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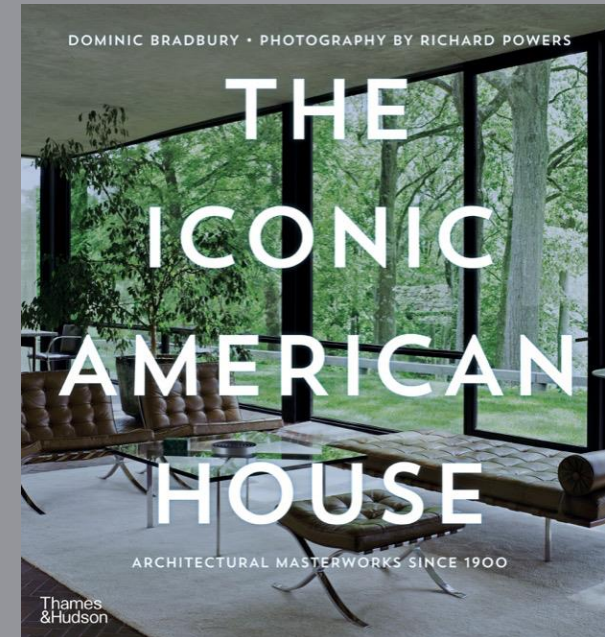
Provisional

# The Iconic American House

## Architectural Masterworks since 1900

Dominic Bradbury and Richard Powers

A compendium of the most innovative and influential residential buildings in the United States since 1900



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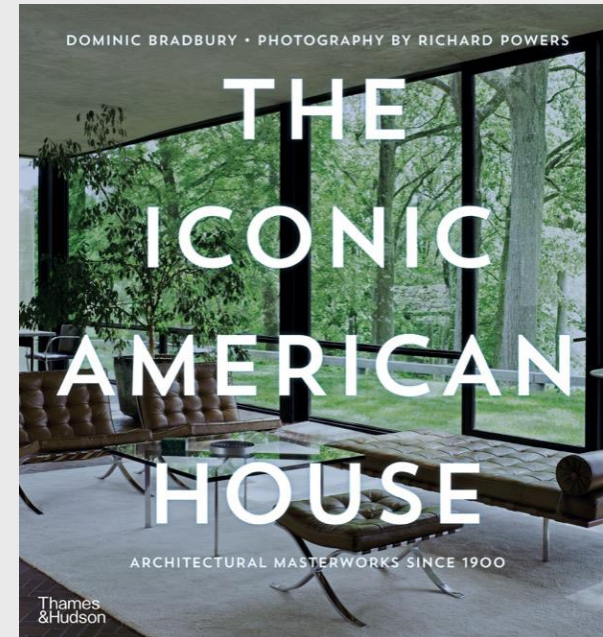
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## Key Sales Points

- Features homes designed by the world's great architects, including Walter Gropius, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, showcasing the key developments in American residential architecture across the past century.
- Offers a comprehensive overview of the most innovative, timeless and recognizable houses in the United States.
- Includes a reference list of architect's biographies and directories of key houses, making this a valuable resource for those interested in the history of American architecture.



