

BY HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA

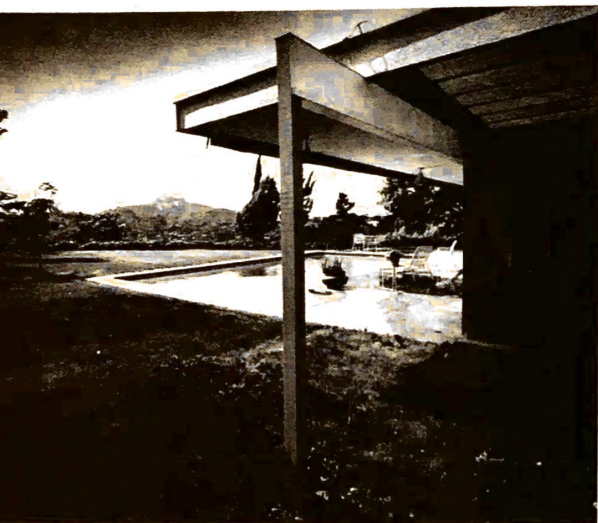
Manse Marketing

Crosby Doe will sell you a piece of L.A.'s architectural heritage—if you promise to preserve it.

"My clients say that once you have lived in an architectural house, you can never live in anything else." Crosby Doe is standing in front of a low-slung white house designed for



A studio addition, designed by Steven Ehrlich, was built by the second owner in 1980.



Doe and the first house he sold, designed by Neutra in 1961 for dancer Eugene Loring.

Doe first sold the house for \$100,000. The current asking price is up to \$598,000.

dancer Eugene Loring in 1957 by the great L.A. architect, Richard Neutra. The floor-to-ceiling sliding-glass windows in the rear living room, bedroom and bath look over a smart pool and lawn to a breathtaking view of Nichols Canyon. Neutra was the master

choreographer of ambient Southern California light, and this house epitomizes the indoor/outdoor lifestyle.

"This is the first piece of architecture I sold," explains Doe. "I realized the house had something special. There were intangibles. It was not just a piece of real estate."

That sale, about 12 years ago, transformed a real estate salesman into a purveyor of fine architecture; it was as though a poster salesman had decided to turn art dealer. "This is the house that started my career," he recalls nostalgically.

Today, Doe is credited with initiating a revival of interest in L.A.'s vast body of fine architecture, much of it built between 1920 and 1965. Internationally prominent architects—Frank Lloyd Wright and his son Lloyd Wright, Rudolph Schindler, Rafael Soriano, Gregory Ain, John Lautner, Craig Ellwood, Richard Neutra and others—had left a legacy of hundreds of private homes in L.A. Yet, no one has specialized in selling them. In real estate listings, they were actually lumped together with tract houses.

Doe saw a need and filled it, at first working for others such as Larry O'Rourke and Bob Crane and Associates. Five years ago, he joined forces with three other realtors to form Mossler, Randall, Deasy and Doe and Associates, whose offices are located in the Lloyd Wright studio at 858 N. Doheny Drive.

Once again, Doe is selling that first Neutra house, now with a studio/guest bedroom by architect Steven Ehrlich, added by current owner Jordan Kalfus in

1980. The addition, too, caught the attention of various architectural journals, which credited Ehrlich with following Neutra's clean, modernist proportions while making an airy new statement.

Conducting a connoisseur's tour of the house, Doe smiles with pride, as if he had owned or designed the place himself. Nine-foot ceilings crown walls of windows divided by sea-green mullions. Interior walls are track-mounted and may be rolled laterally to control light. A sleeping loft is reached by outside stairs with a panoramic dream-inducing view.

He first sold this Neutra home for \$100,000, when that price was considered to be outrageously high. "They just didn't understand Neutra's work," Doe laments. The expanded house, which is now known as the Loring/Kalfus house after two of its owners, is attracting considerable interest at an asking price of \$598,000. "I don't have enough houses for clients these days," he says. "My fear is of one day not having anything more to sell. There are plenty of people buying."

