

## **LEWIS MUMFORD, HENRY-RUSSELL HITCHCOCK AND THE RISE OF "BAY" REGIONALISM**

**Jose Parra-Martinez**

Universidad de Alicante / University of Alicante, Alicante, Spain

**John Crosse**

Independent Scholar, Los Angeles, USA

### **Abstract**

*In the fall of 1949, the San Francisco Museum of Art held Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region. As an illustrated manifesto of Lewis Mumford's regional stance, the exhibition epitomised one of the major turning points in the postwar debates surrounding the question of the autonomy of a truly American modern tradition. Unlike Mumford's 1941 first sight appreciation of the complex reality of Northern California – resulting in an enduring love affair with several generations of its architects, urban planners and social reformers, from William Wurster to his Telesis protégés–, Henry-Russell Hitchcock's evaluation of West Coast architecture was not very high, and his early elucidation evolved through ambivalent considerations. However, as this study tries to demonstrate, the 1949 show would contribute to mellowing the Eastern critic's strict formal and visual criteria delimiting his and Philip Johnson's International Style definitions, which ultimately led him chair the 1962-66 Modern Architecture Symposia at Columbia University to reassess the American reception of European modernism. Conversely, this paper aims to examine the extent to which the conflict of perceptions and interests between the two Coasts brought about the 1949 show as part of a well-orchestrated campaign that had begun around a decade before Mumford wrote his renowned 1947 New Yorker piece triggering a controversy on the existence of a 'Bay Region style'. Contrary to prevailing assumptions that this exhibition was a delayed reaction to the 1948 MoMA symposium organised by Johnson to refute Mumford's opinions, or that it merely tried to make the most of the national polemic, the exhibition was part of a coherent regionalist agenda whose main success was, precisely, that Mumford, Hitchcock and other influential actors in the United States were exposed, indoctrinated and/or seduced by the so-called Bay Area School and its emphasis on social, political and environmental concerns.*

**Keywords:** Bay Area School, California regionalism, Lewis Mumford, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, postwar debates on architectural identity

## **SFMA and the early promotion of Bay Region architecture**

In September 30, 1938, the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMA) premiered its first great architectural exhibition entirely devoted to Bay Area modernism. It was the first of a series of formative architectural actions which, counting on the strong support of SFMA's founding director, Dr Grace McCann Morley, contributed decisively to the process of codification of "Bay" regionalism.



**Figure 1.** 1938 AIA Architecture Exhibition at SFMA. (From *Architectural Forum*, December 1938).

As Morley's priority was to make SFMA's architectural programme an educational challenge<sup>1</sup> to broaden the layperson's perspectives and to prompt visitors' curiosity, William Wurster, chairman of the 1938 exhibition, put local architect and talented graphic artist Ernest Born in charge of designing the show. His enlightening and outstanding installation not only promoted a clear image of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Grace Morley letter to William Wurster, January 15, 1938. SFMOMA Archives: ARCH.EXH.001, box 9, folder 23.

Bay Area as a coherent architectural region, but also set an exceedingly high design standard<sup>2</sup> for futures shows (Figure 1). In total, Born put on three major architectural exhibitions at SFMA with tremendous popular and critical success. The second was *Architecture Around San Francisco Bay* which, after an East Coast preview at the Architectural League<sup>3</sup> of New York, was mounted at SFMA in the spring of 1941 to take full advantage of the AIA National Convention at nearby Yosemite National Park in May, securing the presence of Bay Region architects both inside and outside SFMA's halls around the time of the conference. Born's 1941 show would be a prewar mirror of his third 1949 exhibition *Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region (DASFBR)*, which became a pivotal moment in the American postwar debates on regionalism and modern architecture.

Morley close collaboration with Los Angeles's *California Arts & Architecture* and San Francisco's *Architect and Engineer* magazines, as well as her national connections, facilitated an extensive coverage of her Museum's exhibitions. In this regard, *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Record* and the American Federation of Arts<sup>4</sup> *Magazine of Art* resulted instrumental in various systematically organised campaigns to promote "Bay" regionalism beginning soon after the launching of SFMA's own architecture exhibition programme. From 1938 to 1941, in a series of *Pencil Points* articles, noted architectural critic Talbot Hamlin (1938, p.346) applauded the 'sincere simplicity' of William Wurster and Gardner Dailey's residential designs. Likewise, Mumford's April 30, 1938, *Sky Line* piece praising the Bay Area's vigorous regional expressions indicates that, by then, Wurster was already on his radar screen. This promotion was reinforced by the August 1938 *Pencil Points* issue devoted to Wurster as the

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<sup>2</sup> Local and national press remarked upon the architect's ground-breaking installation whose innovative design was without parallel in the United States. *Architectural Forum* (1938, p.468), for instance, laid emphasis on the simplicity and visual order accomplished by Born's refined proposal: 'a complete reversal of the usual practice of fitting together whatever material available might be'.

