

At Home in the Subtropics: Richard Neutra and the Hispanic Patio

In 1956 the American journal *House and Home* declared to its readership that “your nicest room can be outside your house: it can sell your house faster than just about anything else.”¹

Brett Tippey
Kent State University

By the time this article was published, the leading modern architects had already spent decades studying the ways in which ancient cultures around the globe had utilized courtyards, atria and patios in the design of the single-family home. As a result, these architects quickly discovered that in the design of the modern home these ancient prototypes could be resurrected to illuminate, cool and ventilate the interior spaces, as well as to provide a seamless spatial flow from interior to exterior that would enrich modern domestic life.

Le Corbusier’s 1911 visit to the House of the Tragic Poet and the House of the Silver Wedding (both in Pompeii) inspired him to revive the Roman atrium for use in the modern residence.² In the 1920s he began to experiment with this ancient prototype, and rudimentary forms of the Roman atrium began to appear in projects such as his 1924 Maison La Roche/Jeanneret and his 1927 Villa Stein-de Monzie. Then, almost two decades after his first visit to Pompeii, a mature and well-defined atrium appeared in his 1928-1929 design for the Villa Savoye. It was a fully-enclosed roof garden that was open to the sky and connected to interior rooms on three sides by large openings. He designed this exterior space to be integral with the adjacent interior rooms.

While Le Corbusier studied Greek and Roman precedents, Mies van der Rohe’s experimentation with courtyards in the 1929 Barcelona Pavilion was inspired by traditional Japanese sources.³ In this project the spatial continuum flowed seamlessly from outside to inside, thanks to Mies’s characteristically expansive use of plate glass and the courtyards he designed at the periphery of the pavilion. Following his success in Barcelona he continued exploring the utility of the courtyard in the modern home by designing a series of prototype houses; also as director of the Bauhaus (1930-1933) he instituted a series of design studios to engage students in this ongoing investigation.⁴ These projects fused courtyards of varying sizes with the interior spaces by extending interior walls into the surrounding garden.⁵

THE HISPANIC PATIO IN NEUTRA'S EARLY WORK

Richard Neutra had also studied the atria and courtyards he found on his early travels; in a 1915 entry in his sketchbook he recorded his impressions of a crucifix-dominated courtyard in a town in Southern Europe. His interest in these spaces is even more clearly expressed by his sketch of an unknown cloister, made around 1919 while he was living in Zurich.⁶ In both of these cases the spaces are inwardly focused and intimately scaled; they are clearly defined with walls, vegetation and other elements; and they are open to the sky. Throughout the following years, such open-air spaces appeared frequently in Neutra's travel sketches.⁷

After Neutra took employment with Erich Mendelsohn in 1921 the courtyard emerged from the pages of his sketchbook and began to affect his professional practice. In 1923 Mendelsohn's protracted stay in Palestine inadvertently granted the young Neutra almost total authority over the design for a ten-unit housing project in the Zehlendorf district of Berlin. For historian Thomas Hines, the resulting design is notable for its modernist aesthetic: plain white concrete facades, corner ribbon windows and cantilevered corner balconies.⁸ However, the organization of the ten housing units around a central, shared exterior space also deserves notice, because it is the first instance in which Neutra's growing fascination with courtyards appears in a professional project. Defined by the facades of the ten units, the carefully planned walkways and thick layers of vegetation, Neutra envisioned this courtyard not only as a comfortable shared outdoor living room, but also as the entrance and central core of this small residential community.

Following Neutra's arrival in Los Angeles in 1925, his source of inspiration for courtyards quickly began to shift from Rome and Greece to Spain and Latin America. As he studied the architecture of these places, he discovered that the origins of the patio date back to prehistoric civilizations, and that these spaces represent the human being's twofold need for both shelter and exposure to nature.

