

The Neutra House Project

Honor the Past and Invest in the Future

Jacqueline Johnson in 1940, enjoying her new house



Neutra House in 2008 as a community facility



**City of Los Altos
Los Altos Community Foundation**

September 9, 2008

1. Introduction

A national revival is underway for mid-century modern architecture, which includes the works of Richard Neutra (1892-1970). He was "like a beacon of a brave new world," says Thomas Hines in his book *"Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture."* However, in spite of this revival, many historic buildings of that era are being destroyed for economic reasons.

A community-funded effort in Los Altos is proving the exception... the City, the Los Altos Community Foundation and donors such as yourselves are saving a small Los Altos house designed in 1935 by this renowned California architect.

This Neutra House has been moved to City land and has been adapted for reuse for meetings, off-sites, receptions, classroom work, and dining events. Combining preservation and reuse by the public is the essence of our vision: "Honor the Past and Invest in the Future". Visitors will be attracted by the architecture history exhibits during scheduled open hours. City Council work-sessions, Commission meetings will be planned in the conference room. Also non-profit boards, businesses and private parties will enjoy this unique facility.

This project is endorsed by the American Institute of Architects (AIA), Santa Clara Valley, for its educational goals on architecture history. We have received nationwide attention already, on the national AIA website (March 2008).

Richard Neutra's younger son Raymond Richard Neutra, MD, lives in the East Bay. Dr. Neutra supports our efforts with the following quote:

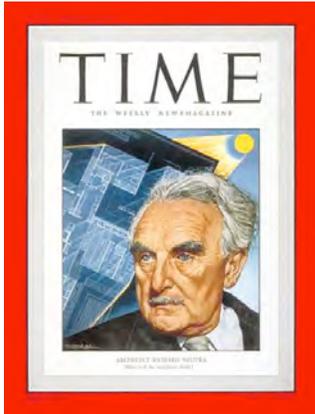
"This little structure represents my father's commitment to finding solutions for housing persons of modest means in a way that melded indoors and outdoors; in a way that was low in cost yet beautiful. It is great that it will have a continued use for the community of Los Altos"

The facility now completed has a conference room that accommodates 35 people, a full kitchen, bathroom, landscaped grounds, and an HDTV audio/video system that will offer self-guided programs on the history of modern architecture in Los Altos and the Bay Area. This system with cable TV and wireless internet also serves the needs of those using the conference room for meetings and events.

This project is funded through generous gifts and donated services from those who respect architectural history and wish to add to our public amenities. The purpose of this paper is to tell you about our vision for this unique community resource and invite you to participate with us as an important donor.

2. The History of this Neutra House

Richard Neutra was born in Austria and studied architecture there. At age 31 he came to the United States and worked briefly for Frank Lloyd Wright. He then settled in Los Angeles for his life work. Such work placed him on the cover of Time Magazine in 1949.



Between 1933 and 1940 Neutra, with collaborator Otto Winkler, did about 15 projects in the San Francisco Bay Area. The only projects south of Atherton were two here in Los Altos¹, both finished in 1939. One house was built in Los Altos Hills for Dr. Alvin Eurich, a vice president of Stanford University and acting president in 1948. This house, at 13081 West Sunset Drive, is still in use.

In 1935 Neutra began designing three houses for two poets Jacqueline Johnson and Clayton Stafford. Two small houses with identical floor plans were the residences of

Stafford and his wife, and of Jacqueline Johnson. The house now being saved was Johnson's home. A third and smaller house was built, possibly for a Mr. Harwood², also a writer, and then was used for guests. Research continues on the history of these original clients/owners. The three residences defined a small commune in a plum orchard on a half acre lot at 180/184 Marvin Ave.

Stafford wrote a poem for Jacqueline in 1938 to celebrate her new house:

*A simple dwelling framed of native wood,
Precise and strong in trim of steel and glass,
Russet as autumn, clean of line and mass,
Modeled with forethought to its time and place.*

Jacqueline Johnson graduated from Stanford in 1935. In 1942 she married the surrealist painter Gordon Onslow Ford, a member of the Parisian Surrealist group founded by poet Andre Breton. The couple later joined the artists and bohemians that dominated San Francisco's culture in the 1950's through early 1960's³.