<sup>3</sup> During this time in New York, from 1929 to 1936, Ernest Born joined the artistic staff of *Architectural Record* (1933-34), and then served on the editorial board of *Architectural Forum* up until his 1936 return to San Francisco. He was also prominent in some of the New York Architectural League's initiatives. As he became one of the most valuable assets of the Bay Area on the East Coast, Born most likely facilitated Bay Region architects' entrée to several League shows.

<sup>4</sup> During her directorship, Grace Morley maintained an active participation in several national and international museum associations and public cultural organisations, such as the American Federation of Arts, where she was elected Vice President.

titular head of the San Francisco Bay Region's "soft" modernism. Wurster's recognition also increased after his marriage to housing expert Catherine Bauer in 1940. Soon afterwards, a consistently maintained collaboration between *Life* magazine and *Architectural Forum* boosted his public notoriety. In 1944, Wurster was appointed Dean of Architecture at MIT which, along with Bauer and Morley's continuing contacts, secured his position on the boards of various architectural journals such as John Entenza's *California Arts & Architecture*, as well as his regular participation in architecture competitions, award juries and academic debates, where he exerted his influence<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, his collaborations with the ideologically diverse scholars he hired to lecture at MIT –from Robert Woods Kennedy to Henry-Russell Hitchcock– provided many opportunities for cultural exchange and East Coast exposure for the Bay Region.

The aforementioned 1941 AIA National Convention was a seminal event in the historiography of California modernism. Lewis Mumford's visit to San Francisco resulted in a personal tour with Wurster and Bauer from which emanated<sup>6</sup> his interest and later love for Bay Region architecture. Coincidentally, the following year, Mumford moved to the Bay Area to teach at Stanford University. There, a younger generation of local practitioners, such as Telesis members, recognised their fascination with Mumford's social criticism. In his turn, Mumford would interpret their work as an inspirational source to further elaborate his arguments defending an enduring tradition of the Bay Region School's organic responses to time and place.

Unlike Mumford's first sight appreciation of the region's architecture, Hitchcock's early opinion of Wurster was not very high. During the 1939-40 Golden Gate International Exhibition's run Hitchcock first visited California. Upon his return to the East Coast he wrote an essay on his findings being published in the December 1940 issue of Entenza's recently acquired magazine and in which the

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<sup>5</sup> In the wake of Wurster's celebrity, a younger generation of San Francisco designers soon received increasingly growing media attention. Among them, Corbett, DeMars, Dinwiddie, Funk and Kump became the most published names of American editors who, by the end of the 1940s, were fully aware that '*Bay Area architects were creating something out of the normal*' (Gebhard, 1976, p.7).

<sup>6</sup> Wurster's effort in showing Mumford around would challenge Marc Treib's suggestion that after Mumford's 1947 *New Yorker* piece, '*quite unknowingly and surprisingly*', Wurster found himself in the middle of a theoretical debate to reassess modernism's evaluation criteria (Treib, 1999, p.58).

Eastern critic continued his harsh post-International Style exhibition opinion of R. M. Schindler's experimental architecture. In this debatable article Hitchcock (1940, p.22) stated:

Wurster's work, which has for some years been well publicized, is not exactly disappointing<sup>7</sup>. It is perhaps duller than one expects and the gradual development away from a simplified traditionalism toward more overtly modern, or at least original forms, seems either to have been arrested late or to have taken an unfortunate turning.

Contrary to Hitchcock, after his 1941-44 recognition of Northern California modernism, Mumford recurrently praised the environmental adaptation of Wurster's houses as particularly representative of the Bay Region tradition<sup>8</sup>, which he identified with a '*free yet unobtrusive expression of the terrain, the climate and the life on the Coast*' (Mumford 1947, p.109).

### **Western architects-Eastern critics: discussions on regionalism and style**

Lewis Mumford's October 11, 1947, *New Yorker Sky Line* column labelling San Francisco Bay Area domestic architecture as '*Bay Region style*' fuelled a national debate after he used the term to denounce what he considered the '*sterile and abstract*', '*one-sided interpretation of function*' of the International Style. Mumford's controversial "Status Quo" essay not only expressed his disaffection with the mechanical, formalist version of modernism proposed by Hitchcock and Johnson at MoMA in 1932, but also criticised their insistence on its legitimacy to evaluate contemporary architecture. Mumford believed that the International

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<sup>7</sup> Even though Hitchcock's comments on other Northern California architects such as Dailey, Clark, Dinwiddie, Funk and McCarthy were more indulgent than his review of his future employer at MIT, the historian-critic clearly expressed his preference for Portland architects, such as Pietro Belluschi.

<sup>8</sup> Marc Treib had advocated that Northern California regionalism, as a re-examination of the locale, arose as an intrinsic theme during the New Deal years. Due to the scarcity of the Great Depression, locally sourced materials, such as wood, became the basis for cost-effective building solutions. Also, as an intersection of practical concerns and symbolic notions associated with the idea of home –so essential amid the stress and dislocation of the depression (Treib 43)–, its pervasive use resulted in the 'style' association with Wurster's second Bay Area tradition. Ironically, the prevalence of wood in the domestic imageries of San Francisco Bay, would be dismissively used by Alfred Barr against Lewis Mumford and William Wurster during the 1948 MoMA symposium, as later expounded upon.