This is exactly as "man, the Southerner" has felt for thousands of years, after the last glacial period had driven him into the caves of Monte Castillo and all the available vacancies of this kind. When the demand superseded



Figure 1: Patio de la Acequia. Alhambra, Granada, Spain. (Photo: Brett Tippey)



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Figure 2: Patio de Lindaraja seen through the viewing screen of an adjacent interior room. Alhambra, Granada, Spain. (Photo: Brett Tippey)

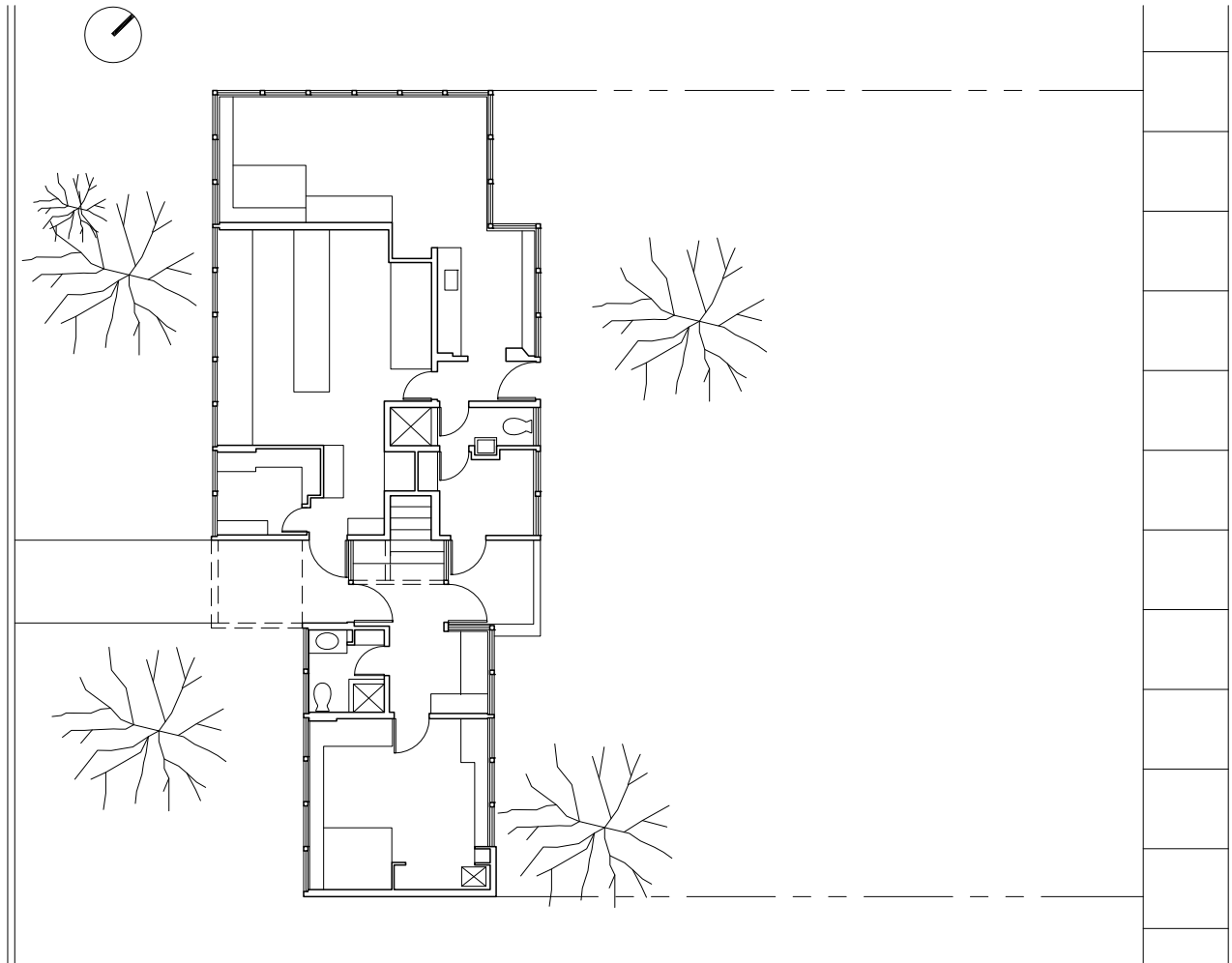
vacancies, man constructed his caves especially for thermal defense. But he found even in this respect that caves and piled up masonry enclosures were not a perfect solution[;] in fact [they] felt clammy for lack of entering heat rays, or often smelly from microbiotic [sic] growth, when germicidal light rays were excluded.⁹

For Neutra, the patio was the obvious solution to this age-old duality, and he was particularly interested in the patios of the prehistoric civilizations of Spain and Latin America such as Monte Castillo (also known as Altamira located on the north coast of Spain) and the Incas in Peru.¹⁰

