

L.A. at Home

 DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE, GARDENS,
 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LIVING

'Atomic Ranch Midcentury Interiors': Modern living with 'Mad' looks

May 28, 2012 | 8:33 am



During a recent trip to San Diego, I drove by my childhood home in Point Loma. The low-lying 1956 ranch house still looked the same from the street. Were my hand prints still in the patio concrete? I also found myself wondering if the home's period details inside remained. The lovely diamond pane windows with the stubborn hand cranks were gone. And surely the small kitchen with its funky brown appliances had been edited by now. But I hoped the wide brick and flagstone fireplace -- the one that could easily seat four and doubled as a stage for my sister and me -- was still there.

Retaining those classic ranch-house elements while adapting to modern living is precisely what Michelle Gringeri-Brown, editor of the quarterly [Atomic Ranch](#) magazine, tries to encourage through her new book, "Atomic Ranch Midcentury Interiors."

"We try to point out the charm of original features," Gringeri-Brown said in an interview. "We encourage homeowners to be cautious. Don't rush to gut the whole thing before you make interior design choices that can't be undone. The period pieces often stand out as things to be appreciated."

Gringeri-Brown credits the [popularity of "Mad Men"](#) for fueling appreciation of ranch houses. A new generation is attracted to what she calls "retro cool." Ranch houses also appeal to aging baby boomers who are wary of stairs. "Because ranches were built when property was cheaper, they tend to sprawl on one floor and have a larger yard," the author said.

This is her second book on ranch houses with husband, photographer Jim Brown, and it highlights eight homes, from a tract house in Calistoga, Calif., to a split-level in Ohio. (That's a 1958 house in San Mateo, Calif., at the top of the post.) Homeowners share their remodeling stories, offer tips on projects such as windows and plumbing, and detail the design elements they have retained. In one case, homeowners found original metal kitchen cabinets in their garage. The book is filled with creative ideas as well as informative sidebars, floor plans, vintage photos and a list of nearly 200 resources.





Gringeri-Brown doesn't always agree with homeowners' design solutions (and that includes pedestal sinks). But she does understand the realities of modern living. In referencing the galley kitchen remodel for an Eichler house, she emphasized that the kitchen is new while having a memory of the past. "It may not look original, but it looks appropriate to the home," she told me.

New additions to the kitchen of the 1954 flat-roof modern house in Dallas, pictured above, include cork flooring, a Viking range top, laminate counters and a cooling rack to the left of the stove. The original brick back splash and 1950s Hotpoint oven, at far right, were left intact. The Hotpoint metal cabinets were sanded and sprayed with auto enamel.



The new stainless steel kitchen of this 1958 Eichler tract house in San Mateo retains the home's original galley kitchen footprint.



When the homeowners of this 1957 aluminum kit house in Brighton, N.Y., remodeled their 1970s kitchen, they chose to keep the pass-through between the kitchen and the lounge. The blue, white, green and black laminate-faced storage unit is original to the house. The new green tile in the kitchen complements the piece.



The two-sided, gray-stained masonry fireplace is situated between the dining room and living room in this 1969 Portland, Ore., ranch house.



Inexpensive solutions in the book include an Ikea buffet and wall cabinet installed in the niche of a 1956 split-level in Cincinnati.



The bathroom of this 1955 traditional ranch house in Tulsa, Okla., has a planter in the tile half-wall and a planetary room divider. (Gringeri-Brown notes in "[Atomic Ranch Midcentury Interiors](#)" that the 1970s foil wallpaper "will probably be coming down.")

ALSO:



[1971 Ojai ranch house remodeled](#)

[Marmol Radziner house: 360-degree panoramas](#)

[Eames House moves into LACMA: Time-lapse video](#)

[California homes and gardens: Design profiles in pictures](#)

-- Lisa Boone

Photo credits: Jim Brown / Gibbs Smith

MORE FROM THE TIMES

Former Pacoima teacher pleads no contest to molesting 13 students

No yolk: eating the whole egg as dangerous as smoking?

Rashida Jones sorry for imploring John Travolta to come out

When belly fat is a worry

The Times' college football countdown: No. 2 Alabama

Ads by Google

Custom Built Furniture

Modern designs, built-to-order custom furniture from Maine www.angelaadams.com/Furniture

Introducing Nexus 7

The 7" tablet that brings you the best of Google. Pre-order now google.com/nexus

Comments (1)