Style principles, as inherited from European criticism, '*fostered a superficial attachment to the symbolism, rather than a deep understanding of the emancipatory possibilities of technology*' (Canizaro, 2005, p.288). Instead, he proposed "Bay" regionalism, from Bernard Maybeck to William Wurster, as a '*native and humane form of modernism*' (Mumford, 1947, p.109). Mumford's excerpt from *The Sky Line* provoked such an angry response from Philip Johnson's circles of the Eastern establishment that it prompted Johnson to host a symposium at MoMA to refute his criticism. The event took place on February 11, 1948, being alarmingly entitled "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" (Figure 2).

Mumford's antagonists Alfred Barr and Henry-Russell Hitchcock opened the symposium by discrediting his misreading of the International Style. They profited from their position as introductory speakers to aggressively undermine Mumford's arguments and exploited the word "style" in their own interests. Barr dismissively dubbed Mumford's original '*Bay Region style*' as '*Cottage style*', intended a less serious, provincial version of the International Style. The term was also bandied about by other speakers who, as Barr, used it contemptuously to underline<sup>9</sup> that it was merely restricted to the field of domestic architecture. Furthermore, instead of focusing on the main cultural implications of Mumford's proposal, Barr and Hitchcock facilitated the views of subsequent panellists<sup>10</sup> and charted ancillary lines of discussion through related cotemporary debates concerning monumentality, functionalism and style, which ultimately diffused the argument's force and clarity, impeding Mumford's challenge from having '*the level of debate it deserved*' (Fenske, 1997, p.38).

The ensuing dispute between Mumford and Hitchcock over their dissimilar understanding of Bay Region "style" is representative of their two fundamentally opposed visions of modern architecture. Contrary to Hitchcock's analysis based on methods of connoisseurship and from the history of art he learned at Harvard (Searing, 1990), Mumford's interpretation of the architecture produced around

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<sup>9</sup> Alfred Barr (1948, p.8) ironically uttered: '*It is significant, however, that when such a master of Cottage Style as William Wurster is faced with a problem of designing an office or a great project for the United Nations, he falls back upon a pretty orthodox version of the International Style*'.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Gropius, George Nelson, Marcel Breuer, Peter Blake and Frederick Gutheim, among others.

San Francisco Bay emerged from a wider conceptual frame considering the built environment as interdependent with its natural surroundings and its urban and socio-cultural context. Their '*impassioned confrontation*' at MoMA in 1948, as Gail Fenske (1997, p.37) observed, '*culminated a 20-year debate between the two historian-critics*' since Mumford could not accept Hitchcock's methodology of evaluating buildings on the basis of formal criteria, whereas Hitchcock was unable to appreciate Mumford's complex approach to architecture, which was deeply rooted in the ecological and social orientation of Patrick Geddes.



**Figure 2.** February 1948 MoMA Symposium. Mumford and Hitchcock are sat in the front row; Gropius at rostrum. (From *Architectural Record's* March 1948 review of the event).

Fenske's thoughtful analysis of the 1948 symposium, however, overlooked Philip Johnson's role as the ongoing debate instigator. Peter Blake's autobiographical account *No Place Like Utopia* intimates that Johnson, who had taken Mumford's comments as an attack<sup>11</sup>, orchestrated carefully the event at MoMA to refute

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Blake who, after meeting Philip Johnson in 1947 was appointed Curator at MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design (1948-1950) would also admit in his autobiography that they were all wrong about Mumford (Blake, 1996, p.107).

Mumford's opinions in *The Sky Line*. Hitchcock's 1948 correspondence<sup>12</sup> with MoMA provides corroboration of Blake's statement. Similarly, the Breuer-Johnson communication during the planning of the symposium –discussing how to rebut 'Lewis Mumford's *Isms* (sic)<sup>13</sup>' – also indicates that Johnson was stacking the deck against Mumford at the time MoMA was simultaneously preparing a retrospective of Breuer's work. Johnson's strategy to neutralise Mumford was twofold: first, he assigned his antagonist the role of moderator, which limited Mumford's possibilities of defending his arguments (Bletter & Ockman, 2015); secondly, upon arrival at MoMA, a number of Mumford's opponents<sup>14</sup> were given in advance Barr and Hitchcock's comments, evidencing Johnson's interest in controlling how the discussion could perhaps unfold<sup>15</sup>.

