

LAWRENCE C. TEST

Architect

Lawrence Cook Test, a well-known architect who spent almost his entire life and career in Pasadena, was born in that city on October 31, 1891. He was of a Quaker background, the son of Lemuel Langstaff Test and Catherine M. (Cook) Test. The senior Mr. Test (1863-1933), born in Ohio, arrived in Pasadena from Iowa in 1887, and worked for the Model Grocery as a delivery driver. He eventually became a successful banker and insurance executive, very involved in the Masons and other civic organizations, both commercial and philanthropic.

Lawrence graduated from Pasadena High School in 1910. At the same time he worked as an office assistant for Reginald Johnson, one of Pasadena's major Period Revival architects. Lawrence subsequently attended Stanford for one year, but transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, well-known for its school of architecture that specialized in historical styles, known as "beaux arts."

After graduating from the University in 1920, Lawrence Test spent almost two years traveling in Europe, Egypt, Greece, and the Middle East, during which time he was quoted as saying, "I tried to absorb the atmosphere of each place, and strived to secure the underlying ideas governing the methods of architecture adopted." He was especially taken with the architecture of Spain and Italy, which would doubtless influence his designs of Mediterranean buildings back in California.

Following a brief stay in New York City and employment with an architectural firm there, he returned to Pasadena where the building business was booming.¹ He gained experience at a number of architectural firms, including the offices of Allied Architects and Edward Bergstrom where he became acquainted with Richard Neutra, soon to become a well-known pioneer of the Modern style. Only when he felt he was ready, in 1928, Mr. Test set up his own practice in Pasadena at 117 East Colorado Street, Room 224. (He would later move his office to 1041 East Green Street.) Although, in later times, he would work for a number of other firms and organizations, he always seemed to be given the freedom to complete his own independent commissions as well, usually domestic or residential projects, "of commendable design" (according to one newspaper). Many of his works just prior to, and following, World War II, made use of experimental materials and construction processes.

During the war, Mr. Test worked with the Army Corps of Engineers creating camouflage for airplane factories in Southern California. He also worked in Eaton Canyon for Caltech's Navy rocket program, the precursor of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Following the War, Mr. Test formed an association with Los Angeles architect Jess Stanton. In the mid-1950s, he joined the

staff of the University of Southern California as "University Architect" where he was responsible

¹ According to David Gebhard and Robert Winter in their guidebook to the architecture of Los Angeles, Mr. Test was once asked how he happened to go into architecture. "With so much building going on [in Pasadena], how could I think of anything else but architecture?" And he added slyly, "I wonder what would have become of me if I had been raised in Glendale or Monrovia?"

for the design of many modern buildings during the school's postwar growth.

Mr. Test then joined the Los Angeles firm of Smith, Powell and Morgridge, which specialized in the design of churches, schools, civic centers, and commercial buildings. Among his works at this time were the nursing building at Pasadena City College, the administration building at Cal State Fullerton, and the Sheriff Substation in Temple City.

Mr. Test retired from the profession in the early 1970s, but continued to give generously of his time and expertise, especially in the field of historic preservation. For instance, he participated in the remodeling of the kitchen at the Old Mill. He also had a lifelong interest in music, dance, theater, and writing poetry. Remembered as a "quiet, but exact, gentleman," Lawrence Test died on September 7, 1981 at the age of 89. He was survived by his wife Jane Ford Test (a Detroit native and graduate of Smith College) and their son Alan F. Test and daughter Mary Lawrence Test. A copy of Mr. Test's brief obituary from the *Pasadena Star-News*, as well as other biographical material, is attached.

Lawrence Test's work is characterized by a sense of rational order as a ruling principle of design, resulting in a feeling of simplicity, spaciousness, and repose. This was reflected in his practical and flowing room arrangements. Having benefitted from the rich background of his education and initial employments, Mr. Test seemed equally adept at all styles, be they International or Period Revival. His own home at 533 La Loma Road in Pasadena, re-designed and built by him in 1952, was originally a 757-square-foot outbuilding for a neighboring property. It underwent \$10,000 in alterations, including the addition of 2,200 square feet encompassing three additional bedrooms and bathrooms. It is recognized as one of his greatest achievements in modernism.

Mr. Test's use of carefully chosen textures and colors of subdued richness was often commented upon, as was his interest in natural-appearing materials such as redwood and adobe-colored stucco. He was also known for siting his houses so they would take maximum advantage of access to sunshine, air, and views to gardens and surroundings—a practice resulting in a "happy alliance with the land." Mr. Test worked to create a true California architecture that would harmoniously combine Old World traditions with modern appliances and "luxurious living."

