\textbf{Figure 2.} Installation views of 1938 AIA Exhibition of Northern California Licensed Architects. In this and subsequent SFMA’s displays, Ernest Born collaborated with his wife, architectural photographer Esther Born. The primarily visual documentation of their exhibitions consisted of exceedingly handsome black and white pictures and floorplans completely redrawn to achieve the highest possible graphic coherence.
Dean of Architecture at MIT which, along with Bauer and Morley’s continuing contacts, secured his position on the editorial boards of various architectural journals like California Arts & Architecture, as well as his regular participation in architecture competitions, award juries and academic debates, where he exerted his influence. Furthermore, his close collaboration with the ideologically diverse scholars he hired to lecture at MIT— from Robert Woods Kennedy and Vernon DeMars to Henry-Russell Hitchcock— provided many opportunities for cultural exchange and East Coast exposure for the Bay Region. In the wake of Wurster’s celebrity, a younger generation of San Francisco designers soon received increasingly growing media attention. Thus, Mario Corbett, Vernon DeMars and John Funk, among others, became the most published names of American editors who, at the end of the 1940s, were fully aware that “Bay Area architects were creating something out of the normal.”

The 1941 AIA National Convention was also a seminal event in the historiography of modern architecture in California. Lewis Mumford’s visit to San Francisco resulted in a personal tour with William and Catherine
Wurster—the critic’s former lover and collaborator—from which emanated his fondness for Bay Region architecture. Coincidentally, the following year, Mumford would move to the Bay Area to teach at Stanford University (1942-44). Then, a number of local practitioners, such as Telesis members, recognized their fascination with Mumford’s social criticism. In his turn, Mumford would interpret their work as an inspirational source to further elaborate his arguments defending an enduring Bay Region tradition of organic responses to time and place (Figure 4).

Unlike Mumford’s first sight appreciation of the region’s architecture, Hitchcock’s early opinion of Wurster was not very high. During the 1939-40 Golden Gate International Exhibition’s run Hitchcock first visited California. Upon his return to the East Coast he wrote an essay on his findings being published in the December 1940 issue of Entenza’s recently acquired magazine and in which the Eastern critic continued his harsh post-International Style exhibition opinion of California architects, particularly biased against Schindler’s case. In his California Arts & Architecture piece Hitchcock wrote: “Wurster’s work, which has for some years been well publicized, is not exactly disappointing. It is perhaps dullest than one expects and the gradual development away from a simplified traditionalism toward more overtly modern, or at least

Figure 4. Ernest Born’s presentation of the June 1941 issue of Architect and Engineer served as the Architecture Around San Francisco Bay exhibition catalogue.
original forms, seems either to have been arrested late or to have taken an unfortunate turning. Contrary to Hitchcock, after his 1941-44 recognition of Northern California modernism, all but coincidentally, Mumford recurrently praised Wurster’s environmental adaptation as exemplary of the Bay Region tradition which, in 1947, he would explicitly identify with the most eloquent, “free yet unobtrusive expression of the terrain, the climate and the life on the Coast.”

**AUTONOMY AT STAKE: “WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO LEWIS MUMFORD?”**

Lewis Mumford’s famous October 11, 1947, New Yorker Sky Line column labelling San Francisco Bay Area domestic architecture as “Bay Region Style” fueled a national debate after he used the term to denounce what he considered the “sterile and abstract,” “one-sided interpretation of function” of the International Style. Mumford’s controversial essay not only expressed his disaffection with the mechanical and formalist version of modernism proposed by Hitchcock and Johnson at MoMA in 1932, but also criticized their insistence on the legitimacy of the International Style principles to evaluate contemporary architecture. Mumford believed that these principles “fostered a superficial attachment to the symbolism, rather than a deep understanding of the emancipatory possibilities of technology.” Instead, he proposed the domestic architecture of California’s Bay Region, from Bernard Maybeck to William Wurster, as a model of a “native and humane form of modernism.”

Mumford’s excerpt from The Sky Line provoked such an angry response from the Eastern establishment that it prompted Johnson to host a symposium at MoMA to refute his criticism.

The event took place February 11, 1948, and was alarmingly entitled “What is Happening to Modern Architecture?” Mumford’s antagonists Alfred Barr and Henry-Russell Hitchcock profited from their position as introductory speakers to aggressively undermine Mumford’s arguments and exploited the word “style” in their own interests. Barr sarcastically dubbed Mumford’s original “Bay Region Style” as “Cottage Style,” presenting it as a less serious, provincial version of the International Style. The term was also bandied about by other speakers who used it dismissively to underline that it was merely restricted to the field of residential architecture. Furthermore, as Gail Fenske has observed, instead of focusing on the main cultural implications of Mumford’s proposal, Barr and Hitchcock influenced the views of subsequent panelists, “nineteen highly opinionated colleagues,” such as Walter Gropius, George Nelson, Marcel Breuer, Peter Blake or Frederick Gutheim, who charted ancillary lines of discussion through related contemporary debates concerning monumentality, functionalism and style, which diffused the argument’s force and clarity. Hence, unfortunately, Mumford’s challenge “never received the level of debate it deserved.”

The ensuing dispute between Mumford and Hitchcock over their dissimilar understanding of “Bay Region Style” is representative of their two fundamentally opposed visions of modern architecture. Contrary to Hitchcock’s analysis based on methods of connoisseurship and from the history of art he learned at Harvard, Mumford’s interpretation of the architecture produced around San Francisco Bay emerged from a wider conceptual frame considering the built environment as interdependent with its natural surroundings and its urban and socio-cultural context. Mumford and Hitchcock’s confrontation at the 1948 symposium, Fenske explains, was so impassioned for the reason that Mumford could not accept Hitchcock’s methodology of evaluating buildings on the basis of formal criteria, whereas Hitchcock was unable to appreciate Mumford’s complex approach to architecture, which was deeply rooted in the “ecological and social orientation of Patrick Geddes.”
Fenske’s thoughtful examination of the 1948 symposium, however, overlooked Philip Johnson’s role as the ongoing debate instigator. Peter Blake’s autobiographical account No Place Like Utopia intimates that Johnson, who had taken Mumford’s comments as an attack, orchestrated carefully the event to refute Mumford’s opinions in The Sky Line. Hitchcock’s 1948 correspondence with MoMA provides corroboration of Blake’s statement. Similarly, the Breuer-Johnson communication during the planning of the symposium discussing how to rebut “Lewis Mumford’s Isms” also indicates that Johnson was stacking the deck against Mumford at the time MoMA was simultaneously preparing a retrospective of Breuer’s work. In fact, Johnson’s strategy to neutralize Mumford was twofold: first, he assigned his antagonist the role of moderator, which minimized Mumford’s possibilities of defending his arguments; secondly, upon arrival at the Museum, a number of Mumford’s opponents were given in advance Barr and Hitchcock’s written comments, evidencing Johnson’s interest in controlling how the discussion could possibly unfold.

