

ROBERT E. BACON.
PHOTO CALEB COPPOLA



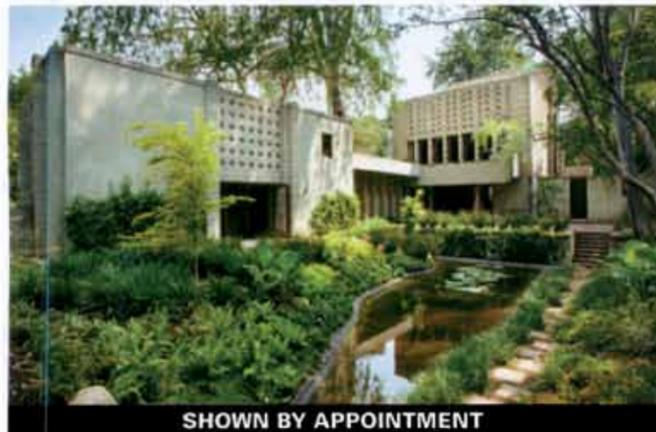
AGENT 90210

ROBERT E. BACON WAS AN ARCHITECT AT CRAIG ELLWOOD BEFORE BECOMING A BROKER IN THE SALE OF HOUSES FEATURED IN HISTORY BOOKS.

Text **Katya Tylevich**

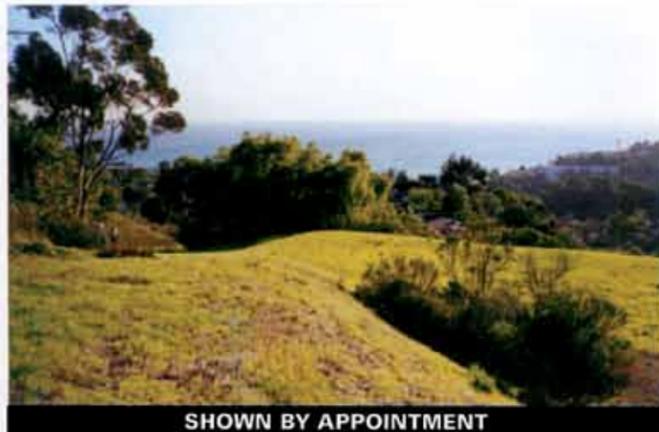
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SHOWN BY APPOINTMENT

Frank Lloyd Wright – Pasadena
The Millard House, 1923, 4 BRS & 4 BAs, Studio, 1 Acre Site
\$7,733,000 / Crosby Doe



SHOWN BY APPOINTMENT

20 View Acres – Pacific Palisades
Over a million dollars in slope remediation already completed w/ City approvals.
ALL PARCELS JUST \$4,500,000 / Crosby Doe



NEW LEASE PRICE

Wexler and Harrison, Architects – Palm Springs
Famous Steel House, 2 BRS & 2 BAs, Pool, Spa,
\$649,000 or Lease \$1,995 month / C.Doe & S.Skuris



PANORAMIC OCEAN VIEWS

Thom Mayne & Michael Rotondi, Architects
Hermosa Beach, Across the Street from the Strand
\$3,975,000 OR 1 Year Lease \$12,500 month / Crosby Doe



OPEN Thursday July 16th
Thursday July 23rd 11-2

559 Milton Court – Mount Washington
3 BRS + Loft & 2 BAs, Light-filled A-Frame Woodsy Retreat
\$649,000 / Matt Berkley



Mamol Radziner & Associates – Museum Masterpiece
7.5 Acres, 3 BRS & 2 BAs, Studio, Pool, Views
\$1,195,000 / Crosby Doe & J.R. Davidson



NEW PRICE

Richard Neutra, Architect – Pacific Palisades
Leon Barsha Residence, 1938, 3 BRS & 2 BAs, \$1,995,000
Or lease for \$6,000 month Crosby Doe & J.R. Davidson



NEW PRICE / OPEN Today 11-2

John Lautner Remodel – Lower Sunset Plaza
8650 Pine Tree Place, 3 BRS & 5 BAs, Studio, City Views
\$1,495,000 Crosby Doe & Gordon Newsom



Robert H. Skinner, A.I.A. – Mountain Center
2 BRS & 2 BAs, 7 Acres and Private Boating Pond
\$849,000 / Crosby Doe



Clyde H. Grimes, Architect – Hollywoodland
3 BRS & 3 BAs, Floor-To-Ceiling Windows, Views of
City Lights, Ocean & Parkland
\$2,000,000 / Crosby Doe & J.R. Davidson



SHOWN BY APPOINTMENT

Craig Ellwood, Architect – Los Angeles
1949 Broughton House, Open Plan Living-Dining
Area, 3 BRS & 2 BAs
\$885,000 / Crosby Doe & David Philp

A PAGE FROM THE MLS OPEN HOUSE GUIDE OF TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2009. THE MLS OPEN HOUSE GUIDE IS A WEEKLY PUBLICATION WITH A CIRCULATION OF APPROXIMATELY 10,000 COPIES.

