

## Julius Shulman: Modernity and the Metropolis at the Getty

By Michele Miles Gardiner

Email this Article · Printer Friendly Page

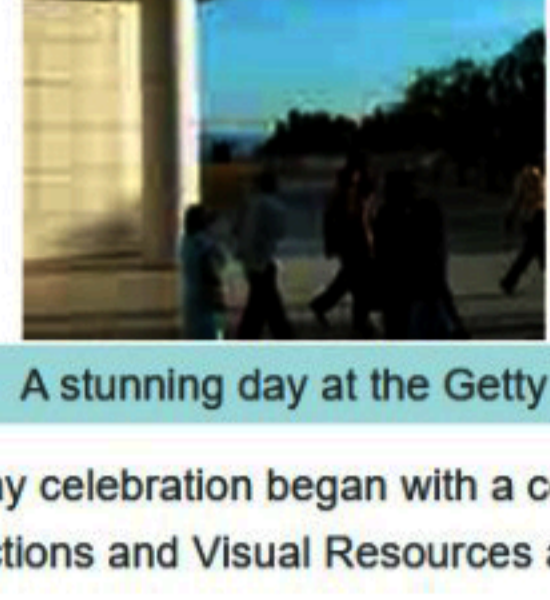


Neutra designed home destroyed in 1972

At 95 years of age, he still creates, inspires and implores us to preserve what is so special about this city. He's the legendary photographer Julius Shulman.

The Getty's exhibit opening of Shulman's work and his 95th birthday celebration coincided October 14, 2005, due to the hard work of the Getty Research Institute. "Julius Shulman: Modernity and the Metropolis," features 83 images, as well as 18 of the 26 California Case Study houses for John Entenza's Arts & Architecture magazine. The Getty Research Institute recently acquired Shulman's archives of 260,000 prints, color transparencies and negatives, prompting the exhibit, which will continue until January 22, 2006.

And what a perfect place the Getty is for this special exhibit! The exquisite hilltop setting looks out over Los Angeles: The city Julius Shulman has captured through seventy years of modern architecture's evolution. His luminous images once promoted sleek and modern homes as an ideal for future generations; today these same magnificent photographs capture buildings that, unless revered as the functional art that they are, risk being forgotten.



A stunning day at the Getty

The afternoon of Mr. Shulman's birthday celebration began with a conversation between Mr. Shulman and Wim De Wit, head of the Special Collections and Visual Resources and curator of architectural drawings at the Getty Research Institute.

While sitting under one of his most iconic photos, the Pierre Koenig designed Case Study #22 house, Mr. Shulman began speaking of the mystery and fateful circumstance of his life.

Born on October 10, 1910 (10/10/10) in Brooklyn, New York, his family soon moved to a farm in Connecticut where he discovered his love of nature. Later, at the age of ten\* he took the first unwittingly fateful step of his life, when he and his family moved to Los Angeles, California.

After attending U.C.L.A. for a while, he left for U.C. Berkeley where he wandered around the campus taking photos of buildings with his vest pocket Kodak camera, eventually winning a prize for one of his photographs. Even at this point, he still had no certainty about his future, and never thought of himself as a photographer.

"Strange how the world turns," Shulman said when Wim De Wit asked how he came to work primarily with architects. It was Shulman's "accidental" meeting with modern architect Richard Neutra in 1936 that changed the course of his life.



Julius Shulman under his icon Stahl house photo

Shulman visited Neutra's Kun house in the Hollywood Hills with a friend, a draftsman\* on the project. Shulman took photos of the house with his vest pocket Kodak camera. Neutra was so impressed, he wanted to meet the photographer and ended up hiring him. So began the fateful path of Julius Shulman.

