
Chapter 13

The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Postwar Suburbia

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Live your New Way of Life surrounded by every convenience imaginable! The carefully developed Eichler floor plans create more usable living space, inside and out, than is offered in any other home! Step-saving, work-saving space-arrangement . . . construction and material innovations . . . and the latest built-in appliances . . . add time to your day and years to your life. You'll live better in the Wonderful World of Eichler.

"Enter the Wonderful World
of Eichler" (ca. 1960)

But is her house in reality a comfortable concentration camp? Have not women who live in the image of the feminine mystique trapped themselves within the narrow walls of their homes?

Betty Friedan,
The Feminine Mystique (1963)

The seemingly contradictory views of the postwar middle-class home offered by Betty Friedan and the publicists of Eichler Homes, Inc., to Americans in the early 1960s shared a common presumption: both assumed the prescriptive power of architecture in the lives of middle-class women. Like most observers of the postwar cultural landscape, both Eichler, a developer, and Friedan, a social reformer, saw women as passive figures moving in "man-made" space, realizing social ideals prescribed by their physical surroundings.¹

There is no doubt that the mass movement of young American families to the suburbs in the 1950s

and early 1960s had devastating implications for women's status in middle-class culture. The suburbs isolated them from political, social, and financial power and segregated them from opportunities for employment, education, and cooperative parenting. As Friedan pointed out, as a result of their physical isolation in the suburbs, many postwar housewives became desperate and depressed.

But the postwar home also acted in another capacity. Suburbia was an arena in which women fought back. Isolated in their houses, women expressed their own ideas about making space, often originating in dissatisfaction, and contested male power in architectural terms.² The postwar house, neither paradise nor prison, was a significant zone of contention between builders and the middle-class family.³ As a case study of how one family followed and countered what some promoters and critics of domestic architecture *supposed* them to experience, this study is an attempt to explore the dynamic relationship between a family and the domestic space they occupied. It analyzes a single house from the "inside"—that is, as it was actually experienced—and relates that information to the world "outside," as it was intended by its builders. In this way, it is an attempt to locate the intersection of real and ideal lives in the postwar cultural landscape. The promotional literature of Eichler Homes, Inc., and the photographs and memories of a female child in the 1960s are the perimeters of this study; between them stands the primary source for the project—the house itself.

They were a typical postwar couple. Both Joan and Frank Clarkson had been in the armed forces during the war, marrying in 1946.⁴ While Frank finished his business degree at the University of California, the Clarksons lived in a rented apartment in Berkeley. Joan worked as a secretary until the birth of their first child, John, in 1951. With the arrival of their daughter Gail three years later, they moved into a small house in Albany, a medium-sized suburban town just north of Berkeley. Frank secured a position with the Bank of America in San Francisco after graduation, qualifying for a mortgage under the Veterans' Administration mortgage guarantee program.⁵ Like most other American families that took advantage of the VA program's generous financing, the Clarkson family chose a home in the suburbs.

The Clarkson family purchased their house in Terra Linda, California, in 1961; Joan Clarkson was then expecting their fourth child, Willy, and the family needed another bedroom.⁶ She had read about the developments of Eichler Homes in *Sunset Magazine*, where they had been described as ideal environments for raising children. Indeed, the company, founded in 1947, had been awarded the *Parents' Magazine* National Merit Award for the "best home for families with children" nearly every year between 1951 and 1959.⁷ That record, together with the reputation of Marin County's schools as among the best in the Bay Area, had helped to convince Joan—and through her, Frank—to move to Terra Linda.

In contrast to their Albany house, the Clarksons' new home was part of a totally planned, newly shaped landscape.⁸ Thirty minutes' drive from San Francisco, the new suburb was planned for forty-five hundred houses, three shopping areas, schools, recreation areas, and churches. There were few businesses and no other cultural institutions. Terra Linda was typical of postwar American suburbs in its peripheral location, low density, stylistic conformity, and racial and economic homogeneity (fig. 13.1).⁹

The Clarksons ordered Plan No. 131 on Lot No. 88 in Terra Linda Valley Unit 4, agreeing to pay

