



LINES LIKE MEDITATION
Facing page, and right
In the Neutra living
room, the Egg chair by
Arne Jacobsen, 1958, is a
curvy contrast to the
rigorous, poetic lines of
the brick fireplace, and
the roof beams. The
table is by Isamu
Noguchi. The breezeway
of the Neutra house,
with the elevated garage
at left, leads to the
bedrooms at right.
CJ Bonura and Patricia
Moritz planted papyrus
in the garden, which
they kept austere, as
Neutra planned.



FOR THE LOVE OF NEUTRA

WITH DELIBERATION AND RESPECT, AN ARCHITECT
SPENDS EIGHT YEARS RESTORING RICHARD
NEUTRA'S O'HARA HOUSE

Architect CJ Bonura and his wife, Patricia Moritz, a book designer, did not go looking for a Richard Neutra house. Rather, a Neutra house (aided by an astute real estate broker) found them.

In the mid-nineties, the couple were house-hunting, and the broker tipped them that the iconic O'Hara house would be offered for sale. It was built in 1960 on Neutra Place in Silver Lake, one of nine in the Neutra Colony. It was a three-bedroom house, with a large living room and a deck, nestled into the hillside and sheltered by bamboo. They saw the setting, overlooking the Silver Lake reservoir, and snapped it up before it went on the market. They were only the second owners, after the O'Hara family.

"The house had not been gentrified or modified or changed or modernized in any way," said Bonura, an architect and contractor who specializes in renovating mid-century modern houses in the Los Angeles area. "Nothing had been changed in the house throughout its life. It was designed by Neutra, and closely supervised

down to the last perfect detail by his staff. It was polished and then never touched in almost forty years. Even the original carpet and paint were in the house. It was ideal for an architect, just waiting for attention."

Over the years that followed, Bonura and Moritz became experts on the world of Neutra, its materials, its methods, and its timeless beauty.

"I could see that we would be custodians of the house, and at first I was ambiguous about the fact that I would not be creating any new architectural details, additions, or even a new kitchen," said Bonura. "There was a lot of deferred maintenance. All the finishes had to be cleaned and restored. In the end, we touched every surface."

The couple received the original drawings, all blueprints and specs for the house.

"Every one of the Neutra houses has a different flavor and configuration, but each one has the same, consistent Neutra sense and philosophy," said Bonura, founder of Bonura Building. The O'Hara house was the



THE JOY OF COLOR
Opposite, and right A Tulip table and chairs by Eero Saarinen (1955–57) add their plastic shapes to the beautifully delineated dining room and kitchen. Patricia collects vintage Blenko glass, along with contemporary Italian glass designs. On the floor is an original poster for Neutra's book lecture series, *For the Love of Architecture*.



first Neutra property he acquired and restored.

"Working in the shadow of Neutra has taught me the attention to detail, the discipline, and the fastidiousness required to work on a Neutra design, with total respect for its integrity," said Bonura. "For all their simplicity and lack of pretension, Neutra's houses have everything exposed and it must be perfect. Whenever I had a question, all I had to do was to go back to Neutra's original drawings."

Bonura disassembled, cleaned, restored, and reassembled each piece of the house, working with the same methodical care he takes to restore vintage automobiles.

Neutra Place, where the house is situated, is a mecca for Neutra lovers. The house stands near the Reunion house, the Neutra family house where Neutra's son Dion and his Institute for Survival Through Design are located.

Clarifying and polishing the interior was Bonura and Moritz's first project.

Bonura made a fortunate find while working on a repair to the roof edge. Neutra's Kaufman house in Palm Springs was under restoration at the same time,

and he was able to acquire a remnant of the corrugated roofing that was custom made for that house.

The interplay of massing and volumes is a source of pleasure for the owners. The genius of Neutra and his staff was to create a harmonious composition of methods and materials. Neutra was the master of simple elegance. He used a single steel column to support the fireplace corner. He emphasized the connection of indoors and outdoors by cantilevering the support beam from the living room out beyond the eave.

By opening each side of the living room to a deck and a terrace, Neutra planned cross-ventilation that draws cool air up from the reservoir and through the house, keeping rooms cool even on hot summer days.

Bonura and Moritz felt a strong bond with Richard Neutra.

"It has been a great experience, living in a masterpiece," said Bonura. "To experience Richard Neutra's great mind at work has been an honor."