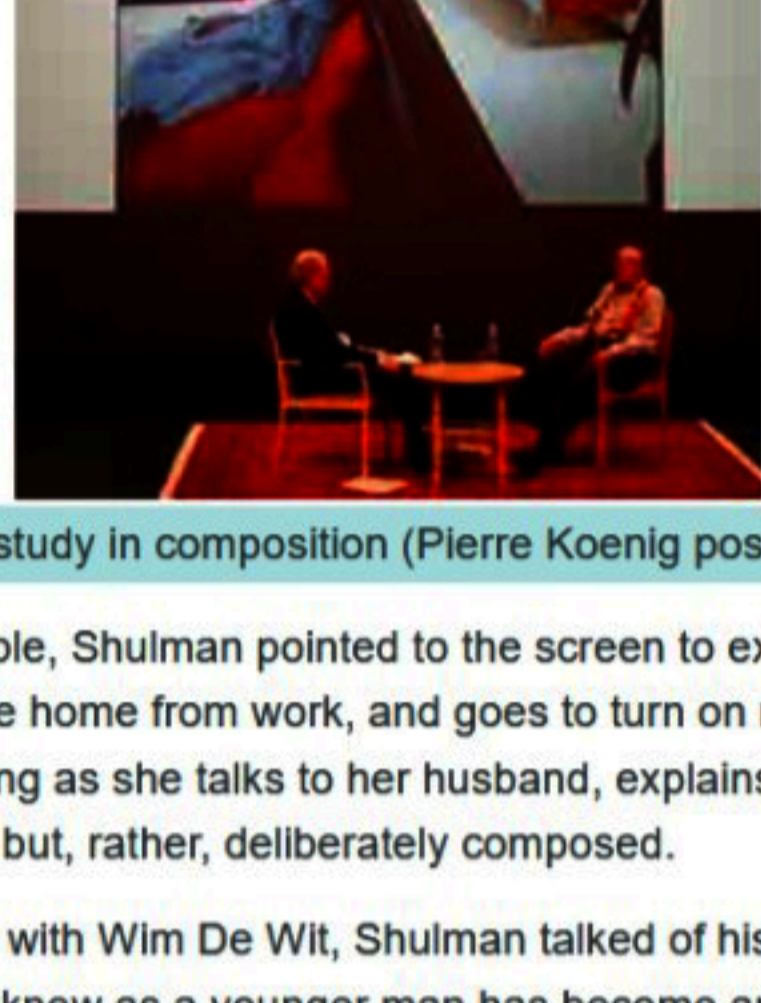
"I was in the right place at the right time," he said. "I witnessed the beginning of modern architecture."

"The great Shulman, I've done thousands of houses..." he said, referring to himself.

"I sell more architecture than the architects." He noted, and "Often people were more impressed with my photographs than with the houses themselves."

Rather than arrogance, he speaks of himself this way, I think, because, as he says, his gift is "a mystery."\*\* As if it's not something he has ever had much to do with. Even during the interview he said, "I don't consider myself an artist. I'm a businessman. I produce a product."

He has promoted modern architecture and brought fame to architects (Neutra, Schindler, Lautner, Eames, Ayn, Koenig, and others) and their buildings, as well as to himself. Yet he also says, "In every work, there's poetry," showing that he is a business minded artist, but an artist all same. No person can create such consistently strong and beautiful photographs over seventy years without being incredibly creative.



A study in composition (Pierre Koenig poses)

In this photograph (left), for example, Shulman pointed to the screen to explain the composition: the man (architect Pierre Koenig) has come home from work, and goes to turn on music. His wife has her arm positioned to show her wedding ring as she talks to her husband, explains Shulman, showing the composition is not merely a fluke, but, rather, deliberately composed.

During the course of the interview with Wim De Wit, Shulman talked of his love for nature and for Los Angeles, and how the city that he knew as a younger man has become an ugly sprawl with no intelligent city plan. Shulman turned to a slide of today's endless tangle of streets, houses and highways. "How would you like to live in that pile of junk?" he asked.

An audience member asked what Shulman thought about the entire community of Chavez Ravine being uprooted and replaced by Dodger Stadium.