‘I HAVE A GRUDGING RESPECT FOR ARCHITECTS WHO CAN PERSUADE CLIENTS TO BUILD THEIR DESIGNS’

– Robert E. Bacon –

I’ve just met this couple, and already they’re telling me about their house hunt. Lord, take me before they whip out photos of their poodle. In fact, they whip out photos of a house for sale; its motorized rear wall reveals a lavatory to the world beyond. These two aren’t looking for white picket fences; they’re in pursuit of an architectural curio – idiosyncrasies and safety hazards welcome, as long as they’re part of an interesting design. There’s a market for people like this in Los Angeles: architectural real estate. It’s a business that whispers in other cities or countries, but in LA it screams from numerous ‘For Sale’ signs between the hills and the ocean. ‘Are you getting the house?’ I ask. ‘If the real estate agent comes with it.’

Robert E. Bacon AIA-E is a broker for Crosby Doe Associates, a leading architectural realty based in Beverly Hills. A handful of LA’s ‘architectural agents’ are actually trained architects. A handful of those have years of practice. Bacon has decades. His resume reads like the Eames family phonebook: ‘Palmer and Krisel’, ‘Craig Ellwood’, ‘Richard Dorman’, to name but a few. Bacon is a wellspring of architecture history, experience and anecdotes (‘I once listened to Bucky Fuller lecture for 14 hours. I drove him home, and all he talked about was his grandchildren.’). So, how did it come to be that below ‘Chief Architect’, ‘Instructor’ and ‘Self-employed’, the final line of Bacon’s CV reads ‘Broker-Associate’? Is this a new chapter in Bacon’s biography or part of that long one on architecture? And could his story have any other backdrop than LA? It takes more than one meeting with the man to get at these questions, but if Bacon’s career is any indication, interesting things are sure to develop in the process he calls ‘zigging and zagging’.

Your relationship with architecture has unlikely roots in the Navy.

Yes, I was lucky to serve with two young fellows: one was Frank Lloyd Wright’s apprentice, the other Bruce Goff’s. To pass the time, we’d design cities. But I entered that situation already seduced into architecture by *The Fountainhead*. I was determined to become an architect in the mould of Howard Roark. That did not pan out. [Laughs.] I never wanted to restrict myself to one straight-lined career. I have a multitude of interests – a necessity if you want to be a good architect. It’s curious; so often in films the good guy is an architect. They have good reputations, but most are not recognized in their lifetimes. I’m constantly amazed by how much good anonymous architecture is never accorded its due.

As an architectural broker, is your mission to credit anonymous architecture?

Our firm recognizes properties that have architectural integrity, even if they don’t have the pedigree of a ‘name architect’. I have a tendency to orient to those homes. I like to go door-knocking. When I see an interesting home, I find out if anybody designed it. I love to list those properties and pass my knowledge on to buyers, introducing them to the fact that they can have good architecture and design without having ‘a name’.

Do your buyers listen?

Well, I listen. As I’m talking, I get a much better understanding. I never stop learning. That goes to the core of being an architect. In real estate, I actually have a platform. I have, on average, 40 to 45 people coming through a house, whom I can . . . educate. [Laughs.]

Are you heartbroken when buyers disregard your advice or remodel haphazardly?

Yes. Fortunately, most people who buy from us appreciate the homes we represent. They also

understand that modifying impacts the value. I point this out to people and emphasize that architecture can be modified, but you have to do it very gently. You have to get inside the original architect’s head and understand what he was doing.

You seem to relish such social interaction.

Well, I once thought it would be nice to be a loner and absolutely within myself, but you can’t do that and make a living, unless you’re really an outstanding architect. And I did not possess a great design talent, so I began to look for various ways to use my skills and background and still participate in the process.

That’s pretty self-detrimental for someone whose career as an architect has the book ends Palmer & Krisel and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

Julius Shulman [who photographed homes represented by Crosby Doe] once said to me, ‘Boy, you’ve been with some of the best.’ But I was second in charge to people like Richard Dorman and Craig Ellwood, supplementing them and providing them with an environment that could nurture their talents. I tried to shield them from the realities of the world. I was almost a bodyguard: the go-between between designer and structural engineer, for example. I mean, some designers are just oblivious to the laws of gravity. By nature and by necessity, there’s tremendous ego in architecture. And I found I had no problem becoming secondary and supporting others’ egos. To a point. There were times when I wanted to drown the designer – I mean, just literally.

