

Architectural Design and Murder



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Imagine your own home. Whether you live in a rural log cabin, chalet, city row house, sleek modern, Tudor style, Victorian, A-frame, ranch bungalow, trailer park, lighthouse, saltshaker or lofty apartment, you know that form follows function. What about your yard and/or surrounding landscape? Natural, native elements are inherent to architectural design, as reflected by the interior. By extrapolation, architectural design also incorporates behavior. And crime.

Your home design, however modest or grand, not only influences your lifestyle, but who is looking. Does your place invite trick-or-treaters for Halloween? Holiday carolers? Girl scouts selling cookies? Lost drivers who just need directions? Friendly neighbor drop-ins? *Who else?*

To preface, I never read true-crime books. Not my genre, although I do mostly read non-fiction (and loads of journal articles). However, last month my dear friend gave me the book *'I'll Be Gone in the Dark'* by Michelle McNamara (published in 2018 by Harper) as a surprise gift. Nearly finishing the book now (which I unexpectedly enjoyed! - well done), the most stunning feature to me was the Eichler Design, which aligns to geographic profiling, which happens to be my specialty. But back to the story.

Circa 1950-1966, innovative American designer/developer Joseph Eichler built a series of approximately 11,000+ middle-class homes in mostly Northern Californian suburbs, colloquially known as “Eichlers.” The modern plans made sense, aiming to *‘invite the outside in’*, featuring floor-to-ceiling windows facing towards the backyard. Eichlers were reasonably priced to accommodate working class families. Refer to Figure below.

- Side note: According to ancient Eastern Europe folklore, vampires could only enter a dwelling if they were invited inside. Unsuspecting people, met with a mysteriously beguiling distinguished man presenting himself under false pretenses, such as being a weary traveller in need of hospitality or offering a gift, would invite the vampire in! You know the rest of the sordid bloody story.
- Still now in modern times throughout Europe, passing any item (such as a package) over a threshold egress is passé and interior doors are customarily kept shut. Superstitious customs such as placing salt or garlic garlands in thresholds were deemed to be protective against evil entities coming in from outside. But back to the story.

Eichlers novel ‘backwards’ orientation meant owners could interact with their relatively secluded backyard patio replete with gardens, landscaped shrubbery and shady trees. Inside, Eichlers were designed to be open and airy, active living spaces lit by the California sun. Distinctively, Eichlers had virtually no windows facing the front egress, with plain front entry doors. Via the inconspicuous front, cars park in driveways and/or garages from the suburban access street onto freeways.



A/ Typical distinctive Eichler home visualized from the backyard, featuring attractive window panels with abundant surrounding landscaping.

B/ Subdued front of an Eichler home, virtually lacking surveillance from the interior and all neighbors, directly accessible via the street.

C1 & C2/ Typical Eichler open design interior with full visibility from the back window panels.

Images of Eichler homes courtesy of online sources.

Sophisticated violent criminals like to watch, oftentimes engaging in Peeping Tom behavior before striking, juxtaposed by their requisite need to be virtually invisible to escape detection. *To see, but not to be seen.* Such offenders balance their risky behaviors with opportunity. Of course, Mr Eichler could not have known that his homes later would become crimes scenes; these homes did indeed *'invite the outside in.'*

Unwittingly, Eichlers plus violent criminality proved to be a dynamite combination. Peeping Toms could comfortably conduct surveillance of Eichlers from landscaped vantage points with an open view of domestic activities. Occupants blithely fixing dinner, watching TV, kids doing homework, folding laundry, baby-sitters, etc. on full display. Worse, in the dark of the night, Eichlers brightly lit interior served as a virtual one-way mirror; occupants could not see out, but Peeping Toms could see inside.

Eichlers proved to be veritable means of exploit for rapists and/or murderers. Such violent criminals could easily enter via the sliding glass door panels (notoriously easy to break into) while unsuspecting occupants slept in bedrooms on the opposite front side of the house or upstairs. After commission of the violating act, the rapist/murderer simply exited out the secluded front of the Eichlers directly onto the street to getaway, unseen by neighbors, eluding detection. Golden State killer Joseph DeAngelo (McNamara, 2018), for notable example, preferentially exploited Eichlers.

- Note to investigators and adjudicators of the law: Make note of the architectural style associated with the criminal act. Do you see emerging motifs? For serial crimes committed indoors, the offender's architectural *modus operandi* may be identifying.

The violent criminal mind is keenly opportunistic, albeit in unsavory ways. As criminologists know, offenders are relatively insular to boundaries, both physical and psychological. Much like their folkloric vampire counterparts, such criminals are looking for an invitation to visit you at home.

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“Keep it always with you that laughter who knock at your door and say, 'May I come in?' is not the true laughter. No! He is a king, and he come when and how he like. He ask no person; he choose no time of suitability. He say, 'I am here.' Oh, friend John, it is a strange world.”

- Dr Van Helsing (in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, 1897)

I am an independent forensic science consultant, a neuroscientist (PhD) and criminal behavioral analyst/profiler (D-ABP) with expertise in bloodstain pattern analysis.

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