Among the other many works by Lawrence Test (all in Pasadena unless otherwise noted):

Haskett-Simonds residence (1660 Lombardy Road)—1928; one of his earliest commissions, it attracted great interest from the public and was known for its "unusual" Italian details.

Capps residence (San Marino)—1929

R. E. Anderson residence (1285 Hillcrest Avenue)—1929

Herbert Hoover, Jr., residence (San Marino)—1932

Tussing residence (1201 Winston Avenue, San Marino)—1934

Workman residence (22633 Vanowen Street, Canoga Park)—1935; a re-working of the original "Shadow Ranch" house (ca. 1869) for playwrights Florence Rynerson and Colin Clements.

Residence (1844 Pepper Street, Altadena)—1936

Residence (1049 Nithsdale Road)—1936 (a Minimal Traditional, according to the City)

Edgar T. Howes residence (1590 Linda Vista Avenue)—1937

Robert Rypinski residence (84 Club Drive)—1937
Ford Stewart residence (808 Linda Vista Avenue)—1938
William M. Campbell residence (1540 Arroyo View)—1939
Residence (2084 Roosevelt Avenue, Altadena)—1939
Residence (600 Westover Place)—1940
Zwerneman residence (Whittier)—1941
Model homes for Sunny Hills Ranch (Fullerton)—1941
Dickinson residence (429 Bellmore Way)—1941; designed by Mr. Test in an International style with echoes of the Craftsman tradition with associate Woodbridge Dickinson, this house was featured in both the *Architectural Forum* and *House and Garden* magazines (the latter giving it an Honor Award).
Henry Hernly residence (1475 Scenic Drive)—1949; known for its experimental wall coverings of plywood on the interior and mahogany on the exterior—a good example of Test’s post-war use of unusual materials. Featured in the *Los Angeles Times*, it was said to exhibit “the skilled workmanship [that] is an echo of the Craftsman era.”
Residence (310 South San Rafael Avenue)—1953 (with landscape by Eckbo, Royston & Williams)

Many of Lawrence Test’s papers and drawings are housed at the University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara. An interview was conducted with Mr. Test by Robert Winter for Pasadena Heritage in July 1981, just before his death

Sources:

Gebhard, David and Robert Winter. *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*. Salt Lake City, Gibbs-Smith, 2003.

Los Angeles Times: November 5, 1933; July 1, 1951

Pasadena Heritage Newsletter: Spring 1982

Pasadena Star-News: May 7, August 3, and September 13, 1917; April 19, 1918; September 5, 1922; May 10 and November 22, 1923; November 4, 1933; September 9, 1981

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A VICTORIAN HOME



Lemuel Langstaff Test and his wife, Catherine Cook Test, are pictured here in their Raymond Avenue home in Pasadena about 1893. Above them is a picture of their baby son, Lawrence, who became an architect here. Originally in the grocery trade, Lemuel Test became quite successful in the insurance business. He was president of the Pasadena Board of Trade, an influential director of the YMCA and a member of the Pasadena Golf Club.

Researched and written by volunteer Sid Gally at the Pasadena Museum of History. Open to the public Wednesday through Sunday at 470 W. Walnut St. Exhibit halls and museum store open noon to 5 p.m.; library and archives 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.; mansion tours at 1:30 and 3:30 p.m.; (626) 577-1660; www.pasadenahistory.org; e-mail info@pasadenahistory.org

Pasadena Star-News
July 5, 2009

Pen Pictures of Pasadenans

No Life but Speeches
Some Great Lesson

LAWRENCE C. TEST, WHO IS AIDING UNCLE SAM

To meet a great disappointment courageously, and to "carry on" in spite thereof, is the mark of a hero. If that be true, Lawrence C. Test can qualify. Seriously injured in a street car accident last July, just before he expected to get into an ambulance unit in the East and start for France, the young man suddenly found all his plans gone awry, and only after three months in a hospital was he well enough to return home. Instead of giving up, he has been searching for some way in which to be useful to his fellow-men, and to the soldiers if possible. Having literary tastes, he quite naturally drifted into the war library work, and officials of the local library speak highly of the consistent, intelligent service he has rendered in preparing for shipment the 5000 books Pasadena has contributed. Always interested in good reading and in close touch with the likes and dislikes of Young America, he has had much to say about what books the boys would want and what they would not care for. He says he has been surprised to find so many people who think soldier boys would not care for books on the present war. This is a mistake, he says, for though they like fiction for recreation, they are eager to post themselves on every phase of international complications and devour all war books eagerly. This war library work still is on in Pasadena, though the active campaign has passed. The soldiers will continue to read and thus to wear out books, and new ones will have to be added. He therefore joins with others in urging that Pasadenans give this a prominent place in their minds and hearts.