Upon his return to MoMA after the war, Johnson’s change of mind regarding Bay Region architecture seems evident. For instance, in “Architecture in 1941,” an unpublished article written in 1942, Johnson had appreciative comments on California’s wood construction. He praised DeMars’s Farm Security Administration housing complexes and mentioned Wurster’s large-scale defense project in Vallejo as examples of site prefabrication. Yet, in 1947, within the coast-to-coast saturation of Bay Region architecture’s press coverage, Mumford’s New Yorker article must have been the straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back and therefore perceived by Johnson as a threat to the goals of his new programs at MoMA.

After the 1948 symposium, Harvard University GSD Bulletin reported the event under the sardonic title “What has Happened to Lewis Mumford?” The article, which was biased against Mumford’s “attack on the modernist” reveals the divergent stances on the issue taken by the two faculties in Cambridge. Whereas MIT backed Dean Wurster, Harvard adopted MoMA’s discourse, being summarized in the GSD review: “Mr. Mumford’s claim that the Bay Region Style was a new form of architecture is incorrect and it should be judged as a regional expression of the modern movement.”

As Pierluigi Serraino affirms, San Francisco Bay’s “romantic blend of natural beauty and cultural legitimacy,” was identified by Mumford’s followers as an oasis of national values owing no debts to European modernism. Conversely, to his adversaries, the “Bay Region Style” was merely an instrumental myth to express their overly provincial discomfort with the growing presence of foreign architecture in the United States. To compound matters, despite the fact that the national recognition of Bay Region architecture was then firmly established by articles and exhibitions, its acceptance as an articulated phenomenon was questioned by both its detractors and supporters, including its practitioners. Having reached no conclusion during the meeting, the 1948 symposium at MoMA had the dichotomous effect of pigeonholing San Francisco Bay architects into a “Style,” of which none of its protagonists agreed they were consciously a part.
about how aggressively and differently the interpretations of Mumford’s standpoint were received.  

1949, A LANDMARK SHOW

Early in 1949, making the most of the stir caused by the previous year’s symposium, the core group of Bay Region architects and editors, led by Ernest Born, agreed to collaborate on the organization, funding and advertising of a new major exhibition at SFMA, which was tellingly named Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region. The show, which garnered the support of the local AIA chapters, was on display from September 16 through November 6, 1949. All the structures exhibited, except for a small apartment building in San Francisco, were single family residences, being most of them built after the war. The installation design was once more entrusted to Born who provided the exhibition with the accustomed conceptual clarity and expressive dynamism (Figure 5).
Upon the commotion caused by Mumford’s advocacy of “Bay Region Style” and its subsequent debates and publicity, unlike the 1938 and 1941 shows, in 1949, SFMA did publish an exhibition catalogue (Figures 6/7), which was also designed by Born. It featured seven essays validating the existence of a modern school in the Bay Region and providing evidence for its consistency as unique regional tradition dating as far back as the work of California pioneers such as Bernard Maybeck, Ernest Coxhead, Greene & Greene, Julia Morgan or John Galen Howard.

Richard Freeman prefaced the book, highlighting the leitmotif of the catalogue: local architects won international recognition for “the imaginative way in which they had met the problems of site, climate, materials and client requirements,” being the reason why Bay Region architecture was monopolizing the pages of every magazine. Wurster also contributed an evocative essay recalling the virtues of the informal California lifestyle, the freedom, audaciousness and the pleasure felt in the anonymous Bay Area houses.
Lewis Mumford’s “The Architecture of the Bay Region” was the catalogue’s most significant contribution. In his essay, Mumford reframed and clarified the ideas put across in his New Yorker column. Reemphasizing his discourse at MoMA, he celebrated the individualism of West Coast architects stating that their common ground was their sensitivity towards the environment which, again, he opposed to the “restricted and arid formulas of the so-called International Style.” Mumford called historians and critics for proper study and recognition of what he more accurately renamed as “Bay Region School,” an all-inclusive designation rectifying his former use of the word “style,” which he lamented as an “unfortunate slip.” Quintessentially Mumford’s, his essay revealed the work of the lucid and progressive thinker he was: “The main problem of architecture today is to reconcile the universal and the regional, the mechanical and the human, the cosmopolitan and the indigenous [...] Bay Region both belongs to the region and transcends the region: it embraces the machine and it transcends the machine. It does not ignore particular needs, customs, conditions, but translates them into the common form of our civilization.”

Figure 7. Ernest Born’s design for the cover of 1949 DASFBK exhibition catalogue (left) and Lewis Mumford’s essay first page (right).
Elizabeth Thompson, whose participation in the catalogue explored the historical roots of the Bay Region School, was the brains behind the exhibition’s national publicity campaign. As Architectural Record West Coast editor, Thompson had a vested interest in her close group of Bay Region architects. The intense editorial activity performed by Thomson during the months DASFBR was under preparation speaks volumes about her magazine’s effort to take advantage of the debates following MoMA’s 1948 symposium.66 Coupling this promotion with DASFBR’s production, Architectural Record released several pieces documenting the show (Figure 8). First, in its May 1949 issue; then, in September, perfectly timed to coincide with DASFBR’s opening, an exhibition guide and a richly illustrated presentation of the show for which Born himself designed the layout.66 Finally, Architectural Record along with Architectural Forum and Life published different monographs on individual houses in the exhibition. 

