

*Paul Tay, Architect*

FIVE HOUSES IN LONG BEACH  
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20TH, 2008



Photo: Island Eye

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Born in 1924 in Pomona, California, Paul Edward Tay was raised and schooled in Long Beach. After a tour of duty in the US Navy as a patrol plane pilot, he went on to pursue architecture at the University of Southern California alongside contemporaries such as Cal Straub, Edward Killingsworth, Pierre Koenig and Lloyd E. Wright, Sr. Tay graduated from USC School of Architecture in 1950. Although Tay acknowledges that his largest influence was the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, he was also influenced by Harwell Hamilton Harris's work and Philip Johnson's 1949 Glass House.

Tay's decision to become an architect came at the age of 15 when his first client, his grandmother, asked him to design her house and draw the plans. As he reflects, "Dreaming it up... then seeing it take shape: Seeing grandma enjoying herself, both in talking about it with me, and learning about the construction process. She loved all kinds of birds, and a big aviary was a part of it ..."

Soon after graduating, he established his architectural practice in Long Beach and focused primarily on residential work. In 1964, Tay designed his office space, which is still located on the same site across the frenetic San Diego Freeway onramp. The design — an A-framed triplex — housed not only his office but also residential quarters. Tay had to conform to the R-zoning restrictions, which required the inclusion of live/work usage on the site.

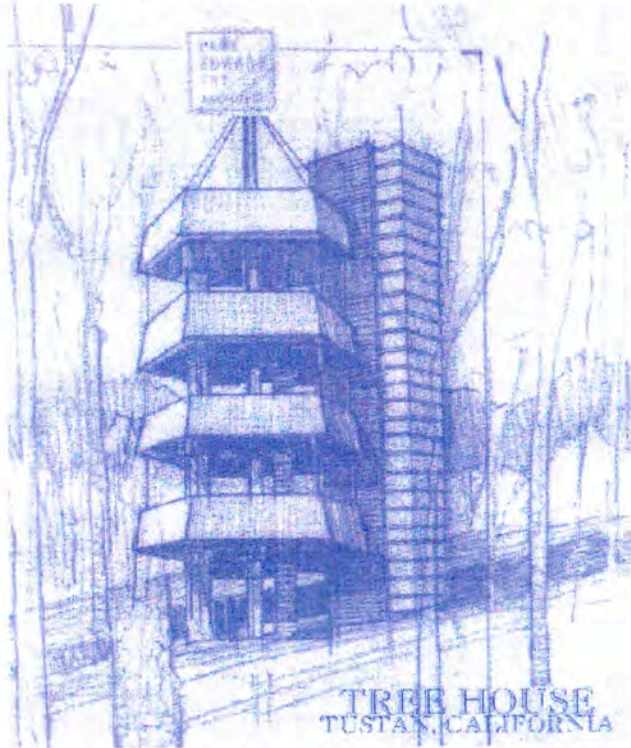
Tay always preferred residential work over commercial because he was able to cultivate personal relationships and get to know each and every one of his clients. As he comments on this personal exploration, "...that is most true of residential work. I did do quite a number of medical facilities. If you are looking for public work, you have to play the game, and I was not ever very good at that." Built between 1950 and early 1970s, Tay's homes exude a unique language and pure identity and they all show his unbridled yet talented hand.

Tay relocated his office from Long Beach to Northern California coastal town of Mendocino in 1971 during the construction of the Braly Residence. In addition to his architecture pursuits he and his wife own and manage a local bed & breakfast. He has this to say about his work in Mendocino, "I'm having more fun in architecture here than anywhere."





# THE ARCHITECTURE OF PAUL TAY: “SPACE FLOW AND SPACE VARIATION”



Tay's early work on the tour is rooted in traditional ranch architecture. This style, known as Ranch or American Ranch, first appeared in Southern California in the 1920s. Its influences came from North American Spanish Colonial architecture from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, using single story floor plans, oriented around an inner courtyard, with simple roofs that were low and had wider eaves than usual for sun protection. Today, California Ranch is a blend of the traditional Ranch, the American Bungalow and Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie House infused with Modernism. This style has evolved to incorporate simple modest materials, open floor plans, the use of built-ins for efficiency of space, post-and-beam construction combined with vaulted ceilings for light flow, air and space, and large expanses of glass that invited outdoor spaces to become extensions of the indoor living spaces.

This blend of modern living qualities combined with the Spanish Colonial rancherías is exemplified by Paul Tay's architecture. However, this was not just a formula that he "plugged in." It was a very pure reaction to visiting the site and meeting with his clients—providing each house its own personality.

