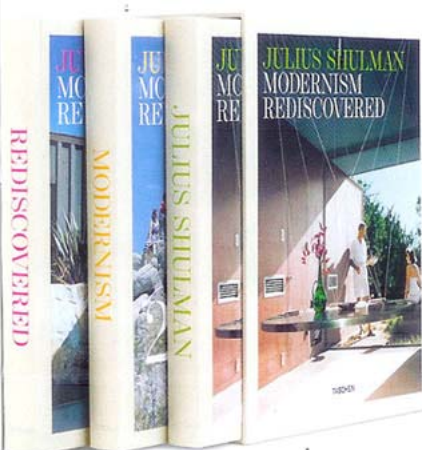


REVIEW



>>BOOK

JULIUS SHULMAN: Modernism Rediscovered

By Julius Shulman
Taschen, £200
Reviewed by Peter Kelly

Right: Lake Shore Drive Apartments by Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, Chicago, 1963

Below: Spring Hotel, Bequia, by Crites and McConnell, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 1967

Julius Shulman, who turned 97 in October, can lay claim to being among the world's most celebrated architectural photographers. His photograph, Case Study House #22, of a Pierre Koenig-designed Los Angeles house, showing two people elegantly perched in a cantilevered front room with an aerial view, is one of the most reproduced architectural photographs of all time. Shulman's pictures of Southern California's modernist homes promoted the careers of many architects, including Richard Neutra, John Lautner, and Pierre Koenig. Even his more obscure work has an air of familiarity, since his capturing modernism within the sunny lifestyle of California was so distinctive and influential. What is being rediscovered in this book, then, is not Shulman's work but a particular view on modernist architecture.

Taken from originals, it makes

Shulman's depiction of LA modernism look startlingly fresh. This epic, three-volume retrospective, has emerged from Shulman's phenomenal back catalogue, a working archive of 260,000 prints, negatives, and color transparencies which enabled him to fulfill the requests of generations of clients in architecture, construction, academia, publishing, and the media.

Now the archive has come under the aegis of the Getty Research Institute, which organised an exhibition in LA, marking his birthday, that presented a less well-known aspect of Shulman's work, the depiction of urban environments. It included grittier portrayals of the city including – shock of shocks – graffiti. Such moments in Shulman's oeuvre are rare, however.

Modernism Rediscovered makes no such effort at re-evaluation. Directed and produced by Benedikt Taschen, the long-time friend and publisher of Shulman's work who christened him 'one-shot Shulman', this is a comprehensively chronological, and beautifully produced, monument to a long career.

The classic elements of a Shulman shot are carefully posed models set against clean, streamlined furnishings and stunning vistas of cityscapes or sun-burnt Californian landscapes. It is not modernism with socialist ideology, but with the glamour of capitalism. The way he used people in his photography was not to depict the messiness of life or in some way to disrupt the typical perfection of architectural photography, but to add finesse. His photos, be they editorial or private, seemed like adverts for a

lifestyle or stills from the movies. He shot Florence Knoll's stacking stools in an elegant apartment with a businessman apparently returning home and noticing the stools as soon as he walks through the front door. It looks like a shot in a Billy Wilder film.

Shulman's personal, and incredibly detailed, reminiscences that accompany the photography in this book show that the link between Shulman's work and the cinematic output of LA went beyond the

construction, takes a broad panoramic view of the building where now one might expect a concentration on details, angles and abstraction. It speaks of time when his audience was not accustomed to extravagant form in architecture.

In the UK, where modernism has become inextricably linked, in the popular imagination, to low-cost social housing, and photography that focuses on decay and degeneration, Shulman's gloriously positive



JULIUS SHULMAN PHOTOGRAPHY ARCHIVE, © RESEARCH LIBRARY AT THE GETTY INSTITUTE

THE CLASSIC ELEMENTS OF A SHULMAN SHOT ARE CAREFULLY POSED MODELS SET AGAINST CLEAN STREAMLINED FURNISHINGS AND STUNNING VISTAS

perspective is timely and refreshing.

One also has to admire Shulman's integrity in knowing what kind of buildings he liked exactly how he wanted to depict them. When post-modernism made the style unfashionable, he simply stepped away from the tripod for 10 years: 'I refused – and I mentioned this publicly – to photograph the post-modern architecture. Of homes especially, commercial buildings, too.

'I just stopped working with architects. And now I devote my time to doing my archival work and to responding to requests from all around the world.'

This book mentions Shulman's decision to pick up the camera again in 2001, to again document modernist architecture, this time working with Juergen Nogai. Frustratingly, however, these three volumes only reach as far as 1986 so we don't see what Shulman has made of the last decade.

One could see Shulman's stubbornness as a failure. He has been unwilling to be challenged, or to use the medium of architectural photography for critique as well as celebration. But at a time when the hopes of modernism are much mangled, a volume of photography with wit, lightness and aspiration comes as a welcome riposte.

stylistic. Hollywood was, of course, on his patch. He photographed a house built by Neutra in 1935 for fellow Austrian, film director and writer Josef von Sternberg. The house was purchased in 1944 by Ayn Rand, author of *The Fountainhead*.

When moving into the territory of urban photography Shulman's taste remained determinedly modern. He took a classic photograph of Lever House in New York (designed by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill) which was completed in 1952 as the first building in New York to emerge from the Museum of Modern Art's International Style exhibition. When shooting buildings that bordered on the brutal rather than light-filled, Shulman's work was still exemplary, though less distinctive. His shot of Moshe Safdie's Habitat Montreal, an experiment in modular