After his return to MoMA, Johnson's change of mind regarding Bay Region architecture seems evident. In his "Architecture in 1941" piece, an unpublished article written in 1942, Johnson praised DeMars's Farm Security Administration wood complexes and mentioned favourably Wurster's large-scale housing project in Vallejo as an example of site prefabrication. Yet, in 1947, within the coast-to-coast saturation of Bay Region architecture's press coverage, Mumford's *New Yorker* piece must have been the straw that broke the proverbial camel's

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Johnson letter to Henry-Russell Hitchcock, January 30, 1948. Henry-Russell Hitchcock Papers, 1919-1987. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (Johnson organised a first dinner before the symposium and a second one the following day, inviting Mumford, Barr and Hitchcock to discuss the terms of the meeting and its proceeding's publication).

<sup>13</sup> Marcel Breuer letter to Philip Johnson, December 30, 1947. Marcel Breuer Papers, 1920-1986. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Barnes letter to Marcel Breuer, January 30, 1948. Marcel Breuer Papers, 1920-1986. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>15</sup> Blake's correspondence and discussion with Hitchcock about Johnson's and Blake's October 1948 article in *Magazine of Art* rebutting Robert Woods Kennedy's earlier piece on New England regionalism would further evidence their collusion in the February Symposium at MoMA. Their article continued the 'Cottage' versus 'International Style' debates resumed at every occasion from the symposium through 1949. See Peter Blake letter to Henry-Russell Hitchcock, October 14, 1948. Henry-Russell Hitchcock Papers, 1919-1987. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



back and therefore perceived by Johnson<sup>16</sup> as a threat to his new programmes at MoMA<sup>17</sup>.

San Francisco Bay's 'romantic blend of natural beauty and cultural legitimacy', (Serriano, 2006, p.94) was identified by Mumford's followers as a sort of oasis of national values. Conversely, to his adversaries<sup>18</sup>, the 'Bay Region style' was merely an instrumental myth to express their overly provincial discomfort with the growing presence of foreign architecture in the United States. To compound matters, despite the fact that the national recognition of Bay Region architecture was by then firmly established by articles and exhibitions, its acceptance as an articulated phenomenon was questioned by both its detractors and supporters, including its practitioners. In fact, having reached no conclusion, the 1948 meeting at MoMA had the dichotomous effect of pigeonholing San Francisco Bay architects into a 'Bay Region style' of which none of its protagonists agreed<sup>19</sup> they were consciously a part. Thus, the main battle lines had apparently been drawn following the 1948 symposium and the dispute between enthusiasts and opponents of Mumford's arguments played themselves out on the pages of the most reputed architectural journals of the country. For instance, in the April 1948 post-symposium issue of *Progressive Architecture* Thomas Creighton published an editorial under the form of a letter to Philip Johnson expressing his support of Mumford's viewpoint. Correspondingly, in December, 1948, Creighton published a highly Wurster-sympathetic editorial essay entitled "Architecture:

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<sup>16</sup> The 1947 Princeton symposium "Building for Modern Man", which was attended by Johnson himself and counted on many of the same participants he invited to MoMA the following year, might have provided the inspiration for his "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" discussion at MoMA.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis Mumford's 1947 article was published just a few weeks after the opening of Johnson's *Mies van der Rohe* exhibit at MoMA in September.

<sup>18</sup> After the 1948 symposium, Harvard GSD Bulletin prompted to write a report of the event under the sarcastic title "What has Happened to Lewis Mumford?". The article, which was biased against Mumford's 'attack on the modernist' reveals the divergent stances on the issue taken by the two faculties in Cambridge. Whereas MIT backed its Dean Wurster, Harvard adopted MoMA's position, which was summarised in the GSD review.

<sup>19</sup>When the following year nine Bay Region architects were asked by *Architectural Record* West Coast editor Elizabeth K. Thompson whether there was a regional style in Northern California, the interviewed authors responded evasively or answered no to the question. Still, Thompson's "Is there a Bay Area Style?" *Architectural Record* article published in its May 1949 issue demonstrated that, implicitly, to what most of them agreed was about the existence of a common ground regarding their understanding of a shared culture of place. Later, Thompson herself would explain the result of her survey by avowing that the individualism of the West Coast architects justifiably rebelled against such a restrictive label (Thompson 1951).

Not Style” which resulted in incendiary responses speaking volumes about how aggressively and differently the interpretations of Mumford’s hot topic were received.

### **Mumford, Hitchcock and the landmark 1949 show on “Bay” regionalism**

Early in 1949, making the most<sup>20</sup> of the stir caused by the previous year’s symposium, a group of Bay Region architects, led by Ernest Born and some reputed editors, agreed to collaborate on the organisation and promotion of a new major exhibition, tellingly named *Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region*. The show, which was almost exclusively devoted to single family residences built after the war<sup>21</sup>, garnered the support of the two local AIA chapters and was on display at SFMA from September 16 through November 6, 1949. The installation design was once more entrusted to Born, who provided the exhibition with his accustomed conceptual clarity and expressive dynamism (Figure 3).

