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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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The Evolution of Gregory Ain's Interwar and Postwar Planned Housing Communities,
1939-1948

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

Brooke Ashton Devenney

August 2014

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Patricia Morton, Chairperson

Dr. Kristoffer Neville

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The Thesis of Brooke Ashton Devenney is approved:

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University of California, Riverside

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Evolution of Gregory Ain's Interwar and Postwar Planned Housing Communities,
1939-1948

by

Brooke Ashton Devenney

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Art History
University of California, Riverside, August 2014
Dr. Patricia Morton, Chairperson

This thesis explores Gregory Ain's planned housing communities spanning the period from 1939 to 1948, connecting their conception to the theoretical legacy of Modernism that began with the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* in Europe a decade earlier. Expanding on existing scholarship, this thesis attempts to contextualize Ain's One Family Defense House Project (1939), Park Planned Homes (1945-47), and Mar Vista Tract (1946-48) within the social, political, and economic context of the interwar and postwar period. I attempt to expand the understanding of their design through new and lesser-known examples by Ain in the area of tract housing and also contemporaneous housing developments. These include his manifesto for a project entitled Preliminary Proposal 'A' for a low-cost community housing development in Southgate, California (1939) and the U.S. government's Basic Minimum House (1936). The three planned housing communities discussed in this thesis expand the context within which one views the typical tract house, but also the avant-garde approach to Modernism during the height of Ain's career and the years that followed.

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“The true architect finds his inspiration in accepting the challenge of a problem, not in repudiating it or circumventing it.”

Gregory Ain, letter to the editor of *Arts & Architecture*, December 1964

Introduction

In a 1945 article for *Arts & Architecture* magazine, Gregory Ain explained his motivation for tackling the suburban subdivision,

Tens of thousands of families, now compelled by circumstances to occupy substandard dwellings, will be in a position to start building as soon as priorities are lifted. For obvious practical reasons, they will be unable to wait for an industrially manufactured product, or for the saner kind of land subdivision which we hope will eventually appear. These first tens of thousands of houses will necessarily be built by methods not very different from those employed in the last pre-war houses, in subdivisions as they already exist, on lots averaging little if any over fifty feet in width. We hope that these houses will be good, but we know that they must be economical.¹

Ain’s practical approach resulted in many of his most innovative adaptations to the typical suburban housing model, but it also meant modifying the most progressive elements to fit postwar social and economic constraints. While Ain’s architectural career consisted primarily of single-family homes for individual clients, public, and commercial buildings, his attention to affordable suburban housing communities during and after World War II sets him apart from his contemporaries. Between 1940 and 1948, Ain approached the rapidly evolving housing market with the attitude of a Modernist and a problem-solver. Instead of imposing an idealized Modernist vision on the market or

¹ “Arts and Architecture’s Second Annual Competition for the Design of a Small House: Jury Comments,” *Arts & Architecture*, February 1945, 30.

abandoning the problem of planned communities altogether, he devised subtle and innovative designs that accommodated the challenges facing architects during this liminal era. In Ain's planned housing communities, the rigid aesthetics of the early "International Style" evolved toward an adapted California Modernism that responded to the changing political, economic, and cultural norms of the 1940s.² During this period, housing production in the United States shifted from the leftist policies of the interwar New Deal social programs to a more market-driven approach in the postwar years.³

This thesis argues that Ain's planned housing communities reflect this shift in policy and its effect on the evolution of architecture, landscape design, and urban planning.⁴ Just as the direction, scope, and purpose of New Deal policies changed over the period, so too did Ain's architecture and urbanism. Ain retained a populist stance

² Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The International Style* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996). The first edition was published in 1932 as to accompany the exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). MoMA functioned as a cultural taste-maker whose influence extended to California, framing the dialogue about Modernism between the two coasts through its exhibitions and associated propaganda. Richard Neutra participated in the execution of the exhibition in Los Angeles at the Bullocks Wilshire department building from July 23-August 30, 1932. I agree with recent scholarship that MoMA tended to reduce Modernism to a mere style that could be borrowed for purely aesthetic means. See: Andrew M. Shanken, *194X: Architecture, Planning, and Consumer Culture on the American Home Front* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009)

³ Collins, Robert M., *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

⁴ Within the context of this thesis, the New Deal era is not solely defined by monolithic leftist and typically progressive notions of liberal politics, but rather I take a more nuanced view of how the evolving government and economic policies affected Ain's architecture.

toward single-family housing in each of his projects, even those that were not explicitly cooperative in nature.⁵

In a short, ten-year period, Ain's planned housing communities realized much of the abstract ideology of European Modernism, exemplified by the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) and the multi-family housing of the German Siedlungen, while also adapting to the shifting cultural climate of Los Angeles. In contrast to the Museum of Modern Art's purely aesthetic characterization of Modernism in the *International Style* exhibition (1932), Ain took a pragmatic approach to Modern architecture and urbanism, modifying its ideology to suit a wider audience.⁶ Unlike many of his contemporaries, Ain chose to work within the confines of existing development and real-estate industries to bring Modernist principals to bear in the average single-family home.

My research explores the fertility of Ain's designs during this vital turning point in United States history, the 1940s, when he experimented with unconventional architectural solutions and produced many of the design principals that he utilized in the postwar period. These experiments resulted in enormous aesthetic variety achieved

⁵ While the European architectural endeavors in the 1920's and 30's were more directly connected to a progressive governmental agenda, Ain's progressivism was tempered by his status as an American citizen. As a result, I use "progressive" as a functional term to describe Ain's approach to architecture and planning as it relates to earlier Modernist movements, not necessarily as an explicitly political term.

⁶ Although Ain adapted some of his aesthetic to meet the constraints of his time, his architecture can still be considered Modernist because it comes directly out of the legacy of Modernism established in Europe. He attempts to apply the same ideological principals to Southern California suburban architecture. His work can be characterized as early California Modernism, but it falls within this liminal zone between the classical International Style Modernism of the early 1930's and the more iconic 1950's mid-century Modernism.

through a limited number of elements, including the rotation of the plan within the lot, pre-fabricated structural materials, moveable walls, flexible interior spaces, communal landscaping, and innovative use of color.

While the iconic homes of twentieth-century Europe and postwar Southern California have been the subject of considerable scholarship, Ain's architecture has been somewhat overlooked, possibly due to his lack of architectural production during the Depression and Second World War. As Marilyn Neuhart notes, "although commercial and civic buildings were among the 200 structures that Ain designed over the years,⁷ his small houses became his hallmark and the segment of his work on which his reputation rests."⁸ This thesis aims to investigate a narrow selection Ain's small houses and planned housing communities designed during this period.

I define "planned housing communities" as any project encompassing a collection of detached single-family homes designed on a neighborhood scale, including those that follow the conventional tract housing model. I will focus on three of Ain's projects, dedicating a chapter to each: *One Family Defense House* (unbuilt, 1939-40), *Park Planned Homes*, Altadena (1945-47), and *Mar Vista Housing*, Los Angeles (1946-48). Through in-depth analysis of the extensive architectural drawings, photographs, and press clippings in the Gregory Ain archives at the University of California, Santa Barbara, I

⁷ In addition to the tract housing discussed here, Ain also completed custom homes for private clients, including his well-known A.O. Beckman (1938), Tierman (1939), and Miller (1948) houses among others.

⁸ Marilyn Neuhart, *The Story of Eames Furniture* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010), 111.

was able to undertake a critical analysis of Ain's architecture and urban planning. These primary source documents provided insight into Ain's working method in each planned housing community and helped me understand his relationships with his collaborators, fellow architects, and mentors. Collectively these materials clarified Ain's design process for each project elucidating how it evolved from one project to the next. The archives include multiple plans for each project, including their date of completion, which chart the evolution of Ain's process through changes and additions. Landscape plans from the offices of Eckbo, Royston, and Williams are also archived, allowing me to deconstruct the relationship between Ain's architectural drawings and Eckbo's landscape designs. This was vital in bringing to light Eckbo's specific contributions to the various projects. Collectively these materials laid out an aesthetic evolution in Ain's planned housing communities during the nine-year time span that straddled the interwar and postwar periods. With each new project Ain evaluated the state of the market and the typical inhabitant. Then he adjusted his approach to meet what he perceived to be the prevailing needs of the time. He started from a specific problem and worked backward to an architectural solution. But that solution was not always aesthetic or structural, most often it was social and economic.

Together, Ain's planned housing communities span a range of inhabitants, from the working class of the interwar period, for whom Ain designed to meet their basic needs, to the middle class of the postwar period, who were more attentive to amenities and social status. As a result, Ain's planned housing communities follow the trajectory of

the typical southern California family seeking a single-family home from the interwar and postwar periods. Each chapter in this thesis tracks the inhabitants' changing needs and the corresponding adaptations Ain made in his architecture. In chapter one I argue that the rational, partly prefabricated design of the One Family Defense House borrowed much of its aesthetic ideology from earlier Modernist precedents in Germany and contemporary examples by his mentors, Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler. I place the project within the context of other interwar projects intended to alleviate the housing shortage for low-income and transitory workers. By comparing the One Family Defense House to Ain's earlier experiments with prefabrication, and also to the federal government's proposal for a Basic Minimum House (1936), I have contextualized Ain's approach.

The second chapter investigates the beginnings of the postwar economic shift through an examination of Park Planned Homes. This was the first of Ain's designs to ideologically connect the interwar and postwar periods and also to appeal to a more affluent and stable inhabitant. In Park Planned Homes, Ain completed one of his first planned housing communities in collaboration with the landscape designer Garrett Eckbo. Together, they created a nuanced planning scheme, even though both the architecture and landscape design were restricted by the demands of the nascent postwar housing market. In the third chapter I argue that the Mar Vista Tract represents Ain's mature style, geared toward a middle-class clientele. He and Eckbo devised subtle ways to provide flexibility and collective space within the confines of a conventional suburban

housing development. Although the Mar Vista Tract's overall site plan, exterior treatment, and internal layout challenged the status quo in tract housing, it was not as innovative as his designs for the unbuilt Community Homes project of the same period. To situate the Mar Vista Tract within the trajectory of Ain's planned housing communities, I contrast it with the more conventional Kaiser Community Homes.

In her ground-breaking work on Modernism in California, Esther McCoy characterized Gregory Ain (1908-1988) as one of the "the Second Generation" of California Modern architects.⁹ Like McCoy, Thomas Hines and Anthony Denzer have also provided an exhaustive look at Ain's architectural career, which included homes for private clients, apartments, planned housing communities, public buildings, renovations, additions, and his own private home. Drawing on their scholarship and expanding it, this thesis examines one element of his architectural production, planned housing communities. I attempt to uncover how Ain's suburban designs evolved aesthetically over time and how they were affected by the social and economic climate of the era. Instead of providing an account of Ain's designs based primarily in personal biography, as Anthony Denzer has done in his dissertation and subsequent book, I present an aesthetic evaluation anchored by the larger historical context of the United States, and Los Angeles specifically. Anthony Denzer argues that Ain's political beliefs caused his unique concern with "the small house" and "the common man."¹⁰ I contend that Ain was part of a larger

⁹ Esther McCoy, *The Second Generation*, First ed., (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1984)

¹⁰ Anthony S. Denzer, *Gregory Ain: The Modern Home as Social Commentary* (Rizzoli, 2008), 143.

movement in postwar California and the United States toward mass suburbanization, which necessarily consisted of modest homes for average families. Ain's designs were unique because they offered an alternative to the profit-driven approach of typical suburban tract housing while still working within its economic and social boundaries.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Ain did not have strong connections to the vernacular architecture of Southern California. Instead, Ain's designs are a continuation of International Style Modernism, which had developed in response to the interwar European housing crisis. Esther McCoy recognized Ain's affinity with European Modernism in *The Second Generation*:

His approach was never regional. Most of California's regionalism started outside the major cities and Ain, a product of the city, rarely left it...The area in which he had grown up in East Los Angeles was something of a colony of first generation Americans, with no stored up memories of California usages to pass along. Ain's major influences in Architecture were two transplanted Viennese...Ain's tradition was closer to European.¹¹

One of these "transplanted Viennese," Richard Neutra, acted as Ain's mentor and connected Ain to the Modern movement through his participation in CIAM. As in Europe following the First World War, California during the 1930's and 40's was dealing with a housing crisis. Many of the modern architects who established CIAM had participated in social housing before emigrating to the United States. As a result, progressive Modern architects in Southern California saw an opportunity to apply to their knowledge of

¹¹ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 133. McCoy maintained a technical and empirical approach when deconstructing Ain's architecture that I have continued.

public housing to projects in the United States, using concepts originally conceived in Europe. As Dana Cuff has noted,

The Great depression had critically slowed construction work so that all participants in the building process were underemployed, including architects. The 1937 Housing Act, as much a jobs program as a housing policy, engaged talented designers nationwide. Some of Los Angeles's best architects had teamed up to design public housing, including Richard Neutra...¹²

Social responsibility and planning for low- and middle- income families were hallmarks of European groups like CIAM. Neutra participated directly in CIAM and even allowed Ain to contribute to a submission for the 1930 third international congress in Brussels.¹³

Like McCoy, Thomas Hines also attempts to understand how and why Ain perpetuated European Modernist ideology in Los Angeles. According to Hines,

As [Gregory] Ain and [Raphael] Soriano were legacies of Jewish, working class, emigre cultures, [Harwell Hamilton] Harris was a protestant, Anglo-American, third generation Californian, whose ancestors had inhabited the American continent for centuries. In the creative tension between Modernism and regionalism and between European and American influences, Ain and Soriano generally embraced the former, while Harris...inclined toward the latter.¹⁴

My thesis further addresses the question posed by these scholars: how did Gregory Ain continue the legacy of International Style Modernism in Los Angeles and why? I argue that émigré architects like Neutra passed a concern with high-quality, low-

¹² Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 158.

¹³ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 87.

¹⁴ Thomas S. Hines, *Architecture of the Sun: Los Angeles Modernism, 1900-1970* (New York: Rizzoli : Distributed to the U.S. trade by Random House, 2010), 483.

cost housing to Ain and other second generation architects as a European Modernist paradigm. Although this legacy was derived from the principles of Modern architecture and planning, I am interested in the way this methodology began to conflict with the social, political, and economic structure of the United States in the late thirties and early forties, and the way this tension affected Ain's oeuvre. In some respects the United States' economic policy during the early part of Ain's career could be defined as socialistic, leftist, or progressive, but Alan Brinkley notes,

One broad assumption was particularly important to the early New Deal notion of reform...the assumption that the nation's greatest problems were rooted in the structure of modern industrial capitalism and that it was the mission of government to deal somehow with the flaws in that structure.¹⁵

So the government's approach was not necessarily anti-capitalist as much as it was conceived through an awareness of the potential pitfalls of capitalism. Throughout this thesis when I use the terms "progressive" or "socialistic," I intend to describe this specific understanding of the New Deal era, a more nuanced view than previous scholars have presented.

Each of these scholars of Ain's architecture and urban planning make the connection to his European forefathers, but fail to take a critical stance toward how his multi-family housing operated within the postwar American context. Many scholars point to forward-thinking elements of his designs that broke the suburban model, but none answer the question "why?" and more importantly, "to what extent?" Ain's work differed

¹⁵ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1995), 5.

from contemporary suburban development. In this thesis I will answer the following questions: what factors constrained the realization of Ain's most progressive Modernist ideas? What effect did the restricting factors have on the design of the house and the site plan? I believe Ain's planned housing communities represent one of the few practical suburban applications of Modernist ideals. The three planned housing communities I will investigate, along with Dunsmuir Flats (1937) and Avenel Homes (1947), demonstrate how close Southern California architecture came to a practical realization of Modernist utopian ideology within the interwar and postwar contexts.

It is impossible to write about postwar Modern architecture without addressing the role of the Case Study House program. The program, organized in 1945 by John Entenza, editor of *Arts & Architecture* magazine, was intended to provide an array of prototypical architectural models that could be replicated en masse during the postwar period. Martin Filler identified the utopian aspects of this project:

Like many early European modernists (especially members of the De Stijl group and the Bauhaus), Entenza and many of the designers he sponsored saw the new world of design in large part as a social movement that could someday lead to a long-dreamed-of utopia."¹⁶

Instead, the Case Study House program became an extensive display of avant-garde, and sometimes impractical, approaches to Modernism in Southern California. Hines refers to

¹⁶ Martin Filler, "Building Organic Form, Architecture, Ceramics, Glass, and Metal in the 1940's and 1950's," in *Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940-1960* (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 169.

the program as an elitist endeavor by the design cognoscenti,¹⁷ whose “failure to complete the tracts by Jones and Emmons would constitute the program’s greatest lost opportunity.”¹⁸ Many scholars and fellow architects have also noted Ain’s absence from this program. Pierre Koenig stated that it was because Ain was “not sufficiently crisp,” while others maintain it was due to Ain’s strong leftist political inclinations.¹⁹ Noted architectural photographer, Julius Shulman (1910-2009), criticized the program for not focusing enough on “low-income, multi-unit housing, and for failing to commission ... qualified modernists as Gregory Ain.”²⁰ But I would argue that Ain chose not to participate in the program because he focused on adapting Modernism to the true postwar context, as opposed to the idealized version envisioned by the Case Study House program. Ain’s focus lay in the design problems of *real houses* and *real neighborhoods* that would be built in the *real world* during and after the war. He was less inclined to build architecture purely for demonstration purposes and he was never a proponent of advertising himself or his architecture. Ain was also not overly concerned with advancing the Modernist architectural avant-garde.

Instead, I believe Ain stuck firmly to his pragmatic approach, borrowing from Modernism what he needed to meet the requirements of his projects. He did not preach

¹⁷ Hines, *Architecture of the Sun*, 508.

¹⁸ Ibid., 514. Jones and Emmons, like Ain, attempted forms of Modernist tract housing.

¹⁹ Ibid, 512.

²⁰ Ibid.

the gospel of the International Style through the creation of singular architectural forms as much as he attempted to translate Modernism to common clients and prevalent situations. This rationalist approach to architecture became the organizing principle for Ain's planned housing communities during the next decade, which waned in influence, like many of the other early modernist ideologies, sometime around the early 1950's. Unfortunately for Ain, his design for the Museum of Modern Art's *Women's Home Companion* demonstration house essentially marked the end of his active career in planned housing communities. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will explore the set of circumstances and changing societal norms that decreased the public's appreciation of the subtle aesthetic beauty and complexity of Ain's functional approach.

Chapter 1

My first impression of Gregory Ain's One Family Defense House project (1939-40) centered on the simplicity of each house and the repetition and subtle complexity of the site plan. (fig. 1) The project represents one of the first in a series of planned housing communities Ain experimented with during the interwar and postwar periods. Although the project remained on paper, many of the One Family Defense House's most progressive elements were executed after the war in Park Planned Homes and the Mar Vista Tract. First explored in a project called "Preliminary Proposal 'A,'" Ain's investigation of the way houses relate to each other within the confines of a gridded site would fascinate him for the next decade. The One Family Defense House was also one of the first and most overt manifestations of Ain's strong ideological and aesthetic connections to the progressive ideas of European Modernism. From the early Siedlungen in Germany to the foundational utopian concepts of Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), many founders of the "International Style" formulated a social ideology for architecture in the twentieth century that Ain would utilize in his One Family Defense House project. Ain was introduced to the ideas of CIAM through the teachings of Richard Neutra (1892-1970), who gave him the tools to transfer these ideas to the housing shortages in Los Angeles during the Depression and World War II. Because the One Family Defense House was never built, my interpretations are speculative, so I will contextualize the project using other contemporaneous architectural examples, most notably the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) Basic Minimum House (1936).

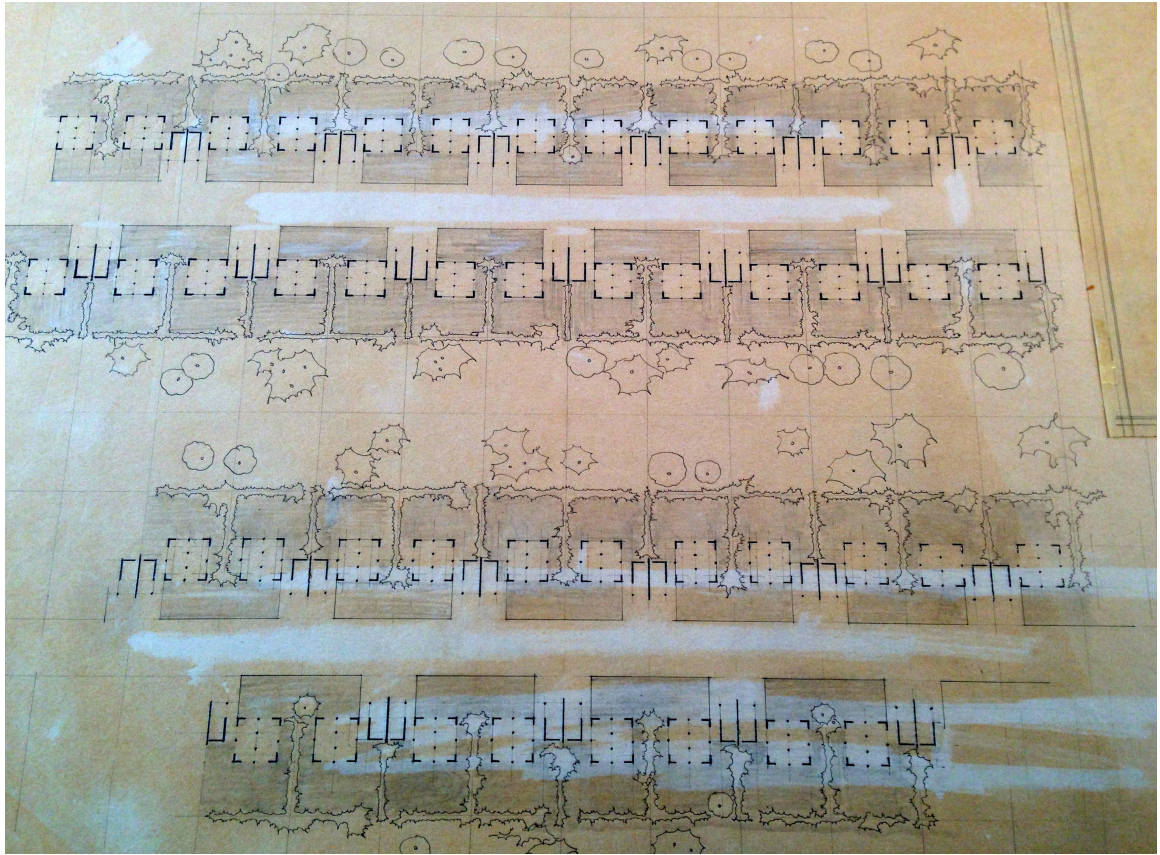


Figure 1. Gregory Ain, One Family Defense House Site Plan (unbuilt), 1939-40.

Gregory Ain was “born in 1908 in Pittsburgh [and] arrived in Los Angeles at the age of three with socialist, once communist-lifestyle parents.”²¹ His family eventually settled in Boyle Heights when Gregory was still young and the family lived in Llano del Rio (1914-1917) cooperative housing as communitarian socialists for a short time.²² Ain’s status as the son of immigrant parents and someone who came of age in a socialist household inclined him toward architecture as a utopian social tool.²³ But I will make the case that his personal history did not solely define his ideology and practice. Although Ain worked with many like-minded clients throughout his years as an architect, his association with CIAM ideology, along with the social and economic context of the era, directly effected his architectural approach.²⁴ Ain received a traditional education in mathematics at UCLA, but did not complete his subsequent architecture degree at USC.²⁵ His real architectural education came by way of his work as an employee of Richard Neutra on the Lovell Health House (1927-1929) in 1927, an informal seminar that fostered his connections to CIAM ideology during his formative years. According to Eric

²¹ Hines, *Architecture of the Sun*, 432.

²² Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 24.

²³ Dolores Hayden describes how Llano Del Rio’s resident city planner and architect, Alice Constance Austin, was well aware of Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. She also notes, “Austin’s design allowed for both communal and private territory, unique and repeatable plans. The houses she proposed were to be personalized and distinct, adapted to specific sites, yet quite simple and easily duplicated.” Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1976), 308-309.

²⁴ According to Breisch’s review of Denzer’s *Gregory Ain: The Modern Home as Social Commentary*, “Denzer’s documentation of the leftist bent of many of Ain’s clients makes a significant contribution to our understanding of his architecture.” Kenneth A. Breisch, “Review,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69, no. 1 (2010): 118-119.

²⁵ Hines, *Architecture of the Sun*, 432.

Mumford, “CIAM’s urbanism was based on the more or less socialist idea that the redesign and development of twentieth-century industrial metropolises should address the biological, psychological, and social needs of the working class.”²⁶ Following this model, the Lovell Health House acted as an experimental laboratory for exploring the earliest tenets of a rationalist approach to Modern architecture. (fig. 2) The house was “constructed of a light steel framework filled with standard window components” and conceptualized around repeatable pre-fabricated elements that took advantage of machine production.²⁷ Writing on the benefits of Modern architecture in 1934, Catherine Bauer reinforced the benefits of standardized components:

Instead of separate houses whose design has been standardized after an obsolete pattern, and which are therefore both wasteful and monotonous and ugly, we can have truly *standardized parts* which will lend themselves to harmonious arrangements as various as human requirements demand.²⁸

This quote sums up the approach taken with the Lovell Health House, and AIA’s approach to housing during this early period in his career when prefabrication and standardization played a large role. The One Family Defense House was not AIA’s first attempt at designing homes constructed of prefabricated parts, but it was his first attempt on a neighborhood scale.

²⁶ Eric Paul Mumford, *Defining Urban Design: CIAM Architects and the Formation of a Discipline, 1937-69* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 2.

²⁷ “Lovell (Health) House, 4616 Dundee Drive, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, CA,” *Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress*, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ca0236/>.

²⁸ Catherine Bauer Wurster, *Modern Housing* (Metropolitan America. New York: Arno Press, 1974), 156.



Figure 2. Richard Joseph Neutra, Lovell Health House, 1929, Gelatin silver print, Julius Shulman photographer, © The J. Paul Getty Trust.

By 1930 Ain was working for Neutra in a part-time capacity helping to devise and execute plans for Rush City Reformed, a project Neutra proposed for CIAM III.²⁹ (fig. 3)

The subject was rational city planning and housing...[Gregory] Ain and [Harwell Hamilton] Harris...became willing participants...Under Neutra's direction they prepared the projects he would present at the congress...It was the initial step in Neutra's theoretical projects, Rush City Reformed. The students worked on office towers in inner city blocks, linked together by upper-level bridges; a twenty-story apartment house on the beach, raised on pilotis, two rooms deep, which used up little land and gave each apartment a share of the view; row housing with a community center; one-story modular buildings in gardens, built with lightweight sandwich panels of diatom (porous microscopic sea deposits).³⁰

Rush City Reformed represented a logical approach to housing on an urban scale.

According to Neutra, the goal of the project was, "...to unroll urban problematics in a scientific manner, expressing belief in the wholesome flexibility of city planning..."³¹

Neutra, Ain, and Harris achieved this by designing residential buildings grouped according to different family types. The compartmentalized plan developed out of CIAM's tendency to "... view the city from the air...or from a sheet of statistics...[to] meet the challenge of developing a mechanized consciousness."³² This formative architectural experience acted as an apprenticeship in Modernist ideology and helped foster Ain's preference for a logical approach to urban planning. Similar to the way

²⁹ Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 49.

³⁰ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 87.

³¹ Richard Joseph Neutra, *Buildings and Projects* (Zurich: Grisberger, 1951), 195.

³² Mitchell Schwarzer, "CIAM: City at the End of History," in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-garde in America*, ed. Robert Somol (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997), 241.