He also recognized that the Romans, Etruscans and Greeks used courtyards in their housing.¹¹ When the Romans colonized the Iberian Peninsula, they brought their domestic architecture, yet thanks to several centuries of Muslim dominance in medieval Spain, a different type of courtyard gradually emerged. Neutra was deeply fascinated with the courtyards of medieval Spain, especially those of the Alhambra, and he admitted that this fascination profoundly affected his professional work: in a 1954 lecture in Madrid, Neutra allegedly claimed that “the true spatial essence of my work is extracted from the architectural patrimony of Spain, especially from the Alhambra of Granada.”¹² Then, when the Spaniards colonized Central America, this courtyard assimilated characteristics from indigenous architecture. In the end, it was this unique hybrid courtyard—full of poetry, mystery and sensuousness—that most inspired Neutra.

This distinct version of the courtyard—which we will call the Hispanic patio in order to represent its combined Roman, Mudéjar, Spanish and Central American influences—is inherently different from the courtyards of other traditions. For example, the void-space of Hispanic patios is often filled with a combination of reflecting pools, jets of water, and thick vegetation that often obscures panoramic views of the space and casts constantly shifting shadows. Also, the boundaries of these patios are often delineated with one-way viewing screens, which are typical to Islamic and Mudéjar architecture; these screens filter light and allow the viewer to observe the activity of the patio without being seen. For Neutra, this open-air space was “very different from a mere terrace,” and he highlighted the physical and spiritual qualities he found in these patios: “A house surrounded by a garden is one thing, but a house that has an articulated outer extension of the living area is another thing for body and soul.”¹³

In addition to his travels through California and Mexico, Neutra was also exposed to Ibero-American architecture through his professional association with architects who had already established their practices in Southern California. During his first few years living in Los Angeles, Neutra took employment with Gordon Kaufmann. Kaufmann was a key figure in the revival of the Spanish Colonial Style, which swept through Southern California in the years following Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue’s famed 1915 design for the Panama-California Exhibition in San Diego. Kaufmann’s ability to adapt historical styles for modern projects such as the 1928 Los Angeles Athenaeum must have helped convince Neutra that the architecture of Southern California’s colonial past could indeed provide valuable source material.¹⁴ Of equal interest to Neutra was the architecture of Irving Gill, who deftly fused the austerity of Franciscan missions in Southern California with modern forms. While they appreciated Gill’s work for its deference to the Spanish



