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Kraigher house by Richard Neutra, Brownsville, Texas

University of Texas at Brownsville

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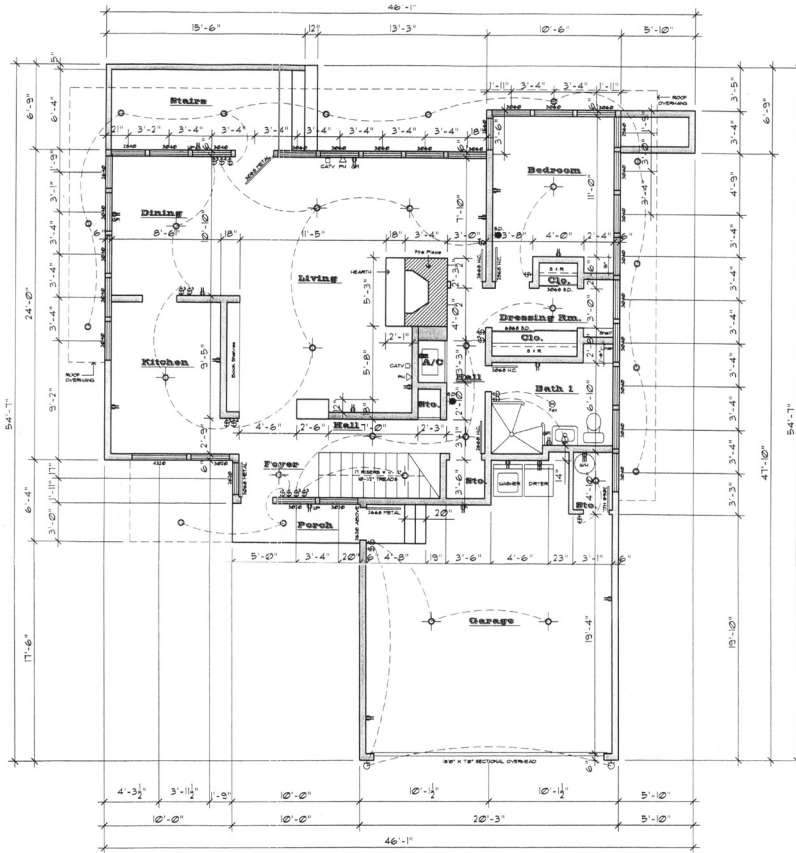
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Kraigher House by Richard Neutra
Brownsville, Texas

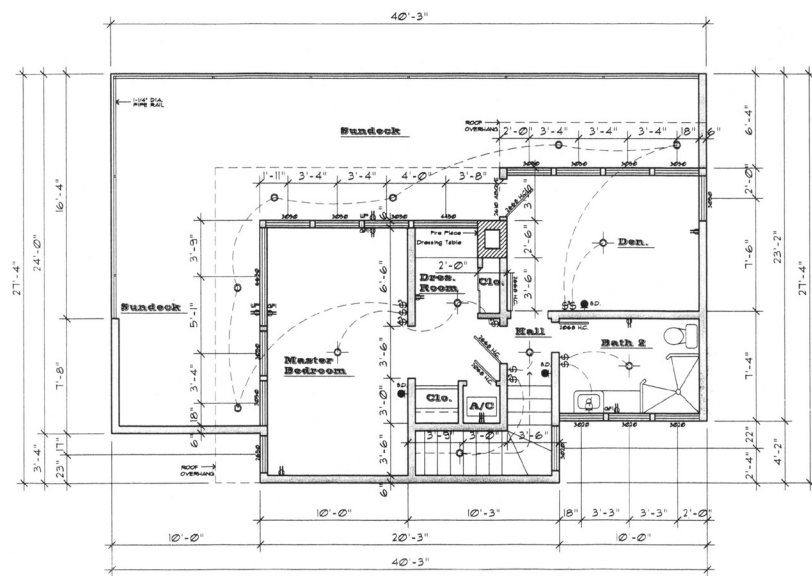


Floor Plans



1ST FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

1ST FLOOR LIVING:	1063.00 SF.
2ND FLOOR LIVING:	571.00 SF.
SUNDECK:	489.00 SF.
GARAGE:	454.00 SF.
STAIRS:	110.00 SF.
PORCH:	30.00 SF.
FLOOR CONT.:	19.00 SF.
TOTAL:	2683.00 SF.



