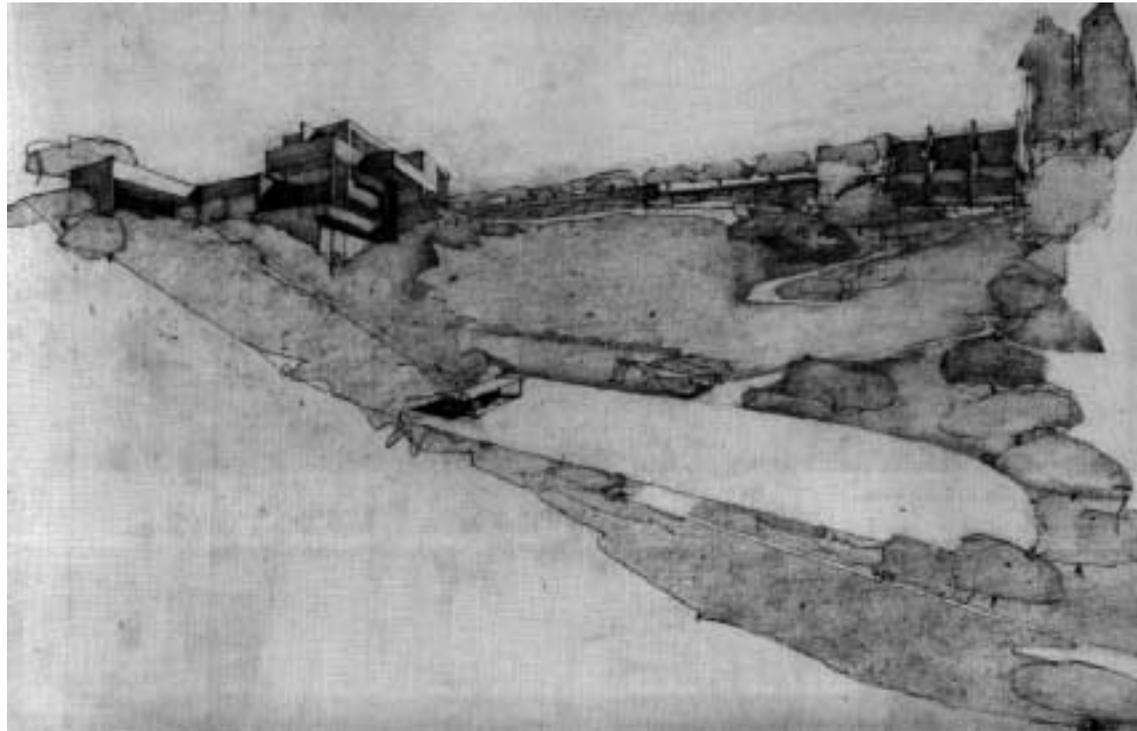


Drawing from the Neutra Archive UCLA Special Collections



Rendering by Richard Neutra of Lovell Health House, 1928.

"...never static. . . . Do not take all pictures showing pool at the same hour, as the ripple or quiet reflection of water changes, clouds vary, and especially shadows and reflections on metal fascias do..."
RJ Neutra to Julius Shulman, March 3, 1947