Mr. Test is Pasadena born and educated. Son of Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Test, he graduated from Pasadena high school in 1910, attended Stanford university for two years, and decided to specialize in architecture. He spent a year in the office of Reginald Johnson here, then went to the University of Pennsylvania to have the opportunity to study under Paul Cret, the greatest French architect of the day, but the same summer he started East his intended master set out for home, called there by war emergencies.

At "Penn" he was always keenly interested in all forms of art and literature, and was a member of Delta Epsilon fraternity. He denies he is a poet, or anything akin to it, though many have very favorably commented on a verse of his that was published in a Pasadena magazine recently. "Tommy, Aviator," killed in action was the title of this poem, and the writer disclaims any great merit for it, saying it "just came to me and all I had to do was write it down." His friends are hoping other inspirations will follow suit, if they are anything like as good as that.

Though his accident has made it seemingly impossible ever to get into the ranks of fighters or ambulance men, he is trying to do his bravest here at home, and hopes to get into reconstruction work abroad when the cannons have been stilled and peace reigns.

Study Architecture at Its Fountain Head in Egypt and Greece

Lawrence C. Test Leaves for Year of Travel in Ancient Lands

To spend a year studying architecture at its sources is the plan of Lawrence C. Test, a young Pasadena man who left today on the Limited for New York, whence he will sail Wednesday for a long trip through Europe. Mr. Test is the son of Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Test of 360 Oakland avenue. He received his college training at Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania. At the latter institution he served as assistant to the dean of the university. Following his graduation he spent a year in the offices of a noted New York architect. About a year ago he returned to Pasadena for a vacation and soon took up work in the offices of Edward Bergstrom in Los Angeles.

On his present trip, Mr. Test will be accompanied by a college chum, George Gillett of Garden City, L. I. The two young men will land at Plymouth and visit the famous Cathedral and other points of architectural interest in England and Scotland. They will then go to France and Spain and thence into Morocco and Algiers, spending the winter in Egypt and Greece and journeying to Constantinople and Palestine in the spring. They hope further to proceed through Austria, Germany, back to France and North into Norway and Sweden.

No time schedule has been fixed by the travelers. They will spend a day or a month at the many points of interest, depending on what they may find of value to them as students. In this way, by easy stages, they hope to see the best the Old World has to offer to the new in architecture.

Youthful Architect

By GUSSTIE PACKARD DU BOIS

Pasadena Young Man Builds House That Recalls Days of the Old Days in California

One of the youngest members of the architectural fraternity in Pasadena, perhaps the youngest in business for himself, is Lawrence C. Test. He is one of our own boys, educated in our schools, and a part of our social life. He studied his profession in the University of Pennsylvania, and later abroad, serving also in larger offices before opening his own office in Pasadena. He has designed some commendable homes here, and is quietly and studiously feeling his way toward real California architecture combined with modern appliances for luxurious living, tying the two together in beautiful harmony. It is work such as this that we want to encourage and bring to perfection, and it is a pleasure to find this young artist working toward success.

It was my privilege recently to go through one of his houses, now completed. I found it noticeable for simplicity of outline; a long central portion with a wing at either end, but it is such simplicity that demands the highest artistic skill, even as a tailored garment must be perfect in fit, since there are no frills to hide scamped work.

It sat down well into its surroundings; the first thing I noted was a sense of space, created by the unusual length of the central part. Then I marked the color of the exterior, a warm old ivory, tinged toward a yellower tint, the wide front door, depressed, and flanked by windows at side and top and the real green shutters, made to close against light or heat. From these came the colonial or southern feeling. Just as I was getting this atmosphere, my eye was drawn to the railed balcony in the second story, and Spain asserted herself.

Entering, I faced a stairway of fine proportions, always a note of beauty with architectural such as I remember, shining down in my New England childhood days. At my left was the reception room—I like the term living room. Here, Mr. Test has succeeded in giving a sensation of spaciousness, while retaining its livableness. The room is very large. Two massive beams in the ceiling serve to break its length, and tie it together. The red brick fireplace is the dominant note. The long front porch and the patio at the rear, brought into the room by wide doors, disclose each their floor of red brick, and looking beyond, I marked the garden brick-walled. It was like a bit of reading, a repeated phrase, emphasizing the fireplace.

Like Garnered Sunshine

At the other end of the entrance hall was the dining room, opening

on a brick floored terrace. Midway was the library, its paneled walls of selected, knotted wood, giving a needed note of darker color to the interior, which otherwise, both walls and wood trim, is like garnered sunshine, the dark floors serving as background. So many houses shut out the light. The tiled service rooms are what our grandmothers used to call straw color, or pale buff, and the breakfast room has spring flowers growing over its walls.

