

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property**DRAFT**Historic name: Mini-Mod #3Other names/site number: N/AName of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 35255 Timber Ridge RoadCity or town: Sea Ranch State: California County: SonomaNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title:**Date**_____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:**Date**_____
Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Third Bay Tradition

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD: plywood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Located in The Sea Ranch, a master-planned community on the coast of unincorporated Sonoma County, Mini-Mod #3 is a split three-level residence with a compact 20'-by-20' square footprint and single steeply sloping shed roof. The 684-square-foot residence is located in a densely wooded 0.3-acre lot, surrounded by redwood trees. The wood post-and-beam building is set on a concrete perimeter foundation and is entirely clad in unpainted plywood panels. The residence embodies the local Third Bay Tradition of Modern architecture with its simple cubic form, unpainted wood exterior finishes, and complex interior volumetric plan. The only fully enclosed room inside the building is the bathroom, and the three open interlocking levels create a nuanced and efficient use of space and light. An exterior brick chimney extends along the tallest (north) elevation, and a projecting bay with a shed roof at the upper level of the east elevation breaks the otherwise flat planes that enclose the building. The property includes one contributing building, and it retains all aspects of historic integrity.

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Narrative Description

Setting

The residence is located in the dense redwood forest east of California State Route 1 (Highway 1) in The Sea Ranch. The property is an irregularly shaped parcel, and the residence is accessed via an unpaved driveway off Timber Ridge Road. Several fallen redwood trees were carefully retained in place, or slightly relocated, by the original architects to retain the natural forested environs. The area in front of the main entry porch is dirt, duff, and wood chips. A dirt walkway with square timber steps leads down along the west elevation to a patio with circular redwood cross-sectional pavers and a non-original, free-standing hot tub and a non-original wood deck with a chair carved into an existing redwood stump. An original rustic grape stake fence runs along the west side of the patio, driveway, and the residence's trash enclosure.

Exterior

The compact, split three-level residence has a simple cubic volume clad in unpainted plywood panels with a sloping shed roof. The woodgrain of the plywood panels provides visual texture and variation in color tone at the exterior. One projection with a shed roof—often referred to by The Sea Ranch architects as a “saddlebag”—cantilevers from the east elevation, housing two interior built-in bunk beds. The plywood panels are carefully aligned on center with other features, including windows, and have visible, flush nail fastenings. The roof is clad in asphalt shingles and has no eaves, except where it extends over a recessed front entry porch, and it features a simple wood board fascia with galvanized metal flashing. A galvanized metal-lined wood gutter at the south (primary) façade, along the lower end of the shed roof, projects out past the east elevation to shed water away from the building's exterior walls and foundation. Windows are located and sized according to the program of interior spaces, and they provide natural light and framed views. Accordingly, the rectangular windows have a variety of dimensions and irregular placement at the elevations. They are black aluminum frame slider, fixed and casement sash windows with flat wood board surrounds. Exterior doors are fully glazed black aluminum frame sliding doors, also with flat wood board surrounds. Wood boards matching the window and door surrounds are used to terminate the corners of each elevation.

The primary façade includes the primary entrance at a recessed entry porch below the low end of the shed roof. The concrete slab of the porch is level with the surrounding ground surface. A metal light fixture to the east (right) of the doorway is screened by a vertical wood board. A small laundry and mechanical room is accessible only from the exterior through a wood slab door at the east end of the entry porch.

The west elevation is defined by the steep profile of the shed roof and includes a secondary entrance off of the lower-level living room at the north (left) end. This entrance opens to a non-original exterior patio paved in sawn redwood logs. A wall-mounted light located south (right) of the doorway is shielded by a simple wood box, open at the top and bottom. A slider window is located at the center of the elevation, at the upper-level bedroom. A larger slider window is

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located at the south (right) end of the west elevation, which corresponds to the mid-level dining room.

The north elevation is the tallest elevation, terminating with the upper edge of the shed roof. The unfenestrated north wall of the cantilevered saddlebag projection is flush with the north elevation at the upper level. An exterior red brick chimney extends the full height of the elevation, located off-center at the east (left) third of the elevation. East (left) of the chimney is a slider window at the upper-level bunk room and a vertical fixed window at the lower-level living room. West (right) of the chimney is a narrow, vertical window with an operable lower sash, located at the upper-level bedroom loft. A large, fixed picture window is located at the west end of the lower-level living room.

The east elevation, like the west elevation, is defined by the steep profile of the shed roof. This elevation also traverses a steep grade change, and the concrete foundation steps up the site's slope from north to south. A slider window is located at the mid-level kitchen at the south (left) half of the elevation. At the center of the elevation, a small awning window is located just below the roof fascia at the upper-level bathroom. A narrow vertical slider window is located at the lower-level living room. The saddlebag projection housing two built-in bunk beds extends from the north (right) end of the elevation, just below the main roofline. The projection has a low-pitched shed roof clad with asphalt shingles and two small awning windows—one above each bunk—at the north (right) end of its east wall. Several small metal and wood-slat vents providing ventilation for various mechanical systems are located at the bottom of the elevations.

Interior

The residence has three interlocking interior levels that make efficient and nuanced use of space and light within a compact building footprint and volume. Interior walls are finished with gypsum board and the ceilings with unpainted wood boards; the structural wood beams are left exposed. The window openings have a squared plaster edge (with no interior trim surrounds) and simple, flat wood sills that are flush with the plane of the walls. The floors are painted plywood board, except at the middle level where they are a mottled gray rubber flooring. Narrow wood baseboard trim is typical throughout the house. The only fully enclosed room at the interior is the upper-level bathroom.

The main entrance on the south façade accesses the middle level dining room, which is open to both the lower-level living room and upper-level bedroom loft. East of the dining room is a small galley kitchen with non-original matte black laminate wood counters and lower cabinets. Open wood shelves are located on the north and south walls of the kitchen. A diagonal red supergraphic (added during the 2017 renovation) is painted on the north wall of the kitchen.

Between the kitchen and dining room, four wood steps flanked by simple, open wood railings lead down to the lower-level living room. A square wood post at the corner of the bed loft extends from the dining room (next to the living room steps) up to roof rafters. Sliding glass doors open out onto the west patio. An unornamented brick fireplace with no mantle is located at

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the north wall of the living room. A built-in L-shaped sofa is located in the southeast corner of the living room, below the stairs to the upper level.

Adjacent to the living room stairs is a separate staircase along the kitchen wall that leads to the upper level. The staircase's wood steps have open risers and a simple wood-frame balustrade enclosed with unpainted plywood. A partial-height wall encloses the main bed loft, which is otherwise open to the staircase and dining room below. A full-height gypsum board wall between the bed loft and stair has a vertical cutout, aligned with a vertical window on the north exterior wall. At the top of the stairs is a full-height closet that partially separates the main bed loft from the bunk room at the northeast corner. The two bunks are located within the cantilevered projection on the east wall. A hidden plywood partition along the south wall of the closets can swing out to enclose the bunk room. To the east (right) of the stair landing is a small full bathroom.

Alterations and Integrity

Mini-Mod #3 is one of three "Mini-Mod" model homes—each with a different layout adapted to its site—designed and built at The Sea Ranch by the architecture firm Joseph Esherick & Associates. Mini-Mod #1 (35447 Sea Gate Road) has been altered through a series of additions and window alterations, and both it and Mini-Mod #2 (304 Moonraker Road) have been reclad—one was altered from plywood to wood shingle siding, and the other from wood shake siding to vertical wood board. Mini-Mod #3 retains the most integrity of the three Mini-Mod model homes, with only in-kind replacement of exterior materials and minor, sympathetic modifications to interior kitchen cabinetry and flooring.

Alterations

Mini-Mod #3 has undergone compatible exterior modifications, which are primarily characterized by in-kind replacement of exterior materials due to deterioration, and minimal interior alterations. In 1972, the original owners, John and Carol Marchant, had conversations with original project architect George Homsey about a small addition to Mini-Mod #3, which was never realized. In 2012, the Marchants again contracted Homsey to assist with a rehabilitation project, as they had been using the house less frequently and some of the materials were falling into disrepair. The exterior siding—originally redwood plywood—was replaced with mahogany plywood to match the color, tone, and wood grain texture of the original siding that had significantly weathered and deteriorated.¹ The porch area retains original redwood siding. Original dark aluminum-frame windows and doors were also replaced in-kind with black aluminum-frame windows and doors with matching operability and within the same openings. Rigid foam insulation was added to the roof and Homsey detailed a slightly wider roof trim to accommodate this modification.

