

From: H. Vincent Moses-PhD <vincate@att.net>

Sent: Wednesday, July 8, 2020 5:04 PM

To: Philip Falcone <philipjfalcone@gmail.com>; Steve Lech <rivcokid@gmail.com>; Nancy Parrish <factsgirl@icloud.com>; Watson, Scott <SWatson@riversideca.gov>; Don Morris <drdmorris@earthlink.net>; Chuck Tobin <ctobin@burrtec.com>; John Brown <john.brown@bbklaw.com>; Edwards, Erin <EEwards@riversideca.gov>

Subject: [External] Beacon Way item on upcoming CHB Agenda

Dear Philip and Scott,

I think I ran over the 3000 character limit in my online response to the Beacon Way item on your next week's agenda, so I pasted it at the bottom of this email for your review. Please share with the other commissioners, if you will.

One thing right up front: we think the entire District needed to be noticed on this item from the beginning, and certainly now. Restricting it to the top of Beacon Way cost many of us an opportunity to weigh in on this important matter. I got the notice through Don Morris' email chain, and only today!

Take note of my comments RE CEQA and NAGPRA (Native American Grave Protection Act), as well as the failure to pull any permits before the fact for anything the applicant did prior to being red flagged by the City. Neal might be forgiven, the architect knew better than to operate without permits.

Best regards,

Vince & Cate

Dear Chair and Distinguished Members of CHB:

Thank you for this opportunity to weigh in on the proposed replacement house atop Beacon Way within the Mount Rubidoux Historic District. My wife and I handled the petition establishing the MRHD for then Councilman Ron Loveridge in the 1980s, eventually leading to it's arrival as the first designated HD in Riverside. Soon thereafter, I worked with 30th Street Architects of Newport Beach and Randy Hlubik, Landscape Architect on the MRHD Design Guidelines.. Below are our objections to the proposed determination:

1. With the greatest of respect to HPO Watson, the applicant's entire proposal, in our humble view is based on a fraud. The applicant, Mr. Neal and his architect Mr. Broeski, from the beginning appear to have intentionally avoided the Municipal Code and its requirements for legal grading and asbestos removal permits, not to mention the required demolition permit. We cannot judge their motives, though perhaps the applicant wanted to escape the scrutiny of inspectors and the CEQA review process. By their failure to pull permits, they endangered the health and safety of the residents of the District. Moreover, seeking a permit to grade within the district would have triggered CHB and CEQA review, especially on such a steep slope with known Native American archaeological history. In our view, their knowing actions demonstrated a flagrant disregard for the City, it's governance, the Municipal Code, and the people of the HD in a kind of catch me if you can, while, carrying on as if things were on the up and up. An act now, ask for forgiveness later proposition.

To this day, there are no permits filed with the City in the online permits section of the City's Building Safety web page.

2. The applicant, in total disregard for health and safety, without permits, removed asbestos bearing roofing tiles and probably air conditioning duct coverings. Do not assume they did not know the regulations in this instance. If Mr. Neal did not know, certainly Mr. Broeski knew. He has practiced architecture in Riverside for more than 20 years, pulling hundreds if not thousands of permits along the way. When Cate and I replaced our ancient HVAC years ago in our 1912 house, we pulled a permit and had a company licensed in asbestos removal do the work in "moon suits," and at a price too. The City inspected the permitted work.

3. Contrary to the findings by staff, this project is certainly subject to CEQA review by virtue of being within a designated Historic District, especially in a Certified Local Government covered HD, per SHPO. Moreover, the MRHD is covered under the Native American Grave Protection Act (NAGPA) since it contained a Cahuilla grave site just below Mr. Neal's slope. According to the Riverside Daily Press, when S. C. Evans, Jr. cut Ladera Lane through the area below the Neal site around 1910, he unearthed 110 barrels of bones from that said grave site. Frank Miller, Master of the Mission Inn, offered to buy them from him!

The entire HD contains known Native American archaeological remains, including grinding basins, and other artifacts on the land, not simply the Neophyte Spring Rancheria on the north slope below Indian Hill Road. as asserted in the staff report.