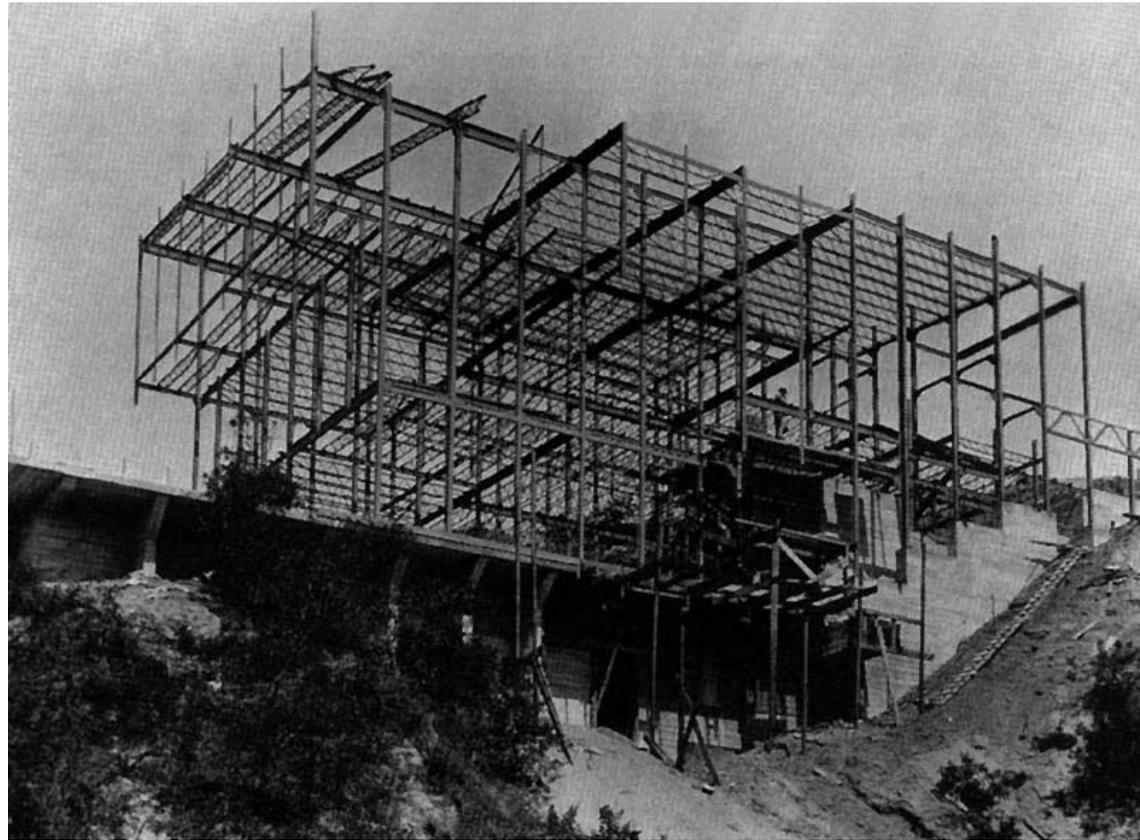


Richard Neutra's influence on this thesis was profound. Through experiencing, and living in Neutra's VDL II house many basic attitudes about housing were generated. These attitudes, in turn, informed this thesis. Neutra, probably more than any other Los Angeles architect of his generation, developed a comprehensive and consistent architectural language.

Neutra immigrated from Vienna, in 1924, at first settling in New York City. He worked there for a time before he went to Chicago, and eventually worked for Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin-East. This is the beginning of the common thread that has tied this work and the work of so many others together. Had it not been for Neutra's insistence, and perseverance in his desire to work for Wright it is truly doubtful that his career would have occurred as it did.

Richard Neutra worked for Wright for about one year. During this time his colleague, Rudolph Schindler, urged him to move to Southern California. Neutra moved to Los Angeles during 1926. There was not an immediate working arrangement between Neutra and Schindler. However, they did eventually form a kind of partnership. To their credit are designs for several commercial projects and some housing projects. Perhaps best known and appreciated of their collaboration is the League of Nations design competition entry. This was not the sole work of Neutra; it was produced in collaboration with Schindler. The fact that Neutra's in-laws did not include Schindler's name on the competition boards, when the project was displayed in a traveling exhibit through-out Europe, was one of the several reasons their partnership ultimately ended.

Photograph by Willard Morgan



A view of the steel frame of the Lovell Health House taken from the southwest.

Photograph by Julius Schulman



Dusk photograph of the Lovell Health house from the south.

Through their architectural collaboration and because of the friendship between their spouses Neutra was able to meet and befriend one of Schindler's more significant clients, Philip and Leah Lovell. It is important though to consider, that Neutra did indeed have work—and rather significant work—before the commission with the Lovells. He had to his credit not only his tireless efforts with the League of Nation's competition, but also the design produced for the inspired Jardinette Apartments. This project was unlike any such complex yet seen in Los Angeles. It is not known if the Lovells actually saw this apartment complex; we can only assume that they did. Perhaps, it is also significant that Schindler's spouse, Pauline and Leah Lovell, were at this time (about 1927) engaged in operating a preschool together. Pauline and Dione (Neutra's spouse) were close friends, and the Neutras and Schindlers were living together in Schindler's Kings Road House. These concurrent relationships we would assume to be significant as there are apparent intellectual links between Neutra and the Lovells. These particular friendships appear only to be a small fraction of a significantly larger group of people who worked, discussed, entertained, and intellectualized together in those early days of Los Angeles Modernism.