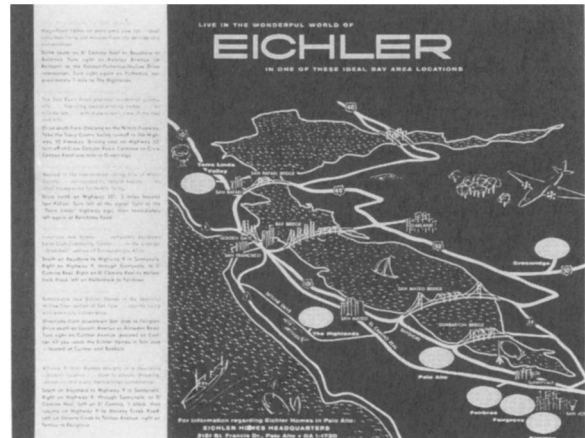
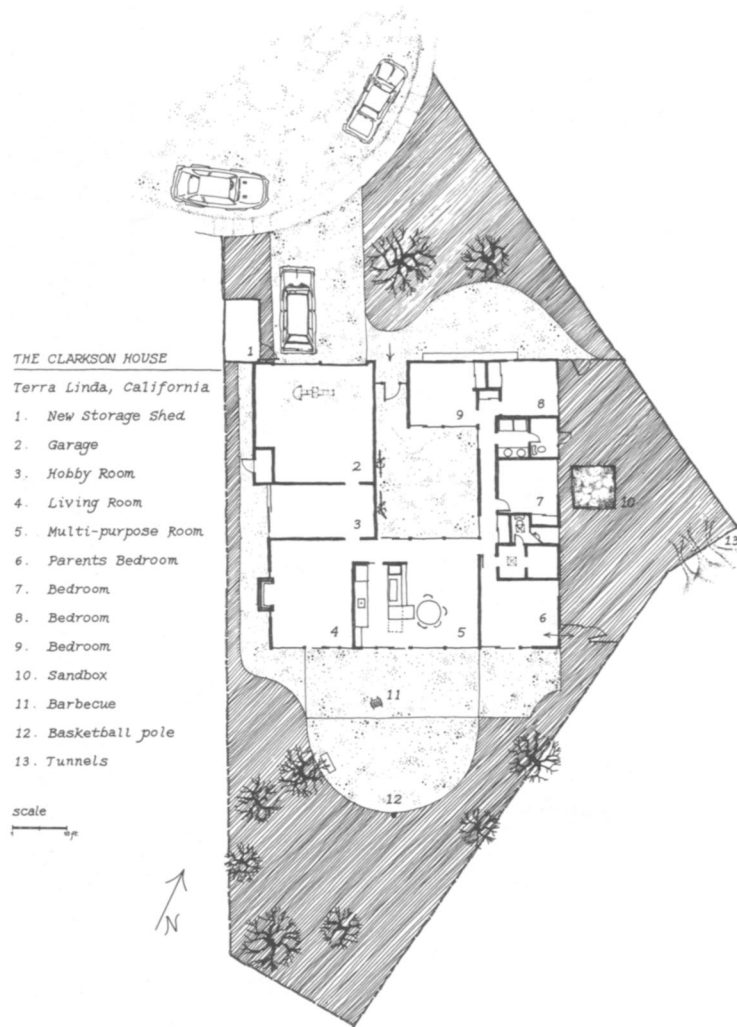


Fig. 13.1. Cover of Brochure Published by Eichler Homes. This cover shows locations of seven Eichler communities in the San Francisco Bay area.

\$27,500.¹⁰ They still live in this house today, and it has remained relatively unchanged over the past thirty years (figs. 13.2 and 13.3). It is a typical Eichler home: a ranch house with a flat roof, visible structure, and plenty of glass. Defined by prefabricated wood frame structures on heated concrete slabs, the plans of Eichler houses are fairly open.¹¹ The major living spaces in the house are distinguished by their spatial continuity, rather than functioning as discreet volumes, as in a traditional nineteenth-century house. These major rooms open toward the backyard, leaving the facade of the house blank save for a few windows intended for ventilation. Up and down the block, and throughout Terra Linda, are houses just like the Clarksons'. They differ slightly in size and some details, but bear a distinct resemblance to one another and are immediately recognizable as "Eichlers."¹²

They are named for the founder of the second best-known "merchant-building company" in America, Joseph L. Eichler (1900–74), who constructed thousands of prefabricated, suburban, middle-class houses in California during the postwar era. Eichler's houses were a well-known house type in the San Francisco Bay area, distinguished by their "modern" appearance—the stark, undecorated structure and

Fig. 13.2. Plan of the Clarkson House, Terra Linda, California. (Measured by the author and Mark Brack, 1992, drawing by Jennifer Beardsley).



relatively blank facade. In terms of a recognizable product, they were the equivalent—at a much higher price—of William Levitt’s houses in the Levittowns on the East Coast.¹³

The Eichler name and the predictable architecture that it represented were marketed as positive features to potential home buyers. So, too, was the revolutionary manner in which the company enticed prospective customers with attractions that reached far beyond the home itself. An Eichler house often included a full set of appliances and

well-known, brand-name materials and fixtures; the lawn, landscaping, patio, and fences were also often part of the initial arrangement with the builder.¹⁴ The Clarkson contract included kitchen cabinets, garage doors, plate-glass mirrors, door chimes, and all the plumbing fixtures. Building materials and details were specified by the family after it had inspected a model home in Terra Linda.¹⁵ The company’s one-stop architectural shopping, like the marketing techniques developed much earlier by mail-order companies such

as Sears, Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward, proved to be an extremely successful approach.¹⁶ Five hundred houses were constructed in Terra Linda in one year; they sold immediately.¹⁷

Unlike most other builders of the time, Eichler hired well-known architects to design models from which his houses were constructed.¹⁸ That decision reflected both a desire and a quite pressing need for professional design expertise. The combination of a growing demand for larger houses and the increasing prevalence of smaller building lots convinced builders like Eichler to look to architects for more efficient and sophisticated solutions to the perceived space problem.¹⁹ "I'd never used architects before because I didn't think design was necessary to sell houses," admitted one builder in 1954. "But today the market is so competitive that builders need good design to sell."²⁰ Eichler himself likened the reliance of builders upon architects to the need of a dress manufacturer for professional fashion designers.²¹ Anshen and Allen, the architects of the Clarkson house, began designing merchant-builder houses in 1949 after having supposedly convinced Eichler of the "possibilities of good design" by showing him Anshen's work on his own house.²²

