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 **GEORGIA**
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

Ranch Houses in Georgia: A Guide to Architectural Styles



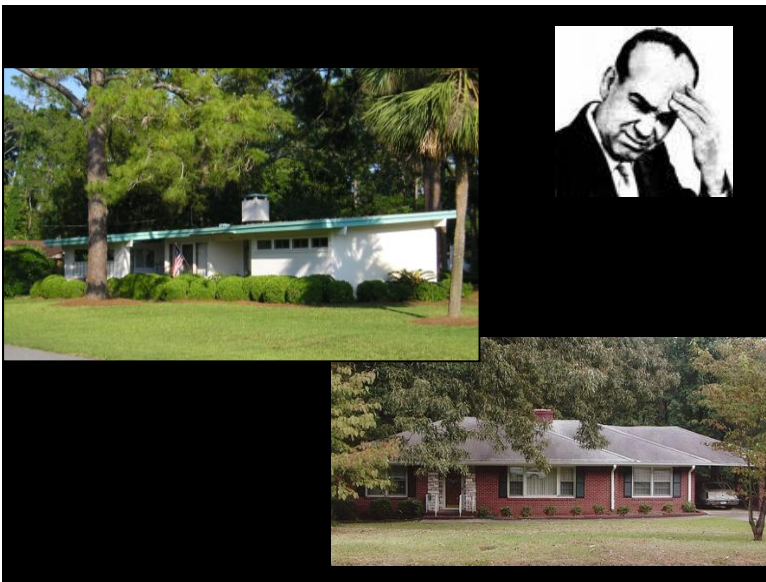
May 2010 Richard Cloues, Ph.D.

2



Ranch Houses in Georgia come in a wide variety – as seen here in these pictures of Ranch Houses in just one small community.

3



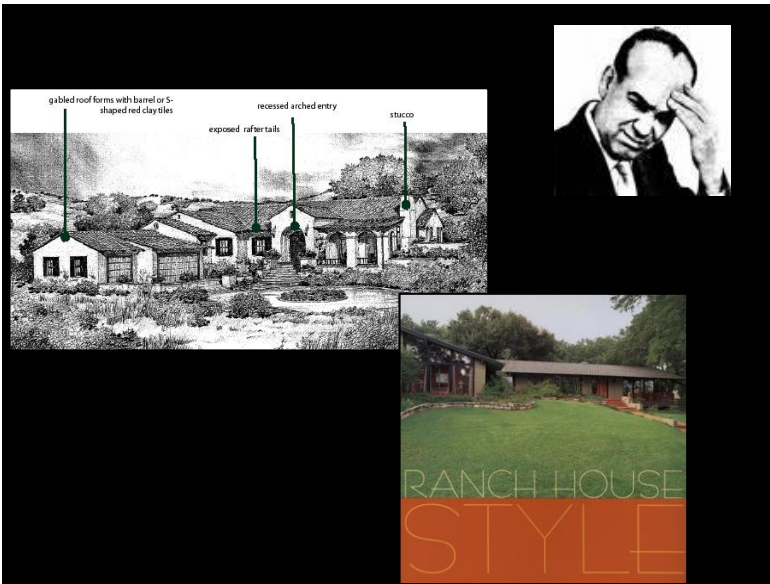
Their diversity is extreme -- more so than any other kind of historic house -- and sometimes perplexing.

4



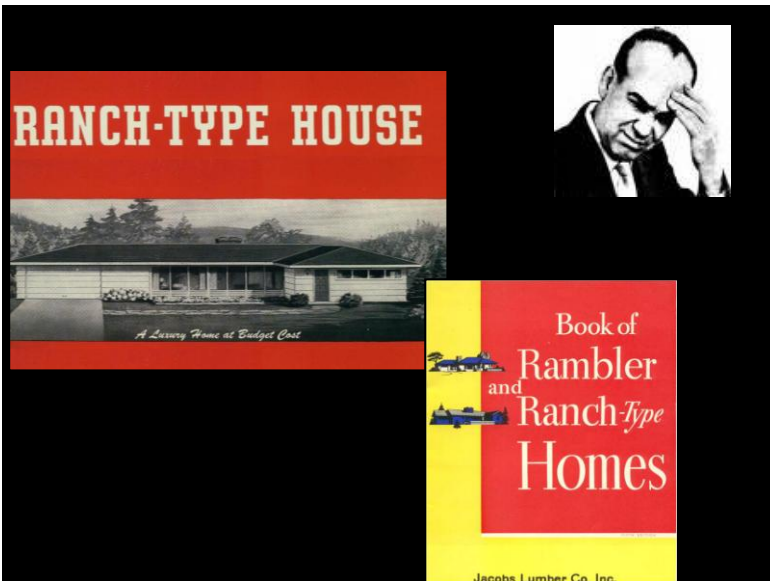
And yet there are recurring patterns of *outward appearances* and *underlying forms*.

5



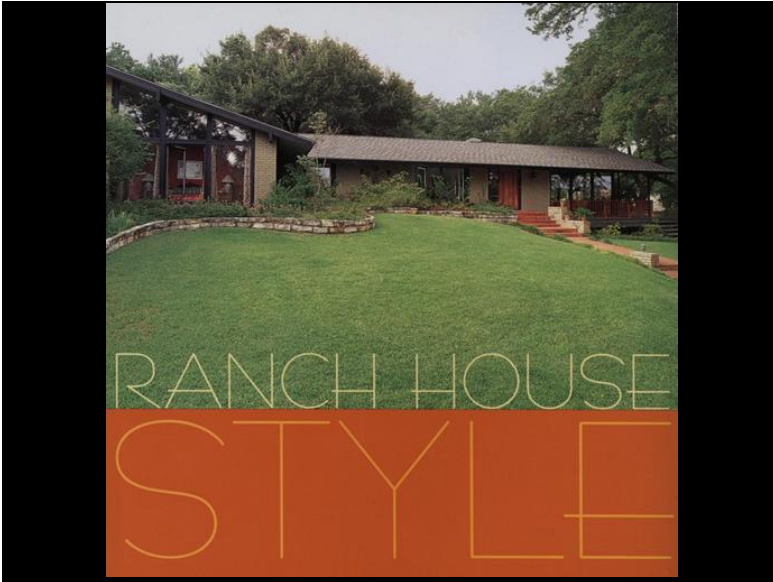
The *outward appearances* are indicative of different *architectural styles* applied to Ranch Houses.

6



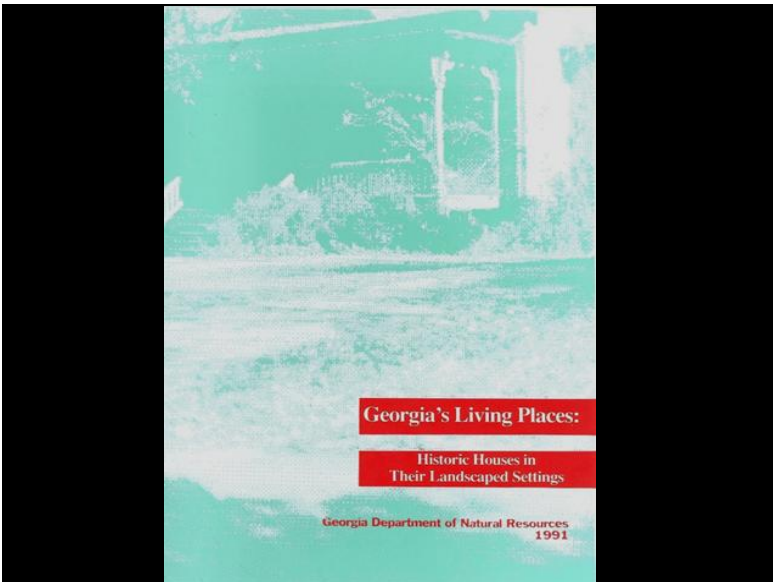
The variations in the *underlying forms* of Ranch Houses reveal different Ranch House types (or *sub-types*).