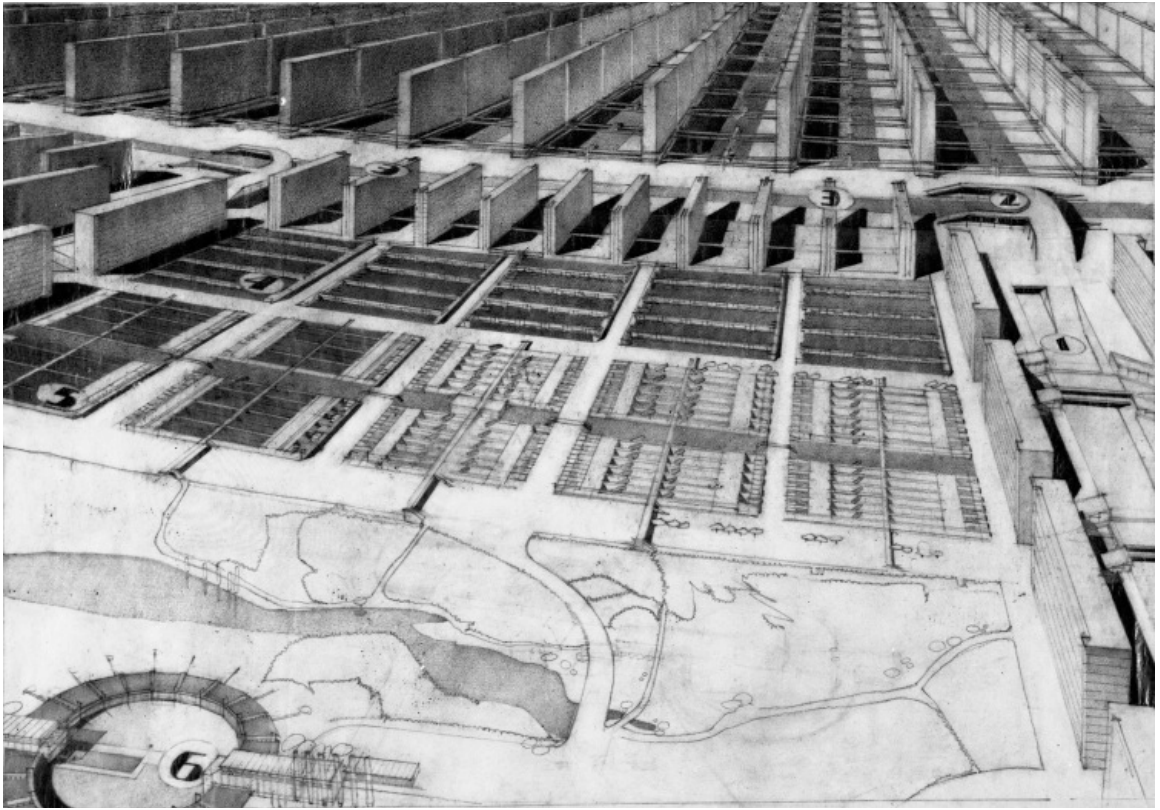


Figure 3. Richard Neutra architect, Gregory Ain collaborating, Rush City Reformed, 1930.

CIAM latched onto the security of a comprehensive scientific methodology, Ain adopted a mathematical approach to his site plan for the One Family Defense House.³³ But the site plan is also where we begin to see the potential pitfalls of the machine-age approach to architecture and urbanism. This was an ongoing ideological struggle that Ain addressed in each of his planned housing communities, beginning with his Preliminary Proposal ‘A’ (1940). (fig. 4)

Preliminary Proposal ‘A,’ like the One Family Defense House project, was an unbuilt interwar project sketched out on paper to meet wartime housing needs. It was most likely conceived by Ain in response to government interventions, like the “... passage of the Landham Act... [Which] appropriated \$1.3 billion for the construction of 700,000 housing units in areas where a shortage of housing for war industry workers either currently existed or could be anticipated.”³⁴ What makes this proposal so vital to the One Family Defense House project, and the rest of Ain’s planned housing communities, is the prospectus which accompanies the drawings. Not only does this document shed light on Ain’s thinking during this early period in his career, it also provides a clear and detailed methodology and set of tools he would utilize for each project discussed in this thesis. In the Gregory Ain archives, written alongside a simple site plan with identical mirrored plans of small houses for a project entitled “Preliminary

³³ Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 147.

³⁴ Cultural Studies Office, Caltrans Division of Environmental Analysis, *Tract Housing in California, 1945-1973: A Context for National Register Evaluation*, (Sacramento, California: California Department of Transportation, 2011), 12.

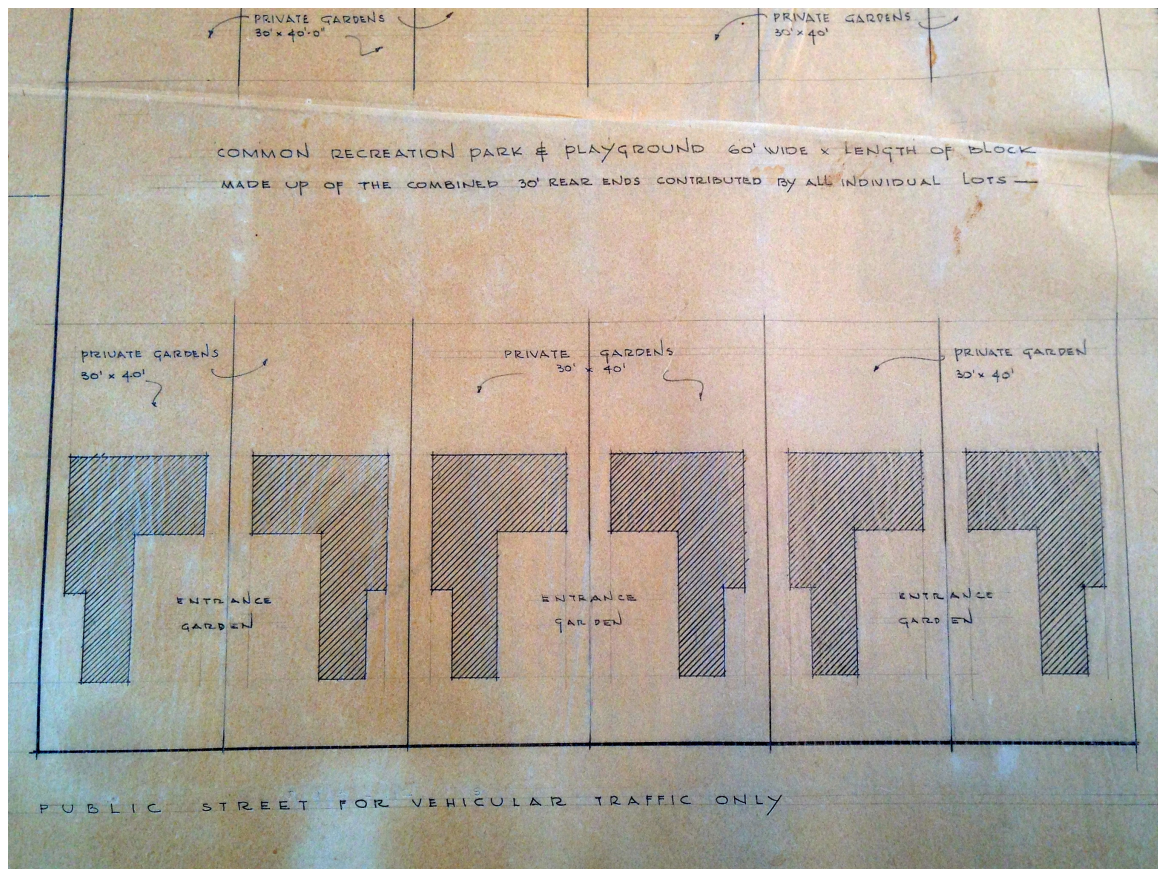


Figure 4. Gregory Ain, Partial site plan of Preliminary Proposal "A," 1939.

Proposal ‘A’ for a low cost community housing development in Southgate,³⁵ California,”

is the text below, signed “Gregory Ain, designer, January 1940.”³⁶ (fig. 5)

This plan provides for a series of four room houses designed for maximum utilization of minimum lots, each 40 feet by 125 feet. Every room of each house gives on private gardens. No principal windows face either the street or adjacent houses. Every room of each house is directly accessible from a small central entry so that the living room is never used as a passage to other rooms. This permits occasional use of the living room as an auxiliary sleeping room. Also, by reducing the number of doors in the living room, it makes the available floor area more usable for furniture. Similarly, juxtaposition of closet doors and entry doors in bedrooms makes the relatively small rooms more spacious.

Concentration of the lot area not covered by the building allows for generous gardens as actual extensions of the rooms, although the rear 30 feet of each lot is separated from the main living garden. By ‘pooling’ this last 30 feet of all lots, a common recreation park 60 feet wide is provided down the middle of each block. This protected play space will keep children off the streets.

A standardized floor plan, reversed on alternate lots, is repeated throughout the development. However, no monotonous repetition will occur, as variety of exterior appearance is attained by different roof treatments. But considerable standardization in general layout makes for economy and efficiency in construction. Also, as the conditions and the building problem on identical lots do not vary, so the solutions must be similar.

³⁵ In Southgate, California, “an industrial base begun in the early 1920s grew and flourished during the 1940s in response to the demands of World War II...[And] by 1940, South Gate boasted more than 35 factories manufacturing chemicals, furniture, roofing, machinery, and other products. This industrial saturation meant South Gate was a hive of activity during World War II, filled to the brim with war workers keeping machinery humming from early in the morning until late at night, if not twenty-four hours a day.” “South Gate: Frequently Asked Questions,” *County of Los Angeles Public Library*, 2014, <http://www.colapublib.org/history/southgate/faq.html>

³⁶ “Preliminary Proposal ‘A’ for a low-cost community housing development in Southgate, California,” *Gregory Ain papers* (Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara)

Estimated cost: \$2,050, including house and land.³⁷

There are a few notable details in this text, including the mention of an auxiliary sleeping room that no doubt is the result of Ain's friendship with Rudolph Schindler, who incorporated similar rooms into the Schindler House on Kings road. Also, the private "living" gardens and shared park spaces, the strategic open floor plan and reduced use of interior doors, the standardized alternating floor plan, and most importantly, the concern for variety within the overall site plan. As early as 1941 he also states:

Aesthetic needs in housing can be satisfied in a new way; elimination of unnecessary capricious deviations from a standard need not result in monotonous repetition of identical dwellings, as personal variation in similar structures can be affected in the media of color, landscaping, placement of the building on the site, the addition of pergolas, etc."³⁸

This proves that early on Ain was aware of many of the most prominent issues he would face while working within tract housing developments, but also that he had already conceived many of his clever solutions. Not surprisingly these characteristics show up in his next project, the One Family Defense House.

Like many of the Modernist housing proposals of the era, the One Family Defense House project was essentially an experiment. Because the country was in a state of crisis, due to the depression, Ain drew on solutions devised by CIAM for similar situations in Europe following World War I. CIAM's 1929 project for the Existenzminimum was

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Gregory Ain, "Small Scale Prefabrication: Designs and Comment by Gregory Ain," *California Arts and Architecture*, March 1941, 42.

PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL "A"

FOR A LOW COST COMMUNITY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT
IN SOUTHGATE CALIFORNIA

GREGORY AIN DESIGNER
JANUARY 1940.

THIS PLAN PROVIDES FOR A SERIES OF FOUR ROOM HOUSES
DESIGNED FOR MAXIMUM UTILIZATION OF MINIMUM LOTS,
EACH 40' X 125'

EVERY ROOM OF EACH HOUSE GIVES ON PRIVATE GARDENS.
NO PRINCIPAL WINDOWS FACE EITHER THE STREET OR ADJA-
CENT HOUSES. EVERY ROOM OF EACH HOUSE IS DIRECTLY
ACCESSIBLE FROM A SMALL CENTRAL ENTRY SO THAT THE
LIVING ROOM IS NEVER USED AS A PASSAGE TO OTHER ROOMS.
THIS PERMITS OCCASIONAL USE OF THE LIVING ROOM AS AN AUXI-
LIARY SLEEPING ROOM. ALSO, BY REDUCING THE NUMBER
OF DOORS IN THE LIVING ROOM, IT MAKES THE AVAILABLE
FLOOR AREA MORE USABLE FOR FURNITURE.

SIMILARLY, JUXTAPOSITION OF CLOSET DOORS & ENTRY DOORS
IN BED ROOMS MAKES THE RELATIVELY SMALL ROOMS MORE SPACIOUS.

CONCENTRATION OF THE LOT AREA NOT COVERED BY THE BUILDING
ALLOWS FOR GENEROUS GARDENS AS ACTUAL EXTENSIONS OF
THE ROOMS, ALTHO THE REAR 30' OF EACH LOT IS SEPARATED
FROM THE MAIN LIVING GARDEN. BY "POOLING" THIS LAST
30' OF ALL LOTS, A COMMON RECREATION PARK 60' WIDE IS
PROVIDED DOWN THE MIDDLE OF EACH BLOCK. THIS PROTECTED
PLAY SPACE WILL KEEP CHILDREN OFF THE STREETS.

A STANDARDIZED FLOOR PLAN, REVERSED ON ALTERNATE LOTS,
IS REPEATED THRUOUT THE DEVELOPMENT. HOWEVER, NO
MONOTONOUS REPETITION WILL OCCUR, AS VARIETY OF EXTER-
IOR APPEARANCE IS ATTAINED BY DIFFERENT ROOF TREATMENTS.
BUT CONSIDERABLE STANDARDIZATION IN GENERAL LAYOUT MAKES
FOR ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY IN CONSTRUCTION. ALSO, AS
THE CONDITIONS AND THE BUILDING PROBLEM ON IDENTICAL LOTS
DO NOT VARY, SO THE SOLUTIONS MUST BE SIMILAR.

ESTIMATED COST : \$ 2075 00 INCLUDING HOUSE AND LAND.

Figure 5. Gregory Ain, Prospectus from Preliminary Proposal "A", 1939.

conceived as a minimum subsistence dwelling intended to meet basic hygienic and other needs at a very low cost. It has striking similarities that will not be explored in detail here, but nevertheless represent an important parallel in Ain's quest for a functional dwelling for low-income individuals. A decade later Ain developed the first version of the One Family Defense House entitled the "Minimum House for Agricultural Workers."³⁹ This plan consisted of a simple and efficient design based on the square, featuring "pre-cast concrete corner slabs eight foot high and five foot long...spaced 10 feet apart" with a structural post in the middle.⁴⁰ Each side of the house is made up of four five-foot modules totaling twenty feet. An extra post in the center of the house makes the plan bilaterally symmetrical. (fig. 6) The proposal was conceived as a quick, efficient, and affordable house utilizing the principals of mass-production, pre-fabrication, and economies of scale. Although the cost of the project is not known, each of these elements was intended to increase cost efficiency and reduce materials. But many of its progressive elements did not follow typical building standards or practices of the time, which may be the reason it remained unbuilt. In addition, "the war transformed California from a primarily agricultural state to an industrial power." This shift is embodied in both the title and the proposed client of the One Family Defense House.

In addition to the Minimum House for Agricultural Workers, Ain's other projects during this period included the the Plywood Panel System (1939), the Vorkapich Guest

³⁹ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 114.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

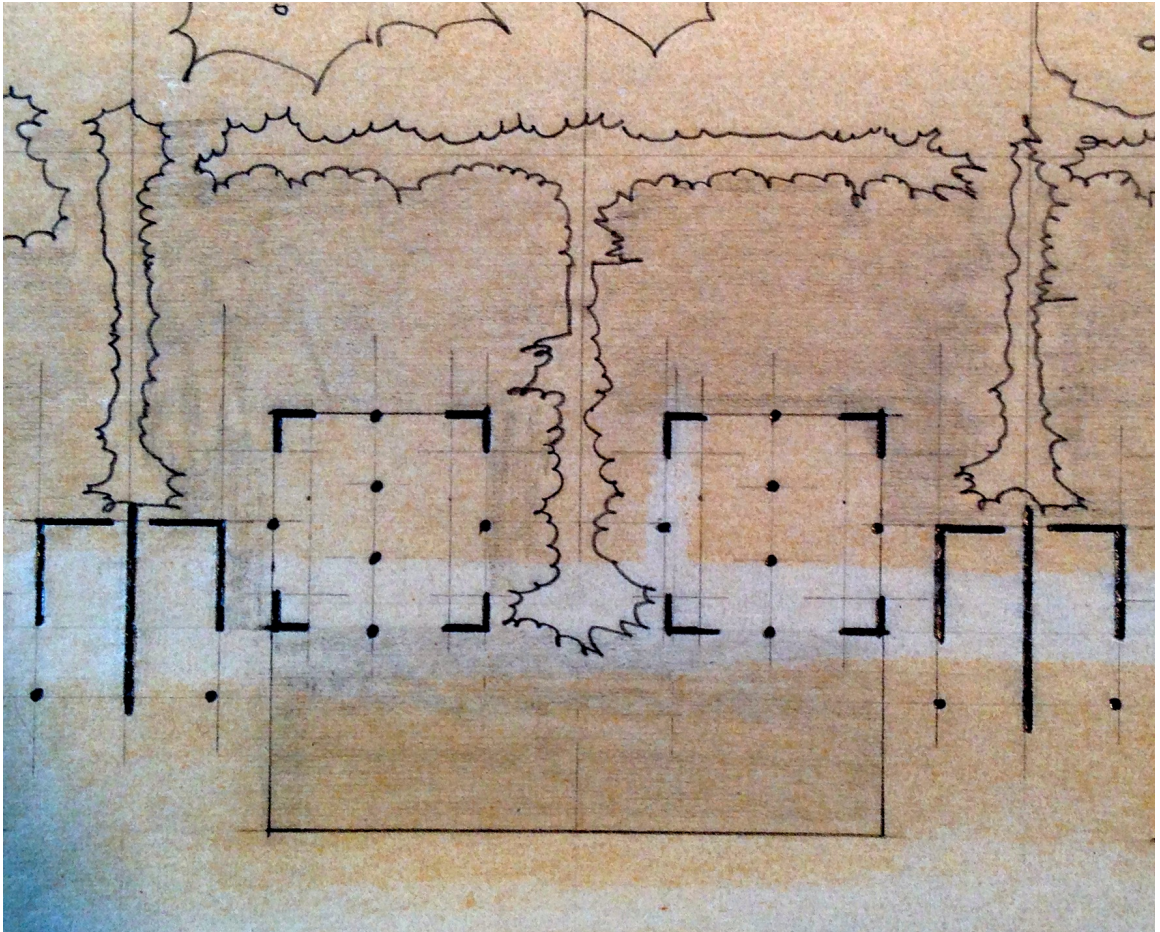


Figure 6. Gregory Ain, Site plan detail, Minimum House for Agricultural Workers, 1939.

House (1939), and the Hemasote Panel House Project (1939), all of which investigated prefabricated paneling and new materials with mass-production potential. During the same year, Ain's mentor Rudolph Schindler (1886-1953) designed his Schindler Shelters Project for a 4 ½ room house (1939), an "...unbuilt design...[for] a small, modular, low-cost prototype to be built of wood or concrete, which Schindler tried unsuccessfully to sell to the federal government for low-cost housing programs."⁴¹ And in April of 1940 Ain received a Guggenheim grant to study 'low-cost housing' - two of his sponsors were Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe.⁴² Presumably this fellowship factored into his decision to revise his initial plan for the Minimum House for Agricultural Workers into what became the One Family Defense House project. These examples demonstrate that, in addition to his early exposure to CIAM, Ain was conducting many of the same experiments as his fellow Modern architects. And he was being recognized for his work as part of an architectural milieu committed to the social implications of housing in Southern California.

By the time Ain went into private practice in 1935 the Depression was in full swing and president Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal had been in operation for two years. In 1941 the United States would enter the war, further adding to the emergency need for war-worker housing in Southern California. Not only was Ain coming of age as

⁴¹ Elizabeth A. Smith, Esther McCoy, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses. Los Angeles* (Cambridge, Mass.: Museum of Contemporary Art; MIT Press, 1989), 86.

⁴² McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 112.

an architect in a time of depression and housing crises, but his architectural education consisted of teachings well-adapted to this situation. He was also starting out during a time when the United States government was adopting an uncharacteristically cooperative approach to the economics of home ownership through the Federal Housing Administration. During the early part of the New Deal,

Two of the administration's most important and successful initiatives were agricultural reform and regional planning... There were even vaguely utopian schemes, such visionary experiments as creating new cooperative communities. In the heady atmosphere of those early years, it often seemed that no dream was too extravagant, no proposal too outlandish, that almost anything was possible.⁴³

As a result, the One Family Defense House represents not only a synthesis of these influences, but one that straddles two different phases of the housing shortage in California. The first came during the depression when workers migrated west during the thirties seeking jobs in farm work, and the second was the influx of industrial workers that followed in the forties looking for jobs in the defense industry.⁴⁴ What these two situations have in common is the state of emergency they caused in housing. The severe demand for single-family homes provided the perfect opportunity for Ain to put CIAM ideology to work on a limited scale. Ain's Minimum House for Agricultural Workers was conceived when the United States government was encouraging low-cost solutions to the massive farm worker housing shortages. In California,

⁴³ Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, 6.

⁴⁴ Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 34.

The recognition of the need for housing produced little until the end of the 1930's, then the Farm Security Administration of the Department of Agriculture built several camps with community facilities for migrant workers....[And] thousands of housing units were built or converted in the first year of the war.⁴⁵

Ain saw this need to house migrant workers, and eventually defense workers, as an ideal opportunity to test out the skills he had learned from Neutra. By April of 1942, “the War Production Board prohibited non-essential construction...to conserve both labor and building materials for the war effort”⁴⁶ and the opportunity to execute the One Family Defense House plan never materialized. So that same year Ain joined the Eames Office where, “he was brought into the new company specifically to design, engineer, and build the molding machines for the mass-production of its first real, commercial project-the molded plywood splints designed for the U.S. Navy.”⁴⁷ This no doubt further refined the problem-solving skills that began in the evolution of the One Family Defense House. It is also possible that he was drawn to the Eames because their approach to design was centered on the “everyman” and the “typical” consumer.

⁴⁵ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 114.

⁴⁶ Caltrans, *Tract Housing in California*, 12.

⁴⁷ “Ain’s architectural practice was seven years old when, in early 1942, he was asked by his good friend John Entenza to lend his engineering skills and knowledge of the properties of plywood to the efforts of a new group that had formed to investigate the possibilities of producing and marketing objects made of molded plywood. The association-The Plyformed Wood Products Company-was working in a small shop space in West Los Angeles...Gregory Ain became one of the design cooperative’s founding members.” (112), “Ain designed and engineered all of the plywood molding machines for the splints, and all of the other molded wood products, including the first plywood chairs that issued from the group from the late spring of 1942 to the fall of 1946.” Neuhart, *The Story of Eames Furniture*, 113.

In 1940 Ain adapted his earlier Minimum House for Agricultural Workers into the One Family Defense House project in collaboration with the like-minded architect Joseph Stein (1912-2001). (fig. 7) The plans are signed “Gregory Ain, Joseph A. Stein, Housing and Industrial Designers and Consultants.” Stein was known not only as an architect, but also as a social and environmental activist.⁴⁸ His “...career, in California, was devoted to designing a prototype low-cost, quickly built, yet elegant, tract house. Though small, the house would seem spacious because of walls of windows, clever floor plans, and a garden setting; his preferred material was concrete.”⁴⁹ So it is not surprising that many of Stein’s architectural principals are also found in the One Family Defense House, including the square plan, the use of cast concrete, and “trellis-topped terraces [that] are as intrinsic to the living space as the actual rooms.”⁵⁰

The One Family Defense House, like Ain’s other interwar proposals, was driven by a commitment to modularity and mass-production as the conceptual basis for construction efficiency. The One Family Defense House adapted the structure of the Minimum House for Agricultural Workers and reduced it to a four-foot module, including an extra bay on each side resulting in a length of twenty-four feet, instead of twenty. This change is significant because it means that each side of the house is divided into six

⁴⁸ “One Family Defense House,” *Gregory Ain papers* (Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara)

⁴⁹ Dave Weinstein, “Architectural idealist / Modernist Joseph Allen Stein preferred to design public housing and finished his career in India,” in *The SF Gate*, 2007, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Architectural-idealist-Modernist-Joseph-Allen-2604585.php#page-2>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

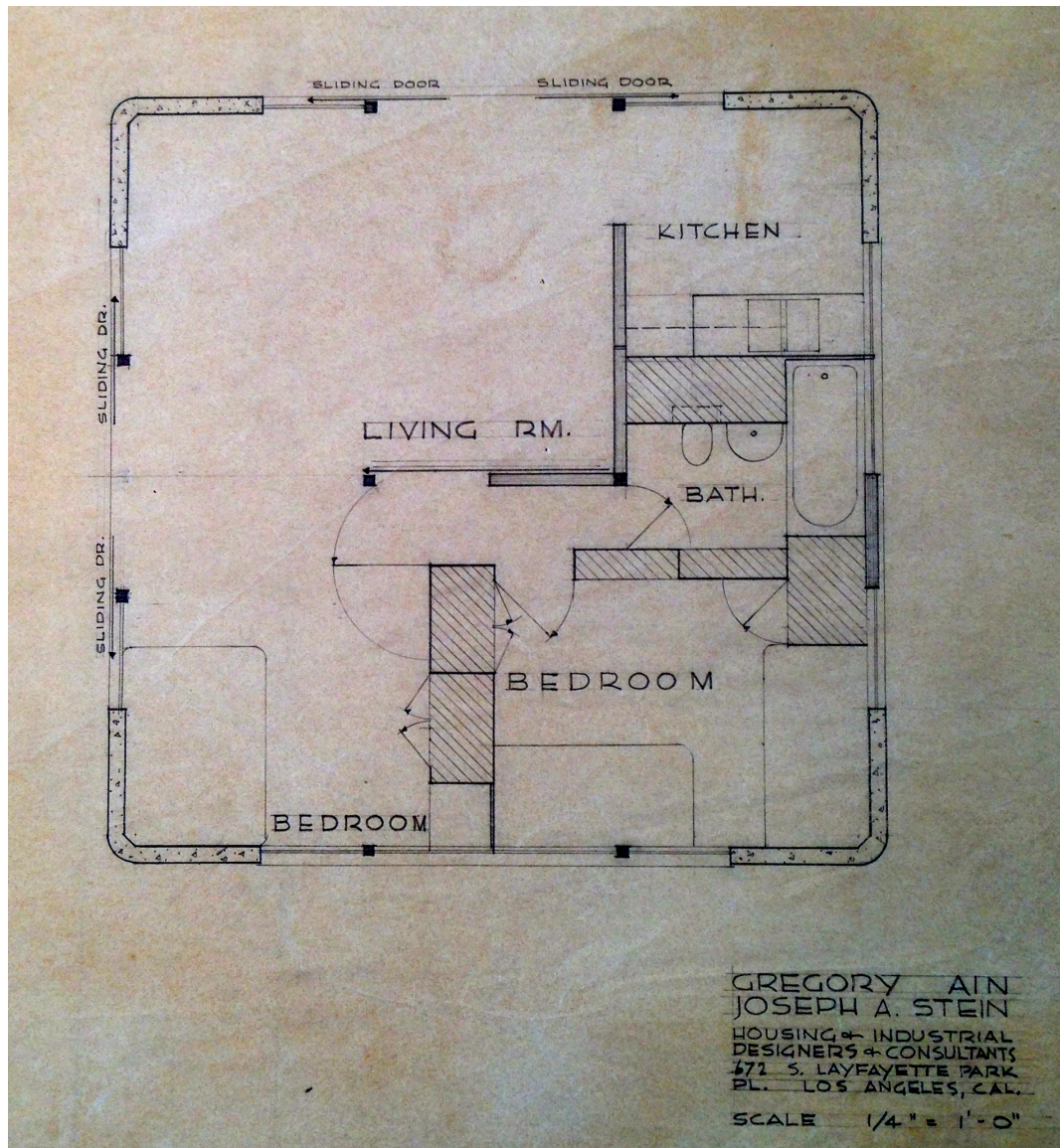


Figure 7. Gregory Ain, architect, Joseph Stein, collaborating, One Family Defense House floor plan, 1930-40.

modules, allowing for a more nuanced arrangement of internal spaces. The One Family Defense House features two rows of structural posts down the center. This dual post system is also used on the outer edges to eliminate load bearing walls and allow large expanses of glass. On the fourth side a small wall unit creates privacy in the bathroom and kitchen. Because of Ain's attention to mathematical regularity, each room's proportions are a variation on the four foot module. This can be seen in the arrangement of the kitchen, bathroom, and private bedroom, where increasingly private spaces are created using smaller segments of the modular plan.