The association of Eichler homes with the world

of custom-built, architect-designed houses added to the "designer" appeal of the buildings. Indeed, the houses were characterized by a unique combination of common, ordinary elements—economical materials, prefabricated elements, and neighborhood conformity—and high-style features—blank facade, visible structure, window walls, flat roof. The rapid acceptance of the blank facade was surprising, even to its designers. Anshen claims that the first builder for whom they designed a house with a blank front was "leery" of the idea; it was one of five designs tested as model houses. According to the architect, this model was so popular that the other, presumably more traditional models were impossible to sell.²³

The merchant-builder house into which the Clarkson family moved in 1961 featured much more, however, than up-to-date styling. At every level of its construction—from the interior detailing to site planning—it suggested or assumed a standard of relations between suburb and city, between neighbors, and between the members of each family. That deliberate construction of social relations began at the level of the neighborhood site plan. The seemingly close relationship of the house to the outdoors, in its use of large areas of glazing, was belied by the actual separation of yard



Fig. 13.3. View of the Clarkson House from the Street.

from yard in Terra Linda. The Clarkson house is located in a cul-de-sac of five identical houses; the yards are separated by high fences that were included in the contract with the builder. "The fence protects us," claimed one customer when questioned about the large areas of glazing in Eichler homes. "We don't feel like goldfish at all."²⁴

The house itself also acted as an impenetrable wall, reinforcing the larger gesture of withdrawal and isolation expressed in both the peripheral location of Terra Linda and in its site planning. The front of the Clarkson house, as already noted, is nearly blank; the large, two-car garage encompasses most of the building's width. Even the front door, a solid wooden door, does not lead into the house, but rather into an open atrium space. The "real" entry to the house, from the atrium to the multipurpose room, is a sliding glass door. In this way, explained the architect, "The entrance court attained privacy from many casual visitors."²⁵ In contrast to the street-facing orientation of traditional American houses, family life was directed to the back of the lot in the Eichler home. In an effort to "protect" mothers and children, Eichler had actually surrounded the family with architecture. The opacity of the front and sides of the house, the enclosed courtyard, and the high fences around the yard ensured that family life was focused within the property lines of the suburban home.

The central interior space in the Clarkson house, the huge multipurpose room, reflected this new concern. Eichler houses were typically promoted as appearing much larger than they were. "In a small house," explained the architect, "the economics of the selling price indicate that rooms cannot be as large as might be desirable, and therefore, in order to provide at least one space which gives at least a visual sense of large size, the architect finds it desirable to 'throw together visually' as much space as possible."²⁶

This "capturing" of additional space in the design of the house was also attempted at the larger scale of the suburb. The distant views of the Marin

hills through the large windows of the Clarkson house served to "extend" the apparent boundaries of the lot. The constructed views in contemporary houses, claimed a journalist, made prospective buyers feel they had "space to breathe in—enough space to walk around in without being crowded." The window wall in the rear of the house and the careful siting of the building extended the room, and the family's sense of territoriality, into the distant landscape.²⁷

The open plan of the multipurpose room at the center of the house also expressed the new emphasis placed on motherhood in the design of houses during the baby boom era.²⁸ From this combination kitchen, dining, and playroom—the "living-center of an Eichler Home" as the company's own publicity described it—mothers like Joan Clarkson could survey all the major spaces in the house.²⁹ She could, while preparing dinner, "keep visual control of children's activities over the house."³⁰ In this way, the kitchen was intended not only as a place to prepare meals but also as a virtual command post for a person whose full-time job was watching. "The architects arranged glass walls and doorways in front or side yards so a mother could keep an eye on the children," the magazines reported, adding almost as an afterthought that she might "even share in the pleasure of outdoor living herself."³¹ Furthermore, the kitchen, "placed squarely in the center of



Fig. 13.4. Postcard Published by Eichler Homes, Inc., Showing the Uninterrupted View of the Multipurpose Room and Backyard from the Kitchen.

the floor plan . . . commands all situations—visually, psychologically, and operationally.”³² The Eichler company included in its promotional materials a colored postcard picturing the house interior as seen from the kitchen, emphasizing the breadth of this zone controlled by the mother (fig. 13.4).³³

Maternal power was also closely linked, in the eyes of the designers, with domestic technology.³⁴ As most of the appliances were included in the arrangement with the builder, female control was, in a real sense, built into the architecture of the house. The Eichler kitchen came equipped with a Waste King dishwasher and garbage disposal unit and a Thermador range and oven.³⁵ Corporate publicity emphasized the labor-saving materials found throughout the house, such as Philippine mahogany wall paneling—“beautiful, durable, easy to clean,” and Armstrong flooring, which required “little or no waxing.”³⁶ Other details were designed specifically to accommodate small children. The kitchen faucet in an Eichler, for example, could be controlled with one hand, in case a mother had an infant in her arms. The radiant-heated concrete floor was described as being not only clean and durable, but also as “perfect for children’s bare feet.”³⁷

In its reliance on domestic technology as a means of enhancing female power in the home, the Eichler house was, in a way, the realization of

a strain of domestic design ideology that looked back to Catharine Beecher in the mid-nineteenth century and had affected kitchen design throughout the twentieth century. Since the construction of the “progressive” house, sixty years earlier, designers had consistently emphasized kitchen technology as a key to lightening women’s labor and elevating their status.³⁸ This was billed in the pre-war house as a means to professionalize women’s position as homemakers, in order to give their work a social value measurable in the same terms by which all labor was measured.