7



This presentation is about *architectural styles*. (A complementary presentation discusses the various types of Ranch Houses in Georgia.)

8



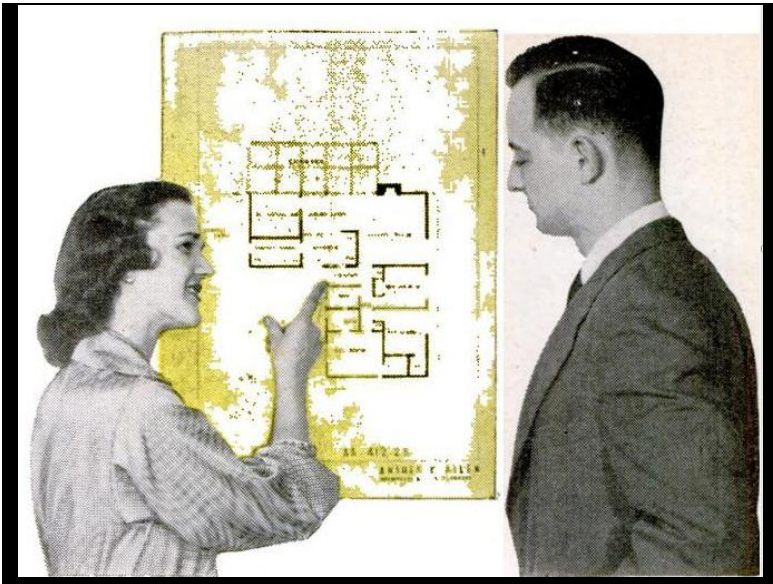
It builds upon the residential architectural styles first identified in the 1991 *Georgia's Living Places* report.

In that report, *architectural style* is defined in two ways:

9



(1) the *decoration or ornamentation* that has been put on a house in a *systematic pattern or arrangement* to create a specific visual effect; and/or



(2) the *overall design* of a house including proportions, scale, massing, symmetry or asymmetry, and the relationship among parts such as solids and voids or height, depth, and width.

10



With this definition of architectural style in mind, let's get our Ranch House identification kit and look at the different architectural styles found on Georgia's Ranch Houses.

11A



Four architectural styles predominate:

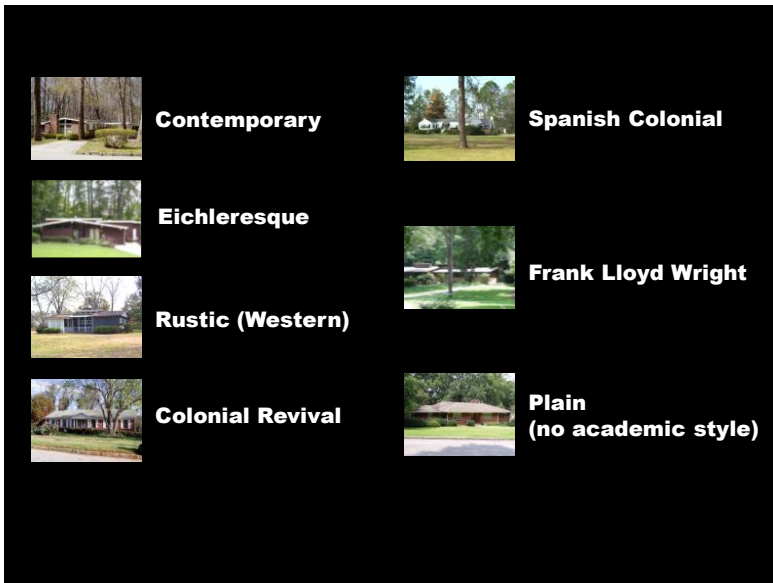
the *Contemporary* (or "California" Contemporary),

the *Eichleresque* (or "Eichler"),

the *Rustic* (or "Western"),

and the *Colonial Revival*.

11B



Also represented in small numbers is the *Spanish Colonial Revival* style.

Clearly evident is the influence of *Frank Lloyd Wright* in both overall design and details.

And then there are the "plain" or "no academic style" Ranch Houses – Ranch Houses whose appearance is defined primarily by their sub-type plan-form and not by historical styles or applied ornamentation.

12



Because of its importance to the history of the Ranch House in Georgia, let's start with this last one -- the *Plain* or *plainly styled* Ranch House.

13



It is best represented by what our office calls the "red-brick Ranch House" -- a plain, unadorned, red-brick house, relying on the architectural fundamentals of form, roofline, window and door openings, and wall treatments for effect.

14



This is the most prevalent architectural style of Ranch House in Georgia.

It's not so much a style in the historical sense of the word as it is a style in the modern mid-20th-century sense:

15



The absence of historically derived forms and ornament, and the presence of functionally derived forms and features, straightforward construction and use of materials, and an exterior design that often reflects the interior arrangement of spaces and functions.

16

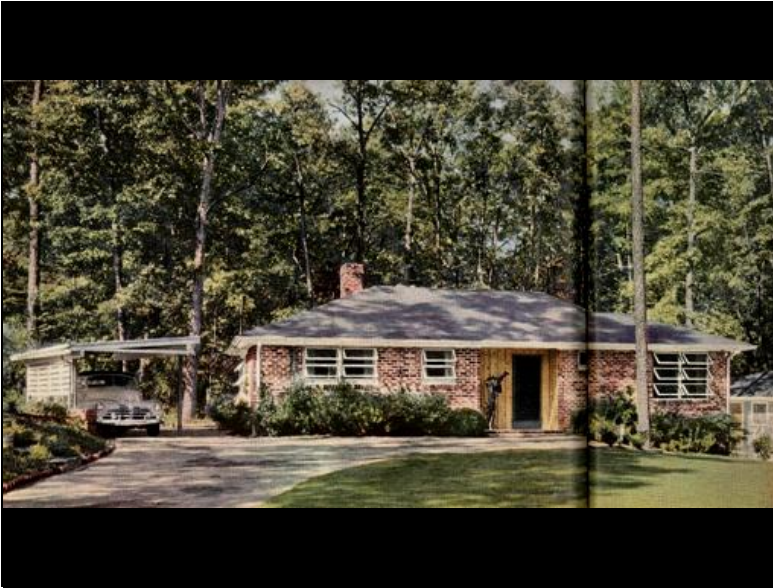


As such, it has a very distinctive appearance ...

17



Often visually striking in its bold simple forms.



It is the style exemplified by the Georgia Ranch House designed by Atlanta architect Clement J. Ford and publicized nationally in the *Better Homes & Gardens 1952 Five Star Homes* publication.



This house was heralded as the epitome of what a middle-class Ranch House should be.

