



Annual Report

NEUTRA INSTITUTE FOR SURVIVAL THROUGH DESIGN

Fiscal Year 2024-2025

BROADENING OUR IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

The mission of the Neutra Institute for Survival Through Design (NISTD) is to preserve and use the legacy of world-famous architect Richard Neutra (1892-1970) to promote creative, research-inspired design that benefits people and the planet. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, leadership at the Institute has broadened the organization's impact through a number of regional, statewide, national, and international strategic partnerships.

Key to these endeavors has been the use of our properties in Silver Lake: the historic Neutra Office Building and Apartments (Richard J. Neutra, 1950); Reunion House (Richard J. Neutra, 1950); and Treetops (Dion Neutra, 1982) to facilitate education and collaboration around our dual mission.

With the advent of the Palisades and Eaton Fires in January of 2025, Los Angeles has forever changed. The nature of place has forever changed. In addition to mourning the loss of thousands of homes by our friends, family, and colleagues, we also mourn the loss of three Neutra-designed residences: the Benedict and Nancy Freedman House (Richard J. Neutra, 1949); Hees House (Richard J. Neutra, 1950), and R. L. Kesler House (Richard J. Neutra, 1953-4). Never again will these structures be able to provide their owners with the harmony, balance, and connection with nature that Neutra's philosophy of biorealism provided.

It has been a time of reflection for everyone in Southern California. Humbled in this context, the Institute looks back on its accomplishments and impacts during the last year.



Student project from Art Center's *Outer Space Architecture*



Student projects from Art Center's *Mobile Furniture: the Body and Senses*

ArtCenter College of Design

A global leader in art and design education, the Pasadena-based ArtCenter College of Design offers undergraduate and graduate-level degrees. During Summer 2024, Ken Bielenberg and Juan Manuel Gutierrez from the Entertainment Design department collaborated with the Neutra Institute to offer a specialized class called *Outer Space Architecture*, integrating the creative endeavors of ArtCenter students with the foundational design principles espoused by Richard Neutra.

Drawing upon Neutra's principles of design, sustainability, and holistic well-being, participants engaged in an in-depth exploration of these concepts. Throughout the term, a series of lectures and presentations by guest speakers augmented the learning process, supplemented by field trips to seminal architectural works by Richard Neutra.

Students were given the opportunity to select from two distinct scenarios: a colony on the surface of a distant planet/moon, or a massive colony traveling for years through space to reach their final destination. The course culminated in an August 2024 exhibition of the student projects at the Neutra Office entitled "Survival Beyond Tomorrow." The exhibition was also an open house for the public.

In early 2025, ArtCenter's David Mocarski once again collaborated with the Institute for a course entitled *Mobile Furniture: the Body and Senses*. Under the premise that furniture is the connector between humans and spaces they live, work and play in, furniture needs to appeal to all five senses engaging their users for health and wellbeing. Final presentations and critiques of these projects were also held at the historic Neutra Office Building. The Neutra Institute looks forward to future collaborations with this esteemed institution.

PARTNERSHIPS

USC School of Architecture

In partnership with the USC School of Architecture, the Neutra Institute offers a Scholar-In-Residence program that provides ten months of rent-free residency during the Fall and Spring academic semesters. The hope is that by experiencing Neutra's architecture in a personal way, a greater understanding of his philosophies and design principles will influence the scholar's own future professional practice. The scholar also participates in giving tours, welcoming academics and those in professional practice for overnight stays at Reunion House.

In May 2024, the Institute selected Ryan Holcomb as its second scholar in residence. Over the past year, while residing at Reunion House, Holcomb completed his second year as a Master of Heritage Conservation student.

Holcomb reflects, "I think the most impactful memories of my time at the house are funnily enough the mundane stretches of leisurous boredom that one can only experience at home. The iconic floor-to-ceiling glass doors/windows that have become almost like a screen as I watch birds, chipmunks, the rain, the sun, really whatever the day brings. Truly bringing the outside in."

"Obviously I live alone but I think the house lends itself to being pictured as full of people. Perhaps it's the strength of the programming, maybe the sense is heightened by the juxtaposition of my solo residency, but it is very easy to imagine someone sitting at the breakfast nook while I cook, for example.

From that same kitchen you can see all the way into the master bedroom. The connection between the spaces so obvious you almost hear someone calling from across the house. It's cool, in a way it makes the house feel lived in."

"The house, in combination with the surrounding foliage, the pond, and the massive windows always seems to be alive with dappled light. Dancing across the wood ceilings, flooding in from the skylights, shifting across the house throughout the day there is always something interesting to be seen. It's something you can only really appreciate when you spend all your time in a place, when you live somewhere."