The Eichler kitchen, however, aspired not to re-value household labor, but simply to make it more pleasant and less disruptive to the other duties of domestic life. Undecorated surfaces, sharp edges, and the open plan made the house a showcase for good housekeeping. Another postcard produced by the company, as well as many photographs in its brochures, featured women in the kitchen, talking to men and children who were eating or playing (fig. 13.5). The “world’s most efficient, most beautiful kitchen” allowed women to complete household tasks while participating fully in family life.³⁹

The central position of the kitchen in the Eichler home was also directly connected to patterns of child care developed long after Beecher’s era. Dr. Benjamin Spock, in his best-selling *Common Sense*

Fig. 13.5. Postcard Published by Eichler Homes, Inc., Showing the Openness of the Kitchen.





Fig. 13.6. Photograph from Promotional Material Published by Eichler Homes, Inc. This photo suggests how a social gathering could occupy several rooms of a house.

Book of Baby and Child Care of 1946, had convinced parents to adopt a more instinctual approach to mothering.⁴⁰ Spock told mothers that their behavior carried enormous consequences for children and placed particular emphasis on the closeness of mother and child. "If relationships are good," claimed the doctor, "[children] don't have to be forced to eat, forced to use the toilet."⁴¹ Spock's approach to mothering, whereby the mother was a constant and close companion, demanded an architecture in which she could observe every gesture of the child, hear every whimper, and respond instantly. The Eichler plan, with its kitchen as an observation station and large expanses of glazing between indoor and outdoor spaces, was intended to facilitate this instinctual mode of mothering.⁴² Instinctual mothering would have been impossible, that is, in a house in which cooking and playing occurred in separate spaces.

The ideal space for Spock-style mothering was the atrium in the Eichler house. This space was intended by the architects of the house to act as a form of filter, like the entry vestibule in a traditional American house, where salesmen or other unwanted visitors could be encountered before they reached the inner sanctum of the family home. It was also intended as a dining area and, according to the company brochures, as the perfect play space for kids, who could benefit from the open air while mothers watched from inside, assured of their children's safety.

Eichler promotional material suggests that the overall plan was further intended to accommodate the woman of the house in her anticipated role as the hostess of cocktail parties for her husband's business associates. In the 1950s corporations began to scrutinize closely the wives of job applicants to ensure that they were pleasant, satisfied with their marriages, and willing to accept their husbands' transfers. Cocktail and dinner parties in the family home for the husband's associates at work became a routine part of middle-class life. The Eichler plan allowed and even encouraged the responsible housewife to prepare drinks and food in the kitchen, while entertaining guests at the same time. Company brochures showed how large social gatherings could spread from the multipurpose room into the atrium or the backyard, taking advantage of the open plan of the house (fig. 13.6).

The details of the house also were designed to facilitate women's ability to serve as both mother and hostess. The built-in dining table, for example, was hinged and could swing into the kitchen or into the multipurpose room. Projected into the latter area, the table was perfect for adult formal dining. As part of the kitchen, it was more suitable for children's meals. The dining table encapsulated the overall design principles implicit in Eichler's collaboration with Anshen and Allen: adaptability within a larger framework of implicit, controlling social expectations.

Thus far we have looked at the Eichler home in terms of how it was *supposed* to function, noting the position of women in the house as one of relative (but limited) power as surveyor of nearly all the family's activities. We have noted the turning of the house away from the street, the enclosed atrium, the high fences, and the absence of any shared spaces with neighbors as an effort to "capture" space and to preserve the appearance of openness within carefully closed and segregated spaces. But did real families live in the ideal ways pictured in publicity brochures and postcards? How did actual life in an Eichler compare with the life prescribed by the physical arrangement of spaces in the house?

The memories and family photographs of the Clarkson family and the present condition of their house indicate that they followed, to some extent, the expectations built into postwar suburban architecture. Mr. Clarkson earned the family living in the distant city, while Mrs. Clarkson remained in the home and suburb and was responsible for child care. But Joan Clarkson and her children did not simply follow blindly the architectural instructions spelled out by their house. They assumed active roles in the "construction" of their own spaces, contesting many of the relationships presumed by the house. In this way, the Clarkson home was a carefully negotiated compromise between ideal and real, a compromise mostly realized through the rearrangement of furniture and the appropriation of spaces intended for other uses. Because it exists in behavior rather than in built fact, the landscape inhabited by women and children is completely invisible in the traditional sources of architectural history.