Over the years, the Marchants also replaced the asphalt roofing, changed various interior fixtures, and added a second wall-hung wood shelf on the north wall of the kitchen. The son of the original mason, who had also assisted with the original construction, repaired the brick

¹ By 2012, redwood plywood was no longer available as a replacement material. The new siding was installed over a new moisture barrier.

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fireplace. A tenant of the Marchants added the north deck, carved a chair into an existing redwood stump with a chainsaw, and installed circular redwood pavers at the west patio.

In 2017, the owners conducted a rehabilitation project that primarily included interior modifications, such as updating the kitchen counter, cabinets, and appliances, and the bathroom fixtures. The vinyl flooring in the mid-level kitchen and dining room was replaced, a non-original shelf on the north kitchen wall was replaced with a single shelf based on original drawings, and a new supergraphic was painted in the kitchen in the style of Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, the designer responsible for iconic supergraphics in other original buildings at The Sea Ranch. The finish of the stair balustrade to the upper level was changed to unpainted plywood (from plaster) based on original drawings. Closets in the loft bedroom and bunk room were modified to have plywood cabinets and a hidden partition that can open to enclose the bunk room, if desired, while still maintaining the open character of the interior; the plywood finish on the south wall of the closets match the plywood specified in original drawings. An unrealized exhaust system from the original designs was also implemented. The 2017 rehabilitation, overseen by owner and designer Chad DeWitt of Framestudio, received a Docomomo US “Modernism In America” Design Citation of Merit in 2020.

Integrity

Location: The property retains integrity of location, as the residence has not been moved from its original location of construction in 1967.

Design: Mini-Mod #3 retains integrity of design, as all alteration and rehabilitation projects were taken with careful consideration of the original form, massing, composition, materials, and overall design. The compact footprint and volume of the residence have been retained, as well as the interior interlocking three-level floorplan. No additions have been made that change the footprint or massing of the residence, all exterior materials have been replaced in-kind, and the fenestration pattern has remained unchanged. Significant features such as the overall volume, exterior brick chimney, shed roof, unpainted wood siding, and pattern of window and door openings corresponding to interior uses, are intact. Overall, Mini-Mod #3 retains a high level of design integrity based on the original 1967 design.

Setting: The property retains integrity of its setting, which is characterized by a dense redwood forest that blankets the sloped uplands of The Sea Ranch. While the surrounding parcels are developed with other residences, these are obscured by the site’s many mature trees—which preserve a sense of the quiet, forested environs that was envisioned in the master plan of The Sea Ranch. The siting of Mini-Mod #3 creates a sense of privacy and isolation from other residences. Redwood trees that were specifically selected for views through the residence’s windows remain, as do downed redwoods that the architects carefully noted on site plans to be retained or relocated so as to preserve the informal and natural floor of the forest. The original grape-stake fence and trash enclosure are also intact. An added west patio and north deck are made of wood and are compatible with the rustic setting.

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Materials: Mini-Mod #3 retains integrity of materials. Most interior materials are original to the residence, and exterior materials have been replaced in-kind based on original documentation. The exterior brick chimney has been retained and repaired appropriately. All aluminum-frame windows were replaced with new aluminum-frame windows utilizing the original windows' sizes, locations, and types of operability. Due to excessive deterioration, the exterior redwood plywood siding panels and window surrounds were replaced with mahogany plywood that closely matches the color and grain texture of the original; redwood was not available as a replacement material by the time of the renovation. Care was taken in aligning the size and location of the plywood panels based on the original design. Original interior materials include the exposed post-and-beam framing, wood ceilings, wood stairs, south shelving in the kitchen, and plywood flooring. Interior features that were repaired or replaced in kind include the gypsum board wall finishes and rubber flooring at the kitchen and dining room. Materials restored based on original drawings include the unpainted plywood stair balustrade and wall-mounted shelf on the north wall of the kitchen.

Workmanship: The 2012 exterior rehabilitation work was undertaken in collaboration with the original architect and expresses the craftsmanship associated with The Sea Ranch. Fairly simple construction methods and rough, exposed materials are paired with an intense level of siting and detailing; careful consideration was given to the siting of the building and its openings, as well as alignment of exterior plywood panels with window openings. At the interior, structural wood beams, wood ceiling boards, plywood floors, wood stairs, and kitchen shelves are left exposed, which also contributes to the naturalistic character of the residence. The physical qualities of Mini-Mod #3 reflect a high level of craftsmanship achieved with affordable and widely available materials (rather than high-end, expensive finishes).

Feeling: Mini-Mod #3 has had no major exterior modifications to its overall massing, footprint, or design, and it retains its relationship to the site and setting of the surrounding redwood forest. The property retains its quiet, private setting, with minimal interventions to the immediately surrounding landscape. Views of redwood trees framed by windows in the house have been maintained, as well as downed redwood trees as specified on original site plans. The feeling of "living lightly on the land" and integrated with nature, which are key principles of The Sea Ranch ethos, have been maintained at Mini-Mod #3.

Association: The property retains a strong association with the Mini-Mod model homes developed by the firm Joseph Esherick & Associates for Oceanic Properties during the early phase of development at The Sea Ranch in the 1960s. Mini-Mod #3 is one of only three Mini-Mods constructed, and it retains its overall original design that expresses the core characteristics of the Third Bay Tradition. The residence retains its ability to convey a compact model for weekend retreat homes at The Sea Ranch.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1967

Significant Dates

1967

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Joseph Esherick & Associates (firm)

Esherick, Joseph (architect)

Homsey, George (project architect)

W. D. McAlvain Const. Co. (builder)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Mini-Mod #3 is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The property embodies the principles that informed the early phase of planning and design of residences and other facilities at The Sea Ranch during the mid- and late-1960s, realized at a relatively small and economical scale. Mini-Mod #3 was designed by the architectural firm of Joseph Esherick & Associates, which was among the first generation of designers hired by Oceanic Properties to develop the environmental design concepts of The Sea Ranch. The residence specifically reflects the contributions of firm principal and long-term Esherick associate, George Homsey. Constructed and completed in 1967, Mini-Mod #3 was the final of three “Mini-Mod” demonstration houses designed by Esherick’s firm and retains the most intact design and materials of the three. The residence was planned to illustrate a comparatively modest and affordable approach to The Sea Ranch’s architectural ethos. Namely, the residence’s design incorporated a pared-down palette of local materials, subdued but expressive form echoing the surrounding hillside, and compact floor plan that promoted interaction among interior spaces and the surrounding environs. The building remains an excellent and well-preserved example of Third Bay Tradition residential architecture, the Northern Californian regional idiom of architectural Modernism that gained broad national influence after it took root at The Sea Ranch in the mid-1960s. The period of significance is 1967, the year of construction.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Sea Ranch: Early Phase (1962-1965)

The Sea Ranch is a master-planned community along 10 miles of rugged Northern California coastline in unincorporated Sonoma County, 90 miles north of San Francisco, that is defined by its ideals of environmental conservation, architectural design, and community ethos. While many people are drawn to the area for its natural beauty, the landscape architects and architects involved in the early design and planning of The Sea Ranch were very aware that this stretch of land had been managed by various communities for generations—initially the Pomo people (the area’s indigenous inhabitants), later loggers in the late 1800s, and then sheep ranchers.² By the 1960s, Highway 1 cut down the coast and divided the redwood forest to the east from an ocean terrace with open meadows and steep, rocky cliffs to the west. The Sea Ranch principle of “living lightly on the land” created a framework for modern residential development that balanced the conservation and protection of natural topography, vegetation, and views.³ A respect for the land informed the site planning, which clustered various residential unit types

² Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher, Joseph Becker, and Phil Mariani, eds., *The Sea Ranch: Architecture, Environment, and Idealism* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2018), 101; William Turnbull, Jr. and Donlyn Lyndon, *GA Residential Masterpieces 29: MLTW/Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull and Whitaker. The Sea Ranch, California 1963-.* Yukio Futagawa, ed. (Tokyo: GA A.D.A., 2019), 6.

