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## Embracing green in Hawaii homes

By Karl Kim  
Special to The Advertiser

Those who hope that Hawai'i's homes and buildings will be more "green" — more sensitive to our Island climate and surroundings — may find inspiration in a new short film, "Site Specific: The Legacy of Regional Modernism," produced by Metropolis, an urban design magazine. Metropolis is sponsoring a screening tomorrow at the Honolulu Design Center.

The magazine's editor-in-chief, Susan S. Szenasy, will follow with a discussion on the Sarasota School of Architecture and sustainable approaches to design. Szenasy and Metropolis are leading a nationwide tour of the film, which features interviews with historians and leading architects associated with the Sarasota School.

At first glance, the similarities between Sarasota, Fla., and Honolulu seem superficial. Both share warm climates and identities as visitor destinations, but they are worlds apart in terms of landscape, culture and urban form. But "Site Specific" argues that a climate-sensitive Modernism, advanced by architects who have incorporated ideas such as day lighting, natural ventilation, sun screens and shade-giving plantings in their designs, has much to offer for places like Hawai'i, with high energy costs and an interest in sustainable design.

The Sarasota School refers to a group of architects who practiced in Sarasota, Fla., between 1941 and 1966. Notable architects within its bounds include Paul Rudolph, Ralph Twitchell, Gene Leedy, Victor Lundy, and Joseph Farrell, who came to Hawai'i from Sarasota in 1961.

Farrell, now principal architect with Architects Hawaii, has designed projects throughout Hawai'i, including the Prince Kuhio Federal Building, Gros-venor Center and the Pacific Tower as well as the award-winning capital complex for the Federated States of Micronesia.

Farrell's early work with the Sarasota School includes award-winning designs for the Ur residence (1961) in Sarasota and the Caladesi National Bank (1960) in Dunedin, Fla.

According to Farrell, "The Sarasota School was largely about aesthetics," adding that "the approach to design was how you start from bare structure and then embellish it." He said working with Paul Rudolph, the emphasis was on "strong form" with a "modern design" yet with some "charm and romance."

The charm of these designs is captured in a book, "The Sarasota School of Architecture, 1941-1966," written by John Howey (MIT Press), published in 1995. The building designs were bold.

University of California, Berkeley, professor and architectural historian Marc Treib pointed out that "like so much midcentury work, there is both an optimism and a humility, both of which seem to be missing today." He points further to the connections between midcentury Hawai'i and Florida, "when people tried to build responsively and responsibly."

"I think influx of people and capital changed all that," Treib said, "but the issue still remains."

### MODERNISM, BREEZES

While flat roofs and boxy buildings are often associated with modernism, the Sarasota architects experimented with interesting approaches to design and construction, such as the Healy "Cocoon House" (1948-49) built in the Siesta Keys, Fla. With its inverted curves, sprayed-on plastic roof, glass walls, and louvered siding, this house, designed by Twitchell and Rudolph, seems to be all about natural ventilation.



Architect Scott Wilson, who designed the award-winning Manoa Ecohouse, has demonstrated how ventilation, ceiling fans, day lighting, solar tubes and thoughtful siting can create beautiful, functional spaces while reducing the need for air conditioning and lowering energy bills.

Photos by JEFF WIDENER | The Advertiser

### WHEN TO WATCH

#### "Site Specific: The Legacy of Regional Modernism"

Film screening, followed by discussion on the Sarasota School of Architecture

- Noon tomorrow, Honolulu Design Center, Cupola Theatre, free, [www.honoluludesigncenter.com](http://www.honoluludesigncenter.com)

- 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, University of Hawai'i-Manoa School of Architecture, Room 205, free

Sponsored by Metropolis magazine, Leo A. Daly, UH-Manoa School of Architecture and Historic Hawai'i Foundation

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[www.metropolismag.com](http://www.metropolismag.com)

Featured in the film is the Riverview High School building in Sarasota, designed by Rudolph. The school, according to Szenasy, "was built before air conditioning, using site-specific moves such as good siting, local vegetation, sunshades on the south side, skylights that act like chimneys and pull out warm air from the inside, operable floor to ceiling windows, and shafts that pulled warm air from the lower floor towards the skylights.

"These systems are now being looked at (again) as architects try to build climate-sensitive, energy-efficient buildings," Szenasy said.

"We made this film because we heard from principals in large architecture, planning, and design practices that their young members did not have a connection to history; that they were reinventing the wheel with each new project. "... Why not learn from history ... and create a timely dialogue around sustainability and modern preservation?"

**GREEN IS GOOD**

Farrell agrees that "these days everyone is on the green bandwagon." He also reminds us that the times have changed. Because of traffic and development and so many homes sited so close together, he notes, "air conditioning provides a solution to the noise problem."

But he also sees an important and deep connection between the work of Sarasota architects like Rudolph and architects in Hawai'i, such as Vladimir Ossipoff, who understood "the importance of climate, siting, and architectural design."

Moreover, the Sarasota School stressed many of the same principles of good design used by green designers today.

Dean Sakamoto, architect and faculty member at the Yale School of Architecture and the guest curator of the exhibition "Hawaiian Modern: The Architecture of Vladimir Ossipoff," currently at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, noted, "One of Ossipoff's contributions to Hawaiian modern architecture is the idea of building without walls. ... Ossipoff took a covered porch or lanai to another level, completely blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor living.

"There is growing interest in understanding the role of regional modernism," Sakamoto said.

Architect Scott Wilson, who designed an award-winning home known as the Manoa Ecohouse, has demonstrated how ventilation, ceiling fans, day lighting, solar tubes, and thoughtful siting can create beautiful functional spaces while reducing the need for air conditioning and lowering energy bills.

Wilson maintains that every new building in Hawai'i should have photovoltaic panels to "reduce our dependency on imported oil and to lower greenhouse gas emissions." He points out that for homeowners and businesses that retrofit their homes with solar energy, "with tax credits, reduced energy bills, and a phased-in installation process, these systems can pay for itself within a few years."

The need to adopt greener building designs "has to be seen within a larger global context," suggested Professor Steve Meder of the University of Hawai'i-Manoa School of Architecture.

"Because we're beginning to see the end of fossil fuels, we need to change the way we build," Meder said.

He maintains that "profound changes in how we generate energy and design our buildings and cities are occurring because of sea level rise (and acidification of the oceans, as well as threats to our national security resulting from storm damage and improper siting and building practices."

Meder says that "we used to build that way because we could, but now we no longer should nor should we want to build irresponsibly, because of the effects on the environment for generations to come."

For those who follow that line of reasoning, the larger lessons of the Sarasota School involve understanding how to be responsive to local climatic and environmental conditions, and to develop designs that are both aesthetically pleasing and future-oriented.

*Karl Kim is professor and chair of urban and regional planning at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa.*



The Manoa Ecohouse, designed by architect Scott Wilson, is owned by Duane and Sarah Preble.



Sarah Preble looks down the length of a mango tree. Staircases and the main living area are built around it.



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