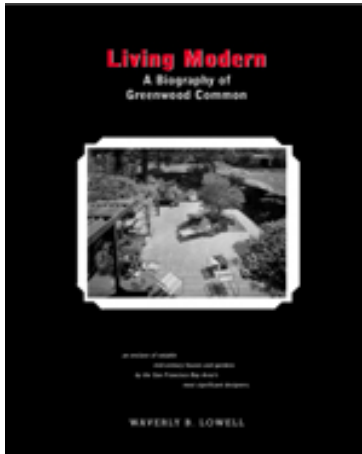


Living Modern: A Biography of Greenwood Common, by Waverly B. Lowell. William Stout, 2009. 176 p. ill. ISBN 9780979550867 (cl.), \$45.00.



Following World War II, a small but influential number of groups formed to build their own residential communities containing high-quality, modern houses. Often composed of idealistic university professors, architects and their acquaintances, these cooperatives banded together to provide alternatives to stale, monotonous tract housing. In California, these communities included the Mutual Housing Association (Los Angeles, 1947-1950), the Peninsula Housing Cooperative, Ladera, (San Mateo County, 1947-1948), and Mar Vista (Los Angeles, 1948-1949), each developed with varying degrees of cooperative ownership and maintenance. Influenced by these precedents, the San Francisco architect and University of California, College of Environmental Design Dean (UCB CED), William W. Wurster (1895-1973) organized Berkeley's Greenwood Common between 1951 and 1957.

In the book's first two chapters, Waverly B. Lowell, the highly respected Curator of the CED Environmental Design Archives, relates the history of its interconnected architecture and landscape architecture; she explains how Wurster and others created a delicate balance, enforcing stylistic unity while avoiding the imposition of stifling artistic regulations. Greenwood Common occupies a high vantage point, its east-west axis providing spectacular views of the Golden Gate. Twelve lots were sub-divided originally, but only eight were built upon, the houses ringing a grassy common on three sides. Wurster assisted homeowners in selecting a stellar group of Bay Area architects to design the houses, including Joseph Esherick (1914-1998), Donald Olsen (b. 1919), Howard Moise (1887-1965), Albert Henry Hill (1913-1984) and John Funk (1908-1993), who worked closely with an array of landscape architects, most notably Lawrence Halprin (1916-2009), and Geraldine Knight Scott (1904-1989). In chapter three, she analyzes each house, emphasizing how the designers maximized sight lines and fused indoor and outdoor living spaces. The extent and expertise of this indoor-outdoor planning, the author contends, distinguishes Greenwood Common as a landmark of the "Bay Region Style."

Lowell has expertly mined the CED Archives' primary sources to fashion and illustrate her narrative. Her knowledge of the collection is apparent, particularly when she relates an architect's earlier designs to one at Greenwood Common. In her enthusiasm to present a complete picture, however, she occasionally supplies too much detail. Given this penchant for thoroughness, her bibliography is surprisingly skimpy. The book contains many beautiful plans and photos drawn from the archives, never before published; while most illustrations effectively reinforce her points, some interior shots are too dark to be legible. *Living Modern* is required reading for scholars focusing on 20th century American regionalism; it is a book probably best suited for academic libraries serving upper level undergraduate and graduate architectural history students.

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