Paradoxically, Arts & Architecture, which until then had been actively supporting SFMA’s activities deliberately did not mention the 1949 event. Instead, in its September issue, Entenza preferred to include an article by Edgar Kaufmann revealingly named...
A smaller version of DASFBR was planned as a touring show. The exhibition was circulated by the AFA which, from February 1950 to July 1951, coordinated twelve venues in the United States and Canada including, among other institutions, MIT and the Cleveland Museum of Art, before traveling to Germany. The existing correspondence reveals that both Leslie Cheek and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, in charge respectively of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) and Smith College Art Museum, showed an avid interest in obtaining the show. Hitchcock’s correspondence during the Smith College venue exposes some of his own ideas in respect of the exhibition, namely, that Wurster’s work would have gradually evolved moving away from previous restraints. Yet, Hitchcock still spoke disapprovingly about San Francisco’s taste and expressed his doubts about the catalogue’s “inadequacies.” Also revealing of his undecided judgement is that immediately afterwards he planned to discuss Bay Area architecture in his course lessons.

A DECADE OF SFMA-MOMA COLLABORATIONS

The 1949 show at SFMA coincided with the culmination of nearly a decade of cooperation between the country’s two main museums, being primarily the result of a crescendo of interlocked advertising and publicity of Bay Region modernism. Grace Morley’s prominent role in the American Federation of Arts, as well as her lobbying effort to secure a Western circuit for shows coming from the East, primarily explained her close collaboration with MoMA, beginning as early as 1937. Morley’s familiar relationship with Alfred Barr, and later with Elizabeth Mock via her sister Catherine Bauer and brother-in-law William Wurster, facilitated a number of noteworthy traveling exhibitions borrowed from MoMA, which naturally fit into her architectural programs. Mock’s correspondence reveals that she was collaborating with both her sister and Grace Morley, at least since her arrival at MoMA in 1938. This unexplored triangle of intertwined personal lives and professional alliances would explain the vigorous circulation of exhibitions between the two museums during Mock’s curatorship at MoMA (1938-1946), which ensured the cultural exchange of progressive ideas regarding modern planning, public housing, wartime emergences and, of course, their 1940s regionalist agenda (Figure 9).

After Catherine Bauer’s 1940 acceptance of a position as Visiting Lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley and wedding to William Wurster, the sisters’ correspondence gives documentary evidence of Elizabeth Mock’s frequent professional and personal travels to California in 1940 and 1941. Upon Mock’s return from the Bay Area, armed with fresh, regional perspective, she organized and/or circulated, among others, American Architecture, Regional Building in the United States, The Wooden House in America and Planning a Modern House, four shows where Bay Region architects figured prominently. Between 1942 and her departure in 1946, MoMA exhibitions under Mock had the largest audiences on both Coasts to date, being as well an international success. Mock focused on American architecture, presenting related topics through different approaches to house design and neighborhood planning in which the public was most interested (Figures 10/11). Her Wurster-Mumford well-informed regionalist slant was thus ideological but also the result of financial reasoning due to MoMA’s concerns in reaching wider audiences. From this viewpoint, it is enlightening to compare the coverage...
of Bay Region architecture in the most significant MoMA-produced shows encompassing the 1949 exhibition during and after Mock’s curatorship: Built in USA: 1932-1944 (1944) and Built in USA: Post-war Architecture (1953).

Elizabeth Mock’s discourse was detailed in her major show Built in USA: 1932-1944. Although she aimed to educate the public in the acceptance of a wide range of different interpretations of modernism, Mock particularly stressed the importance of Northern California contributions,81 which, due to her sister’s guidance, were presented through cases of affordable homes for working families, urban facilities and rural community planning projects by William Wurster and Telesis members Vernon DeMars and Garret Eckbo, evidencing at MoMA the utmost concern of the Bay Region School.82 Anticipating Mumford’s arguments and stressing the ideas she had put forward in one of her most popular exhibitions, Regional Building in the United States (1941), Mock’s introduction to Built in USA’s accompanying catalogue insisted on the fact that,83 since 1932, modern architecture had entered a process of humanization. Her message was that...
Americans had learned to adapt the modernist idiom with local materials, natural forms and the appropriate floor plans and building solutions for living in the different climates of the country. All but coincidentally, she illustrated her point with Wurster’s work, which she presented as an example of “flexible native style which could go over into modern architecture without any serious break.”

The second Built in USA show, subtitled Post-war Architecture, was mounted in January 1953 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of MoMA’s Architecture Department. This retrospective was curated by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler under Philip Johnson’s tutelage. Unlike Mock’s exhibition, Built in USA: Post-war Architecture focused more on corporate buildings and private residences than on urban planning and public housing. Moreover, its domestic section deliberately turned its back on Bay Region architecture, which was reduced to a couple of minor examples (Figure 12), being Southern California homes mainly explained through the industrial paradigm of the Case Study House Program.
After a decade-long series of events devoted to introduce MoMA’s public to regional planning and building, Philip Johnson’s triumphal preface implicitly claimed that there was no other possible architectural present in America but an evolution from the International Style. Johnson alleged that his arguments were founded on Hitchcock’s analysis and double selection criteria: “quality and significance of the moment.”

