

NOW

At home with...

Julius Shulman

The icon who turned architectural photography into an art form shows us round his streamlined Fifties space – a monument to Californian Modernism

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Entrance 'When people first arrive here, they are introduced to some of my favourite houses from around the world that I've photographed,' enthuses Julius. Both the floor and the partition hiding the living area are covered with cork tiles

Studio Julius sits at his desk, surrounded by a lifetime's work. He never throws away words of encouragement, so his desk is piled high with letters received over the years from students, architects, friends and fans. Light floods into the space through a skylight in the ceiling, so walls can be used to store books and hang pictures

Aged 96, Julius Shulman, the grandfather of architectural photography, still commands respect from everyone around him. Warm, witty and occasionally impatient, for nearly eight decades he's been documenting Modernist buildings in California and across the globe, bringing fame to a host of US architects, including Richard Neutra, Rudolf Schindler and Pierre Koenig. His images of Koenig's 1960 Case Study House No 22 and Neutra's Kaufman House in Palm Springs are among the most recognisable architectural photos of the 20th century.

Julius has lived in Los Angeles since 1920 and, unsurprisingly, his own home/studio is a Modernist monument. Designed by Raphael Soriano in 1950, it's the US architect's only remaining unaltered steel-framed house in existence (the two men's friendship goes back to 1936, when they met through Richard Neutra, to whom Raphael was apprenticed at the time). Stepping inside is like going back in time and finding something very special. The sparse interior feels cosy, with deep sofas and original warm timber coffee and dining tables designed by Raphael (the latter haven't been moved since the day they were put in place). The shelves are full of intriguing ornaments and books collected over the years, but what makes this home such a great place to be are the large windows that look out to the seven-acre jungle-like garden, planted by Julius over 50 years ago. We find out what inspired him to stay here so long...

What does your home mean to you?

It's my private retreat, my sanctuary and haven.

What do you love about your home?

Being so close to nature is wonderful. Wherever I'm sitting, I can see the outdoors. The house is built on a nearly barren hilltop, now overgrown with native plants and towering redwoods that I planted as saplings half a century ago. In the 56 years I have lived here it just gets better. Every morning I wake up and it's a blessing.

Which side of you dominates your home – the personal or the professional?

I'm always working. If I'm not out photographing, I'm producing a book or preparing a lecture. There's no reason not to because what I do is so enjoyable.

How do you display favourite objects?

I have filled my home with my own photographs and things I have collected on my travels. My wife passed away five years ago, so this house is a vessel that holds many wonderful memories.

Is there anyone you find particularly inspiring?

I've always admired architect Frank Lloyd Wright as he was never scared to experiment with form and shape.

What keeps your passion for photography alive?

Photography has been with me all my life. Ever since I began my career, everyone loved my work, and I've been surrounded by great architects and publishers. There's no reason to stop. ➡➡

If you want to find out more about Julius Shulman's photographs, there are two new books out on him, Vest Pocket Pictures (Nazraeli Press, £24.99) and Julius Shulman: Modernism Rediscovered (Taschen, £200 for a three-volume set, out September)

