

arresting of the San Lorenzo drawings (Uffizi 281 A). Beside it was Giuliano's plan of Pisa, a huge drawing composed of twenty-four smaller sheets that blended precise survey with idealized antiquarian reconstruction and projected work, representing present, past, and future as an indivisible whole. A large residential plan for another planned Medici villa, in Rome's Piazza Navona, rounded out the triad of sacred, military, and residential architecture.

The exhibition also included the familiar drawings for Saint Peter's Basilica. Bramante's filigree half-plan, the well-known Uffizi 1 A, was effectively placed opposite the main entrance to the exhibition. Flanking it, in a double-sided mounting, was the solid, square plan with which Giuliano responded to the implausibly thin piers of Bramante's proposal, with Bramante's reply quickly sketched in red chalk on the verso (Uffizi 8 A). These drawings are an astonishing survival that testifies to two architects' debate over the most important architectural commission of the Italian Renaissance. Considering that Giuliano has sometimes been cast as a second-rate foil to the genius of Bramante, the curators' decision to let the drawings stand on their own was understandable, but nonspecialists were unlikely to grasp the vivid narrative without an explanatory text. The excellent catalogue describes the historical context in detail, but unfortunately no consultation copies of that publication were available in digital or paper form to bridge the gap. Virtual materials were used successfully elsewhere; a partial digital facsimile helped make up for the absence of the Barberini Codex, which rarely leaves the Vatican.

The diversity of the drawings on display in *Giuliano da Sangallo: Disegni degli Uffizi* reflected the growing trend in the study of early modern architecture away from neat categories and straightforward narratives. Giuliano himself, never easily classified but undoubtedly original, is perhaps the ideal architect to represent this shift.

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Related Publication

Dario Donetti, Marzia Faietti, and Sabine Frommel, eds., *Giuliano da Sangallo: Disegni degli Uffizi* (Florence: Giunti, 2017), 192 pp., 115 color and 15 b/w illus. €35, ISBN 9788809856981

Note

1. Sabine Frommel, *Giuliano da Sangallo* (Florence: Edifir, 2014); "Giuliano da Sangallo 1516–2016," study day, Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence, 17–18 Nov. 2016; Amedeo Belluzzi, Caroline Elam, and Francesco Paolo Fiore, eds., *Giuliano da Sangallo* (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2017).

Quest for Beauty: The Architecture, Landscapes, and Collections of John Yeon

Portland Art Museum, Oregon

13 May–3 September 2017

It was the compelling power of towering snowcapped mountains, deep forests, and sharp peaks plunging precipitously into the Pacific Ocean that served as the driving force of John Yeon's life. Born in 1910, he grew up in the shadow of an ambitious father who began as a logger, rose to become a leading figure in Portland, Oregon, and in 1913 supervised the construction of the state's first paved highway along the Columbia Gorge, the nation's first scenic route. Equally important was Yeon's mother, whose pioneering family began as homesteaders in Portland in the 1850s and through whom her son acquired an appreciation of the arts. Thus early on Yeon was drawn to the vast scale and powerful pull of the natural beauty of untouched wilderness—the rugged Oregon coastline, the deep Columbia Gorge with its powerful river, the flora and fauna of the forest—but also to the small scale and refinement of fine art.

Having grown up in privileged circumstances and inherited wealth, Yeon turned to architecture in his late teens. He worked summers in the offices of A. E. Doyle, Portland's largest and most successful architectural firm, whose practice followed the classicizing tradition of McKim, Mead & White, and in the office of the Beaux-Arts-trained architect Herman Brookman. Granted access to their extensive libraries of architectural books, Yeon acquired a knowledge of and taste for European traditions at once Palladian and English picturesque. His interests were broadened by a trip to Europe in 1928 and by a visit to Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin in Wisconsin. He also developed a love of Asian, especially Chinese, art, which he began collecting as a young adult, as well as an Arts and Crafts sensibility. This last was acquired through

Doyle, whose design for a cottage for the painter Harry Wentz on the Oregon coast influenced Yeon. This rich, diverse mix of artistic traditions, coupled with his love of the natural beauty of the Oregon wilderness, shaped Yeon's architectural direction. A decade after his European trip, he designed the 1937 Watzek House, the residence that drew national attention to an emerging Pacific Northwest regional modernism and for which he is primarily known (Figure 1).