2ND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

Kraigher House drawings by David Hinojosa, a former student at The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

In 2005, The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College entered into an agreement with the city of Brownsville to restore the nearby, endangered Kraigher House, a gem designed by renowned architect Richard Neutra. UTB/TSC rehabilitation projects manager Larry Lof described his initial encounter with the 1937 home: “I first saw the house on a cold, rainy winter day in 2006. Graffiti-covered plywood sheets covered all the windows and doors. Only the light from

holes in the collapsing roof lit the dark, dank interior. The air was permeated by the smell of filth and mold-covered rotting wood. Remnants of old cooking fires littered the terrazzo floor. Everything of value had been stripped out for the few cents it would bring as salvage. The lower section of all the wall studs had rotted away. Literally, the only thing holding the building up was the exterior stucco.”



Pictured from left to right are Larry Lof, Sergio Rodriguez, Pablo Quintanilla, Rubén Salazar, Raul Hernandez, Clairaut Kinha, Morel Bossoudaho, Maria Vasquez, David Hinojosa and Ricardo Juarez Jr., participants in The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College’s Historic Rehabilitation Practicum. Rodriguez, Salazar and Hernandez are master carpenters employed by the university; they work full-time on restoration projects. Lof, UTB/TSC’s in-house rehabilitation project director, teaches the Historic Rehabilitation Practicum. After students have finished their basic vocational training, they can take this course on historic building rehabilitation, spending the semester on-the-job, working under the direction of Lof and under the master carpenters.

City-University Partnership to Save the House



Kraigher House as it appears in early 2008, nearing completion of restoration

A partnership between the city of Brownsville and The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College saved the historic Kraigher House.

Although the house designed by renowned architect Richard Neutra had been placed on the market at some point in

the late 1990s, the structure had deteriorated to the extent that it had become a target of potential code enforcement efforts. “It had gotten to the point that it could not be allowed to exist as it was, being a health and safety hazard,” said Larry Brown, the director of planning and community

development for the city when the property was purchased.

Before it could be torn down, city commissioners became aware of the historical and architectural value of the house.

“Every time I drove by I had visions of this important and historical building being

leveled to build an apartment complex or a used car lot,” said Harry McNair, a city commissioner in 1999.

McNair, along with City Commissioners Bud Richards, John Wood and Ernie Hernandez, took this concern to then-Mayor Henry Gonzalez. “Everyone felt there was a need to explore purchasing the house, that this was an opportunity for the city to keep this unique property from destruction,” McNair said.

Brown said the city was encouraged in their efforts by individuals in the private sector who saw the value of acquiring the property. “The purchase of the property involved the city taking a risk, that we would acquire not only an architecturally significant piece of property but that we would be able to restore it and make it something that would enhance the community,” Brown said.

The owners agreed to subdivide the property, selling the

City-University Partnership to Save the House

middle portion with the house to the city for \$150,000, while keeping the flanking lots with frontage on Paredes Line Road. The city immediately fenced the house to deter any further vandalism. Brownsville's general fund was used to make the purchase, but that was replaced when Community Development Block Grant funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development became available in 2004.

Then began a period of several years when city leaders and concerned residents discussed the hoped for restoration of the house: How to go about it? Who to do it? How to finance it? What to do with it when it became usable again? "It was very important to elected officials that this became a public entity," said Historic Downtown District Director Peter Goodman.

Former Mayor Eddie Treviño Jr., who inherited the house when he took office in 2003,

recalls the dilemma the house posed to the City Commission. "I really give credit to the city for having taken this issue seriously and purchasing the property before it was sold and razed for development on that busy street."

Then in 2004, the designation by not only Preservation Texas but also the National Trust for Historic Preservation thrust the building into the national spotlight. This helped spur city leaders and preservation-minded residents into recognizing there was no excuse for waiting any longer to embark on a full-scale restoration project.

Informal conversations between elected officials, interested residents and UTB/TSC President Juliet V. García had been in progress for some time. "There were a lot of conversations with Dr. García and Larry Lof about where we were headed with the house, and I thought we needed to look at the

university's track record of what it had done with some of the buildings downtown and on the campus," Treviño said.

It became clear that only the university, with its in-house restoration program led by Lof, working with a hand-picked crew and college apprentice carpentry students, could properly handle such a delicate project.

On January 1, 2005, the city of Brownsville and UTB/TSC signed an agreement in which the university would lease the house from the city for 99 years for \$1. In return, the university agreed to restore and maintain the house and make it accessible to the public.

Restoration of the House

Two fires and years of water damage had severely compromised the structural integrity of the Kraigher House. The exterior stucco

was all that kept the building from collapsing. Almost every splinter of exposed wood and built-in furniture on the interior had been ripped

out and used as firewood by trespassers. The roof was virtually nonexistent. There was evidence of campfires. Several fires apparently got out of control, causing the fire department to respond. Charred wall studs and rafters were plainly visible. Any metal, especially copper and brass, had been ripped out, stolen for the few cents it would garner at a scrap yard. The heavy, cast iron bath tubs were bashed in where copper faucets, fixtures and pipes had been torn out. This plundering included copper and brass hardware such as window locks.