³ Dunlop Fletcher, Becker, and Mariani, *The Sea Ranch*, 31.

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together near hedgerows— providing breaks from the whipping coastal winds—and on the edges of meadows. On the forested upland side of Highway 1, the houses would be tucked into the woods along winding roads through the redwood forest to minimize visibility and increase privacy. Meadows, coastal and forest trails, and recreational facilities would be maintained as common amenities for The Sea Ranch’s residents.⁴

The idea of The Sea Ranch germinated with Alfred “Al” Boeke (1922-2011), a trained architect who had worked with Richard Neutra in Los Angeles and later became a real estate developer for Oceanic Properties.⁵ After success with the development of a planned community in Hawaii, Boeke identified the stretch of Sonoma coastline during a 1962 scouting trip as the site of his next project. Boeke was inspired by the New Town movement in Europe, which combined social and environmental ideals into town planning and development. In early 1963, Boeke hired landscape architect and environmental planner Lawrence Halprin (1916-2009) to design a master plan for what became known as The Sea Ranch.⁶ Halprin was himself inspired by the experience of living on a kibbutz in Israel and also felt that cultivating active community-building and a strong sense of place would be vital to The Sea Ranch.⁷

Boeke hired Charles Moore, Donald Lyndon, William Turnbull, and Richard Whitaker, who worked together as the architectural firm MLTW, to design a condominium and recreation center for the new community, known as Condominium One. The condominium embodied several key design, social, and environmental principles of the overall project, including clustered development in unique modular residential units and use of local materials. Condominium One represented a balance in communal living with individualized private respites, and the building helped to define what became known as Northern California’s Third Bay Tradition of regional architecture. Working at the same time, Joseph Esherick & Associates designed a general store and series of “demonstration houses” for Boeke that illustrated the architectural possibilities while working within the constraints of the Halprin master plan and the environmental conditions.⁸ By 1965, real estate attorney Reverdy Johnson integrated The Sea Ranch’s early design principles and requirements into the community’s covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs), and formal design guidelines and a review committee were implemented.⁹

The Demonstration Houses

As The Sea Ranch’s developer, Oceanic Properties was heavily invested in the evolution of the site’s overall architectural and landscape vocabulary. The Sea Ranch remained a business venture as much as a design experiment, and Oceanic staff members were intensely aware of the need to sell lots and make the venture profitable. To attract interest in the community and to

⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁵ Oceanic Properties was a division of Castle & Cooke, which itself was a subsidiary of Dole Food Company.

⁶ “Timeline,” The Journey to the Sea Ranch, UC Berkeley Environmental Design Archives and University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, <https://searanch.ced.berkeley.edu/s/sea-ranch/page/timeline>.

⁷ Dunlop Fletcher, Becker, and Mariani, *The Sea Ranch*, 101.

⁸ Joseph Esherick, “An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1938-1996,” oral history conducted by Suzanne B. Riess, 1994-1996, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1996, 577.

⁹ Dunlop Fletcher, Becker, and Mariani, *The Sea Ranch*, 32.

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show prospective buyers how The Sea Ranch's design principles could be realized comfortably, Oceanic commissioned the architectural firm Joseph Esherick & Associates in 1963 to design a collection of "Demonstration Houses" for one of the most picturesque and exposed coastal sites on the ocean terrace. These residences are also frequently referred to as either the "Cluster Houses" or "Hedgerow Houses": the selected lots lie along the north side of a cypress hedgerow near Black Point and are accessed from Black Point Reach. The Sea Ranch was not strictly a speculative housing development, meaning many property owners were responsible for hiring their own architects and contractors to build their homes. The Demonstration Houses and Condominium One were among the residential projects for which Oceanic Properties served as the direct client.¹⁰

In collaboration with firm founder Joseph Esherick, principal George Homsey drew up several designs for the first Demonstration Houses at the same time that MLTW developed a scheme for Condominium One.¹¹ Al Boeke has recalled that he directed Esherick's staff not to share notes with the other design team saying, "Take the ecological material and digest it and use it as you will but come up with your own thing so that maybe there is some variety between the two of you."¹²

As a testament to the clarity of the initial The Sea Ranch design philosophy and the influence of the natural environment, the forms and materials of the detached homes designed by Esherick's firm complemented the architectural qualities of Condominium One despite the firewall between design teams. While the condominium building was a sprawling yet unified complex that accentuated the towering coastal cliffs, the Demonstration Houses presented a more organic and harmonious response to the landscape of the ocean terrace.¹³ Each house contained a legible primary volume crowned by a shed roof rising to the south for gusting winds from the northwest, typically with several projecting bays and small wings. The sloped roofs were oriented away from prevailing winds, which offered the leeward sides of the buildings some protection. As later described by architect and historian Marc Treib in a monograph of Esherick's residential work,

The final plans continued a pattern by then common in Esherick houses: clean boxes set against one another—perhaps in a staggered relationship—or rectangular volumes architectonically energized by protruding bays set orthogonally or diagonally to the dominant geometry. The façades were planar with few protrusions. [...] As a totality the play of walls

¹⁰ Al Boeke, "Al Boeke, Oceanic Properties, Vice-President: 1959-69," oral history conducted by Kathryn Smith, 2008, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2010, 62.

¹¹ Although the Demonstration Houses are widely attributed to Esherick himself, Homsey has stated that he was chiefly responsible for bringing the designs to fruition. See George Homsey, "#5 Interview With George," interview by Helen Degenhardt, January 25, 2011, published in George Homsey, *Dinner With George* (San Francisco: EHDD, n.d.), 63.

¹² Boeke, "Al Boeke," 63.

¹³ In an oral history, Esherick stated that Charles Moore of MLTW "wanted to do something [for Condominium One] that both worked with the site but was hostile to the site, whereas the cluster houses are very harmonious and integrated." Esherick, "An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area," 575.

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and windows renders the house an observatory for viewing the landscape and the ocean: windows frame particular episodes of forest, grassland, or sea; light energizes the entirety.¹⁴

One and two stories tall, the Demonstration Houses huddled against their hedgerow and were sited somewhat irregularly to maintain views of the rugged coastline through large, fixed windows. Unlike the wood board-clad Condominium One, the Demonstration Houses were sheathed in wood shakes, and the roofs of some examples were even covered in sod and grass. In 1965, one of the earliest articles on The Sea Ranch published in a nationwide periodical plainly stated that the first four “rough and simple” Demonstration Houses “reflect the character of the land.”¹⁵

Despite their modern forms and simple material palettes, the Demonstration Houses were also meant to appeal to buyers who sought reasonably comfortable accommodations within a remote coastal landscape. The careful balance between experimentation and convention underscored a tension inherent in The Sea Ranch philosophy—residents sought exposure to the ruggedness of the site and also needed shelter from it, and they did not intend to abandon all of the trappings of home. Oceanic’s salespeople continued to drive prospective buyers past the Demonstration Houses in order to show the buildings’ successful approach to The Sea Ranch’s climate and landscape.¹⁶ Each of the residences also incorporated a fenced yard on its south side, where residents could find some protection from the wind and still enjoy a version of California’s coveted indoor-outdoor lifestyle. One architecture journal noted that the Demonstration Houses “are just conventional enough to deceive the sub-urban housewife.”¹⁷

The Mini-Mod Concept

In spring 1966, following the completion of the first Demonstration Houses, Oceanic Properties approached Joseph Esherick & Associates to request designs for two new residences at The Sea Ranch. The concept behind these two houses—which were variously described in project correspondence as “small model houses,” “little demonstration houses,” and the memorable neologism “Mini-Mods”—was to showcase house designs that fit The Sea Ranch’s design ethos and could be constructed more affordably than the initial Demonstration Houses. As Esherick later recalled in an oral history about his career,

They were very small model houses—the design was actually commissioned by The Sea Ranch [Oceanic Properties] as a very small house that could be reproduced anyplace. Bill Turnbull did a bunch that are known as barns [“Binker Barns”]. Rather than calling them small models, or something like that, I just decided Mini-Mod sounded jazzier.¹⁸

¹⁴ Marc Treib, *Appropriate: The Houses of Joseph Esherick* (San Francisco, CA: William Stout Publishers, 2008), 215-219.

