

RIGHT NOW ICON

Words by AMANDA TALBOT



Modern legend

The man who turned architectural photography into an art form will soon turn 100 – and he's still going strong.



FROM TOP Julius Shulman, the image-maker instrumental in defining US modernist cool, in his home in Los Angeles; his images of Albert Frey's house in Palm Springs and Herbert Greene's house in Oklahoma.



AT 97 YEARS OF AGE Julius Shulman, the grandfather of architectural photography, 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, and brought fame to a host of US modernist architects, including Richard Neutra, Rudolf Schindler and Pierre Koenig, in the process. His images of Koenig's 1960 Case Study House No. 22 (aka the Stahl House) in Los Angeles and Neutra's Kaufmann House in Palm Springs are among the most instantly recognisable architectural photographs of the 20th century (Los Angeles' J. Paul Getty Museum bought his complete archive in 2005).

Shulman has lived in Los Angeles since 1920 and, unsurprisingly, his own home/studio, just off Mulholland Drive in the heart of the city, is a modernist monument. Designed by Raphael Soriano in 1950, it's the architect's only remaining unaltered steel-framed house (the two men's friendship goes back to 1936 when they met through Richard Neutra, to whom Soriano was apprenticed at the time).

Belle caught up with the celebrated photographer and asked him about his home, as well as his inspirations and why he continues to work.

What do you love about your home? It's my private retreat, my sanctuary and haven. I have a long driveway at the front [for] complete privacy. 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, it's a blessing.

Which side of you dominates the house – personal or 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. People from all over the world request to come and visit me. There's never a dull moment here at the house!

How do you display your favourite objects? I have filled my home with my own photographs and things I have collected on my travels. My wife passed away a little more than five years ago, so this house is a vessel that holds many wonderful memories.

Is there anyone or anything you find particularly inspiring? I've always admired [architect] Frank Lloyd Wright, because he was never scared to experiment with form and shape.

What keeps your passion for photographing architecture alive? Photography has been with me all my life. Ever since I began my career, everyone loved my work, and I've always been surrounded by great architects and publishers. There's no reason to stop.

More than 900 of the photographer's images have been assembled in the three-volume Julius Shulman: Modernism Rediscovered (\$650) by Taschen, pictured left. Available now from selected bookstores.