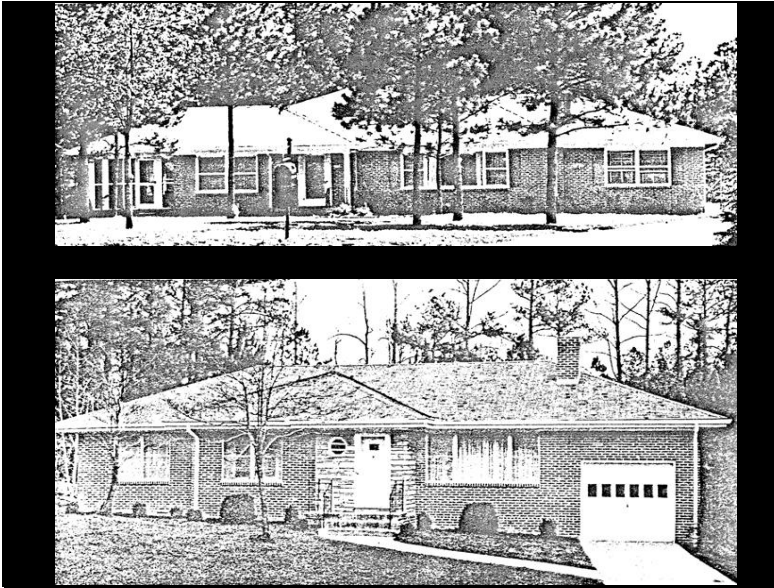
In the editors' opinion, it "avoided the triteness of the Traditional as well as the starkness of the Modern" and presented a "fresh pleasing style of its own."



Plain-style Ranch Houses were among the earliest Ranch Houses in Georgia.

This Atlanta house, designed by local architect W. Montgomery Anderson, was published in the 1946 *Book of Homes*.

21



And these Plain-style houses were featured in a 1948 plan book published by the Home Builders Plan Service in Atlanta.

22



At this same time, this Plain-style red-brick Ranch House was built on the outskirts of Decatur ...

23



And this one was built on the southside of Savannah.

24



Plain design is found on every sub-type of Ranch House in Georgia, from the linear ...

25



To the linear-with-clusters ...

26



The courtyard ...

27



And the rambler.

28



It also is found on small Ranch Houses and big Ranch Houses alike.



29



To adapt a phrase from an article about California Ranch Houses in a 1930 issue of *Sunset* magazine, many of these plainly styled Ranch Houses embody a "sophisticated simplicity" which made them well suited for the casual, unostentatious post-World War II family lifestyle.

30



But here's something to keep in mind: although the plain *red-brick* Ranch House dominates this style in Georgia, the Plain style is not exclusively red brick.

31



Here, the bricks on this Plain-style house are a stone gray ...

32



And here they are yellow.

33



Sometimes the Plain-style Ranch House is not even brick, but stone -- in this case, locally quarried granite in DeKalb County ...

34



And in this case, imported Tennessee Crab Orchard stone, more commonly used for decorative trim on Ranch Houses.

35



But as a rule, the plainly styled Ranch House in Georgia is more often than not built of red brick ...

36



And it is, without a doubt, the state's "signature" Ranch House style.

37



38



The *Contemporary* style Ranch House has a distinctive appearance: abstracted, stripped down, to the very "essence" of the Ranch House form and structure.

39



It too is a seemingly simple style, all geometric planes and surfaces, with contrasting solids and voids, reflecting the essential design characteristics of the Ranch House ...

40



And done with an eye to overall scale and proportions, and often using substantial materials such as stone and redwood or cedar to add a warmth or richness.

41



A hallmark of the Contemporary style is exposed structural elements, especially roof beams in gable ends – another result of “abstracting” the design of Ranch House to its essential components.

42



Other hallmarks include wide overhanging eaves, metal-sash awning-type windows, sliding glass doors (sometimes in multiples to create a window-wall), and fixed plate-glass windows of irregular shapes fitted into the gable ends of the house.

43



Sometimes the Contemporary style displays a pronounced simplicity, in keeping with the fundamental nature of the Ranch House ...

44



While in other cases the basic elements of the style are juxtaposed, creating a dynamic effect.

45



Rooflines are often accentuated, and in some cases take on unusual forms, like this triple-sloped front-gable roof on a house in southwest Atlanta ...

46



Or this offset shed or double-monopitch roof in Columbus ...

47



Or this unusual inverted gable or "butterfly" roof on a Jekyll Island resort house.

48



Sometimes the bold simplicity of a Contemporary-style roof can obscure the underlying house sub-type, as is the case of this discreetly “rambling” Ranch House whose form is literally smothered by an all-embracing front-gabled roof ...

49



Or this rambling Jekyll Island Ranch House covered by a dominant Contemporary-style shed roof.

50



But in other cases the bold nature of the Contemporary-style roofline accentuates the underlying house form:

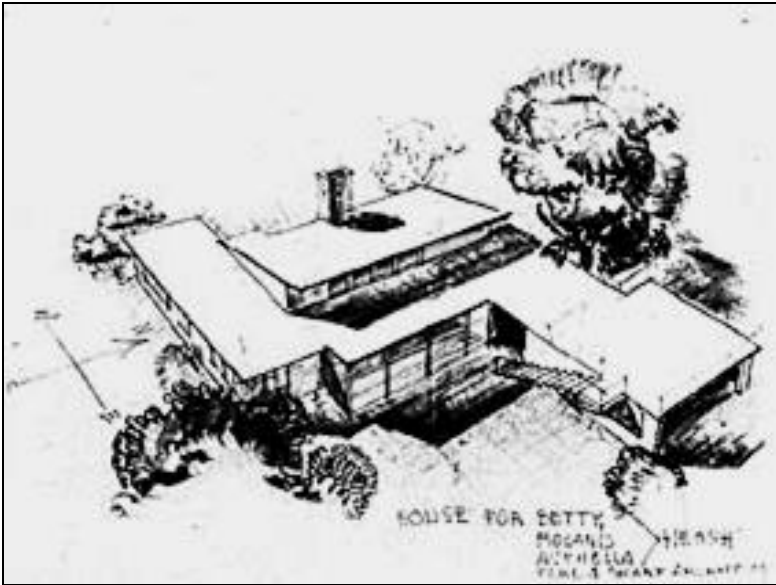
Always dramatically, as in the case of this linear-with-clusters sub-type of Ranch House where the cluster is amplified by a monopitch roof ...

51



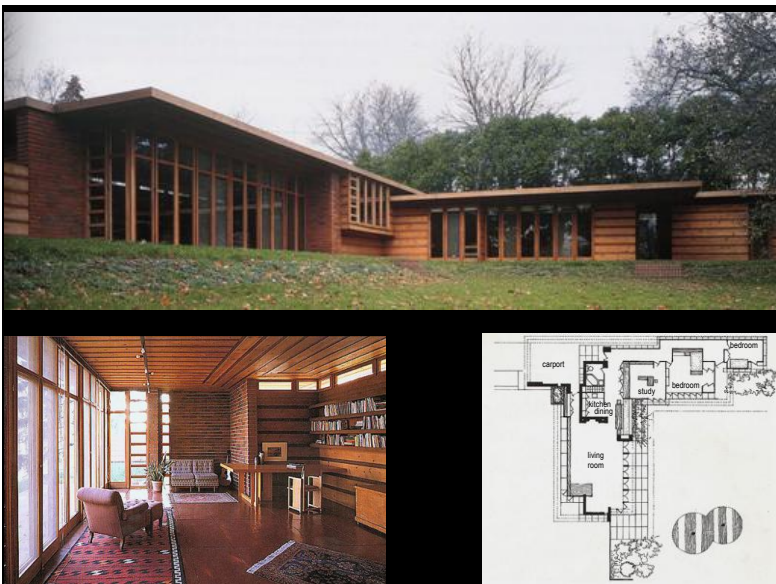
And sometimes with overstated architectural drama, as in this apparent collision of a contemporary shed roof and a more traditional gable roof.