By 1941, the One Family Defense House was featured in an *Arts & Architecture* article written by Ain, addressing "...the pressing need for good, cheap, and rapidly erected dwellings."⁵¹ In the article he makes the argument for "...a kind of prefabrication which needs no large plant or costly machinery, and which will be effective even on a small scale of production."⁵² As a result, the structural elements were comprised of a simple list of pre-fabricated and mass-produced parts intended to minimize on-site construction. Including, eight 4'x 4' posts, four concrete corners, two sliding glass doors, and a selection of windows. As Esther McCoy points out in *The Second Generation*, "the window walls can be stacked and the reinforced concrete corners nested to truck to the site."⁵³ The "structural systems...[were] based on a reduction of the building elements to

⁵¹ Gregory Ain, "Small Scale Prefabrication: Designs and Comment by Gregory Ain," *California Arts and Architecture*, March, 1941, 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵³ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 115.

a minimum number of similar units which [could] be easily put together in a moderately well equipped carpenter's shop by semi-skilled labor" and assembled on-site.⁵⁴ For Ain, like the Modernists that came before him, this combination of logical restrictions, modularity, and playful manipulation of proportion achieved the most cost effective and visually appealing minimum house. Unlike Rush City Reformed, which was based on the principal of designing houses according to family type, the One Family Defense House had a more flexible plan, a characteristic that Ain would continue to explore in his post-war designs.

This logical approach was not only characteristic of early CIAM ideology, it was also an adaptation to interwar home building where mass-production was encouraged and housing was in high demand. So it is not surprising that the site plan for Ain's One Family Defense House is defined by its sheer repetitive nature, including multiple rows of perfectly square units arranged in a strict grid pattern like its European Modernist predecessors. (fig. 1) According to Ain, "...it is generally assumed that the average home seeker will reject a standardized house...But this does not apply to the low income groups, [like those in the market for defense housing], for whom there is not problem of 'merchandising' houses."⁵⁵ As a result, each house sits centered on its rectangular lot and Ain attempts no rotation of the plan to break up the repetition of the façades. In addition,

⁵⁴ Gregory Ain, "Small Scale Prefabrication: Designs and Comment by Gregory Ain," *California Arts and Architecture*, March 1941, 25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

the rigid landscape reinforces the repetition of geometric elements in each house and the overall site plan. This row-house approach has many aesthetic and functional parallels to the plans of the Berlin Siedlungen of the late 1920's and early 1930's, specifically block one of the Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf (Forest Settlement of Zehlendorf) designed by Bruno Taut in 1930-31. (fig. 8)

Bruno Taut's design is a long apartment block surrounded by green space and flanked by Grünewald Avenue on one side and the rapid transit line on the other, culminating in the "Uncle Tom's Cabin" U-Bahn station on its western edge. Like the One Family Defense House project, the plan consists of paired and mirrored units situated within a natural landscape buffering the residence from the street. (fig. 9) The simplified floor plan of two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and bath, including the single plumbing unit housed between the kitchen and bathroom directly parallel the One Family Defense House. But the most obvious similarity is the repetition of simple Euclidian forms defining the exterior structure/s. In the early stages of Modernist architecture and planning the Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf's repetitive exterior façade would have been praised for obviating the didactic functionality of the plan. But because Ain designed the One Family Defense House project as a set of detached single-family homes, its repetition takes on a more ominous sensibility. This was especially true in Southern California where space was free and a bucolic relationship with nature was the norm. This also speaks to the tension between collectivity and individuality that paralleled CIAM's concerns during the same period.

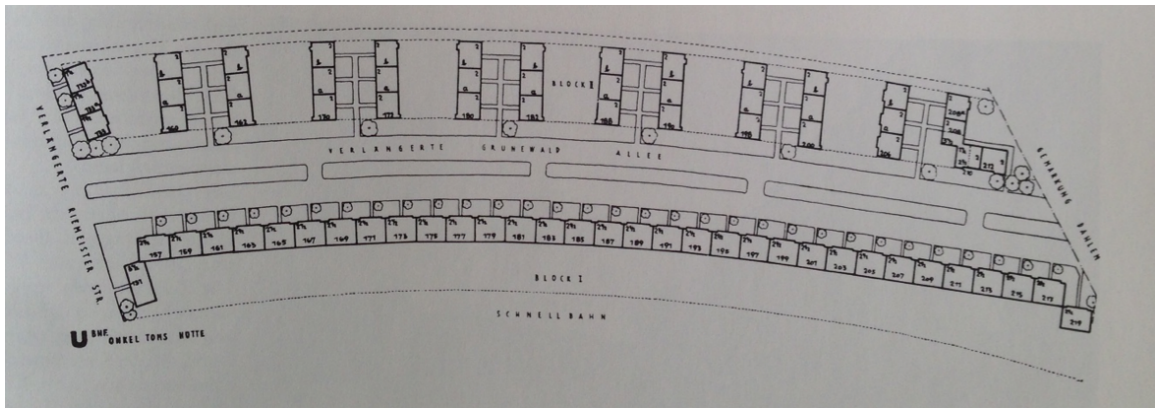


Figure 8. Bruno Taut, site plan, Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf (Forest Settlement of Zehlendorf), 1930-31.

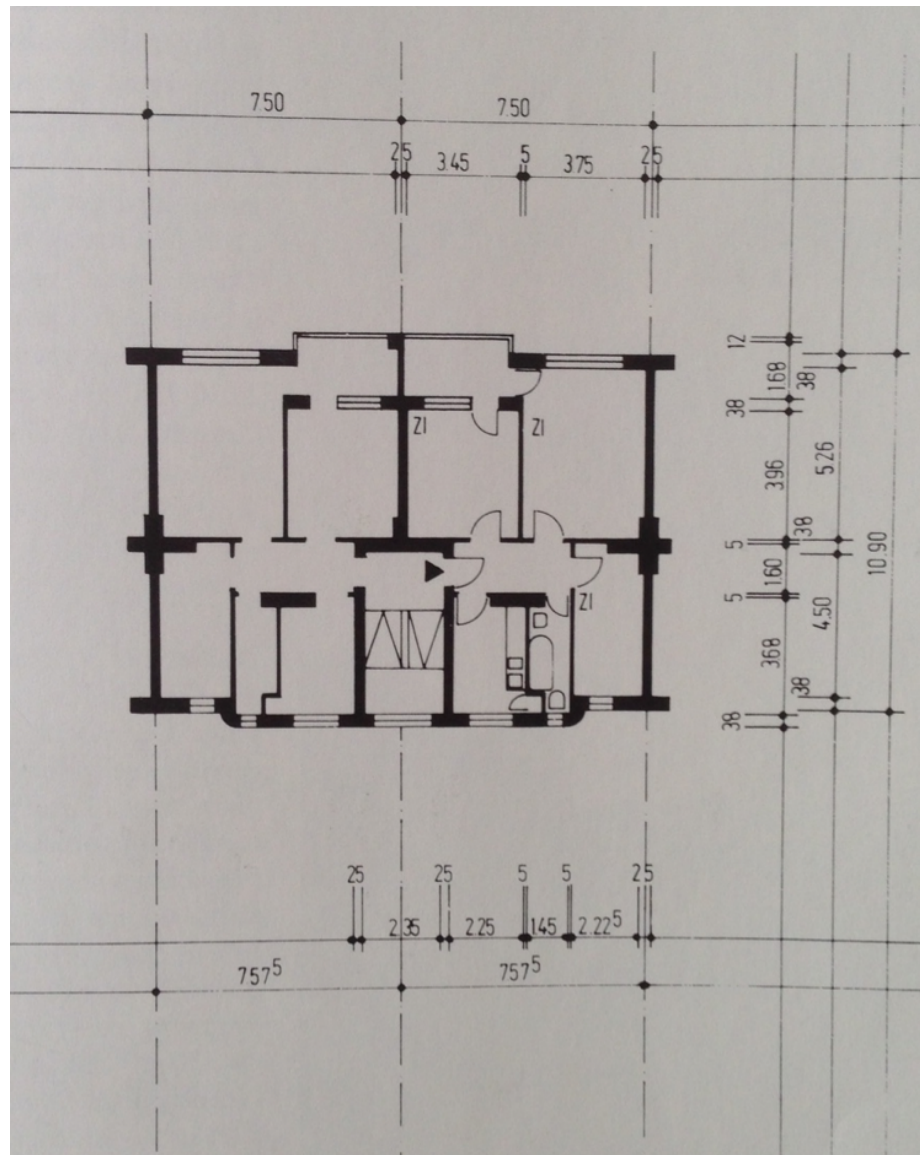


Figure 9. Bruno Taut, individual unit plan, Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf (Forest Settlement of Zehlendorf), 1930-31.

By the late 1930's CIAM was beginning to "...stress the importance of town planning in producing a well rounded society."⁵⁶ Neutra was in attendance at CIAM V, entitled "Dwelling and Recreation," where "[Sigfried] Gideon's emphasis was now not on legitimizing the scientific basis of modern architecture, but on its spiritual, unifying role."⁵⁷ This tension between the anonymity of collective life and the benefits of individualism begins to take shape in Ain's site plan for the One Family Defense House project, where he presents his first practical solutions to the rigid modernist housing concepts. In Ain's plan each house is identical, but the pairing of garages creates a subtle variation that distinguishes one house from another and breaks up the monotony of the site plan. (fig. 1) Social interaction is encouraged through the communal green spaces created by the paired front yards. The houses are further differentiated by an off-set plan where none of the pairs directly mirror any set on the opposing side of the street. To provide privacy Ain lays out individual back yard spaces cordoned off by hedges. But, instead of the severe division associated with fences or walls, Ain creates a permeable separation using vegetation. Also, in the corner of each individual back yard there is a small opening in the hedge that reveals a pathway to a communal park beyond. In Ain's words,

Even within the limitations of an old-fashioned system of lot subdivision, it is possible to have private gardens for each dwelling, direct access from all dwellings to a protected playground park (down the center of the

⁵⁶ Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, 110.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 115.

block), [and] complete separation of automobile traffic from the pedestrian traffic.⁵⁸

Attention to permeable and communal spaces is a recurring theme for Ain in his quest to gently encourage social interaction between the inhabitants through these unique design features. Rather than a dismissal of individuality “...dwelling design became a matter of understanding the perimeters that would foster the greatest degree of individualized social interaction...” converting “alienated individuality to free social associations.”⁵⁹

For Ain, these subtle variations provided the bridge between the overwhelming nature of modern life, including both the anxieties and utopian possibilities of the machine age, and a full acceptance of “the passivity of collective behavior.”⁶⁰ In the end Ain has created a site plan that encourages the inhabitant to be aware of the collective interaction present in his version of the neighborhood, while also providing an acceptable level of privacy.

Ain’s experiments in the One Family Defense House prove that he embraced the opportunity to participate in the nationwide push toward better housing through the application of Modernist architectural ideals. Luckily for him, home building was one of the ways the New Deal attempted to stimulate the depressed economy.

New Deal architecture...[came out of] federally funded building initiated in the United States of America, over the course of a little more than a decade, beginning in 1933, during the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Neither stylistic similarities nor preferences for specific

⁵⁸ Ain, “Small Scale Prefabrication,” *California Arts and Architecture*, 24.

⁵⁹ Schwarzer, “CIAM: City at the End of History,” in *Autonomy and Ideology*, 248-250.

⁶⁰ Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1976), 1.

building types characterized the enormous body of work that dotted the country by the end of the period. Instead, a shared imperative propelled the construction.⁶¹

During this period the FHA's Basic Minimum House (1936) was developed as a simple and adequate example for architects to follow. (fig. 10) This early prototype was a 624-square-foot dwelling referred to as the "minimum house" or "basic plan."⁶² It was just one of the ways the government attempted to educate citizens in how to achieve better living conditions. Its accompanying text, "...informs readers that 'in the design of small, low-priced houses, the principals of efficiency, economic use of materials, and proper equipment, which are important to any class of dwellings, become paramount.'"⁶³ And because the Federal Housing Administration provided mortgage insurance for almost 20% of the new housing constructed [in Los Angeles], it was also a way of protecting the government's large-scale financial investment in housing.⁶⁴ Even though it utilized a traditional architectural style with small windows and a pitched roof, the FHA's Basic Minimum House has striking similarities to Ain's One Family Defense House in both conception and overall plan.

⁶¹ Sara A. Butler, "New Deal Architecture," *Grove Art Online*, Oxford University Press, 2013, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T2090612>

⁶² Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 68.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 70.

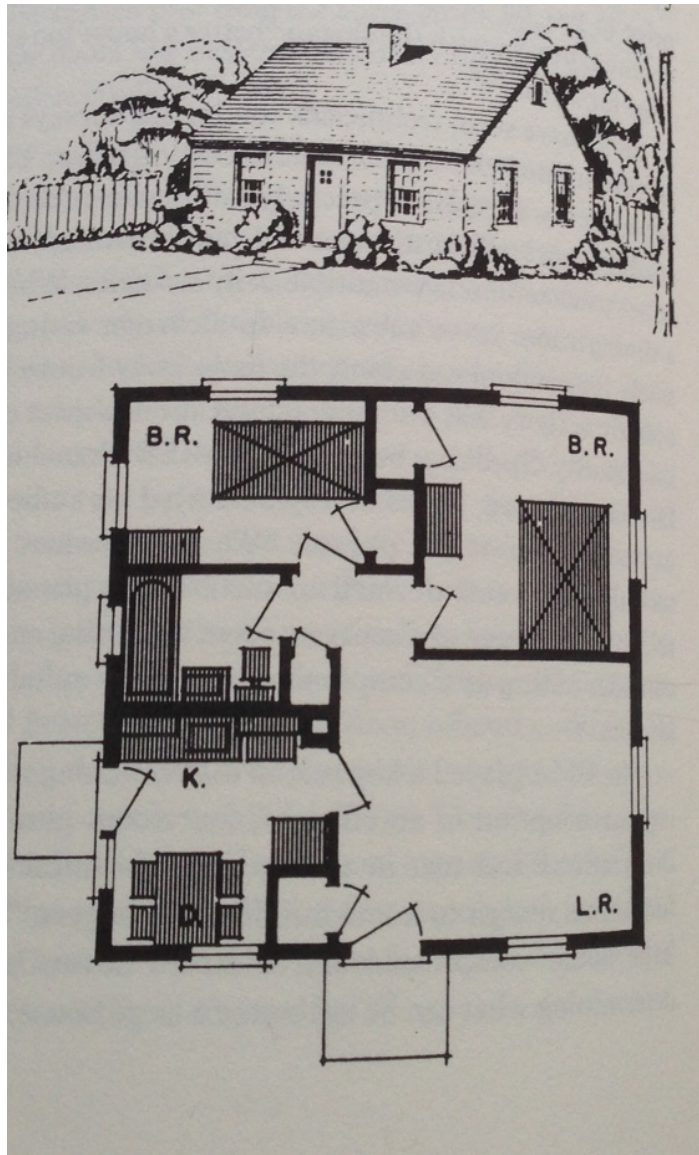


Figure 10. Federal Housing Authority, plan and elevation, Basic Minimum House, 1936.

Both the Basic Minimum House and the One Family Defense House feature a square plan with windows on all sides. The Basic Minimum House has small windows taking up about 30% of the wall space on each side, while Ain's One Family Defense House reduces all wall space to a minimum and replaces it with large expanses of glass. This includes sliding glass doors on two of the sides. (fig. 11) The third side has a large window section spanning both bedrooms. The glazing is possible only because of the One Family Defense House's unique structural system, which also provides complete interior flexibility. In addition, the glass walls allow a visual connection to the exterior landscape. In contrast, the Basic Minimum House has an abundance of structural walls that impose a traditional sense of privacy separating inside from outside.

Internally, both the Basic Minimum House and the One Family Defense House have two bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen, and a large living room *without* a formal dining room. (figs. 7 & 10) Each house demonstrates a different approach to the aesthetics of the minimum dwelling, but they share an ideological affinity for plan efficiency.

For advocates of the minimum house, the dining room was anachronistic... The authors of *How to Own Your Home: A Handbook for Prospective Home Owners* informed their readers the dining room was not longer a functional necessity. 'Where it is used but three times a day, it is the most expensive room in the house.'⁶⁵

Both plans also feature a "wet wall" which consolidates all of the plumbing mechanisms into one area backed by the kitchen sink on one side and the bathroom sink, toilet, and

⁶⁵ Ibid., 67.



Figure 11. Gregory Ain, model, model, One Family Defense House, 1939-40.

bathub fixtures on the other.⁶⁶ To a certain degree the Basic Minimum House represents a progressive plan, but Ain's inclusion of a sliding partition wall between the living room and the second bedroom make his plan even more innovative. The sliding wall can be tucked away, enlarging the communal space of the living room and eliminating one of the bedrooms. Both plans technically provide two bedrooms, but in the Basic Minimum House both bedrooms are fully "private" because of their fixed walls and traditional door, while Ain's plan emphasizes flexibility.

Although the bathrooms of both houses are relatively similar, the kitchens have strategic differences. The Basic Minimum House does omit the dining room, but the kitchen is still an isolated room. In contrast, the One Family Defense House plan merely suggests the kitchen through an extension of one of the interior walls of the living room. This not only leaves the kitchen more or less open to the living room, but it creates an ideological connection between the two spaces. In the Basic Minimum House the dining table is situated within the kitchen. Conversely, in Ain's One Family Defense House plan the dining table is omitted altogether. The social and ideological implications of not addressing the kitchen/dining room table in 1940 are significant. By leaving out this simple feature Ain again yields flexibility, allowing the homeowners the freedom to make their own arrangements. Although the kitchen can hold a small table, the vast living room space (permitted by the sliding wall) would be the more logical choice. Like the permeable landscaping, this subtle variation on the traditional plan, using a single

⁶⁶ Ibid., 69.

moveable wall, is a hallmark of Ainian design and will evolve throughout the rest of his planned housing communities.

The final interior distinction is the treatment of storage space. For Ain the freedom created by his unique structural system allows the interior walls to serve a double function. Two of the main walls in the house are also closets. The closet wall between the two bedrooms is a single unit that can be opened on opposing sides to provide a closet for each room. (fig. 7) A smaller version of the same design is used between the bathroom and the second bedroom. Because the bathroom is small, Ain used sliding doors on each side of the wall to minimize intrusions into either space. This is also helpful in the private bedroom because it has a second closet with a swinging door. As a result, this very small house has more than adequate storage space without the unnecessary clutter of extra doors or furniture. In stark contrast, the Basic Minimum House provides only two freestanding storage units, one in each bedroom. (fig. 10) Because the walls are structural, the efficiency and flexibility of built-in storage cannot be utilized.

On the exterior of the One Family Defense House model Ain's embrace of the California climate is clear. (fig. 12) In addition, the pattern created by the horizontal elements of the terrace is striking. (fig. 13) The repetition of Ain's modular structure is used to create patterning in the terraces, where the each horizontal cross-bar follows the four-foot module. This imitates a similar treatment on the garden side of Dunsmuir Flats and anticipates a corresponding treatment on the terrace in the home Ain designed for



Figure 12. Gregory Ain, model, model, One Family Defense House, 1939-40.



Figure 13. Gregory Ain, model, One Family Defense House, 1939-1940.

himself in 1941. In each example the terrace is integrated into the plan of the house, but they represent a tendency toward aesthetics dictated by structural repetition that Ain would continue to utilize in later tracts like Park Planned Homes and Mar Vista. Unlike the Basic Minimum House, which has small porches over the two entry doors into the kitchen and the living room, the One Family Defense House model shows one long terrace spanning the length of two adjacent sides. This placement provides cover over both walls of the living room (assuming the sliding wall is open). Even though the One Family Defense House plan was never executed, it can be assumed that the terrace faces the back yard, because Ain's later planned housing communities feature strong affinity for orienting the living room toward the private space of the back yard.

Like the partition wall between the living room and the bedroom, the sliding glass door to the back yard creates a permeable area that invites the residents to occupy both spaces simultaneously when the door is open. (fig. 12) Ain's use of large sliding glass doors on the back side of the house, coupled with the terrace, extends the space of the living room into the back yard. The terraces are deep enough to provide increased useable space on the outside through their shaded (vine covered) overhangs. They yield privacy and shade, but also exterior differentiation on an otherwise monotonous façade.

Interestingly, the Basic Minimum House was oriented exactly the opposite. "The FHA publications showcased alternative sitings for this roughly square floor plan, setting the public zone [the living room and kitchen] parallel to the street or rotating it so that the

living room faced the front of the lot and the kitchen opened to a rear yard.”⁶⁷ Where Ain opens up the living room of his house to the back yard to encourage privacy and take advantage of the benefits of indoor-outdoor living, the Basic Minimum House essentially isolates the living room by treating it as a presentation space that always faces the public zone of the street.

Lastly, the orientation and placement of the front door of each house highlights one of the most significant differences between the two plans. In the Basic Minimum House the front door, like most interwar homes, enters into the living room. The only other exterior door functions as a service entrance leading directly into the kitchen. In contrast, because Ain provides two separate sliding glass doors on adjacent sides of the house, there is no official front entry. The back yard sliding glass door of the One Family Defense House, like the side door of the Basic Minimum House, provides direct entry into the kitchen but only through the openness of the plan. This leaves the adjacent sliding glass door as the front entrance. It could be argued that Ain’s presence in California and his adaptation of the plan to the mild climate allows for these large expanses of sliding glass, but it also shows an intentional choice by Ain to buck the prevailing system of traditional home design in his model of a modern home.

Although Gregory Ain’s background and socialist upbringing give him a strong tendency toward social housing, in reality it was his informal architectural education with Richard Neutra and his participation in the ideas of CIAM through his work on Rush City

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Reformed that had the greatest effect on his architectural practice. The early ideology of CIAM, based in utopian notions of society, proved to be the perfect training ground for Ain's concepts behind the One Family Defense House. The striking similarities between Ain's One Family Defense House and the FHA's Basic Minimum House are remarkable and yet previously unexplored. As are the influences of New Deal programs on his architectural approach. Both share an ideological basis in the populist stance of the United States during the Second World War that runs parallel to the aims of early CIAM ideology and the even earlier *Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf*. From the arrangement of its modular structure, the positioning of its interior and exterior spaces, to the conceptual underpinnings of the site plan, each of these precedents provide a point of entry for understanding the One Family Defense House. They also demonstrate how Ain began to speak to one of the stumbling blocks that CIAM never fully addressed: the notion of anonymity within the homogenizing designs of modernist utopian plans. The elements that Ain developed to remedy this situation, including the paired garages, moveable walls, terraces, and permeable/communal landscape, will be followed throughout his next two planned housing communities as we observe their evolution within the changing political, social, and economic environment of Southern California following the Second World War.

Chapter 2

Gregory Ain designed Park Planned Homes in 1945, on the cusp of the interwar and postwar periods.⁶⁸ As a result, the project presents an opportunity for investigating the liminality of the social and economic climate following the end of the Second World War. It also represents an important turning point in the evolution of Ain's aesthetic approach, occupying a transitional position at the intersection of his interwar and postwar design strategies. (fig. 14) The end of the Second World War declared end of the "spirit of anticipation" in the United States defined so adeptly by Andrew Shanken.⁶⁹ Park Planned Homes became the first completed manifestation of Ain's ideological investigations which began with the One Family Defense House project. It also demonstrated both his compromises and solutions for the special conditions of the postwar housing boom in Los Angeles. Ain differed from many of his colleagues in his insistence on a realistic, not solely theoretical, approach to the problems of postwar planned housing communities. Ain's plans for Park Planned Homes reside somewhere between the undifferentiated, yet rationally efficient designs of his European predecessors, like Bruno Taut's *Waldsiedlung Zehlendorf* (1930), and the similarly monotonous but profit-driven designs of postwar subdivisions like *Lakewood* (1950). This tension between European ideological Modernism and the aesthetics of pure practicality in the post-war building boom created

⁶⁸ Robin Park, "Subdivision in Altadena," press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 4.

⁶⁹ Andrew Shanken, *194X: Architecture, Planning, and Consumer Culture on the American Home Front* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), vii.



Figure 14. Gregory Ain, architect, Julius Shulman, photographer, Park Planned Homes from the street, 1946.

transitional features in Park Planned Homes. Within this framework, Ain's collaboration with landscape architect Garrett Eckbo became a major influencing factor. Ain and Eckbo shared an educational background in European Modernism, resulting in ideological similarities that would make them effective working partners. The two men shared a sense of purpose: making the suburban home the ideal dwelling for a wider range of inhabitants, while introducing a more communal lifestyle to the typical suburban subdivision. Lastly, the interior layout of Park Planned Homes continues Ain's progressive approach to architecture and familial roles, while still maintaining traditional gender stereotypes.

Park Planned Homes is important because it illustrates the practical nature of Ain's designs without the collaborative influence of other architects. Unlike some of his predecessors, most notably Richard Neutra, Ain's designs were not an avant-garde endeavor. Nor were they intended to be demonstration dwellings, like those of the Case Study House program, which began the same year. Ain may have benefitted from the positive propaganda of the Case Study House program, but his houses were the every-man's alternative to these expensive and sometimes fantastical single-family homes on extraordinary lots. Park Planned Homes was the physical manifestation of Modernist ideals and interwar planning ideology learned from Ain's European predecessors, but executed in suburban Los Angeles. In the words of Anthony Fontenot, "while Ain designed a number of private houses during this period, the most innovative aspect of his work that he would continue to develop throughout the postwar period were the planning

structures for organizing high-density clusters of low-cost housing units.”⁷⁰ Expanding on the suburban adaptations he developed for the One Family Defense House, Park Planned Homes had the power to improve mass-produced housing for average families. It also represented an alternative to profit-driven suburban expansion following the war. In an often quoted passage, Ain states: “...if the problem’s not well solved now by architects, it will be badly solved later by the jerry-builders...too many architects in their zeal to promulgate new...ideas withdraw from the common architectural problems of the common people.”⁷¹

At the end of World War II the housing situation in Los Angeles (and the rest of the United States) was rapidly changing. Previous large-scale social housing projects, like Neutra’s Channel Heights Housing, bolstered by government-subsidized New Deal era financing for migrant farm- and defense-industry workers, were being wound down in favor of economic intervention more favorable to private enterprise. According to historian Dolores Hayden, “since 1945, complex public subsidies have buttressed many types of private real estate development...[a] process which diverted public dollars to private rather than public space.”⁷² During the early New Deal period, architects could rely on government-sponsored projects to execute their progressive designs, but the

⁷⁰ Anthony Fontenot, “Gregory Ain and Cooperative Housing in a Time of Crisis,” in *Making a Case*, ed. Emily Abruzzo, Gerald Bodziak, and Jonathan D Solomon (New York: 306090, Inc., 2011), 167.

⁷¹ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 118.

⁷² Dolores Hayden, “Building the American Way: Public Subsidy, Private Space,” (unpublished paper, delivered at the International Planning History Society conference, Barcelona, Spain, July 17, 2004), in *The Suburb Reader*, ed. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese (New York: Routledge, 2006), 273.

situation changed after WWII when government programs began to support private building, incentivized through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA).⁷³ But “the threat that the government would shift from war production into public products, indefinitely extending the New Deal, gravely challenged the laissez-faire basis on which corporate America depended.”⁷⁴ Ain realized that he needed to adapt his designs to work within this framework. In a press release about Park Planned Homes, no doubt written in consultation with Ain, Robin Park states:

...the building of an individually designed and constructed house has become a luxury which many people cannot afford. A far more practicable solution would seem to be the construction of well planned subdivisions incorporating all the qualities of good architectural design with careful site planning and the obvious economies of group fabrication...The result of an ideal collaboration between owner, architect and builder, [Park Planned Homes] represents an attempt to answer today’s critical need- efficient, enjoyable homes at reasonable cost within the fame-work of the existing building industry.⁷⁵

As a result, the adaptations Ain made to the Park Planned Homes’ design were a direct response to the changing economic and political conditions.

Park Planned Homes consists, to this day, of 28 houses “on very deep lots on gently sloping land” in an unincorporated area of Los Angeles county known as Altadena.⁷⁶ (fig. 15) The initial development included 56 houses, but in the end half were

⁷³ Ibid., 273.

⁷⁴ Shanken, *194X*, 11.

⁷⁵ Robin Park, “Subdivision in Altadena,” press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1-2.

⁷⁶ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 123.



Figure 15. Gregory Ain, architect, Julius Shulman, photographer, Park Planned Homes, 1946.

removed from the plan.⁷⁷ Each 1600-square-foot house had an identical plan on a quarter-acre lot,⁷⁸ including “three bedrooms and two baths, with the living room facing the patio at the back.”⁷⁹ (fig. 16) Similar to the One Family Defense House, Park Planned Homes was made up of individual homes with identical floor plans, which were mirrored and paired to create variety within the site plan. (fig. 17) Ain worked with friend and financier Robert Kahan and landscape designer Garrett Eckbo for this project. The press release for the project states that it was “built for sale...and designed for a hypothetical ‘average’ family,” while another article lays out a narrative that begins with a group of war veterans seeking out Ain directly.⁸⁰ The December 1945 article in *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* states, “...a group of people went to architect Gregory Ain and asked him to model a unit of houses for them in Altadena. Neither a real estate promotion nor a co-operative development, this series of houses is now under construction in what used to be an orange grove.”⁸¹ It is likely that a significant portion of Park Planned Homes’ inhabitants worked at neighboring airplane factories in Burbank, including Vega and Lockheed.⁸² According to Anthony Denzer, “Park Planned Homes...would not be

⁷⁷ Ibid., 125.

