

The incredible works of john lautner essay sample



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John Lautner is one of this century's most influential, contemporary, American architects. Practicing architecture for more than 55 years, designing unique and breath-taking houses in and around Los Angeles. Also being responsible for some restaurants.

His works largely concentrated on the relationship of a building in the space surrounding it. Working with the landscape and the views from the building. He creates views that are so staggering, I could only imagine, makes you dizzy. He utilizes water and the surrounding landscapes in his overall designs. Lots of his works contain existing large stone rocks and great old trees as a part of the interior of his designs. He boldly experiments with new industrial processes and materials and considers concrete his most desirable material for his designs. Using concrete, he can create sensuous curves and dramatic straight lines needed for his magnificent spaces.

John Lautner was born in 1911, and raised in Michigan, you can see in his works, that the woods and the deep blue water of Lake Superior were in his soul throughout his designing.

His first taste of building a space was when he helped his father build a chalet-type retreat, which was designed by his mother and looked over the lake from a hillside that was high above it.

His career began at Frank Lloyd Wrights Taliesin in 1933. After graduating with a degree in English from the University of North Michigan, Lautner at 22 became an apprentice to Frank Lloyd Wright for six years.

Frank and Olgivanna Wright had begun the Taliesin Fellowship in September 1932 as an attempt to repair their increasing debt. Frank and his wife decided that offering to allow John Lautner and other students to live with them would be worth an \$1100 per year's tuition. John Lautners ' Master' did not like his apprentices to imitate his designs but this was obviously inevitable, he found it difficult to teach individuality to his 30 students. He wanted them to break out into new territory.

John Lautner is one of the few who managed this.

Eventually John Lautner established his own practice in Los Angeles in 1938. His first project was a house for his family in Silver Lake, which was completed in 1940. Lautner took Wright to see his completed house, which showed a diversion of Wrights designs of geometric shapes. There was a casual disregard for neatening up the edges and straight lines. Wrights structured and geometric shapes pointed out his need for control over the landscape, but Lautner rarely expressed this control, so he was able to deal with the space more freely. By breaking free of Wrights controlling design style, Lautner was able to venture out and put his own spin on Wrights organic philosophy.

John Lautners Buildings are Original.

One of Lautners best-known works is the Malin House, otherwise known as the Chemosphere. Built in 1961 in Los Angeles.

This almost unbuildable site is mastered by a simple solution: a single concrete column, embedded in a wide footing, supports a circular domed

house. Steel diagonals support the edge of the eight-sided house. A track brings visitors up the right side of the house; the living room faces the view. This building demonstrates Lautners ability to solve architectural problems in unconventional ways.

In the living room area, wood laminated beams form the dome shape roof, with wood purlins stretching between them.

The Chemosphere is a L. A. icon.

John Lautners Buildings are Instantly recognizable.

Not because all of John Lautners buildings look the same but because they look like nothing that has ever stood before on the face of the earth.

The Elrod House is a 23-acre property with a 7000 sq foot floor plan. It is hardly recognisable from the street and offers no prominent image or facade. A curving wall hides a raised garden. A hidden entryway creates a feel of secrecy and protection.

The outdoor entry court leads through the large glass door to a circular living room.

Boulders found on site are incorporated into the living area. Some of the wedge shaped gaps are filled with glass to create skylights, some are solid, tilted shades

that allows more indirect light into the room. 25-foot high curving glass walls make the room open to the fantastic panoramic view. The outdoor pool extends into the living area blurring the line between indoors and out. I

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imagine being in this building is as though you are looking at earth from another planet or from a private island in the air.

John Lautners Buildings are Dramatic.

Lautner uses bold geometry and exciting new uses of materials.

- * Concrete roofs
- * Steel Cantilevers
- * Double curves
- * Push of a button glass walls
- * Retracting roofs
- * Indoor streams

The Goldstein/Sheats House is one of Lautners most dramatic structures. Built in 1963 in Beverly Hills, the dynamic triangular roof and walls of glass place no barrier between the shelter within and the outside world at your feet. The views out of Lautner homes become part of the architecture.

Another dramatic building as the highly stylized Arango House (1973)

Lautner is very much inspired by nature and here he invents a living room terrace like an island surrounded by a moat of water that is only accessible via a bridge.

Sitting on a hill overlooking Acapulco Bay in Mexico, the Arango house's arc roof ' hovers' over the freeform terrace edge. The bedrooms are underneath.

