

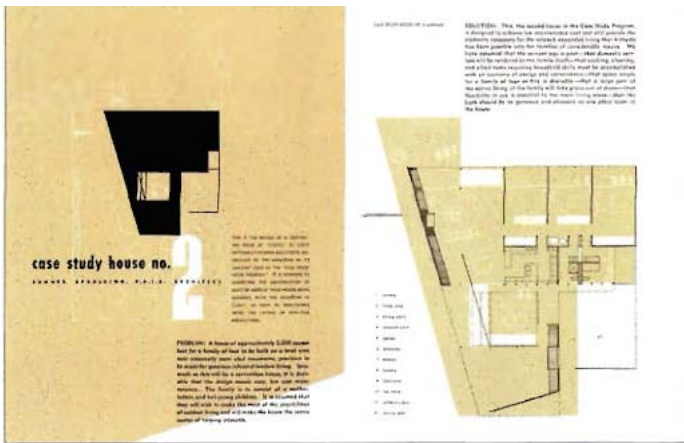


BOOK

West Coast wonder

Despite a hefty price tag, Taschen's 6,076-page collection of *Arts and Architecture* magazines is worth its weight, says **Steve Parnell** >>

Arts and Architecture 1945-54, *The Complete Reprint*. Introduction by David Travers. Taschen, 2008, 118 issues, 6,076pp, £400



In 1945, an army of Modernists managed to achieve what Hitler could only dream of – world domination with minimal resistance. This new world order included *Arts and Architecture* magazine, which John Entenza took over in 1938 (as *California Arts and Architecture*) and edited until 1962. As the title suggests, *A&A* delivered the latest trends in books, art, cinema, music and architecture to a few thousand left-leaning, aesthetically discerning fans of the Modern movement. What made it special was Entenza's eye for talent, and its creation of a beautifully designed and hermetically sealed world that believed art and technology could, together, solve immense global problems.

Last year, Taschen published a huge 12-volume compilation of articles from Italian

year. The definitive index will satisfy even the most esoteric inquiry.

The print quality is okay, but inevitably some of the smoothness and crispness of the originals has been lost. It's as though the contrast has been turned up to 11, resulting in blotchy, dotty images in places. The cover of the February 1954 issue, designed by graphic designer John Follis, suffers particularly. Purists will notice that the paper is a heavier matt, instead of the originals' flimsy satin sheen. And, of course, you don't smell 60 years of history when you open the cellophane.

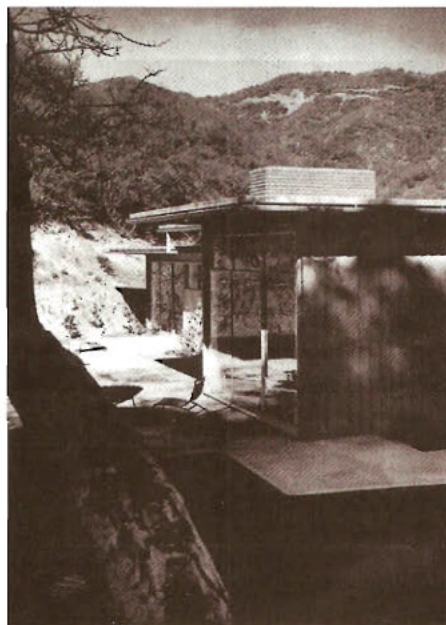
I admit that I haven't read all 6,076 pages. Such a collection obviously doesn't merit starting at the beginning and working your way through it like a set of Harry Potters. The beauty of collating 10 years' worth of