Oddly, Wurster was not even mentioned in the catalogue despite being one of the authors most clearly identified with the major architectural debates of the time. As a first deduction, this appeared to be a logical consequence of Johnson’s interest in securing his viewpoint. However, the question was more complicated. During the preparation of Built in USA: Post-war Architecture, Hitchcock’s relation with both Catherine and William Wurster was very fluent, if not familiar as their 1951-1952 correspondence reveals. Wurster likely declined to participate in the show as he was devoted to the task of organising UC Berkeley Architecture School – for which he commissioned Hitchcock a report on its Library. Besides, the majority of the members of the exhibition advisory committee were sympathetic to Wurster, such as Creighton, Hamlin and Mock. Wurster’s MIT faculty members Vernon DeMars, Carl Koch, and Robert Woods Kennedy had a project in
Indeed, except for the occasions in which the critic collaborated closely with Johnson (such as in the 1948 symposium or the 1953 show), Hitchcock’s stance vis-à-vis Wurster was ambivalent. Also, it is possible to ascertain ways through which the two Bauer sisters influenced Hitchcock’s vision of California. They planted seeds for the production of In the Nature of Materials, 1887-1941: The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright in conjunction with the 1940-41 MoMA exhibition Frank Lloyd Wright, American Architect. Bauer had collaborated with Hitchcock and Mumford in the 1932 MoMA show and, again, on the 1937 Modern Architecture in England book and exhibition. Hitchcock’s inevitable

Figure 12. Left: Cover of Elizabeth Mock’s 1944 Built in USA: 1932-1944 exhibition catalogue featuring John Funk’s Heckendorf House. Right: Page from Hitchcock’s and Drexler’s 1952 Built in USA: Postwar Architecture catalogue featuring Mario Corbett’s Moritz House as the only example of Bay Region’s residential architecture in the book.
mellowing as the impact of the International Style faded is evident in “The International Style Twenty Years After,” his article finally accepting Wurster’s architecture, which was published in the August 1951 issue of Architectural Record. It predicted Hitchcock’s continuum referencing to the death of the International Style in his 1965 introduction to the 1966 edition of International Style, as well as his apologetic introduction to David Gerhard’s 1971 survey on Schindler. Correspondingly, Hitchcock’s chairing the series of three Modern Architecture Symposia at Columbia University in the 1960s and inviting to it both Catherine Bauer and Elizabeth Mock—who, again, questioned the International Style’s contributions to the development of American modernism—, can be interpreted as another attempt to reassess his own 1930s-1940s preconceptions.

CONCLUSIONS

Although many studies have acknowledged the historical importance of the ideological debates surrounding the 1949 exhibition Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region, no survey has yet further examined the circumstances and decisions linking the show and its strategically planned venues to West Coast architecture’s promotional campaigns that had begun more than a decade before Lewis Mumford wrote his renowned 1947 New Yorker piece raising the issue of a “Bay Region Style,” which he presented as an alternative to the International Style. As this essay tries to demonstrate, previous displays at the San Francisco Museum of Art in collaboration with popular department stores and local press, such as the 1938 and 1941 exhibitions, prove that the 1949 show mounted after the previous year’s symposium at MoMA was not an isolated event. Rather, it was another milestone in the series of well-orchestrated actions that, under the directorship of Grace Morley, had been developed by active groups of San Francisco-based architects counting on the support of the American Federation of Arts, the AIA and several editorial hubs that sponsored the cause of Bay Region architecture throughout the country years before regionalism became a nexus of national debates. Leading Eastern architects, scholars and editors’ early experience to Northern California architecture through William Wurster, Catherine Bauer, Ernest Born and their Bay Region colleagues, as well as the continuum of 1940s MoMA-SFMA exchanges, and their New York Architectural League connections, approximately coincided with Mumford teaching at Stanford and with the rise and fall of the curatorship of Elizabeth Mock assisted by the connections of her sister. All these situations would coalesce into Mumford’s recognition and support of a distinctive Bay Region sensitivity which, coupling with the process of codification articulated through the combined effort of exhibitions programs, media coverage and public discussion, had the effect of establishing for San Francisco Bay’s domestic tradition a room in the pantheon of architectural history.