I went up the easy ascent of the stairway, and found wide bedrooms opening on the long balconies; baths and showers of palest amber, one with picture tiles that looked like a bit of Holland, and with all the latest luxuries in "biling cases" for shirts, shoes, and other haberdashery, and all sorts of closes the like of which the early Californians could never have dreamed, but which modern life demands.

One is conscious of the outdoors from every room in the house. The walled garden is unusually spacious. At the center of the end wall stands a truly regal old oak, which mothers the whole place.

"Of what did you think first in your designing?" I asked Mr. Test. He paused a moment and replied, "The old oak." The house really radiates from that. "Then I thought of the early California days, when wealthy dons, building homes, brought doors and windows for them around the Horn; that meant Colonial. The Spanish element demanded balconies, so I tied those in. I recalled their famed hospitality with elegance of dress, and tried to suggest these." He has succeeded, for when I entered the reception room I thought of water and velvet, of trains and lilies and manillas. Those old dons and señoritas had open house and always guests; so it was necessary that I make it hospitable. In fact, I tried to take the best of those days, and add all the modern luxuries in a real Californian architecture, emphasizing outdoor life, which we are beginning to appreciate as we should."

Just California

He has arrived and it is just such artists as he, loving the past, looking to the future, who will preserve the best and create for us a distinctive style of architecture that will be worthy to bear our name—not Spain, not New England, but "Just California," stretching down the middle of the world.

TEST--Lawrence C. Test died September 7, 1981. Survived by his widow, Jane; daughter, Mary Lawrence Test; son, Alan F. Test; and one grand-daughter. Memorial service at All Saints Episcopal Church, 132 N. Euclid, Pasadena, at 11:00 A.M. Thursday, Sept. 10. Interment private at Mountain View Cemetery. Friends may send contributions to Friends of the Old Mill, 1120 Old Mill Rd., San Marino, Ca. 91108, or to the charity of their choice.

Pasadena Star-News
September 9, 1981; p. D-6

Pasadena Heritage
Newsletter
Spring, 1982

still a number of young architects who Lawrence had not yet made modest and even more architectural historians to whom he had not yet taught the lesson of exactitude.

Lawrence was punctiliously correct. When in doubt he was relentless until he found the answer that would relieve his dubiety. That was, as Lytton Stackey would say, the key to his character. Lawrence dove into the stacks of the Pasadena Public Library in order to find the truth for California Design as well as for Pasadena Heritage. He devoured the information in newspapers, city directories and other documents with a passionate desire to set things completely straight and to get the facts placed in their proper context... everything except his own age!

Lawrence was born and died in Pasadena. When late in life he was asked how he happened to go into the architectural profession Lawrence's face lit up: "Why, there was so much building going on in Pasadena when I was a boy that I never had any other thought than that I would be an architect." Even while attending high school he worked in the architectural office of Reginald Johnson, one of the great period revivalists, and after graduating he continued this work ("sharpened pencils," Lawrence said.) Then he went on to Stanford, but after a year, transferred to the great architectural school at the University of Pennsylvania where he worked under Paul Cret, a leading exponent of the ideas of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. It was from Cret that he learned the meaning and use of the historic styles and the concept of rational order as a ruling principle of design -- above all else, order.

Upon graduation (1920) he travelled in Europe and North Africa. Then, after working in New York for a time, he returned to Pasadena. He worked in several offices here and in Los Angeles. In fact, it was while working for Allied Architects on the Pasadena City Hall that his drafting table was next to that of Richard Neutra until both men went different ways.

When Lawrence opened his own office, he was conversant with the doctrines of the International Style and occasionally experimented with it (modular plywood panels in houses during the late fifties). But he was always more sympathetic to the period styles that he had learned from Cret and Johnson. Most of his work was domestic, but while with Powell and Morgridge, he also designed churches, college buildings and commercial architecture. He was for a time "University Architect" at the University of Southern California.

Although a good architect, Lawrence was probably happiest on the fringes of architecture after his retirement in the early seventies. He could devote his time to a variety of things -- his family (Jane, Mary Lawrence, Alan) and his friends, his interest in architectural history and its landmarks, vacations at Santa Fe and San Malo near Oceanside, and doing up bits of scholarship and architecture (the new kitchen at the Old Mill in San Marino was his last completed design).

He enjoyed nothing so much as driving about Pasadena and surveying his beloved city with clear and humorous eyes.

In Memorium

Lawrence Test

It was almost a year ago (September 7, 1982) that the Pasadena architect and gentleman, Lawrence Test, quietly as was his way, bowed out of our lives. Although reasonably good humored about the afflictions of his last days, he really didn't want to leave us. He still had too much to do. He was right in the middle of savoring Tom Wolfe's From Bauhaus to Our House, and enjoying the shock of Wolfe's savage treatment of "The Silver Knight" and his "modern movement" in architecture. There were, moreover,

