

What's Old is New Again: Looking at Mid-Century Architecture through West Coast Modern Eyes



A key characteristic of mid-century architecture is features that bring the outdoors in — ample glass windows, sliding entrance doors, and natural materials that promote a connection to nature — an ideal home design for getting the most out of the west coast's lush surroundings. If you're planning to update your mid-century home or build new, you'll be reassured to know that many modern design features are today's most popular style. The use of clean lines and open floor plans continue to inspire contemporary designers and architects to create functional spaces with livable style.

The Boom of the West Coast Modern

Mid-century modern architecture began in the early 1940's and stretched well into the 1960's. During this time, architects and designers began to explore both modern and organic design themes. The early concepts of what we call modern design hailed from the Bauhaus movement, a modernist design philosophy that was fundamental to a renowned art school in Germany. Helmed by the concept that form should follow function, the Bauhaus movement explored simple designs with the absence of decorative details. As practicality became a social theme for many families post World War II, west coast architects designed affordable homes with simple and modern elements that reflected both societal changes and the rapid growth during the 20th century.

A Vision for West Coast Living

The West Coast Modern home populates the lower coastline of California to Vancouver, pioneered by visionary architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, Pietro Belluschi, and Net Pratt. Upon the rise of mid-century modern architecture, architects recognized how passive design features could be beneficial to coastal climate conditions, such as: ample roof overhangs and flat roofs to protect homes from the rain, south facing overhangs for controlling summer heat, and expansive glazed windows to allow for solar heating during the winter. While these design features met the practical

side of coastal living, architects of the mid-century endeavored to create an intentional connection to nature by consideration the site's landscape. Entrances of homes were designed in relation to the surrounding nature so you could enjoy the transitions from inside to outside while still having privacy from neighbors.

Another common characteristic of the West Coast Modern home is the revolutionary use of post-and-beam construction and flat planed roofs. The timber frames were derived from locally sourced Douglas fir and Cedar trees that were fully exposed in home interiors, adding warmth and texture to the space. The post-and-beam construction also eliminated the need for additional interior partitions, lending the floor plan to be open-concept with ample air circulation and a sense of spaciousness.



Residential design by west coast architect Peter Hildebrand, Iredale Group Architecture

Livable Style

The *modest* features of mid-century architecture are showing no signs of going out of style. What many of us consider contemporary is often characterized by the most prized elements of modern design — minimal detail, clean and simple lines yet highly functional. Living on the west coast provides a year-round opportunity to enjoy outdoor settings and beautiful scenery, and with a functional and stylish home, there's no need to cancel your outdoor dinner party!