However, as shown by the Portland Art Museum's exhibition *Quest for Beauty*, Yeon's legacy in environmental preservation is equal in importance to his other accomplishments. It was an exquisite exhibition, as exacting and low-key in demeanor as Yeon himself. Portraying his multifaceted pursuits, it provided a richly textured picture of Yeon's eclectic tastes as well as the range of scales and diversity of mediums in his work and his collecting, from architecture, landscape design, and environmental activism to his collection of Persian miniatures, Chinese scrolls, surrealist paintings, and Alvar Aalto and French rococo chairs. The exhibition focused on Yeon's lifelong quest for beauty—in his architecture, to be sure, but also in the broader environment, both natural and built. Architecture dominated, but as Yeon was never a licensed architect and his body of built work was small, the exhibition included photos and text of his efforts in landscape design, urban planning, and preservation (much of which was behind the scenes, in planning and lobbying through letters, testimonials, and meetings), focusing on now-famous tourist sites such as Chapman Point on the Oregon coast, Olympic National Park in Washington State, and the Columbia River Gorge (Figure 2). Then, too, there was his extensive art collection. All this was adroitly pulled together into a single cohesive portrait of the man and his all-but-obsessive pursuit of visual beauty.

The exhibition was organized roughly chronologically, with displays of Yeon's architecture, landscapes, and art collection interwoven; thus, beautifully crafted wooden models, original drawings, and photographs of his buildings (the Watzek House, innovations in a series of plywood houses of the late 1930s, and several postwar houses) were displayed alongside enlarged photos of his conservation endeavors and objets d'art mounted on



Figure 1 John Yeon, Watzek House, Portland, Oregon, 1937 (The Carnegie Arts of the United States Collection, University of Georgia Libraries).

pedestals. What held everything together was Yeon’s exacting eye and sense of visual order.

With its seemingly studious avoidance of Yeon’s role in the larger context of architectural history, the exhibition prompted further analysis—of Northwest regional modernism and of Yeon’s relationship with Pietro Belluschi, who was only briefly mentioned, despite the fact that it was in Belluschi’s office (then still under A. E. Doyle’s name) that the Watzek House was produced. Further, without Belluschi, the house would not have been known to John McAndrew, then curator of architecture and design at New York’s Museum of Modern Art; it was also clearly Belluschi who commissioned the famous Walter Boychuk photo, with its “fortuitous shadow” (as Yeon described it in a 1986 lecture), that led to the building’s fame.

Then, too, the Watzek House, now a National Historic Landmark and iconic in discussions of Pacific Northwest regional modernism, might have received more analysis; for example, how, in his first significant built work, was Yeon able to come up with such a polished statement? The accepted view is that it was informed by the Doyle-designed, Arts and Crafts-inspired simple wooden Wentz Cottage, coupled with Yeon’s interest in Asian art. But surely there was more to it than that—the influence of Beaux-Arts traditional historicizing architecture, for example, and the legacy of both Doyle’s Palladian classicism and Brookman’s eclectic manor houses. To my mind, Brookman’s Tudor 1925 Fir Acres (today the M. Lloyd Frank Estate and part of the Lewis & Clark College campus), with its banks of mullioned windows and projecting temple

front facing onto a broad landscaped vista with Mount Hood in the distance, subconsciously or otherwise served as a model for the Watzek, endowing it with Palladian poise and stature.

Yeon’s innovations in plywood could have used more architectural context. Instructive, too, would have been a comparison between Belluschi’s and Yeon’s professional practices: the one with an innate classicism absorbed in his native Italy, the other whose classicism was largely academic; the one struggling to maintain the Doyle office after Doyle died and to keep it alive during the lean years of the Great Depression, the other independently wealthy and free of such economic imperatives. Even more intriguing might have been an exploration of the parallels between Yeon and Philip Johnson: both independently wealthy, both immersed in the arts from an