52



The Contemporary style has its roots in the experimental Ranch House architecture of the 1930s in the Southwest ...

53

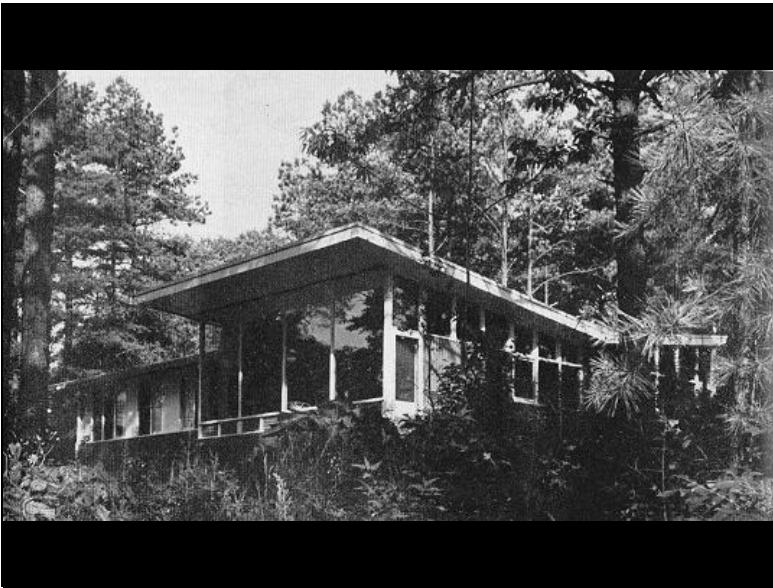


And in the mid-1930s "Usonian" houses of Frank Lloyd Wright.



But for Ranch Houses the style really took off with Cliff May's 1946 *Western Ranch Houses*, published by *Sunset* magazine, which was full of the new contemporary-style designs.

Given their place of origin, these designs are often referred to as the "California Contemporary" style.



The earliest known Contemporary-style Ranch House in Georgia was the 1947 Wilkinson House, designed by James Wilkinson, a new partner in the Atlanta architectural firm of Stevens & Wilkinson.

No longer extant, the house featured a bold butterfly roof and large expanses of glass.



Other early extant examples of the Contemporary style, dating from 1950 and designed by Georgia Tech architect Bill Finch, are found in Atlanta's small Golf View subdivision.

These "California" Contemporary versions of the style feature wood posts and beams, weatherboard and board-and-batten siding, and selective use of brick; no historical details or motifs were applied.



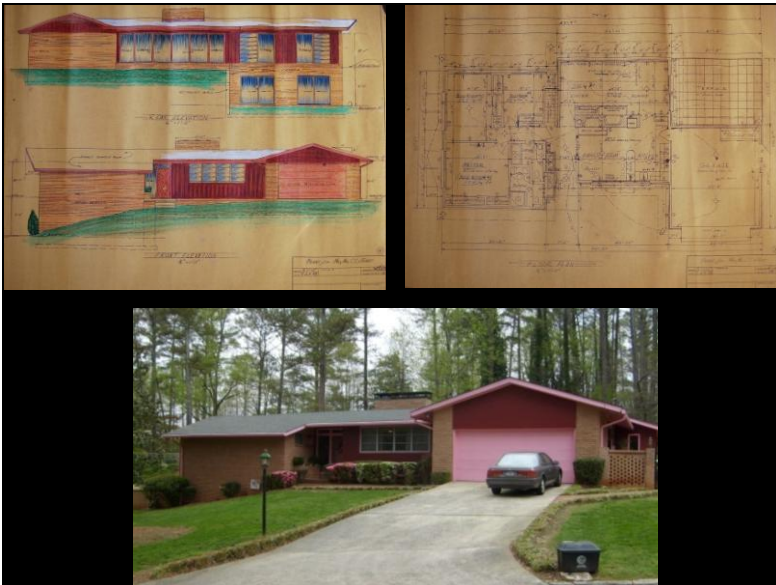
This 1950 California Contemporary-style Ranch House in Macon, designed by Jean League Newton, was featured in five national architectural magazines. It was recently listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

58



In the mid-1950s, a large number of modest Contemporary-style Ranch Houses were built in Northwoods, in DeKalb County, one of the first developments in the Southeast to successfully market the new Contemporary style to middle-class homebuyers.

59



Starting in the mid-1950s, dozens of Contemporary-style Ranch Houses were designed by Joseph Robinson, one of Georgia's early African-American architects, for the Collier Heights area on the west side of Atlanta.

60



The Contemporary style reached a peak in the early 1960s ...

61



And persisted throughout the decade.

62



In the early 1970s, as the Ranch House fell from general favor, large Contemporary-style Ranch Houses continued to be built, often on expansive tracts of land.

63

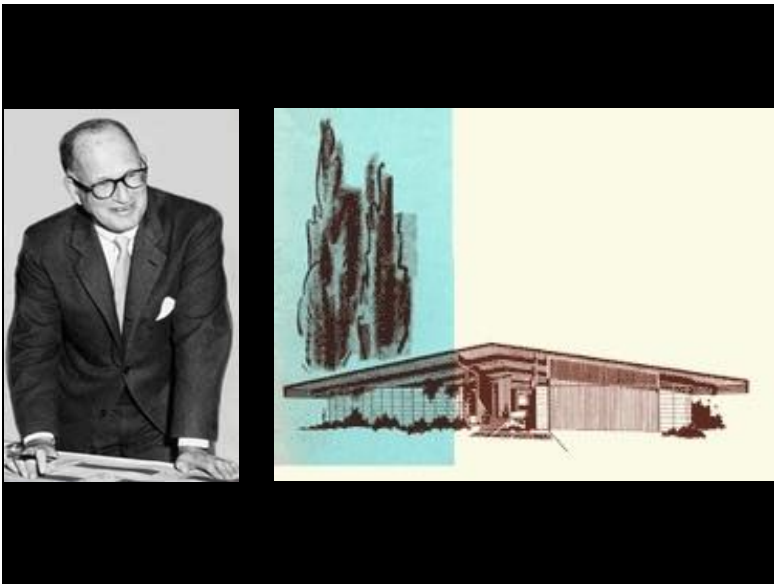


64



The *Eichleresque* style is a distinctive version of the broader Contemporary style. Its most obvious “trademark” is a very broad and very low front gable roof with exposed structural elements.

65



It takes its name from the mid-20th-century California developer Joseph Eichler who first commissioned the style in the late 1940s.

It is often referred to simply as the "Eichler" style.

66



In addition to their signature rooflines, Eichler houses were known for their relatively blank front facades and their wide-open rear facades.

67



In Georgia, the style first appeared in the mid-1950s in Savannah ...