Doe, 39, looks like he stepped out of an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel: His face is handsome, experienced well-bred, with a long thin scar across his forehead that he makes no attempt to disguise. He speaks in measured tones, seeming to suppress the excitement he clearly feels about the buildings.

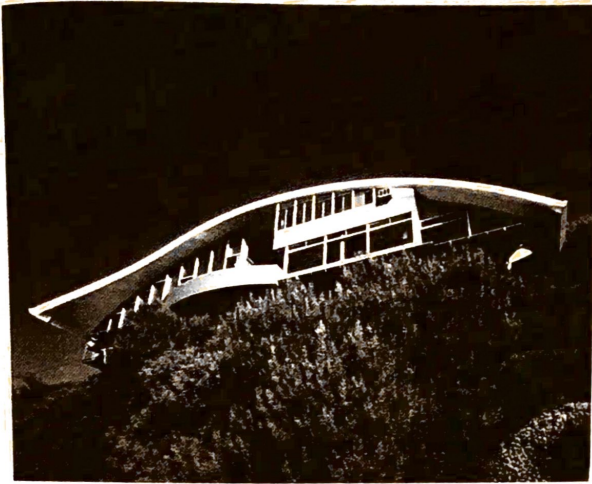
His interest in architecture began when he was growing up among the grand old homes of Pasadena. He majored in marketing at the University of Colorado and worked a variety of sales and management jobs before entering real estate in the early '70s. He's sold only a few houses before discovering the Neutra. That experience sent him to David Gebhard and Robert Winter's *Guide to Architecture in Southern California*, which had just been published by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Doe followed the maps to the addresses listed, and began calling the owners of architectural homes to see if they wanted to buy or sell. He uses a more sophisticated version of that system to this day, sending picture postcards to a mailing list of those who are interested in special properties.

At least part of his motivation is revealed in a favorite quote by Frank Lloyd Wright from the '20s: "L.A. mushroomed with jerry-built obscenities." Says Doe, "I guess this career is a reaction against all that."

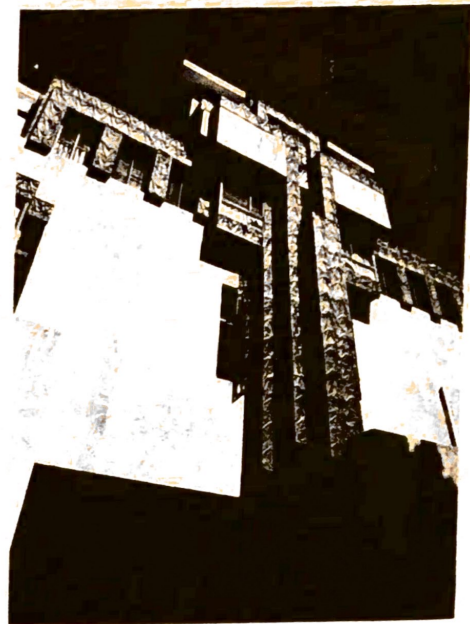
He wants to preserve old L.A., hating the destruction of many of the notable mansions in his old neighborhood. He's a patron of the preservation group, L.A. Conservancy, and serves on the board of directors of Hollywood Heritage.

Selling national landmarks to individuals who will love and care for them is a strategy for saving history. If clients want to tack a dining-room addition onto the Neutra, or paper the walls of an original Spanish mission-style mansion, Doe tries to educate or discourage