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Notes and References
1 The word “modern” was officially added to the Museum’s name in 1976, when it was changed to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA).
2 Erskine, “Grace McMillan Morley and the Modern Museum,” in San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: 75 Years of Looking Forward (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006). In Spain, more recently, Raúl Rodríguez, in an article exploring midcentury debates on regionalism, has inaccurately stated that in 1949 “for the first time, the San Francisco Museum of Art organized an exhibition entirely devoted to the vernacular architecture of this city, entitled Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region.” Cf. Raúl Rodríguez García, “La oporotidad regionalista en EE. UU. Genezis bibliográfica de una teoría filosófica arquitectónica,” Cuaderno de notas, no, 16 (2012): 61. This assertion oversteps the magnitude of Morley’s previous architectural shows on the topic.
3 Late in 1948, SFMOMA mounted a second major landscape show, just at the peak of the national debates on regionalism and style. It was titled Landscape Design and expanded its scope to include planning and social housing. A third crucial show on the topic was organized under the curatorship of Dorothy Erskine in 1957, Including the work of Douglas Boyce, Thomas Church, Garrett Eckbo, Lawrence Halprin and Geraldine Knight Scott as some of the most significant exponents of Bay Region’s modern landscape design.
4 This environmental research group was an informal alliance of young local designers and social activists. Its core group included architects: Burton Comis, John Dowdall, Joseph McCarthy and Vernon DeMars; planner T. J. (Jack) Keen; landscape architects — and future planners— Garrett Eckbo, Cawen Moche and Francis Welch; licensed designer Walter Landor; and, among other notable figures, social reformer and conservation pioneer Dorothy Erskine, Grace McMillan, William Wurster and Catherine Bauer were among their regular circle of contributors and benefactors.
5 In point of fact, the first architectural show mounted at the San Francisco Museum can be dated shortly after its foundation in 1935. However, being an outgrowth of curating and not an AA accredited architect’s award-winning project, it can be considered that the first comprehensively curated and designed architectural exhibition was the 1938 event organized by Ernest Borg.
6 The Eleventh Annual Convention of the American Institute of Architects, Northern Chapter, was held in San Francisco, October 12 through October 15, 1938.
7 The term “regional” is an elusive historical, cultural construct with multiple connotations, dialectical oppositions and ideological implications. “Regionalism,” as Vincent Canizaro’s reader on the topic expounds, is now “visually a concept, strategy, tool, technique, attitude, ideology or habit of thought” which, regardless of its prior manifestations, collectively can be understood as “a theory that supports resistance to various forms of hegemonic, universal, or otherwise standardizing structures that would domino local differentiation.” Vincent Canizaro, Architectural Regionalism. Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity and Tradition (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 20. Given the difficult use of the term, the uneasiness with it on the part of most Bay-Area architects and the East Coast bias expounded later in this paper, here, the meaning of the word “regionalism” is aligned with the comprehensive sense articulated by Lewis Mumford in his series of lectures “The South in Architecture,” which the critics derided in 1941 after forty years of exposure to different architectural traditions in the United States, including his growing interest in the Bay Region from the late 1930s (see note 24). In the first of his four presentations, “The Basis for American Form,” Mumf- ford underscored: “Regionalism is not a matter of using the most available local material, or of lapsing some simple form of construction that our ancestors and […] regional forms are those which most closely meet the actual conditions of life and which most fully succeed in making a people feel at home in their environment. They do not merely satisfy the soil but they reflect the current conditions of culture in the region.” Thus, instead of stressing the theme of “resistance” commonly associated with regional positions, Mumford’s statement emphasized the idea of “cohesiveness.” Morley and other architects and are the first universal solution in both time and space. […] every regional culture necessarily has a universal side to it. It is steadily open to influences which come from other parts of the world, and from other cultures, separated from the local region in space or time but both together.” Lewis Mum- ford, “The South in Architecture” (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1931), 30. Mumford would re-educate this key argument in his contributions to the exhibition catalogue Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region (ASAARB, SFMOMA, 1949), where he opposed the free expression of the architecture of the Bay Region to what he considered the restrictions of the “international style” (see notes 6 & 44). Soon afterwards, Southern California architect Harris Hamilton Harris assumed Mumford’s wish to propose his notion of “regionalism of liberation” at the North-West Regional Council of the AIA (Oregon, 1945), where he affirmed: “A region promotes ideas. A region accepts ideas. Imagination and intelligence are necessary for both […] in California in the late nineteen and twenty, modern European ideas over a low architectural tradition. California’s acceptance was partial but intelligent, largely confined to what it found relevant […] New England, on the other hand, modern European ideas met a rigid and entrenched tradition that at first resisted and then surrendered.” Enoch Mumford’s 1949 interpretation (see ASAARB exhibition catalogue), Harris declared that the East Coast had accepted European modernism whole because New England regionalism had been previously reduced to a collection of restrictions. See Howard H. Harris, “Regionalism and Nationalism in Architecture” (originally published as a revised essay in Texas Quarterly, 1, Feb. 1958), reprinted in AIAA, Architectural Regionals, 60. Thirty years later, François would identify Harris’s discourse as a genuine expression of “critical regionalism.” See Kenneth Frampton, “Prospects for a Critical Regionalism,” Perspecta 20 (1982): 152. More recently, Canizaro has elucidated that, due to Mumford’s commitment to delve into the irrefutably linkage the site, field step between architectural form, and social forces, Mumford’s idea of regionalism in “The South in Architecture,” which was deeply informed by the ethical concerns of WHO, must be considered an important precursor to the “critical regionalism” of Tzannes, Le-Faw and, of course, Frampton. A question of concepts eloquently criticized by Alan Colquhan. Cf. Canizaro, Architectural Regionalism, 96. Cf. as well Alan Colquhan, “The Concept of Regionalism,” In Postmodern Architecture, ed. Gudrun Beyer-Mbohong and Wong Chong (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 1-21.


Ibid.

Apart from every variation of the name “Bay Region” itself, or the problematic adjective “regional,” which may insinuate an imported category created elsewhere and which may preclude understanding between different cultural geographies—perhaps, a more accurate term to define the distinct character of modern architecture in Northern California is “Bay Region School,” and also “Bay Region second tradition,” which implies the connections between the younger generation of Bay Area architects and the local practices established by Californians pioneers. Moreover, to do justice to the histography of California modernism, the origin of Bay Region School was already proposed by Lewis Mumford himself that he wished to correct his own “unfortunate” first attempt to name it after having used the common term “Bay Region Style” (see note 15).

Local and national press remarked upon the architect’s ground-breaking installation whose innovative design was without parallel in the United States. Architectural Forum, for instance, listed emphasis on the simplicity and visual order accomplished by Born, whose refined proposal was exhibited as “a complete reversal of the usual practice of laying together whatever material available might be.” “AIA Exhibit of Architecture, San Francisco,” Architectural Forum 68, no. 6 (December 1938): 468. Actually, no other museum in the country, including MoMA, had yet arisen to this challenge, being the originality and quality of Born’s first proposals at SFMA only comparable to the work that, by then, George Nelson produced for the New York Architectural League.

During this time in New York from 1929 to 1936, Ernest Born was actively involved in a number of influential circles through which he and his wife Esther would contribute to the national visibility of their fellow Bay Region architects. Ernest had joined the artistic staff of Architectural Record (1933-41), and then served on the editorial board of Architectural Forum up until his 1936 return to San Francisco. He was also prominent in some of the New York Architectural League’s initiatives. As he became one of the most visible assets of the Bay Area on the East Coast, Born invited selected Bay Region architects’ entries to the League shows of 1938, 1947, 1948 and possibly others.

Immediately after John Fettiplace’s takeover, in 1948, Grace Morley became a member of the advisory board of California Arts & Architecture magazine. She also contributed a monthly column to the San Francisco-based publication Architect and Engineer.

Grace Morley was also a board member of Magazine of Art, the organ of the American Federation of Art, among whose prominent board members were Alfred Barr and Philip Johnson.