⁷⁸ Lee Howard, “New Homes...New Friends...New Life!,” *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* (Los Angeles, CA), Jun. 8, 1947.

⁷⁹ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 123.

⁸⁰ Robin Park, “Subdivision in Altadena,” press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 3.

⁸¹ “Estates in Miniature,” *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine*, (Los Angeles, CA), December 30, 1945.

⁸² Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 30-31.

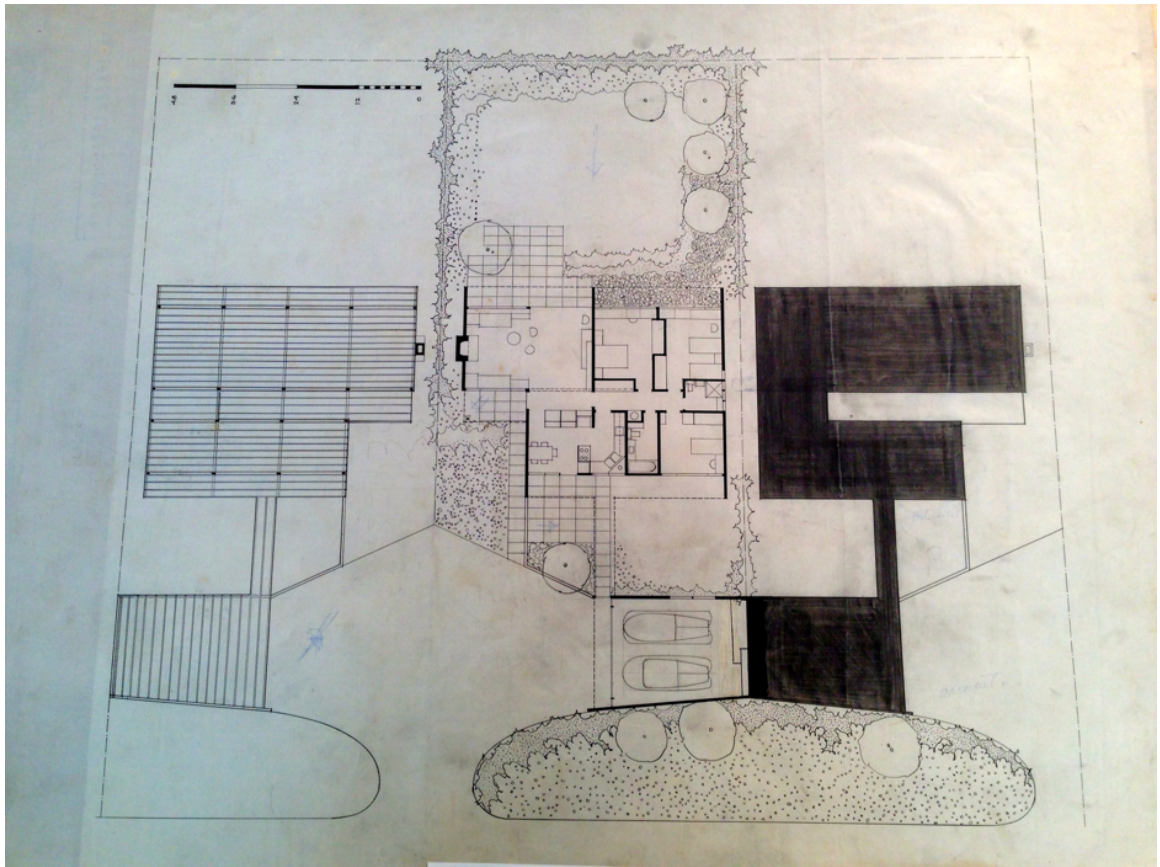


Figure 16. Gregory Ain, paired site plans, Park Planned Homes, 1945-47.

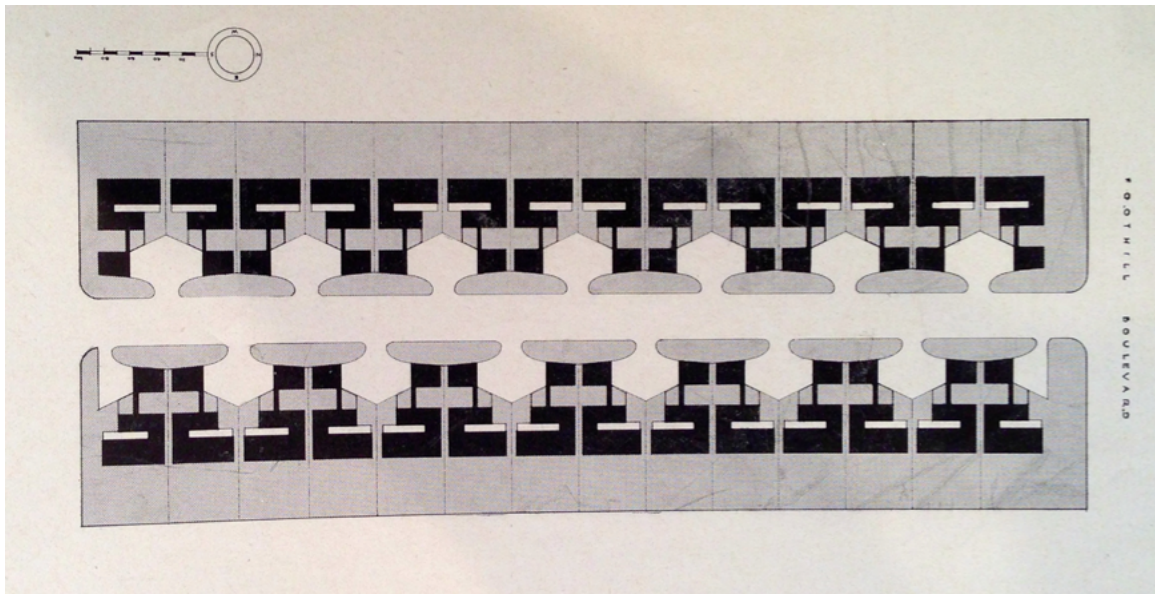


Figure 17. Gregory Ain, site plan, Park Planned Homes, 1945-47.

populated by minimum houses for workers, such as those that he explored in 1939-40. These homes...were forecast as 'miniature estates' before they were built."⁸³ Either way it can be assumed that the "average" client for these houses followed the typical model of postwar southern California home buyers with service-men husbands recently returned from the war: young, with small children, middle-class, and white.⁸⁴ There are some indications that Park Planned Homes, like Mar Vista, appealed to a slightly more enlightened and arts-centered crowd, but this is hard to confirm with a dearth of information on the original owners of the houses.⁸⁵

Park Planned Homes was initially designed in February and March of 1945 as an aluminum pipe system, but by the time the project was built its structural framework was transferred to wood, with steel beams for support.⁸⁶ This adaptation is telling because it

⁸³ Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 111.

⁸⁴ "Many of the newcomers 'good-bye babies,' conceived just before the husbands shipped out, partly because of an absence of birth control, partly because the wife's allotment check would be increased with each child...During the war, government and industry both played up the suburb and home to the families of absent servicemen..." Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 232.

⁸⁵ "Joe [Mims] served in the army during WWII and was a member of the 1-130th Combat Engineer Battalion...Joe made it through the war unscathed, and after returning home to the states, he enrolled in the Art Center School in downtown Los Angeles in a program designed to teach technical illustration and design to returning war veterans...he worked as a designer for the Avery Corporation in Pasadena since graduating from Art Center in the early 1950s all the way through to retirement...The Mims family was officially formed in 1956, after Joe married his sweetheart Marceline...They moved purchased and moved into the Ain home on Highview in 1961, where then eventually raised three children. I'm not 100% sure, but I know Joe's family was perhaps the first African American family to move on to the street." Ralph Haxton, "Just listed Gregory ain home demands a tribute to original owner," *Gregory Ain-Park Planned Homes*, June 14, 2013, <http://gregoryainparkplannedhomes.blogspot.com/2013/06/just-listed-gregory-ain-home-demands.html>.

⁸⁶ Robin Park, "Subdivision in Altadena," press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 4.

represents one of the first compromises Ain made to the design for the sake of postwar building conditions. During the interwar period, new materials like steel and aluminum were prized as new and innovative, carrying with them the promise of building efficiencies. The most prominent example being the Quonset Hut.⁸⁷ Yet they were almost immediately abandoned after the war for more familiar materials, like wood, indicating the building industry was slow to adopt the changes initiated during the interwar period. Unfortunately, the building industry was also slow to adapt to a rapidly changing home-building market, so Ain faced many financial issues during the building phase of Park Planned Homes, including the elimination of price controls, material shortages, and increased labor costs due to his unique prefabrication-centered construction process. All of these factors drove the price per house up from \$11,000 to \$13,000.⁸⁸ This price is revealing because during this same time period the average Levittown house sold for around \$8,000.⁸⁹

When it was finished, (and even before the landscaping was in place) articles about Park Planned Homes noted its role in expanding the boundaries of the traditional building industry, referring to it as “a radical departure in concept from the speculative

⁸⁷ Shanken, *194X*, 147.

⁸⁸ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 124. For further details of the struggles Ain and Kahan faced when trying to complete this project during the time period immediately following the war, see page 123-124.

⁸⁹ Peter Bacon Hales, “Building Levittown: A Rudimentary Primer,” *Art History Department, University of Chicago*, 2014, <http://tigger.uic.edu/~pbhales/Levittown/building.html>.

and real estate custom.”⁹⁰ The July 1947 issue of *Progressive Architecture* stated that “this 28-house subdivision demonstrates what can be done within the severe limitations of speculative building, real estate custom, and the unintegrated building ‘industry.’”⁹¹ Because Ain’s design was originally conceived in 1945, it fell within the “spirit of anticipation” of the interwar period.⁹² “Architectural Forum...invented the term 194X to describe this wartime anticipation of post-war architecture and urbanism...”⁹³ As a result, the plan has characteristics of both the naive and ambitious war years and the more practical postwar period. And evidence of Ain’s idealistic tendencies can be seen in the modular diagram he initially developed for the project. (fig. 18)

Before the end of the war, Ain conceptualized the floor plan of Park Planned Homes as a combination of flexible and interchangeable “increments.”⁹⁴ Staying true to the experimental approach of the interwar period he “conceived the plan as one component in a system capable of immense variety”⁹⁵ using a series of 12’ x 16’ modules with different characteristics intended to adapt to the needs of various family types and sizes. Ain learned this approach when he worked on Neutra’s Rush City Reformed

⁹⁰ “28 Moderns in a Group,” *American Builder*, February 1948, 94.

⁹¹ “Park Planned Homes, Altadena, California,” *Progressive Architecture*, July 1947, 67.

⁹² Shanken, *194X*, vii.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁴ “Park Planned Homes,” *Gregory Ain papers* (Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara)

⁹⁵ Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 118.

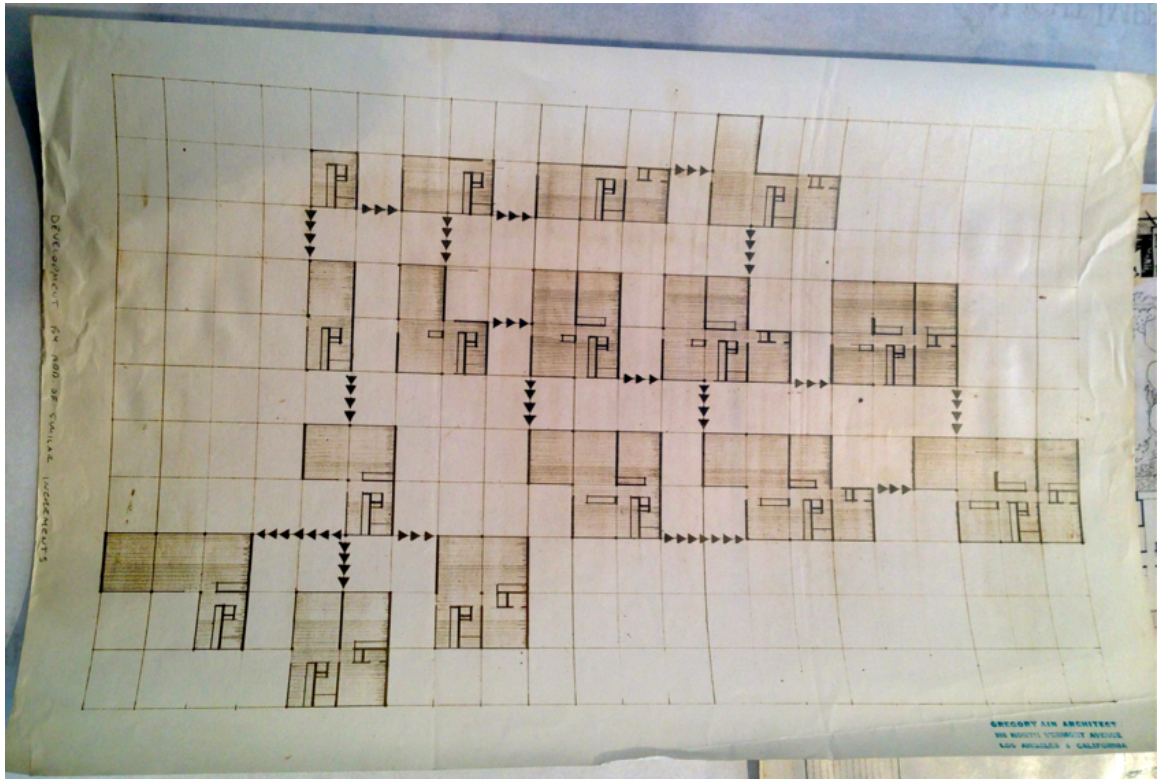


Figure 18. Gregory Ain, Modular Diagram Study, "Development by Addition of Similar Increments," c. 1945-46.

proposal for CIAM III. In *Rush City Reformed*, housing units were developed for inhabitants ranging from apartments to single family homes according to four different types of inhabitants. These included singles, couples, the smaller “growing family” of the “first decade,” and the larger “advanced family” of the “second decade.”⁹⁶ In Neutra’s proposal the apartments for singles and couples were situated closer to an industrial zone, while the single-family homes for the first and second generation were located further away in a verdant greenbelt. Neutra’s urban plan is based on a narrow and traditional notion of the typical nuclear family, assuming that all members of society will inevitably go through each of these familial stages. And only those who attain the “family” stage are given the privilege of a single family home away from the less-desirable industrial areas.

Similarly, because of the social and economic norms of his time, Ain envisioned his client for Park Planned Homes as the “typical” nuclear family. Like many contemporaneous housing developments, Park Planned Homes was sold to the “average” home buyer. Unfortunately, we now know that this “average” home buyer was almost always a white, middle class, and relatively young, due to the exclusionary tactics imposed by the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation (HOLC). HOLC restrictions led to the racial disenfranchisement caused by “red-lining” and exclusion of non-whites from the majority of the housing market, including those who had served in World War II. Because of the racially-restrictive housing covenants of the time, the neighborhood would accept no blacks in 1946. Never the less, Ain attempted to combine his plans for multi-family

⁹⁶ Neutra, *Buildings and Projects*, 195.

housing with ideas of flexibility. He collapsed Neutra's urban plan into a single family house, so his is a synthesis of the "first family decade" and "second family decade" models of Rush City Reformed, including a "detached two car garage per family."⁹⁷ As mentioned previously, he arrived at this arrangement through a permutational system where different "increments" could be paired according to need, resulting in different types/sizes of houses, with smaller versions labeled "mountain cabin" or "minimum cottage," etc. (fig. 18) Not surprisingly, each house plan starts with the unit containing the kitchen onto which identically-sized units can be added on as needed. Because Park Planned Homes was a speculative project, Ain decided to use the the "seven-unit" configuration consisting of three bedrooms and two bathrooms, because it provided the most flexibility and consumer appeal.⁹⁸ (fig. 19) The living room is apportioned two modules and each of the bedrooms consists of one module. The dining bay is one module connected to the half-module of the kitchen in an open plan arrangement. The bathrooms are also allocated a half module each. The second bathroom is given slightly less room as it is also sharing space with the furnace. Each of the bedrooms could easily be adapted to the needs of families of various sizes, but the growing nuclear family was the presumed client. Within Ain's design, the general openness of the plan was not a hindrance to a family who had not yet "filled up" the space with children. So although Ain's homes

⁹⁷ Ibid., 200.

⁹⁸ Robin Park, "Subdivision in Altadena," press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 6.

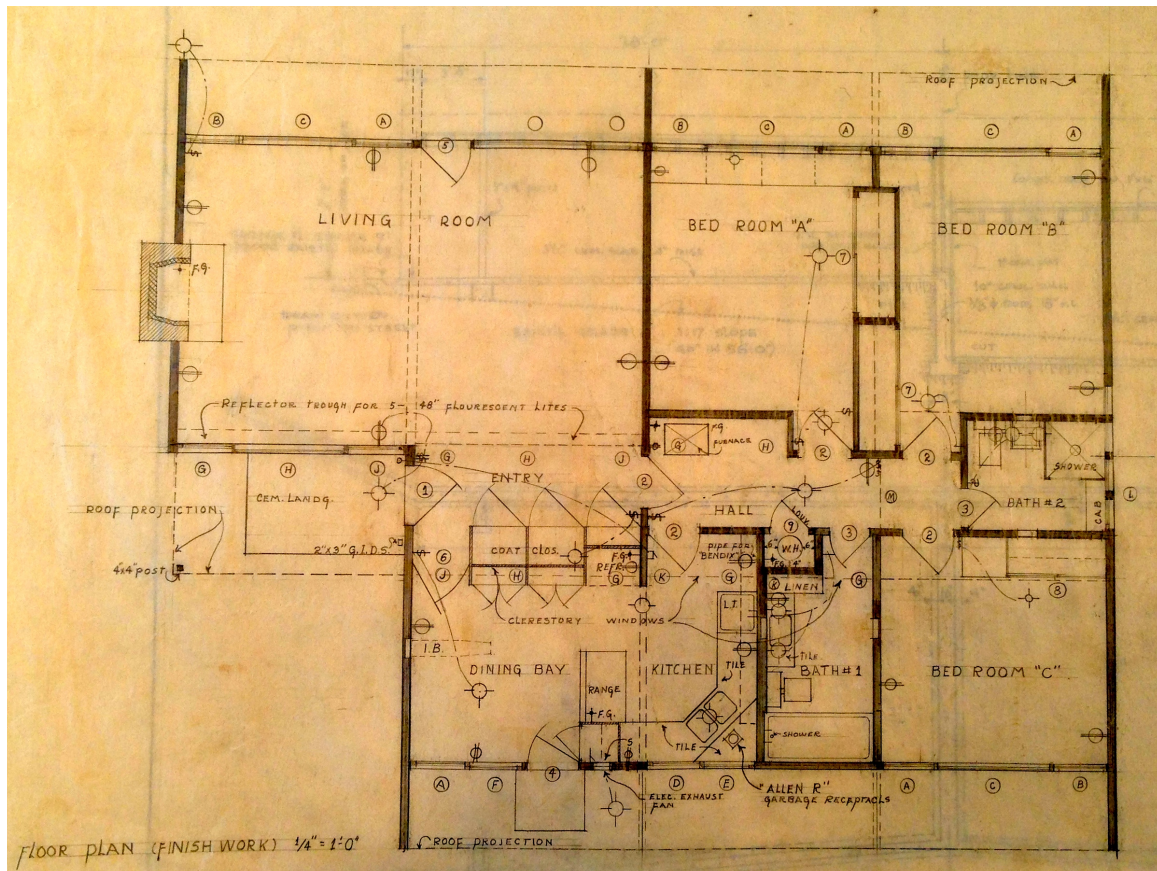


Figure 19. Gregory Ain, floor plan, Park Planned Homes, c. 1945.

ultimately sold to a relatively narrow segment of the population, the plans themselves strove toward notions of flexibility that would be beneficial to any family, irrespective of race and family size.

Ain's structural approach to Park Planned Homes did not deviate much ideologically from the One Family Defense House and was conceived in rationalistic, even mathematical, terms. Like the One Family Defense House, the structure was constructed of a semi-prefabricated system which was more detailed, but followed the same principal:

Although not truly a prefabricated house in the sense of using large scale industrial facilities, it nevertheless applies the principals of mass production wherever possible and could be used as a model for a prefabrication system. Lumber and steel, for instance, is all pre-cut and window assemblies in 12' sections are completely shop-built. The construction of the house is based on the repetition of standardized elements.⁹⁹

While the One Family Defense House plan was somewhat revolutionary during the interwar period, defense-industry production had made prefabrication the norm by the end of the war.

Builders seeking to increase their production of houses were also inspired by the example of ship and aircraft manufacture, which converted from craft methods to assembly-line production in the early 1940's in order to meet the demands of the war effort.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁰ Caltrans, "Tract Housing in California," 57.

Ain adapted his designs to the prevailing trend in home building, using a Modernist approach that further increased efficiency and functionality. He did this while also incorporating the amenities that come from good design, like open flexible spaces and a functional kitchen.

Another way Ain converted his Modernist ideals to the postwar Los Angeles building industry can be seen in the site plan itself. Ain's plan stays within "twenty-eight small city lots laid out in the usual gridiron pattern," following the existing streets and lot subdivision.¹⁰¹ Within this grid Ain adapted an idea that he first conceived in the One Family Defense House: mirrored and paired houses and garages.¹⁰² (fig. 1) This formula provided aesthetic variety from the street and the pairing of houses broke up the inevitable monotony of identical lots. When combined with the sloping site, which staggered each house on its own terrace, a staccato view of the alternating the façades is created. (fig. 20) This further emphasized the unique combination of positive and negative space along the street. This elevational variation was also intended to be combined with the optical effects of color, "[where] the only construction immediately visible to passersby is the varying planes of unbroken wall surfaces, which will allow the use of fairly strong colors."¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Robin Park, "Subdivision in Altadena," press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2.

¹⁰² Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 115.

¹⁰³ Robin Park, "Subdivision in Altadena," press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2.

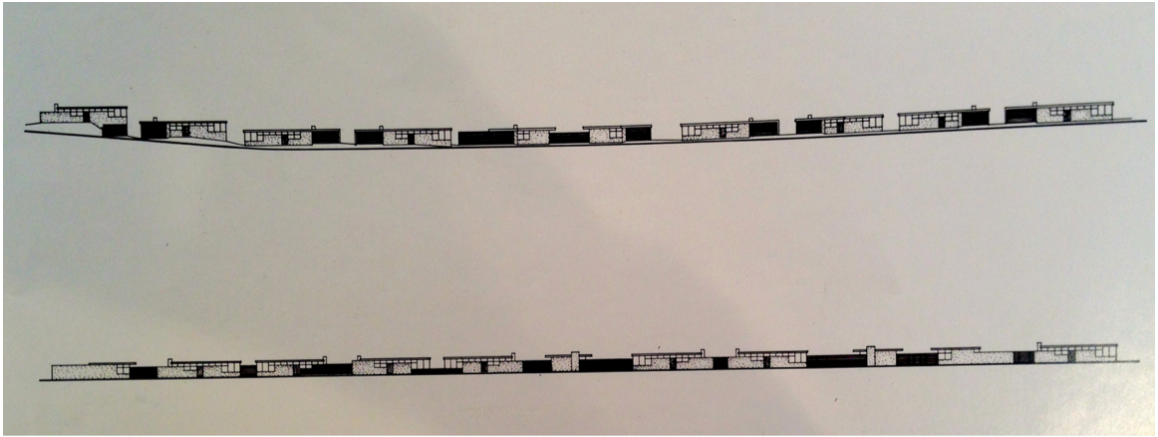


Figure 20. Gregory Ain, Site Plan, Elevation, Park Planned Homes, 1947.

As Anthony Denzer notes, pairing the driveways was a further design element constructed to break up the presence of individual lots:

Pairing the houses and sharing the driveways created an unbroken stretch of frontage ninety-six feet long for each pair in front of the garages. The resulting ‘islands’ functioned as representational front yards, although they subversively spanned property lines.¹⁰⁴ (fig. 16)

In contrast to Denzer’s characterization of these islands as a “subversive” transgression, I argue that Ain actually created a new framework within the typical suburban tract. Since he was working with a like-minded developer, Robert Kahan, Ain had more flexibility when it came to elements like adhering to lot divisions. Ain was presenting a postwar subdivision that embraced a more communal lifestyle, with ample opportunity for interaction among families. In a 1945 article about Park Planned Homes entitled “Estates in Miniature” the author states, “some people think of utopia as a place in the wilderness and others as a warm-hearted community life where people are always within reach. It is of the latter kind that this story was written.”¹⁰⁵ But the crisis of how to execute this type of plan was always one of communalism versus individual privacy. Ain was constantly balancing what was socially acceptable with what was too progressive.

During this time Ain was also working with Garrett Eckbo on a proposal for a communal housing project in Reseda, California called Community Homes, Inc. (1946-49). Because Community Homes was conceived as a multi-racial housing

¹⁰⁴ Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 115.

¹⁰⁵ “Estates in Miniature,” *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* (Los Angeles, CA), December 30, 1945.

collective it remained unbuilt due to the restrictive racial covenants of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). FHA loans essentially excluded all non-whites from homeownership, preventing Community Homes from moving forward because of the lack of funding to build the project. But some of the communal elements of the landscape design, including the long lines of trees connecting large swaths of the site, found their way into Eckbo's design for Park Planned Homes. (fig. 21) Ain and Eckbo were contemporaries who both had both grown up in California and had extensive exposure to the European precedents of Modern architecture and design. Eckbo's education in the ideology of European Modernist ideals came by way of his schooling at Harvard's Graduate School of Design (GSD) as a student of Landscape Architecture beginning in 1936.¹⁰⁶ This was one year before former Bauhaus director Walter Gropius accepted Joseph Hudnut's offer to be chair of architecture at Harvard's new GSD and begin collaborative studio teaching with Hudnut and other faculty.¹⁰⁷ Eckbo spent the second year of his studies taking architecture courses from Gropius and absorbing the latter's foundational ideas about architecture and design, refined over several years as the head of the Bauhaus and through his active involvement with the formation of CIAM. Eckbo

¹⁰⁶ Marc Treib, *Garrett Eckbo: Modern Landscapes for Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 182.

¹⁰⁷ Mumford, *Defining Urban Design*, 28. This was also two years before Gropius would sponsor Ain's successful bid for a Guggenheim grant to study low-cost housing.