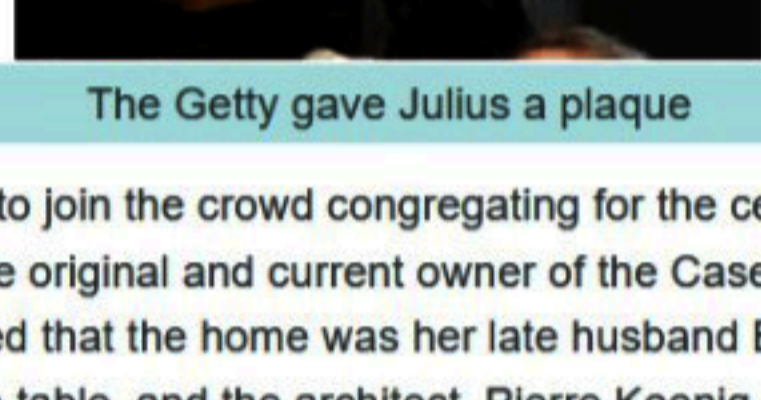
Referring to the Los Angeles city council at the time, Shulman said, "They became stupid." And then added, "And the Dodgers ain't no good!" He took photos of Chavez Ravine, and said they're "Ghosts of what used to be a beautiful Mexican community."

Unfortunately, too many of the homes that he once photographed have been, or are in danger of being, plowed down for new development. "I plead with all of you," he implored the audience. "We have a responsibility."

Another audience member asked, "What is elegant?"

Shulman answered "Elegance is a dream, only to be realized when you awake from a nightmare." The lecture ended with a loud round of applause.

Then the crowd spilled out onto the sun drenched, and brilliantly bright travertine stone plaza of the Getty. The vibrant blue sky so haze-free that downtown Los Angeles appeared clearly in the horizon.



The Getty gave Julius a plaque

After making my way down stairs to join the crowd congregating for the celebration of Shulman's 95th birthday, I found Carlotta Stahl, the original and current owner of the Case Study #22 house in the Hollywood Hills. Carlotta explained that the home was her late husband Buck's vision. He created a model of his dream on their coffee table, and the architect, Pierre Koenig, made it a reality. Their dream home was finally completed in 1960. Julius Shulman's now iconic photograph of the house was taken just prior to Buck and Carlotta moving in. To this day, she lives in the "floating" masterpiece with the incredible view of Los Angeles visible through her floor to ceiling glass walls.

Mark Stahl, Carlotta's son, said he never thought it unusual to be living in an icon. It was where he was born, and where he grew up; nothing unusual at all.

Architect Pierre Koenig's wife, Gloria, came to greet Carlotta. I asked her about her book, "Iconic L.A., and the Story of L.A.'s most memorable buildings." She said, "It's done very well, and is coming out this spring in paperback."



Julius cutting into his Nikon shaped cake

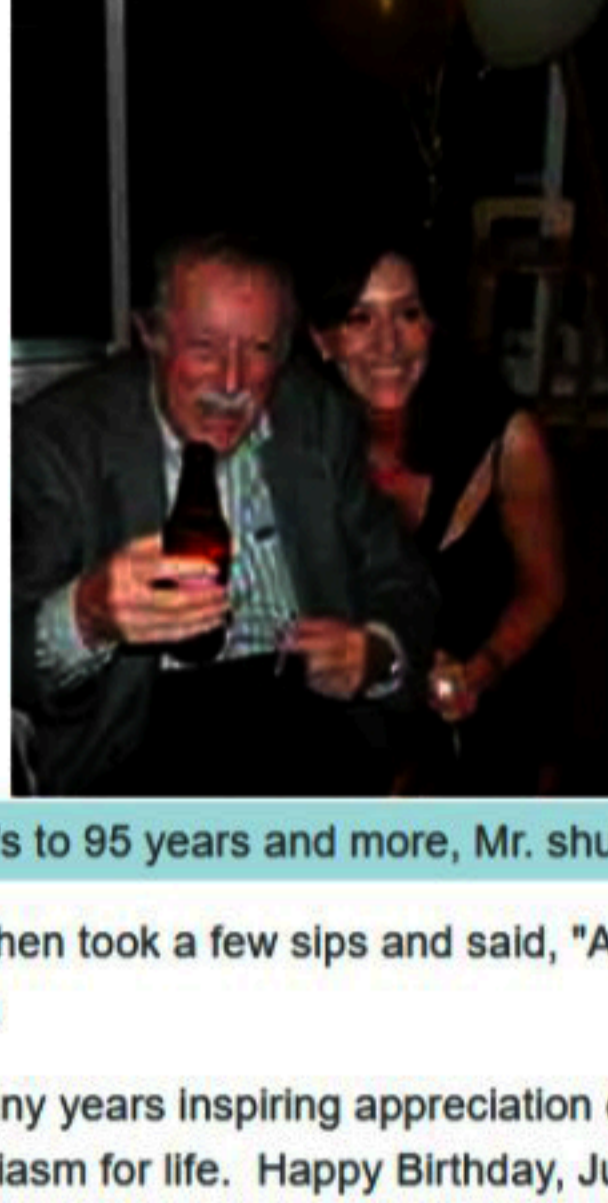
Soon the room grew more lively as the eternally vivacious and smiling Julius Shulman entered; his energy radiated through the crowd of family, friends, fans and press.