At this point, Lof and the team finished another of the university's historical buildings and picked up work in earnest on the Kraigher House. Walls were braced on both sides to support their own weight. Weakened structural pieces were "sistered," or conjoined, with new wood, allowing the walls to support themselves once again. The next step involved sistering the few remaining roof beams and adding new ones to get a roof on the house as soon as possible.

Plaster

Plaster on the inside walls had disintegrated to being very thin or to having the lath exposed. Local plaster artisans followed a traditional three-coat plastering system. The results are milky-white, matt-finish walls. All door frames and corners are crafted with round corner molds.

Emergency Stabilization

"The house was terribly close to collapse and certainly could not have withstood even a minor tropical storm," said Larry Lof, The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College rehabilitation projects director.



Before stabilization (early 2006)



Nearing completion (early 2008)

Restoration of the House



Upstairs bathroom (before)



Upstairs bathroom (after)

Windows

Metal casement windows were a standard feature in Neutra's designs, in homes both modest and sumptuous.

This style of "horizontal banding rhythms" of steel casement windows became known as "ribbon windows."¹

Every glass window pane in the house was missing, but many of the steel window frames remained. With a few exceptions, all of the window hardware – the latches and casement cranks – was missing.

Most accounts of the Kraigher House's windows had them being 1 foot wide by 3½ feet tall. They were actually 1½ feet wide – making each double casement set 36 inches wide – and 51 inches tall, or 4¼ feet tall.

On the first floor, there are 23 double casement sets, 17 transoms and two stationary windows.

On the second floor, there are 12 double casement sets,

17 transoms, two stationary, one picture and one low swing-out windows.

HVAC

Three HVAC units have been installed in the house. The building was divided into sections to avoid long runs of duct work. The ducts were run between the ceiling joists to the various rooms before plastering.



Bedroom windows (after)

Restoration of the House

Passive Solar Design

“One can, from the very start, design a room, its orientation and material selection, in such a manner that temperature losses, irradiation and air currents are salient parts of the scheme,” said Richard Neutra in “Survival Through Design.”

Neutra cleverly used a handful of tricks to make this house as cool as possible. He oriented the living side of the house to face south/southeast to capture the prevailing Gulf of Mexico breezes.

Employing simple passive solar techniques, Neutra created broad overhangs on the south, east and west facades. An extension of the upstairs deck shades the living area from the sun’s strong summer rays, while the upstairs is shaded by a wide roof overhang.

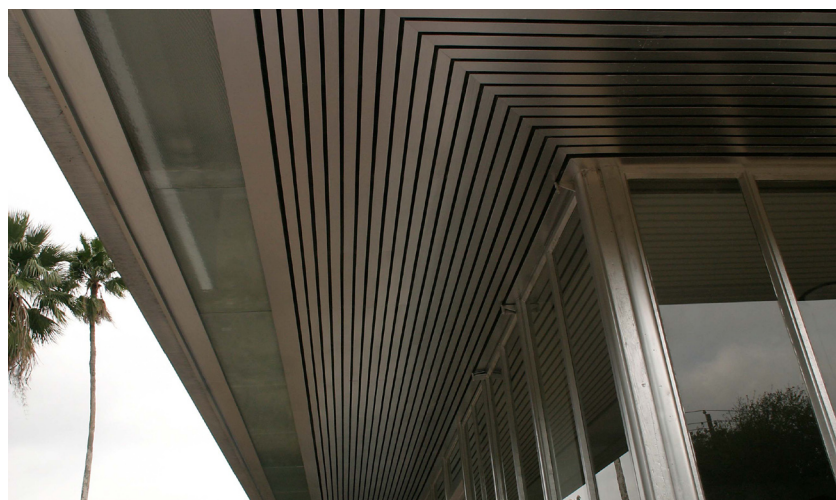
Soffit ventilation keeps the lower level overhang from capturing excessive heat. Wooden strips, approximately $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide, are spaced

about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch apart along the undersides of the overhangs. On the lower level, these openings vent upward, to about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet up the upstairs

wall, where a screened opening runs horizontally along the wall, letting the air captured downstairs to vent.



Soffit ventilation (before)



Soffit ventilation (after)

Working transoms above doors and some windows – or in the case of the horizontal line of windows along the ceiling on the stairwell wall – allow for draw and ventilation.