¹⁵ “Second-Home Communities,” *Architectural Record* (November 1965): 154.

¹⁶ “Ecological Architecture: Planning the Organic Environment,” *Progressive Architecture* 47, no. 5 (May 1966), 128-130; Boeke, “Al Boeke,” 62.

¹⁷ “Ecological Architecture,” 130.

¹⁸ Esherick, “An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area,” 583.

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This underscores an important distinction between the first Demonstration Houses and the subsequent Mini-Mods. Whereas the Demonstration Houses had unique designs intended to inspire buyers, the Mini-Mods were more akin to model homes whose designs were available for replication on different sites throughout The Sea Ranch.

Per Oceanic's direction, each house was to be constructed for no more than \$15,000. Esherick's firm appears to have received few other parameters for designing the two Mini-Mods, although each needed a fenced service yard. The designs also had to be developed so that the residences could be expanded in the future with additional bedrooms. The firm later drew up several schemes for additions to the Mini-Mods, although it does not appear any of these was ever realized as such.¹⁹ As during the design and construction of the Demonstration Houses, Esherick served as the firm's primary point of contact with decision makers at Oceanic Properties. Homsey appears to have served as the project architect who refined the broad design concepts devised by Esherick.

Oceanic Properties selected two dissimilar sites for the first Mini-Mods, each reflecting the natural characteristics of its respective area of The Sea Ranch. The parcel chosen for Mini-Mod #1 (Unit 7, Block 2, Lot 10; later 35447 Sea Gate Road) lay on the gently sloping and predominantly open "ocean terrace" between Highway 1 and the rugged coastline. In this location nestled against a hedgerow, the house enjoyed unobstructed views towards the Pacific Ocean, and photographs from the late 1960 depicted it as the solitary built feature in its vicinity. In contrast, the location chosen for Mini-Mod #2 (Unit 4, Block 4, Lot 8; later 304 Moonraker Road) lay above (east of) Highway 1. This site embodied another side of The Sea Ranch's landscape, characterized by a dramatic hillside slope and a dense forest of towering redwood trees. In its forested environment, Mini-Mod #2 was meant to blend in with its site rather than stand out from it. Homsey later commented that the Mini-Mods were "so simple that they'd just sit in the woods and you'd never see them. They're like a lot of Mediterranean buildings—the cubes that sit on the Greek Islands. They just sort of sit there."²⁰

Project records indicate Esherick's office produced initial sketches of the Mini-Mods' basic form and floor plan concepts in April 1966, which introduced a compact square-plan volume with a steeply pitched shed roof.²¹ The firm signed a contract with Oceanic Properties for the design of both houses in June of that year. The contract stated the two Mini-Mods would be "approximately 840-square feet each, of basically identical design, to be executed simultaneously in all stages of work, including design, bidding, and construction." For the design

¹⁹ Emmett R. De Moss, Jr. to Joseph Esherick, April 21, 1966, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617; Geoffrey Fairfax to Joseph Esherick, June 13, 1966, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617; Joseph Esherick to Geoffrey Fairfax, June 20, 1966, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617.

²⁰ Homsey, "#5 Interview," 68-69.

²¹ Joseph Esherick & Associates, untitled sketches, April 23, 1966, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617.

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of the two houses, Oceanic Properties agreed to pay Esherick's office a fixed fee of \$4,000, plus an additional \$100 for each instance of the same plans being used on additional properties.²²

George Homsey, working in close collaboration with Esherick, set about developing working drawings for the Mini-Mods in order to advance a design concept that could be adapted and constructed on both sites. Before the end of June, he submitted a primary scheme (Model A) to Oceanic Properties, along with three variants (Models B, C, and D) that could be constructed for somewhat lower costs. Esherick wrote that one of these design variants would allow Mini-Mod #1 to be constructed for under the allotted \$15,000 since its site required a greater investment in road and utility work.²³

The plans for Model A introduced a general scheme that was ultimately realized at all three Mini-Mods. The general form of the residence remained true to the earliest sketches, comprising a roughly square-plan building with a striking single roof slope of 4.5/12 pitch. The split-level plan of the house placed the kitchen and dining room at the intermediate level of the main entrance, under the low end of the roof slope. A set of steps descended from the dining room to a lower level containing a living room (the house's principal social space), a bedroom, and a bathroom. A flight of stairs off the kitchen climbed to the upper level, under the high end of the roof, which contained an unprogrammed loft and a second fully enclosed bedroom.²⁴

Model B was a slightly smaller version of Model A, while Model C was a one-story variant of Model B that entirely abandoned the upper loft, bedroom, and bathroom. Although it provided considerably less space than the other models, Model C offered the greatest cost savings. Model D shared several aspects of Model A's floor plan but was somewhat smaller (approximately 640 square feet) and relocated the bathroom to the upper level, adjacent to the loft.

Esherick recommended to Oceanic Properties that they use Model A for Mini-Mod #1, then construct the design variants on multiple other sites, even though this approach would have exceeded the company's initial budget of \$30,000 for the two Mini-Mods. Oceanic Properties ultimately decided to apply Model D to both of the initial Mini-Mods—while directing Esherick to reverse the design for the forest site (Mini-Mod #2) so that the residences were not strictly identical to one another.²⁵ During the remainder of 1966 the design team finalized plans, made decisions regarding finishes and furnishings, and coordinated with their contractor, the W.D. McAlvain Construction Company of Sebastopol.²⁶

²² Joseph Esherick & Associates, "The Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect for Sea Ranch Model Houses," June 14, 1966, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617.

²³ Esherick to Fairfax, June 20, 1966.

²⁴ Joseph Esherick & Associates, "Mini-Mod: A," n.d., Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617.

²⁵ Esherick to Fairfax, June 20, 1966.

²⁶ Various letters, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617.

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The first two Mini-Mods were completed in the first half of 1967. Although strikingly similar in form and plan, the design team appears to have made several adaptations so that the two houses were ultimately not mirror images of one another. Instead, their differences reinforced the adaptability of the original plans drawn up by Esherick's office. The most obvious differences were that Mini-Mod #1 was clad in wood shakes, similar to the earlier Demonstration Houses that were also located on the ocean terrace. Mini-Mod #2 was constructed on a challenging hillside site, requiring complex foundation work and deck construction to traverse a steep grade change. In contrast to the shake cladding of its counterpart, the exterior walls of Mini-Mod #2 were sheathed in redwood plywood boards that reinforced the home's visual and material harmony with its wooded setting. In keeping with other residential projects of Joseph Esherick & Associates, the placement of windows reflected the views available on a given site.

Designing and Constructing Mini-Mod #3

During the first week of 1967, as planning for the initial two Mini-Mods remained underway, Oceanic Properties' Joseph McClelland drafted a letter to Joseph Esherick that introduced Oceanic's interest in designing and constructing a third Mini-Mod. The location that McClelland proposed was Block 1, Lot 6 in Unit 5 (later 35255 Timber Ridge Road), an irregularly shaped parcel along the elevated eastern boundary of The Sea Ranch. The parcel lay to the north of Mini-Mod #2, within a similar densely wooded setting above Highway 1. The new site was somewhat more level than the sloped lot where Mini-Mod #2 stood. McClelland's proposal to Esherick made clear that Oceanic expected the third Mini-Mod to closely resemble the designs of the first two, although adjusted to fit on its chosen site. He also expressed a desire for several modifications, suggesting ideas such as "extending the building roof to form a carport, providing a balcony, having the living area upstairs and the bedroom downstairs, etc."²⁷ McClelland desired that the new design should not exceed \$1,500 in additional construction costs, i.e., it needed to be built for less than \$16,500.

For his part, Esherick appears to have found the Mini-Mod project worthwhile and supported the effort to have more affordable house designs available for adaptation and replication. As he wrote to Fairfax in early 1967, "I think if there is a real bite from the public for the first two models once they are shown, and assuming you can make something on them, it would really be worth the effort. It does get people up there and does show that you don't have to build a very expensive house."²⁸

Over the next month, Esherick's office drew up preliminary plans for Mini-Mod #3, while engineers looked into more mundane issues such as the placement of the septic tank and configuration of paving for the drive. Available correspondence and secondary sources generally do not describe the respective contributions of Esherick and Homsey to the house's design. It appears that the plans were developed under the close direction of Homsey, who contributed

²⁷ Joseph McClelland to Joseph Esherick, January 5, 1967, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617.