68

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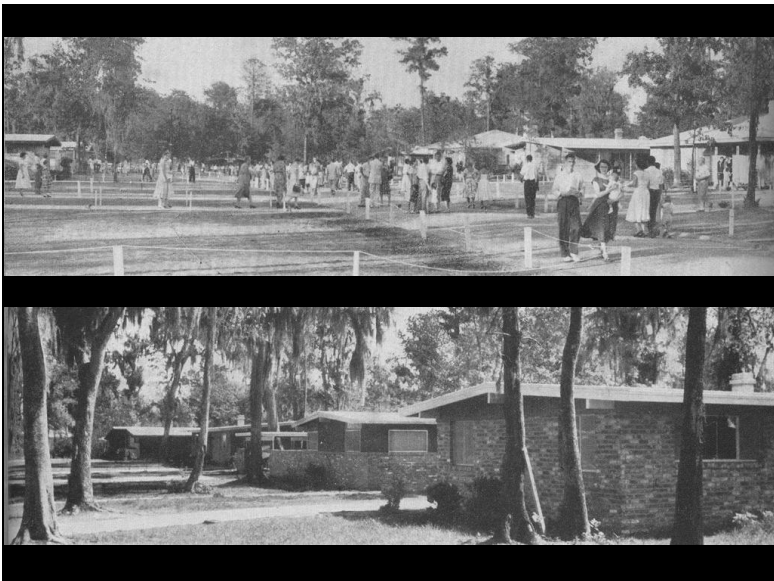
POWELL CONSTRUCTION CO.

Builder Clayton Powell started as a contract builder on \$1,500 in 1951. An organizational wizard, he developed his building know-how into a flourishing Savannah business within 15 months, organized the Home Builders Assn. of Savannah of which he is now president.

Architect Ralph Thomas, Georgia Tech graduate is guaranteed 5% of sales price for a single plan and is paid \$100 per start for repeats. "Design," says Powell, "is the cheapest thing I buy. Many builders pay as much as \$25 for a building permit, less for an architect."

Through the work of a developer (Clayton Powell) and a local architect (Ralph Thomas) who were set on introducing this new style of Ranch House.

69



A number of their Eichleresque-style Ranch Houses were built in the Windsor Forest development on Savannah's southside ...

70



Each with variations on the Eichler theme.



71



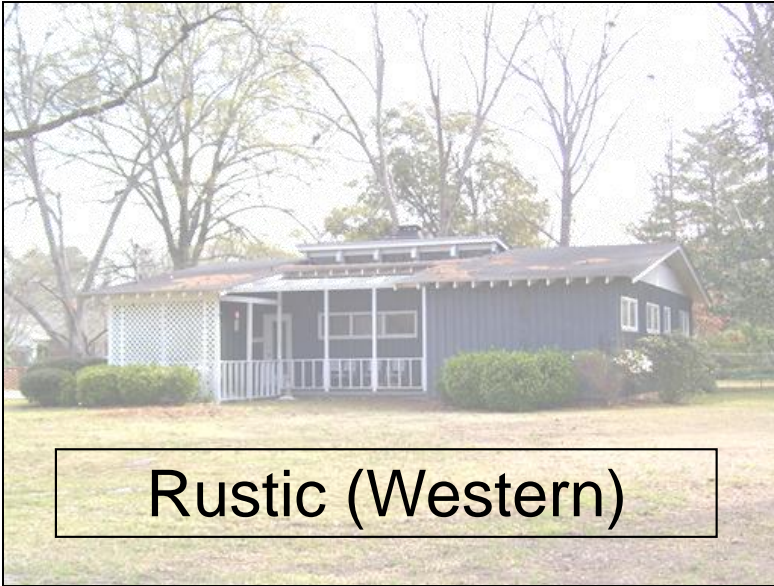
In the mid-1950s, the new style very quickly spread across the state, to great effect ...

72



And it appeared in substantial numbers in places like DeKalb County.

73



74



The *Rustic* style is characterized by what might be called a “carpenter” aesthetic: board-and-batten siding or rough-hewn weatherboards, exposed rafter ends (but not “beams”), simple porch posts, and simply detailed windows.

75



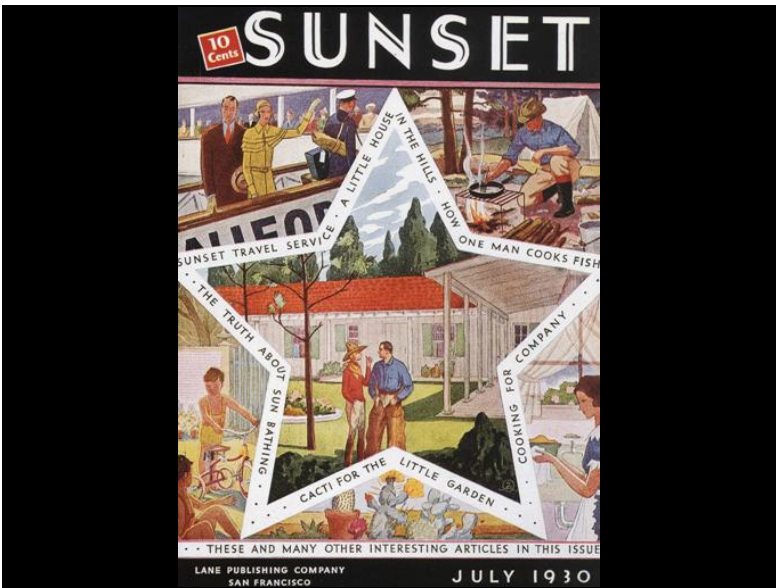
It is sometimes referred to as the “Western” Ranch House style.

76



It harkens back to the earliest days of the California Ranch House revival with the design and construction of what were sometimes called “shacks and shanties” ...

77



And what *Sunset* magazine famously termed “sophisticated rusticity” in 1930.

78



In Georgia, these houses often are quite small, reflecting their vernacular origins ...

79



But they also can be quite expansive.

80



Here's one outside LaGrange obviously inspired by the vernacular architecture of sheds ...

81



And here's a more elegant version in Ashburn.

82



Board-and-batten siding also shows up as a rustic stylistic highlight on a recessed front porches of many brick Ranch Houses.

83



Here's another way in which this rustic detail could be incorporated into a Ranch House.

84



Colonial Revival

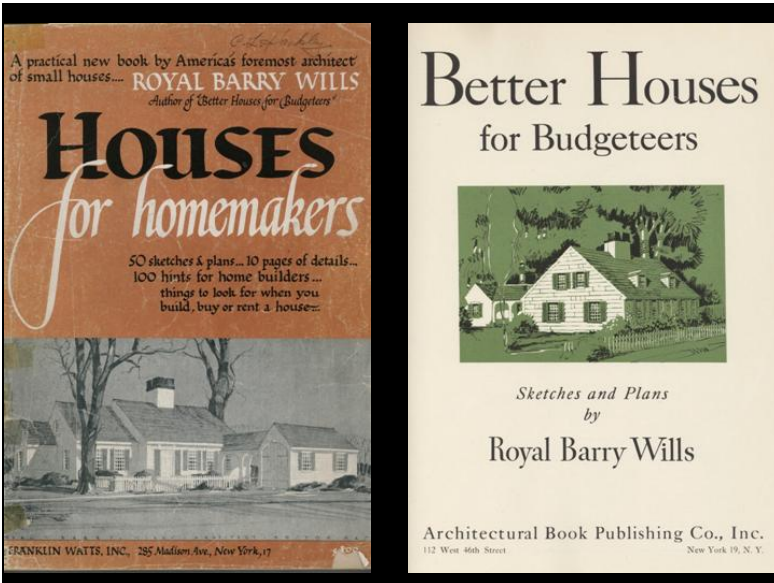
85



What we're calling the *Colonial Revival* style might be better understood in Georgia's Ranch House context as the *East Coast Colonial Revival*.