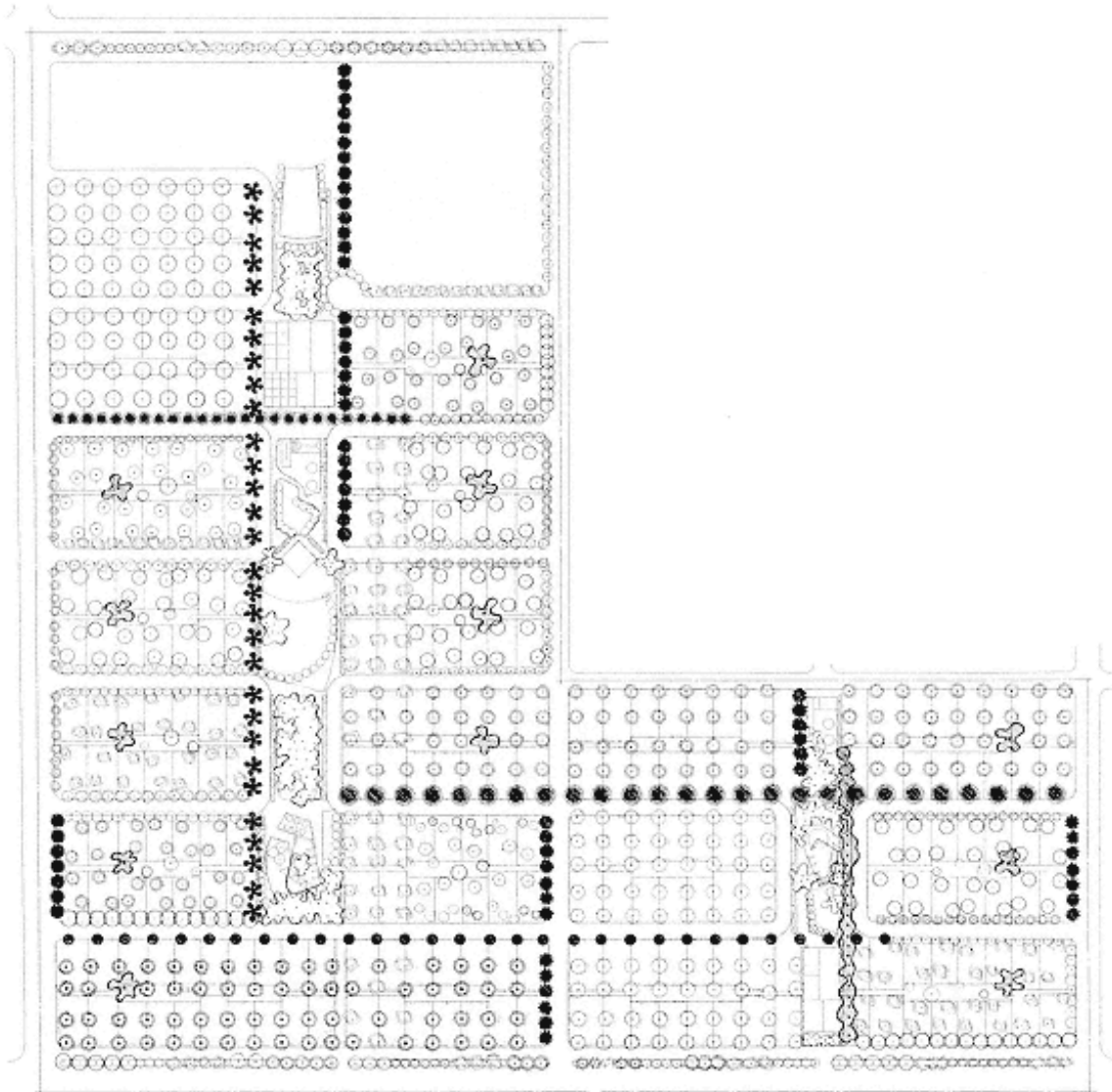


Figure 21. Gregory Ain with Joseph Johnson and Alfred Day, architects, Garrett Eckbo, landscape designer, Simon Eisner, planner, Site Plan, Community Homes, Reseda, San Fernando Valley, 1946-49.

embraced a collaborative approach to planning from Gropius, who “injected forefront European ideas about architecture and its social role into an American context.”¹⁰⁸

This education in a communal and socially driven approach to design would remain with Eckbo throughout his career, leading him, according to Marc Treib, to “... work for the US Housing authority designing prototypical recreation spaces and courtyards for public housing” and “...the western regional office of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) ...designing camps for migrant agricultural workers in California’s central valley...”¹⁰⁹ During the same time that Ain was creating the One Family Defense House as a prototype for both migrant farm workers and defense workers, Eckbo was exploring similar issues in landscape design through a hands-on approach at the FSA. Eckbo’s landscape design for “Trailer Housing Patterns in San Diego and Vallejo, California” (1942) made up of a “large number of identical small housing units,” already exhibited his tendency toward a unification of the entire site.¹¹⁰ (fig. 22) By creating long lines of trees that went beyond the condensed rows of trailers, Eckbo was able to break up the monotony caused by their replication. This was further enhanced by the “tree patterns and building colors...[that] expedite[d] this identifying articulation...”¹¹¹ Eckbo’s years of experience as a landscape architect in New Deal-funded social housing

¹⁰⁸ Treib, *Garrett Eckbo*, 16.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹¹⁰ Garrett Eckbo, *Landscape for Living* (New York: Architectural Record with Duell, Sloan, & Pearce, 1950), 205.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

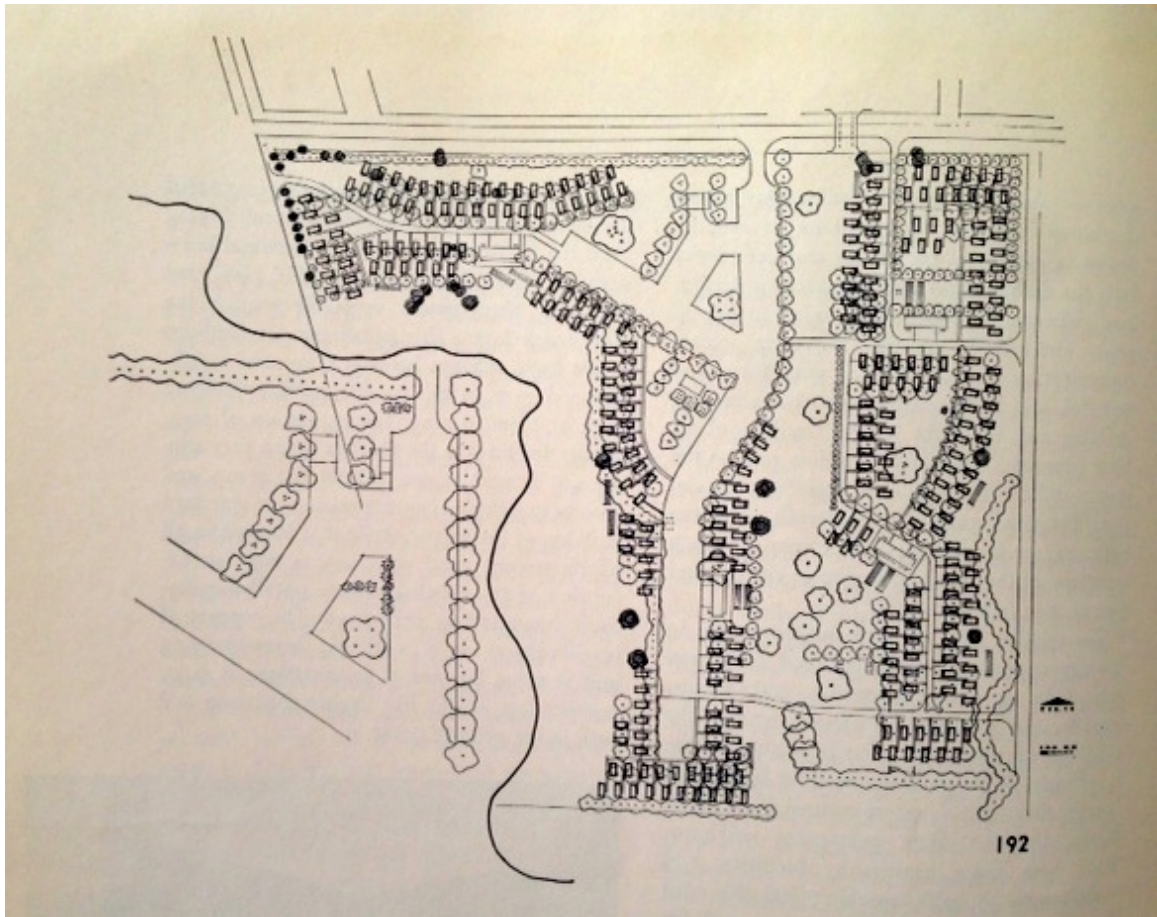


Figure 22. Garrett Eckbo, landscape designer, District Architect, Vernon De Mars, Trailer Housing Patterns in San Diego and Vallejo, California, 1942.

provided him with the perfect preparation for his work with Ain on Park Planned Homes where these design strategies played a central role.

The collaboration between Ain and Eckbo on Park Planned Homes can be seen as early as January of 1945 in the colorful studies by Eckbo, Royston and Williams. The before and after drawings of the “bird’s eye view from the Southeast,” (fig. 23 & fig. 24) show the transformative effect landscape design had on the project. Ain’s initial drawing exhibits monotony even with the variations he applied to the plan using mirroring and elevation changes. But in Eckbo’s landscape designs color and shape create movement and diversity. Eckbo implemented a variety of tall tree clusters so that large swaths of similar trees alternated along each side of the street. Like the Trailer Housing for San Diego and Vallejo, Eckbo’s long allées span the shared front yard islands, further linking them to a larger communal space of the neighborhood. According to Marc Treib, Eckbo drew inspiration from modern artists like “Joan Miro [who] spoke of the ‘motionless movement’ he sought in painting...[with] horizon line or indication of depth, [the forms] displaced in depth. They are also displaced in plane, because a color or line leads finally to a displacement of the angle of vision.”¹¹² Eckbo borrowed abstract ideas from modern art to create perceptual changes through his framing of the space. This approach, combined with Ain’s architectural variations, created differentiation on a psychological as well as aesthetic level.

¹¹² Treib, *Garrett Eckbo*, 31. Emphasis added.

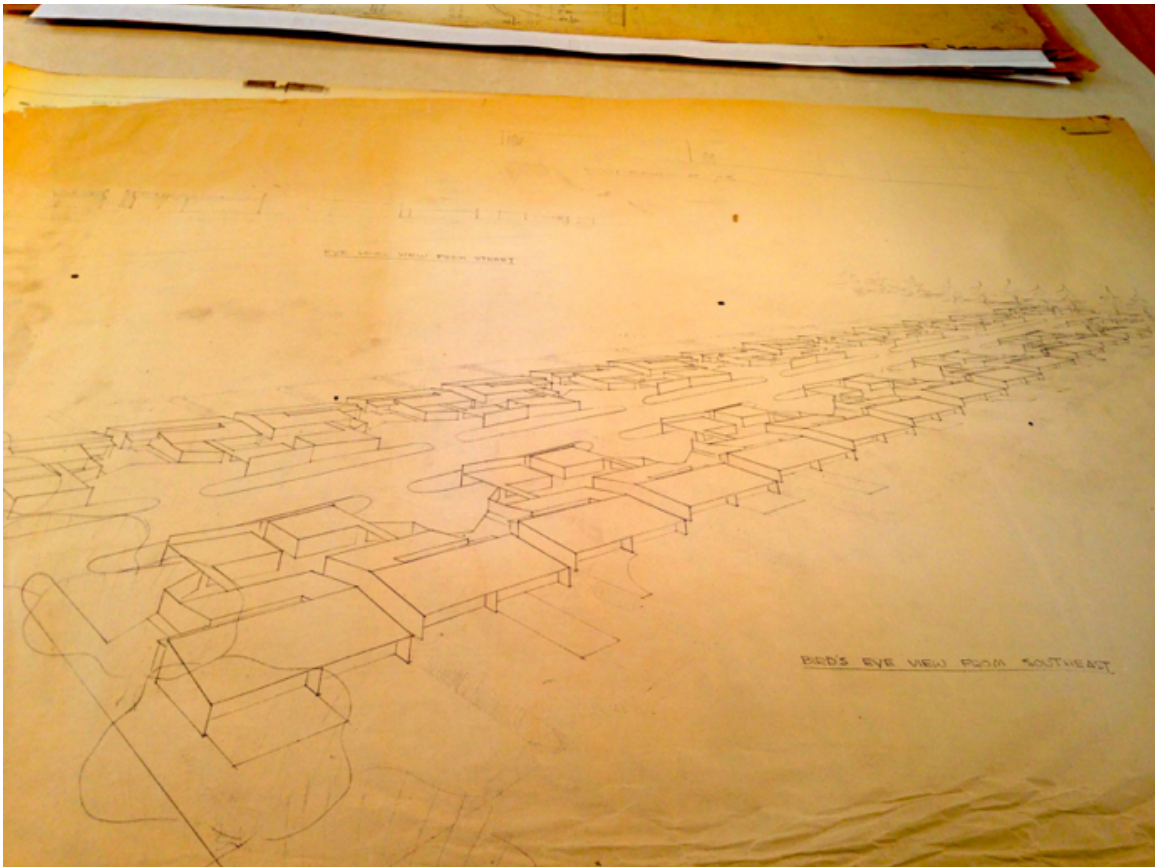


Figure 23. Gregory Ain, Site Plan, Park Planned Homes, 1945.



Figure 24. Eckbo, Royston, and Williams, Park Planned Homes Landscape Design Site Plan, 1946.

In addition, Eckbo added visual interest by using various types of plantings on each front-yard island. On the plans, a chevron-shaped line transverses the street demonstrating how the two sides are united by placing similar trees along either side in an off-set pattern. (fig. 25) On the tree list for one of the later drawings Eckbo listed 57 different kinds of trees to be used on-site.¹¹³ Eckbo's drawings also include color studies for house shades in concert with different types of planting. (fig. 26) It is unclear how close these colors come to the actual painting scheme, but this investigation of color and vegetation demonstrate Eckbo's shared commitment to differentiation that Ain executed with the orientation of the houses. The two men worked together to create variety with their respective contributions to the project. While Ain worked within the strict guidelines of the existing building industry, his ingenuity in creating variety within a simple plan and his collaboration with Eckbo, created more variety than could be found in other suburban housing tracts of the time.

In the communal front yard, Ain and Eckbo's designs work together to encourage shared use of the green spaces that line the front of the houses. Park Planned Homes was even given its name because of the park-like quality intended for the front yards. But in the back yards Ain and Eckbo adapted their designs for the sake of longstanding attitudes toward privacy and the suburban home that date from the eighteenth century.¹¹⁴ Although

¹¹³ Eckbo even specifies in his drawings the height, size, and scale of multiple types of plants on each island.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985). See Chapter 3.

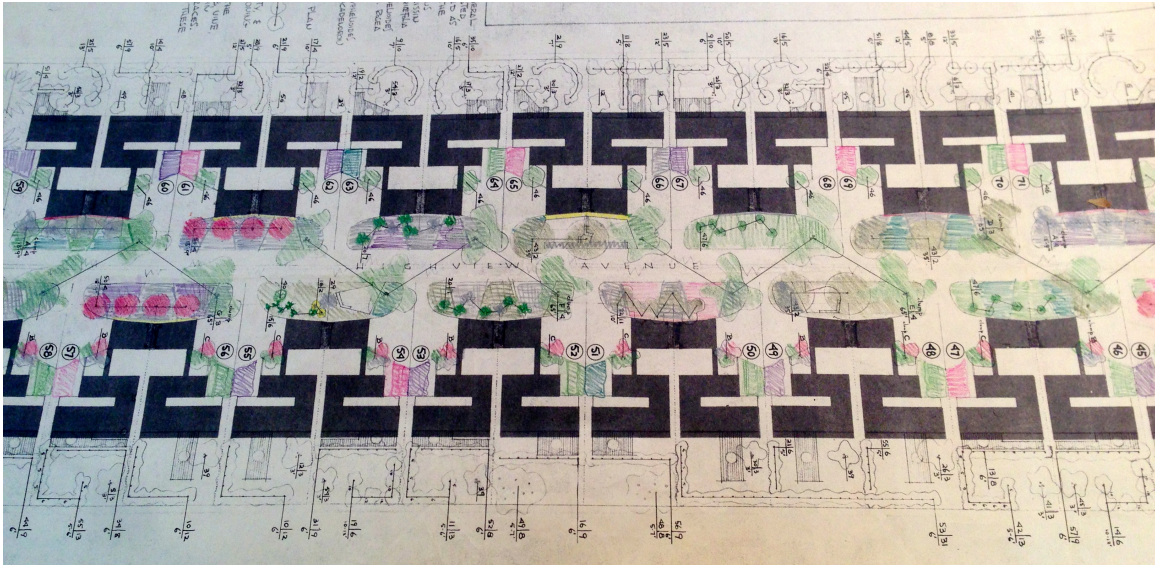


Figure 25. Eckbo, Royston, and Williams, Park Planned Homes Landscape Design Site Plan, 1946.

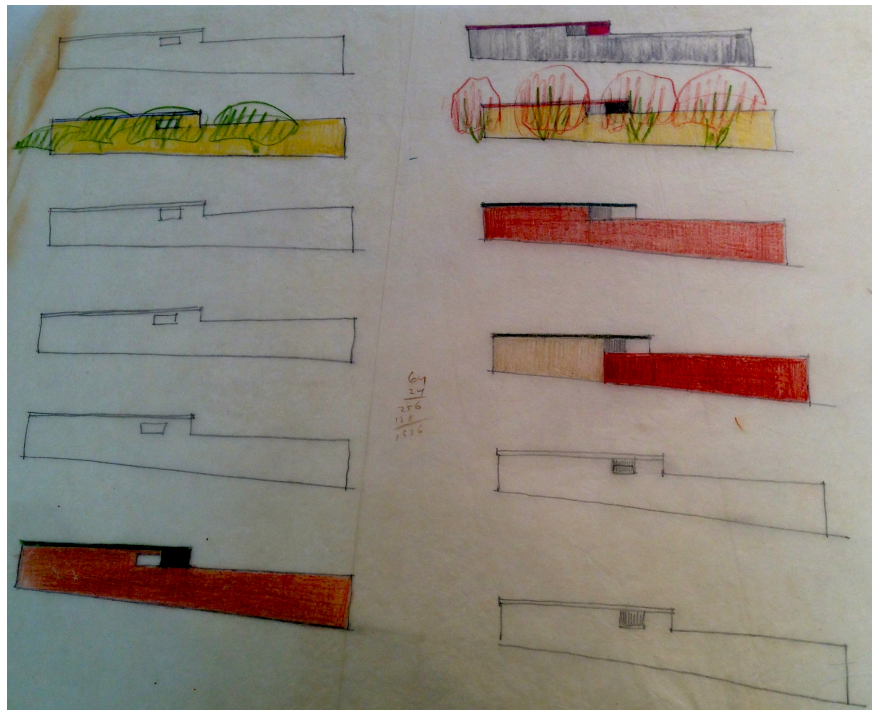


Figure 26. Eckbo, Royston, and Williams, Detail, Park Planned Homes Landscape and House Color Study, 1946.

Ain and Eckbo were able to maintain notions of communalism in the collective front yard, the back yards adhered to a more traditional model. (fig. 16) The interwar years allowed for some flexibility in this approach to suburban living, as can be seen in Ain's project for Dunsmuir flats, which had communal outdoor space devoid of walls. But the prevailing attitude following the war was a return to a more conservative approach to private space. Eckbo states in his book, *Landscape for Living*, that the

...rear gardens-half facing east and half west-developed three standard patterns of paving, grass, fine rolled rock, color borders, shrub and vine screens, small trees forming planes, and shade trees, for each half. These plans were so combined with planting chart as to produce different combination of plan material for each garden.¹¹⁵ (fig. 25)

Although Eckbo respected each potential homeowner's need for back yard privacy, he also replicated the permutational approach that he had devised for the front yard to create variety while also individualizing the spaces. Some back yards featured a curved line of trees, while others were made up of intersecting straight lines, but each one was bordered on each side by a "tall rough hedge." Ain also had a deep awareness of privacy and designed accordingly, but like Eckbo he felt that communal life was invaluable to this new and progressive concept of suburban living. It is interesting to note that today the landscaping of the front yards has been divided along property lines, in almost all cases bisecting the original communal front yard shared by the two adjacent properties. In Ain's design for the One Family Defense House each back yard had a narrow opening in the hedges that connected them to a communal park beyond. Similarly, each back yard in

¹¹⁵ Eckbo, *Landscape for Living*, 215.

Park Planned Homes had a small opening in the corner that connects the private back yard to the semi-private space of the front service yard. Instead of creating a strict division between the public and private spaces, Eckbo kept a subtle connection between the two. The front- and back-yards, although seemingly separated, were actually connected.

In June of 1947 the *Los Angeles Times* home section published an article about Park Planned Homes entitled *New Homes...New Friends...New Life!* The implications of a “new life” were not simply highlighted as part of this newly completed housing community, but also a new approach to postwar living. The article began: “Sociability is a flower that blooms with restrained care and withers with unnecessarily close cultivation. It’s man’s nature to want to be close to others and at the same time have seclusion assured when he wants it.”¹¹⁶ Ain was aware that some of his more progressive ideas, attempted in projects like Community Homes, would not be appropriate for this private for-profit development. Like its site plan and landscape, the design of individual houses for Park Planned Homes represented an interesting mix of both traditional and progressive approaches to suburban home design. In addition, notions of privacy, flexibility, and the women’s role are exemplified within the home itself.

In Park Planned Homes, each house consists of a bifurcated plan with the dining bay, kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom on one side and the living room and remaining

¹¹⁶ Lee Howard, “New Homes...New Friends...New Life!” *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* (Los Angeles, CA), Jun. 8, 1947.

bedrooms on the other. (fig. 19) What made Park Planned Homes unique, however, was Ain's placement of transparent exterior walls only on the private sides of the home.¹¹⁷ The two sides of the house facing neighboring lots had no windows except a small set in the second bathroom. The back yard provides privacy for the living room, and the kitchen faces the front service yard, walled off from the street by the carport. (fig. 27) Instead of relying on only two exterior walls for light, which would create dark interior spaces, Ain added a dual spine of clerestory windows down the center of the house that allowed light to penetrate inside. (fig. 28) According to the Los Angeles Times article, "all the windows overlook patios, mountains or surrounding treetops. And because of the carefully arranged plot plan no view can be spoiled by the neighbors."¹¹⁸ The height of interior windows provided an added layer of privacy. There were essentially two entrances to the house, one private, going from the carport directly to the kitchen, and another, more public, directly from the street. These design choices show that Ain intentionally created a clear division between public and private spaces within the house.

The interior layout of Park Planned Homes takes on a more progressive approach through a flexible and efficient plan. The hallway is oriented laterally through the center of the house, lined on both sides by the clerestory windows mentioned above. It goes from the heavily used public areas of the house to the more sparsely populated private rooms. (fig. 19) From the hallway, members of the family progress into the increasingly

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.



Figure 27. Gregory Ain, Model, Park Planned Homes, c. 1946.

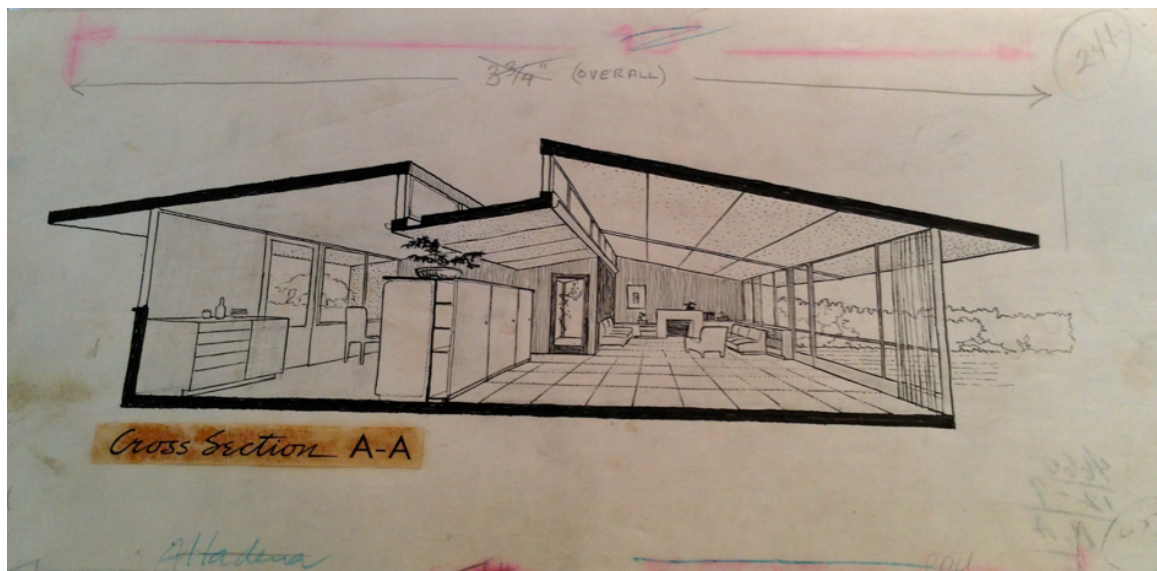


Figure 28. Gregory Ain, Cross Section A-A - Park Planned Homes, c. 1945-46.

private spaces of the house as they move away from the entrance. Because the hallway acts as a central spine, there is no need to cross through any room to get to another. The entry itself is flanked by the living room on one side and the “dining bay” on the other. Like the One Family Defense House, the formal dining room has been eliminated. According to George Nelson in *Tomorrow's House*, “elaborate studies were made to prove that here was a room which should never have existed in the first place—it took up many cubic feet of space...but was only used three or four times out the twenty four. This...was inefficient.”¹¹⁹ Instead of creating a solid division between the living room and this new dining bay, Ain created a more subtle boundary. He achieved this through a dual-function wall with a built-in coat closet off the entry and dining bay storage and the refrigerator on the other side. (fig. 28) This wall unit is shorter than ceiling height, creating a visual connection and sense of openness between the two spaces. Ain took the same approach when he connected the dining bay to the kitchen. Between these two rooms the cook-top range acts as a divider between the respective spaces. (fig. 29) This unit also does not rise to full ceiling height. The third example of a double-function wall is carried over from the One Family Defense House where Ain used a double-function closet-wall between bedrooms “A” and “B.” (fig. 19) According to the press release for Park Planned Homes:

¹¹⁹ George Nelson, *Tomorrow's House: A Complete Guide for the Home-builder* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), 41.



Figure 29. Gregory Ain, architect, View of Kitchen from Dining Bay, Park Planned Homes, 1947.

Wherever possible the furniture necessary to the house except moveable pieces will be built in. This means a considerable saving of space, especially in the bedrooms, eliminating the need for drawer and storage units standing out in the room, freeing these areas for greater variety of use.¹²⁰

These three double function walls eliminate the need for superfluous furniture, increase the usable floor space, leaving the public spaces more open.

In contrast, Ain's treatment of the kitchen is a mix of both progressive and traditional approaches to postwar domesticity. On the one hand it is planned according to traditional gender roles, and on the other it provides for efficiency and freedom from work through the inclusion of modern appliances. Ain designed the kitchen under the assumption that it would be the dominant sphere of the stay-at-home wife and mother. As a result, the plan is designed "with due consideration for the housewife who must spend fully as much time in the kitchen as all the rest of the family spends in any other part of the house."¹²¹ But by making it open and strategically connected to other parts of the house, both internally and externally, Ain took a much more progressive approach. "Instead of being a small separate compartment facing on a neighboring building, [the kitchen] becomes a center of the house and opens to a pleasant garden which has the triple function of service yard, children's play space and outdoor dining area."¹²² By comparison, a contemporaneous Cape Cod style house of 1947 from Levittown, New

¹²⁰ Robin Park, "Subdivision in Altadena," press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 5.

¹²¹ Ibid., 3.

¹²² Ibid.

York isolates the kitchen within ‘small separate compartment,’ completely disconnected, both visually and physically, from the rest of the house. (fig. 30) According to Barbara M. Kelly:

[This] reveals the dominant values of the postwar period: conformity and privatization, as well as the revival of several nineteenth century themes: the cult of domesticity, the doctrine of separate spheres, and the agrarian myth. Each of these themes was related to another value of American life, the right to private property. In the America of 1947, these themes had wide appeal.¹²³

Although Ain does not abandon his attention to flexibility and functionality, these ideas are integrated into a design that is based, at least in part, on nineteenth century notions of the bourgeois housewife. According to Catherine Beecher, “women of refinement and culture build houses on the Christian and democratic plan, work themselves, and train their children to work, [so] they will never suffer for want of domestic helpers” under the philosophy of “self-sacrifice for the public good.”¹²⁴ This same thinking is made clear in the press release for Park Planned Homes:

¹²³ Barbara M. Kelly, “Expanding the American Dream,” (© 1993 by State University of New York) in *The Suburb Reader*, ed. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese (New York: Routledge, 2006), 284. Figure 9-13 “Architect’s rendering of a basic 1947 Cape Cod home, accompanied by a floor plan sketch by Barbara Kelly.” See also *Suburb Reader* figure 9-14, “Architect’s rendering of 1949 ranch model home, accompanied by floor plan sketch by Barbara Kelly.” Here, just two years later, the kitchen is completely open to the living room separated only by a range. Much like the 1945 design of Ain’s Park Planned Homes.

¹²⁴ Catharine Beecher, “How to Redeem Woman’s Profession from Dishonor,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, November 1865.