²⁸ Joseph Esherick to Geoffrey Fairfax, January 10, 1967, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617.

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substantially to much of the firm's work at The Sea Ranch although his role is frequently unattributed—likely because the office bore the name of only its founding architect.

In mid-February, the design of the residence was substantially complete, and the architects had identified several adaptations to the basic plan of the earlier Mini-Mods. Esherick conveyed these recommendations for Mini-Mod #3 to Oceanic Properties:

- Lower the height of the mid-level kitchen and dining room, which would improve its programmatic connection to the lower living room while also reinforcing the privacy of the upper-level bedrooms;
- Adjust the staircases to accommodate the slightly lowered kitchen level, with five steps leading down and eight steps leading up;
- Place the projecting front storage room on a concrete slab rather than on a cantilevered deck;
- Widen the front roof overhang so that it spanned the entire front (south) side of the residence; and
- Introduce more fencing between the Mini-Mod and Timber Ridge Road, given that the residence was more exposed to its road than the earlier Mini-Mods.²⁹

Esherick's correspondence mentioned one additional design adaptation almost in passing, although it is the most noticeable element that distinguished Mini-Mod #3 from the earlier two iterations. He wrote that the architects added a closet to the primary bedroom, which required them to reconfigure the spaces on the upper level. Esherick wrote that "we have cantilevered a bay out at the northeast bedroom" to ensure both of the upper bedrooms would be large enough to comply with building code.³⁰ At nearly seven-and-one-half feet wide, the bay accommodated interior bunk beds at the upper level. It was crowned by a secondary shed roof, which added volumetric complexity to the otherwise monolithic mass of the residence. Esherick later remarked in a letter that "I think we have arrived, with the current model, with a house that is far superior to our previous design and which at least takes care of flatter slopes with ease."³¹

Although none of the recommended adaptations of the earlier Mini-Mod plan aligned with the initial concepts that Oceanic had suggested to Esherick, Geoffrey Fairfax appears to have received the progress drawings enthusiastically and did not object to the architects' new recommendations. Fairfax was intrigued by the cantilevered saddlebag bay off the upper-level bedroom and wanted to know how much it would add to the total cost. He seems to have understood its value as a visual framing device, and he told Esherick that "assuming that it is

²⁹ Esherick suggested that a new grape stake fence could be installed, but also that Oceanic could consider reusing the "old ranch fences" that had been salvaged from agricultural properties previously on The Sea Ranch site. Joseph Esherick to Geoffrey Fairfax, February 15, 1967, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6709.

³⁰ Esherick to Fairfax, February 15, 1967.

³¹ Joseph Esherick to Geoffrey Fairfax, February 24, 1967, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6709.

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within reason, we should continue with it and should consider making it glassier where warranted by views.”³²

The development of the design of Mini-Mod #3 underscored the difficulty that Ocean Properties encountered with all of the Demonstration Houses. Fairfax shared with Esherick that the model homes like the Mini-Mods were proving more expensive to build than Oceanic Properties desired, thus limiting their utility for selling lots at The Sea Ranch. The primary reason Fairfax cited was the higher than anticipated costs of the architectural services required to adjust the standardized designs for each unique lot configuration. Due to the constraints of the project budget, Fairfax directed Esherick and his colleagues to develop a set of plans that were more easily adaptable to a given site with as minimal a role for the architect as possible:

a finished drawing which with various footing notes and details indicates modifications required for sites of varying terrain—level, up-slope, and down-slope [...] A set of drawings which indicates a house design easily adaptable to varying sites will help us in selling “packages” [of lots and house plans together].³³

By keeping the drawings as standardized as possible, with only a few details to be worked out by a contractor, Oceanic Properties sought “a program that is above all comprehensible and easy for the buyer.”³⁴ Based on correspondence, Esherick understood Oceanic Properties’ motivations but felt that the additional architects’ fees were commensurate to the amount of technical input he felt was necessary to adapt the standard design to the characteristics of a given site.³⁵

Drawings for Mini-Mod #3 were completed in February 1967, and early the next month the architects accepted a bid of just over \$14,000 from the W.D. McAlvain Construction Company, the same contractor that had built Mini-Mods #1 and #2. The architects received \$500 for their work. In short order, Oceanic Properties formally authorized construction of the residence, which then proceeded quickly. A notice published in a Santa Rosa newspaper in early May announced Sonoma County had issued a permit to Oceanic Properties for a residence at 35255 Timber Ridge Road. According to the recollections of the first owner, Carol Marchant, the house was constructed within three weeks. Although many of the available correspondence and notes related to the project date to May and early June 1967, work appears to have continued through the summer; final inspections may have occurred in September. George Homsey appears to have overseen construction administration, as project records include several memos and letters between him and the contractors.³⁶

³² Geoffrey Fairfax to Joseph Esherick, February 28, 1967, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6709.

³³ Geoffrey Fairfax to Joseph Esherick, February 15, 1967, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6709.

³⁴ Fairfax to Esherick, February 15, 1967, 2.

³⁵ Esherick to Fairfax, February 24, 1967.

³⁶ Joseph Esherick to Joseph McClelland, March 4, 1967, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6709; George Homsey to M.W. McAlvain Construction Company, March 6, 1967, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California,

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Similar to the Demonstration Houses, Oceanic Properties intended to stage all three of the Mini-Mods for viewings before selling them. Esherick's office drew up a furniture plan that proposed beds, tables, desks, couches, chests, and rugs, and Oceanic expressed the desire to rotate furniture among the model homes.³⁷

Following the completion of Mini-Mod #3 in 1967, the residence was not sold for more than a year—suggesting that Oceanic Properties showed it, like the earlier Demonstration Houses, to prospective buyers for a period of time before it was formally listed for sale. The ultimate buyers were John and Carol Marchant of Berkeley, who acquired the parcel containing Mini-Mod #3 in February 1969.³⁸ They remained the owners of the property until the 2010s. John Marchant was elected to the board of directors of The Sea Ranch Association just one year after purchasing Mini-Mod #3, and he served multiple terms. Notably, Marchant was the board president during The Sea Ranch Association's protracted negotiations with the California Coastal Commission that sought to establish a program for new development at The Sea Ranch following the passage of the California Coastal Zone Conservation Act of 1972.³⁹

During the initial development phase of The Sea Ranch in the 1960s, numerous architectural periodicals and mainstream media outlets published articles describing the community's then-novel approach to ecological conservation and architectural Modernism. Condominium One, the Demonstration Houses, and The Sea Ranch Lodge all were widely praised and the three Mini-Mods received far less attention. Even so, the houses appear to have been understood at the time as a particular template of residential design at The Sea Ranch that distilled the development's architectural qualities down to its most basic elements. For example, a local newspaper advertisement published in 1974 for a newly constructed residence at The Sea Ranch described it as an "exciting split-level with window seats, similar in architecture to the original Sea Ranch mini-Eshericks."⁴⁰

Joseph Esherick & Associates: Joseph Esherick and George Homsey

The architectural legacy of The Sea Ranch is closely associated with the career of Bay Area architect Joseph Esherick (1914-1998), an influential figure of twentieth-century environmental design in Northern California. Although Esherick's career flourished on the West Coast, he was born in Pennsylvania. He later described his family as artistically unadventurous with one primary exception: his uncle Wharton Esherick, a wide-ranging artist and craftsman known for creating forward-looking, sculptural wood furniture. The younger Esherick received a relatively

Berkeley, Project File 6709; "Sonoma County Building Permits," *Press Democrat*, May 7, 1967, 6E; Carol Marchant, undated letter, collection of Framestudio.

³⁷ Joseph Esherick & Associates, "Sea Ranch Mini Mods Furniture Layout," December 22, 1966, Joseph Esherick Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, Project File 6617; McLelland to Esherick, January 5, 1967.

³⁸ Sonoma County Clerk-Recorder, Grant Deed, Oceanic Properties to John B. and Carol L. Marchant, Lot 1, Block 6, The Sea Ranch No. 5 Tract, Book 2379, Page 376.