4. A technical point: this project should have triggered a notice to the entire District, and not have been restricted to surrounding residents at the top of the hill. Cate and I got this notice only through the largess of Don Morris and his neighborhood email chain this morning, July 8, 2020

Given the above, my wife and I urge you to deny the determination that this project is exempt from CEQA. We think it clearly falls squarely within the CEQA review process due to its potentially adverse impact on architectural and related pre-Riverside cultural resources within the HD. We do not believe that knowing destruction of resources without the advantage of legal permits is an excuse to provide cover via an ex post facto CoA.

5. Noes on the Broeski design plan: While my wife and I do not advocate replication or mimicry for new construction in the MRHD, we do believe in this case the applicant needs to adhere closer to the mid-century modern style of the previous home, including hipped roof and horizontal massing. The glass window wall on the southwest elevation should more closely reflect uninterrupted window walls of the mid-century as in the example of the famous Case Study House in the Hollywood Hills, or Philip Johnson's Glass House. The building technology exists to make it so. In our view, the current plan evokes the contractor houses of Orange Crest more than the Modern Movement houses of the mid-century.

We believe the CHB must negotiate the matter of CEQA and the flagrant failure to obtain legitimate permits before granting a CoA for this premature project.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute thought on this proposal, and best of luck in your deliberations.

Best regards,

Vince Moses and Cate Whitmore

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Herman Vincent Moses, PhD CEO & Principal VinCate & Associates Museum and Historic Preservation Consultants

Protect yourself and those around you. Wear a face covering, stay home, and avoid gatherings with people outside your household. [RiversideCA.gov/COVID-19](https://www.RiversideCA.gov/COVID-19)



July 12, 2020

VIA E-Mail

City of Riverside
Cultural Heritage Board

Re: Agenda Item #4 Planning Case P19-0487 (COA)

Dear Members of the Cultural Heritage Board:

Old Riverside Foundation encourages the Cultural Heritage Board to deny the Certificate of Appropriateness for the above-referenced planning case. The proposed structure continues to be in defiance of the Mt. Rubidoux Historic District Guidelines, despite the cosmetic changes made to the proposed design. Perhaps it is instructive to recap how we got to this point.

This case started last September just after Labor Day weekend. The existing 1960's home on Beacon Way was demolished. Old Riverside Foundation notified the City and asked if a demolition permit had been issued. We were told that it had not been issued, and a Stop Work Notice was issued by the Building and Safety Department. Unfortunately this was too little, too late, as nearly the entire structure had been demolished and removed.

At the Cultural Heritage Board (CHB) meeting in October, the City asked for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the after-the-fact demolition and for the design of the replacement home. The CHB had concern about the design of the replacement home. The architect acknowledged that he was aware that there were guidelines for the Mt. Rubidoux Historic District, but based on the submitted design, chose to ignore them. The CHB recommended that the applicant meet with a committee of 3 CHB members to discuss. Since the applicant was not in attendance, the issue was continued to the November meeting.

At the November meeting, the Cultural voted to deny the Certificate of Appropriateness for both the after-the-fact demolition and the replacement structure. The CHB issued eight findings in support of its decision. Four of the findings were about the demolition being in violation of the California Environmental Quality Act since the Mt. Rubidoux Historic District is a Cultural Resource, and four of the findings were about the design of the proposed structure being in violation of the Mt. Rubidoux Historic District Guidelines.

The applicant appealed the decision to the Land Use Committee (Councilmembers Conder, Edwards, Fierro).

At the January Land Use Committee meeting, the Committee came to a compromise decision. The Certificate of Appropriateness for the after-the-fact demolition was granted (a decision that Old Riverside Foundation strongly disagrees with), and the applicant was instructed to meet with a committee of three CHB members to discuss modifications to the replacement structure, where this committee would help guide the owner and architect toward a design in keeping with the established guidelines. Committee meetings were held on May 28 and June 11. The architect made some



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adjustments to the original design in an attempt to address the committee's concerns and meet the design guidelines.