Aluminum-Color Metallic Accents

White and silver are the exterior colors. The trademark “ribbon” steel windows have been painted a shiny aluminum-color paint. It also is used on the wooden soffit strips and exterior trim. Simple round steel pipe was used as a deck railing on the upper level. Neutra wrote of using the paint in an effort to dematerialize an object and fool the eye, rather than trying to making wood look like steel.

One-piece galvanized steel gutters contribute to the “trim” of aluminum color. A company in Monterrey, Mexico, was found to make the equipment to fabricate these distinctive crimped gutters.

Restoration of the House



Living room (before)



Living room (after)

Planes of Vision

Simplicity of line, a hallmark of International Style, is evident throughout the house. There is a virtual, continuous visual plane created in each room by window heights or, in the case of the dining area, by the back of the banquette. In the living area, a second, echoing line is created by the picture-hanging indentation.

Glorification of Common, Utilitarian Materials

The built-ins are crafted from simple cabinetry woods, and all sliding doors on closets, shelving and the banquette surfaces are made of polished natural Masonite. Found on site, a sliding door has been helpful in recreating the simple, sliding door design. The two-hole, two-finger grips have been recreated on the closet storage doors above the hanging area.

All interior doors, too, are made of Masonite with waxed finishes. Another example

Restoration of the House



A fragment of the original soffit glass



Exterior lighting (after)

of simple materials is the use of 3x6-inch subway tile in both baths and as the kitchen counter top and backsplash.

This interest in using simple materials waned a bit in later years. Neutra traded rubbed waxed Masonite for birch, mahogany and Japanese ash plywoods.

Soffit Strip Lighting

An important Neutra trademark is placing exterior lights above translucent glazed soffit strips at the edge of a second floor overhang. Neutra's trick was to use light to extend living space out into the garden at night. Conversely, the light reflected off the window glass, providing a curtain effect of privacy.

Original Cedar Closet

The original cedar closets in the dressing areas had not been destroyed. They were, however, defaced with graffiti. Built into the shallow closet floors are simple slant-board shoe racks.

They have been stripped and sanded. "Why these weren't ripped out for firewood, we'll never know," Lof said.

Built-ins

Every room has built-in storage in the way of drawers, vanities or shelving and cabinets. The banquettes in both the living



Light fixture (before)



Ceiling dome light (after)

Restoration of the House



Dining area (before)



Downstairs bedroom and dressing area (before)



Dinning area with built-ins (after)



Downstairs bedroom and dressing area with built-ins (after)

Restoration of the House



Fireplace and living room (*before*)



Fireplace and living room (*after*)

and dining areas have flip-up seats to allow for storage.

Fireplace

At some point, the terrazzo-faced fireplace was covered with a brick facade. Lof reported that this was easily chipped off, revealing the original surface. Once again, this is an example of Neutra using simple, but rich and unadorned materials.

Outside Spaces

Neutra spoke of the “sacred spot” in a house, a place where the structure opened to the surroundings. This house is atypical for him in not having the expected sliding glass doors leading to a spacious patio. Neutra often equipped those patio floors with radiant heating to eliminate a jarring transition from inside to outside.

The Kraigher House has no such sliding wall, no such patio or incorporated pond. Perhaps Kraigher informed Neutra of the local mosquito problem

Restoration of the House



South facade (before)



Southwest corner (during)



Roof deck (after)



South entry (after)

Restoration of the House



Red downstairs bath (after)



Blue-green upstairs bath (after)



Red cabinet interiors (after)



White plaster throughout

and the decision was made that the most comfortable living would be inside the house with the screened windows open, ideally with a southeast breeze flowing through. According to Dennis Franke, the present-day *resaca*, or finger lake, was nothing more than a drainage ditch when his family bought the house in 1961. Certainly, the upstairs deck would have been used for *al fresco* entertaining.

Color

In correspondence between Neutra and George Kraigher, certain colors were specified for the house. The descriptions are Chinese red for the interior of the kitchen cabinets and a dark Indian red for the downstairs bath and blue-green for the upstairs bath. Blue-green was also specified for the interior of the living room cabinets. Remnants of this color were found during the restoration work. This correspondence also made

mention of button tufting for the banquette upholstery.

¹ "Neutra: The Complete Works,"
Barbara Lamprecht, 2006

Restoration of the House



Stairs (before)



Stairs (after)



Second floor hall (before)



Second floor hall (after)

Historical Significance of the House

The 1937 Kraigher House is the only Richard Neutra-designed, single-family dwelling built in Texas¹. It is also distinguished as the first modern house in Texas². It is also one of the few Neutra residences built outside California.