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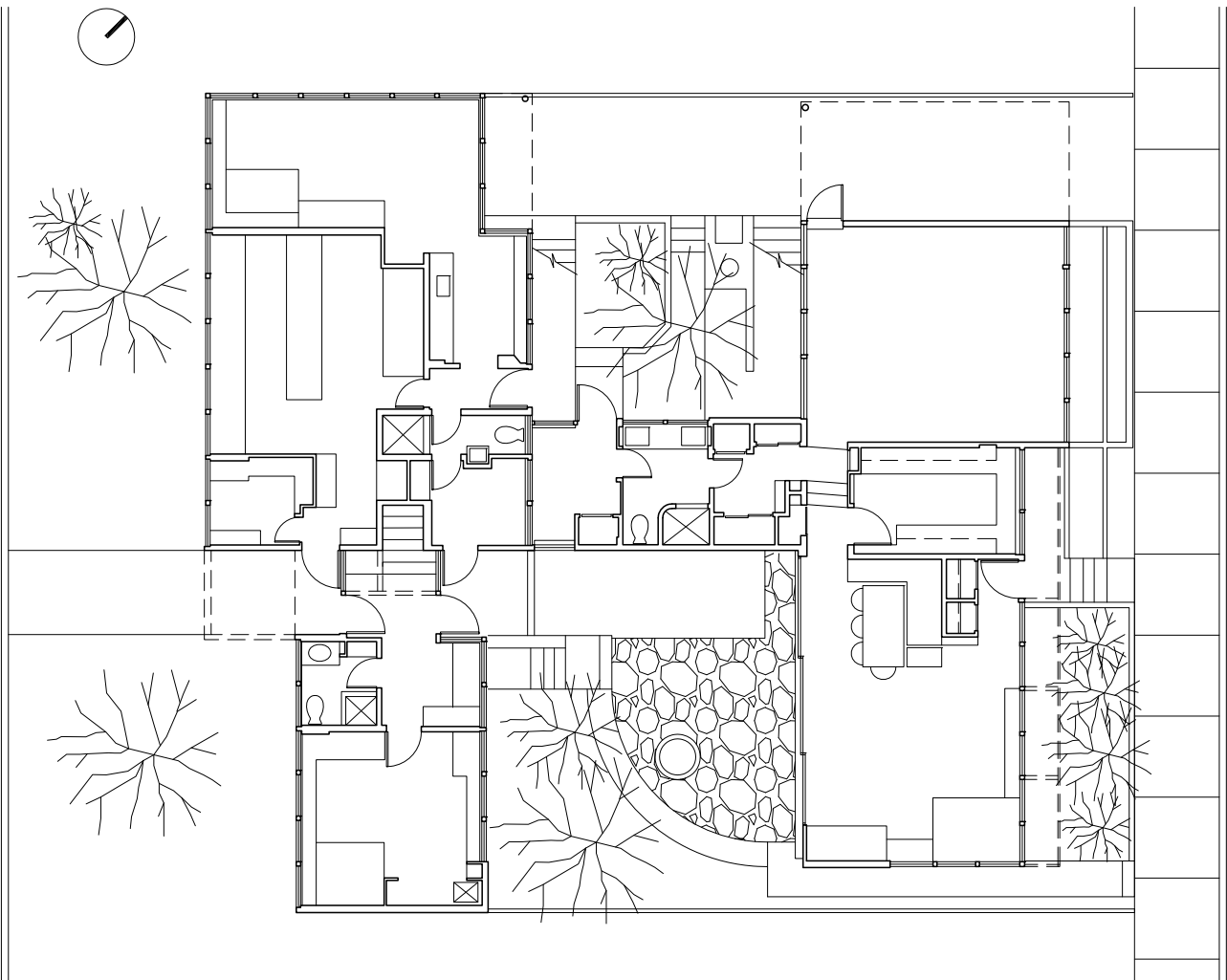
Colonial Style, Neutra and Rudolph Schindler also noticed that, because of its modernist aesthetic, Gill's work bore an uncanny resemblance to the work of their mentor Adolf Loos.¹⁵

Also, during the mid-1920s Neutra designed several small houses in the Spanish Colonial Style for properties in Santa Monica. Although these houses do not exhibit the genius that would later come to mark Neutra's designs for modern single-family homes, they nonetheless indicate Neutra's willingness to experiment with Spanish Colonial architecture, even if only in order to promote his professional services to a conservative clientele.¹⁶

Then, in autumn of 1930 Mies van der Rohe invited Neutra to spend six weeks as visiting professor at the Bauhaus.¹⁷ Interestingly, Neutra's term in Dessau occurred at the same time that Mies was beginning to formulate his thoughts on modern courtyard housing.¹⁸ This coincidence must have revived in Neutra the fascination with courtyards that he had shown nearly a decade before in his sketchbook and in his design for the Zehlendorf housing.

Naturally, this interest in courtyards, coupled with his respect for California's colonial architecture, eventually led him to use the Hispanic patio as a primary source, although the rich physical and spiritual qualities Neutra appreciated in the Hispanic patio did not immediately appear in his work; instead, he incorporated

Figure 3: Plan of VDL Research House in 1932. Los Angeles. (Drawing: Brett Tippey)



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these qualities in his design of the modern single-family home through a gradual process of evolution and discovery. In 1932 he designed his own Los Angeles home in Silverlake, the VDL Research House, with a scant floor area of 2100 square feet, which included living and working quarters for his family as well as his drafting staff.¹⁹ In spite of its minimal size, the VDL Research House boasted ample natural light and ventilation; it also embodied key elements of Adolf Loos' *Raumplan* theory.²⁰ As a result, the VDL Research House is an elegant sequence of individual rooms joined together by rich diagonals of movement and view, both in plan (horizontally) and in section (vertically). However, notwithstanding its rich spatial continuity the VDL Research House, as it was completed in 1932 (before the addition of the garden house), was essentially a cubist prism hovering over an unaffected *tabula rasa* with little thought for exterior spaces.²¹

The houses Neutra subsequently designed in the mid- to late-1930s for clients in Southern California are marked by two general tendencies: on one hand, he began to soften the harsh modern aesthetic typical of his works of the 1920s; on the other hand he gradually incorporated exterior spaces that he designed as outdoor rooms. Increasingly, he conceived of these outdoor rooms according to the logic of the Hispanic patio, and he began to incorporate them into the spatial sequence of the *Raumplan*.