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<sup>20</sup> Contrary to Pierluigi Serraino’s (2006, p.70) statement that both the label ‘*Bay Region style*’ and the arguments of its cultural legitimacy were invented on the East Coast, and the controversy only reached California in 1949, two years after the dispute had ‘*snowballed from a passing comment in a weekly publication to become the subject of a debate of national proportions*’, it must be recalled that Bay Region architects provided the controversial conditions that echoed as far as the *London Architectural Review*, which in its October 1948 issue openly endorsed Mumford’s stance. The 1949 show was thus anything all but a delayed response to Mumford’s 1947 piece.

<sup>21</sup> The original exhibition, as shown at SFMA, included 52 houses by 35 architects. The average age of the architects participating in the show was 40 years and only one of them was a woman, Helen Douglass. About half of the houses shown in 1949 were designed by architects who had begun practicing after returning from the front very shortly after the war.

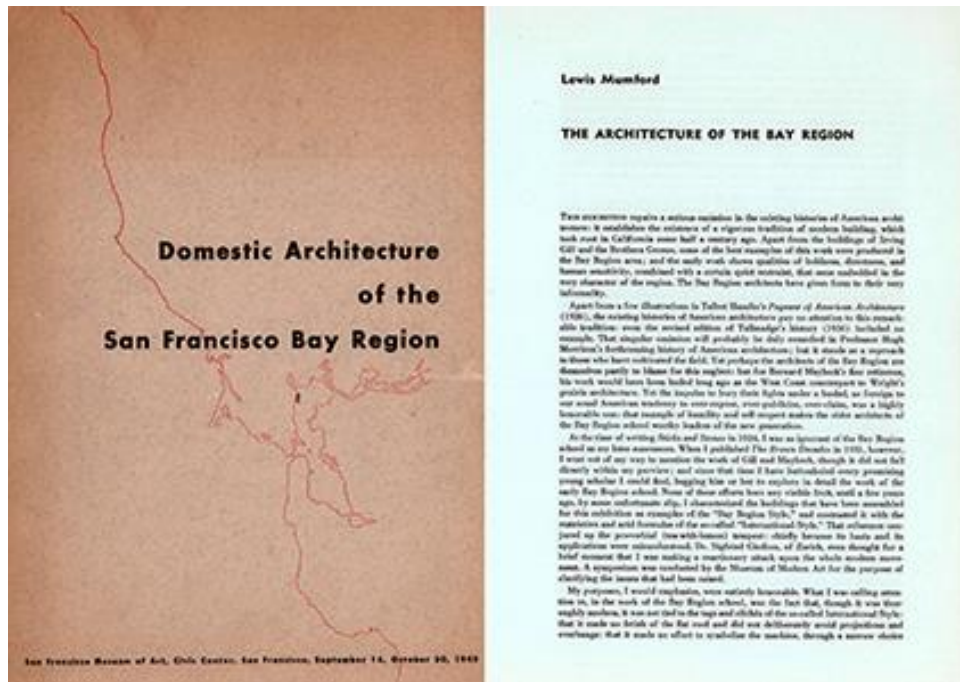


**Figure 3.** *Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region's* installation at SFMA. (Courtesy of SFMOMA archives).

Upon the commotion caused by Mumford's article and subsequent public debates, unlike the 1938 and 1941 shows, in 1949, SFMA did not want to miss the opportunity of publishing an exhibition catalogue (Figure 4). It featured seven essays validating the existence of a modern school in the Bay Region and providing evidence for its consistency as a unique regional tradition dating as far back as the work of California pioneers such as Bernard Maybeck, Ernest Coxhead, Greene & Greene, Julia Morgan, John Galen Howard, etc. Richard Freeman<sup>22</sup> prefaced the book highlighting the leitmotif of the catalogue: Bay Region architects were winning international recognition for '*the imaginative way in which they had met the problems of site, climate, materials and client requirements*', being the reason why their houses monopolised the pages of every regional and national architectural magazine.

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<sup>22</sup> Executive director Richard Freeman was at the helm of the San Francisco Museum of Art during Grace Morely's 1947-1949 leave of absence in Paris to work for UNESCO.



**Figure 4.** E. Born's cover of 1949 *DASFBR* exhibition catalogue (left) and L. Mumford's essay first page (right).

Lewis Mumford's "The Architecture of the Bay Region" was certainly the catalogue's most significant contribution. In this second essay Mumford reframed and clarified the ideas he put across in his 1947 *New Yorker* column. Also reemphasising his discourse<sup>23</sup> at the MoMA symposium, he celebrated the individualism of West Coast architects affirming that their common ground was their sensitivity towards the environment which, again, he opposed to the 'restricted and arid formulas of the so-called International Style'. Mumford called upon historians and critics for proper study and recognition of what he more accurately renamed as 'Bay Region School', an all-inclusive designation rectifying his former use of the word "style", which he lamented as an 'unfortunate slip'. Quintessentially Mumford's, his contribution revealed the work of the lucid and progressive thinker he was:

<sup>23</sup> By the time Mumford was invited to contribute an essay to the exhibition catalogue, in an article published in *Architectural Review* he insisted that the 'restrictive definition of modern architecture' emerging from the 1932 show was 'still maintained' by Philip Johnson's MoMA in 1948 (Mumford 1949b, p.174).