As he recently stated, "Get the client to express their desires and dreams. Get as much information as possible about each family member. Have them talk to each other to see who is where in this process. LISTEN, take notes. Visit them in their present environment. When I have this beginning orientation in mind, I spend time on the site, alone, and with them. This is just the beginning..."

In these five examples of Tay's work from the 1950s to the 1970s, we see how this domestic architectural mode was adopted not just as a style but more as a way of life, and Tay's signature was in keeping with this progression.

The openness and freedom of a ranch house can be seen in many of Tay's early residential projects, such as the Penn Residence (1954), and the Drake Residence (1951). These two homes are predominantly single story without being claustrophobic, offering simple yet efficient structural systems with the use of post-and-beam—with vaulted ceilings and clerestory windows—allowing streams of indirect light while providing privacy, reinforcing it as a sanctuary. For the clients, there is a feeling of escapism which is achieved with unassuming street facades, compressed entries, or as one homeowner called it "press and release" resulting in his use of expansive glass walls focused toward the back and side yards.

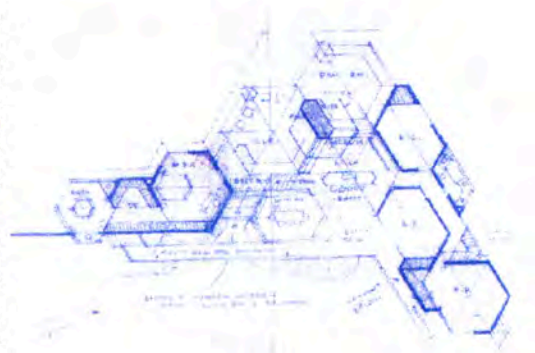
However, as Paul Tay's architecture progressed into the late 50's and early 60's, the influences of Frank Lloyd Wright become more apparent as he began to experiment with FLLW's hexagons and move away from the linear modernism. Tay designed and built a Hexagon House for Ruth Massey (Park Estates, 1960). Tay describes his interest in the form, "Because the hexagon approaches a circle it is much more friendly for people to sit in a circle than to line up on opposite sides of a square room...There are many ways that Wright tried to avoid the 'boxi-ness' and I think that he had a point."



Although the houses on the tour are not hexagon houses and were completed before the Massey Residence, the Sippelle Residence (1959), and the Crail Residence (1957), they are evidence that in response to each site and his newfound interest in sculpting space, the box begins to get broken apart providing the "space flow" and "space variation"— playing with space in section. The addition of levels becomes a tool to define space as it flows in one continuous organic stream. In 1950 Tay noted, "I think the trend is away from 'less is more' and I am glad. I like to take the example of the natural world around us. Nature, I think, is abundant, not stingy. Underlying its abundance however, is a strict set of natural laws. Much of nature's design is repetition with variation, laid over a consistent basic framework (consider a tree)."

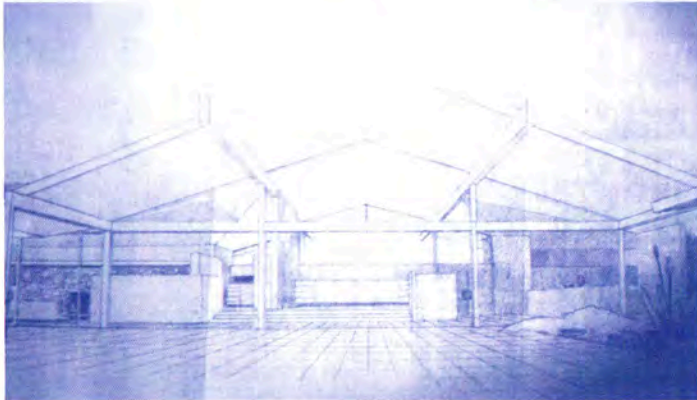
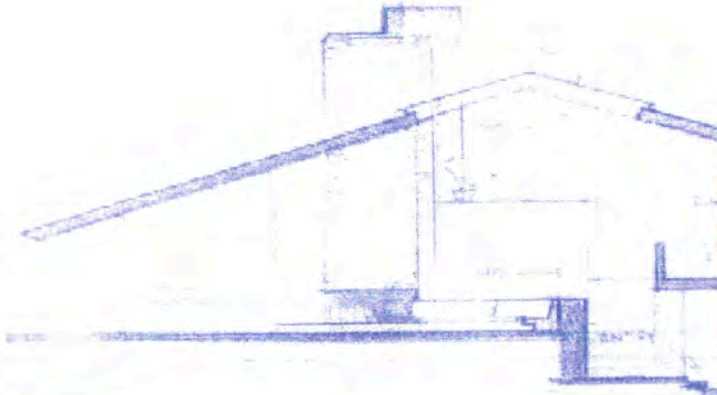
Lastly, the Braly Residence (1974) speaks to this organic quality while infusing it with a modern aesthetic. While the "space flow and space variation" dictates the design of this house, Tay "lifts" the living space and exterior garden placing it on the second floor due to the site maximizing the views of the Naples canal location and the main channel. Throughout his work, Paul Tay continues to emphasize comfort, flexibility, and simplicity of being.

