



Annual Report

NEUTRA INSTITUTE FOR SURVIVAL THROUGH DESIGN

Fiscal Year 2025-2026

Entering a New Era with First Executive Director



Cindy Olnick, NISTD Executive Director

In January 2026, the Neutra Institute for Survival Through Design welcomed its first Executive Director to position the organization for long-term growth and impact.

After a three-month search, the Institute hired Cindy Olnick, a seasoned communications professional, former Associate Director of Heritage Conservation at the University of Southern California, and inaugural Los Angeles Conservancy Director of Communications. Fittingly, when Cindy moved from Boston to Los Angeles in 2000, she interned for Dion Neutra and the Neutra Institute. Her hiring represents a real homecoming.

“Cindy will help propel the Institute into the future,” said Dr. Raymond Neutra, President of the Institute, “ensuring that my father’s legacy—as well as that of the other Neutras—continues to create positive outcomes for people and the planet. This is the logical next step in professionalizing the organization and expanding our reach.”

While much of Cindy’s professional career has been in heritage conservation, she is most excited about the potential of the Institute to further Neutra’s ideas about biorealism and the role that good design can play in quality of life, health, and wellbeing. “I’ve long been fascinated by the use of social and behavioral science in communications,” she says. “I’m equally fascinated by neuroscience and [Neutra’s concept of] biorealism. I can’t wait to amplify these ideas, which are more relevant than ever.”

Please join the Board in welcoming Cindy back to the Institute and supporting her work advancing the NISTD mission.

CONTINUED IMPACT THROUGH RESEARCH, PROGRAMS, AND PARTNERSHIPS

During the last fiscal year, the Neutra Institute has created meaningful impact on both sides of our mission to preserve and share the Neutra legacy and promote human-centered design that serves people and the planet.

Here are just a few examples:

Biorealism Today: Lessons Learned from Richard Neutra’s UCLA Lab School

Over the past three years, the Institute collaborated with the UCLA School of Education & Information Studies and global design firm Perkins Eastman, to conduct a post-occupancy evaluation of the UCLA Lab School at the University of California Los Angeles (Richard J. Neutra and Robert Alexander, 1957-8). The project studied how biorealistic design and behavior shaped indoor environmental quality at the school and the relevance of this approach for today. Among the findings, the school’s carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels were lower than those in typical, mechanically ventilated schools—even in high-performing facilities. The design’s natural ventilation strategy combines with “fresh air breaks” in which students leave the classroom and CO₂ levels decrease.

The report, *Biorealism Today: Lessons Learned from Richard Neutra’s UCLA Lab School*, provides teachers, designers, and building operators with practical evidence-based guidance for designing and adapting facilities to evolving needs. The report received press coverage in magazines with combined circulations of more than 50,000. It was the topic of a series of educator workshops in Southern California attended by 120 people, during which participants applied the findings to their real-world classrooms and campuses. It has also been shared at the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) and Greenschool conferences.



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Chris Nichols presenting *Bowlarama*



Raymond speaking about the Galka Scheyer house restoration

Programming at the Historic Neutra Office Building

The Institute continues to offer a robust roster of educational programming at the Historic Neutra Office Building in Silver Lake. This includes educational events about architectural history, Neutra-designed projects, and research-inspired design.

In May 2025, the Institute celebrated the centennial of Neutra's arrival in Los Angeles with lectures by scholars Todd Cronan, James Guthrie, Barbara Lamprecht, PhD, and architects Frank Escher and Ravi GuneWardena. The following month, Lamprecht, Escher, and GuneWardena spoke on the restoration efforts at the Jardinette Apartments (Richard J. Neutra, 1928) and the Lovell Health House (Richard J. Neutra, 1927-9).

In the fall, John Zeisel, PhD, lectured on *The French Alzheimer's Village at Dax*. Dr. Zeisel shared how the plan of the village reflects the special needs of villagers living there and how design and neuroscience can work together to benefit people and the planet.

The Institute also continues its partnership with the Society of Architectural Historians/Southern California Chapter's in-person and hybrid programs, including:

- Luke Leuschner on *Germans in the Desert: Beyond Amerikanismus in the American Southwest, 1914-1934*;
- Volker Welter, PhD on *Leopold Fischer: Exiled in LA*;
- Chris Nichols on *Bowlarama*;
- Charles Fisher on *the Architecture and Symbolism of Freemasonry*; and
- Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Krys Blackwood on *Putting the Human in Designing for Space*.

The Institute's website, neutra.org, expands the reach of our in-person programming and educational activities to an international audience. The website offers free access to videos, webinars, and presentations. Through neutra.org, virtual tours of the three Institute-stewarded properties make them accessible to more than 55,000 people all over the world annually.

Alfred Preis/Displaced Exhibition



In March 2025, the Institute hosted its first exhibit at the Historic Neutra Office Building. The Institute partnered with Axel Schmitzberger, RA, a professor at Cal Poly Pomona, to install his exhibit, *Alfred Preis Displaced: Viennese Modernism in the Tropics*.

Born and educated in Vienna, Alfred Preis, FAIA (1911-1994) fled Nazi-occupied Austria in 1939 and settled in Honolulu. After a brief internment as an "enemy alien," he emerged as one of Hawaii's leading architects from the 1940s through the 1960s, completing nearly 180 projects during his career, including the USS Arizona Memorial. His work forged a distinctive synthesis of Viennese modernism with Hawaii's climate and cultures.

The exhibition traces Preis's life and work through eight thematic clusters presented as faux newspapers, referencing his prominent presence in local media. Featuring restored historical photography, contemporary documentation, drawings, models, and more than a hundred images and videos, the traveling exhibition has been shown in Honolulu and New York. The exhibition opened March 14 with a welcome by Christine Moser, Austrian Consul General in Los Angeles. Aaron Cayer, PhD hosted a panel discussion with Laka Preis Carpenter, Dr. Barbara Lamprecht, filmmaker Valentina Ganeva, architect Eui-Sung Yi, and Axel. More than two hundred people visited the free exhibition over the month it was open to the public.