Proof of the emergence of a Bay Region modern tradition, or at least of its actualization and public attention as a coherent movement around the time SFMA launched its program of architectural exhibitions in 1938 is that Sheldon Cheney, one of the most perceptive local critics and earliest advocates of California modernism did not mention the work of the second generation of San Francisco Bay architects in his 1930 book The New World Architecture, which was reprinted in 1935. Cheney was the son of Charles Cheney, a prominent figure in the 1910s new-planning movement in California, being the reason why he grew up and was educated in Berkeley. Like Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Cheney traveled to Europe in the late 1920s while researching for his book. Cheney’s seminal The New World Architecture, which predates Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock’s exhibition Modern Architecture: International Exhibition by two years, includes the work of almost all of the 1932 MoMA show participants. It features much of the 1930 work of Frank Lloyd Wright and his son Lloyd, as well as some late minor works of Rudolf Schindler and his 1925-30 Kings Road tenant and sometime partner Richard Neutra. Cheney also discusses favorably the work of Bernard Maybeck and expands on a California Style that had much else in common with the Bay Region. Yet, Cheney’s book would demonstrate that Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock were not alone in recognizing the rapid shift from Beaux Arts architecture to modern architecture throughout the 1930s, although they conspicuously missed some of the most original examples of the West, such as Schindler’s iconic houses.

In April 1942, a year after the AIA National Convention in California and the premiere of Architecture Around San Francisco Bay at the New York Architectural League, Grace Morley prompted SFMA to mount Western Living: Five Houses under $7,500, another exhibition on California residential architecture with a high media profile (see note 75). Allegedly, its genesis was a Harper’s piece published by Talcott Hamlin in January 1942, which should be framed within the intense promotional effort undertaken by Bay Region architects through 1941. See Exhibition Records, box 16, folder 29, SFMOMA Archives, San Francisco. Talcott Hamlin’s 1942 article would anticipate by half a decade Lewis Mumford’s picture of the Bay Region as the center of the “most advanced domestic architecture in the world” (being characterized by a blend of available materials, a fine handling of spaces, and a constant preocupation with the actual living of its inhabitants.) Talcott Hamlin, “The Trend of American Architecture,” Harper’s Bazaar (January 1942): 169. As for the exhibition content, except for Frank Lloyd Wright, who refused to participate in the show, Western Living was conceived to illustrate Hamlin’s elevation through the residential work of the architects mentioned in his Harper’s article: John Dinwiddie and Albert Henry Hill associates; Henry Parke Clark; Clark,iment. However, Garett Wurster, Richard Neutra and William Wurster, each one represented by a single family residence. Unlike previous shows at SFMA, it was not restricted exclusively to Northern California and was sponsored by John Ewens’ California Arts & Architecture magazine, whose March 1942 issue served as unofficial exhibition catalogue (see Figure 9), in which Grace Morley herself contributed an introductory entry. See Grace Morley, “Western Living: An Architecture in Exhibition,” California Arts & Architecture 59 (March 1942): 23. Eying Hamlin’s words, Turner’s enthusiastic review of the exhibition affirmed that the showing at SFMA proved three things: that California had developed “to own brand new style of domestic architecture [that it was] perhaps the most advanced and progressive of the world (and that the California house was) modern and handsome at the same time.” “New California Architecture,” Time, April 28, 1942, 23.


The 1939 New York World’s Fair and Golden Gate International Expositions also brought about significant East-West Coast interactions. During WWII, leading California regionalist architects such as Gawler Oliver, Clark, John Dinwiddie, John碰 and Joseph McCarthy were more indulgent than his review of his future employer at MIT, the historian-critic clearly expressed his preference for Portland architects, such as Petro Breaccioli, over William Wurster and the rest of the above-mentioned Bay Region architects.

Wurster’s effort to show Wurster himself would challenge UC Berkeley Architecture Professor Marc Treib’s suggestion that, in 1940, after Wurster published his New Yorker piece, “quite unknowingly and surprisingly,” Wurster must have found himself in the middle of a theoretical debate to reestablish the evaluation criteria of modernism. Marc Treib, “William Wurster: The Fool of Lascor,” in An Everyday Modernism: The Houses of William Wurster, 58.
Marc Treib has advocated that Northern California regionalism, as a re-examination of the local idiom, arose as an intrinsic theme during New Deal years, which was a combination of several factors. Marc Treib, “The Social Art of Landscape Design,” in Garret Esher. Modern Landscapes for Living: Ed. Marc Treib and Geraldine Isakent (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 41. For instance, due to the scarcity of the Great Depression, locally sourced materials, such as wood, became the basis for cost-effective building solutions. Thus, as an instance of practical concerns and symbolic notions associated with the idea of home –so essential amid the stress and dislocation of the depression–, the pervasive use of wood resulted in the style associated with William Wurster’s second Bay Region tradition. Ironically, the prevalence of wood in the domestic imagery of San Francisco Bay, would be contemporaneously used by Alfred Barr against Lewis Mumford and William Wurster during the 1948 MoMA symposium, as later expounded upon.


As Jane Castle suggests, despite the wide recognition gained by Northern California architects, the fact that they became cohesive, wishing to avoid being labelled as part of the “Bay Region Style,” would eventually contribute to the dissolution of their practice as an identifiable school, particularly when the theoretical argument supporting this notion also diminished as Mumford later became more preoccupied with technology than with writing about architecture, as William Wurster’s second Bay Area tradition.

When the following year nine Bay Region architects were asked by Architectural Record West Coast editor Elizabeth K. Thompson whether there was a regional style in Northern California, the interviewed authors responded varying or answered no to the question. Stewart’s, Thompson’s, and Mumford’s interest in a Regional Style versus Regionalism, “Is there a Bay Area Style?” Architectural Record, article published in its May 1949 issue, demonstrated that, implicitly, in what most of them agreed was about the existence of a common ground regarding their understanding of a shared culture of place. Later, Thompson herself would explain the result of her survey by knowing that the indivisualization of the West Coast architects justifiedly rebelled against such a restrictive label. See Elizabeth K. Thompson, “Is there a Bay Area Style?” Architectural Record, 131 (1949): 92-97.

As Jane Castle suggests, despite the widespread recognition gained by Northern California architects, the fact that they became cohesive, wishing to avoid being labelled as part of the “Bay Region Style,” would eventually lead to the dissolution of their practice as an identifiable school, particularly when the theoretical argument supporting this notion also diminished as Mumford later became more preoccupied with technology than with writing about architecture. Thus, although Bay Region architects continued to practice during the 1950s and 1960s, the proposition of the existence of a recognizably Bay Region tradition “was not renewed until the mid-1970s. When Sally Woodbridge and her contemporaries began to research the architects Mumford had identified,” Castle, “Indispensable and Modern,” 59, 78. It would be also in this sense that Fenske stated that the Bay Region School happened to be the unfortunate “national casualty” of the debate over its very existence. Fenske, “Mumford, Hitchcock, and the Bay Region Style,” 75.