They main problem of architecture today is to reconcile the universal and the regional, the mechanical and the human, the cosmopolitan and the indigenous. [...] Bay Region both belongs to the region and transcends the region: it embraces the machine and it transcends the machine. It does not ignore particular needs, customs, conditions, but translates them into the common form of our civilization (Mumford, 1949a).

William Wurster also contributed an evocative essay, "A Personal View", in which he recalled the virtues of the informal California lifestyle, the freedom, audaciousness and the pleasure felt in the anonymous Bay Area houses.

*Architectural Record* West Coast editor Elizabeth Thompson, whose participation in the catalogue explored the historical roots of the Bay Region School, was the brains behind the exhibition's national publicity campaign. The intense editorial activity performed by Thomson during the organization of the show speaks volumes about her magazine's promotional effort to take advantage<sup>24</sup> of the debates following MoMA's 1948 symposium. Coupling Thompson's promotion with *DASFBR*'s production, *Architectural Record* released several pieces documenting the show. First, the May 1949 issue; then, in September, perfectly timed to coincide with its opening, an exhibition<sup>25</sup> guide and a richly illustrated presentation of the show for which Born himself designed the layout. Finally, *Architectural Record* along with *Architectural Forum* and *Life* magazine, published different monographs on individual houses included in the exhibition. Paradoxically, *Arts & Architecture*, which until then had been actively supporting some of the most significant SFMA's activities deliberately did not mention the 1949 event<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> The earliest correspondence concerning *DASFBR* kept in the SFMOMA archives is dated March 2, 1949. Six months prior to its opening in September, Thompson had published the aforementioned "Is There a Bay Region Style?" spread in the May of 1949 issue of *Architectural Record*.

<sup>25</sup> The magazine also offered its Western Section readers a four-page hand guide and a map locating the houses in the exhibition. These two *Architectural Record* supplements were used strategically to enhance the publicity of *DASFBR*, and sent to every venue as part of the exhibition documentation.

<sup>26</sup> Instead, Entenza preferred to publish an Edgar Kaufmann's article revealingly named "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" which tried a compromising formula.

A smaller version<sup>27</sup> of *DASFBR* was produced as a touring exhibition. It was circulated by the American Federation of Arts (AFA) and, from February, 1950, to July, 1951, visited twelve venues in America before travelling to Germany. Archive records reveal that both Leslie Cheek<sup>28</sup> and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, in charge respectively of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and Smith College, showed an avid interest in the show, wanting to obtain it from the very moment its availability was announced. Hitchcock's correspondence<sup>29</sup> during the Smith College Art Museum venue exposes some of his ideas concerning the show. For instance, that Wurster had evolved moving away gradually from previous restraints. However, Hitchcock also spoke contemptuously about San Francisco's taste and expressed his doubts about the exhibition catalogue '*inadequacies*'. Also revealing of his undecided judgement is that the following year he included Bay Area architecture in his course lessons.

### **MoMA-SFMA exchanges and the ensuing East Coast reactions**

In 1949, *DASFBR* coincided with the culmination of nearly a decade of cooperation between the country's two main museums, being primarily the result of a crescendo of interlocked advertising and publicity of Northern California which had the effect of establishing for the Bay Region a room in the pantheon of architectural history.

Grace Morley's prominent role in the AFA as well as her lobbying effort to secure a Western circuit for shows coming from the East primarily resulted in a close collaboration with MoMA, beginning as early as 1937. Morley's close relationship with Alfred Barr, and later with Elizabeth Mock via her sister Catherine Bauer and brother-in law William Wurster, facilitated that a number of noteworthy

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<sup>27</sup> For the travelling exhibition, the original 52 entries of the contemporary section were reduced to 16 houses.

<sup>28</sup> Leslie Cheek letter to the American Federation of Arts, July 19, 1949. VMFA records. The Library of Virginia archives. Cheek, who was close to Grace Morley, Lewis Mumford and Frank Lloyd Wright, wrote an article for the Museum Bulletin insisting on the uniqueness of the architectural production of the Bay Area as very different from the rest of the country.

<sup>29</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock letter to Robert J. Duemling, April 21, 1950. In this letter he offers his viewpoint on the show. Referring to the Greene & Greene house in Berkeley exhibited on the historical section of the 1949 show, the critic considered that the brothers were quintessentially Bay Region architects regardless of their practice and office being based in Southern California.

circulating exhibitions borrowed from MoMA fit naturally into her architectural programmes. Mock's correspondence<sup>30</sup> reveals that she was collaborating with her sister Catherine and Grace Morley at least since her arrival at MoMA in 1938. The circulation of exhibitions between the two museums during Mock's curatorship produced a cultural exchange of progressive ideas regarding modern planning, public housing, wartime emergencies and, of course, the regionalist standpoint<sup>31</sup>.