These relationships had the most profound effect on Neutra's ability to obtain commissions; he had a voice, and a willingness to speak...the only other ingredient he needed was a listening audience. The Lovells were the first, of many, such patrons. Ironically, for the Lovells Neutra created what has been noted as one of the five great houses of the "Modern" period.

It was important to Lovell to establish Los Angeles as a center of architectural expression. The commission, known as the Lovell Health House in the Hollywood Hills, built in 1929, was the first residential building in the United States to have a steel structure. The expanses of windows hover over a cantilevered balcony and look down a long canyon through a mesh of rich foliage. The interior is a celebration of openness, rather than a group of boxy rooms enclosed by walls.

Until his death in 1970, Neutra worked out of his own house, the VDL Research House, located on Silverlake Reservoir about 2 miles northeast of the downtown area. This house, which Neutra used as an advertising tool to attract new clients to his practice, was first built in 1933 at the height of the Depression. It was built almost entirely with donated

Photograph by Luckhaus



The swimming pool of the Lovell Health house.

materials. His use of the building as both home and office resolved his complex programmatic requirements. Neutra's original house was destroyed by fire in 1963. He and his son, Dion, redesigned and rebuilt the current house on the original house's foundation by 1965. The original plan was slightly modified to encompass the changes in the Neutras lifestyle. The newer structure, like the original, incorporates the use of contemporary materials.

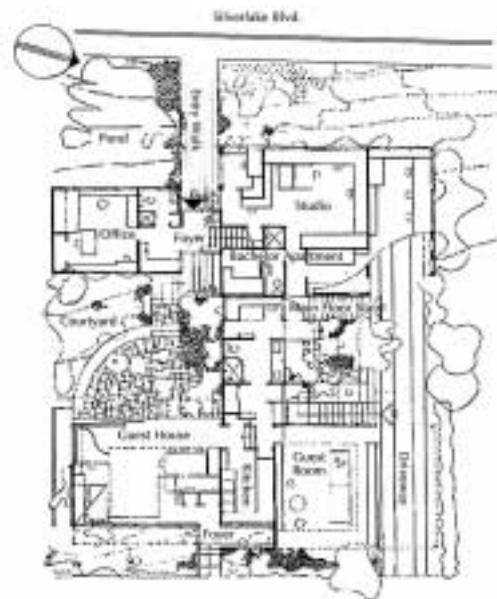
The current dwelling consists of a two-story wing fronting the reservoir connected by a service core to a one-story wing at the rear. The one-story wing is the only remaining original portion of the house. Neutra placed the main living quarters on the second floor to take advantage of the views to the lake, and the abundance of sunlight. He placed his office and drafting studio on the ground floor. Among the many subtleties of this dwelling is the way that Neutra sought to differentiate entry. Since Neutra's program required that the building have both the functions of work and dwelling combined he sought to formally separate the two. This was obviously accomplished by the floor separation discussed previously, however, everyone arriving to the building, including clients had to pass through a front door. To further separate the two functions of living and working Neutra included two formal front entrances to the building. One might assume the obvious choice would be to place these two doors as far apart from one and other as possible.

However, Neutra choose to place the doors adjacent and at a 90° angle to each other. His design subtlety did not end there. He further expanded this definition by making each door of entirely different materials. The entrance to the dwelling is crafted of on-edge 1 x 2's, forming a heavy wooden door that is naturally associated with dwelling. The business entrance was constructed of glass with aluminum hardware, and has the firm's name painted on the glass surface. Formed by the main two-story, side service, and rear one-story wings is a patio-courtyard reminiscent of the Spanish dwellings of early California. This garden room served as a second

Photograph by Julius Schulman



The Garden Courtyard of the VDL II Research House, 1965.