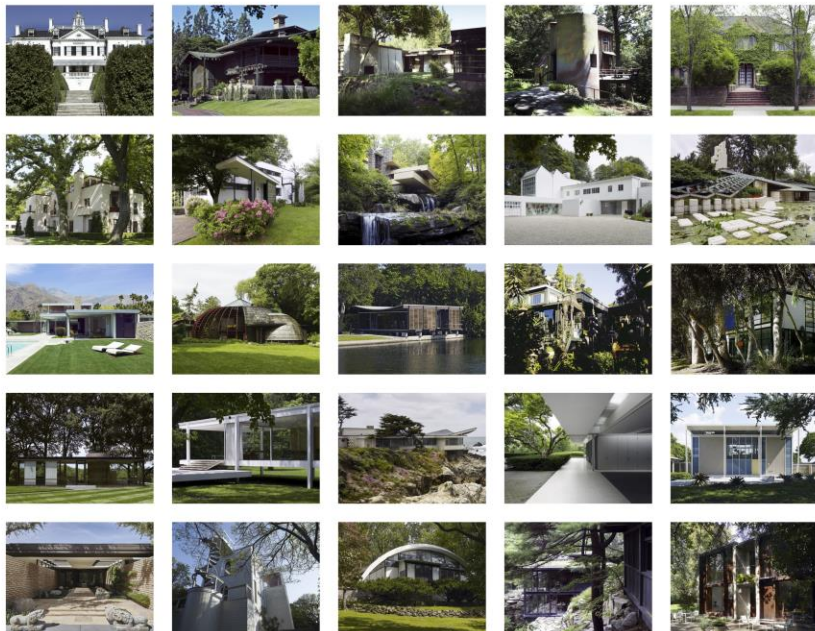


ARCHITECTURAL MASTERWORKS SINCE 1900

# THE ICONIC AMERICAN HOUSE

Dominic Bradbury  
Photography by Richard Powers





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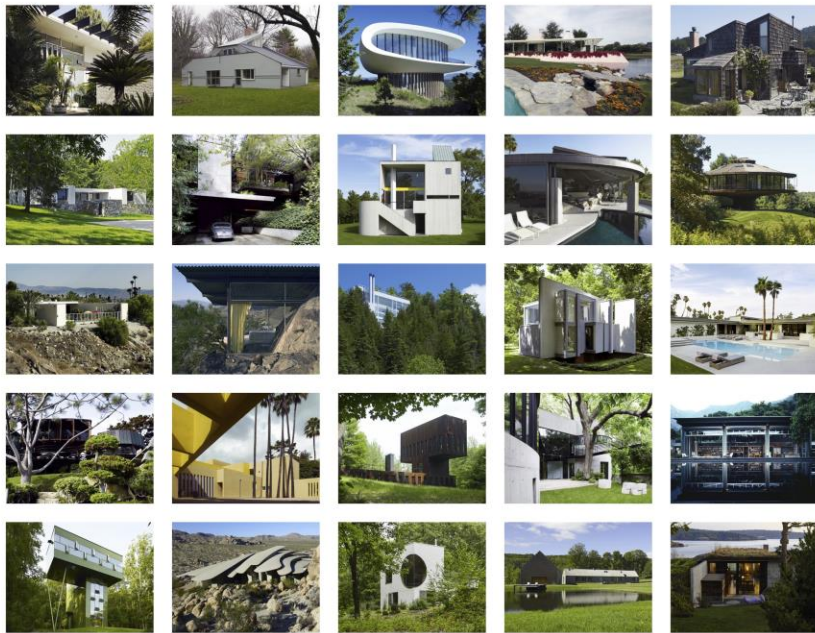
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## Introduction

The concept of the 'American Dream' encompasses the broad ideal of a better way of life. It offers a fresh start, an honest job and, above all, a home to call one's own. In America, the idea of building a home for oneself and one's family has always had an extraordinary resonance, beginning with early settlers on the East Coast, followed by adventurers pushing West. For many, the dream would never be complete without a house and a roof over one's head.

The pioneer spirit has been a vital spur towards construction and creativity, from prairie cabins to brownstones, and everything in between. The American vernacular was, in itself, a creative fusion drawn from the experience of the English, Dutch, Spanish, and many other incomers, fabricating an architectural approach that was both a new invention and a reworking of European ideas, styles and influences. It was old and new at the same time, with its form

and character also shaped by context. Farmhouses and barns, for instance, would be built with local materials such as timber or stone, and woven into the landscape with logic and practicality in a way that would help protect the building and its occupants from the elements.

In the modern era, the combination of this pioneering spirit and an openness to ideas and incomers has helped to forge some of the most important and influential houses in the world. There was a constant willingness to experiment and innovate, which helped to secure America's prominent position on the architectural map and send its fresh ideas back into the wider world.

Early in the 20th century, the novelist and designer Edith Wharton, along with her architect Ogden Codman, Jr, argued for an American version of pared-down neoclassicism. Wharton's home in Massachusetts, The Mount (1902; p. 14), was infused with French and



## Gamble House

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Greene & Greene (1909)

In the early 20th century Pasadena, situated towards the northern edge of greater Los Angeles, was known for its fresh air, green spaces and views of the San Gabriel mountains. One of its neighbourhoods was 'Little Switzerland', an area close to the Arroyo Seco (dry canyon), home to Brookside Park and the Rose Bowl Stadium.

Little Switzerland took its name not just from the topography, but also from the wooden chalet-style homes that dominated the neighbourhood. The most famous of these is the Gamble House, one of the finest exemplars of the Arts and Crafts style in America. There is something of a Swiss influence to the house, yet it also takes some conscious inspiration from Japanese architecture and garden design.

The architects, brothers Charles and Henry Greene, became key figures within the American Arts and Crafts movement, which was founded in part on the design philosophy championed by William Morris and John Ruskin in England during the late 19th century. In the US, the West Coast designer and publisher Gustav Stickley

promoted the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, with its use of natural, handcrafted materials over factory-made products, through his furniture and in the pages of *The Craftsman*, a journal founded by Stickley. The Greenes were contributors, and shared many of its values.