³⁹ "Sea Ranch Association Election Repercussions," *Independent Coast Observer*, July 1, 1970, 4; "Association Brings Members Up to Date," *Independent Coast Observer*, February 20, 1976, 8.

⁴⁰ "Don Berard Associates" [advertisement], *Independent Coast Observer*, August 23, 1974, 16.

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traditional but rigorous education at the University of Pennsylvania, which awarded him a bachelor's degree in architecture in 1937. As a young adult he assisted Wharton with various projects, which instilled in him a curiosity and openness toward emerging trends in art and design.⁴¹

Esherick relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1938 and soon secured a position in the office of Gardner Dailey, one of the Bay Area's noted architects who had adopted the influence of Modernism during the Great Depression. Esherick stayed with Dailey's firm until 1943 while also accepting commissions from architect Walter T. Steilberg. During this early first phase of Esherick's career, he absorbed the progressive architectural traditions that had emerged from the Bay Area since the late nineteenth century. Among the most important projects Esherick contributed to during this period was the Owens House in Sausalito, a relatively small box-like residence that exemplified the regional idiom of Modernism known as the Second Bay Tradition. The residence represented the Bay Area in the Museum of Modern Art's 1944 survey of American Modernist architecture, *Built in USA: 1932-1944*.⁴²

After Esherick temporarily paused his career to serve as a naval intelligence officer during World War II, he established his own architectural office in 1946, which he called simply Joseph Esherick, Architect. Many of Esherick's early independent projects were residences in the Bay Area's suburban communities, which became opportunities for him to master the tenets of California Modernism: open floor plans, economical use of materials and space, and integration of a building with its site.⁴³

Esherick began teaching architecture at the University of California (UC), Berkeley in 1952, a role he continued over the next thirty years. That same year, he hired George Homsey (1926-2019), a San Francisco native and recent architecture graduate of UC Berkeley who subsequently became a critical design and business partner in the firm. Peter Dodge took a position at the firm in 1954, and the final future partner, Chuck Davis, joined in 1961. All three became principals in 1963, when the firm became known as Joseph Esherick & Associates.⁴⁴ Homsey found that his design perspective complemented Esherick's remarkably well, and he soon became recognized for his strong ability to realize Esherick's design concepts. Davis later recalled that from "1952 until '78 or something like that, the houses and stuff like that, George interpreted, managed et cetera, did the day to day. Joe was kind of the impresario, the conductor."⁴⁵

Although George Homsey has not achieved the same public name recognition as Esherick, several writers have credited Homsey with pushing Esherick's firm beyond the influence of

⁴¹ Esherick, "An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area," 15-20, 42-46.

⁴² Esherick, "An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area," 104-106; Treib, *Appropriate*, 38-39; *Built in USA: 1932-1944*, ed. Elizabeth Mock (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1944), 33.

⁴³ Esherick's command of residential Modernism was recognized in a 1952 article in the national magazine *House and Home*, which highlighted the architect's attention to visually striking forms (often achieved with diagonal lines), vertical sequencing of interlocking spaces, and the interplay between a residence and its surrounding landscape. See "Joseph Esherick and the Third Dimension," *House and Home* 1, no. 1 (January 1952): 125.

⁴⁴ Dave Weinstein, "No Second Fiddle," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 4, 2004, F1-F4.

⁴⁵ Esherick, "An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area," A-29.

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Gardner Dailey and William Wurster (figureheads of the preceding Second Bay Tradition) and forging a new phase of Bay Area regional Modernism known as the Third Bay Tradition. The earliest example of Homsey's stylistic innovation was his Rubin House in Albany, CA (1961), which Charles Moore has described as "an introduction to a whole new world."⁴⁶ In contrast to the modest boxes that exemplified the Second Bay Tradition, the Rubin House showcased simple yet slightly jumbled cubic forms, a sloped roof, and wood shake cladding that clearly anticipated the better-known Demonstration Houses constructed at The Sea Ranch several years later. Homsey's colleagues have confirmed the Rubin House's influence on Joseph Esherick & Associates, particularly its volumetric innovation and the "nubbly" effect of secondary projections or saddlebags that accommodated window seats, stairs, and other interior elements.⁴⁷

Homsey also made substantial contributions to his firm's work at The Sea Ranch, although the projects are typically credited primarily to Joseph Esherick. This experience was typical of eponymous architectural firms. Esherick still maintained primary creative control during this phase of the firm's development, but the design process was collaborative. Homsey emerged as the partner who was best suited to refine and enhance Esherick's ideas during design development. As Peter Dodge later defined the roles of the two architects:

Joe [Esherick] usually was concerned about overall issues, and philosophy, and approach, and occasionally some very specific solutions, but he would express something, and then it would be up to the rest of us. In the case of Sea Ranch, George leading the way to implement those ideas into the architecture. And there's an awful lot of work to that; hundreds and hundreds of hours go into something like that.⁴⁸

Joseph Esherick & Associates remained associated with residential design leading into the mid-1960s, which supported Esherick's election as a fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1965. The firm began to take on larger-scale projects that reflected the partners' growing influence and adaptability. Important examples included the firm's contributions to the design of a new building for UC Berkeley's College of Environmental Design (completed in 1964 and later known as Bauer Wurster Hall) and the 1967 adaptive reuse of the Cannery, a former Del Monte canning complex near San Francisco's northern waterfront.⁴⁹

Due to the firm's larger projects and Esherick's academic position at UC Berkeley, the structure of the office naturally evolved. By the end of the 1960s, Homsey, Dodge, and Davis were regularly making significant contributions to the firm's designs, and they performed much of the day to day management of the office. Although Esherick remained heavily involved, the more balanced responsibilities among partners was formally recognized when the firm was renamed

⁴⁶ Charles Moore, "The End of Arcadia," in *Bay Area Houses*, ed. Sally Woodbridge (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1988), 267. Note that the Rubin House is attributed to Homsey exclusively; he developed the design as a side project while employed at Esherick's firm.

⁴⁷ Esherick, "An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area," A-18 through A-20.

⁴⁸ Esherick, "An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area," A-55.

⁴⁹ Treib, *Appropriate*, 179-181.

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Esherick Homsey Dodge and Davis, typically shortened to EHDD, in 1972.⁵⁰ Notable projects overseen by Homsey for the firm after this point include Garfield Elementary School in San Francisco (429 Filbert Street, 1979) and the Hermitage Condominiums on Russian Hill (1020 Vallejo Street, 1984), which drew on the architectural vocabulary of neighboring First Bay Tradition residences.⁵¹

EHDD and its four partners have been recognized widely for their significant contributions to twentieth-century environmental design in the Bay Area. The office was awarded the AIA's prestigious Architectural Firm Award in 1986, and Joseph Esherick received that organization's highest individual honor, the Gold Medal, in 1989. Esherick died in 1998 at the age of 83. Homsey himself was elected a fellow of the AIA, and in 2006 he received the Maybeck Award from the California Council of the AIA in recognition of his influential career in architecture. The firm continues to operate as EHDD Architecture. Homsey retained a workspace in the EHDD office after his official retirement, and he took on design projects well into his later life. He died in 2019 at the age of 93.⁵²

Third Bay Tradition

The regional idiom of Modernist architecture that characterizes The Sea Ranch has gone by various names including "Sea Ranch style"—indicating the importance that the development played in shaping and defining a new approach to Modernism on the West Coast. Most Modernist architects were and have been resistant to the notion of working within a style of architecture, choosing rather to emphasize their specific response to site, program, material, and technology. The Third Bay Tradition locates the architecture of The Sea Ranch within the lineage of regional San Francisco Bay Area architectural design stretching back to the 1800s, which includes influential early practitioners like Bernard Maybeck (First Bay Tradition) through to Modernists such as William Wurster (Second Bay Tradition). This tradition emphasized regional materials, climate, and connection to the outdoors while eschewing the European and American East Coast conventions of style and academic approaches to architecture.

Where the Second Bay Tradition infused the strict geometry of European Modernism with a softer material palette—often using unpainted redwood boards or shakes—the Third Bay Tradition looked to the region's vernacular building types for inspiration and broke out of the strict box of Modernist massing. Building from the prior Second Bay Tradition and early architectural experiments such as Homsey's Rubin House (1961), the first projects at The Sea Ranch by Esherick's firm and MLTW marked the beginnings of what has been retroactively dubbed the Third Bay Tradition. Furthermore, Charles Moore of MLTW was a prolific writer and academic whose standing in the architectural field ensured that the images and architectural

⁵⁰ Esherick, "An Architectural Practice in the San Francisco Bay Area," 623-624.

