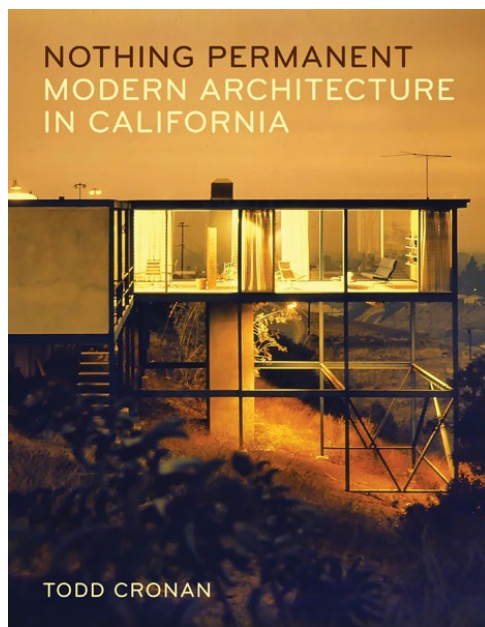


## Review: Nothing Permanent: Modern Architecture in California

by Todd Cronan. University of Minnesota Press, June 2023. 400 p. ill. ISBN 978-1-4529-6938-1 (pbk.), \$39.95. <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/nothing-permanent>.

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Reading Todd Cronan's *Nothing Permanent: Modern Architecture in California* is like attending a dinner party. In fact, the reader has been invited to the ultimate salon-like gathering where Richard Neutra, R.M. Schindler, Charles and Ray Eames, Raphael Soriano, Esther McCoy, Reyner Banham, and so many more architects, historians, and thinkers pertinent to the period and geography of the California modernist era are the topic and toast of the hour.

Many readers will find familiarity in Cronan's discussion of Schindler and Neutra's personal relationship and the influence of Adolf Loos, Charles and Ray Eames' evolutions in design and film, and Reyner Banham's love of the west coast scene. However, the author goes far beyond a literal recounting of history, biography, and descriptions of

architectural and design projects. Themes of architectural thinking, connections, intentions, and materiality underpin the author's central arguments throughout the introduction, six chapters, and conclusion, all of which culminate and meld together into a complex commentary on agency and the human experience of California modernist architecture as communicative, artistic, and creative endeavors.

Each chapter includes bountiful visuals, including black-and-white photographs and architectural drawings from archival collections. The image placement in relation to the pertinent textual discussion is well executed and rarely requires paging forwards or backwards to achieve the

text to visual context. A color plate-insert predominantly featuring the films still of Charles and Ray Eames is also included at the mid-point of the book. An abbreviations list of select, cited sources is placed at the beginning of the book, offering a preview of texts heavily quoted and referenced throughout the chapters. The breadth of research conducted by the author is evidenced by the extensive notes for each chapter—explanatory and additional source citations—and the multifaceted arguments laid out in the text. The chapter notes are included at the end of the book, an arrangement decision that some readers may find cumbersome to maneuver.

This book is appropriate for an advanced, post-secondary audience that firmly leans towards graduate-level students. The use of complex sentence structures in combination with embedded quotations from key texts, and the author's own analysis are challenging to read and assimilate at times. On the other hand, arguably one of the greatest successes of the book is how the writing style brings to the forefront the seminal source texts and 'voices' of Neutra, Loos, McCoy, and others. A curious reader will be hard-pressed not to feel compelled to stop and revisit each cited source individually.

In contrast with its title, Cronan's book should prove to be an enduring source for critical discussion and reflection on California modernist architecture.