Figure 4: Plan of VDL Research House in 1939. Los Angeles. (Drawing: Brett Tippey)



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Hints of the interior/exterior spatial continuity of the Hispanic patio begin to appear in Neutra's 1934 Beard House in Altadena. Although often cited for its technical innovations, such as its all-metal frame and its progressive heating and cooling systems, one of the most noteworthy features of the Z-shaped house is the moveable glass wall that separates the living room from the garden.²² In fact, one of Neutra's favorite photographs of the Beard House highlights this innovative wall, and portrays Neutra himself gazing through this partition into the adjacent garden while smoking and reading the morning news. Clearly, in the Beard House he had already begun to design the interior spaces to look through viewing screens onto adjacent exterior spaces in a way similar to that of the Hispanic patio.

However, in designing the exterior space at the Beard House, it seems that Neutra did not consider the ways in which this space could be made continuous with the interior living room. While the garden is clearly defined on two sides by the walls of the house, he did not include any architectural or vegetative elements to enclose it on the remaining sides; for this reason, the garden of the Beard House can hardly be described as a patio. Moreover, instead of locating the house's exterior sitting area directly adjacent to the interior living room, as he would often do in later projects, he moved it up to the flat roof, which was only accessible by way of a narrow metal ship's ladder.²³ Therefore, the Beard House represents an incipient yet not fully-developed integration of the Hispanic patio and the modern home.

Neutra's little-known and never-constructed design for workers' housing for the Riverside Cooperative Dairy Farm in Riverside, California, which he designed in the mid-1930s, represents a more complete integration.²⁴

Figure 5: Patio of Neutra's VDL Research House showing the 1939 Garden House beyond. Los Angeles. (Photo: Brett Tippey)

Neutra must have been compelled to compensate for the diminutive size of the interior spaces, which most likely resulted from the programmatic requirements of a mass housing project for migrant workers, by incorporating large exterior living rooms. These patios were clearly defined on two sides by the wings of the L-shaped house and a curving vegetative hedge on the other two sides; these patios also included recreational areas that were partially paved, partially grass, and partially shaded by the roof overhang. Furthermore, using a technique similar to that of the Beard House he included sliding glass walls to join these exterior spaces to the adjacent rows of dormitory rooms. As a result, Neutra provided these diminutive homes with comfortable and flexible outdoor extensions of the interior spaces.

Like the Zehlendorf Houses from fourteen years earlier, the housing units of Neutra's 1937 Strathmore Apartments are grouped around a central patio that is both well-defined and designed for comfortable, collective living in an outdoor space. However, unlike the Zehlendorf courtyard, the exterior space of the Strathmore Apartments clearly incorporates elements of the Ibero-American heritage. Thomas Hines has noted that "Long impressed with the stacked mega-structures of the Pueblo Indians and of the more recent systems of courtyard housing in Southern California, Neutra designed Strathmore as a modernist updating of both vernaculars."²⁵ Through a combination of large windows, low railings and well-defined exterior spaces Neutra achieved what Hines calls the "interpenetration of inside and outside space."²⁶ Although the apartments were not well-received initially, they eventually became a popular home for such noteworthy Angelinos as Luise Rainer, Orson Welles, Clifford Odets, Charles and Ray Eames and John Entenza.²⁷

Perhaps the most exceptional illustration of Neutra's appropriation of the Hispanic patio for the modern home came in 1939, when he designed an addition to the original VDL Research House.²⁸ Following what Neutra described as "the old Spanish custom of building on the perimeter of the lot with an interior patio," he located a one-story garden house along the rear property line;²⁹ he then connected it to the original house with a series of small one-story service rooms that subdivided the exterior space between the original house and the new garden house, thereby creating two patios, one for service and one for living. Thanks to another viewing screen similar to the sliding glass wall of the Beard House, the interior living room of the garden house was seamlessly joined to the new exterior space both visually and physically. Like the Hispanic patio, this space was designed for outdoor living amid thick vegetation, exposed to the sky, yet all the while maintaining an appropriate level of privacy.