The International Style house attained national attention with the publication of an article in *Architectural Record* magazine in May 1939.

In their 1932 book, “The International Style,” which accompanied a show they curated for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Henry Hitchcock and Philip Johnson identified three principles for what they called the “style of the time:”

- expression of volume rather than mass
- balance rather than pre-conceived symmetry
- expulsion of applied ornament

International Style characteristics applied to the Kraigher House include:

- rectilinear forms
- light, taut plane surfaces devoid of applied ornamentation and decoration
- open interior spaces
- use of cantilever construction
- primary building materials are reinforced concrete, glass and steel

Neutra characteristics include the above, plus:

- repeated “ribbon” casement windows
- passive solar design techniques
- soffit ventilation
- soffit strip lighting
- built-in furniture
- aluminum-color metallic accents
- glorification of common, utilitarian materials
- restrained use of saturated color

Neutra’s quest to incorporate nature into his design and create harmony between man and nature – what he called biorealism – often led

him to unconventional scouting forays. Stories have been told about Neutra tromping through acreage at all times of

“We saved every bit of the remaining historical fabric of the house that was possible.”

**Larry Lof
Restoration Project Director**

the day and night to familiarize himself with its orientation to the sun, the indigenous flora and the local weather.

The Kraigher House commission, however, was a modest one, and it was in an out-of-the-way location. This, coupled with the time frame of the Depression, presumably eliminated the luxury of a personal visit. Although there are no records of a client questionnaire, Neutra undoubtedly discussed the Lower Rio Grande Valley climate and environment with George Kraigher³.

Neutra incorporated passive solar techniques, particularly the use of cantilevers and

half-walls of glass to control the direct rays of the sun.

Much is made of Neutra’s connection to Frank Lloyd Wright, who was already a well-known architect when Neutra arrived in the United States. Neutra worked in Wright’s studio for several months before moving to California.

Edgar J. Kaufmann commissioned Wright to design his Falling Waters House. Kaufmann then selected Neutra to design his Palm Springs, California, house (1946-47). While Kaufmann’s Falling Waters House seems to “have grown out of its environment,” the design for the Kaufmann Winter (or Desert) House stands out and transcends the environment, which is a trait shared by the Kraigher House.

The Kraigher House is equipped with south, southeast and southwest-facing overhangs.

While these cantilevers are an expected design element,

Historical Significance of the House



it may be more significant to point out the unexpected.

The first anomaly to be noticed in the Kraigher House, indicating Neutra's break from his already established International/California Style, is the lack of a patio and a water feature – either a swimming pool or a reflecting pool. The same water elements that make sense in dry California do not make sense in the humid Lower Rio Grande Valley. Though unexpected in comparison to most of Neutra's California residences, this lack of a water element is consistent with his attention to the environment.

Another departure is the lack of any sliding glass doors to open onto a patio/pool area. In fact, there are no floor-to-ceiling windows in the house. These wall-to-wall, but not floor-to-ceiling, casement windows are sufficient for the tropics. The view is not sacrificed, and lower windows would unnecessarily increase the natural ambient light and cause a rise in temperature with extra radiant heat generated from the terrazzo floors.

Cross-ventilation made possible by these casement windows allow for greater comfort in a period before air conditioning. The house also has a number of transoms that, when opened, move warm air at the ceiling up and out.

Another California trait that Neutra used in Brownsville is building on a slope. While on slopes in California are typical, the Kraigher property offered only a slight depression toward the resaca. Neutra exaggerated this slight slope, going so far as

to carve a basement out of it. By doing so, he was able to bring the house, with the exception of the northeast corner, off the flat ground slightly.

This would also have been a consideration to allow for runoff in the rainy season.

Screened casement windows would have taken care of flying insects. The second-floor roof deck would have offered an optimal space for socializing, with most snakes and crawling insects being kept at bay.

¹ In 1941, Neutra collaborated on the design of a multi-family complex, one of eight experimental developments built nationwide to create efficient, multi-unit housing by the U.S. Federal Works Agency, for wartime employees in Grand Prairie, Texas. Avion Village, still standing today, was a collaborative effort by a team of architects, including Richard Neutra, David R. Williams, Arch B. Swank, and Roscoe DeWitt of Dallas.

² The first true use of International Style in Texas was a temporary structure built one year before the Kraigher House. That was William Lescaze's Magnolia Pavilion at the Texas Centennial Exposition of 1936 in Dallas.