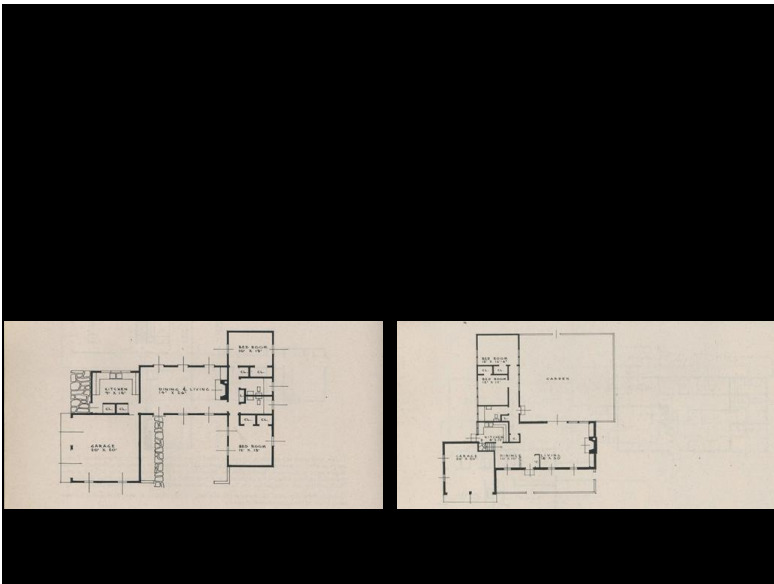
This might seem like an oxymoronic term, given the Southwestern vernacular origins of the Ranch House.

86



It all has to do with a Boston architect, Royal Barry Wills, who liked the new, open, zoned Ranch House plans from California but worked with a clientele that appreciated East Coast architectural traditions.

87



Starting in 1946, Wills took the new Ranch House floor plans with their functional zones and open-space living areas ...



And “dressed them up” in traditional East Coast Colonial Revival styles.



In Georgia, some designers simply added Colonial Revival motifs such as a front porch-portico, a front door with traditional sidelights, multi-pane double-hung windows, and shutters.



Other designers took a little more care with proportions and added details like cornice moldings.

91



Still others literally transformed the appearance of the Ranch House into something quite East Coast Colonial.

92



For some, a single porch column and a few shutters did the trick.

93



Another common Colonial-style treatment was a recessed front porch with turned wood posts along with the shuttered windows and perhaps a Colonial lamppost by the driveway.

94



This Colonial Revival-style Ranch House displays not only the requisite multi-pane double-hung windows with shutters and the paneled front door with sidelights but also brick quoins at each corner of the house ... and two Colonial lamp posts at the front entry!

95



For the most part, the Colonial Revival style in Georgia was conveyed by multi-paned double-hung-sash windows with shutters.

96



The Colonial Revival style (along with its alter-ego, the Contemporary style) persisted through the 1960s.



"Colonial" shutters on an otherwise plain Ranch Houses raise a tricky stylistic question:

Do shutters in and of themselves transform a plainly styled Ranch House into a Colonial Revival-style Ranch House?



As a matter of fact, shutters are inherently "historic." They derive from historic residential architecture and that of the Colonial era in particular.

So one could say that shutters are inherently Colonial Revival stylistic features.



But does it really make sense to call a Ranch House like this "Colonial Revival" in style simply because it has a few shutters flanking modern windows on the front of an otherwise plain-style house?

100



In cases like these, the presence of historically derived shutters should be noted, but the overall design is clearly not "Colonial Revival" in effect or intent.

101



Spanish Colonial

102



Somewhat surprisingly, given the origins of the 20th-century Ranch House, there are not many Spanish Colonial Revival-styled Ranch Houses in Georgia ... but, and perhaps appropriately, one of them is the very first Ranch House in the state.

103



The Spanish Colonial Revival stylistic elements of this mid-1930s Fort Valley Ranch House are subtle but evident: stucco walls, stucco chimneys with rounded profiles, exposed carved roof beams ("vigas"), terra-cotta attic vents in the gable ends, and the irregular massing of the rear wing.

104



Not so much Spanish Colonial,, but more like Cliff May's mid-1930s California designs, is the large angled porch on the back of the house.

105



This 1951 Ranch House in Fitzgerald displays some Spanish Colonial Revival traits in its clay tile roof and stucco-colored brick.

106

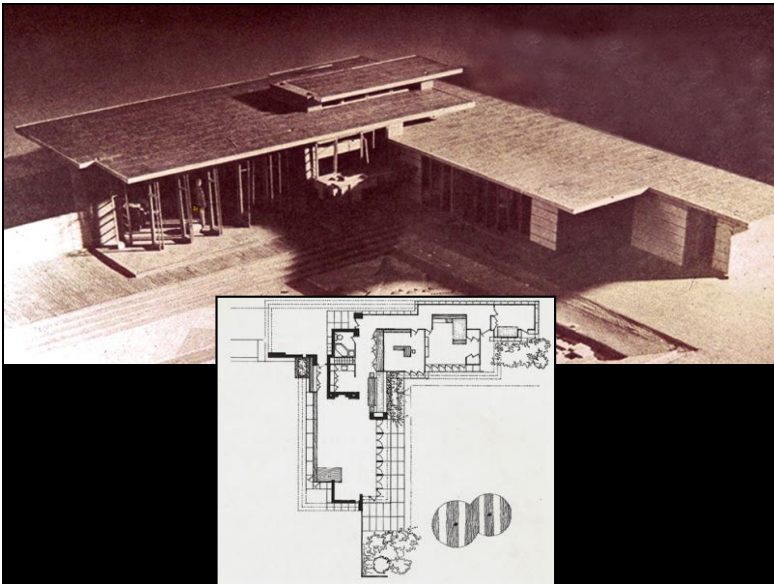


107



Whether he knew it or not, the famous American architect Frank Lloyd Wright played a major role in shaping the mid-20th-century Ranch House with his 1930s designs for what he called "Usonian" houses.

108



In terms of plan and massing, they set the pattern, inadvertently or otherwise, for the mid-20th-century suburban Ranch House.

Indeed, these Usonian houses had radically new forms and radically new open and zoned floor plans ...

109



And in their appearance they heralded the new Contemporary style with their a-historical forms and detailing and their use of natural building materials.

But they are so distinctive as to warrant special notice, if not a special stylistic category.

110



In Georgia there are a few Ranch Houses here and there that were *modeled* after Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses ...

Like this one, somewhat worse for the wear, on the road from Athens to Lexington ...

111



And this one, near Carrollton in rural west Georgia, with some later alterations.