Growing up in the VDL Research House, Neutra's son Dion remembers that the family typically left the sliding glass door of the garden house open, thereby uniting the interior and exterior spaces. Although he noted that the family mostly used the patio as a circulation space and not as a formal living room, he clearly remembers that they did occasionally take their meals in the patio, and that "the patio served mostly as a verdant interlude to be seen from other rooms of the house."³⁰

THE HISPANIC PATIO IN NEUTRA'S LATER WORK

After the 1930s the Hispanic patio continued to manifest itself throughout Neutra's subsequent work. His 1950 Northwestern Mutual Fire Association building in Los Angeles demonstrates this interest in patios, although in this

ENDNOTES

1. "The Patio: A Place to Enjoy the Outdoors in Privacy." *House and Home* 10, no. 2 (August 1956): p. 125.
2. William Curtis has stated that "in the houses at Pompeii, Charles Edouard Jeanneret, a future leader of the modern movement, found domestic archetypes that would influence his own ideas on houses profoundly." Curtis, William J. R. *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*. London: Phaidon Press, Ltd., 1986, p. 35.
3. Russell, Frank, ed. *Mies van der Rohe: European Works*. London: Academy Editions (Dr. Andreas Papadakis, pub.), 1986, p. 89.
4. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin/Museum für Gestaltung, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, and Klassik Stiftung Weimar. *Bauhaus: A Conceptual Model*. Translated by Benjamin Carter, Benjamin Letzler, Ian Pepper and John Southard. Ostfildern (Germany): Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009.
5. For more on Mies's designs for courtyard housing, see Russell, Frank, ed. *Mies van der Rohe: European Works*, op. cit., pp. 86-90.
6. These two sketches were exhibited in Hines, Thomas S., exhibit curator. "Richard Neutra, Architect: Sketches and

case the exterior patio is replaced with a two-story interior workspace, which Neutra surrounded with smaller, one-story spaces that served as private offices, conference rooms and file storage. In this case, the natural light of the sun is substituted by what Dion Neutra calls the “luminous ceiling design” of the central space.³¹

Neutra also incorporated the patio into his 1953 Hafley-Moore “twin houses.” As individual owners of two adjacent properties, The Hafleys and Moores simultaneously commissioned Neutra to design two single-family houses.³² He chose to link the two projects with a shared, L-shaped patio and a pergola, thereby providing areas of sun and shade, lawn and pavement in one flexible exterior space. Also, many of the interior spaces of these two houses open onto this patio via large expanses of glass. In his 1956 article in *House and Home* Neutra promoted the shared exterior space of the Hafley-Moore “twin houses” as a prime example of the appropriate use of the patio, due to the fact that it unites the houses while maintaining the integrity and privacy of each unit.³³ He also designed the 1953 National Charity League in Los Angeles and the 1957 chapel at the Miramar Naval Station in San Diego around clearly defined patios. These projects provide their inhabitants with the vibrant flexibility of indoor/outdoor living, thanks to Neutra’s incorporation of elements from the Hispanic patio in their design.

Neutra’s appropriation of the Hispanic patio did not go unnoticed by Spanish and Latin American architects. In 1965 Spaniard Francisco Prieto Moreno, who had already established himself as the leading expert in Spain’s Mudéjar architecture found comparable attributes between the Alhambra, the gardens of the Generalife and the typical Andalusian country house, and Neutra’s Kronish, Hafley-Moore and Slavin Houses. He accredited such similarities to the fact that both Neutra and Spain’s Mudéjar architects used broken axes, one-way viewing screens, vegetation to create sun and shade patterns and seamless interior/exterior spatial continuity. In Neutra’s Hafley-Moore Houses Prieto Moreno discovered that “The fabric of pergolas, enclosed and open patios, exterior gardens and swimming pools [...] clearly recalls the design of the *carmen* of Granada and its overt Muslim influences.”³⁴ In 1969 Spanish architects Francisco Zamora and Rafael Alfonso determined that Neutra had successfully used the Hispanic patio to blur the distinctions between interior and exterior and between house and garden; as a result, they believed that Neutra had created an entirely new type of patio.³⁵