'Let us begin all over again,' wrote Charles Greene in 1907. 'We have got to have bricks and stone and wood and plaster: common, homely, cheap materials, every one of them. Leave them as they are ... why disguise them? The noblest work of art is to make these common things beautiful.'

Having founded their architectural practice in Pasadena in 1894, the brothers designed a number of houses in the area over the following years. The firm was a natural choice for David and Mary Gamble, when they decided to build a new winter residence for themselves in Little Switzerland. David Gamble was the wealthy son of the founder of Procter & Gamble, based in Cincinnati. He and Mary had three children to take into consideration, as well Mary's sister ('Aunt Julia'), who spent a good deal of time with the family.

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into the site, with Kaufmann requesting additional features, including a plunge pool by the stream, which were integrated into the design. Yet nagging doubts about the structural athletics involved in building with reinforced concrete, a practice that was still in its infancy, would eventually cause tensions between Kaufmann and Wright. The addition of extra steelwork also compromised the structure, leading to problems that eventually required considerable repair works by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in 2002.

Reinforced concrete slabs were used to cantilever the house out over the waterfalls of Bear Run, while walls of local stone help anchor the building to the site. The concrete framework took the structural load from the façade, allowing Wright to create horizontal bands of glass that connect the house to the surrounding woodlands. The ground floor holds a large, open-plan living room and dining area, flagged with stone, leading directly out to terraces to east and west, with the stream flowing underneath. The floor above holds three bedrooms and additional terracing, with the third storey devoted to







## Gwathmey House & Studio

AMAGANSETT, NEW YORK

Charles Gwathmey (1965)

This house in the Hamptons, designed Charles Gwathmey for his parents, can be seen as one of the great familial commissions. It was a generous act of faith, as he had only qualified as an architect a few years earlier, followed by a period spent in Europe visiting buildings by his architectural heroes, particularly Le Corbusier.

Upon his return, Gwathmey spent a short time working with Edward Larrabee Barnes, but gave up his job when his parents offered him, more or less, *carte blanche*. 'It was a very personal experience, and my parents did place a great deal of trust in me,' he explained. 'My mother said, "do what you would do for yourself"'. So I designed and built the house in a "naive" spirit that was unencumbered and uncontaminated, while committed to a modern ethic.'<sup>29</sup>

His parents, Robert and Rosalie Gwathmey, had acquired an acre of land near Amagansett, not far from the sea, at a time when Long Island was still the preserve of potato farmers, but was being discovered by artists including Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. They had a total of \$50,000

to both buy the land, which cost around \$15,000, and build the house. Having spoken with local contractors and realizing that it would be impossible to build the house he had in mind for such a limited budget, Gwathmey decided to act as the contractor himself, working alongside three craftsmen he brought over from Brooklyn.

There was another key compromise, as the young architect discovered that he would not be able to build with concrete, as he had hoped, and turned instead to a timber frame with cedar siding. Yet this decision did not affect the form of the house, which was influenced more by the inspiration of Le Corbusier, particularly the Chapel of Notre-Dame du Haut (1955) at Ronchamp, than by the vernacular influence of barns and silos, as later suggested by some commentators.

'I was very influenced by Le Corbusier at the time and wanted to make a volumetric building,' Gwathmey said. 'The modulation was all about ceiling height and form. Corbusier's plans were always very simple, but the spaces became very dynamic, spatial and complex. That was my motivation.'<sup>30</sup>

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Towards the rear, the building opens up to the courtyard, which holds the swimming pool. Banks of floor-to-ceiling sliding-glass windows blur the division between inside and outside space, while drawing light deep into the living areas and bedrooms. Landscaping and planting around the courtyard preserves privacy, without blocking the vista.

The current owners, who acquired the house after Betty Ford died in 2011, asked architectural firm Marmol Radziner to update the property, the same practice that restored Richard Neutra's Kaufmann Desert House (p. 72) in Palm Springs. Systems were

upgraded throughout, with a solar array fitted to the roof, providing electricity and hot water. Landscape designer Marcello Villano refreshed the planting and terraces, and interior designer Darren Brown was able to preserve or re-purpose a number of items of furniture that belonged to the Fords.

"We got quite a few pieces with the purchase of the house," the owners explain. "We would take a sofa or a chair and get it recovered, then we would save the fabric from the drapes and the chairs and have them made into bedspreads, so nothing was wasted."