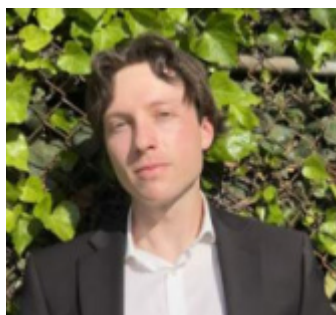
Another partnership with the Heritage Conservation Program at the USC School of Architecture was developed during Spring 2025 for ARCH 554 Heritage Conservation Practicum: *Advanced Documentation*.

The course is focused on preserving women's heritage and included a lecture on Dione Neutra. ARCH 554 will hold its final presentations at the Neutra Office at the end of the spring semester.



HABS Photographs of Reunion House ©2023 Schaf Photo Studios

PARTNERSHIPS



The Institute thanks Ryan Holcomb for his valuable and important stewardship of Reunion House during his residency.

California Preservation Foundation

The California Preservation Foundation (CPF) provides statewide leadership, advocacy, and education to ensure the protection of California's diverse cultural heritage and historic places. Each year, the organization hosts Doors Open California, the largest statewide celebration of historic places in California. Enthusiasts of historic architecture, design, and cultural heritage gain access to more than 80 sites across the state.

In September 2024, Reunion House participated for the second consecutive year in Doors Open. In a single day, more than 120 people visited the property and were welcomed with specialized tours by the Institute's scholar in residence and board members.

During these tours, participants were also treated to a stroll along Neutra Place to learn about and experience the unique colony of Neutra-designed homes designed and built between 1948 and 1962. This collection of custom homes is one of the few concentrations of custom architectural homes by a single architect. They offer viewers a clearer understanding of Neutra's ideas, architectural language, and evolution of materials.

California Polytechnic University, Pomona

The Neutra family has enjoyed a relationship with Cal Poly Pomona for decades. After her death in 1990, Dione Neutra donated the Van der Lew (VDL) House II (1932/1964) to the university with the College of Environmental Design and Department of Architecture as its steward.

The VDL House and Reunion House share a unique history. Although Reunion House was designed and built as a speculative house, when a fire gutted VDL House in 1963, Richard and Dione purchased Reunion House and lived there during the rebuilding of VDL. Once the elder Neutras moved back to VDL, their son Dion purchased the house and lived there until his death in 2019. As a result, Reunion House is one of the few Neutra houses that Richard lived in during his lifetime and served as a focal point for the family during a traumatic period of fire recovery.



Each semester, Reunion House welcomes a new group of Cal Poly docents to Reunion House to learn about the link between the two homes, explore similarities and differences in the buildings, and learn more about the family.

Additionally, in early 2025, Reunion House welcomed the student volunteers who are currently cataloging the papers of Dione Neutra and the papers of Raymond Neutra (Richard & Dione's youngest son) to tour the property. In 2024, the Institute funded the ENV Special Collections, to further their efforts to make the Neutra holdings accessible. The Institute looks forward to a long and productive partnership with Cal Poly.

PARTNERSHIPS

Society of Architectural Historians / Southern California Chapter

In 2024-2025, the Neutra Office became home to the in-person/virtual series, VISUAL WORLD with Victoria Lautman. VISUAL WORLD explores the constructed environment in its various forms: architecture, design, fashion, art, landscape, or their intersections. A long-time cultural journalist, Lautman has contributed to many newspapers and magazines, and hosted long-running radio programs.

Lautman's series is part of the Society of Architectural Historians/ Southern California Chapter's (SAH/SCC) mission to provide its members with opportunities to learn about and experience the rich architectural heritage of Southern California and beyond.

VISUAL WORLD programs from the past year have covered a wide variety of topics including the architecture of Ray Kappe and Robert Stacy Judd; the influence of car design in Southern California; Virtual Reality concept design and construction in film and television; interior designer Tony Duquette, the photography of Tim Street-Porter; and the legacy of the 1989 Case Study House exhibition at MOCA. VISUAL WORLD has attracted more than 700 in-person and virtual attendees during the past 12 months who learn about the building's legacy.

In addition to the VISUAL WORLD events, the Neutra Office was also the site of the first annual SAH/SCC Merry Ovnick Fellowship Lecture. This program honored Dr. Merry Ovnick, an educator, author, and past SAH/SCC president. With over 350 members and 3,500 international contacts, SAH/SCC collaborations expose historians and enthusiasts alike to the ongoing legacy of Neutra.



Panelists, for the program on Ray Kappe.



Discussion with Elizabeth Smith about MOCA's Case Study House Program

EDRA

The Institute sponsored a symposium at the annual Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) conference in Portland in June. EDRA is the largest and oldest environmental design research organization in the world. The symposium showcased three research projects related to Richard Neutra's book, *Survival Through Design*. Heather Jauregui of Perkins Eastman reported on the thermal performance of Neutra's experimental school on the UCLA campus in light of future temperature increases, Kris Mun of USC presented her eye-tracking study of the spider leg on Reunion House, and Dr. Marc Jurblum, from the University of Melbourne, described his successful doctoral research installing fractal nature murals in two closed psychiatric wards in Australia. The symposium showed that the theories of Richard Neutra are still valuable and inspirational today and deserve to be integrated into current architectural practice.