CONCLUSION: HOUSING FOR TODAY’S SUBTROPICAL CITIES

Even though Neutra’s investigation of the Hispanic patio and his incorporation of its elements into his single-family residences occurred in the middle of the last century, the lessons he learned are still relevant for the design of housing in the subtropics today. In order to effectively utilize the Hispanic patio, like Neutra, architects of today must first understand the basic architectural elements that compose a patio. The editors of *House and Home* stated that “a patio is just another room...with floors...a ceiling...with built-in furniture...with a fireplace...with a focal point...with walls...and with a view.”³⁶ It must be open to the sky to allow the inhabitant to appreciate the natural elements from the shelter of the home’s interior spaces, as well as to admit light and ventilation. Also, the void space of the patio must be clearly defined on all sides. Neutra found that the edges of the patio may be defined explicitly, as is the case with

Drawings.” Los Angeles: Library Foundation of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Public Library and the Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library (UCLA), 3 May to 1 November 2009.

7. Box 2, Richard and Dion Neutra Papers (Collection Number 1179). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA (hereinafter, “UCLA”). This box contains over eighty travel sketches that Neutra composed between the mid-1930s and the mid-1960s.
8. Hines, Thomas S. *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 35.
9. “Patios”, Box 161, Folder 32, UCLA.
10. In addition to the *House and Home* article, such allusions to a Hispanic origin of the patio can be found throughout other Neutra texts such as Neutra, Richard. *Survival through Design*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1954; and Neutra, Richard. *Realismo Biológico: Un nuevo Renacimiento humanístico en arquitectura*. Edited by Horacio Baliero and Juan Manuel Borthagaray. Translated by Luis Fabricant. Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1958.
11. “Patios”, Box 161, Folder 32, UCLA.
12. Spanish architect Fernando Higueras remembered that Neutra made this statement in 1954 during his guest lecture at the School of Architecture in Madrid. Navarro, María Isabel. “Desde el origen: La arquitectura de Fernando Higueras.” *Basa*, no. 24 (2001), p. 4. Original quote: “la verdadera esencia espacial de mi trabajo está extraída de los patrimonios arquitectónicos de España, especialmente la Alhambra de Granada.”
13. “The Patio House—A Note by Richard J. Neutra, FAIA.” *House and Home* 10, no. 2 (August 1956): p. 130. Emphasis original to the quote.
14. For more on Neutra’s relationship with Gordon Kaufmann, see Hines, Thomas S. *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
15. For a detailed account of Neutra’s and Schindler’s interest in the works of Irving Gill, see Hines, Thomas S. *Irving Gill and the Architecture of Reform*. New York: Monacelli Press, Inc., 2000.
16. Hines, Thomas S. *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, *op. cit.*, p. 60. Hines believes that these houses were probably never constructed.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
18. Most of Mies’s designs for courtyard houses date from the mid-1930s; however, he must have begun formulating his thoughts on the courtyard house prototype by May of 1930, when he assumed directorship of “The Dwelling of our Time” section of The German Building Exposition. Mies constructed his first courtyard house for this exposition, which opened in May of 1931. Tegethoff, Wolf. *Mies van der Rohe: The Villas and Country Houses*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985, pp. 110-113.
19. *VDL Research House: Richard Neutra’s Studio and Residence*. DVD. Prod. Cal Poly Pomona. Pomona, California, 2007.
20. For a detailed analysis of Loos’s Raumplan, see Colomina, Beatriz. “The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism.” In *Raumplan Versus Plan Libre: Adolf Loos/Le Corbusier*, by Max Risselada, 32-51. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2008.

