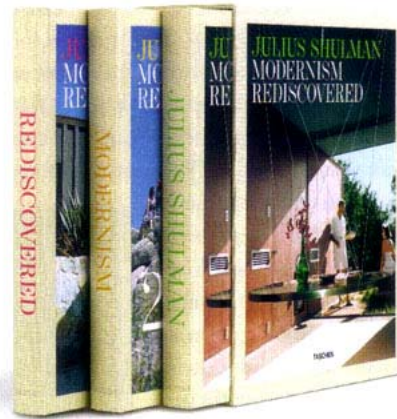


# Master Of ARCHITECTURE

The late **Julius Shulman** was at the vanguard of architectural photography for all of his long career



By Mark Edward Harris >> Photography By Julius Shulman

On July 15, 2009, famed architectural photographer Julius Shulman passed away at the age of 98. He had rubbed elbows with the who's who of 20th-century architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Charles and Ray Eames, Richard Neutra, Raphael Soriano, Rudolph Schindler, Pierre Koenig and John Lautner. His ability to translate their architectural achievements into a two-dimensional medium by his use of light and choice of angle has assured him a place in the pantheon of photographers.

Unlike many artists, Shulman was able to enjoy the accolades of his efforts during his lifetime. This is no Van Gogh story. He lived in a Hollywood Hills mid-century house he had designed by Soriano (in 1987, the Shulman House was designated a monument by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission). His awards included the American Institute of Architecture's Gold Medal for Architectural Photography. He was the subject of the award-winning documentary film *Visual Acoustics: The Modernism of Julius Shulman*, directed by Eric Bricker and narrated by Dustin Hoffman. In 2005, the Getty Center celebrated the acquisition of Shulman's archive of 260,000 negatives, prints and transparencies with the exhibition "Julius Shulman, Modernity and the Metropolis." In early 2009, Shulman was in attendance to see his photos on display at the inaugural exhibit at the Annenberg Space for Photography in Los Angeles. His images can be studied and enjoyed in coffee-table books, including

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a magnificent large-format, three-volume box set published by Taschen in 2000, *Julius Shulman: Modernism Rediscovered*.

But Shulman has done far more than photograph the 20th century's most dynamic and innovative architecture. He has taught us how to do it. His book *Photographing Architecture and Interiors*, first published in 1962 by Whitney Library of Design, is the bible for architectural photographers. *Digital Photo Pro* sat down with Mr. Shulman at the dawn of the 21st century at his home in the Hollywood Hills, as the Balcony Press edition of the book was published.

**DPP:** You've had one of the longest and most successful careers in photography. How have you kept active for so long?

**Julius Shulman:** I tell young people all the time when I lecture, "What's your hurry?" They talk about expanding even before they have a business. I have friends that had organizations—photographers, craftspeople—they expanded too much and burned themselves out. I grew up on a farm in eastern Connecticut out in the woods. I came out to Los Angeles with my family in 1920 when I was 10 years old. When I was 12, I joined the Boy Scouts, and my life in the outdoors began again full bore, which has never changed. In fact, at one point in my life, I wanted to be a forest ranger. So I think I've really learned from the balanced rhythm of nature.

The secret of being freelance is to be free. Then you can toss the lance and have the freedom to go wherever it lands.

**DPP:** Considering your love of nature, what made you decide to go into architectural photography instead of landscape photography?

**Shulman:** I didn't decide anything. It was decided for me. I had a little Kodak Vest Pocket camera that was given to me in 1933 for my 23rd birthday. I started taking snapshots four years earlier. I had enrolled in UCLA in 1929 in engineering school. I was a ham radio operator, and I was interested in electrical things. At that time, photography was the furthest thing from my mind. I was at UCLA for five years, and then Berkeley for two more because a friend of mine was going up there to get his masters in social studies. I had a seven-year hiatus in my life, having no idea what I wanted to do. In Berkeley, I had an apartment with my friend where I set up a little enlarger,

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and I'd develop my Kodak negatives and make 8x10 prints of the old buildings on the campus and sell them at the bookstore. At Berkeley, I audited a few classes, spent a lot of time at the gym swimming and playing basketball, and wandered

around the campus. It didn't take much time in those days because rent was \$25 a month, which we split, and I was making a few dollars selling my pictures. I framed them by taping a piece of glass to a photo mounted on a corkboard. The pictures sold for two-fifty a piece.

Toward the end of February 1936, I asked myself, "What am I doing here? I've been going to college for seven years, I have no major and no idea what I want to do with my life." Since I love nature and the outdoors, I had at one time had the fleeting thought of getting a job working

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...lener in Griffith Park. I was so removed from having  
 ...cept of what I should do with my future. So I moved  
 ...L.A., and two weeks later, my sister Shirley Bear who  
 ...an acquaintance of Dione Neutra, wife of architect  
 ...Neutra, introduced me to a young man who worked  
 ...Mrs. Neutra had asked my sister if she had a room to  
 ...him, which she did. I went along with this young man to  
 ...Neutra's houses [the Kun House, 1936] that he was  
 ...king on and took a few snapshots. I didn't know I was  
 ...ographing a Neutra house. I gave this fellow the photos,  
 ...ch he showed to Neutra, who loved them and wanted to  
 ...me, which we did on March 5, 1936. The date is indeli-  
 ...mprinted in my mind.

Neutra ordered more pictures and had me meet Soriano,  
 ...was doing his first house. I became a photographer that

day. I had never met an architect before in my life, let alone  
 Neutra of all people. What sparked that? People have pointed  
 out the irony that I started out taking pictures for the architects  
 who were the pioneers in modern architecture. By 1937,  
 besides Neutra, I had already met Schindler, Gregory Ain, J.R.  
 Davidson and Soriano, and I was a photographer for them.

**DPP:** At what point did you make the switch to a larger-  
 format camera?

**Shulman:** I did my first assignments with the Vest Pocket  
 Kodak camera that created a 2½x1½-inch negative. The Vest  
 Pocket did produce some darn good, sharp images. The Kun  
 House, for instance, was shot with the Vest Pocket. But I real-  
 ized its limitations. You couldn't have a large negative to  
 work with and, more importantly, you couldn't make correc-  
 tions with bellows. In architectural photography, the main

reason for using the 4x5 is to avoid dis-  
 tortion of the vertical elements of a  
 building. So I acquired an old 4x5  
 camera and created "field trips" for  
 practice. In the late 1930s, I obtained  
 a new Eastman Master View Cam-  
 era that was the first monorail view  
 camera. Since then, I've worked with  
 the Sinar camera system and then  
 the Horseman.

**DPP:** People have said, incorrectly,  
 that architectural photographers have  
 an advantage because their subject  
 matter doesn't move.

**Shulman:** I used to go around the  
 country giving seminars for architects  
 on how to photograph their buildings  
 since photography is the lifeblood of  
 their profession. We went to visit a  
 Baptist church in Tulsa, Okla., that  
 Bruce Goff designed when he was 23  
 years old. He had been studying with



Possibly the best-known and most  
 highly regarded architectural  
 photographer of all time, Julius  
 Shulman passed away in 2009.  
 His legacy endures, however, and  
 the genre that was his passion  
 both personally and professionally  
 for so long will feel the influence  
 of Shulman for years to come.  
 Taschen's retrospective on  
 Shulman, *Modernism  
 Rediscovered*, is a beautiful  
 collection of his photography.  
 In 2009, he was one of the  
 photographers featured at the  
 inauguration of the Annenberg  
 Space for Photography in  
 Los Angeles as part of the  
 "L8S ANG3LES" show.

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