



The Neutra VLD Studio and Residences have been named a National Historic Landmark in the USA.

RICHARD NEUTRA

Before he built what would eventually become known as Neutra VLD Studio and Residences in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles, Richard Neutra had had only one big commission as an architect. The Lovell House—also in Los Angeles, but in the tonier neighborhood of Los Feliz—was built for a prominent physician. The style reflected the client's tax bracket; the house is large, multistoried, and is cantilevered on the hillside to take advantage of views over Los Angeles. But it's also groundbreaking architecturally, combining steel working techniques used in skyscrapers with ideas borrowed from modernists like Le Corbusier.

The Neutra House in Silver Lake, which the Austrian-American Neutra designed for himself and his family, was a test to prove whether the grand ideas he'd pioneered at Lovell could work on a smaller scale, with a much smaller budget, for a family of lesser means.

Neutra developed his signature style—the much-imitated desert modernism—as a response to the new ways in which people were living on America's West Coast, rather than as any grand personal expression. However, in radically attending to his clients' proposed use for the space he was designing, he helped carve out a new school of architecture in the mid-20th century. The house was no longer a staid piece of art around which people adjusted their lives, but something built around the daily rhythms of life.

In both the Lovell and Neutra houses, shaded outdoor spaces take advantage of the dry, temperate climate of

Southern California. Slatted walls encourage airflow, and soaring panels of glass diminish the barriers between indoor and outdoor spaces, bringing in natural light and a sense of airiness to spaces which might otherwise have felt cramped.

Neutra was not at the pinnacle of his career when his family's need for living quarters arose. It was 1932, the height of the Great Depression, and he had a budget of only \$10,000 (€9,000) and a tiny sliver of land in the at-the-time unfashionable neighborhood of Silver Lake.

"I was convinced," the architect later wrote, "that high-density design could succeed in a fully human way, and I saw my new house as a concrete pilot project. I wanted to demonstrate that human beings, brought together in close proximity, can be accommodated in very satisfying circumstances, taking in that precious commodity called privacy."

That doesn't mean fun isn't in the mix as well. A reflecting pool on the rooftop is especially striking at sunset when it becomes a whimsical miniature of the Silver Lake Reservoir beyond.

Neutra went on to build dozens of desert modernist houses in Southern California, and many similar houses not built by Neutra have also proliferated—beyond the desert, even, as a symbol of modernism and dream of the Californian lifestyle. Of course, this fully defeats his purpose. But Neutra, who reportedly appreciated irony, may have been pleased by the image of his desert house under a blanket of snow.



FURNITURE — Glass-fronted houses put their interior spaces on public display, so it follows that designing furniture perfectly suited to each property became a key consideration for Neutra; he produced limited-run or one-off pieces for the private residences he built. Manufacturer VS acquired the license to Neutra's furniture in 2012. Among the reissued designs were certain chairs that had previously only existed as sketches in the architect's notebooks.