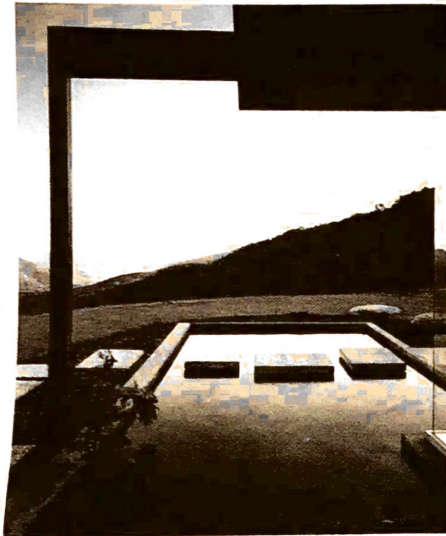
The Garcia House
By John Lautner
Circa 1962



The Navarro House
By Lloyd Wright
Circa 1928



The Singleton House
By Richard Neutra
Circa 1960



The Kuderna House
By Craig Ellwood
Circa 1957



them before refusing to sell: "I'm not a purist, and I don't want to keep architecture in a historical capsule, but you have to respect the integrity of the building."

Who is willing to put up with such uppity salesmanship? "It is difficult to categorize a type," says Doe, "but I do think those who buy architectural homes are individualistic, artistic, creative types. We have loyal followers in the entertainment industry, celebrities, directors and producers; they are visually oriented people." He sold Frank Lloyd Wright's Storer house to producer Joel Silver (*L.A. Style*, July 1985), a Gregory Ain house to David Byrne and a rambling hacienda to Tony Perkins. "The integrity of the homes is what's important to me; I'm not really partial to any particular style," Doe explains.

The specialized nature of the homes makes selling them an absolute challenge. Just 20 years ago, there was virtually no market for the modernist white-and-glass box. "People who lived in houses with flat

roofs were considered to be communists—or weird," recalls Doe.

Since starting his business, he estimates he's sold more than 100 of the 2,000 to 3,000 "architectural" properties in the region. Clients now see the houses as status symbols and investments that will appreciate in value, especially if designed by a renowned architect. Why not have a contemporary architect build a new home? "The best sites are gone," says Doe. "Wright, Neutra... they were very concerned with site. There isn't much left."

Bank policies are often an obstacle to buying architectural homes. According to Doe, lending institutions appraise property without taking into account the site, the reputation, the historical import—what he refers to as the "intangibles." Consequently, they're slow to lend money to his clients. "Privacy is the last great luxury in L.A.," he says, referring to his camouflaged nature of the Neutra house, "but banks never consider that."

Gazing out from the patio of the

Neutra, Doe points to John Lautner's Garcia house—visible from few other vantage points—which he sold two years ago. "The hills are full of wonderful houses you can't see," he says.

In fact, Doe and his wife, Linda, live in just such a rambling, mission-style home, commanding one of the most spectacular views in L.A. The drive up is not for acrophobes, but the windows of Doe's aerie take in Lake Hollywood, the Valley and the Pacific. On a clear day, he says, they can see both Catalina Island and the San Gabriel Mountains.

Doe admits that the house, built in 1927, is "one benefit of working in this industry." In keeping with his position as conservator, Doe stripped six layers of black paint off the wood beams, plastered over the sparkly cottage-cheese ceiling in the bedrooms, and restored the original hardware. "Nearly every inch had to be reworked," he says, "but I'm a fanatic about that stuff." The effect is monastic, meditative, soothing. "People think I'm only interested in

modern architecture, but I love these old Mediterranean houses just as well. My wife and I both like the old missions."

The house is spare except for a few Oriental and old Indian rugs, 16th-century carved-wood Spanish chairs and a grand piano. A Charles Eames screen and a California pleinair painting reinforce the impression that a serene quality is yearned for here. "I don't want to decorate here. I want to let the house reflect itself."

Doe's success in selling architectural homes for prices ranging from \$150,000 to \$2 million and higher has proven a point to an industry that doubted his methods. Two other companies have recently started selling architectural homes. Doe thinks the competition is healthy.

"I think people realize that architectural homes, which are eminently more satisfying to spend time in, afford us a way of being extraordinary in ourselves," he says. "I find that hard to do in a tract house done by some decorator. Good architecture satisfies something in our souls about home." □