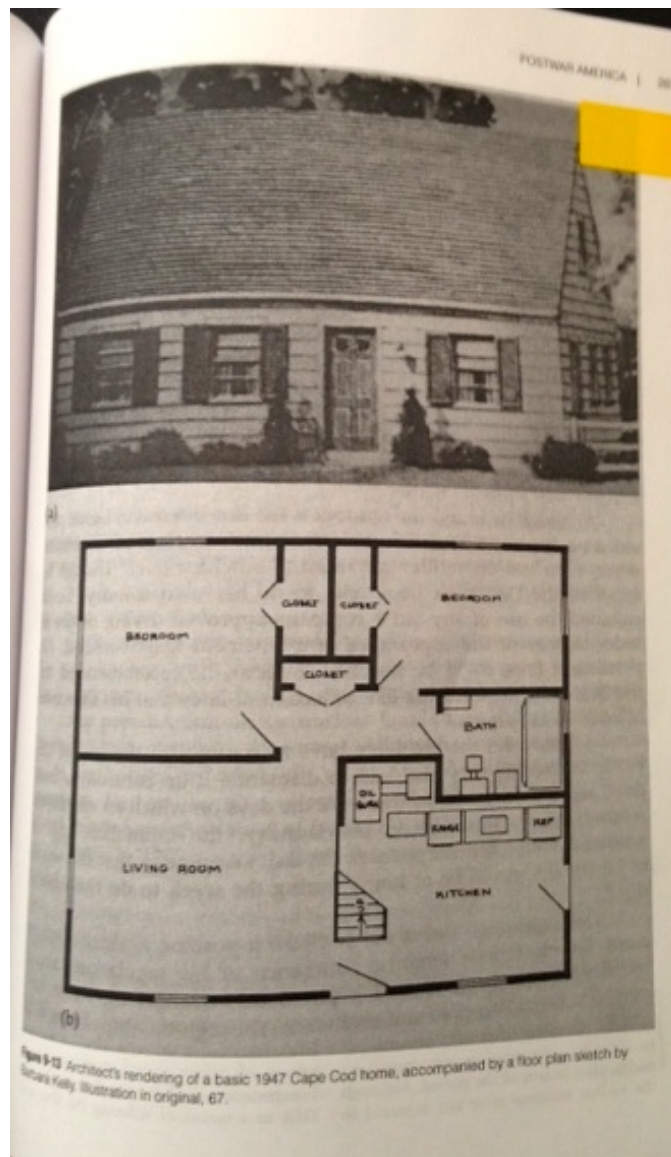


Figure 30. Architect's Rendering of a basic 1947 Cape Cod home, accompanied by a floor plan sketch by Barbara Kelly.

It is presumed that the housewife, who must be both cook and hostess, prefers a more open kitchen-dining-living-room arrangement which permits her the freedom to assume both duties simultaneously. She may go about her household tasks and not feel isolated from the family's activities.¹²⁵

This perfectly illustrates the tension between the specific set of duties ("cook and hostess") prescribed for the housewife in the postwar period and Ain's more progressive desire to alleviate the social isolation that comes with these restrictions.

Like other traditional tract housing developments of the era, Ain incorporates state-of-the-art appliances in his practical design for the kitchen. The best example is his inclusion of a Bendix automatic washing machine.¹²⁶ Advertisements for the Bendix from 1945 and 1946 perfectly sum up the futuristic postwar attitude toward efficiency in housework. The 1945 advertisement touts: "At last it's here!" and "she goes shopping on washdays."¹²⁷ This language further emphasizes the presumed freedom that came with automatic appliances during the postwar period. In addition to the Bendix, a hide-away ironing board was included in the kitchen. Ain's supposition here was that when the kitchen and dining bay were not being used to prepare and serve meals, they could be used for everyday chores like laundry and ironing, all while keeping an eye on the

¹²⁵ Robin Park, "Subdivision in Altadena," press release from Gregory Ain archives, University of California, Santa Barbara, 3.

¹²⁶ "Bendix washing machine in Ernst Hardware window, probably in Seattle, 1945," *Museum of History & Industry, Seattle (MOHAI)*, January 31, 2014, http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm-mohai/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/imlsmohai&CISOPTR=1861&CISOBBOX=1&REC=16. Bendix introduced the first automatic washer with full wash, rinse and spin cycle at a Louisiana state fair in 1937.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

children playing outside in the service yard, which, not surprisingly, also doubles as a safely enclosed play area.

In *Architects People* Russell Ellis and Dana Cuff make the argument that “the single family house is what Durkheimian sociologists call a ‘collective representation.’ Although clearly a construct, through usage, acceptance, aspiration, and commitment, it has become something we take for granted...”¹²⁸ By deconstructing the physical and ideological constructs present in Ain’s complex design of Park Planned Homes we can see how his vision of the single family house was anticipated in the interwar period and executed in the postwar period. His design navigated both the interwar visions of a more collectivist postwar utopia and the aspirational aspects of post World War II capitalistic desires. From the variation of the site plan and the alternating façades, the privacy provided by the orientation of each house to another, the collective impetus behind the landscape design, and the flexible interior plan, we can see how Ain negotiated the confines of the impending postwar ideology centered on the myth of the singular nuclear family, separated from their neighbors.

Ain, with extensive collaboration from Eckbo, conceived of Park Planned Homes on a unified neighborhood scale, where all parts were related and balanced to create a sense of individuality and collectivism for each potential home buyer. For Eckbo the interaction between people, and the interaction between people and the landscape, were

¹²⁸ William Russell Ellis and Dana Cuff, *Architects’ People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 146.

an essential element of his designs. Early “International Style” Modernism took an avant-garde approach to design, while the work of second generation architects, like Ain, investigated how Modernism could be adapted to the needs of people and impart more of a sense of individuality. Instead of seeing people as one mass that needed housing, a group organism that needed a cure, Ain went beyond the desire to establish his own “style,” in favor of an exploration of how his architecture could improve the lives of people.¹²⁹ He did this by creating individualized spaces within the necessary confines of traditional subdivision. Although Park Planned Homes was a commercial endeavor, not a communal experiment like Community Homes, Ain was able to integrate some of his more progressive ideas both inside and out. Many of these experiments will be further refined in his next project, Mar Vista housing.

¹²⁹ Shanken, *194X*, 66. For more information on “mature economy theory,” see chapter two of *194X*.

Chapter 3

When Gregory Ain designed the Mar Vista Tract (1946-48) the United States political situation was shifting from the interwar period of state-sponsored New Deal policies to the postwar era when consumerism was increasingly equated with freedom and democracy. Notably, this era included the “origins of the cold war and its effects on American policies and the meaning of domestic political campaigns against communism.”¹³⁰ During this time typical housing developments in Los Angeles, like Kaiser Community Homes in Westchester (1946), displayed the tendency toward mass-production and monotony that increasingly lead to anonymity. In contrast, Gregory Ain’s design for the Mar Vista Tract represents an improvement on this typical model through his attention to the relation of the car and the pedestrian, the function of landscaping, exterior treatments, color, and the internal flexible layout of the house itself. I would argue that the Mar Vista Tract displays just a fraction of Ain’s capabilities, as evidenced by his unbuilt project for Community Homes (1946-49), which were restricted by the economic and political situation of the time. While scholars like Anthony Denzer focus on the social and political restrictions of Community Homes, I will use it to present a more nuanced view of Ain’s design approach to the Mar Vista Tract. The economic and political shift toward “growthmanship” following the war, coupled with a severe lack of housing in California (as noted in chapter two), created a disincentive for developers and

¹³⁰ David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 298.

realtors to take on experimental forms of housing.¹³¹ For Ain, the urban-scale planning of early Modernists and CIAM remained the benchmark for a successful planned housing community. But as he did in the plans for Park Planned Homes, Ain adapted the Mar Vista Tract to the constraints of the postwar Los Angeles subdivision. Here the existing grid pattern and traditional zoning became defining factors in restricting the overall plan.

Gregory Ain returned to private practice following the war and began his partnership with Joseph Johnson and Alfred Day in 1945. According to Esther McCoy, “Joseph Johnson was at Harvard Graduate school in 1937, the first year Walter Gropius arrived and he knew Gropius’ work in Germany and England. Alfred Day, a graduate of Cornell, was also aware of developments in Europe....”¹³² Ain collaborated with Johnson and Day on two well-known postwar projects relevant to my argument. Both expand his unique approach to planned housing communities begun with the One Family Defense House and continued at Park Planned Homes. The first was Community Homes, a project which remained unbuilt due to a lack of Federal Housing Administration funding.¹³³ (fig. 31) The second, designed almost simultaneously, was the Mar Vista Tract. (fig. 32) The tract was executed with developer B.M. Edelman of Advanced Development Company

¹³¹ Collins, *More*, 39.

¹³² McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 133.

¹³³ For more specifics on the racial covenants and other factors that led to the demise of Ain’s Community Homes project-see Anthony S. Denzer, *Gregory Ain: The Modern Home as Social Commentary* (Rizzoli, 2008)

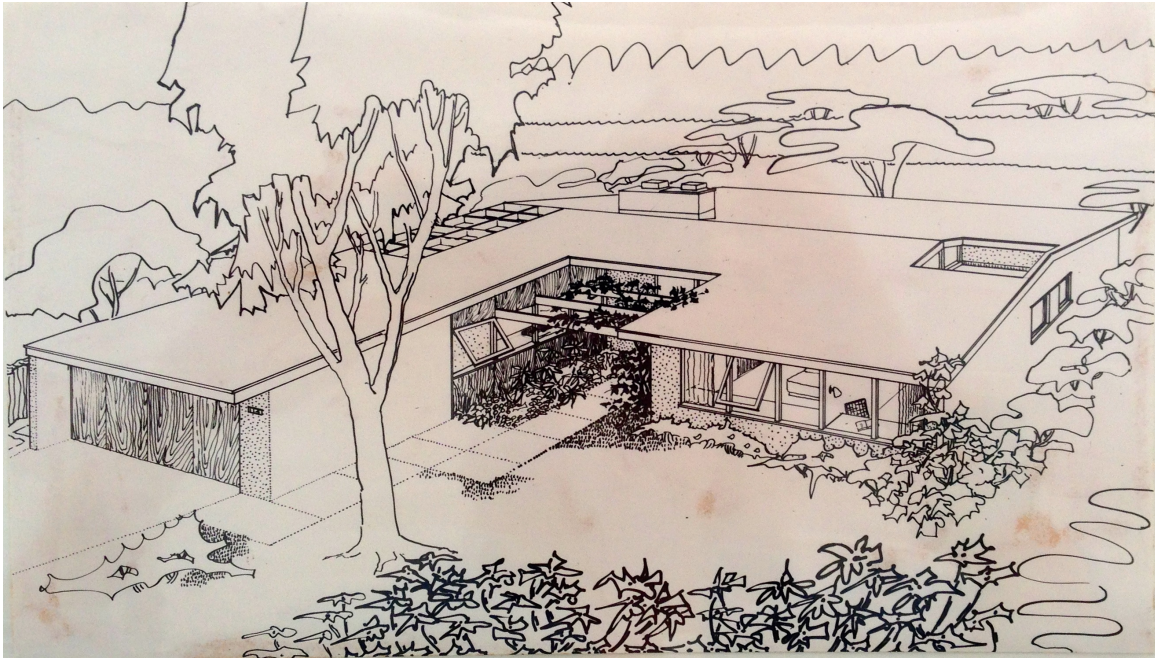


Figure 31. Gregory Ain, architect's rendering, Community Homes, 1946-49.



Figure 32. Gregory Ain, Architect's Rendering, Mar Vista Tract, 1946-47.

and advertised as “Modernique Homes.” Garrett Eckbo was the landscape designer for both projects.

The Mar Vista Tract “was planned in 1947 for a hundred houses on a 60-acre site” and is “bounded by Palms Boulevard on the north, Meier Street on the east, Marco Place on the south, and Beethoven Street on the west,” with Moore running parallel to Meier in the center.¹³⁴ The average house size was 1,060 square feet not including the double garage¹³⁵ with a standard lot size of 75 x 104 feet.¹³⁶ The houses were built using the “post and lintel system of construction, allowing generous window areas with no interruptions of structural framing.”¹³⁷ Ain kept the modular system he first employed on the One Family Defense House, where each structural member is evenly spaced, creating a pattern that is visible in the spacing of the exterior windows. The windows and internal structure also follow a four-foot module. And “by standardizing certain interior features and by setting up a mill on site, the architects and builder [turned] out homes of custom individuality on a mass production scale.”¹³⁸ According to the preservation plan for the Los Angeles Historic Preservation Overlay Zone governing the Gregory Ain Mar Vista Tract:

¹³⁴ Los Angeles Conservancy, *Los Angeles’ Historic Preservation Overlay Zones* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Conservancy, 2002), 17-20.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁶ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 129.

¹³⁷ “One Hundred Houses,” *Arts & Architecture*, May 1948.

¹³⁸ “New Flexibility Features Modern Residence Design,” *The Mirror*, November 1948, 32.

While the original intent was to create a housing development that provided cost efficient housing using prefabricated materials for construction and a single floor plan, the sale price of each home was about \$12,000, considerably higher than the contractor- inspired houses around nearby Venice Blvd. that were then selling for about \$5,000. The main selling points were the convertible features, the ultra-modern design, and colors.¹³⁹

Many of the original owners were the type to appreciate these added amenities because of their connections to the arts, including Max and Rita Lawrence, future proprietors of *California Pottery*, actress Barbara Billingsley, and television and cinema art director Seymour Klate.¹⁴⁰

But I also strongly agree with Denzer's assessment that,

...Ain would freely admit that he had no fixed point of reference for the project's inhabitants. 'In planning the house, architect and builder sensibly recognized that the 'average' family which constituted their market, does not exist as such...All families are different and therefore the plan was made extremely flexible to allow the consumer, within limits, to design his own house.'¹⁴¹

Mar Vista was originally intended for subscribers only, but in the end it attracted only 20 and the rest of the 32 houses were sold to the general public. As a result the tract "was a severe financial loss to the developer" and the first phase of 52 houses was the only one completed.¹⁴² Fortunately, all of the original houses are still extant. The Historic

¹³⁹ Los Angeles Conservancy, *Historic Preservation Overlay Zones*, 20.

¹⁴⁰ S. Ravi Tam, "Distant Vistas: Exploring the Historic Neighborhoods of Mar Vista," (self-published booklet by the author), 110-113.

¹⁴¹ Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 141-142. Denzer's quote is taken from an interview by Kathryn Smith, Los Angeles, July 27, 1977, sourced from the Esther McCoy papers, Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art (AAA), Washington, DC.

¹⁴² McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 129-130.

Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) has deemed all but three of the original houses as “contributing structures,” meaning that they “retain elements that identify [them] as belonging to that period” without significant irreversible alterations.¹⁴³ Because many of the major landscaping features are still in place, it is possible to observe the landscaping in its mature state. (fig. 33)

To clarify what Ain accomplished in his design for the Mar Vista Tract, it is important to contextualize the project against other planned housing communities of the era. I will do this through a comparison to his more progressive Community Homes project and alternatively to a typical housing development of the time, Kaiser Community Homes. I would like to expand Anthony Denzer’s characterization of Community Homes by situating its progressive urban planning features against those of the Mar Vista Tract. Although both act as an extension of early Modernist ideology in postwar Southern California, Mar Vista was planned and completed as a mono-functional neighborhood unit, while Community Homes was conceived as a more comprehensive plan, including areas zoned for commercial use, community buildings, and a school site. (fig. 34) I believe that in the latter project Ain, Johnson, and Day came closest to their European predecessors in conceiving the neighborhood as a cohesive multi-functional

¹⁴³ “Contributing structures are those structures, landscape features, natural features, or sites identified as Contributing in the Historic Resources survey for the HPOZ. Generally, ‘contributing’ structures will have been built within the historic Period of Significance of the HPOZ, and will retain elements that identify it as belonging to that period. The historic period of significance of the HPOZ is usually the time period in which the majority of construction in the area occurred. In some instances, structures that are compatible with the architecture of that period or that are historic in their own right, but were built outside of the Period of Significance of the district, will also be ‘contributing.’” Los Angeles Conservancy, *Historic Preservation Overlay Zones*, 23-24.



Figure 33. Mature Landscaping, Mar Vista Tract, 2014. Image by Author.

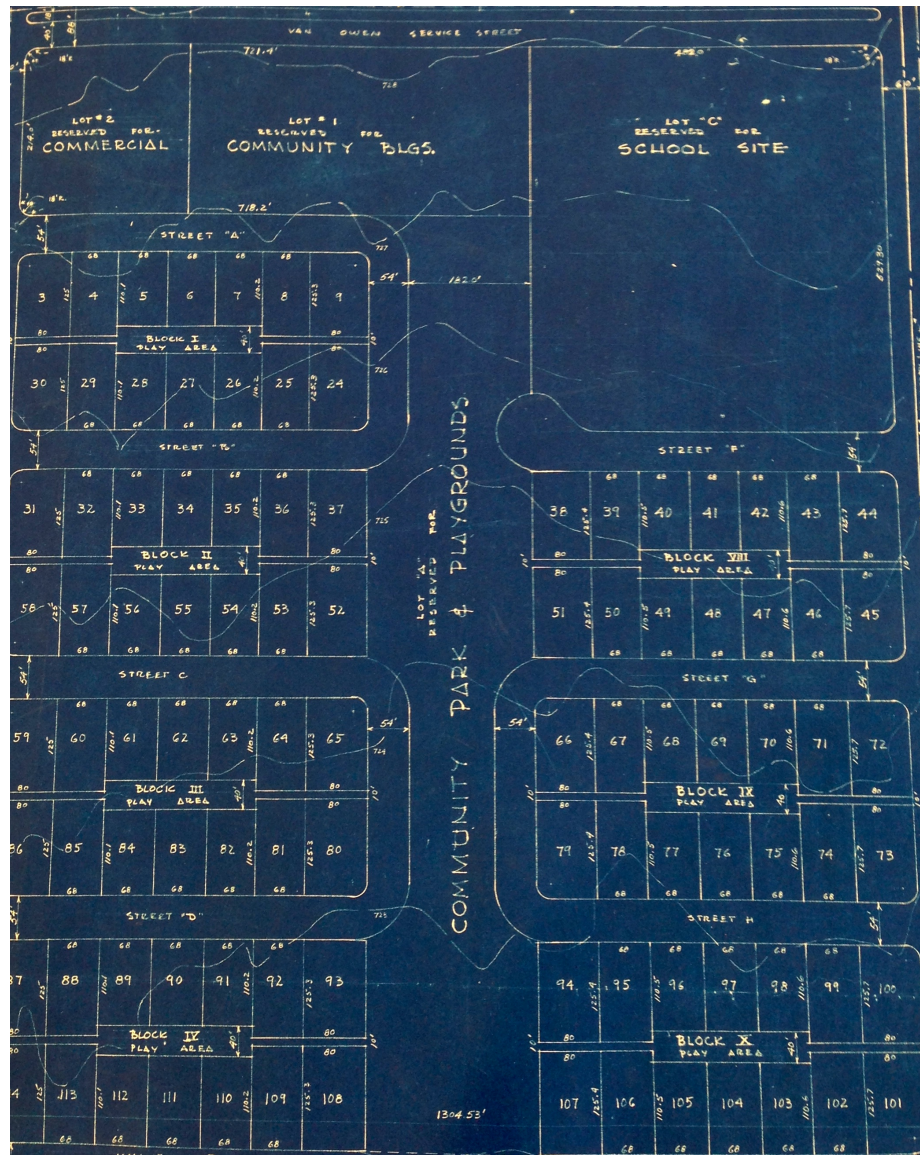


Figure 34. Gregory Ain, Site Plan, Community Homes, 1946.

neighborhood unit. This is not surprising considering Ain's association with Walter Gropius through his Guggenheim grant and his extensive contact with Richard Neutra. As noted above, Johnson and Day also participated in this cross-pollination with European Modernists and would have reinforced this ideology when conceptualizing Mar Vista. As a result, I believe this collaboration further strengthened Ain's commitment to modernist urban planning. I contend, however, that Mar Vista represents an interesting liminal zone between the idealism of the Community Homes project and the more commercially driven approach of Kaiser Community Homes.

As discussed in previous chapters, Ain's introduction to CIAM ideology was through Neutra, and much of this ideology is present in both Community Homes and the Mar Vista Tract.¹⁴⁴ During the war Neutra actively participated (with Gropius) in the 1943 New York CIAM "Chapter for Relief and Postwar Planning."¹⁴⁵ One of the group's main goals was to "...make the past work of the CIAM (1928-1939), its organization and aims known to the authorities who will have a say in the relief shelter and postwar planning."¹⁴⁶ During the same time, in the U.S., Neutra was putting CIAM's ideas to work in his Channel Heights Housing Project (1942) for shipyard workers in San Pedro,

¹⁴⁴ Neutra was in attendance at CIAM meetings that dealt directly with urban planning, including CIAM V, entitled "Dwelling and Recreation" which was dedicated to "...the importance of town planning in producing a well rounded society." Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, 110.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 146.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

California.¹⁴⁷ (fig. 35) This project, “coordinated by the Los Angeles Housing Authority,” was completed in 1943 and contained 222 residential structures, a communal market, community center, crafts center, and a school.¹⁴⁸ Like Ain’s later Community Homes project, Channel Heights featured many of the ideals that CIAM espoused, including comprehensive planning, with communal facilities, large amounts of land dedicated to public space, and a variety of housing types united by Modern design principals. Even with the success of projects like Channel Heights, by 1947 Neutra was warning, while reporting on Los Angeles for CIAM VI in England, about “the shifting unpredictability of real estate values, the vague speculative possibilities of 1000 square miles of land with good accessibility by private rubber tires, [that] have in the past constantly overtaken... premeditated planning...”¹⁴⁹ Neutra’s desire for “premeditated planning” was something that Ain would emulate in projects like Community Homes and Mar Vista, although to differing degrees. Unfortunately, the influence of real estate values, private vehicles, and profit motive were what ultimately constrained Ain’s designs for the Mar Vista Tract.

At the same time that members of CIAM were attempting to influence the direction of postwar planning through their efforts in New York, the federal government was shifting away from the government-sponsored programs of the New Deal toward a

¹⁴⁷ Hines, *Architecture of the Sun*, 408.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Mumford, *CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, 174.



Figure 35. Richard Neutra, Channel Heights Housing, San Pedro, 1942-43. Julius Shulman, photographer.

re-conceptualization of government largesse in terms of what economist Robert Collins calls “growthmanship,” also known as “economic growth.”¹⁵⁰ Collins argues that,

Although focused and articulated most clearly by the new Council of Economic Advisors [active from 1946], the postwar interest in economic growth per se was not the Council’s unique discovery or intellectual property. Talk of abundance, hopes of abundance, plans for abundance were all in the air as the war drew to a close.¹⁵¹

And “the movement away from scarcity economics toward a new economics of abundance gathered impetus steadily throughout the war years...”¹⁵² Following the war, fears about a post-war economic slump and possible return to depression were paramount. Talk of abundance and economic growth policies extended to the Bureau of the Budget’s Fiscal Division, including prominent business organizations like the Committee for Economic Development and other influential government officials.¹⁵³ The government’s solution was a full-scale push towards retooling war-time industries to create demand for mass-produced products keeping the economic engines of the postwar period strong.

As growthmanship came increasingly to be discussed in explicitly Keynesian terms, with an emphasis on boosting aggregate demand (which came to be translated as: consumption, more consumption), the

¹⁵⁰ Collins, *More*, 17.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 14.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 17.

convergence between postwar political economy and the voracious postwar culture of consumption became ever more complete.¹⁵⁴

Overall, there was a growing rejection of the ‘mature economy’ theories that underlined ‘New Deal’ policies.¹⁵⁵ Practices that had reinforced socialized approaches to housing during the war, and provided architects like Neutra with the funding to design and build wartime housing, were coming to an abrupt end. Instead, the government shifted from a model of allocating federal funds directly to social welfare projects to a model where spending was geared toward boosting economic activity through the consumer market. Figures show that “federal spending, which... had crested at 10.5% of Gross National Product in 1936, averaged 17.3% over the 1947-60 period,” which “...greatly increased the federal government’s power to influence the pace of economic activity.”¹⁵⁶ This approach, in theory, would raise the fortunes of all citizens.

Ain was operating within both the opportunities and restrictions of this rapidly evolving economic, social, and political climate. Although Mar Vista’s design had many more ideological and aesthetic similarities to Community Homes, the clientele ended up being more closely related to that of Kaiser Community Homes. According to Robert Kahan, Ain’s financing partner on Community Homes, the Community Homes’ members were “...young professionals-actors, doctors, attorneys, musicians, teachers...”¹⁵⁷ And

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 39.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁵⁷ McCoy, *The Second Generation*, 119.

the successful aerospace industry in Los Angeles combined with “... the vaunted baby boom in the years 1944-64, gave America the largest absolute population increase in history” and created “...the explosive growth of the crabgrass frontier of suburbia and in the emergence of the sunbelt.”¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately, many of Ain’s ideas about planned housing communities were both practically and ideologically at odds with the new postwar economics of growthmanship and the government’s political stance of consumption as an extension of democracy. Although he did not participate directly in government housing projects during the war, Ain’s One Family Defense House project symbolized his commitment to the government’s role in housing support.¹⁵⁹ Ain’s teachers and contemporaries, including Neutra and Eckbo, shared his views and also participated in wartime and depression-era government housing projects. At the same time, there was a strong economic incentive, spurred by the push toward economic growth, to both create and meet demand. For architecture, this meant a focus on the number of houses, not necessarily their quality. Scholars have explored this phenomenon extensively in massive developments like Levittown, but there has been little investigation into how the interwar ideology of rationing and socialist policies begin to conflict with the well-known postwar consumer-driven model. The Mar Vista Tract was

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵⁹ He did also work in the Eames office during the war helping develop the molded plywood splint, but he did not design any architecture.

being conceptualized during this period when the public began to focus on the future, the rise of consumption, and the pursuit of pleasure.

When comparing the Mar Vista Tract to the Community Homes project, designed at roughly the same time, the differences are striking. According to Anthony Denzer, “the plan for Community Homes included 280 detached single-family homes, as well as schools, community buildings, and a shopping center, to constitute a completely planned community.”¹⁶⁰ (fig. 36) In this comparison there are two important factors. First, the comprehensive plan of Community Homes included nonresidential functions. Second, the amount of property and value given to public green spaces. Not coincidentally, these are the elements that Ain, Johnson, and Day were not able to execute in the Mar Vista Tract because of its traditional developer-architect relationship. Community Homes consists of a series of housing clusters bounded by loop streets that connect to the main roads surrounding the development. (Fig. 34) Within each cluster are two rows of houses that face out toward the street with individual back yards connected to internal “finger parks.”¹⁶¹ These parks then connect to one of two large “community parks and playgrounds,” spanning the length of the development on either side, or to long “green belt parks” of their own.¹⁶² The result is an internal network of safe, walkable, and public green space separated from vehicular traffic. This also connects residents directly to the

¹⁶⁰ Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 121.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁶² “Mar Vista Housing, Advanced Development Company,” *Gregory Ain papers* (Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara)

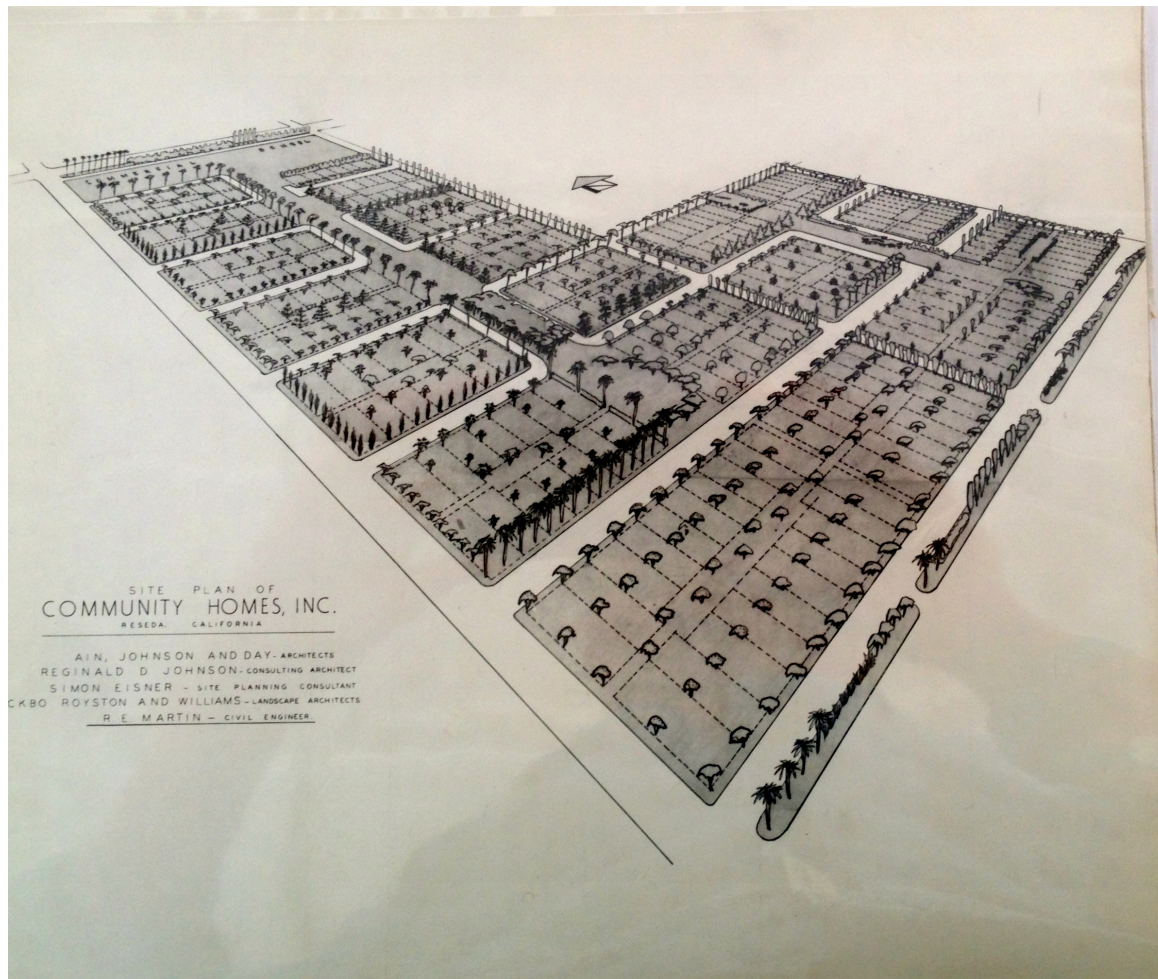


Figure 36. Gregory Ain and Reginald Johnson, architects, Eckbo, Royston and Williams, landscape architects, Site Plan of Community Homes, n.d.

commercial and school zones at the North corner of the development. These public spaces, combined with their proximity to the non-residential zones, support a communal experience of the neighborhood where walking is encouraged and driving is accommodated merely by necessity.