112



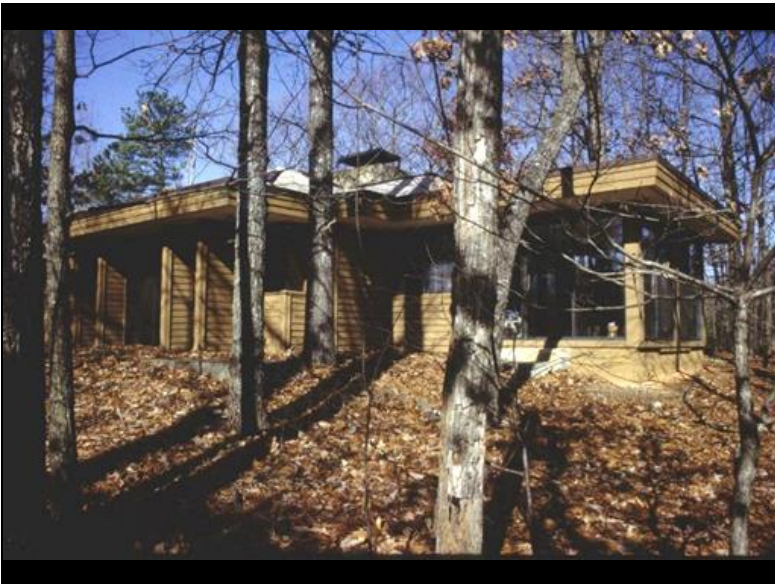
There are many others that were *inspired* by Wright's new houses, incorporating elements from them into their designs, like this one in northwest Atlanta ...

113

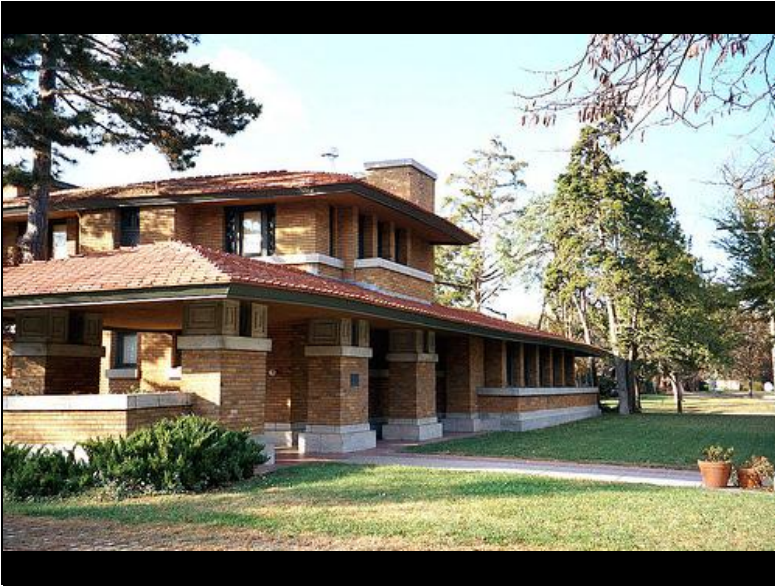


And this one along Lenox Road in north Atlanta.

114



Also in Georgia are the works of a self-proclaimed follower of Frank Lloyd Wright: Robert Green, a Georgia Tech graduate who worked with Wright at Taliesin West and then returned to Atlanta to design Usonian-type houses in the 1960s.



But one of Frank Lloyd Wright's greatest contributions to the design of the mid-century Ranch House in Georgia and elsewhere was embodied in his much earlier Prairie-style houses designed in the first two decades of the 20th century.

To create a long, low, ground-hugging effect for these houses, Wright split each floor level into two or more narrower horizontal bands, often using a continuous window sill with a solid wall below and ribbon windows above, and he used wide overhanging eaves to cast long linear shadows across the facade.



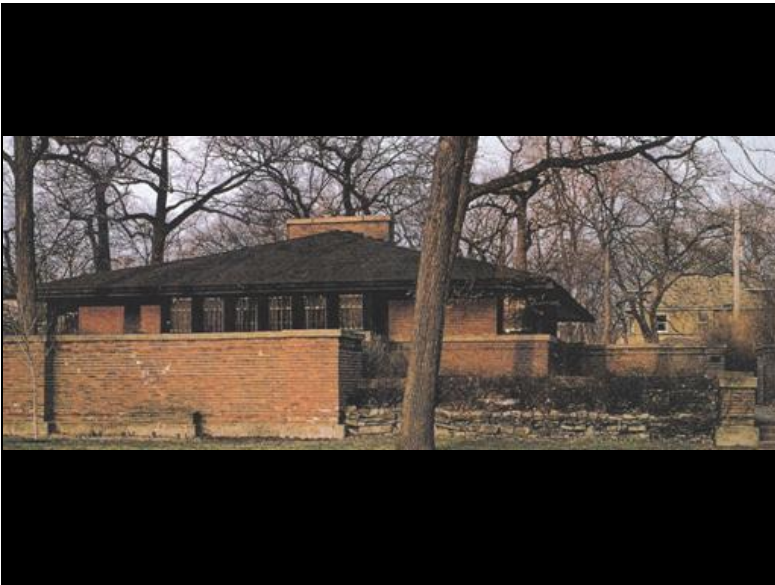
This effect was perfectly suited to the new Ranch House with its inherently long, low form, and it was used in custom-designed high-style houses like this one on Lenox Road in Atlanta.

117



It was also perfectly suited to "stretch" the standard design of thousands of contractor-built Ranch Houses like this one, making these smaller houses look stylishly longer and lower than they really were.

118



Another hallmark feature of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses, also dating from his early 20th-century Prairie-style houses, is the massive chimney stack.

119



These chimneys continued to be important aspects in Wright's later Usonian houses, as shown in this diagram.

120



Massive chimneys inspired by Wright's Prairie and Usonian houses became common features on many mid-century Georgia Ranch Houses ...

121



Sometimes lined up with the long linear form of the house ...

122



And sometimes set at right angles, cutting into or jutting out from the main mass of the house.

123



Here is a typical mid-century red-brick Ranch House with the slab-like chimney built of contrasting fieldstone.

124



This early 1950s Georgia Ranch House incorporates both the horizontal banding and the massive chimney.

125



Another Frank Lloyd Wright hallmark is the triangular-shaped picture-bay window, occasionally seen on Georgia Ranch Houses.

126



Ranch Houses incorporating design elements inspired by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright are included in the broader Contemporary-style category with an acknowledgment of their design inspiration.

127



A note about the Modern or International Style and Ranch Houses:

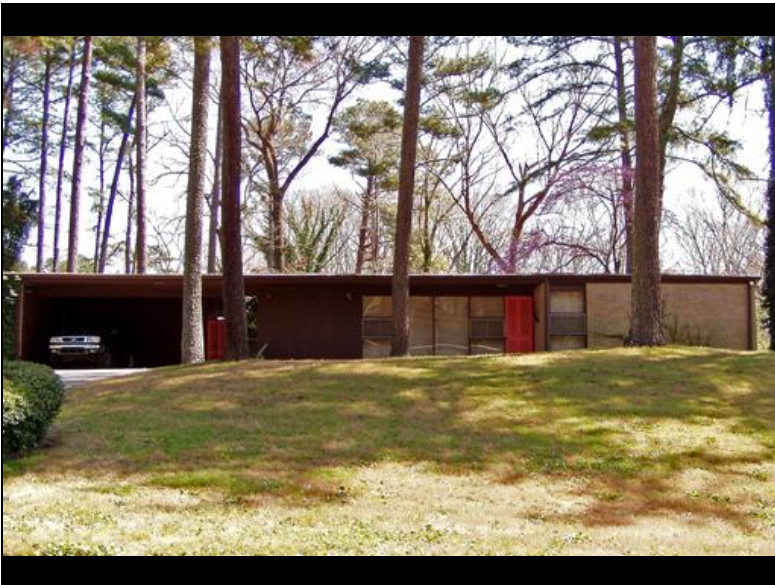
128



The Modern or International Style poses a conundrum for Ranch Houses.