³ Neutra would provide clients with detailed inquiries regarding not only their likes and dislikes, favorite colors, etc., but personal questions such as what items do they keep on their bedside tables. This is further evidence that Neutra personalized his designs to each client individually, down to who needed space for a bedside lamp, water carafe, books and so forth, as shown in the files of John Nicholas and Anne Kinsolving Brown's Windshield House on Fishers Island, New York. That well-known Neutra project was in the design stages in 1937, the year the Kraigher House was built.

Timeline of the House

1937: Richard Neutra-designed house at 525 Paredes Line Road built for George Kraigher by contractor A.W. Neck.

March 27, 1946: Kraigher sold the house to Winship A. and Muriel M. Hodge.

Courthouse records reflect this transaction as:

Share 22 of the Los Ebanos Estates, Espiritu Santo Land Grant, including
Blocks 57, 58 = 2.69 acres
Block 59 = 3.68 acres
Block 60 = 3.20 acres

1951: Neutra visited the house for the first and only time, accompanied by George S. Wright and Charles Granger. Neutra had been brought in as an associate architect by Wright and Granger, who were interviewing to design an addition to the McAllen Municipal Hospital. Neutra accompanied Wright and Granger to McAllen for the selection interview, and being so close to Brownsville, he suggested they make a visit to see the Kraigher House.

The “lady of the house” invited the three men inside to look around. “The white stucco was badly discolored, with massive cracking. Charlie and I were shocked; Neutra was appalled,” wrote Wright in a letter to the editor of *Cite* (Rice School of Architecture magazine) Winter-Spring 1994.

The men, by the way, were not awarded the McAllen project.

1961: Muriel M. Hodge, widow, sold blocks 58, 59, 60 of Los Ebanos subdivision, Share 22 of the Espiritu Santo Grant to John P. Franke.

“Dad bought the house when I was about 12, and I lived there until I went off to the Army,” Dennis Franke said. “My brother Richard and I had the upstairs bedroom that faces Paredes. The other upstairs room was a study, with bookshelves lining one wall.”

Franke recalled that the resaca – a local term for a finger lake – behind the house was really nothing more than a ditch that his father extended to reach the existing resaca on the north side of the property.

Dennis Franke also recalled hearing that Kraigher had horses on the property.

The original property line appears to be north to the resaca, west to McKintosh Street, east to Paredes Line Road, and south to Los Ebanos Road.



Earliest known photo of house, believed to be during Kraigher's ownership

Timeline of the House

He thinks the northern perimeter was the El Jardin subdivision.

After the Franke family moved out of the house and relocated to South Padre Island, they rented the house to a succession of tenants. “It became increasingly more difficult to find good tenants, so Dad finally just boarded up the house,” Franke said.

During this period, vagrants came and went, destroying the house. What they didn’t ruin, the elements did.

1999: Dennis and Richard Franke sold the Kraigher House with two lots to the city of Brownsville for \$150,000.

The original four lots in the Los Ebanos Subdivision were renamed the Neutra Subdivision. The middle two lots were the portion purchased by the city of Brownsville, with the two flanking lots still owned today by the Franke brothers.

February 19, 2004: Preservation Texas included the Kraigher House on its first list of Texas’ Most Endangered Historic Places.

May 2004: National Trust for Historic Preservation named the Kraigher House to its 11 Most Endangered List.

2004: Brownsville received a \$150,000 HUD Community Development Block Grant funds to offset the purchase price of the house.

November 15, 2005: Brownsville City Commission unanimously approved a lease agreement in which The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College would lease the house from the city for 99 years for \$1 per year under the condition that the university restore and maintain the house and make it accessible to the public.

January 1, 2006: Lease of Kraigher House by UTB/TSC begins.



Then-Brownsville Mayor Eddie Treviño Jr. and Dr. Juliet V. García, UTB/TSC president tour house while work is in progress

January 2008: Restoration nears completion.