After Bauer's 1940 wedding to Wurster, the sisters' correspondence gives documentary evidence of Elizabeth Mock's frequent professional and personal travels to California in 1940 and 1941. Upon her return from the Bay Area, armed with fresh perspective, she organised *American Architecture, Regional Building in America* and *The Wooden House in America*, three regionalist-slanted shows where Bay Region architects figured prominently.

This period<sup>32</sup> is representative of MoMA's socio-political change of direction to embrace a broader regionalist standpoint. Between 1942 and Mock's departure<sup>33</sup> late in 1946, MoMA's exhibitions had the largest audiences in both Coasts to date. They focused on American domestic architecture, presenting related topics through the approaches in which the public was most interested. Her Wurster-Mumford well-informed regionalist slant was thus ideological but also the result of financial reasoning due to MoMA's concerns in reaching wider audiences. From this perspective, it is enlightening to compare the coverage of Bay regionalism in the most significant MoMA-produced exhibitions encompassing the 1949 SFMA

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<sup>30</sup> See Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers: series 1, subseries 1.2, correspondence 1921-1964: box 1, folders 8-10 (Catherine Bauer to Elizabeth Mock and vice versa). The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>31</sup> Mock's main exhibitions travelling to San Francisco –such as *Wartime Housing* (1942); *Look at Your Neighborhood: Principles of Neighborhood Planning* (1944) or *If You Want to Build a House* (1946)– are expressive of her social concerns. MoMA received the influence of California exhibitors and even their exhibitions, like the 1942 *Western Living* show, which travelled to MoMA under the form and title of *Five California Houses*, indicating of the cross-pollination between both museums.

<sup>32</sup> From September, 1937, to July, 1946, MoMA's Department of Architecture was headed by curator John McAndrew, and later by his former collaborator Elizabeth Mock after his resignation in 1941.

<sup>33</sup> Lefaivre and Tzonis (2012, p.120) have assumed Franz Schulze's 1994 account that, in 1946, Johnson eliminated Elizabeth Mock upon his return to MoMA to reclaim his former position. However, according to Jennifer Tobias, there are other versions of Mock's departure, such as Mock's own one as she declared it was her choice to join her husband architect Rudolph Mock in Tennessee, where he worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority (Tobias 2003, p.33-34).

show during and after Mock's curatorship: *Built in USA: 1932-1944* (1944) and *Built in USA: Post-war Architecture* (1953).

Elizabeth Mock's discourse was detailed in her major show *Built in USA: 1932-1944*. Although Mock aimed to educate the public in the acceptance of a wide range of different interpretations of modernism, she particularly stressed the importance of Northern California<sup>34</sup> contributions, which due to her sister's guidance were presented through cases of affordable homes for working families, urban facilities and rural community planning projects by William Wurster, Vernon DeMars and Garret Eckbo, evidencing at MoMA the utmost concern<sup>35</sup> of the Bay Region School. Anticipating Mumford's arguments and stressing the ideas put forward in one of her most popular exhibitions, *Regional Building in America* (1941), Mock's introduction to *Built in USA's* accompanying catalogue<sup>36</sup> stressed that, since 1932, American architecture had learned to adapt the modernist idiom with local materials, the free forms of nature and the appropriate floor plans, volumes and building solutions for living in the different climates of the country. All but coincidentally, she illustrated her point with Wurster's work as an example of a practice 'based on good sense and the California wood tradition rather than on specific theories of design' (Mock, 1944, p.14).

*Built in USA: Post-war Architecture* was curated by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler under Philip Johnson's tutelage. Unlike Mock's homonymous exhibition, the second *Built in USA* focused more on corporate buildings and the private residence than on urban planning and public housing. Its domestic section deliberately turned its back on "Bay" regionalism, which was reduced to a couple of minor examples. William Wurster was not present in this exhibition. Instead, Harwell Harris's personal tribute to Greene and Greene was the only

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<sup>34</sup> The work of Bay Region architects –including Corbett, Dailey, DeMars, Funk, Kump and Wurster– was perceptibly well-covered.

<sup>35</sup> As none of the admirable works of these Bay Region architects in the field of social housing were included in *Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region*, it seems evident that the interest of the 1949 show was a discussion on identity that ultimately folded upon architectural language.

<sup>36</sup> Significantly, John Funk's indisputably Bay Region Heckendorf House (Modesto, CA, 1939) illustrated the cover of her 1944 *Built in USA* exhibition catalogue.



representation of Western regionalism, being California modernism mostly summarised through the industrial paradigm of the Case Study House Program.