The trademark of the Modern or International style is the flat roof, along with boxy geometric forms, and there are some Ranch Houses out there with those characteristics.

129



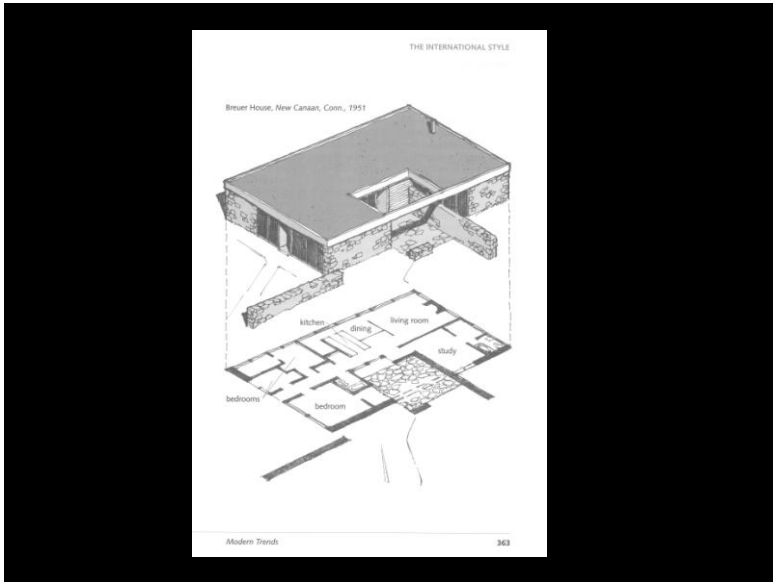
But true Modern or International-style architecture also made use of industrially produced building materials -- steel, glass, concrete -- most of which were antithetical to the Ranch House design philosophy.

130



So even though houses like these are one-story high and have zoned interiors with open-space plans, they belong to another 20th-century architectural movement ...

131



A movement that derived its inspiration from what were considered to be "universal" design sources rather than regional traditions ...

132



That was entirely forward-looking and did not originate with architecture from the past (except in opposition to it) ...

And that made use of industrially produced building components rather than those that were hand-crafted.

133



Houses like *this*, however, with their use of traditional or natural materials such as redwood, cedar, and earth-toned brick, are properly classified as Contemporary-style Ranch Houses.

134



This was the approach taken by *Better Homes & Gardens* magazine when it featured this similar house in an early 1950s edition -- it noted the "modern" form of the Ranch House but favored its "contemporary" use of materials.

135



A similar approach was taken by the lumber industry in promoting otherwise "modern" Ranch House designs but emphasizing the use of natural wood siding.

136



Elements of the International Style do show up in many early Georgia Ranch Houses, however, particularly in window treatments. This otherwise Plain-style red-brick Ranch House built in 1950 features a corner window fashioned from industrial-type sash ...

137



As does this Ranch House in Savannah.

138



Modern-style industrial sash windows dominate the design of this Plain-style red-brick Ranch House, also in Savannah.

139



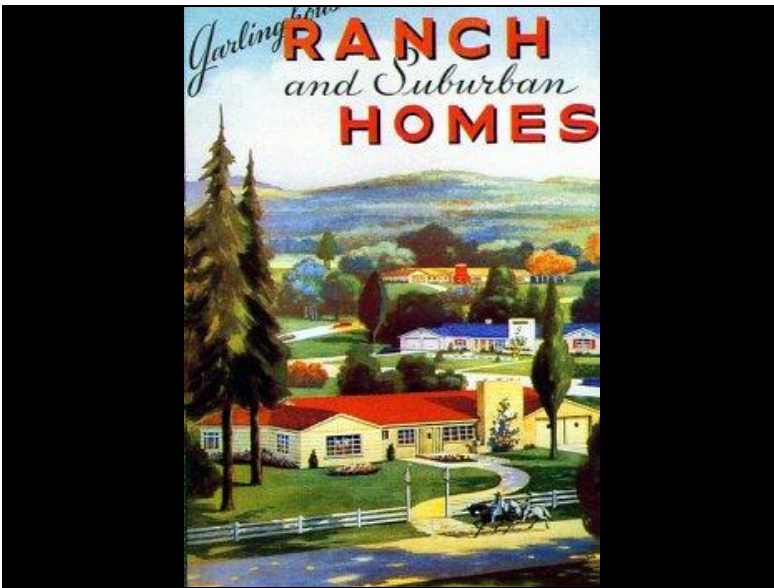
The occasional Contemporary-style Ranch House features International-style paneled window-walls.

140



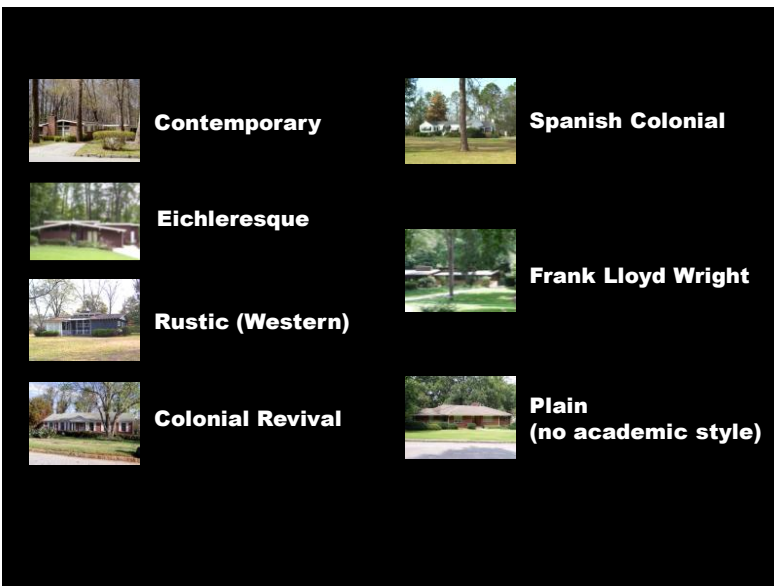
But for the most part, the Modern or International style (upper illustration) was fundamentally different than authentic Ranch House designs (lower illustration).

141



This concludes our presentation of the architectural styles of Ranch Houses in Georgia.

142



To recap:

Four major styles, one minor style, the influence of a famous architect, and a plain or no academic style that takes on the characteristics of a style in its own right.

143



Postscript:

A distinctive stylistic detail found on Ranch Houses in Georgia and elsewhere deserves special mention:

Those *faux-vine* metal porch supports.

144



In some ranch-house neighborhoods, this feature is almost ubiquitous.

145



Yet no one seems to know for sure where it came from.

146



My theory -- and it's just a theory -- is that the faux-vine metal porch post is a mid-century interpretation ...

147



Of the vine-encumbered wood porch posts on the early 20th-century ranch houses designed by Cliff May in southern California.


148




Many of Cliff May's early 20th-century ranch houses included long back porches, and many of them had climbing vines on the porch posts.



It seems reasonable to conclude that mid-century architects and builders picked up Cliff May's 1930s design "conceit" and turned it into an iconic ranch-house detail.


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May 2010 Richard Cloues, Ph.D.

And *that* does conclude this presentation on the mid-20th-century architectural styles of Ranch Houses in Georgia.