Photo: David Coffey

Members of the Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo

Universidad De La Republica Uruguay

Last year, the Institute also welcomed the Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo Universidad De La Republica Uruguay (Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, University of the Republic of Uruguay). It included members of the faculty and students in the last year of the five-year program. The curriculum for the final year includes traveling the world visiting prominent architectural sites. The trip is funded by the students selling raffle tickets for the first four years of the program. Uruguay has a significant legacy of modern architecture, so the students were particularly interested in Neutra's work. Attendees visited both Reunion House and the Neutra Office and carried memories of their visits back to their home country.

PARTNERSHIPS



Coalition Building Among Building Science Programs

In early 2025, the Neutra Institute flexed its convening power to engage professors from five building science programs: Cal Poly Pomona, SCl-Arc, Woodbury University, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Southern California. These leaders came together at Reunion House to discuss how they could work more closely together and integrate Neutra's ideas into their curricula. This nascent collaboration was the first of its kind across local educational institutions and can potentially impact hundreds of students across Southern California.

Spanning the Globe:

Raymond Neutra as Brand Ambassador

Dr. Raymond Neutra, President of the Neutra Institute and the sole surviving son of Richard and Dione Neutra, leads the Institute and promotes his parents' legacy. From Bakersfield to Barcelona, from Palm Springs to Portugal, Raymond Neutra has been a featured speaker on his father's work, as well as the current endeavors of the Institute.

During the past fiscal year Dr. Neutra has lectured at such prestigious venues as Fallingwater, for the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, the TU Vienna, the Center for Architecture + Design in San Francisco, Modernism Week in Palm Springs, the MUDE Museum of Design in Lisbon, Moving Boundaries in Portugal, and the Porto Marques de Silva Foundation, also in Portugal. He has also participated in several webinars and podcasts reaching a national and international audience.



Dr. Neutra in Barcelona, Spain.



Restoration work continues...

As part of his estate plan, Dion Neutra, the architect's son, bequeathed the ownership of three Neutra-designed properties in Silver Lake, California to the Institute for use in furthering its mission: the Neutra Office Building (Richard Neutra, 1950), Reunion House (Richard Neutra, 1950) and Treetops Apartments (Dion Neutra, 1982).

Over the past year, restoration of the exterior redwood siding on Reunion House has continued with the Institute having the entry and patio elevations of the house restored.

More than a decade ago, the clear-heart redwood board and batten siding was covered with a brown, solid body stain which reduced maintenance challenges but obscured the natural grain, color and look of the redwood.

Under the stewardship of the Institute, the existing, non-original brown stain is being removed around successive elevations of the residence and replaced with a natural, clear sealer. The net effect is the building's original exterior finishes are slowly being restored to the original look from 1950.

What is Biorealism?

“Biorealism” is a term coined by Richard Neutra to capture his recognition of “the inherent and inseparable relationship between man and nature” as well as his philosophical approach to design. By combining “bio” and “realism,” Neutra was signaling the priority he gave to respecting the constraints and possibilities human biology presents for design. Biology doesn’t change with fashion, and he believed that it demands an evidence-based and biophilic approach to design.

Biorealism was meant to firmly separate Neutra from the other Modern architects that were his contemporaries. In our more intellectually fragmented 21st century, it takes at least four different intellectual disciplines to capture what he meant by it.

The first of these we today call “research-inspired design.” It means that science informs design decisions to ensure that they are made on the firmest possible grounds.

The second of these is neuroscience, because Neutra believed that the evidence needed for good design could be found in the basic physiology and neural functioning of humans.

The third is what is now recognized as “biophilia,” the deep connection that our physiological and neural operations have to the natural world around us.

The fourth is captured in what today we call “sustainability.” It means that the designs we create should support us and maintain us into a future with its own new challenges and help us preserve all that we want to about the values we find and imbue into our lived world. Biorealism is all that!

Summary

During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the Neutra Institute for Survival Through Design expanded and solidified partnerships with many important educational organizations. As a result, the NISTD has extended its reach, influence, and impact across the globe.

In 2026, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) plans to reprise its successful 2024 Conserving Modern Architecture program, using Reunion House as its case study and the Neutra Office as its lecture venue and workspace. The Getty program brings scholars from all over the world to Los Angeles to participate in its program.

The Institute looks forward to continued opportunities to collaborate with organizations that advance the Neutra legacy.

The Institute wishes to thank the following volunteers for their time:

John Berley	PJ Letofsky
Russell Brown	Marc Romeo
Carla Fallberg	Noam Sargosti
Chris Hacker	Griffin Synder
Rob Heggen	Gary and Gayle Strang
Lisa Heschong	Will Thomas



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