Richard Joseph Neutra Biography

Born: April 8, 1892,
Vienna, Austria

Died: April 16, 1970,
Wuppertal, West Germany

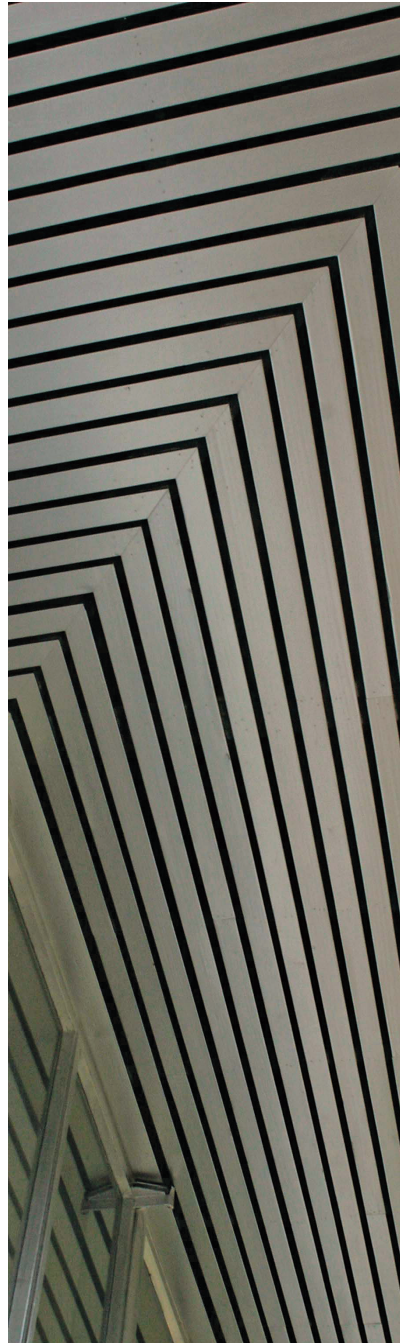
Architect Richard Neutra defined modern architecture in the United States from the time of his arrival in the

“Design, the act of putting constructs in an order, or disorder, seems to be human destiny. It seems to be the way into trouble, and it may be the way out. It is the specific responsibility to which our species has matured, and constitutes the only chance of the thinking, foreseeing, and constructing animal, that we are, to preserve life on this shrunken planet and to survive with grace.”¹

country in 1923 until his death at the age of 78 in 1970.

Several parallels exist between Neutra and George Kraigher, who commissioned the Kraigher House:

- They were born within two years of one another.



- Both attended technological academies in Vienna.
- They were both in the Austro-Hungarian army during WWI. Kraigher, however, defected to the Allies early in the war.
- They both immigrated to the United States within two years of one another.
- Both men were pioneers in their respective fields.

After the WWI armistice in November 1918, Neutra spent the year in Zurich, Switzerland, studying, working and recovering from malaria contracted during the war years. In Zurich, he met Dione Niedermann, and they were married in 1922. By then, Neutra was working for the Berlin architect Erich Mendelsohn and remained there until immigrating to the United States in October 1923.

After immigrating to the United States, Neutra worked briefly as a draftsman at C.E. Short and Maurice Courland in New York, the

“With knowledge of the soil and subsoil of human nature and its potentials, we shall raise our heads over the turmoil of daily production and command views over an earth which we shall have to keep green with life if we mean to survive – not cramped full with all the doubtful doings of a too thoroughly commercialized technology. Tangible observation rather than abstract speculation will have to be the proper guide. And drifting will no longer do.”¹

architectural firm of Holabird and Roche in Chicago and a short stint at Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisconsin, with Frank Lloyd Wright.

Neutra and his family moved to Los Angeles in 1925 at the urging of an old classmate and sometime-rival, Rudolph Schindler, who had immigrated to the United States before the war. The Neutras moved into an apartment in Schindler’s house, where they remained for five years. During this time, the two architects worked

Richard Joseph Neutra Biography

independently but occasionally collaborated on projects.

Southern California, in contrast to war-riddled Europe, offered Neutra a fresh canvas on which to practice his designs. Brilliant sunshine, cliffs and rolling hillsides, the Pacific Ocean and the high desert were all within about two hours of driving time. The topography and weather were

“If ... the floor area of a small future house for the many is no more than a limited number of square feet, well and conveniently planned, its usefulness will have to be tested by the intensity of easy, logical, flexible usage of each part of this floor area during the day. So-and-so many ‘square foot hours’ of usage per diem will be its livability index, an index of dwelling value.”¹

destined to become integrated into Neutra’s designs.

Neutra accepted the hypotheses that the human genetic code evolved on the savannas of East Africa with its open plains

interspersed with groups of trees. That hypothesis had dramatic consequences for his designs. Humans had to be able to orient themselves in their surroundings, for which they needed all their senses. The theory provided a rationale for why people need physical contact with nature, even why they need to see the horizon. Embracing such a hypothesis was also one of the reasons Neutra went not just to America but, specifically, to warm, freedom-loving southern California.

Intellectuals, artists and the avant-garde were drawn to Los Angeles after WWI. Here, the Neutras joined the intellectual set and raised their three boys, Frank (b. 1924), Dion (b. 1926) and Raymond (b. 1939). Neutra lived in Los Angeles until his death in Germany while on a vacation in 1970.