That very month, Robert Woods Kennedy, who was then on William Wurster’s faculty at MIT, published a Wurster-sympathetic piece “The Small House in New England” in the April issue of Architectural Record. Kennedy’s essay was harshly answered by Philip Johnson and Peter Blake in an essay published in the October issue of the same magazine (see note 47 above).

Implicitly enabling Bertel’s speech at the 1948 symposium, the editorial claimed: “critic” points to Wurster’s residential work as being “cottagy,” while his large buildings are, according to them, in the International Style. The International Style is accepted (by this group of critics) as the correct style. Therefore, the “cottagy” building is wrong. Therefore, as Philip Johnson and Peter Blake write in the Magazine of Art, “to the architectural framework of order there can be no room for the anarchy of cottages.” Or, as Henry-Russel Hitchcock said at the Museum of Modern Art, “Its activities (the cottagy style) are centered on what is frankly not one of the important problems of the architecture of the present day.” To such a “real conclusion this twinned architectural logic leads—the small individual house is, Hitchcock went on to say, ‘of very little statistical consequence today.’ ” Thomas Cheng, Architectural Style, “Progressive Architecture 29 (December 1948): 127.
In January 1949, Progressive Architecture received supportive letters to the editor from Bay Region architects Gardiner Dailey, Ernest Kemp and William Wurster, also from Wurster's then MIT faculty member Robert Woods Kennedy, as well as more confusing letters from Christopher Tunnard and Henri-Russell Hitchcock. In February 1949 mixed letters to the editor came from Philip Goodwin, Talbot Hamlin, Philip Johnson and Peter Blake. The following month Coghten published the annotated proceedings to the 1949 Princeton symposium “Building for Modern Men” which sympathized with Munsford and Wurster.

Contrary to Northern California architectural historian Periagni Serraino’s statement that both the label “Bay Region Style” and the arguments of its cultural legimity were invented on the East Coast, and the controversy only reached California in 1949, two years after the dispute had “snowballed from a passing comment in a weekly publication to become the subject of a debate of national proportions” (Serraino, NorCalMod, 70), it must be recalled that Bay Region architects provided the controversial conditions that echoed as far as the London-based Architectural Review. For example, as a result of Catherine Bauer and Elizabeth Mock’s correspondence with English editor James M. Richards, Architectural Review openly endorsed Munsford’s stance. See “Bay Region Domestic,” Architectural Review 104 (October 1948): 164. Thus, the 1949 show was nothing but a delayed response to Munsford’s 1947 piece.

Due to SFMOMA’s scarcity of funds, the participant architects paid pro-rata for redrawing the blueprints. Richard Freeman, “letter to participants” (enlisting schedule and terms & conditions of the show), June 21, 1949, Exhibition Records, box 32, folder 3, SFMOMA Archives, San Francisco. Also, local companies and manufacturers got involved in the production of the show by paying the costs of materials for its installation. Richard Freeman, “letter to Don W. Lyon, President, Producers Council of San Francisco,” September 19, 1949, Exhibition Records, box 32, folder 3, SFMOMA Archives, San Francisco.

The original exhibition, as shown at SFMOMA, included 52 houses by 25 architects. The average age of the architects participating in the show was 40 years and only one of them was a woman, Helene Douglass. About half of the houses shown in 1949 were designed by architects who had begun practicing after returning from the front very shortly after the war.

Richard Freeman was at the helm of SFMOMA as its executive director during Grace Morley’s 1947-1949 lease of presence in Paris to work for UNESCO.


By the time Munsford was invited to contribute an essay to the exhibition catalogue, in an article published in Architectural Review he asserted that the “essential definition of modern architecture” emerging from the 1932 show was “still maintained” by Philip Johnson’s MoMA’s connection with English editor James M. Richards, Architectural Review openly endorsed Munsford’s stance. See “Bay Region Domestic,” Architectural Review 104 (October 1948): 164.


For the traveling exhibition, the original 52 entries of the contemporary section were reduced to 16 houses, being only included structures by Arts and Alice, Wurster, W. Wurster, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, W. F. Massey, Peter Blake, Charles Eames, Mies van der Rohe, Philip Johnson, and Charles Eames. The other entries of the 1932 show were reduced to about 1200 photographs and a two-page printed catalog, indicating of the venue or institution. See Grace Morley’s October 1937 letters to MoMA, ARCH.EXH.001, box 6, folder 1, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) archives, San Francisco.

By the time, MoMA’s circulation of exhibitions had two primary goals: to broaden the museum’s audiences and to secure financially the museum’s programs by leasing its shows to other institutions. Mathew Postal, “Toward a Democratic Aesthetic,” The Modern House in America, 1932-1955 (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 1980): 54.

Catherine Bauer Wurster letters to Elizabeth Bauer Mock (Kassler) and vice versa, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers 1931-64 (BRN AOS 74/76/3), series 1, subseries 2.1 correspondence 1931-1964, box 1, folders 8-10, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Having worked intermittently with John McAndrew since 1937, Elizabeth Mock arrived at MoMA in time to assist with the hanging of her former patron Frank Lloyd Wright’s solo show on Falling Water House, which opened on January 25, 1938. Born Elizabeth Bauer, she had graduated in 1932 from Vassar College, where her joined McAndrew’s art and architecture history courses. Shortly upon graduation she moved to Taliesin as Wright’s student and became one of the first Taliesin Fellows. During her Taliesin internship she met Edgar Kaufmann Jr. and her future husband, Swiss architect Rudolph Mock.