21. One of the most successful spaces of this house was the sleeping porch that Neutra located on the second floor. While the interior/exterior spatial quality of this room is certainly noteworthy, it exists entirely within the envelope of the house.
22. Hines, Thomas S. *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, op. cit., pp. 119-120.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
24. Hines, Thomas S., exhibit curator. "Richard Neutra, Architect: Sketches and Drawings," op. cit.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Hines, Thomas S. *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, op. cit., p. 172.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Even during the initial design phases of the 1932 house, Neutra claimed that he had always planned to expand the size of the diminutive dwelling. See *VDL Research House: Richard Neutra's Studio and Residence*, op. cit. However, Dion remembered that "when Neutra designed the first VDL Research house (1931-1932) he gave no specific thought towards the future addition of the garden house." Neutra, Dion, interview by Brett Tippey. Los Angeles, (23 June 2009).
29. *VDL Research House*, op. cit.
30. Neutra, Dion, interview by Brett Tippey, op. cit.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Hines, Thomas S. *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, op. cit., p. 268.
33. Neutra, Richard. "The Patio House..." op. cit., p. 130.
34. Prieto Moreno, Francisco. "Coincidencias de Neutra con las arquitecturas orientales." *Arquitectura*, no. 81 (1965), p. 26. The *carmen* of Granada is a Mudéjar walled garden. Original quote: "El trazado de pérgolas, patios cerrados y abiertos, jardín exterior y piscina [...] recuerda en gran manera la traza del *carmen* granadino, con sus acusadas influencias musulmanas."
35. "Francisco Zamora, Cargado de las Relaciones, Rafael Alfonso", Box 1502, Folder 9, UCLA.
36. "The Patio: A Place to Enjoy the Outdoors in Privacy," op. cit., pp. 128-129.
37. Prieto Moreno, Francisco. "Coincidencias..." op. cit., p. 26.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 25. Original quote: "Neutra, que aborrece la geometría de setos recortados y árboles en hilera legada por el Renacimiento, distribuye la vegetación de manera asimétrica, otorgando a cada planta su máxima expresión natural."
39. Neutra's preference for asymmetrical design and his care for stimulating the senses are documented throughout Neutra, Richard. *Survival through Design*, op. cit.
40. "Patios", Box 161, Folder 32, UCLA.
41. Neutra, Richard. "The Patio House..." op. cit., p. 130.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
43. *Ibid.*

the fully-enclosed patio he designed for the VDL Research House, or the patio may be defined implicitly with permeable edges, as is the case with the patios of the Zehlendorf and Strathmore housing projects.

Taking cues from Hispanic patios such as those at the Alhambra, Neutra learned that instead of being designed according to the rigid rules of symmetry, patios should provide a rejuvenating, restful oasis, and they should flexibly accommodate the everyday tasks of modern living.³⁷ Prieto Moreno noted that

Neutra rejects the geometry of carefully trimmed hedges and straight lines of trees handed down by the Renaissance; instead he distributes the vegetation asymmetrically, giving each plant its greatest natural expression.³⁸

For this reason, architects of today need not design patios symmetrically; Neutra discovered that asymmetrical spatial arrangements, organic distribution of vegetation, changing levels of shadow and shade and one-way viewing screens actually stimulate the senses and provide a rejuvenating atmosphere.³⁹

The patio should also be "an articulated outer extension of [the interior] living area";⁴⁰ likewise, the interior spaces immediately adjacent to the patio should be designed to flow seamlessly with it via large openings such as doors and windows, or by means of other transitional spatial devices such as covered walkways. Essentially, the Hispanic patio functions as the core of the subtropical home, not as a peripheral space such as a porch, a terrace or a loggia.

Finally, the Hispanic patio, which Neutra discovered in Southern California, is uniquely appropriate to accommodate the ever-expanding population of our subtropical cities, because of its efficient use of space and resources, as well as the flexibility and vitality it brings to modern domestic life. He claimed that

The problem of the 50' or 60' lot is nothing new: it was solved on the Island of Capri and in the mountain villages of Spain centuries ago. There a series of patios would supplement skimpy indoor floor areas and provide outdoor rooms separated from the neighbors by walls [to ensure] privacy to each family. A contemporary house can solve the small lot problem in the same way.⁴¹

Neutra criticized the typical North American approach to the single-family home, in which the house is surrounded by garden, as an inefficient use of land. The Hispanic patio inverts this relationship by creating a garden that is surrounded by a house. Neutra found that by using this inverted relationship he could actually reduce the footprint of the single-family house and more effectively utilize the space of a small urban lot, all while maintaining high levels of privacy, interior-exterior spatial continuity and modern standards of comfort and healthy living.⁴²

Through his study of Spanish and Latin American sources, Neutra discovered that "the patio of old can in our age be made infinitely more livable than ever before. It seems to me that, as our land shortage increases, the patio house will inevitably return to solve the same problems it has solved so successfully in a long past."⁴³ By following Neutra's lead, we can design comfortable and efficient housing for our subtropical cities of the twenty-first century.