The crowd mingled for a while, until members of the Getty presented Mr. Shulman with a plaque, and then acknowledgments were given for those involved in putting together the successful exhibit in such a compressed amount of time.

Soon after, Shulman cut into his 95th birthday cake, shaped like a Nikon camera, and the crowd burst into appreciative applause for his years of inspiration and amazing work.

Though Mr. Shulman has an impressive life that he can look back on with pride, he continues to work. In the last five years he's partnered with photographer Juergen Nogai. Shulman says, "We're good photographers. We're about the best," and even added that lately "I've taken the most incredible photographs in my sixty-nine years." Other than working, Shulman says "I'm enjoying life. Living in my own hideaway in the Hollywood Hills." The very same house built for him by Raphael Soriano in the 1950s.

He sure does seem to enjoy life, and shows no sign of stopping anytime soon. At the end of the evening a woman handed Shulman a beer and said, "Here, Julius, you only have a 95th birthday once."



Here's to 95 years and more, Mr. shulman!

He smiled as he did all evening, and then took a few sips and said, "And there's always my 96th," chuckling as he raised his beer.

I hope Julius Shulman goes on for many years inspiring appreciation of mid-century architecture and its preservation, and radiating his enthusiasm for life. Happy Birthday, Julius!

Whether you appreciate modern architecture or know nothing about it, I highly recommend the Julius Shulman Exhibit at the Getty Center. The selection is made up of some of Shulman's most iconic photos and others that are lesser known. But all reveal the special and mysterious talents of Julius Shulman.

For more information on the exhibit or to make a reservation, call 310-440-7300 or visit <http://www.getty.edu>

\*Details with an asterisk were obtained from Smithsonian American Archives Julius Shulman interview conducted by Taina Rikala De Norelga

### More Entertainment & Culture

- Film & TV
- Art & Books
- Music
- Celebrity Talk
- Celebrity Gift Suites
- Fresh Faces
- Talent
- Romance
- Local Entertainment
- Local Events
- Local Performances
- Local Charities
- Entertainment Gift Guides
- Goodies

Top of Page

Make your Splash!  
Advertise with us today!  
ads@lasplash.com

Splash Magazines - adding style to your life™  
6.4K followers

One of the longest running online magazines in the United States and Worldwide

Maazine

Subscribe to Splash Magazines  
And Get Involved with Splasher's Sweepstakes!!!

calendar

Feature Article

Tempflow™ and Tempur-Pedic® Reviews - What 35 Hours of Research Uncovered

Want Your Business to Make a Splash?

<p>Select Your Location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amsterdam</li> <li>Atlanta</li> <li>Barcelona</li> <li>Boston</li> <li>Dallas</li> <li>Denver</li> <li>Hawaii</li> <li>Los Angeles</li> <li>London</li> <li>Miami</li> <li>Paris</li> <li>San Diego</li> <li>Toronto</li> </ul>	<p>Browse Splash</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home</li> <li>Entertainment</li> <li>Food &amp; Beverage</li> <li>Technology</li> <li>Home &amp; Garden</li> <li>Health &amp; Beauty</li> <li>Style &amp; Fashion</li> <li>Travel &amp; Leisure</li> <li>Life's Journey</li> <li>Sports</li> <li>Vehicles</li> </ul>	<p>Company Details</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Masthead</li> <li>Contact Splash</li> <li>Privacy Policy</li> </ul>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------