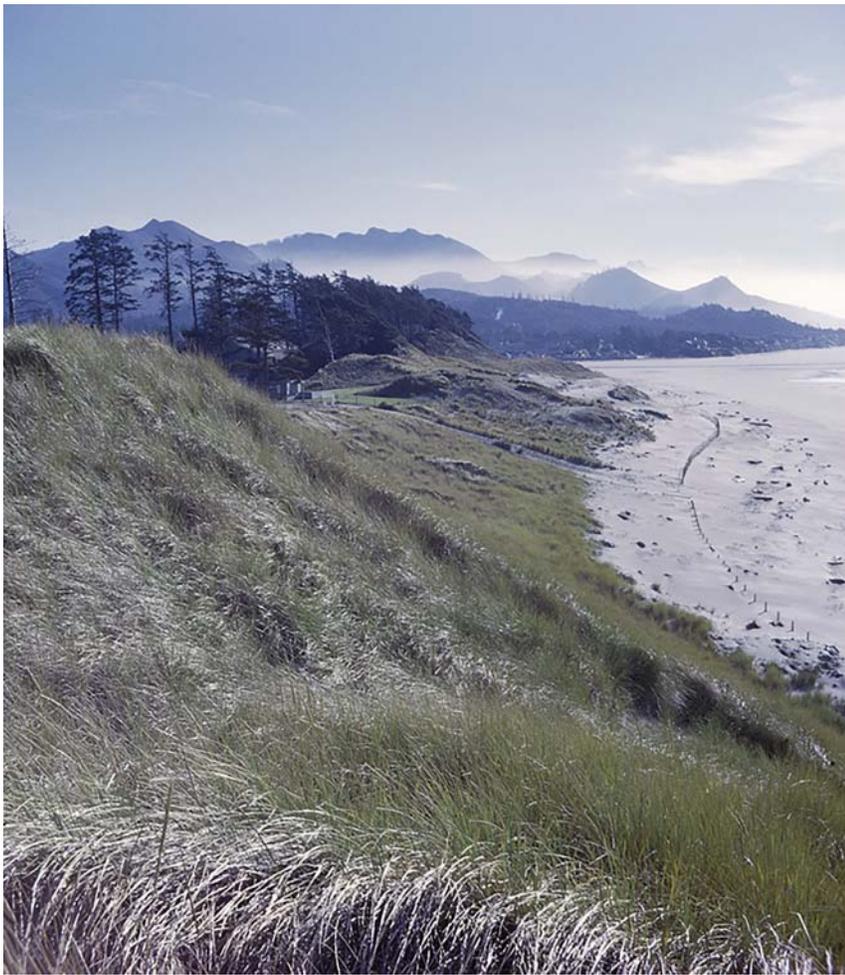


Figure 2 Chapman Point, Oregon, ca. 1940s (photo by John Yeon, courtesy Portland Art Museum).

early age, both taking European trips in the late 1920s, both with close connections to the high-end art world, both architects, both gay. In addition, both designed their own landed estates—Johnson in New Canaan, Connecticut, and Yeon several years later on the Columbia Gorge—sculpting the natural environment to meet their personal psychological and emotional needs.

But again, the exhibition’s avoidance of distractions of this nature was no doubt deliberate. Curator Randy Gragg, along with collection exhibition curators Maribeth Graybill and Dawson W. Carr, nimbly sidestepped such contentious issues to focus simply on Yeon and his remarkable artistic legacy.

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Related Publications

Randy Gragg, ed., *John Yeon: Architecture—Building in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Andrea

Monfried Editions, 2017), 240 pp., 40 color and 180 b/w illus. \$60, ISBN 9780991026371
Randy Gragg, ed., *John Yeon: Landscape—Design, Conservation, Activism* (New York: Andrea Monfried Editions, 2017), 155 pp., 70 color and 25 b/w illus. \$30, ISBN 9780991026388

The Japanese House: Architecture and Life after 1945

Barbican Art Gallery, London
23 March–25 June 2017

When reviewing, in these pages, the 2015 exhibition *The World of Charles and Ray Eames* at the Barbican Art Gallery in London, I observed how the building’s heavy, windowless gallery had been imbued with some of the sunlight of Southern California.¹ In the recent exhibition *The Japanese House: Architecture and Life after 1945*, curated by Florence Ostende and designed by Lucy Styles, the re-creation by Ryue Nishizawa (the

N in SANAA) of his Moriyama House in Tokyo (2005) made the defamiliarization of the gallery almost complete.

Architecture and life started afresh in Japan after 1945 and the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In architecture, this was demonstrated by the rejection of both *teikan yōshiki*, the Imperial Crown style that recalled the great disaster of the war, and Western modernism, which was the architecture of the conqueror. In their place, Kenzō Tange promoted the *zakuri* style of the imperial villa at Katsura, while Seiichi Shirai turned to the *minka*, the vernacular farmhouse architecture that stretched back to the ancient Jōmon period. Both themes reoccurred in photographs, drawings, and the occasional installation throughout the exhibition. More difficult to identify was “life,” a concept characterized at the beginning of the exhibition by the films of Yasujiro Ozu and Mikio Naruse, which considered major social change from a domestic perspective, using the home as a cinematic space for women’s subjectivity and desire. In the same way *teikan yōshiki* was no longer relevant in postwar Japan, so Naruse’s *Late Chrysanthemums* (1954)—its title a play, surely, on the fact that the chrysanthemum is the imperial symbol—told the story of four retired geisha trying to make a life in the new order of postwar Japan.

With the scene thus set, the exhibition explained but rarely questioned the various directions of Japanese architecture over the subsequent seventy years. Walter Gropius’s enthusiasm for Katsura, for example, was demonstrated by the book that he published with Tange in 1960: *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*.² Yet while for Tange Katsura presented a study of tradition and creation, for Gropius it offered an unexpected chance to revive the flagging hopes of Western modernism. But, as we know, there was no such revival. What did emerge from Japan, more than from anywhere else, was what Alison and Peter Smithson identified—in the “underlying idea, principles, and spirit” of Japanese architecture—as the New Brutalism.³ This was well expressed in buildings like Junzō Yoshimura’s Mountain Lodge A at Karuizawa (1963) and Takamasa Yoshizaka’s own house in Tokyo (1955), both rooted in the earth by the visceral nature of their exposed concrete. Yoshizaka built his house, a cross between the formalism of