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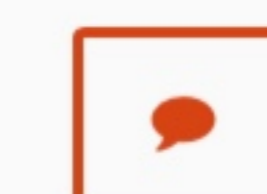
How to get on the trail of LA's most significant architectural homes



The Singleton House, Richard Neutra, 1959. This home can be seen on the FORT Trail, "Decade-by-Decade: The Houses of the 20th Century," curated by author and photographer Tim Street-Porter.

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Russell Brown isn't an architect or a historian, but the filmmaker, a lifelong Angeleno, is an ardent fan of the city's architecture.

Having grown tired of trying to explain to others that L.A. is an architecturally significant city, he founded [Friends of Residential Treasures: Los Angeles](#), or FORT, two years ago. It took a bit of time to build and develop the non-profit dedicated to the study and preservation of local historic homes, but this past June FORT officially launched online with the first two installments in a series about trails designed to get people out and exploring.

“I think it’s an interesting user experience because you’re really taking a tour of many neighborhoods in L.A. when you go on one of these trails,” says Brown by phone.



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Case Study House No. 8, Charles and Ray Eames, 1949. This home can be seen on the FORT Trail, “Decade-by-Decade: The Houses of the 20th Century,” curated by author and photographer Tim Street-Porter.



There are a few different components to FORT’s mission, including a fellowship program for the research of historic, residential architecture and videos that provide virtual tours of homes that would otherwise be inaccessible to the public. At the core, though, are the trails. These are guides that group together works of residential architecture by theme, rather than by neighborhood. (Although Brown notes, there might be neighborhood trails available in the future.)

Brown’s own trail, “1920s Nights,” takes travelers from Malibu’s Adamson House, now a museum, to the Anthony House near Griffith Park, best known these days as the one-time convent caught in the middle of a legal battle between Katy Perry and restaurateur Dana Hollister. In between, there’s the Schindler House, as well as the site of the long-gone estate-turned-hotel Garden of Allah and The Freeman House.

It’s The Freeman House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1924 and one of four L.A. homes that shows off his textile block technique, that kickstarted Brown’s interest in local, historic homes. “I was always a fan of Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture,” says Brown. “But when I finally dug into who had been there and why that house was so important and beautiful and influential, that was the thing that I think sparked a greater passion for the topic.”

The stories are just as important as the homes themselves, particularly since most of the entries on these trails aren’t open to the public. Or, in the case of Garden of Allah, no longer exist. The trails are packed with information and link to auxiliary media, like videos, photos and news stories.

“For me, it’s a really contemporary and tech-savvy version of what we all used to use, which was the Gebhard and Winter ‘Architectural Guide to Southern California,’” says Sian Winship, referencing the book that was first published by Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1965 and has enjoyed continued popularity over a number of revised editions.

Winship, an L.A.-based preservation professional and president of Architectural Historians, Southern California Chapter, was awarded the FORT Fellowship to create the Postwar Japanese American Architects trail that's now online.

This explores a lesser-known side of the area's architectural history. In it, Winship, who previously authored the SurveyLA Japanese American Historic Context, focuses on Mid-Century Modern architecture designed by Japanese Americans. There are very few examples of this work in the region and, as Winship explains, there's a reason for that. The architects' educations and/or early careers were interrupted by the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Those who returned to Los Angeles after the war often had little financial resources, meaning that it took longer to finish their education and they may not have been able to open their own firms.

"The residential works were extremely rare," says Winship. "They tended to be homes for themselves or homes for members of their extended family or friends."

Moreover, the research was difficult, due to the little archival material that's available and the fact that most of the architects have since died. However, Winship was able to create a trail of 11 homes extending from Venice to Pasadena to Granada Hills. Plus, she was able to interview two of the surviving architects, Franklin Sata and Hideo Matsunaga. While the homes on this tour are noteworthy for their aesthetics, when included together on this trail, they shed light on an important history within the context of architecture.

With FORT, it's not just about the homes and neighborhoods you know. "When we're talking about the word 'significant' or 'iconic,' that's a big category and can mean a lot of different things," says Brown. "People know about Pasadena and Silver Lake having interesting architecture, but I think that there are many different surprises for what could be in your neighborhood, right around the corner, that's interesting and beautiful to look at that you didn't even know about."

Understanding the histories inside the many neighborhoods and cities of the region (Brown says that, while they try to stick with Los Angeles County, "it's not really a hard and fast rule."), can ultimately be meaningful in a hyperlocal way too. "When you suddenly realize that there is an important piece of architecture in your neighborhood, I believe that will lead to greater civic and community involvement and a sense of pride in your neighborhood and on your block," says Brown. "There are a lot of benefits that can come out of that that are ancillary than just learning about architecture. "