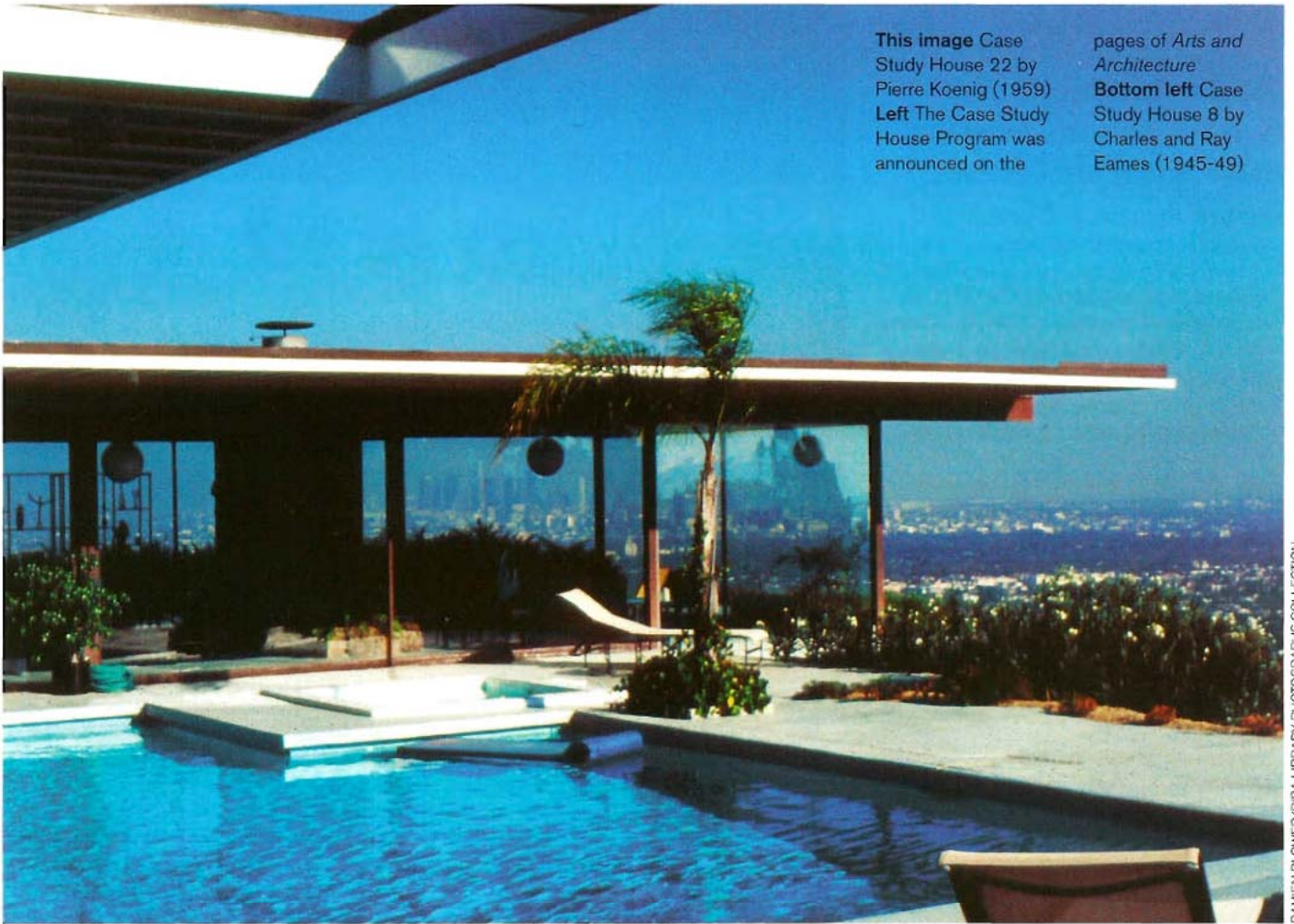
magazines that recount an almost forgotten era is that you can fast forward to the bits that appeal to you most, or flick through the whole period in minutes. It's like using a time machine. There are Eric Mendelsohn's polemics on Modern architecture, 'Architecture Today', from 1947, and then there's his obituary in November 1953. But it's the content that makes this limited-edition reprint of only 5,000 numbered copies worthwhile. While Modernism got high, the structure of *A&A* hardly changed. The art sections consistently delivered criticism and appreciation, but the architecture sections simply printed buildings with description, pointing out features and colours. Being published was appreciation enough. Entenza's editorial, entitled 'Notes in Passing', delivered

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magazine *Domus* from 1928 to 1999. This year, the publisher has gone a step further and reprinted every issue of *A&A* from 1945 to 1954. Next year, a second volume will reprint all issues from 1955 to 1967. Taschen has scanned each magazine in its entirety, touched it up and reprinted a facsimile. The price is an eye-watering £400. However, if you consider that an original 1940s *A&A* would cost over £60 on eBay, this doesn't seem unreasonable.

Each year's magazines come housed in a sturdy box whose rivets will surely shred each year's December edition if not replaced with utmost care. In addition to the reprints, you get an 83-page supplement with an introduction written by David Travers (*A&A* editor, 1962-67) and all the contents of each





This image Case Study House 22 by Pierre Koenig (1959)
Left The Case Study House Program was announced on the

pages of *Arts and Architecture*
Bottom left Case Study House 8 by Charles and Ray Eames (1945-49)

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monthly sermons on a completely unrelated moral topic of the day, and occasionally there would be a tangential outburst, such as critic Jules Langsner's McCarthy-era essay 'Art Summoned Before the Inquisition', published in December 1951.

A&A was most famous for its Case Study House Program, which Entenza conceived and announced in the January 1945 issue: 'We are proposing to immediately begin the study, planning, actual design and construction of eight houses.' The magazine acted as client and brought together architects, product manufacturers and end-users, and published the designs and built results. The program was envisaged to promote modern, low-cost, well-designed replicable prototype houses using the latest in materials and technology. However, out of the 33 houses that were published and the 24 that were eventually built, only one was ever

reproduced (CSH 15, the plan for which is still being used by developers, according to Travers). Nevertheless, many have gone on to form a chunk of the Modernist architectural canon. Consider Pierre Koenig's CSH 22 overlooking Beverly Hills (*pictured above*) and the Eames house (CSH 8, *pictured left*), for example.

Initially, *A&A* was largely concerned with individual houses and their furnishings, but gradually it started publishing larger, more public buildings – as long as they were Modernist. Houses featured products designed by Charles Eames and Joseph Albers, and from manufacturers such as Knoll and Herman Miller. These designers were regular contributors to the magazine, and others, such as Alvin Lustig and Herbert Matter, even designed adverts and covers, many of which are worthy of enlarging and framing. The entire magazine looked like a

uniquely styled whole.

The list of contributors and featured designers reads like a who's who of mid-century design, with many being relatively unknown or making a new life in the US at the time: Richard Buckminster Fuller, Eames, Mendelsohn, Craig Ellwood, Harry Seidler, Richard Neutra, Julius Shulman (whose address labels adorn several of the rear pages). The list goes on.

Like digitally remastered mp3s of Frank Sinatra's back catalogue, this reprinted edition re-presents the original material for 21st-century consumption. There are plenty of other books on the Case Study Houses, on Shulman's photography, and even on *A&A* itself, but for those who want to immerse themselves in West Coast Modernism, this is – almost – the real thing. ■

Resume: Program in some Study time for this Case of delights