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ARCHITECTURE

# Neutra's Maxwell house moves to Angelino Heights from Brentwood

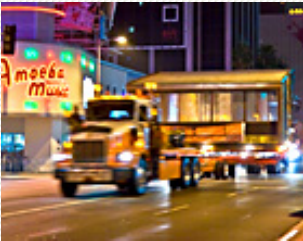
Once it is reassembled, the new owner will restore and sell it.

By Morris Newman, Special to The Times

August 23, 2008

FOR ANYONE lucky enough to have witnessed the move, it was some kind of spectacle: the 1941 Maxwell house by Richard Neutra, one of Southern California's most celebrated residential architects, loaded onto a flatbed truck for a cruise down the Sunset Strip.

The midnight voyage last weekend started in Brentwood, where one-third of the house was slowly wheeled out, followed by a caravan of Neutra devotees, a real estate agent and one very nervous homeowner -- all focused on the survival of a little-known architectural gem.



[Photos: Moving the Richard Neutra...](#)

If all goes according to plan, the remainder of the 1,700-square-foot wooden structure will follow in coming days, taking up residence on what had been a vacant lot in Angelino Heights, the neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles best known for its flamboyant Victorians.

Saving the house has become a labor of love -- some say obsession -- of the owner, developer Barbara Behm, who does business under the name Princess Bovlana. She plans to restore the house "from top to bottom, and everything in between," before selling it.

Built for \$6,750, the Maxwell house has been the subject of intense interest among preservationists for years. Previous owners Jeffrey and Karen Brandlin bought the home and its 13,200-square-foot lot in 2002 for \$1.6 million, not knowing the structure's significance.

When word spread that the couple planned to raze it and build a 5,300-square-foot contemporary residence in its place, preservationists pressured the couple to spare the Neutra architecture. With a push from the Los Angeles Conservancy, the house was declared a city historic-cultural monument in 2005, keeping the bulldozers at bay.

At one point, the Brandlins offered the house for sale on EBay with a reserve price of \$1. At least one party other than Behm reportedly offered to buy and move the home but was unable to find a new location.

Behm bought the house, but not the land, from the Brandlins in 2004. She won't reveal the price other than to say "it was much more than a dollar."

Behm then spent the subsequent years and thousands of dollars -- she won't disclose specifics -- to gain the cooperation of neighbors, the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission and even the city's arborist to agree on a plan for relocating the one-story structure. Behm says she waited three months just for permission to trim trees on the Brentwood property so that the moving truck could back up on the lot.

Neutra, who lived from 1892 to 1970, designed the house for piano teacher Sybil Maxwell and her husband, Charles, thus the separate rear entrance for music students. Although Neutra was famous for elegant, hard-edged houses in stucco, steel and glass (or wood painted to resemble metal), neighborhood design guidelines required all houses to be built of wood. The result is one of Neutra's few all-wood structures, with a peaked roof no less -- a rarity for the Modernist who preferred flat-topped boxes.

Architectural historian Barbara Lamprecht, who wrote what's widely considered to be the definitive book on Neutra, encouraged Behm to make the move. She says the Maxwell house shows the flexibility of Neutra's approach to design.

"Many know of his techniques in making small homes feel spacious, but few are aware of a much smaller number of wood and glass houses with pitched roofs," she says.

These atypical designs, she says, "show us how Modernism can be interpreted in materials and roof lines that were more approachable, more rustic, more pastoral, without losing a distinctive character of taut detailing, a well-thought spatial sequence in rooms and a site thoughtfully integrated with the building."

Although the Brandlins initially resisted efforts by preservationists, they have worked with Behm to clear all the legal and governmental requirements necessary to move the house.

"We've all been holding hands in this weird journey together," Behm says.

Brian Linder, the partner in the real estate firm of Deasy/Penner & Partners who will represent the house for sale after it's reassembled and renovated, is impressed by the financial investment that Behm already has made.

"I'm just intrigued that someone would go to this length to rescue this project," says Linder, who declined to estimate the listing price. "At the end of the day, I don't know how much profit will be left in the house."

Although Behm says she's exhausted by the experience, her wit remains fresh.

"I feel like I've been pregnant for three years," she says.

And now that her baby has arrived? "You really have work to do."

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