In contrast, Ain's plans for the Mar Vista Tract feature public space only in the front yards, leaving the back yards demarcated as individual private lots. Although Ain, Johnson, and Day were working with B.M. Edelman "...an enlightened developer..." who, according to Ain, "[had] a more human definition of commodity," they were still restricted to the grid pattern dictated by the economics of a typical postwar development.¹⁶³ Instead of devoting a portion of the back yard space to a communal park like they had done with Community Homes, Ain, Johnson and Day were forced to create individual back yards behind each house. (fig. 37) And because the tract was only zoned for residential use, the architects were unable to include the more progressive urban planning elements found in Community Homes, like finger-parks, public spaces, and the direct connection to non-residential areas. When compared to the unbuilt Community Homes project, the Mar Vista Tract resembles a more traditional housing development of the postwar period, whose design is dictated primarily by land speculation and profit. But Ain, Johnson, and Day did make an attempt to innovate within the confines of this traditional structure. Many of their most effective concepts are best understood when compared to a typical development of the time, like Kaiser Community Homes.

¹⁶³ Denzer, *Gregory Ain*, 145.

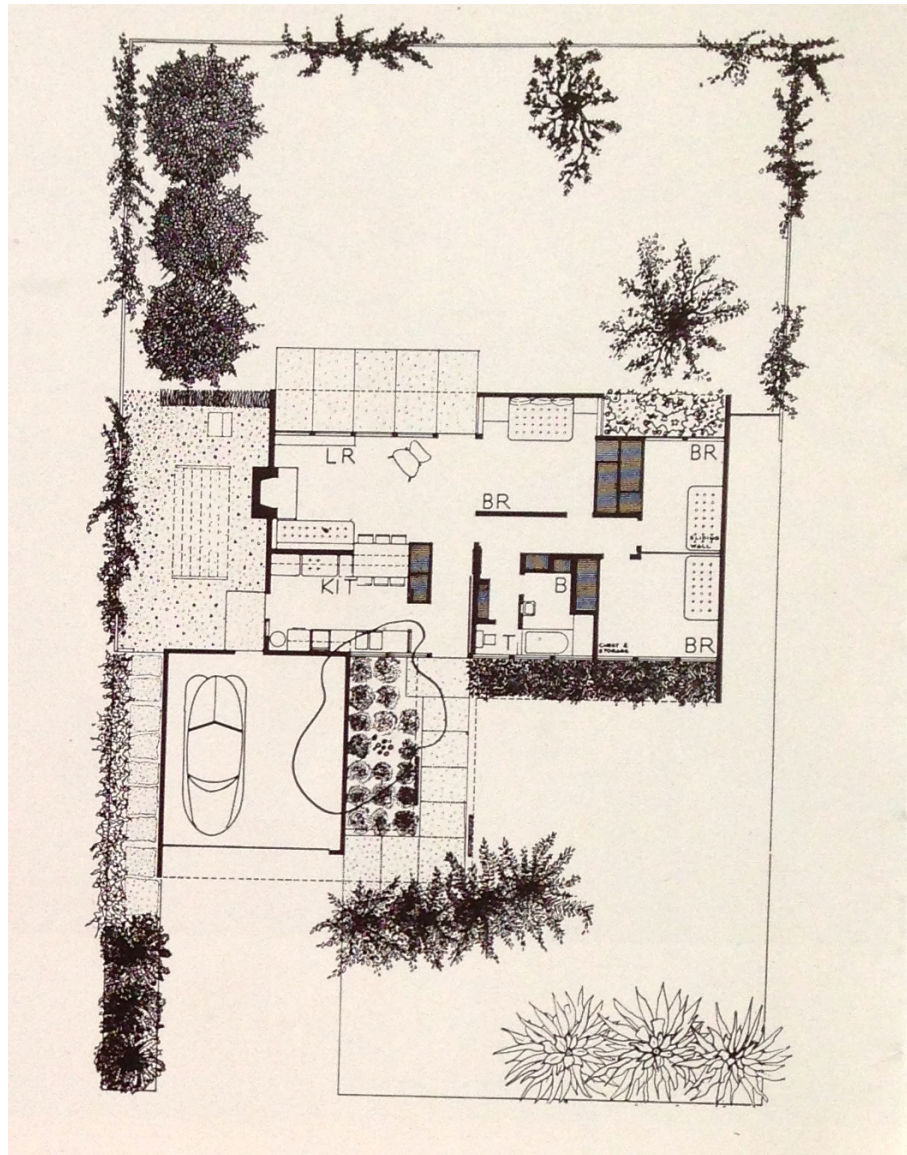


Figure 37. Gregory Ain, Floor Plan, Mar Vista Tract, Featured in Arts and Architecture, September 1949.

In 1961, Lewis Mumford described the suburbs of Los Angeles as “...cheap excursions into distant lands or into past moments of history,” where “domestic whimsy offset productive utilitarian monotony.”¹⁶⁴ Just 15 years after the end of the war, Mumford aptly summed up the downside of mass-produced postwar housing and land speculation. During the war “Federal Housing Administration representative, Fred Marlow, teamed up with builder extraordinaire Fritz Burns and eventually J. Kaiser” and began perfecting the art of mass-produced housing.¹⁶⁵ By 1945 these “operative builders” were planning Kaiser Community Homes, “with Kaiser as chairman of the board, Burns as president, and Marlow as head of the land development division.”¹⁶⁶ The construction of this tract was done in groups of 200 to 2,500 homes, that sold for \$7,950 to \$8,800, including the cost of the land, a scale much larger than Mar Vista and a price almost 50% less per unit.¹⁶⁷ According to a February 1947 article in *Science Illustrated*, “their factory builds, besides the “chassis” units, wall panels, ceiling and floor panels, plumbing and kitchen cabinets.”¹⁶⁸ (fig. 38) Although each house was exactly the same on the inside, with a “rectangular core of 5-1/2 rooms,” mass-produced exterior treatments like porches,

¹⁶⁴ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins and Transformations, and Its Prospects*. 1st ed (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 491.

¹⁶⁵ Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 113.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁶⁷ “Kaiser’s ‘Chassis’ Homes,” *Science Illustrated*, February 1947, 76.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

KAISER'S "CHASSIS" HOMES

They're assembled from factory-built units, but they don't look alike

WHAT Henry J. Kaiser is already doing to meet the housing shortage in the Los Angeles area he regards as a sample of what he will be doing shortly near Detroit, Portland (Oregon), and other of our cities. Teamed up with Fritz B. Burns, veteran Los Angeles land developer, Kaiser is completing 1,700 homes near the California city, and before the year is over he expects to put up 10,000 more, there and elsewhere.

There's conjecture about just how many homes Kaiser can provide in 1948, but the nation remembers how he turned production impossibilities into production records when the nation needed cement, steel, and ships.

Kaiser builds communities, not of houses, but of attractive, liveable homes, communities complete with shops, churches, schools. You pay \$7,950 to \$8,800, and Kaiser gives you a modern, three-bedroom home with a two-car garage, and throws in a lot worth around \$2,000. Kaiser communities, under construction or in project, run in groups of 200 to 2,500 homes.

As you look at a block of Kaiser homes you can't find two that look alike, and yet each house is the same in interior construction. This is the secret of Kaiser's mass production plan; he builds "chassis" for houses, as Detroit builds chassis for automobiles.

The Kaiser chassis consists of a rectangular core of 54 rooms. This he turns out in a sprawling 15-acre factory. Garages, roofs, porches also are mass-produced, but they are put on the chassis in a variety of ways.

One house may have the garage attached at the right front corner. One may have it at the left rear corner. Or a third may have it completely detached.

Some walls are a yard thick

Your roof may have a high pitch and two slopes. Your neighbor's may have four sloping surfaces and a low pitch. Your house can be white stucco, or clapboard, or dark redwood, or a combination of several finishes.

It was Kaiser's partner, Burns, who doped out the idea



ONE OF 20 three-bedroom models built from the same chassis.



THE CHASSIS from which the 20 different three-bedroom models are built. Foundation of garage is in place but garage has not been assembled. At left is another identical chassis. Directly

across the street, in this Kaiser-Burns community, in unfinished state is the house shown in upper photo. Kaiser is building complete communities with shops, schools, and 200 to 2,500 homes.

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SCIENCE ILLUSTRATED

Figure 38. Science Illustrated, Kaiser's 'Chassis' Homes, 1947.

roofs, and garages were combined in different ways to give the illusion of variety.¹⁶⁹ (fig. 39) Kaiser prided himself on the multiplicity of exterior treatments applied to these factory-produced “chassis,” including styles like “Ranch and Cape Cod.”¹⁷⁰ Even with his efforts to disguise their manufactured monotony, these homes were all essentially the same. “Innovative” exterior treatments provided only minor cosmetic differentiation. The architecture of the homes themselves, the overall site plan, and the landscaping, did little to alleviate the inevitable anonymity caused by their sameness.

Ain confronted the same issue as Kaiser: how to avoid the anonymity that results from mass-produced housing. Unlike the “historic” styles applied like a veneer to the outside of Kaiser “Chassis” Homes, Ain’s Mar Vista Tract produced true architectural variety. And when it was finished the tract was marketed as both modern and unique.¹⁷¹ By 1948, the *Mirror* played on the rampant monotony of postwar suburbia as a foil to the design of Mar Vista,

A suburbanite trying to find his house in a large subdivision where every house on the block is practically the same in appearance. That theme and variations on it is a favorite of cartoonists. But there is at least one tract of 52 houses in Los Angeles where the cartoonists cannot make this comedy take off.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Cuff, *The Provisional City*, 248.

¹⁷¹ Jay C. Allen, “Modernique Homes Feature New Designs and Color Combinations,” *Building Contractor of California*, February 1949, 6.

¹⁷² “New Flexibility Features Modern Residence Design.” *The Mirror*, November 1948, 32.

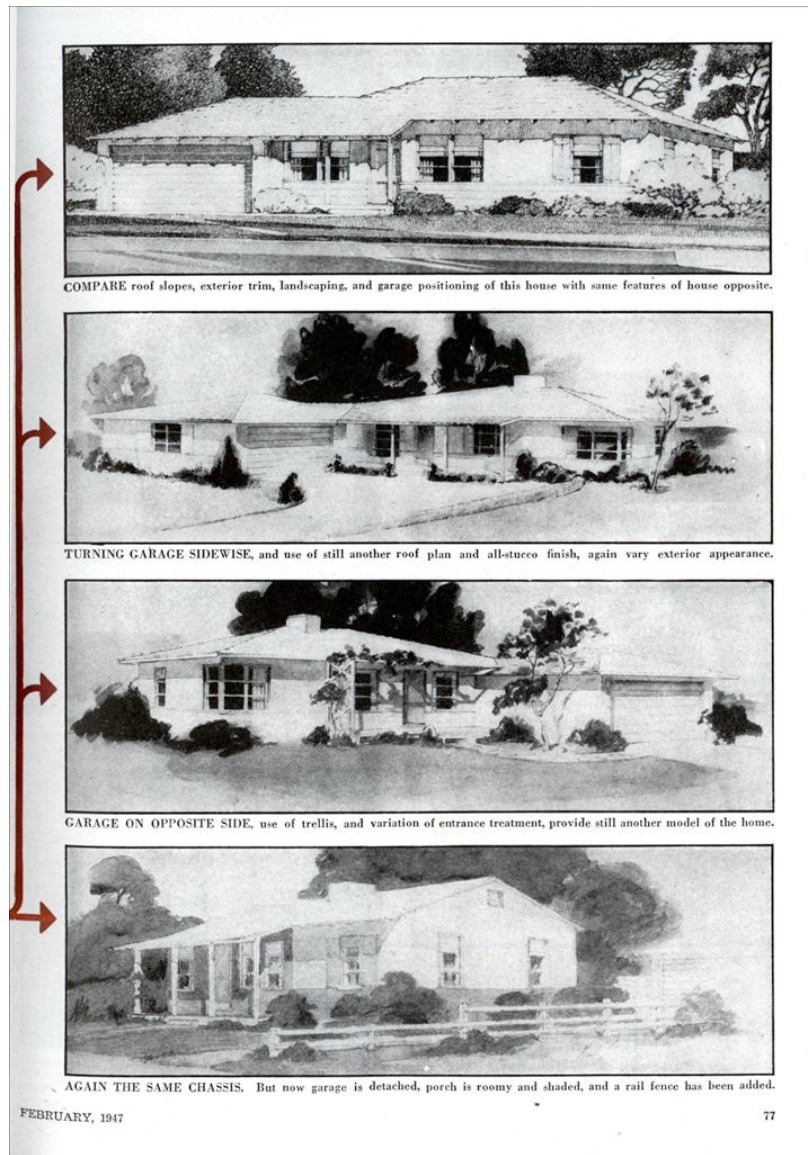


Figure 39. Science Illustrated, Kaiser's 'Chassis' Homes, 1947.

Without disguising itself in past styles, Mar Vista conveyed differentiation through a strategic Modernist approach to mass production, landscape design, color, and site planning. Although he did employ some of the same approaches used in Kaiser Community Homes, like the variable placement of the garages and porches, Ain chose to embrace the utility of mass production. In the Mar Vista development each house is clearly part of an aesthetically cohesive whole, defined by its modernist flat roofs, clerestory windows, and modular construction. In addition to creating a sense of individuality, Ain's innovations also provided practical solutions to some of the most isolating features of the typical postwar suburban development, like repetition, subservience to the car, and lack of integration with nature.

From the exterior it is not easy to understand the methods Ain used to achieve the distinctive variety in the Mar Vista Tract. But in Ain's plans and descriptions the methodology becomes clear. For the sake of building and cost efficiency, his designs for Mar Vista consist of identical core units and variable exterior treatments where the internal unit of each house is a rectangular core. This way the entire unit can be rotated on the lot to generate variety.¹⁷³ (fig. 40) The internal structure will be explored shortly, but here it is important to view each core unit as a building block that can be manipulated to increase heterogeneity using a limited number of elements. In Ain's plans for Mar

¹⁷³ "Sliding Walls Make a Small House Large," *House and Garden*, August 1951.

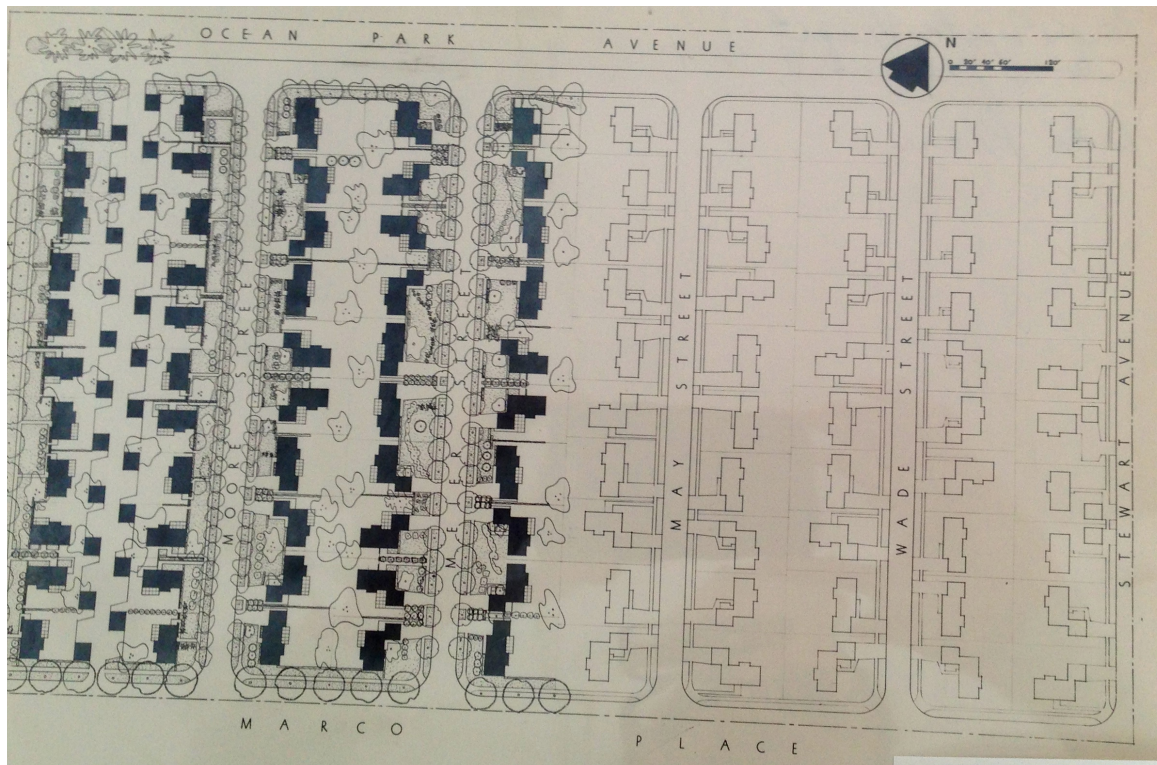


Figure 40. Gregory Ain, Site Plan, Mar Vista Tract, c. 1946-47.

Vista he includes a “legend of house type symbols”¹⁷⁴ that identifies five unique adaptations that can be applied to each house to create diversity including,

1. Variation in house orientation or changes in relation of garage and house (“1,2,3”), 2. Left and right relation of kitchen from the front door when facing the house from the outside (“L & R”), 3. Two additional transom windows in the kitchen (“t”), 4. Canopy type roof over entrance walk (“c”), and 5. Wood floor on a sloping lot (“w”).¹⁷⁵ (fig. 41)

In the plans each house is labeled using this key to denote which adaptations have been applied. I would argue that Ain conceived of the tract using mirrored plans (as he had done before), then added layers of differentiation. Each pair is then set apart through the use of his five levels of variation detailed above.¹⁷⁶ When viewed together you can see that no set of pairs has received the same treatment. In some paired plans Ain uses the “special canopy roof over the entrance walk” on one house and not the other. (fig. 42) In others, only one house has the “additional transom windows.” These subtle changes create effective distinctions without adding additional labor or cost. Depending on which façade faces the street and which combination of elements are utilized, the exterior patterning becomes very different. This means that no two homes are identical, even before the introduction of landscape, fencing, or color.

Unlike Park Planned Homes and the One Family Defense House, where a single floor plan simply mirrors itself, in the Mar Vista Tract the “long side” of the plan is

¹⁷⁴ “Mar Vista Housing, Advanced Development Company,” *Gregory Ain papers* (Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ For the sake of brevity, wood floors are not discussed here.

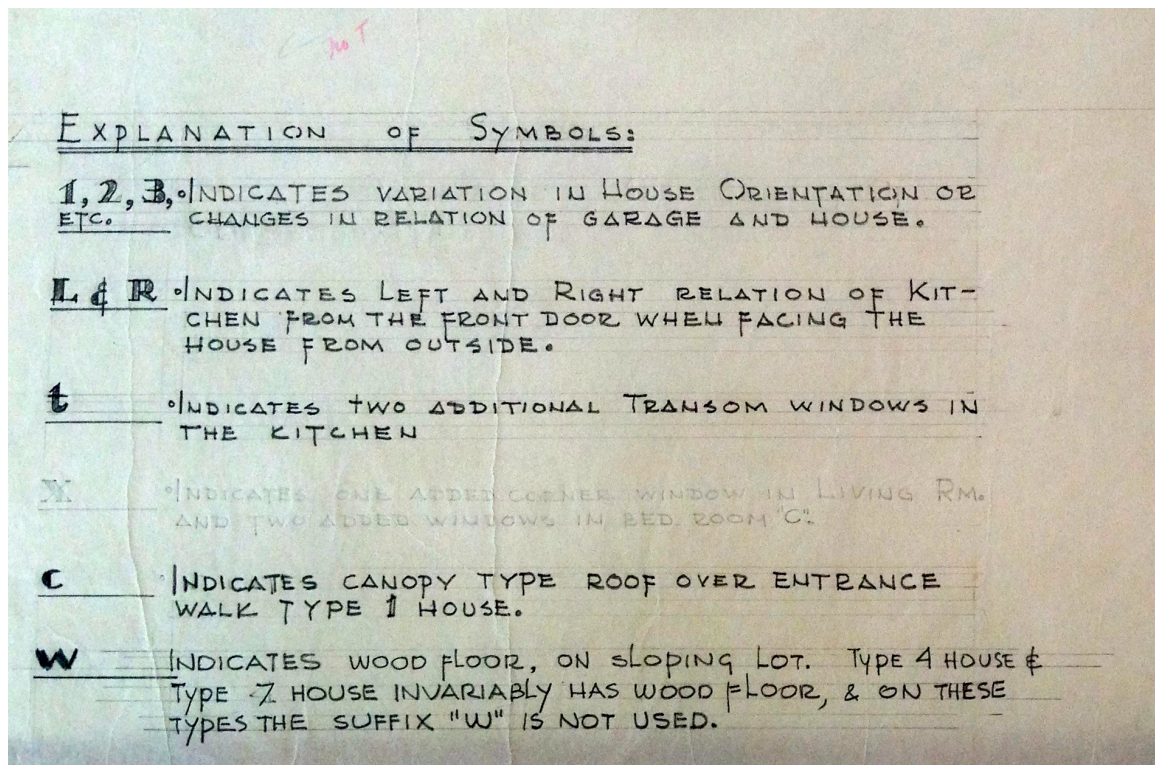


Figure 41. Gregory Ain, Legend of House Type Symbols, Mar Vista Tract Plans, 1946-47.



Figure 42. Julius Shulman, Mar Vista Housing Development, 1947-48.

rotated either parallel or perpendicular to the street. (fig. 43) The houses facing parallel to the street include large swaths of windows. But the living rooms follow Ain's well-established model, facing only the side- and back- yards.¹⁷⁷ In some plan pairings the private portions of the house, on the kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom side, mirror their counterpart in the neighboring house, meaning that the two houses essentially "look" into each other. But Ain devised a way to deal with privacy issues, giving him the freedom to orient the houses any way he chose. Instead of relying on plan orientation to create privacy he uses different windows sizes to affect privacy.

On the more "public" side of the house there are three types of windows. The kitchen features half-size windows, the bathroom has narrow clerestory windows situated just under the roofline, and the bedroom utilizes three-quarter length windows. (fig. 44) On the "private" side of the house full-length windows connect the living room to the back yard, and three quarter windows are again used for the bedroom. The master bedroom is situated as a pop-out from the core unit, getting light from windows on either side of the exterior wall. (fig. 45) When the party wall is open it also receives ample light from the living room. Of course the placement of the garage can effect the number of windows, but the window placement is essentially the same in each unit.

An additional layer of visual interest is achieved through the gates and fencing that connect the houses. Although not fully present in the houses today, Ain's detail

¹⁷⁷ This is a characteristic of all his planned housing communities, beginning with the One Family Defense House.

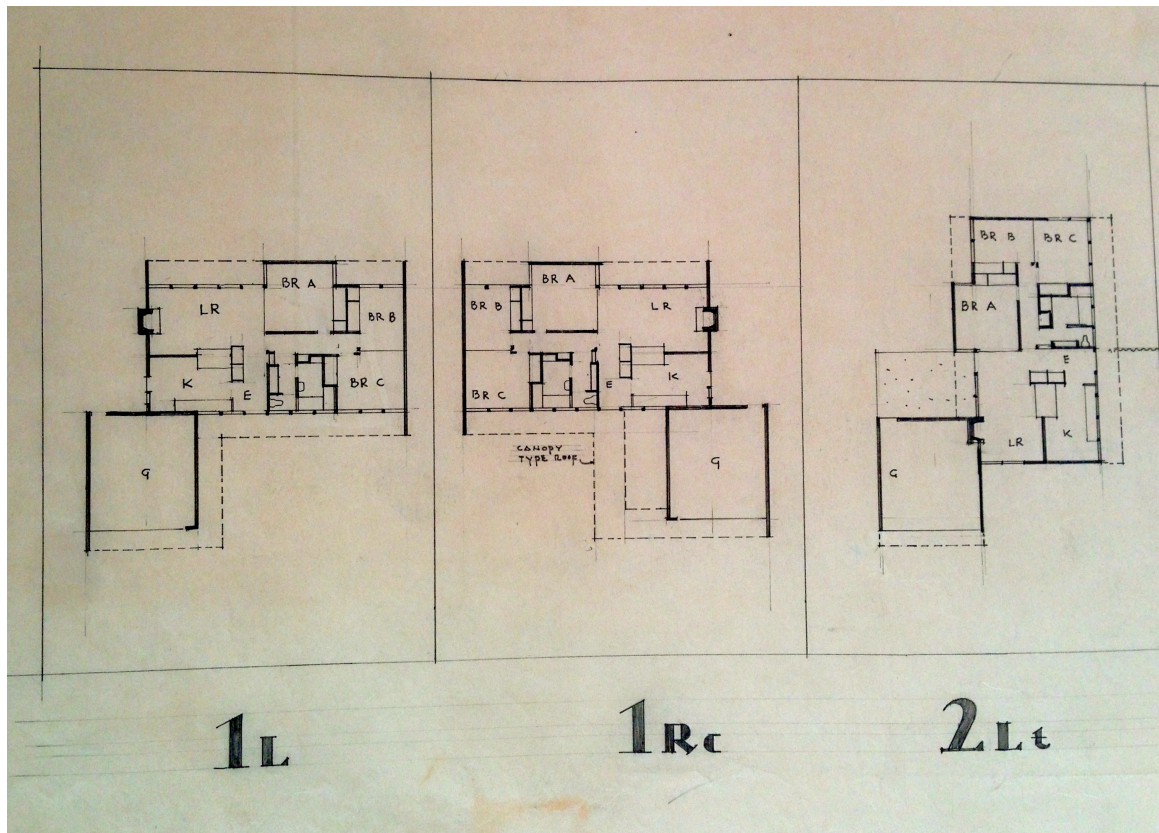


Figure 43. Gregory Ain, Mar Vista Tract, plans for house 1L, 1Rc, and 2Lt, 1946-47.



Figure 44. Gregory Ain, Mar Vista Tract, c. 1948.