The three Neutra houses are known to those who study Richard Neutra's works. For example, in the introduction of her book Neutra, Barbara Lamprecht says, "Metal casement windows remained a stalwart element of Neutra's kit of parts, used for lavish homes or projects as modest as the haunting redwood-clad 'Three Small Houses in an Orchard,' Los Altos, 1935-39."¹

1. Neutra, Barbara Lamprecht, Taschen, 2004, pg. 13.
2. Article by Helen Weigel Brown for "American Home", presumably in 1940.
3. Three Small Houses in an Orchard, Mark Sandoval and Casey Li Driskill, 2005

3. Project Description

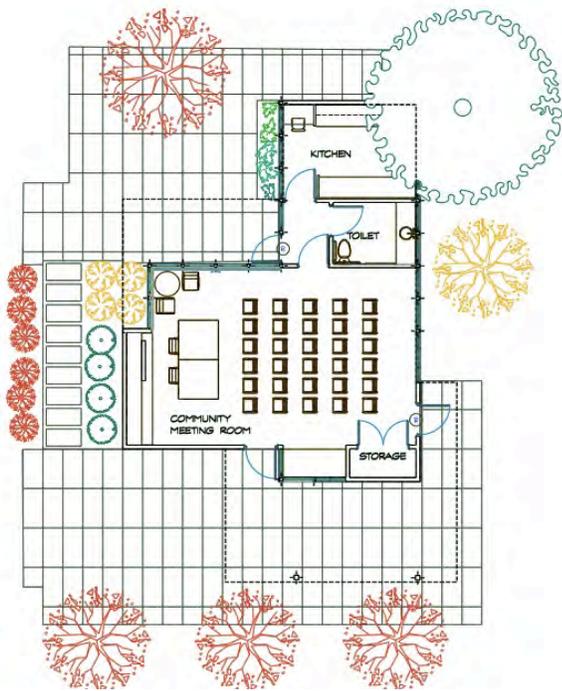
This photo shows the house being moved on November 20, 2005, from three short blocks away to the City Community Center on Hillview Avenue. On the left is George Limbach, the former Chair of the LACF Board. Roy Lave on the right is the Executive Director of LACF. The house had to be cut in half and the carport cut-off for the move. In January, 2006, the house was seated on its new foundation.



Structural members in the foundation, walls, and roof damaged by dry rot or infestation were replaced. The green paint was stripped and the original siding sanded and treated. The front siding boards are original. Many of the rear siding boards have been replaced with new redwood. A sealant has been applied to darken and preserve the redwood as originally finished. The walls have been strengthened, floor joists leveled and bolted to the foundation, and ceiling joists leveled. A new covered entry has been built to shelter the front door and the ADA access door on the right side. This covered entry replaces the original carport with the same footprint as shown in this photo taken in the evening.



We have preserved the exterior while modifying the interior for use as a small conference center. The kitchen, originally in front, has been moved to the former



Courtesy of Bob Nerrie, project volunteer

bedroom in back. With the kitchen wall removed, the conference room can seat 35 people. The site plan with the interior floor plan is shown here. The facility is its own endowment, via rental income, to cover future operating and maintenance expenses. The rental value is set by the large meeting room, the convenient kitchen and toilet (ADA-compliant), an audio/visual system, and the landscaping designed to accommodate receptions or break-out discussions or just for people relaxing. The character of the interior design choices were made to be consistent with Richard Neutra's design principles. The fact that this house is an historical exhibit for modern architecture increases the rental value. It will always be a special facility with its own charm.

A generous capacity heat pump system for cooling and heating will bring the interior temperature to a comfortable level quickly using floor vents. Title 24 insulation standards are met, including dual-pane windows to provide all-weather comfort.

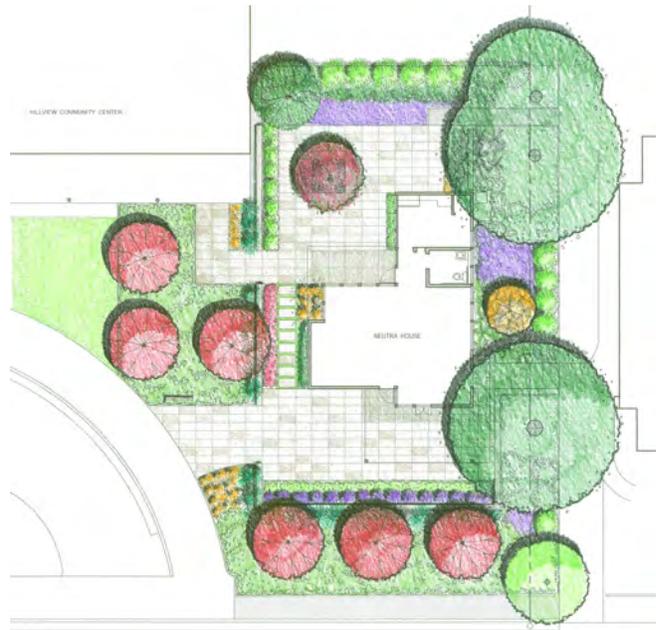
The left (west) wall of the main conference room is the location for the



location for the architectural history exhibit as shown here. A 52" LCD HDTV shows content stored on an Apple TV unit with a menu controlled by visitors. Videos are available on the life and works of Richard Neutra and the history of the project. Relevant historic material will continue to be added as we produce it. If

rental users wish to use the multimedia system they can connect a laptop to display their own content, use cable TV, play music stored on the Apple TV, or play DVDs. Wireless cable internet service is also available so the TV display can be used to show internet operations for a class or presentation. Ten lightweight training tables and 36 chairs are always stored in and/or set-up in the room.

