

meanwhile... back at the ranch

Ada Louise Huxtable died in January 2013 at the age of 91. The celebrated and respected architecture critic for, first, the *New York Times* and later the *Wall Street Journal*, she won the Pulitzer prize in 1970 for ‘distinguished criticism’ and authored 10 books. Her last, *On Architecture*, published by Walker & Company (2008) was a collection of essays that spanned her four-decade career and is a good introduction to her writing.

Huxtable wrote about the big commercial and public buildings that were transforming our cities in the mid-20th century; both the good and the bad received equal attention. Possessed with an elegant style, she did not hold back on her trenchant opinions. Our readers who are architecture enthusiasts probably already know of her work, but for those who don’t think they fit into that group, I’ll let you in on a little secret: You are an enthusiast, too, you just don’t know it yet.

If you enjoy Atomic Ranch and the homes we profile, you will soon realize that architecture binds our interests together. Our merchant builders and their tract homes utilized bits and pieces of the more revered architectural details, and you appreciate your home because of that. Huxtable didn’t write softball pieces on houses and homeowners, but her connection to ranches was closer than you might think.

I can’t claim to have known her, but we did exchange some emails when, in 2005, I sent her copies of our then-new magazine. To my great surprise she responded and became a subscriber: I was quietly flattered. She then accepted a copy of our first book and, when our second book was printed, I approached her again in December 2011. I allowed that, while my book was important to me, I understood that it might not be such a joy to a recipient who, after a long career, probably gets inundated with books all the time.

“Yes, of course I’d love to have the book; I enjoy every issue of the magazine,” she wrote.

“I have been doing a lot of research on my ranch house book whenever I can—the writing hasn’t started because my commitment to the *Wall Street Journal* takes up most of my time—but I had nice news today; I’ve received a grant from the NY State Council on the Arts to help with the work. Georgia, of all states, has put several developments on the National Register with exemplary research and application documents. And yet, when I tell anyone I’m working on a book on the ranch house, they still say, ‘The what?’ and then many confess they grew up in one. Thank you so much, and all the best to you both. Ada Louise.”

In one of her numerous online obituaries, I read that her estate was bequeathed to the J. Paul Getty Trust, along with her archives. I have no idea how far along her efforts had taken her in the ranch project, but perhaps some time in the future a dedicated researcher will bring it all together and share her insights and commentary about ranch homes. I think we’d all like to hear from her again.

Jim Brown, Publisher



Ada Louise Huxtable, 1921–2013
Photo: David Malosh