Figure 45. Gregory Ain, Mar Vista Tract, c. 1948.

drawings include gates with sections of wood slatting and “shiplap” oriented horizontally and vertically.¹⁷⁸ (fig. 46) Ain also indicates the use of stucco on some of the fencing that makes certain houses appear larger. Along with the different patterns and textures, the fencing is designed at varying heights and setbacks. The resulting motif, combined with the solids and voids of the window placement, makes each façade highly complex.¹⁷⁹ But the tract is still unified by materials and design.¹⁸⁰ Ain also increased the structural variety through the use of color.

There were a total of 23 different color design combinations created for the houses. This was done from 24 colors and an additional seven floor colors...The *Plochere Color System* (1948) provided a muted palette, with a few daring accent colors.¹⁸¹

When cross-referencing the colors Ain chose for Mar Vista with the Euclidian layout of the color swatches in the 1948 *Plochere Color System in Book Form: A Guide to Color and Color Harmony* (which were laid out from light to dark across a two-page spread and the shades from top to bottom) we can see how Ain again applied a mathematical

¹⁷⁸ “Mar Vista Housing, Advanced Development Company,” *Gregory Ain papers* (Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara)

¹⁷⁹ This is done in a manner similar to the combined façade of Park Planned Homes.

¹⁸⁰ In contrast to earlier German *seidlungen*, where patterning is achieved through repetition, Ain’s design places much more emphasis on exterior diversification.

¹⁸¹ Hans Adamson, “Colors,” *marvistatract.org*, March 20, 2014, http://marvistatract.org/tract_color_chart.html.

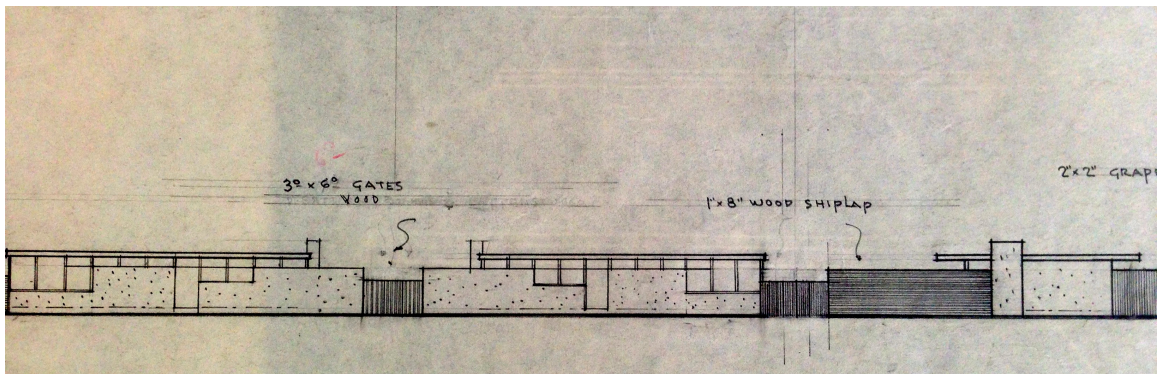


Figure 46. Gregory Ain, Elevation Detail, Mar Vista Tract, 1948.

approach to the creation of variety.¹⁸² He chose neutral colors from designated sections of each two-page spread and accent (highlight) colors from opposing sections of another spread. As a result, no two houses next to each other would be painted the same color or feature the same color combinations.¹⁸³ Yet he still utilized a narrow selection of colors. Each house was conceived using the same basic structure, but the orientation, glazing, fencing, and final color create a unique view from the street. So any section of the tract becomes reminiscent of the variety found in a Mondrian painting, where pleasure is derived from the intricate play of contrasting geometric forms in space. This poetic approach was not lost on Garrett Eckbo when he designed the landscape plan.

As they had done in previous projects together, Ain and Eckbo worked to reconceptualize the suburban development, giving equal precedent to nature and architecture. Eckbo characterized Mar Vista this way:

Planting, confined to the front yards with some trees in the rears, endeavors to develop a spatial park-like quality, rather than the standard two-dimensional ‘foundation planting.’ It also endeavors, by exploiting the wealth of plant material, to expand and integrate the spatial relations established architecturally, and at the same time to individualize the houses.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² On each two-page page of the *Plochere Color System* the color swatches are glued into the book in a grid format. The grid is labeled “one” through “six” across the two-page spread from left to right, and labeled “A” through “H” from top to bottom on each page. This creates a grid where certain tones of muted colors are always found on designated parts of the two page spread. Conversely certain tones of very bright “accent” colors are found on different parts of the page. This creates a repeatable system that can be followed with any color combination.

¹⁸³ Hans Adamson, “Colors,” *marvistatract.org*, March 20, 2014, http://marvistatract.org/tract_color_chart.html. This website shows an incomplete diagram that supports this notion.

¹⁸⁴ Eckbo, *Landscape for Living*, 236.

In contrast to Kaiser Community Homes where “nature” is relegated to a small square of grass in the front yard truncated on each side by driveways, Mar Vista features large expanses of green park-like space in the front. Similar to Park Planned Homes, the Mar Vista Tract features a pairing of “front yards.” But instead of isolated pods that link each pair of houses, the front yards are combined to give the effect of one large strip of green space spanning the length of the street. This is most successful on Moore Street, where the garages are placed in the rear alley between Moore and Beethoven. (fig. 40) The increased green space between the houses and sidewalk acts as a collective park, interrupted only by pathways from the sidewalk to the doors. (fig. 47) Unfortunately there is no similar alley between Moore and Meier streets, so the east side of Moore street and all houses on Meier street have garages integrated into their plans. This allows for shorter stretches of landscaping between the driveways, but the intention is the same. This verdant public atmosphere is further enhanced by the fact that pedestrians are visually and physically separated from vehicular traffic. Throughout the tract the sidewalk is buffered from the street by the long line of mature trees stretching from one end to the other. These allées of Melaleuca trees on Moore street, Magnolia trees on Meier street, and Ficus trees on Beethoven street are still present today. (fig. 48) They achieve in the Mar Vista Tract the cohesive park-like setting that was originally intended for Park Planned Homes.

Although these frontal parks improve upon the precedent set by typical housing developments like Kaiser Community Homes they are not as progressive as those of



Figure 47. Julius Shulman, Mar Vista Housing Development, 1947-48.



Figure 48. Contemporary View of the Mar Vista Tract, 2014, Image by Author.

Community Homes. The value of Community Homes' finger parks is the fact that they are removed from both the public space of the front yard and private space of the back yard. They are placed in an intermediary third zone that is created solely “for the benefit of all residents.”¹⁸⁵ In Eckbo’s opinion this landscape of “sixteen acres of park space in central strips and inner-block finger-parks [made] possible a balanced and integrated pattern of recreation for all ages.”¹⁸⁶ In Mar Vista Ain and Eckbo were able to realize, in a slightly more muted form, the finger-parks first conceived for Community Homes. But because of the Mar Vista tract’s strict grid pattern they were unable to create a truly communal atmosphere. Unfortunately for Ain and Eckbo, dedicating a percentage of residentially zoned real estate to economically unproductive areas was risky in the postwar economic climate, even with a “progressive developer.”¹⁸⁷ In *The City in History* Lewis Mumford notes the causes of the postwar suburb’s negation of communal public space,

By discouraging and eliminating the pedestrian, by failing to extend and to perfect the mass transit, our municipal officials and highway engineers have created a situation that calls for extremely low residential densities. Here again the monopoly of private space not merely reduces the social facilities of the city but sacrifices public open space to private.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 243.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 236.

¹⁸⁸ Mumford, *The City in History*, 510.

During an era when land and time were at a premium, extra space dedicated to purely civic purposes (and removed from further housing development) was not an option without a drastic change in the existing social and economic system. I believe Ain's designs for the Mar Vista Tract worked within this system, while also attempting to reform it.

Interestingly, this same logic was used in the May 1948 issue of *Arts & Architecture* magazine to contextualize the Mar Vista Tract,

The great majority of houses being erected today are the product of operative builders, who provide the lot as well as the finished house to purchasers who have little or no active part in expressing their preferences, or in determining the character of the structure. Most operative builders, like most radio writers and most movie producers, assume that they know 'what the public wants;' and their assumption is usually insulting to the public's intelligence. This is not surprising, since the object of most construction is a quick and profitable sale, rather than the genuine satisfaction of a common general need.¹⁸⁹

The article goes on to say, "no one of the hundred hypothetical average families could be presumed to be really 'average;' the house plan must be flexible, and adaptable to varied family compositions. Hence the liberal use of sliding partitions."¹⁹⁰ Ain was aware that the postwar client was most likely a young couple with one or more children, which was the norm during the postwar baby boom. Although much of the advertising at the time assumed this fact, Ain did not let this circumstance restrict the design possibilities for Mar Vista. Just as the exteriors of the houses provided genuine variety within a narrow

¹⁸⁹ "One Hundred Houses," *Arts & Architecture*, May 1948.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

set of constraints, the interior plans strove for flexibility and individuality as well. I would argue that the introduction of choice permitted by the moveable walls not only goes beyond the basic faults of houses by operative builders like Kaiser, and even Ain's plans for Park Planned Homes, but also answers the question: who is the 'common man'? Unlike other planned communities, Ain found a way to adapt the typical home for the "average nuclear family" to accommodate many different family types and arrangements.

Like Kaiser Community Homes, each plan consists of a matching central core. A rectangular box housing the living room and kitchen on one end, the master bedroom "A" and the bathroom in the middle, and bedrooms "B" and "C" on the opposite end. (fig. 43) But unlike Kaiser Community Homes, where a singular floor plan was imposed upon all potential inhabitants, the internal structure of the Mar Vista homes were extremely flexible. Ain achieved this through the use of moveable walls between bedrooms "B" and "C," and between "master" bedroom "A" and the living room. The range of options created by just two moveable walls are impressive for such a small house. According to the 1949 *Arts & Architecture* article about Mar Vista: "...a three bedroom house was determined as the best house to meet the requirements. Flexibility of use was then achieved by use of sliding walls to actually permit the use of the house as a one, two, or three bedroom house, or any combination of them."¹⁹¹ When the wall between the living room and the master bedroom is "open" it expands the living room space "from a length

¹⁹¹ "One of a Hundred," *Arts & Architecture*, September 1949.

of 20 feet to 32 feet.”¹⁹² And if this same bedroom is outfitted as a “study or den,” the wall can be open during the day and then closed off at night for privacy.¹⁹³ The same logic applies to “the two smaller bedrooms (most probably children’s bedrooms) [which] can be readily converted into a single larger room by rolling the intermediate partition alongside a blank wall in the hallway.”¹⁹⁴ Or they “can be converted to a single room for use as a nursery or playroom.”¹⁹⁵ From a young couple with no children, a growing family with multiple children, an elderly couple, a single person (young or old), or simply changing daily functions, the house adapts easily to a multitude of “typical” situations. Ain understood that the average inhabitant was not average at all, from year to year, or even from hour to hour. To him this heterogeneity characterized “the common man.”

The concept of partition walls was not new, however. Ain was simply one of the first architects to utilize it in a residential project. Published in 1944, the Museum of Modern Art’s *Built in the U.S.A. 1932-44* exhibition catalog notes, “the constantly changing needs of family life must literally be met with flexibility, and a one-story house with an independently supported roof (non-load bearing) and readily adjustable full-length partitions would have many advantages.”¹⁹⁶ Because there were no extant

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ “One Hundred Houses,” *Arts & Architecture*, May 1948.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ “One of a Hundred,” *Arts & Architecture*, September 1949.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 20.

examples of residential use of temporary walls, MoMA featured three civic buildings in the catalog. Noting: “such construction has been successful in many public buildings... but its domestic use has rarely gone beyond the project stage.”¹⁹⁷ These three examples are a California High School with partition walls of plywood (1940-41), by Franklin and Krump Associates, the Fresno City Hall, (1941) also by Franklin and Krump Associates, and finally, the MoMA building itself (1939), with flexible partition walls for exhibitions.¹⁹⁸ These examples were completed at least five years prior to Ain’s plans for Mar Vista, but he was no doubt aware of this approach due to MoMA’s strong influence at the time and its connections to European Modernist emigres like Gropius.

The interior of the house also features many of the same progressive elements used in Park Planned Homes. Notable is the way the contemporary press continued to present these innovations as solutions for the typical postwar nuclear family. One of the most striking examples was written by Pauline Berg Graves:

With passing years the needs of a family in regard to their housing change completely. The newlyweds are happy with a single or one-bedroom apartment or a small house. When a baby arrives, suddenly they’re crowded, and as the child grows, his needs grow...at toddling age, a room of his own becomes imperative. Two children can...share rooms, but differences...make separate rooms infinitely better...Architect Gregory Ain, AIA...came up with a solution, a house in Mar Vista that expands to meet the needs of the growing family.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 76, 88, 90.

¹⁹⁹ Pauline Berg Graves, “This House Keeps Pace with the Family,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, Ca) December 18, 1949.

Many of Ain's design elements provided for more efficient and progressive living and encouraged communal social interaction. Some of these innovations even reduced the chores of "typical housewives" and helped to integrate their social role within the family. But contemporary magazines and news press chose to highlight her traditional role as wife, mother, and entertainer. I argue that a series of strategic design decisions by Ain actually give the house a functionality appropriate for the non-traditional housewife as well.

First is the connection between kitchen and the living room. Similar to the party walls throughout the rest of the house there is a permeable division between the kitchen and the living room. (fig. 49) In Park Planned Homes the kitchen is connected to a dining bay, but in Mar Vista it connects directly to the living room. Ain achieves this by incorporating a dining table that serves both the kitchen and the living room simultaneously. This opens up the kitchen to the rest of the house. Ain has also included a set of venetian blinds above the table that can be raised or lowered to separate the kitchen from the living room at different times of the day. Interestingly, a 1949 article from *Building Contractor* magazine contextualizes Mar Vista's kitchen space solely in terms of food service where the "dining area converts to four functional uses-Breakfast, Formal Dinner, Buffet, and Bar."²⁰⁰ And *Arts & Architecture* notes in 1948: "when opened (the normal position), the family eating space is accessible from both sides, and the housewife

²⁰⁰ Jay C. Allen, "Modernique Homes Feature New Designs and Color Combinations," *Building Contractor of California*, February 1949, 6.



Figure 49. Gregory Ain, Mar Vista Tract, c.1948.

in the kitchen can participate in social activities in the living room.”²⁰¹ When the blinds are open the kitchen has a view through the living room directly into the back yard. (fig. 50) Building on this idea, the context statement for the historic preservation overlay zone states that Ain read progressive parenting books by “Dr. Benjamin Spock...[and] since women at the time spent so much time in the kitchen. Ain felt the area needed to be open so that the mother could keep an eye on children playing in the living room and out in the yard.”²⁰² These three characterizations of Mar Vista’s kitchen portray the housewife as a person relegated to the space of the kitchen, unable to physically engage in the social activities of the living room because of her duties as homemaker. She participates only visually level through her view out from the kitchen. According to *House and Garden* magazine, Mar Vista’s kitchen table could be used for “private desk duty in the living room,” but only when the blinds are down.²⁰³ This assumes the functions of kitchen and desk are mutually exclusive and further reinforces my argument about how this progressive element was misunderstood by the era’s shelter magazines.

Ain’s second innovation was his focus on efficiency and functionality. He was more concerned with the practical nature of the home than the gendered uses of the space. As a result, Ain designed the kitchen as a multifunctional space geared toward maximum efficiency. It features state of the art finishes and amenities, like “a chrome trimmed

²⁰¹ “One Hundred Houses,” *Arts & Architecture*, May 1948.

²⁰² Los Angeles Conservancy, *Historic Preservation Overlay Zones*, 20.

²⁰³ “Sliding Walls Make a Small House Large,” *House and Garden*, August 1951.



Figure 50. Gregory Ain, View from Kitchen to Backyard, c. 1948.

formica service area...concealed wash-tray...and built-in exhaust fan.”²⁰⁴ It even includes a built-in ironing board and integrated washing machine, centralizing all housework in one area. In fact, efficiency is achieved throughout the entire house. As he did with Park Planned homes, Ain has included built-in units in every room that also function as walls. So each wall either provides storage or adds flexibility, creating efficiency not present in typical postwar homes. None of the square footage of these small houses is wasted, including in the distinctive bathroom design. The bathroom is divided up into two private spaces, one housing the toilet and the other, the bathtub “so that two persons can use the bathroom at the same time.”²⁰⁵ But the space allocated to the bathroom also houses a linen closet in a small hallway outside the toilet room. Other small details also increase efficiency, including sliding wardrobe doors in each of the bedrooms and the coat closet, and a folding accordion door between the kitchen and the front entry.

Like the partition walls and the dual function kitchen table, the open plan and glazing between the kitchen and the patio create a permeable space that increased the livability of such a small house. Like his other planned housing communities, Ain provides a living room with one full wall of glass looking out onto the back yard. Where

²⁰⁴ Jay C. Allen, “Modernique Homes Feature New Designs and Color Combinations,” *Building Contractor of California*, February 1949, 6.

²⁰⁵ “Modernique Homes” brochure, Advanced Development Company, “Mar Vista Housing, Advanced Development Company,” *Gregory Ain papers* (Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara)

“eight foot windowed walls...merge patio and garden.”²⁰⁶ Indoor-outdoor living is typical in California at this time, but for Ain it was another way of extending the space of the living room. The overall effect is one that reinforces the open plan, described by a 1949 *Building Contractor of California* article as, “Center Planning...when you enter the house you can go to any room or area without criss-crossing or back-tracking”²⁰⁷ By the time he completed the Mar Vista Tract Ain had perfected the art of permeable multi-use spaces and the Modernist open floor plan.

Continuing a legacy begun with the One Family Defense House and Park Planned Homes, Mar Vista represents the pinnacle of Ain’s designs for planned housing communities which specifically adapt to the limitations of the post WWII moment. Although Mar Vista did not include some of the most progressive elements found in Community Homes, like a cohesive neighborhood plan with non-residential zones and communal green spaces, Ain did attempt to go beyond the typical developments of the time. Kaiser Community Homes and Mar Vista have some striking similarities in their approach to mass-produced housing, but Ain’s layers of structural and cosmetic modernist adaptations make Mar Vista vastly more visually heterogeneous. This adaptability is continued in the interior with the use of moveable partition walls that allow the house to adapt itself to a multitude of domestic situations. Although the media

²⁰⁶ Jay C. Allen, “Modernique Homes Feature New Designs and Color Combinations,” *Building Contractor of California*, February 1949, 6.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

at the time presented Mar Vista according to the accepted gender roles typical of the postwar context, in reality the tract's homes provide a flexibility that frees inhabitants from conformity. But the adaptability of the houses and their spaces also allowed advertising to present them as typical postwar homes, compete with new and exciting "amenities." This flexibility ultimately proves the Mar Vista Tract's lack of anonymity. For each inhabitant/s this modern home adapted to their changing needs and desires, providing a sense of flexibility, progressiveness, and practicality, without the rigid constraints imposed upon the inhabitant found in early European Modernist housing.

Conclusion

Gregory Ain's Mar Vista Tract represents the culmination of a successful evolution of his planned housing communities from the interwar to the postwar periods. Yet his *Women's Home Companion* House for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA-*Companion* house) of 1950 was received very differently. In the MoMA-*Companion* House, each lot is presented as a purely private zone. (fig. 51) This creates a paradox where the demonstration house is very much at odds with Ain's ideology up to this point.

Some of the flaws present in the exhibition house were purely practical. It was difficult to present a full-size, fully-furnished and decorated demonstration house while also conveying how it operated when repeated at a neighborhood scale. But there seemed to be only limited effort, both in MoMA's exhibition brochure and the *Women's Home Companion* magazine article, to convey the design strategies that gave Ainian design its progressive status within the speculative housing market. Reinforcing the fact that architectural Modernism was in a state of crisis during this time, it appears the Museum of Modern Art decided to focus on the more avant-garde elements of the house, including expensive finishes and museum-quality artwork. Following a tradition established by shelter magazines like *Women's Home Companion*, this successful Modernist adaptation of the typical tract home was marketed to the upper-class housewives anticipated as the audience for a MoMA exhibition. We do not know to what degree Ain fought to preserve his forward-thinking approach in the MoMA-*Companion* House, but it is obvious that the museum and the magazine relied heavily on the interior layout to convey his design. And



Figure 51. Ezra Stoller, Installation view of the exhibition, Exhibition House by Gregory Ain, New York, NY, 1950.

each presented the house as a single entity in conflict to Ain's approach to similar projects. Throughout this thesis I have deconstructed the aesthetic evolution of Ain's planned housing communities via their relationship to various rapidly-evolving social and economic factors by noting how they affected his designs for single-family housing and also how he viewed his potential client. Each chapter centers on a set of innovative design elements Ain devised for modernist tract housing, including prefabricated materials, variable site plan, exterior treatment, open plan, moveable walls, and communal landscaping. Here, it is important to note how some of these elements were treated in the MoMA-*Companion* House.

Although there were many practical factors that impeded Ain's ability to fully demonstrate his innovative approach to mass-production housing in the MoMA House, the issue was not about technical details as much as it was about the country's shifting attitude toward Modernism, design, and popular culture. In the architecture community there was an impending crisis of ideology compounded by shifting attitudes about Modernism's priority as a project. Ain had spent his whole career attempting to execute Modernism for the common person, yet those priorities were now in question.²⁰⁸ Ain later reflected on this change while he was Dean of the School of Architecture at Pennsylvania State University. In an article written in the mid 1960's, he lamented the state of

²⁰⁸ In one of the more famous examples, "in a 1953 essay, 'The Threat to the Next America,' [Elizabeth Gordon] railed against cultural dictatorship and the evils of 'a self-chosen elite who are trying to tell us what we should like and how we should live,' by which she meant the followers of International-style architecture, the curators at the Museum of Modern Art and European architects like Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier." Julie V. Iovine, "Elizabeth Gordon, 94, Dies; Was House Beautiful Editor," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Sept. 17, 2000.

architecture and architectural education as lacking a clear direction leading to rampant individualism and expressionism.²⁰⁹ By the end of World War II, there was a sense that the wartime social and economic constraints, which had allowed Modernists like Ain to experiment with new communal approaches to architecture and urbanism, were necessarily coming to an end.

In the catalog for the Brooklyn Museum's 2002 exhibition *Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940-1960*, Kevin Stayton argues that architecture, design, and fine art were "...turning away from the old aesthetic of hard-edged machine imagery toward an aesthetic based on the fluid, organic, indeed vital-forms of the postwar era...at least in part [as] a response to the unsettling ambivalence and anxieties of the new age."²¹⁰ These anxieties included the impending realization of the power of the atomic bomb and a subsequent romance with the human form, both of which resulted in a move away from the aesthetics of the machine and all that it represented. Like the Modernists who came before him, Ain felt the efficiency, functionality, and unique beauty of the machine age could have a transformative effect on the single-family housing market. Unfortunately, the MoMA-*Companion* house existed at the intersection of these conflicting attitudes, both aesthetically and temporally. "In the Cold War's ideological dialectic, the United States' material abundance-readily apparent in its torrent of

²⁰⁹ Gregory Ain, "In Search of Theory," *Arts & Architecture*, January 1966, 14-15.

²¹⁰ Brooke Kamin Rapaport and Brooklyn Museum of Art, *Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940-1960* (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 25.

automobiles, T.V. sets, and other home appliances, and suburban housing developments-proved the West's ideological superiority."²¹¹ Ain's reductive, yet flexible approach to planned housing communities, and the version he created for the Museum of Modern Art, was incompatible with the calcification of a postwar culture of abundance, even though it demonstrated many of his most successful adaptations to the typical postwar single-family home.

In the postwar period the move toward vital forms and the increased emphasis on consumerism were in conflict with the functional Modernism and communal spaces at the heart of Ain's planned housing communities. According to the *Vital Forms* catalog: "organic forms provided an antidote to the Bauhaus-inspired geometry of International School architecture, and the hard-edged shapes of the Machine Age."²¹² But they also signified a larger shift away from the functionalism, collectivism, and practicality that defined Ain's practice up to this point. Ain came of age as an architect during the Depression and World War II when a "less is more" attitude prevailed and collective social behavior was acceptable and encouraged. But in the postwar period communal ideals were increasingly considered anti-American. Unlike the depression and war years, collectivism came to be associated with the enemy, equated with a loss of individuality found in early mass-produced housing. Unfortunately, the museum's presentation of the MoMA-*Companion* House was a manifestation of this conflict. Prior to 1950 Ain's

²¹¹ Ibid., 50.

²¹² Rapaport and Brooklyn Museum of Art. *Vital Forms*, 29.

planned housing communities included a cohesive site plan where every house relied on its unique relationship to others and to the landscape; in the MoMA-*Companion* House this essential relationship was eliminated, isolating the house by itself and misinterpreting or omitting its most important design elements. As a result, the house was simultaneously a successful modernist prototype for mass-produced suburban housing, and a marketing tool for a postwar lifestyle increasingly at odds with the ideology of International Style Modernism. This lifestyle was characterized, as we now know, by a return to traditional family values and a new emphasis on the purchasing power of the expanding middle-class.

Further compounding this issue were the necessary limitations of the demonstration house itself and its goal to promote the lifestyle of the future. Expensive materials were used throughout the house and each room was outfitted with furniture and artwork, all of which were listed in MoMA's exhibition catalog. (fig. 52) The structure of the exhibition encouraged visitors to aspire to, and purchase, this new lifestyle for themselves. According to *Women's Home Magazine*, "all the pictures and sculpture are from the museum's collection. "...and each piece is available in stores carrying modern lines."²¹³ In the end the avant-garde artwork and luxury goods conflict with the practical nature of Ayn's architecture. And on an aesthetic level the artwork was the epitome of the organic aesthetic that defined the new era of vital forms. Surrealist artworks displayed in the house like Joan Miro's, *Acrobats in the Garden at Night* (1948), were aesthetically

²¹³ "Our House with a View to the Future," *Women's Home Companion Magazine*, June 1950, 68.



Figure 52. Gregory Ain, Installation view of the fireplace, Exhibition House by Gregory Ain, 1950.

and ideologically in conflict with Ain's design and signaled this shift. (fig. 53) Because Ain had tied himself to popular taste through his work on tract housing, he was beholden to its stylistic shifts, even when they drifted away from his core Modernist principals. Unfortunately, this phenomena began in the 1950's and, "it remained only for the anxieties of one age to replace those of another for the visual vocabulary to be transformed."²¹⁴ The result was a successful, functionalist, and Modern home masquerading as a luxurious avant-garde piece of architecture that had less and less to do with the legacy of Modernism Ain was attempting to translate to the common man.

In the end the Museum of Modern Art-*Women's Home Companion* house represents a fulcrum point in Ain's career. Throughout this thesis I have argued that Ain was working toward an ideal, some would say utopian, version of postwar suburbia using a model developed in Europe following World War I. In many ways, he achieved his vision with the Mar Vista Tract. By the time he designed the MoMA House, however, Ain was no longer free to continue developing his progressive and communal innovations to the suburban model without coming into direct conflict with the social and economic changes that evolved in the postwar period. Many of his contemporaries, like Richard Neutra, took this as an opportunity to focus on partnerships with like-minded and wealthy individual clients. Others, like Le Corbusier, simply adapted their designs and embraced the potentialities of these new vital forms. Ain's focus had been, since he was first introduced to International Style architecture, on bringing the utopian visions of early

²¹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 53. Louis Checkman, View into the Master Bedroom, Exhibition House by Gregory Ain, 1950.

Modernism to the masses. I believe he was too invested in this project to leave it behind, even when the conditions of the 1950's were clearly limiting the "utopian" possibilities of his architecture and urbanism. Ultimately, he decided to continue the legacy of his mentors Neutra and Schindler by becoming an educator and attempting to convey the values he had established over the course of his career. In a 1964 letter to the editor of *Arts & Architecture* magazine, he stated:

Here at Penn State we are attempting to emancipate the students from the mania for super-spectacular design by offering them an adult goal with which to identify - a vital, harmonious environment for the whole human community. Visual heroics diminish in appeal even to the young architect, when he believes that he can make a personal contribution, albeit modest, toward the attainment of a heroic end.²¹⁵

For Ain this heroic end was achieved in all of his planned housing communities, because each went far beyond what was expected of the post-war suburban single-family house.

Ain adapted the legacy of Modernism to meet his own unique ambitions. He never retreated from the hard work of designing suburban tract houses, one of the great problems of the postwar period. In this way Ain achieved the utopia he set out to build and his uncompromising quality is what makes him a true Modernist.

²¹⁵ Gregory Ain, "Letter to the Editor," *Arts & Architecture*, December 1964.

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