⁵¹ Weinstein, "No Second Fiddle," F1-F4.

⁵² "An Office of Ideas," *Architecture California* (July/August 1986), 22; John King, "George Homsey, Architect of BART Stations and Sierra Retreats, Dies at 93," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 2019.

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ideas percolating at The Sea Ranch were widely disseminated.⁵³ Cover articles in *Progressive Architecture* (May 1966 and March 1967) and *Global Architecture* (February 1971) cemented the image of The Sea Ranch style in the popular architectural imagination. Additionally, publications like *The Place of Houses* (1974) by Moore with collaborators Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon articulated the ethos of an approachable, affordable, and personal residential architecture for the more everyday homeowner.⁵⁴

The early buildings at The Sea Ranch that informed the Third Bay Tradition utilized unpainted wood finishes—wood boards, shakes, or even plywood—that weathered naturally and evoked the barns and mineshafts of Northern California, and characteristic shed roofs also had the benefit of sweeping wind over the house. Site planning was of the utmost importance: rather than leveling a site, buildings were designed into the existing topography with consideration for conservation, privacy, and natural windbreaks like hedgerows. While the Third Bay Tradition was strongly rooted in the regional Modernism of the Bay Area through its emphasis on honest expression of local materials and a strong connection to the outdoors, the unconventional play with historical detail and vernacular forms has been described as an “incipient postmodernism.”⁵⁵ The volumes and rooflines of early Sea Ranch architecture also moved away from the tight geometry and flat roofs of earlier Modernism, and introduced more complex interior volumetric planning. The open plan was expanded into three dimensions so that interlocking and interconnected mezzanines, lofts, and multi-height spaces created a dynamic and flowing series of interior spaces. The Sea Ranch architects often used what they called saddlebag volumes to accommodate more specific programmed spaces like a kitchen, bathroom, storage, or stairway, or to extend the building into the landscape with a bay window and bench seat.⁵⁶ Rather than full-height walls of glass that were more common in mid-century California Modernism, windows were more strategically designed and placed to frame discrete views or to throw natural light against walls and through rooms, as well as to avoid heat loss.

Conclusion

Mini-Mod #3 is a tight, compact expression of the Third Bay Tradition with its interlocking interior levels and open spaces, enclosed by one sweeping shed roof. The efficient floor plan and use of simple materials also played into the notion that architecture at The Sea Ranch should be affordable, not ostentatious. The exterior plywood cladding weathers to harmonize with the surrounding redwood trees, and eaves and projecting window surrounds are eliminated so that they won’t catch wind or moisture. As a small vacation home for a couple or small family, the residence eschews the need for full-height interior walls (except at the bathroom); large windows and sliding glass doors provide natural light, connect the interior to the dense redwood forest,

⁵³ Hannah Simonson, *San Francisco Modern & Postmodern Architectural Styles (1960-2000) Historic Context Statement* (Prepared for San Francisco Planning Department, Adopted August 2024), 116.

⁵⁴ Charles Moore, Gerald Allen, Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 82.

⁵⁵ Simon Sadler, “That Sea Ranch Feeling,” in *The Sea Ranch: Architecture, Environment, and Idealism*, ed. Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher and Joseph Becker (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art and DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2018), 72.

⁵⁶ Moore, “The End of Arcadia,” 280; Moore, Allen, and Lyndon, *The Place of Houses*, 52-55.

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and frame views. One saddlebag volume provides space for an extra bunk bed, and the brick chimney—also hung on the exterior—brings warmth to the small residence in the woods.

George Homsey, having marked the beginning of a new chapter in the Bay Tradition of architecture with the Rubin House, later experimented with new forms and scales at The Sea Ranch alongside his colleagues at Joseph Esherick & Associates. Mini-Mod #3 illustrates the principles that define the Third Bay Tradition and The Sea Ranch project as a whole: living lightly on the land, making use of locally available materials, and creating dynamic open interior spaces. In this case, the designers were successful at realizing the Third Bay Tradition in a particularly efficient volume. Mini-Mod #3 is an intact, well-preserved example of the firm's work exploring various Demonstration House during the early phase of design at The Sea Ranch, as well as the regional idiom of Modernism that would soon have broad national influence.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
 - ☐ Other State agency
 - ☐ Federal agency
 - ☐ Local government
 - ☒ University
 - ☐ Other
- Name of repository: University of California Berkeley, Environmental Design Archives, Joseph Esherick Collection

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 38.690152 Longitude: -123.418939

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary corresponds to the legal boundary of Sonoma County assessor parcel number, 155-020-007 (LOT 6 BLK 1 SEA RANCH NO 5).

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds to the legal boundary of the parcel on which the building has been located since its 1967 construction.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jon Rusch, M. A. Historic Preservation Planning, 2012; Hannah Simonson, M.S. Historic Preservation, 2017; and Chad DeWitt, Principal, Framestudio
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street & number: PO Box 70097
city or town: Point Richmond state: CA zip code: 94807
e-mail: cd@framestud.io
telephone: (510) 740-9172
date: April 2025; Revised June 2025

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property:	Mini-Mod #3
City or Vicinity:	The Sea Ranch
County:	Sonoma County
State:	California
Photographer:	Jon Rusch and Hannah Simonson
Date Photographed:	March 17, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1 of 13 | Primary entrance at south façade (right) and west elevation (left) |
| 2 of 13 | View from unpaved driveway, lined with redwood grape stake fencing |
| 3 of 13 | Context view of northwest corner amongst redwood trees, with grape stake fence |

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- 4 of 13 Oblique view of east elevation (left) with saddlebag volume at second story, and north elevation (right) with exterior brick chimney
- 5 of 13 East elevation (left) with saddlebag volume at second story for two bunk beds
- 6 of 13 Oblique view of primary south façade (left) with projecting wood gutter, and east elevation (right)
- 7 of 13 Dining room at main (middle) level, with lofted bed visible to the upper right
- 8 of 13 Living room, looking south to the staircase next to the kitchen; exposed wood stairs and ceilings, unpainted plywood balusters, and plaster walls reflect the original material palette
- 9 of 13 Living room with brick fireplace and vertical window, framing views of the redwoods beyond
- 10 of 13 Kitchen, looking east
- 11 of 13 Living room (below) and lofted bed (above) from the dining room
- 12 of 13 Bunk beds in the saddlebag volume, on the east side of the house
- 13 of 13 Lofted bed, looking south over the kitchen (left), and dining room (right) and primary entrance

Index of Figures

Figures 1-8, Source: Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley, Esherick Collection

- Figure 1 Mini-Mod model “D,” June 1966. The floor plan is very similar to that of Mini-Mod #3, except that Mini-Mod #3 also includes a projecting saddlebag volume at the second story for the two bunk beds, providing more square footage. 17-071-012.
- Figure 2 Mini-Mod #3, Joseph Esherick & Associates, February 1967, Sheet 1. The site plan shows existing downed logs, as well as instructions to “move existing log.”
- Figure 3 Mini-Mod #3, Joseph Esherick & Associates, February 1967, Sheet 2. Detail view of east and north elevations and upper level floor plan by Joseph Esherick and Associates.

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- Figure 4 Mini-Mod #3, Joseph Esherick & Associates, February 1967, Sheet 2. Detail view of west and south elevations and lower level floor plans by Joseph Esherick and Associates.
- Figure 5 Mini-Mod #3, Joseph Esherick & Associates, February 1967, Sheet 3. Section view of interior stair.
- Figure 6 Mini-Mod #1, May 1967. The house has since been expanded, the windows reconfigured and reclad in vertical wood board. 17-060-101.
- Figure 7 Mini-Mod #1 interior, c. late 1960s. The split-level interior layout is similar to that of Mini-Mod #3, but utilized pine board wall finishes whereas Mini-Mod #3 has plaster walls. 17-052-034.
- Figure 8 Mini-Mod #2, c. late 1960s, prior to being reclad with wood shingles. Design and footprint are similar to that of Mini-Mod #3, with entrance and storage area on the left (rather than the right) and the Mini-Mod #3 has a projecting saddlebag volume on the second story. 17-071-012.
- Figure 9 Mini-Mod #3, c. 2011, prior to rehabilitation. Source: Homsey Collection.