By 1930, Neutra’s work had become well-known in architectural circles, particularly due to his

acclaimed Lovell Health House in Los Angeles. Although fraught with incompatibilities

“... Present and probably future generations are committed to a sportsmanlike interest in the systematic exercise of their own human bodies. Atrophy of muscle groups as a result of failure to practice them is dreaded. We all are less content than were the Victorians merely to own our body and to drape it for dignified presentation.”¹

for daily living, the house broke ground with numerous structural and design innovations or adaptations by Neutra. The commission by the owners, who had previously worked with Schindler on their beach house and was a personal friend, was one of the final blows in the rivalry between Neutra and Schindler.

After the Lovell Health House acclaim, Neutra was booked on a speaking tour to Asia, Europe and the United States. His visit to Japan proved to be

particularly significant, and Neutra immediately began to incorporate various aesthetics of Japanese design into his work.

Upon returning from the long journey, the Neutras moved out of Schindler’s apartment.

Neutra was prolific in his work. During the WWII building moratorium, he was a visiting professor of design at Bennington College in Vermont and did some government commissions, such as Avion Village Housing for Defense Department employees in Grand Prairie, Texas. Avion is still in use today. His post-WWII work is considered by historians as his best examples of International Style.

¹ “Survival Through Design,” Richard Neutra, 1954

George Kraigher Biography

1891: Born outside Postojna, 40 miles southeast of Ljubljana, Slovenia (later Yugoslavia). Did basic studies in Ljubljana. Studied engineering in Vienna.

1912-?: Aviation studies at Aspern Military Aviation School.

1914-1918: World War I

- Flew for the Austro-Hungarian air force.
- Escaped by plane to Asiago, Italy (near Verona).
- Was initially held as a prisoner of war.
- Defected and was transferred to the Solun (Thessalonica) front with Serbian and French volunteers.
- Volunteered as a pilot in the Serbian Army, serving the Allies during remainder of the war.

1921: Immigrated to the U.S.

1921-1925: Worked as an aircraft mechanic with Curtiss Aeroplane Co. and Wright Aeronautical Corp.

1925-1928: Worked as an aerial cartographer for Brock & Weymouth Engineering of Philadelphia.

1927: Became a naturalized American citizen.

1929: Delivered a new Fairchild 71 to Brownsville.

1929-1945 (except for WWII assignments): Became chief pilot and operations manager of Pan American Airways Western Division in Brownsville. During this time, he scouted and perfected landing approach patterns on the mountainous overland routes through Mexico and South America.

1936: Was impressed by a modern house that he saw in Los Angeles when visiting Douglas Aircraft. After inquiry, learned architect was Richard J. Neutra and contacted him. Neutra accepted the commission to design a Brownsville house.

1937: Set record for commercial flights in a Lockheed Electra, flying 8,370 miles in six days, from Brownsville to Cristóbal to Lima to Santiago to Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro.

1937: Contracted Neutra-designed house built in Brownsville on Paredes Line Road.

1941: Became operations manager of Pan American Africa, a civilian front for the U.S. government to operate an airline from Liberia across Africa to Karachi to keep Allied supply lines open.

1942: Was commissioned a colonel in U.S. Army Air Corps Reserves.

- Flew the first Allied survey flight across the Soviet Union in a Douglas C-47.
- Was involved in the resupply of the French campaign in North Africa.

May 1944: Assigned to assist Josip Broz Tito, the main partisan commander

during WWII, during the German invasion of Drvar.

July-December 1944: Commanded Air Crew Rescue Unit in Caserta, Italy, directing the rescue of more than 1,200 Allied airmen shot down over German-occupied Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Czechoslovakia and northern Italy.

March 27, 1946: Sold Brownsville house to Winship A. and Muriel M. Hodge.

1948: Hired by the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) to develop and manage its aviation department.

1957: Retired from ARAMCO.

1958: Completed one-story house on Bethlehem Road in Litchfield, Connecticut, also designed by Neutra. Kraigher had the builder add a pitched roof to the design.

1984: Died September 17 in Litchfield, Connecticut, at the age of 93.

Bibliography & Acknowledgements

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In early 2006, Dion Neutra, son of Richard Neutra and principal of the firm that bears the Neutra name, honored UTB/TSC with a visit. This was Mr. Neutra’s first occasion to see the only single-family house in Texas designed by his father. Along with several representatives from the university, Mr. Neutra toured the Kraigher House; together, we lamented the ruinous state of the structure and contemplated the challenges ahead. We were grateful for Mr. Neutra’s input and interest in our project and look forward to his return to join us in a ceremonial unveiling of this historic treasure that belongs to all the citizens of Brownsville. — *Dr. José G. Martín*

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Cheryl Taylor, *Writer*
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Andrew Keese, *Editor*
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