Ground floor plan of the VDL II Research House, 1965.

kitchen, and outdoor living room for entertaining. Between the ground floor drafting studio and the service corridor is a small bachelor apartment complete with kitchen. The most inviting as well as relaxing space in the house is the roof-top solarium. Facing the lake, Neutra employed a roof-top water garden that both cools and insulates the house. However, this choice also performs a much more heroic accomplishment. The water reflects the sky. This room, with its glass and mirrored walls in combination with the reflective qualities of the water envelope anyone who sojourns within this very special place.



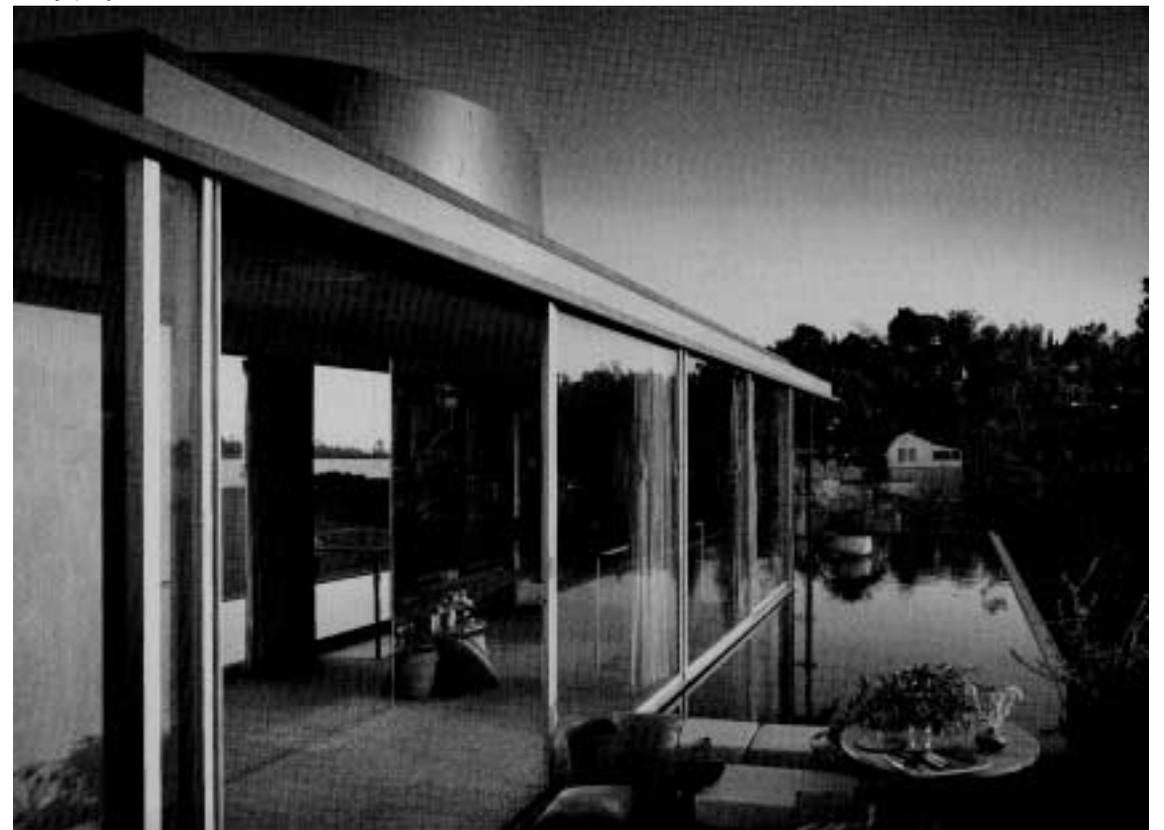
Main floor plan of Neutra's VDL II Research House, 1965.

Image created from a photograph by Julius Schulman



The VDL II Research House, 1965, after reconstruction. Note the roof top solarium. The newer house did not lose the magic of the first. It is indeed a house for living...

Photograph by Julius Schulman



The VDL II Research House, 1965, roof top Solarium. By using mirrors Neutra was able to extend the view of the Silverlake Reservoir. With the water roof he reflected the sky.