Since the house was designed with extensive windows to allow occupants to enjoy the orchard and patio area, our new landscaping is an important feature of the site. Our landscape design by Robyn Reed, ASLA, with detailed plans by Thomas Klope, ASLA, is shown here. The Los Altos Community Foundation office is on the right and the City's Hillview Community Center is to the left. The entrance to the Neutra House is off the circular walkway in front of the Hillview Center.



Plum trees are planted in the front and on the left side to resemble the historic



setting in a plum tree orchard, at least appearing so as one approaches the facility. The fruitless plum trees are in bloom in the photo below taken in the spring of 2008.

The landscaping plan provides for useful outdoor patio space for meetings and receptions, consistent with Neutra's concept of integrating interior and exterior spaces.



Low seat walls define spaces without being visually confining and the hardscape complements the design of the house. Soft lighting is provided for evening use. Here the back patio is being prepared for a party.

The Neutra House can be used in combination

with the Hillview Community Center and/or the LACF Community House. Pathways connect all three areas. The kitchen in the Neutra House will support such combined functions. The Community Center will be rebuilt one of these years and the Neutra House will be one of the few facilities for small conferences still available during the construction.

4. Schedule



The project was officially completed with the final inspection on July 25, 2008. Fine-tuning will continue but the house is now being used by the public and the City.

Shown here is Mayor Val Carpenter and other officials of the City, the Los Altos Community Foundation and the Chamber of Commerce at a ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 7, 2008.

5. Community Value of the Completed Project

(1) Education: This historic house and small conference center will attract many visitors. We are developing a self-guided Architecture History video program in the conference room to complement the house which itself is an exhibit. The video will cover Richard Neutra and his lifework, the story of his Los Altos projects, and the context of this work within the overall history of modern architecture. We have an Architecture History Committee of distinguished architects who are overseeing the content and goals of this exhibit. This committee is defining an architecture learning center concept for students in middle school and above.

The American Institute of Architects, Santa Clara Valley, endorses this goal:

“...we support this architectural “exhibit” as one that should help educate the public on what architecture is all about and as a very positive outreach toward the promotion of good design. We hope educational programs will be developed for school children and others - class tours, etc. - that will help future generations develop an appreciation for the simple, honest architectural expression so evident in all of Neutra's work.”

Kent Mather, Director, speaking for the board, 2007.

(2) History: This project preserves a historic design by a renowned architect. This 1935 design was an interesting milestone in suburban, affordable, California modern residential design. It was a precursor to the popular Eichler homes, some of which are located in south Los Altos. The history of poets Jacqueline Johnson and Clayton Stafford and their unique commission for Neutra is being researched.

(3) Public meeting room: This project contributes additional meeting facilities to the City inventory at the Hillview Community Center. The facility is being managed to be affordable for non-profit users. The main meeting room will seat up to 35 people, or more for a stand-up reception. We anticipate its use for City Council work sessions. Future plans for the Civic Center will accommodate the Neutra House as it is currently sited.

(4) Small conference center: This facility will be a unique small conference center with a private home-like atmosphere. The indoor and outdoor spaces including bathroom and kitchen are ideal for an all-day retreat for a management team. The audio/video set-up presenting the Architectural History story is also available for conference use by connecting with a laptop computer provided by the users. Cable HDTV, music, and DVD playback and wireless internet connection are available. The sound system is Dolby 7.1 with the quality of a small theater.

(5) Receptions and Dining: The house and grounds are excellent for hosting receptions, supported by the full kitchen. The main conference room will also support dining events for up to 30 persons. The A/V system will, of course, be available for entertainment and/or used as a PA system. A recent catered event used the kitchen as shown below. The conference room can be closed-off leaving

access to the kitchen via the back door. Food and refreshment preparations need not interfere with an ongoing meeting.



6. Operational Budget

The economic model that helped save this house was the donor-supported capital investment and rental-supported operations and maintenance.