Nearly every aspect of the ideal use of the house as represented by "The Wonderful World of Eichler" was subject to some modification by the Clarksons. To begin, the strict territorial boundaries constructed to separate families in Terra Linda—the high fences, the enclosed atria, and the general turning of Eichler houses away from the street—were ignored or overcome in the real lives of the inhabitants, particularly the children.

The family's major "misuse" of Eichler's site plan was in the Clarkson children's use of the street as a play space. Every evening, a kickball game was organized among the twenty-four kids who lived in the five houses of the cul-de-sac. Although each lot had a relatively large backyard, intended for carefully supervised playing, the older children of Terra Linda preferred the relatively "neutral" space of the street, outside the area easily supervised by mothers cleaning up in the kitchen after dinner. Perhaps the mothers of Terra Linda did not want to supervise more than necessary; although American child rearing has always placed a premium on the child's independence, mothers also may have valued time spent alone.⁴³

Other active play zones were also located beyond the gaze of Joan Clarkson: in the side yard and the garage. The side yard was the preferred play space of the Clarkson children (fig. 13.7). The oldest kids, John and Gail, had special garden plots in the side yard. It was also the home of the family dog, Casey, for whom the children were supposedly responsible. The side yard's exclusiveness as a "kids' space" was guaranteed by the fact that a special door led out to it from the combination bathroom and laundry room. Probably intended by Eichler and his architects as a minor side entry to the house, this door was easily appropriated by the children because it led from their own bathroom inside the house.

The Clarkson children also tried to "demolish" the barriers between the backyards on their cul-de-sac by digging carefully planned tunnels under the high fences that separated their world from those of their friends. Gail Clarkson and her childhood friend Lori passed messages through their subterranean tunnel.

Also outside of Mrs. Clarkson's line of vision was the garage, which was the setting for special games. Although the two-car garage was obviously intended for the family automobiles, it became the relatively permanent setting for both hopscotch and Ping-Pong when the children were young, en-



Fig. 13.7. Photograph of the Side Yard of the Clarkson House Looking Toward the Backyard.

abling them to play “outside” the house in rainy weather. Once the chalk lines for hopscotch were drawn on the concrete floor of the garage, remembers Gail, the space was hers. This reapportionment of space was a conscious choice on the part of the family; they preferred to park their two cars on the driveway and street in order to gain this ad-hoc “games room” for the kids. In a more traditional builder’s house, the basement may well have served this purpose.⁴⁴

While brochure descriptions and photos, as we have seen, billed the enclosed courtyard as the perfect space for child care, real children preferred to play in less visible areas. As a result, many residents in Terra Linda transformed their underused atria into other kinds of spaces. Immediate neighbors of the Clarksons kept reptiles in their courtyard; most atria became elaborate gardens. The Clarksons stored bicycles and other bulky items in their outdoor room.

Admittedly, the Clarkson children sometimes played in the atrium; they especially liked to sleep under the stars on camp cots in the courtyard. Again, it is interesting to note that the children preferred to use this space when mothers were noticeably absent from their “command post” in the multipurpose room.

The continuous supervision of children by mothers implied in Eichler’s architecture depended on vast areas of glazing around the atrium and facing the backyard. This afforded, as already noted, uninterrupted views from the kitchen.⁴⁵ What the publicists of Eichler homes seldom mentioned was the consequent high visibility of parents’ activities to children. Just as the Clarkson children chose to play in spaces that lay outside their mother’s guard, so too did the Clarkson parents block their own visibility by simply drawing the curtains, transforming their windows into walls. Nearly every extant photograph of the family, outside and inside, shows the windows of their house completely curtained. In this way, the Eichler house could function as a traditional American suburban house with opaque walls. Whenever the parents were in the master bedroom, remembers a Clarkson child, the curtains were drawn (fig. 13.8).⁴⁶

Men were afforded little space of their own in the Eichler home. In other suburban, postwar houses, however, the basement and backyard were often associated with the husband and father, accommodating his technology—the workshop and the barbecue. The Eichler home, though, had no basement, and the backyard barbecue was in full view of the command-post kitchen, which

was controlled by the woman. Furthermore, the backyard area immediately adjacent to the Clarkson house was paved, appearing as an extension of the indoor flooring. Ceiling beams, too, extended out from the indoor area and blurred the distinction between inside and outside, transforming “dad’s kitchen” into a simple extension of the regular cooking space.⁴⁷

The children’s bedrooms in the Eichler home, on the other hand, were fully enclosed, private spaces, pierced only by small windows for ventilation, rather than the large sliding-glass doors of the parents’ room. These cramped, boxy rooms—they averaged about ten-by-ten feet—acted as the antithesis, in both spatial and psychological terms, of the open, multipurpose room shared by the entire family. While the multipurpose room provided an arena for family togetherness, more traditional American values concerning independence and individuality were the special preserve of the bedroom wing, or “quiet zone,” of the Eichler home.⁴⁸

Fig. 13.8. Photograph of the Clarkson Children behind Their Home. Most family photographs of the house show curtained windows.