GCI Conserving Modern Architecture Program



GCI scholars at the Neutra Office

In 2025, the Institute welcomed back the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) Preserving Modern Architecture Program. This prestigious educational course draws approximately thirty-five mid-career professionals from all over the globe. The students once again engaged in workshops at the Historic Neutra Office Building and visited Reunion House (Richard J. Neutra, 1950.) Institute representatives shared how the findings of the 2024 student projects shaped the preservation philosophy and conservation work of recent years.

The Institute continues to value its partnership with the Getty and looks forward to another visit in 2027.



Board member Catherine Azimi leading a tour of the Neutra & Alexander County Hall of Records

Docomomo International Conference Comes to Los Angeles

The Institute was also honored to participate in the 19th International Docomomo Conference in March 2026. Students from all over the world completed a workshop before the conference exploring the potential adaptive reuse of the Los Angeles Hall of Records (Richard Neutra and Robert Alexander, 1962) as multi-family housing.



Executive Director Cindy Olnick leading a tour of Reunion house

Institute President Raymond Neutra and Secretary Sian Winship introduced students to Neutra with a lecture at the historic Neutra Office Building and a tour of Reunion House. The next day, Institute Vice President Catherine Azimi treated students and faculty to a rare tour of the Hall of Records.

During the conference itself, Sian Winship led a group of fifty on the sold-out tour *Neutra: At Home in the Colony*, which featured a lecture by Dr. Barbara Lamprecht, a tour of the VDL Research House II (Richard J. Neutra, 1932; Richard & Dion Neutra, 1964) with Resident Director Noam Saragosti, a walk of Neutra Place, and visits to Reunion House (Richard J. Neutra, 1950) and the Inadomi House (Richard J. Neutra, 1960).



The Richard Neutra designed Leddy residence in Bakersfield, CA

Winship led another tour to Bakersfield, where participants visited the Davis Residence (Richard J. Neutra, 1937) and the Leddy Residence (Richard J. Neutra, 1958).

Through these programs, more than one hundred students, scholars, and preservation professionals experienced Neutra's architecture and philosophy.



Raymond Neutra speaking to a gathering in Washington, D.C.

Raymond Neutra Continues RJN Ambassadorship

As the surviving son of the master architect and President of the Neutra Institute for Survival Through Design, Raymond Neutra, MD, Dr.PH, gives talks around the world about his father's work and research-based design.

During the last year, Raymond lectured at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., the Fundacion Arquitectura, COAM in Madrid, Liljestrand Foundation in Hawaii, the Department of Architecture at Woodbury University, and the MAK Center in Southern California.

The Institute also attended the Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture (ANFA) Conference in San Diego, California.

The Properties



Restored original redwood siding at Reunion House

As part of his estate plan, Dion Neutra, Richard Neutra's son, bequeathed ownership of three Neutra-designed properties in Silver Lake to the Institute for use in furthering its mission:

- Historic Neutra Office Building (Richard J. Neutra, 1950)
- Dion Neutra/Reunion House (Richard J. Neutra, 1950)
- Treetops Apartments (Dion Neutra, 1980).

Reunion House

During the last year, restoration work continued on Reunion House as paint and stain were removed from the redwood cladding. The Institute has slowly been moving around the building, restoring one façade at a time. Residents of Neutra Place have commented that Reunion House has never looked better. Some owners have even been inspired to restore their own redwood cladding and the Institute is delighted to be leading by example.

Restoration of the building's two spider legs—hallmarks of Neutra's design and this property—also continued over the past year, thanks to the master craftsmanship of Eric Lamers.

Neutra Office

At the Historic Neutra Office Building on Glendale Boulevard, the Institute has removed graffiti from the building's front façade during the past year. The Institute conducts all repairs in accordance with widely accepted historic preservation standards.

In 2026, artist Eric Junker painted a festive mural on the building's north façade as part of a special project by our neighbors at Silver Lake Wine.

The mural was reviewed and approved by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission and is registered with the Los Angeles Mural Program.



Eric Junker Mural on the north elevation of the Neutra Office

Treetops

At the Treetops Apartments, the Institute performed a series of maintenance and repair projects, including the removal of some large specimen trees that were no longer viable, to ensure the safety of tenants and neighbors.



Scholar in Residence: Maria Alejandra Mateus

Over the past year, the Institute has been delighted to host a third-year USC master's student as our scholar in residence. This May, Alejandra Mateus will receive her Master of Landscape Architecture degree with a Certificate in Heritage Conservation.

During her tenure as the Reunion House Scholar in Residence, Alejandra reports having “developed a new appreciation for the dialogue between landscape design and architecture.” Alejandra was inspired to focus one of her class projects on the history, development, and preservation of the Silver Lake Reservoir.

She also helped lead the annual tours of Reunion House for the California Preservation Foundation's Doors Open day, during which three-hundred people received guided interior and exterior tours.



Maria Alejandra Mateus

So, 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 past year, the Neutra Institute for Survival Through Design has significantly increased the impact of its educational programming about Neutra's architectural legacy as well as how his ideas about design, neuroscience, and psychology create spaces and experiences that increase quality of life and contribute to sustainability. We also debuted on Instagram (@neutra institute) to share our work more broadly.

With Cindy Olnick as the new Executive Director, the Institute is poised to expand its sphere of influence and continue its role as steward of Reunion House, the Historic Neutra Office Building, and Treetops Apartments—preserving and sharing them with future generations.



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