*Adam Wheeler, Executive Board Member*





## CRAIL RESIDENCE, 1957



One of Tay's larger homes, the Crail Residence is a 3,600 square foot single story "U" shaped plan on a 10,680 square foot corner lot. Located in the wealthy enclave of Park Estates and designed for Mr. and Mrs. Eunice Crail in 1957, the house captures the elements and qualities consistent in Tays' work. The 3 bedroom and 3.5 bath house features an open courtyard, a long and low to the ground profile, accentuated cantilevered eaves marking the main entry and large glass expanses that wrap around a pool.

The interior spaces flow into each other both in plan and in section with the use of cross gabled-roofs and raised/lowered areas depending on function. Recently remodeled, this house also uses the floor plane to define function of space – dining and kitchen are raised 18" while the living room is sunken 12".

## PENN RESIDENCE, 1954

photos: rochele kramer and e pugh



The Penn Residence is located in Bixby Knolls, not too far from the Drake Residence, on an 11,150 square foot lot. It was designed by Paul Tay while he worked as a lead designer for the architecture firm Monturth and Strickland. The 3,308 square foot residence is single story and was originally designed with 6 bedrooms and 4 baths. Similar to the Drake Residence, the floor plan is "L" shaped with the kitchen located at the elbow adjacent to the open dining/living rooms on one side and the family room on the other. The hallway which leads to the bedrooms was designed to serve a second function – a play area for children with built-ins providing efficient storage for the toys. One of the bedrooms was designed with a sliding partition so that it could convert into one bedroom. The entire house has radiant heating which continues to work today.

The house was just recently renovated and restored. On the exterior, a pool was added into an existing barren side yard with emphasis on period style details and finishes, and on the interiors, the current owners maintained the structural integrity of the home and simply refinished hardware and flooring to its original design and conditions.





## DRAKE RESIDENCE, 1951



The Drake residence is "L" shaped in plan and is a single-story 3 bedrooms and 2 bath residence. The 1,475 square-foot house sits on a typical flat 6,490 square-foot lot in Bixby Knolls and is typical of many floor plans of that time: modest living spaces which flow into each other, and open to the kitchen and the backyard making the house "feel" larger. There is a large fireplace and the construction is post and beam with vaulted ceilings. However, what makes this house unique is the privacy of the master bedroom, even though it is directly adjacent to the entry. The Drake Residence is exemplary of what could have been a prototype for an efficient and inexpensive housing type for a single family. The current owners have only upgraded the house with landscaping, appliances, finishes and flooring.

## SIPRELLE RESIDENCE, 1961



The Siprelle Residence is a 3,040 square foot two-story plan located in Signal Hill. Its design showcases 4 bedrooms and 3 baths and is sited on a sloped condition that produces 180 degree views of downtown Long Beach and the harbors beyond. The client Jim Siprelle, a structural engineer, and Tay collaborated in a true sense by melding structural prowess and architectural talent. The result is a spectacular hillside statement. The house sits ready to fly off over downtown Long Beach and is only accessible by crossing a small bridge. The interior is compact but opens up to the rear with the help of an angled sloping roof cantilevering over a large deck. Unfortunately, a portion of the property was sold off and what was once the terraced garden is now a large three-story stucco residential box. The current owners have only upgraded the house with finishes and flooring.



## BRALY RESIDENCE, 1972



Located on the Peninsula in Long Beach, the Braly Residence is the last house designed and built by Paul Tay before he moved to Mendocino. The clients were introduced to Tay through a contractor who pointed out one of Tay's houses being constructed across the main channel in Naples. The house is 4,200 square feet with a two-story floor plan that includes 5 bedrooms and 4 baths. Sited on the waterfront, the Braly Residence is an example of a design that starts from the inside out due to its view and focus on Naples. This is evident with Tay's decision to place the main living spaces on the second floor. The ground floor spaces feature a raised entry, the game and exercise room, the bar, and the two car garage. Tay incorporates the exterior into the interior with a water feature in the entry garden and on the second floor a patio is situated between the kitchen and bedroom providing natural light and coastal breezes. The only remodeling which has occurred has been on the exterior where much of the wood siding has been replaced with stucco.



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