After a decade-long series of events devoted to introduce MoMA's audiences to regional planning and building, Johnson's triumphal preface intimated that there was no other possible architectural present in America but an evolution from the International Style. He based his arguments on Hitchcock's analysis and twofold selection criteria: quality and significance of the moment. Oddly, Wurster was not even mentioned in the catalogue despite being one of the authors most clearly identified with the major architectural debates of the time. As a first deduction, this fact could be considered a logical consequence of Johnson's interest in securing his viewpoint. However, the question seems far more complicated. During the preparation of *Built in USA: Post-war Architecture*, Hitchcock's relation with both Catherine and William Wurster was very fluent, if not familiar as their 1951-1952 correspondence<sup>37</sup> proves. Wurster most likely declined to participate in the show as he was devoted to the task of organising UC Berkeley Architecture School –for which he commissioned Hitchcock a report on its Library. Besides, the majority of the members of the exhibition advisory committee were sympathetic to Wurster, such as Creighton, Hamlin and Mock. Wurster's MIT faculty members Vernon DeMars, Carl Koch, and Robert Woods Kennedy had a project in the show; Aalto's Baker House commissioned under Wurster's MIT tenure was included; and his successor Pietro Belluschi had his work conspicuously exhibited. Notwithstanding his absence from the catalogue, as a figure of national stature and influence, Wurster's fingerprints were all over the second *Built in USA* show.

Always less polemical than Johnson or Barr, Hitchcock's consideration of Wurster and his fellow Bay Region architects was problematic. Due to his strict formal criteria he always had serious reservations about the domestic tradition of San Francisco Bay. Yet, Hitchcock's interest in obtaining the exhibition at Smith

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<sup>37</sup> Hitchcock informed Bauer and Wurster about his new 'association' with Philip Johnson to 'get together a new *Built in USA* exhibition and publication'. Although there is no invitation to Wurster to submit materials to the exhibit, the critic spoke frankly about it. See Henry-Russell Hitchcock letter to Catherine B. and William W. Wurster, June 6, 1952. Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. Catherine Bauer Papers. BANC.MSS 74/163c: Series 2. Subseries 2.2. Box 19, folder 13.

College signalled his curiosity about its contributions. Indeed, except for the occasions in which the critic collaborated closely with Johnson, Hitchcock's stance vis-à-vis Wurster was ambivalent.



**Figure 5.** Photo of R. M. Schindler's Lovell Beach House on the cover of the first edition of MAS at Columbia.

One can only wonder the extent to which the two Bauer sisters influenced Hitchcock's vision of California. They planted seeds for the production of *In the Nature of Materials, 1887-1941: The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright* in conjunction with the 1940-41 MoMA exhibition on Wright. Bauer had collaborated with Hitchcock and Mumford in the 1932 MoMA show and again on the 1937 *Modern Architecture in England* book and exhibition. Hitchcock's inevitable mellowing as the impact of the International Style faded is evident in his 1951 *Architectural Record* article "The International Style Twenty Years After" accepting Wurster's architecture. It predicted Hitchcock's continuum referencing to the death of the International Style in his 1965 introduction to the 1966 edition of *International Style*, as well as his apologetic introduction to

David Gerhard's 1971 survey on *Schindler*. Correspondingly, Hitchcock's chairing the series of three Modern Architecture Symposia at Columbia University in the 1960s was another attempt to reassess the American reception of European modernism, being its 1962 MAS cover featuring Schindler's Lovell Beach House (Figure 5) a sort of personal *mea culpa* aiming to repair one of his most egregious mistakes at interpreting California architecture.

## **Conclusions**

The circumstances and decisions behind the organisation of the 1949 exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art, as well as of its strategically planned venues reveal that this exhibition was part of a well-orchestrated campaign that had begun around a decade before Lewis Mumford wrote his renowned 1947 *New Yorker* piece causing the ideological controversy on the existence of "Bay" regionalism as an alternative to the International Style. Previous displays in San Francisco prove that *Domestic Architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region* was not an isolated event. Rather, it was another milestone in the series of promotional actions that, under the directorship of Grace Morley, had been developed by active groups of local architects counting on the support of SFMA's circles and channels, such as the American Federation of Arts, the AIA and several editorial hubs that sponsored the cause of Bay Region architecture throughout the country years before regionalism became a nexus of national debates. Leading Eastern architects, scholars and editors' early experience to Bay Region architecture through William Wurster, Catherine Bauer, Ernest Born and their Bay Region colleagues, as well as the continuum of 1940s SFMA-MoMA collaboration, and their New York Architectural League alliances, approximately coincided with Mumford teaching at Stanford, with Hitchcock's waning enthusiasm for the International Style as he gained appreciation for Wright's work, and with the rise and fall of the curatorship of Elizabeth Mock assisted by her sister's connections. All these situations and exchanges would coalesce into Mumford's recognition, observation and support of a distinctive Bay Region understanding of architecture.

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## **Author identification**

**Jose Parra-Martinez.** Ph. D. Architect. Architectural Historian. Assistant Professor History and Theory of Modern Architecture. Department of Graphic Expression, Architectural Theory and Design. University of Alicante, Spain.

**John Crosse.** Architectural Historian. Independent Scholar. Environmental Engineer. Retired Assistant Director, City of Los Angeles, Bureau of Sanitation, California.