But your first ambition was to be an architect, not a bodyguard. What of your own ego?

Oh, no. I have a very large ego. [Laughs.] But I’ve been able to subordinate it to a task at »

A HOUSE BY CRAIG ELLWOOD, ROBERT E. BACON'S FORMER EMPLOYER, FOR SALE AT CROSBY DOE ASSOCIATES.

'MUCH GOOD ANONYMOUS ARCHITECTURE IS NEVER ACCORDED ITS DUE'

– Robert E. Bacon –

hand or to a larger good. At times, it's been extremely painful and frustrating. That's one of the reasons I chose real estate. In a sense, it enables me to be my own man and to be creative. I'm able to convey the sense I get of a house. That gives me enough creativity. That satisfies my ego.

Is your appreciation of unknown architecture connected to a desire for your own designs to be discovered?

I've never thought of it, but that may be. In the early days of modern architecture in Southern California, there were few venues for architects to be recognized. Maybe I'm trying to right a wrong. I did always think it would be fun to sell a house I had designed. In fact, I once walked into a house in Bel Air and thought: 'Gee, this looks familiar.' Then I saw the flyer the agent had prepared, on which she'd misspelled the architect's name, but it was my partner. Finally I realized this was a house I had designed! It had been updated, so to speak. Modified.

I'm sorry.

Well, they did a good job. They preserved the essence of the house. Changed some materials, made it a little more chic, but basically it was still there. Anyway, I corrected the spelling, but that's as close as I've gotten to my own design. They're all gone now. Some taken down, some modified to the extent that they're no longer mine.

You must see that often – the architect's vision 'modified'.

Part of the detective work I enjoy is trying to understand how a house came to be the way it is. I'm more intrigued with the bad than the good. Often, in bad spaces, I can pretty much visualize what happened. I've been there.

What happens when you have to sell a place you don't like?

I do my best to find as much good about it as possible. If there's nothing truly good about it, maybe I can find something that could be good and help people understand the space in terms of its potential. Fortunately, I don't have to do that often.

Why is the business of architectural real estate so specific to Los Angeles? Surely architectural homes exist elsewhere.

It's growing in other parts of the country, to some degree. But Southern California – in the '50s, this was the new frontier. It attracted a lot of great talent. Neutra was drawn here, Schindler, Wright. I remember the energy. Although there was a lot of very good traditional architecture in the East and Midwest, this is where it was really coming to life. You've got surfing, and you've got great weather: there's no limit to how much you can do.

Why the past tense? Is that energy gone?

It's beginning to be much more difficult to be a Renaissance man or a jack of all trades, as they used to call it. It's the age of specialization. A one-man architectural office is really like the family doctor. They do it all. To me, these are the true architects. That's the way I began. That's the way I envisioned myself. And there are some architects still doing that. God bless them for it. I do have a grudging respect for architects today who are able to persuade clients to build some of the things they're designing. [Laughs.]

There must be moments – especially when you're disappointed with what you see – that you want to jump in and contribute to the architectural landscape again.

Sure. I find myself looking at a building – what

would I do with it? Looking at a vacant lot or a site – what would I do with it? But I quickly come back to reality. I couldn't go back to architecture now. I'm not familiar with the building codes; the technology has changed. I'm of the old school. I always felt connected to a building through the pencil. The computer comes in, and you lose that tactile connection.

I suppose selling a home, interacting with it, is a tactile connection.

I have access to homes now I never would have had as an architect: 'I'm a real estate broker, can I see your house?' Once I'm in, I use my diversity to have a wonderful conversation. The joy of all of my different experiences is meeting extraordinary people. You know, I went to see John Lautner when I graduated from college. He was working in his garage, and I showed him my stuff. We sort of connected, but he said he didn't have any need for me right then. I left very disappointed, then got a job with Palmer & Krisel. John called me the next day: 'I've got an opening for you if you want it.' But I'd committed to these other architects, and I didn't feel it would be fair. I've often wondered if that's the traditional 'road not taken'.

Do you regret not taking it?

I don't regret anything. I've had a ball. «

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Craig Ellwood, Architect



909 North Beverly Glen — Los Angeles

Craig Ellwood's 1949 Broughton House is a bold precursor of his well known Case Study designs. Modular construction and Miesian styled steel beams support curtain windows that draw in abundant light and afford expansive views of the Beverly Glen hillside. The early open plan living-dining area, a precursor to today's popular loft living concepts, connects to the entry/entertainment deck on the south side of the house. The residence incorporates two bedrooms and a bath on the principal level, and an additional bedroom and bath on the lower level adjacent to the carport parking area.

\$885,000

Crosby Doe & David Philp