Bedrooms were where children nurtured their own individuality by spending time alone—playing, reading, or simply thinking.⁴⁹ The typical child’s bedroom of the 1960s expressed, in its arrangement and decoration, the personality of its tiny inhabitant.⁵⁰ Wall color or wallpaper pattern was based, first and foremost, on gender; books and toys were displayed in bedrooms; older children often exhibited posters of music or television stars, showing their awareness of and association with popular culture.

The lack of storage space was another distinguishing feature of Eichler’s architecture. Although two standard hall closets were provided and the bedrooms each included a clothes closet, there was negligible “back stage” space in the house. The laundry room, for example, was located just off the main circulation corridor. The slab construction system, of course, meant that there was no basement or crawl space to use for storage beneath the main floor of the house. The challenge of storing the typical accoutrements of middle-class life—bicycles, sports equipment, camping gear, off-season clothing—led to many small-scale, but significant, changes in the Clarkson house. Frank Clarkson constructed a storage shed beside the garage almost immediately after the family moved in. This extra space was intended to accommodate large equipment; with the appropriation of the garage as a play space for children, there was little room remaining for lawn mowers and other tools. Inside the house, Mrs. Clarkson extended the kitchen cupboards up to the ceiling, eliminating cupboard tops that only attracted dust while increasing kitchen storage space.

More significant still in the family’s redesign of the architecture was the “addition” of a free-standing dining table to the Clarksons’ multipurpose room (fig. 13.9). The presence of this second table completely defied the flexible, “multipurpose” nature of the space as intended by Eichler and recalled the separate dining room of the traditional American house. The table presumed the need for

Fig. 13.9. Photograph of the Clarkson Multipurpose Room Looking Toward the Kitchen. This photo shows the juxtaposition of the two tables.



different kinds of rooms for formal and informal eating, just as traditional houses had. The Clarksons' extra table thus transformed the huge, undifferentiated multipurpose space into two distinct rooms: a kitchen and a dining room. Although the tables were actually only five or six feet apart, the difference in their meanings acted as a thick wall between the two parts of the room. Despite their apparent preparedness for guests, the Clarksons never once hosted a cocktail party for Frank's business associates. "My mother was never into cooking or parties," remembers Gail. "If we had people over it was usually family."⁵¹

Due to the isolation of individual houses in postwar suburbs, most housewives, including Joan Clarkson, did not form close friendships with the other mothers in the immediate vicinity; observers of the postwar cultural landscape have concluded from this that suburban women led extremely lonely existences, confined, as Friedan noted, within the "narrow walls of their homes." By 5:30 P.M. on most days, reported one journalist, many women were glad to see their husbands, so desperate were they for adult conversation.⁵²

Again, reality and experience reveal completely different stories. Mrs. Clarkson and most postwar housewives led busy "public" lives in Terra Linda,

participating in significant relationships outside the family. Every afternoon Joan Clarkson took her children to the public pool, like hundreds of other mothers in California suburbs. At the recreation center in Terra Linda, women watched swimming lessons and admired back flips, but they also formed lasting friendships with other women with whom they interacted on a daily basis in a public place.

Joan Clarkson was also involved in charitable organizations. The members of the Summer Hills Club to which she belonged met regularly in various Terra Linda houses in order to plan their annual fund-raising events. At the pool, in the living rooms, and in countless other spaces, the supposedly private sphere of women in the suburbs was invisibly extended and ranged widely.⁵³ Telephones and cars, as well as the employment of "cleaning ladies," enabled postwar women to break down the "confining walls" of their physical environments.

American suburban housewives, claimed Friedan, "learned to 'adjust' to their biological role. They [became] dependent, passive, childlike; they [gave] up their adult frame of reference to live at the lower human level of food and things."⁵⁴ Friedan attributed this adjustment to women's isolation, and she described the situation in specifically architectural

terms: the house was a concentration camp. She assumed, like many others, that women were mute victims of their social and physical situations. The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s also used the metaphor of imprisonment or containment in its battle for equal rights, precisely the same language used by architects and developers to promote postwar houses.⁵⁵

The architectural evidence suggests, however, that the "adjustment" of the postwar housewife may also have occurred in the opposite direction of that indicated by Friedan. Although Mrs. Clarkson obviously conformed to the standards prescribed by the built environment, she also "adjusted" or re-designed the meanings and the uses of the spaces in her house, setting in motion a completely different standard of relations between neighbors and

between members of the family than that established for her.

While this study of the Clarkson house is a very limited sample, it nonetheless demonstrates that there is a major gap between actual use and descriptive or prescriptive literature on houses. If historians continue to project women's lives into the ideal spaces prescribed by architects and builders, they will propagate an inadequate history, dominated by the designers of the postwar cultural landscape. It is only by investigating domestic space from the interior—and comparing that information to ideals established on the exterior—that we can begin to understand how houses actually worked and represented women's true experiences of the built environment.

