

WEXLER²

AN ARCHITECT & HIS SON

WORDS LANE LEE

IMAGES COURTESY ERIC STAUDENMAIER PHOTOGRAPHY
AND GLEN WEXLER

CONTRIBUTING WRITER LANE LEE
QUERIES THE CREATIVE DUO ABOUT
PAIRING UP TO BUILD A
DREAM LIVE/WORK SPACE.





PHOTO: © ERIC STAUDENMAIER PHOTOGRAPHY



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***Creative genius.** Where does it come from? For the Wexlers, it runs in the family. Donald Wexler, AKA the almighty mid-century architect of Palm Springs and Glen, his son, the prolific photographer with an eye for other worldly surrealism, collaborated to take on the behemoth task of erecting Glen's live/work home in the Hollywood Hills. Fabrik Magazine caught up with them for an exclusive look at how the father-son duo realized this spectacular, modern-meets-mid-century dwelling:*

Fabrik Magazine (FM): Why did you want to remodel your house?

Glen Wexler (GW): I wanted to create our dream house with a live/work space.

FM: How did the house remodel idea with your dad's involvement come about?

GW: We looked for years for a live/work space, but found nothing that was right for both work and family, or was affordable. When the adjacent lot was for sale, I asked my dad about adding on to our existing house bought in 1988. He said it would be challenging, but doable.

FM: What were some of the challenges you faced?

GW: It was an incredibly long, drawn-out process that started in 2000 and lasted roughly eight years until both the addition/remodel were finished. From the original geology report that recommended 40 caissons (probably enough to build a skyscraper!) to a woman on the Mulholland Design Committee who was determined to stop us, and other issues, it was a major ordeal.

FM: Did it help having your dad involved in getting design permits?

GW: Definitely. The last house my dad built in Los Angeles was in the 60s. The architectural historian community and their letters of recommendation helped, as well.



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FM: Talk about your dad's role in the project.

GW: He did the original design sketches and consulted throughout the construction process. Being semi-retired, he didn't have the building relationships in L.A., so we hired Henry Buckingham, a local, emerging architect at the time. Henry did the working drawings, contributed to the design, and ran the project day to day.

FM: Is the house indicative of your dad's mid-century style?

GW: His design aesthetic and sensibilities are definitely carried through, but it's more contemporary than his legacy of mid-century work. The site and building codes created a number of obstacles. Because we're hillside, we had to build vertical, rather than horizontal. Also, due to energy requirements, the city doesn't allow for the amount of glass that's typical of mid-century post and beam architecture.

FM: What aspects encapsulate his design?

GW: There's an overall design aesthetic to the way the proportions align. He's very much about organizing space, creating a visual rhythm. For example, with the doors he carried the header up to the ceiling resulting in a clean linear plane from ceiling to floor.

FM: What's your favorite part of the house?

GW: There's so many that I really enjoy. On an architectural level, in our backyard, next to the lap pool, there's a section of glass where you can see through the house to the other side of the Hollywood Hills. We can sit back, have the fire pit going and watch the sunset.

FM: Speaking of views, being located in the Hollywood Hills, how else did you incorporate the views into the design?

GW: In our original house, we had very little yard space and a limited view. Now that we could expand the yard, my dad had this notion to create a bridge and roof deck. The view from the deck is amazing, and a very peaceful spot to relax.

FM: What kind of projects have you shot in the studio?

GW: I keep photo shoots at my home studio pretty low-key; major shoots are on commercial production stages. I've shot a number of album covers in my studio, like Brian Ray (Paul McCartney's guitarist) and Dilana (in my opinion, one of the



PHOTO: © ERIC STAUDENMAIER PHOTOGRAPHY

greatest rock singers in the biz) as well as a number of celebrities. Much of my work from home is digital illustration, art prints, and design work. My career has also shifted towards directing.

FM: Was this the first time you collaborated on a project with your father?

GW: When I was in art school, my dad hit me up to photograph his projects. More recently, I digitally archived much of his work and my photos were included in the “Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler” book and the 50-year retrospective of his work at the Palm Springs Art Museum in 2011.

FM: As two dynamic creative types, there had to be artistic differences.

GW: No, he understood what we wanted and delivered 100 percent.

FM: What was your relationship with Donald Wexler growing up?

GW: I was of the hippie era and my dad didn’t know what to make of me as a teenager. We didn’t see eye to eye on anything. He used to get really upset with my long hair and jeans. It wasn’t what he expected, but his whole generation didn’t know what to expect with the major cultural shift of the 60s and 70s.

FM: You get along with him very well now...so what changed?

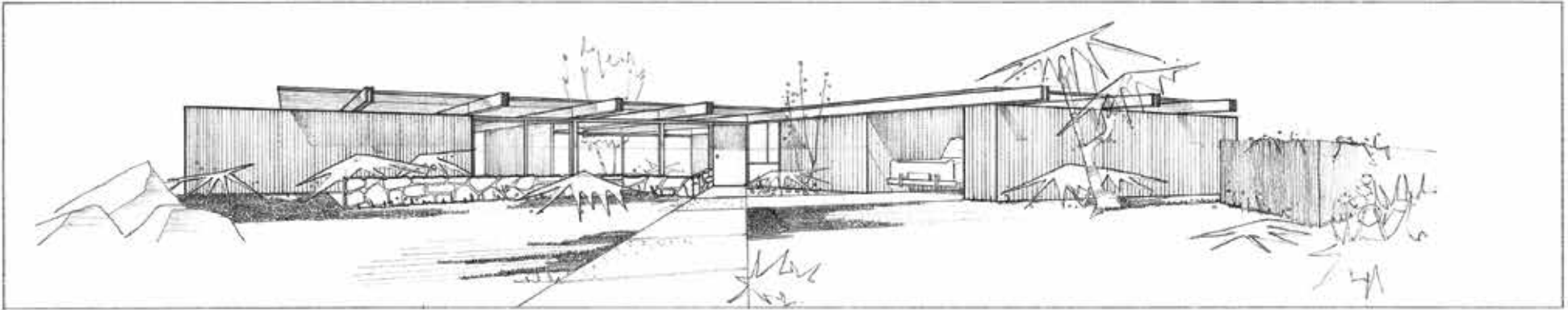
GW: There was a point, when I came home from college and showed him my photography portfolio, that something clicked. Being visually in tune, he saw we were on a parallel path. From my early 20s on, he’s been very supportive of my work. We talk every few days.