Among MoMA’s most exhibitions which traveled to MoMA’s STOR, the following are revealing of her social concerns and regionalist concerns, as well as of the assistance of her sister Catherine Wurster Housing (1942). Look At Your Neighborhood. Principles of Neighboring Planning, (1944) or If You Want to Build a House (1946) which Grace Mory immediately echoed through her The House I Want program relying on a local examples of Bay Region’s domestic architecture. In turn, MoMA received the influence of California architects and even their exhibitions, like the aforementioned 1942 Western Living show (see note 22), which traveled to MoMA under the form of a five California Houses, indicating of the cross-pollination between both museums (see figure 9).

The decisive 1937-1946, when the Department of Architecture was headed by John McAndrew, and later by his former student and collaborator Elizabeth Mock after the resignation of the former in 1941, is representative of MoMA’s socio-political change of direction to embrace a broader regionalist standpoint.

That very many figures belonging to Wurster, Bauer and Mock circles took significant regionalist stances, such as Katherine Murray Ford’s publishing of “Modern is Regional” in the March 1941 issue of House and Garden, Taliesin, the following month, where the names of more and more authors in the regional scope was rising. Lewis Mumford would deliver his influential series of lectures “The South in Architecture” at Alabama College (see note 12).
Late in 1945 Philip Johnson began to be involved again with MoMA, in part because of few opportunities to build. The following year, he was already acting as the unofficial director of its Department of Architecture. See Jennifer Tobias, “The Museum of Modern Art’s What is Modern? Series 1938-1969” (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2012). 183. Lefèvre and Tzonis have assumed Schutze’s account that Johnson eliminated Elizabeth Mock upon his return to MoMA to reclaim his former position. See Lefèvre and Tzonis, Architecture of Regionalism, 270; see also Franck, "Theodore. Philip Johnson. Life and Work (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 173-174. However, according to Jennifer Tobias there are two versions of Mock’s departure: “In 1995 she explained it was her choice, that she left to join her husband in Tennessee, where he was chief architect for the Tennessee Valley Authority. She said that Architecture Committee Chair Philip Goodwin begged her to stay, but she was adamant.” In 1995 Philip Johnson said that “I didn’t remember why she left. His biographer [Schulze] says Mock ‘never had a chance’ upon Johnson’s return, that (for example) Johnson purposely ignored her during a lunch with Barry. If the reasons for her departure are unclear, the state is certain. In a December 1946 memo asking department activities for that year, Philip Johnson reports these personnel changes: Elizabeth E. Mock resigned as Curator July 15, 1946; Philip C. Johnson, Consultant since August, 1946.” Jennifer Tobias, “Elizabeth Mock at the Museum of Modern Art, 1938-1946” (unpublished manuscript: Archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2003), 33-34.

In 1946, while preparing Built in USA: 1932-1944 as part of the program “Art in Progress: 130th Anniversary Exhibitions,” the Museum of Modern Art was requested by the OWI and the American Scandinavian Foundation to mount a major event in Stockholm. To cope with the many difficulties of this challenge, Mock decided that the only possible way to meet the deadline was to “concentrate the exhibition from as much as possible material at hand,” for which she coordinated her team to assemble the four sections of the show from previous exhibitions: “Y. H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright,” “Planning in the USA,” “1938 Housing in War and Peace,” and “Outstanding Buildings of the Last 10 Years,” which was an offshoot of the ongoing Built in USA: 1932-44. Elizabeth Mock, “Letter to the editor,” Pencil Points 25, no. 10 (October 1946): 164-170. As usual, Mock counted on the assistance of her sister Catherine Bauer, as well as her brother-in-law William Wurster, who was also an exhibitor. Furthermore, Wurster’s close friend Alan Adolfo was instrumental to the success of the show in Scandinavia, as from 1944 to 1945 it was seen by more than twenty thousand visitors.

The decade 1929-1945 was first conceived in 1941, and circulated from 1941 to 1944, then it was redesigned for the Office of War Information (OWI), renamed as Regional Building in America and sent to Great Britain under the auspices of its Overseas Division (1946-47). Also conceived in 1941, the extensively circulated and acclaimed The Wooden House in America, in America joined the achievements of East Coast modern houses with West Coast residences, such as, respectively, Marcel Breuer’s and Bay Region architect John Funk’s, to whom, one year later, the show Planning a Modern House was devoted.

The exhibition featured works by Southern California architects Neutra, Neuma, Sauton and Anhe. The selection of Bay Region architects including Corbett, Dailey, Demaris, Funk, Kump and Wurster was perceptibly well-covered.

Significantly, none of the admirable works of these Bay Region architects in the field of social housing were included in Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region, which would evidence that the political interest of the 1949 show was a discussion on identity that ultimately folded upon architectural language. Despite the emphasis of its exhibition catalogue on the progressive spirit of the region, DATSFBR elided a huge variety of innovative design practices, looking a broader urban vision and not taking into account the role of the market forces in the transformation of the American landscape, such as the 1947 Heiris exhibition at SFMOMA had already investigated.

Significantly, John Funk’s indisputably Bay Region Heckendorf House (Modesto, CA, 1939) illustrated the cover of Mock’s 1944 Built in USA exhibition catalogue. Among other MFM’s shows organized by Elizabeth Mock during the 1940s, this house was included in The Wooden House in America (1941), Tomorrow’s Small House (1945) and in If You Want to Build a House (1946).


Hitchcock informed Bower and Wurster about his new “association” with Philip Johnson to “get together a new Built in USA exhibition and publication.” Although there is no invitation to Wurster to submit materials to the exhibit, the critics spoke frankly about it. Hitchcock even provided them with references of some of his students and collaborators in the ongoing show who were interested in visiting the Bay Area for summer internships and research trips. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, “Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Wurster, June 6, 1952,” Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers 1933-64 (BANC MSS 74/163), series 2, subseries 2.2, box 19, folder 13, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

“I am convinced that the International Style, as the dominant movement of the 1930s, produced no buildings of historic value in this country. And I am now begin to question whether it really was any important in the development of our architecture.” Elizabeth Mock Kassler, interview at Sunday, May 10, 1964 session, MAS 1964 Proceedings (The decade 1929-1939), in Better, The Modern Architecture-Symposia, 215.

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