Notes

1. The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Jennifer Beardsley, Mark Brack, Chandos Brown, Elizabeth Cromley, Peter Gossage, Paul Groth, Janet Hutchison, Rick Kerrigan, Margaretta Lovell, Eric Sandweiss, Eleanor McD. Thompson, Dell Upton, Abigail Van Slyck, and an anonymous reviewer, and to thank the family in the case study, especially daughter Gail, whose photographs were the initial inspiration for the project.
2. For reviews of the literature on women in architecture, see Sally McMurry, "Women in the American Vernacular Landscape," *Material Culture* 20 (Spring 1988): 33–49; Carolyn Merchant, "Gender and Environmental History," *Journal of American History* 76 (4) (Mar. 1990): 1117–21; Gerda R. Wekerle, "Women in the Urban Environment," *Signs*, 5 (3) (suppl.) (Spring 1980): S188–S214. Toward a feminist analysis of architectural space, see Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham, eds., *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women, and Design* (London: Women's Press, 1989); Jos Boys, "Is There a Feminist Analysis of Architecture?" *Built Environment* 10 (1) (Nov. 1, 1984): 25–34; Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," *Design Issues* 3 (2) (Fall 1986): 3–14; Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (London: Pluto, 1984); Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Leslie Kanes Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).
3. The relationship between middle-class families and their housing, particularly during the progressive era, has been explored by many scholars. See, for example, Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Sally McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Albert Eide Parr, "Heating, Lighting, Plumbing, and Human Relations," *Landscape* 19 (1) (Winter 1970): 28–29; Robert C. Twombly, "Saving the Family: Middle Class Attraction to Wright's Prairie House, 1901–1909," *American Quarterly* 27 (1) (Mar. 1975): 57–72; Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873–1913* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
4. In the interest of privacy, I have changed the name of the family described in this study. All other details given are factual.

5. This plan allowed veterans to borrow the entire appraised value of a house without a down payment. While not entirely prescriptive, the VA loan program offered strong incentive for home buyers to buy in suburban neighborhoods. See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 233.
6. Betsy Clarkson, the third child, had been born in 1959.
7. Eichler won many other national awards, including the *Life* Magazine Award of Merit, 1953; National Association of Home Builders of U.S., 1954; *Living* Magazine Award, 1955; AIA-House and Home, 1956; *Sunset* Magazine, 1956; and the AIA-NAHB Award of Honor, 1959.
8. Terra Linda was reportedly the first planned community in America to have all contemporary houses. See "Terra Linda: California's Newest Planned Town," *House and Home* 6 (3) (Sept. 1954): 155.
9. These five characteristics of postwar suburbs are cited in Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 238–41.
10. Contract between the purchasers and Eichler Homes, Inc., and a letter from Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson to Joseph L. Eichler, July 2, 1961, in possession of the family.
11. Because the heating pipes in many Eichler houses burst and could not be repaired, new occupant-added, rooftop heating systems are an additional signature Eichler feature. See Dale Mead, "Leaky Floor Heat-Pipes Plague Old Eichler Tract," *San Jose Mercury*, Sept. 23, 1971.
12. Even the changes made to the houses by residents are remarkably consistent. For example, a typical street in an Eichler community will now comprise houses with pitched roofs of varying angles, second-floor additions, or two-story additions. See note 11.
13. The term is taken from Ned Eichler, *The Merchant Builders* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), which includes valuable information on his father's firm in the broader context of the American home-building industry; also see Marc A. Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); for a comparison of approaches between Eichler and Levitt, see Ned Eichler, *The Merchant Builders*, 116–18. Further biographical information on Eichler is offered in his obituaries in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 27, 1974, and the *San Francisco Examiner*, July 26, 1974.
14. The basic package varied from project to project; a typical cost breakdown is included in "Subdivision of the Year," *Architectural Forum* 93 (6) (Dec. 1950): 87.
15. The understanding that their new home would be identical to the model home they had inspected, with the exception of an agreed-upon expansion, was articulated in a letter from the Clarksons, dated July 2, 1961, to Joseph L. Eichler, in which the family complained to him about the materials used in their fireplace and noted a rumor of substandard workmanship in the unit. The letter is in the possession of the Clarkson family.
16. On merchant building as an outgrowth of the 1910s and 1920s, see Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*.
17. "Terra Linda," 155.
18. Ned Eichler, *The Merchant Builders*, 86–87.
19. Whereas in 1951, three-bedroom houses were considered ample, by 1954 the purchasers of most new homes wanted four bedrooms. See "Four Bedrooms Solve Space Squeeze," *House and Home* 5 (6) (June 1954): 116.
20. *Ibid.*, 116.
21. "Subdivision of the Year," 80.
22. Robert Anshen, "Design—Today's Contemporary House," *ALA Journal*, (Sept. 1960): 44–48; "Subdivision of the Year," 80.
23. See Anshen, "Design—Today's Contemporary House," 47.
24. Eichler's use of high fences was in contrast to other postwar merchant builders; fences were forbidden in