FM: What shifted on your part?

GW: It took awhile, but in my 20s, I finally got him. I understood his passion for design and sense of perfection. Not sure if it was a synergistic thing or it was just built into my DNA, it was easy to see that the photography I was doing was an extension of his influence – not so much in subject matter or conceptual context, but in approach, design and craft.

FM: Can you elaborate on his influence in your work?

GW: My approach to photography has been described as “architectural” in that I pre-visualize and design my images in advance of picking up a camera. Much of



WEXLER RESIDENCE, PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
PRE CONSTRUCTION RENDERING BY DONALD WEXLER, 1955

my work is constructing images from photographic elements that are specifically shot for photocompositions. There has also been mention of the correlation of us both pushing the mediums – my dad’s experimental residential work with pre-fab steel construction, and my work as a very early adopter of digital image editing tools. The main thing I discovered is that we were both driven by a passion to create, and not restricted by adhering to convention.

FM: How would you describe his body of work?

GW: He’s a genius. All of his work is perfectly proportioned, clean and precise, with an acute sensitivity to the surrounding environment and actual function of the space. When I started to photograph his work, it was clear that his work was something special. His buildings stood apart from others.

FM: Why was it important to have your dad consult on the project?

GW: I knew this was probably a once in a lifetime opportunity to build something together and I jumped on it.

We also caught up with the legendary architect Donald Wexler to hear his take on the project:

FM: When/where was the last house you designed in L.A.?

DW: It was the only house I designed in L.A. It was in the early 60s in Bel Air. It’s an all steel house and still looks brand new.

PRE-FAB STEEL HOUSE BY WEXLER & HARRISON, PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
PRE CONSTRUCTION RENDERING FROM DONALD WEXLER ARCHIVES, 1960



FM: What were the main challenges of Glen's remodel/build?

DW: Working with the site was the main challenge. It was very steep.

FM: What are your favorite elements of the house?

DW: I like how it ties into the original house, how it fits on the lot and the view from the house.

FM: Since it's not purely mid-century due to building restrictions, how would you describe the style?

DW: I have no way of describing it. There's a fallacy about the mid-century style. When the work was going on in the golden age of architecture (50s, 60s and 70s), no one heard of the term 'mid-century.' Everybody was just trying to design things that belonged in the desert. The people interested in architecture, roughly 15 years ago, was when the coined term emerged. The term has lost its luster because everything seems to be called that, that was built during that time.

FM: What was it like to work on a building project with your son?

DW: I loved it. I'm very proud of Glen for doing this.

FM: What are your thoughts on Glen's body of work as a photographer?

DW: He's terrific. He's the best!

FM: Leonardo Di Caprio just bought your Dinah Shore house. What advice would you give him in maintaining such a historical jewel?

DW: The house is over 50 years old with an adobe exterior that needed to be replaced. According to my son, Gary, they found a manufacturer to replicate the original adobe exterior. That's a good sign. If his representatives want to give me a call, I'd be glad to tell them what I think.

FM: What were your favorite Palm Springs projects?

DW: My favorites were the Dinah Shore house, the original airport in Palm Springs, and the Spa Hotel Bath House.

Donald Wexler, FAIA, is an influential Mid-Century modern architect whose work is predominantly in the Palm Springs, California area. He is known for pioneering the use of steel in residential design. Wexler worked for Richard Neutra prior to moving to Palm Springs in 1952 and practiced there for almost six decades, developing an architecture that is acutely sensitive to the extremes of the desert climate. In 1962, he designed the all-steel Alexander houses. While he chose to keep his office small and limited his practice to the desert community, Wexler produced a body of work that included houses, schools, hotels, banks and the Palm Springs International Airport. Other notable residential projects include the Dinah Shore residence in the Old Las Palmas neighborhood of Palm Springs purchased earlier this year by actor Leonardo DiCaprio. "Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler" book and the 50-year retrospective of his work was exhibited at the Palm Springs Art Museum in 2011.

Glen Wexler is a photographer, director and designer best known for his elaborately staged digital photocompositions of improbable situations. At 22 years old Wexler photographed his first album cover for Quincy Jones Productions while a student at Art Center College of Design. He quickly gained a reputation for his imaginative photo illustrations for Michael Jackson, Van Halen, Rush, Black Sabbath, Yes, ZZ Top and many others. Advertising clients including Acura, Sony, Jeep, Maxell, Adobe, Intel, Coca-Cola, Capital One, Toyota, Pepsi, Warner Brothers Pictures and hundreds of others. Wexler's editorial work includes featured photo illustrations for TIME Magazine. Wexler also created photographic logos for The Star Wars Trilogy, Batman Forever, Universal Pictures and Geffen Records. Internationally recognized as one of the original artists to incorporate digital imaging technology into the creative process, Wexler is widely regarded as a leader in the field. Wexler's fine art works are in the homes of many celebrities and included in the permanent collection of the George Eastman House. www.glenwexler.com