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The roofs simple form and grand scale, emulates the simple line of the horizon and expanse of the ocean. Both the roof and the terrace frame the actual landscape like a picture, in which the inhabitants can be a part of.

John Lautners Buildings are Logical.

Despite their originality and drama, nothing is accidental or unplanned, every single item, from the foundation to the faucet is planned, and sensible, and inevitable.

John Lautners Buildings are Functional.

He designs to suit the site, the climate and his clients needs and desires. He built a heat conserving home on Alaska, and a motel that steadfastly stands up to the brutal winds of the desert.

In this Desert Hot Springs Motel (1947), Lautner uses sprayed-on gunite to form three-inch-thick concrete walls. Their angles made them self-supporting. The interlocking motel units each had their own parking area, garden and kitchenette.

Glass walls wrap around three sides of the room, which is slightly sunken below floor level. With a sloping roof and balanced light from skylights, the room is surprisingly spacious.

John Lautners Buildings are Wonders of Engineering.

When clients come to him with an 'unbuildable site', like the Chemosphere's narrow 45 degree sloping site he can devise new structural principles and elements required to be built on it.

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He also invented new building methods. He attached the steel girders supporting the Chemosphere using Epoxy - in 1960! This was revolutionary at this time, to trust this strong synthetic resin to help hold up such a structure.

John Lautners Buildings Have Integrity.

This is because, John Lautner himself, has integrity. In a career that has spanned over 50 years, he has never deviated from his principles or allowed fashion or cliché, or anything other than the brilliance of his own vision to be built.

Perfect Film Settings.

Lautners buildings have been location for several films. The Elrod House (as mentioned on page 7) was so extravagant, people believed it to be a studio film set. It was used as the perfect backdrop for the glamorous James Bond film, 'Diamonds are Forever'. Below shows Bonds suite or, boudoir.

The Sheats/Goldstein House (as page 6) hosts a dramatic setting for Blockbusters such as The Big Lebowski and Charlies Angels.

Above, is the entrance to the living room. Interesting angular stepping-stones guide residents over the pool and into the space. Lighting clearly plays an important part in the overall atmosphere of this building. Luxury oozes out through every component of concrete, wood and glass.

It is certainly clear to see why this extraordinary building was selected for the grand budget movies.

Below shows the scale of the protruding lounge room. The shockingly large overhang causes you to be thrust into nature, making the views and lush surroundings impossible to ignore.

It is clear to see that John Lautner has certain traits in his design, he manages to utilize his trademark materials (concrete, glass, wood) in different ways in each building. He focuses on concrete, molded into sweeping forms that almost enclose occupants into cave like structures yet open to the natural world via:

- * High Ceilings

- * Sky-Lights

- * Moving Walls

- * Full Height, Walls of Glass

He is the only architect in the past 30 years to have given substantial thought to the ways of experiencing the elements, often with staggering results.

Other design traits include:

- * Windows and natural light are used to maximum effect.

- * Natural landscaping was included into the overall design.

- * Ceilings were independent sculptures.

- * Walls were removed or turned into free-flowing, organic forms.

The results were spectacular yet utilitarian.

It is easy to say that yes, he was unusual, and his work did take a lot of patience to understand what he was doing and pick up on his sensibility. Not everyone appreciated his work and he was certainly fair game for critics.

The following quote sums up his attitudes towards the world of architecture.

“Lautner's frustration was not that he didn't get the work but that he was working in a system that does not recognise artists. And yet it's a system that does recognise promoters, diplomats and architects who play the game by conforming to specific styles. Styles are safe. But playing it safe never promotes interesting art. And Lautner was an artist first and an architect second.”

Lautner did not follow conventions and conform to the 'fashionable' architecture, he chose to build the designs that existed in his mind, and if they were thought of as extreme by others and 'unbuildable', this was a mere obstacle for John Lautner, an obstacle that he had to get round, over or indeed build into. He made amazing almost impossible structures, possible.

Los Angeles was famous for its elegant, spare, rectangular domestic architecture. John Lautner stood out, at the other end of the architectural spectrum, serving up glamour, style, and of course, eccentricity for the wealthy clients.

Lautner was an important residential architect in a time and place where innovation was greatly admired. The cold grey concrete became art, the sweep of the curves play between the structure and the environment and

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create fantastic forms which I could only imagine makes you slightly light-headed.

It was not easy to be John Lautner, but his buildings show what was gained by effort. He perfected the trademark free form architecture that would inspire a generation of architects in the 80's and 90's, of Los Angeles and further afield. John Lautner died in 1994 and over 100 sensational buildings will serve as his monument forever.