- Levittown because they were thought to appear cluttered and to detract from the landscape design. See "Subdivision of the Year," 81.
25. Anshen, "Design—Today's Contemporary House," 47.
 26. *Ibid.*, 48.
 27. "Terra Linda," 157; Lynn Spigel has explained the ambiguity between indoor and outdoor space in postwar suburban houses as the simultaneous urge to separate from and integrate into society. See Lynn Spigel, "The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the Neighborhood Ideal in Postwar America," in *Sexuality & Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 186–87.
 28. The birth rate in 1960 was 3.52 children per woman, compared to 2.10 in 1940. Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, 3d ed. (New York: Franklin Watts, 1983), 268; on the design of kitchens prior to World War II, see Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, *The Bathroom, The Kitchen and the Aesthetics of Waste: A Process of Elimination* (Cambridge: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1992).
 29. "Enter the Wonderful World of Eichler," n.p.
 30. "Courtyards for a Builder's House," *Architectural Record: Record Houses of 1960* (May 1960): 114.
 31. "Four Bedrooms," 123.
 32. "The Hub of the House," *House Beautiful* 94 (9) (Sept. 1952): 97.
 33. This view was also featured in many magazine articles on Eichler homes. See *Record Houses of 1960*, 115. The concept of the "fitted kitchen" was marketed in postwar Britain as a particularly American feature. See "The American Dream," in Sally MacDonald and Julia Porter, *Putting on the Style: Setting Up Home in the 1950s* (London: Geffrye Museum, 1990), n.p. On the association of domestic interiors with women, see Bonnie Lloyd, "Woman's Place, Man's Place," *Landscape* 20 (1) (Oct. 1975): 10–13.
 34. A closer analysis of the relationship of maternal power and domestic technology in earlier houses is offered in my "Architecture in the Family Way: Health Reform, Feminism, and the Middle-class House in England, 1870–1900," (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1992).
 35. "An Eichler Home Invites Comparison," publicity brochure, n.d., n.p.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. On the rationalization of housework in the early twentieth century, see Bettina Berch, "Scientific Management in the Home: The Empress's New Clothes," *Journal of American Culture* 3 (3) (Fall 1980): 440–45, and Christine E. Bose, Philip L. Bereano, and Mary Malloy, "Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework," *Technology and Culture* 25 (1) (Jan. 1984): 53–82. On technological change throughout the century, see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the Twentieth Century," *Technology and Culture* 17 (1) (Jan. 1976): 1–23, and *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Joann Vanek, "Household Technology and Social Status: Rising Living Standards and Status and Residence Differences in Housework," *Technology and Culture* 19 (3) (July 1978): 361–75, and "Time Spent in House Work," *Scientific American* (Nov. 1974): 116–20.
 39. "Enter the Wonderful World of Eichler," n.p.
 40. Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies: Child Care From Locke to Spock* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), 223; the relationship of Spock's ideas to the plans of ranch houses is discussed in Clifford Edward Clark Jr., *The American Family Home, 1800–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 206–7.
 41. Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 188. See also Nancy Pottishman Weiss, "Mother, the Invention of Necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's

- Baby and Child Care," in *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective*, ed. N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 283–303.
42. The multipurpose room was also called the "don't say no" space. See Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 255.
 43. The potential security offered by the enclosed spaces in the house and yard obviously left an impression on the Clarkson children, despite their attempted defiance of it. Gail Clarkson and her husband, now expecting their second child, are considering moving into the house when her parents vacate it later this year simply because she "can send [their son] in the backyard with his little cousins and keep him completely in sight." Personal letter from Gail Clarkson, June 11, 1992, in my possession.
 44. On the appropriation of the garage as multipurpose family space in the postwar period, see J. B. Jackson, "The Domestication of the Garage," in *The Necessity For Ruins and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 108–11.
 45. As the mild California climate did not require double glazing, the window wall was actually cheaper per square foot than a conventional wall. See "Subdivision of the Year," 80.
 46. Telephone interview with Gail Clarkson, Apr. 28, 1991.
 47. The general absence of men's space in the Eichler home may be a mark of the occupants' more progressive ideals than those of the inhabitants of traditional suburban houses. Ned Eichler has noted that his father's clients considered themselves "avant-garde." See Ned Eichler, *The Merchant Builders*, 82. On the dissent of men from the breadwinner ethic of the time, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor, 1983).
 48. Wright, *Building the Dream*, 254.
 49. Elaine Tyler May, in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), argues that the reliance on domestic "containment" or enclosure was directly connected to the political climate of the cold war era.
 50. The concepts of self-expression and individuality were equally important characteristics of bedroom design in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century house. The postwar bedroom for children, however, differed in that it was used extensively during waking hours for play and also that it contrasted so dramatically by its degree of enclosure with the family spaces in the house. On earlier bedrooms, see Elizabeth Collins Cromley, "A History of American Beds and Bedrooms," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, IV*, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 177–86.
 51. Telephone interview with Gail Clarkson, Apr. 28, 1991.
 52. "Midwest Suburbia," *Look*, May 16, 1967, 79.
 53. Spigel has suggested that the television, too, mediated the postwar family's occupation of public and private space. See Spigel, "The Suburban Home Companion," 185–217. Also, there is considerable debate among historians about the historical significance of women's activities outside the home in the postwar period. Some scholars see women's memberships in clubs and charities as foreshadowing the feminism of the 1960s, while others claim it only served to codify women's subservient status in the family. For diverse views on the issue, see William Henry Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 219–25; Eugene Kaledin, *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne, 1984); Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982).
 54. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 296.
 55. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 15.