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The early photographs of Eichler homes announce a distinctively American hybrid functionalism, one that fused the manifest visibility of structure and economy with subliminal human needs for comfort, familiarity, and joy. This combination of new technologies with more traditional concerns epitomized middle-class suburban life in California in the 1950s and '60s. The longing for a union between the two remains resonant today.

These were marketing photographs, of course, and Ernest Braun's work captured Joseph Eichler's keen awareness of the needs and opportunities of his time and milieu. Many pictures depict actors performing the roles of happy family and friends in surroundings that are at once generic and distinctive settings for these dramas. Togetherness radiates as they laugh and embrace one another; at the same time, a teenager, strangely unmindful of her parents and their friends watching from the patio, asserts her autonomy on the telephone. If today we cannot fail to sense the strained upbeat emotions, especially on the faces of women and adolescents, and the consumerism that defines well-being, we also recognize a compelling simplicity and directness.

Like the houses themselves, Braun's images never look back nostalgically to an idealized past. They tout the benefits of new materials and production techniques developed during World War II, then maintained by the military-industrial-university complex that flourished in northern California during the decades that followed. Inexpensive wartime matériel—plywood, foam insulation, high-gloss durable plastic paints and

laminates, clear acrylic skylights—were deployed in these homes. The simple framing and roof supports were left exposed; modular wall elements interspersed floor-to-ceiling panels in wood, glass or sliding glass doors; space and activities flowed easily between the bright, simple interiors and their lush natural surroundings.

The architectural quality is evident, without ever suggesting that it serves to ratchet up the occupants' taste. For his first houses of 1949, Eichler turned to Robert Anshen of Anshen & Allen, who designed a few basic prototypes that could be varied along a block. Popular magazines, such as *Life* and *House Beautiful*, as well as professional magazines, notably *Architectural Forum*, carried Braun's photos of their products to a larger national audience. The San Francisco Museum of Art placed some of these photographs alongside the major 1949 exhibition, "Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Area," with its more formal portraits (including two by Braun) of custom-designed houses in a similar vein by Anshen & Allen, Hamilton Harris, Gardner Dailey, Joseph Esherick and other architects. A decade later Eichler brought in Quincy Jones for his southern California houses and Claude Oakland for new developments in the north.

These houses, as well as their systems of production and marketing, are resolutely modern—in the sense of the term as we use it now, and as it was understood in the 1950s. Whereas European modernism of the 1920s and '30s had alternated between the free flow of space in elegant private villas and well-designed if spartan Existenzminimum housing for urban workers, the American

movement turned its attention toward suburban single-family houses for a mass market. Braun's images embody that democratic vision of "the good life" available to everyone. (Indeed, while all the actors are white, Eichler insisted on racial integration in all his developments.) They also reveal a contemporary concept of collaboration: between architect and builder, building and setting (both natural and social), director and actors. We recognize an ongoing process of social and spatial change, rather than a static representation of modernity.

Experimentation thus takes many forms. The builder and the architects explored ingenious ways to improve the quality of domestic architecture while making good houses more affordable. The marketing sought to promote their endeavors and to foster like-minded efforts elsewhere. All the same, we are reminded, it is ultimately the residents themselves who create new possibilities, bringing their own ambitions and adaptations to the construction of joyful everyday lives.



Fairbrae development,
Sunnyvale, Calif., 1960