

Unsung Advocates of Mid-Century Modern

Saluting those who strive to preserve our California homes and neighborhoods

BY JACK LEVITAN – CA-MODERN – WINTER 2023



California's mid-20th century architects produced some of the most innovative architectural housing. Distinctively different, these truly 'modern' homes were inspired by the West Coast's natural beauty, temperate climate, and relaxed lifestyle.

Miraculously, many of these architectural treasures remain standing today, despite being under constant threat from profit-driven developers, insensitive remodelers, and soaring land values.

Who are the professionals, over the past several decades, who've worked behind the scenes to protect California's mid-century modern homes— surveying, landmarking, and advocating on their behalf?

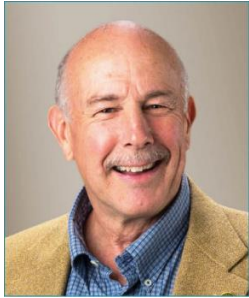
We'd like to introduce you to a handful from that special breed—men and women who create initiatives for positive change, like city planner Ken Bernstein; champion buildings slated for demolition, like historian Alan Hess; and restore historic residential gardens, like landscape architect JC Miller. Recognizing these individuals and others is an important way of thanking them for their vision and proactive stance on preserving our modern past.

Though 'historic preservation' is a term that is often misunderstood, it's a valuable tool that can transform communities, assess the integrity of existing structures, and engage those who are seeking to preserve their own neighborhood's history and character. Without the energy and laser-like focus of historians and preservationists, many

important buildings would remain unprotected, become blighted over time, and perhaps even vanish.

It is our hope that the tireless advocates we profile here will continue to pave the way for California's next wave of preservation-minded individuals—like Monique (Lombardelli) Anton (who works in the real estate field), Hannah Simonson (in architecture), and so many others—who've taken up the torch to ensure that the best of California's residential architecture remains a tangible piece of modernist history.

Let's applaud California's preservationists of residential mid-century modern. For starters, here are ten longtime advocates who have made a mark and a difference.



ALAN HESS

Architect, historian, and passionate advocate of the 'recent past' for nearly four decades, Hess is the victorious voice of preservation. Lecturing throughout California and beyond, he is a familiar face at Palm Springs Modernism Week, engaging audiences with his warmth and intellect. Currently serving on the State Historical Resources Commission, Hess lends his knowledge to evaluating the eligibility for listing historic residential and commercial properties. He is also the author of 20 architectural books, including *Frank Lloyd Wright: Natural Design, Organic Architecture, Forgotten Modern: California Houses 1940-1970*, and *Hollywood Modern: Houses of the Stars*.



STEVEN KEYLON

A landscape historian-turned-crusader who thrives on sharing and researching the history of cultural landscapes, Keylon is the editor of *Eden*, the journal of the California Garden and Landscape History Society; and serves on the board of the Palm Springs Modern Committee and Docomomo US/SoCal. He co-authored the cultural landscape reports for Baldwin Hills Village (Los Angeles), and historic context statement for the garden apartments of Los Angeles. Keylon restored and landmarked his Herbert Burns-designed home in Palm Springs, and then authored the books *The Design of Herbert W. Burns* and *The Modern Architecture of Hugh Michael Kaptur*.