Mini-Mod #3

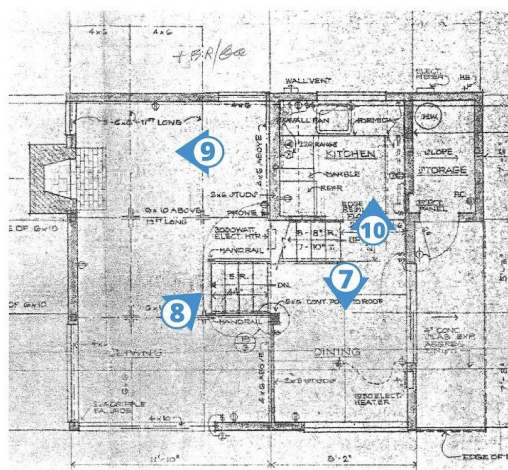
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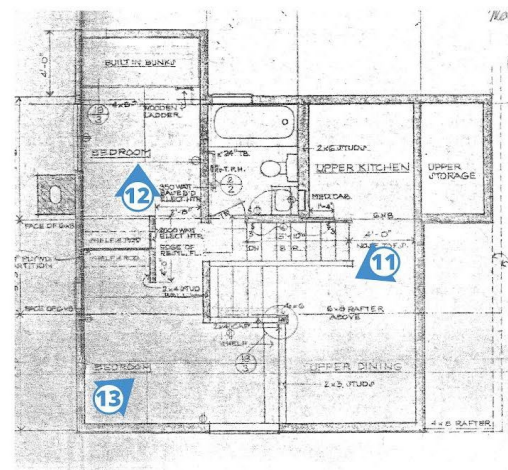
Sketch Map/Photo Key



Site Plan



Lower - Middle Levels



Middle - Upper Levels

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Figure 3

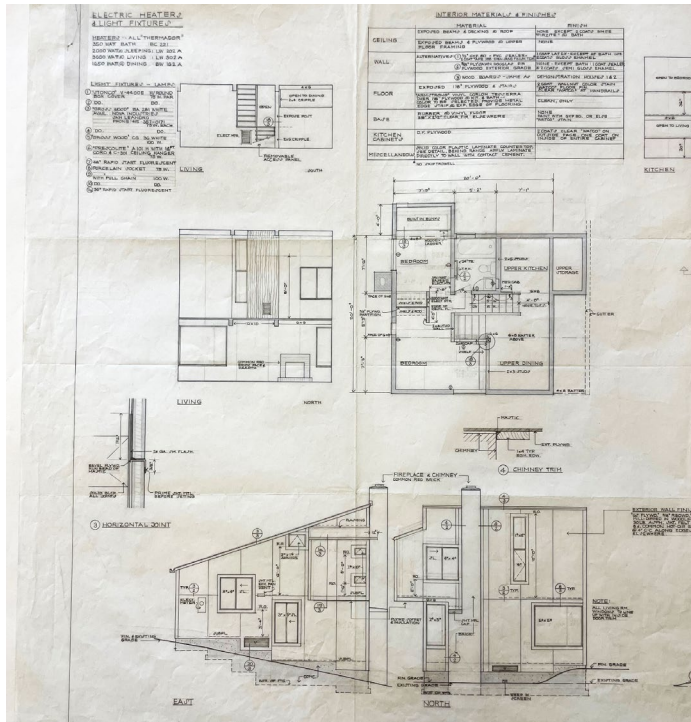
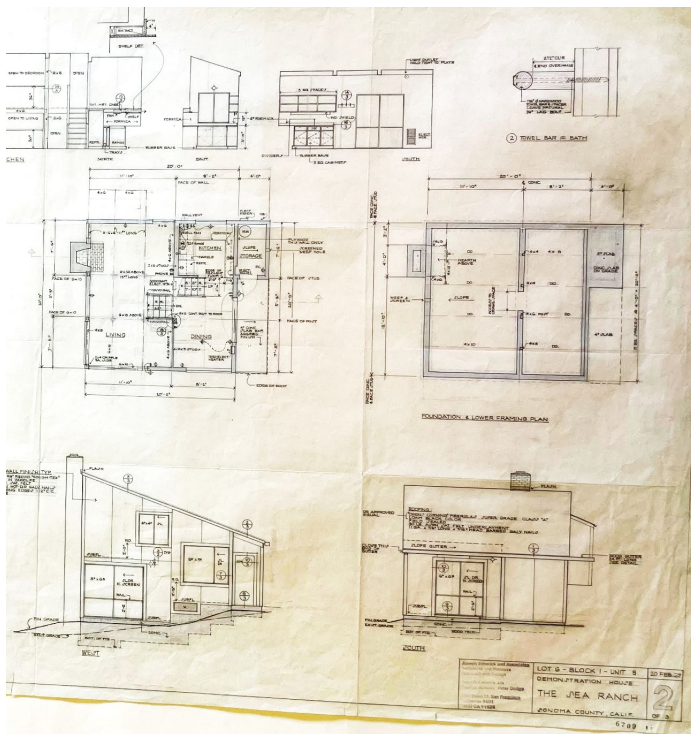


Figure 4



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Figure 5

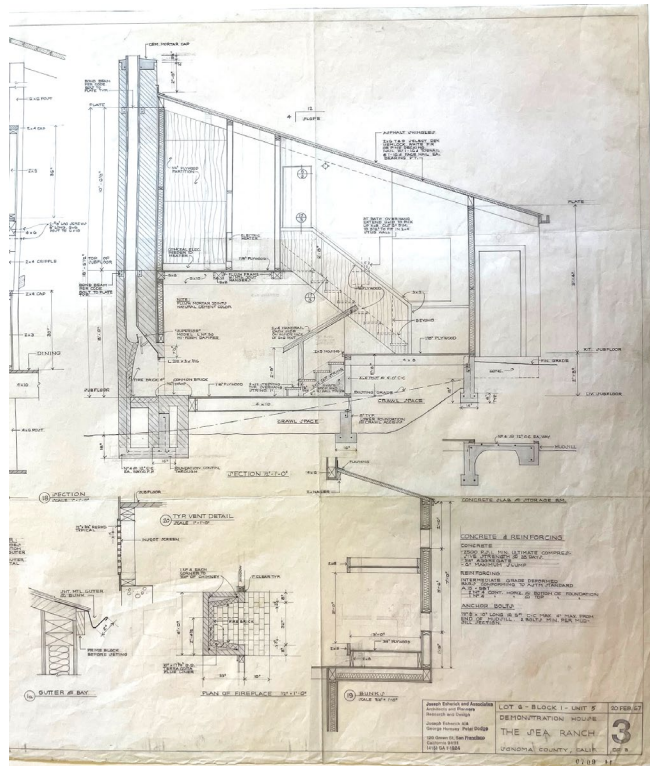


Figure 6



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Figure 7



Figure 8



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Figure 9 Prior to rehabilitation, c. 2011



Photo 1 Primary entrance at south façade (right) and west elevation (left)



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Photo 2 View from unpaved driveway, lined with redwood grape stake fencing



Photo 3 Context view of northwest corner amongst redwood trees, with grape stake fence



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Photo 4 Oblique view of east elevation (left) with saddlebag volume at second story, and north elevation (right) with exterior brick chimney.



Photo 5 East elevation (left) with saddlebag volume at second story for two bunk beds



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Photo 6 Oblique view of primary south façade (left) with projecting wood gutter, and east elevation (right)



Photo 7 Dining room at main (middle) level, with lofted bed visible to the upper right



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Photo 8 Living room, looking south to the staircase next to the kitchen; exposed wood stairs and ceilings, unpainted plywood balusters, and plaster walls reflect the original material palette



Photo 9 Living room with brick fireplace and vertical window, framing views of the redwoods beyond



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Photo 10 Kitchen, looking east



Photo 11 Living room (below) and lofted bed (above) from the dining room



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Photo 12 Bunk beds in the saddlebag volume, on the east side of the house



Photo 13 Lofted bed, looking south over the kitchen (left), and dining room (right) and primary entrance