Annual expenses:	Utilities	\$1200
	Supplies	500
	Gardening	1500
	Maintenance	2500
	Janitorial	400
	Administration	900
	<u>Maintenance reserves</u>	<u>\$1000</u>
	Total	\$7000

Annual revenues:	60 meetings times \$50 each	\$3000
	<u>Offsite rentals: 10 days at \$400 per day</u>	<u>\$4000</u>
	Total	\$7000

7. Capital Budget to move and restore the Neutra house

We have defined the project as “adaptive reuse” so the interior can be optimized for its new mission as a small conference center. The exterior has been restored to be historically correct with a few exceptions required to accommodate the reuse function.

The project took two years and eight months, costing approximately \$700K including the fair market value of donated services and materials.

A construction loan was obtained, which enabled the project to be completed in an efficient manner while the fundraising continues. We have raised \$500K in cash and donated services leaving \$200K to go.

8.0 Project Organization

If you might be interested in working with us as a volunteer, email us at Neutra@los-altos.org. We can explore how you could become involved in this interesting project with these other volunteers.

Management:

King Lear, director
Russ Quacchia, architect advisor
Robert Nerrie, architect advisor
Thomas Klope, landscape
Stephan Tanczos, General contractor

Campaign Committee:

Jonathan Baer
Marian Cooper
Justin Drewes
Lynette Lee Eng
Ken Girdley
Randall Hull
King Lear, Chair
Anna Weldon

Architecture History Committee

Guy Ayers, AIA
Thomas Horan, AIA
John Miller, AIA
Russ Quacchia, Chair
Carroll Rankin, AIA
Mark Sandoval, AIA

9. Capital Campaign

The Los Altos Community Foundation has set up a 501c3 account for The Neutra House Fund. We ask for gifts of \$50,000, \$25,000 or \$10,000 for the major gift categories, to include in-kind gifts. Major gift donors will be permanently honored on a plaque inside the house. These donors will be honored for their vision, their support of education, and their support for community facilities.

There are more than 100 donors at lower gift levels.

Donors at or above \$50,000 include:

City of Los Altos (land)
Ginny and King Lear
Santa Clara County Historical
Heritage Commission

Donors from \$25,000 to 49,999:

Marion and Bob Grimm
The Los Altos Community
Foundation
Penny and Roy Lave
Peter Pau
Rudolph and Sletten

Donors from \$10,000 to \$24,999:

Kathy and Ralph Adams
Borel Private Bank
CD Landscaping

Casto Roofing
Betty and George Cilker
Claudia and Bill Coleman
Will and Lela Corkern/
Mel and Mady Kahn
Guy and Virginia Farthing
Jim Forster
Tom Harrington
Thomas Klope and Robyn Reed
Francis and Myla La Poll
George and Ann Limbach
Lea and Sung Engineering
The David and Lucile Packard
Foundation
Mary Prochnow
Mark Sandoval
Jim Strand

Los Altos has always been special in the way volunteers in the community organize to build or restore public facilities, often in a visionary way. Examples include the city pool built at Covington school in the 50's; History House and the History Museum; the Bus Barn Theater; the City Youth Center; Garden House; and the LACF Community House.

To join us in this fund-raising effort just fill out the following commitment form.

A plaque honoring our major donors will be permanently displayed in the house in appreciation to those who helped make this vision come true. All donors will be honored on our new website, www.neutrahouse.org. We will be bringing this donor list up soon. The website is now running and rapidly evolving.

Commitment to Support The Neutra House Fund

Thank you for agreeing to support the preservation of the historic Richard Neutra house for community use in Los Altos.

The Neutra House Fund has moved the house and has restored and adapted it for reuse as a community meeting center and home for an architectural history exhibit. The house is on Los Altos City property and the City owns the house. The LACF is acting as an agent for the City to restore and operate the house at no cost to taxpayers. See the attached proposal for details.

To help us meet our fundraising goal and manage the project, we are asking for signed commitments for monetary gifts, and/or in-kind gifts. We intend to complete the fundraising by the end of 2008, though some commitments can be completed in 2009 for tax advantages to the donors.

Major gifts of \$50,000, \$25,000 and \$10,000 will be honored on a permanent plaque in the house. All gifts will be appreciated.

All donations are tax deductible. The Los Altos Community Foundation (77-0273721) is the fiscal agent for the Neutra House Fund. Make the donation check out to: "LACF – Neutra House Fund" and send to LACF 183 Hillview Avenue, Los Altos, CA 94022.

I (we) _____ agree to donate \$_____ to the Neutra House Fund for use as described in the document "The Neutra House Project Description".

Is there is a schedule constraint for making your donation?

My (our) donation will be available on or before _____
Date

If the gift is In-kind or stock, please estimate the value above and describe the services/materials or stock below:

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

Thank you, King Lear, Neutra Campaign Chair