Based on what is available in the agenda item, Old Riverside Foundation does not believe that the revised design meets the guidelines. The staff report continues to misapply the Neighborhood Standard in the guidelines by ignoring the only Historic District Contributor nearby, which happens to be next door to this case. The guidelines were put in place to ensure that new structures harmonize with contributing structures, not non-contributors. To continue to base compliance on non-contributors will only ensure that new non-complying structures will persist into the future, in violation of the spirit in which the Mt. Rubidoux Historic District Guidelines were established in the first place.

An issue for the Cultural Heritage Board (and for all of us) is: do Historic Districts have any meaning in the City of Riverside? The CHB can respond with a resounding "Yes" by again denying a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed structure, along with a list of findings in support of its decision. While the applicant may appeal to the City Council and take his chances there, the CHB must be there to support the Historic Districts while the decision is in its hands.

Respectfully,

Michael J. Gentile
President
Old Riverside Foundation

From: Teresa & Jason Wassman <fullmaa@yahoo.com>

Sent: Sunday, July 12, 2020 11:21 AM

To: Andrade, Frances <FANDRADE@riversideca.gov>

Subject: [External] Deny the certificate of appropriateness for Beacon street

I am deeply disappointed that the committee attempted to reach a compromise on allowing a new structure to replace an illegally removed structure. The City's requirement for a demolition permit encompasses more than just whether a structure should be removed. Did the builder obtain a hazardous material demolition permit? The property most likely had asbestos. Were workers protected? Did the builder have a permit from Cal/OSHA?

Government fails when there is a lack of coordinated response and collaboration. The City utterly failed to perform their duties and the builder should not be rewarded for their mutual failures. Ms. Edwards has proven herself to be either ill informed or a wolf in sheep's clothing. Her decision making processes are faulty and should be viewed with a critical eye.

I am demanding the City deny a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed structure on Beacon Way.

Namaste

Teresa Wassman

3673 Oakwood Place

From: Don Morris <drdmorris@earthlink.net>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 12:54 AM
To: Andrade, Frances <FANDRADE@riversideca.gov>
Subject: [External] Public Comment regarding Beacon Way Design

Dear Chairman and Members of the Cultural Heritage Board,

As you realize, this project at the top of Beacon Way has been fraudulent from the start. The Building Design Guidelines of the Mt. Rubidoux Historic District were approved 27 years ago by the City Council. The illegal demolition of the existing house by the owner and architect, was done with NO permits of any kind. Had the owner or the architect followed the required procedure, it would have undoubtedly triggered requirements for legal grading, asbestos removal permits, a demolition permit, other inspections, and the CEQA review.

This property sits in the middle of the Historic District which contains known Native American archaeological remains. Other building sites in the Historic District have been required to submit required archaeological studies, and so should this one.

In addition they are attempting to build a structure on a very steep slope which has stability concerns for the neighbors below. In short, the owner of the property and his architect has shown complete disregard for the health and safety of the residents of the Historic District. This will NOT be forgiven.

Additionally the design submitted to the CHB is an insult to the Historic District Guidelines. Any responsible owner, and competent architect would be ashamed of their actions thus far, and the completely non-conforming design and construction they have submitted for approval.

I respectfully ask the Cultural Heritage Board to deny this design. Additionally, I ask that you require the legal grading permit, a stability report of the ground on the building site, an EIR study to include a report of Native American archaeological findings, and require a CEQA review.

Sincerely,
Don Morris

4736 Indian Hill Road
Riverside, CA. 92501

From: Molly A. Morris <mollymorris819@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 12:15 AM
To: Andrade, Frances <FANDRADE@riversideca.gov>
Subject: [External] new build on Beacon Way

As a 34 year resident of the Mt. Rubidoux Historic District, I would like to voice my opinion on the design of the projected house on Beacon Way. I have been going through my copy of the design guidelines looking at the varied designs of homes in the district that are examples of contributing structures. With all of the choices available, nothing even remotely resembles the submitted design for this project. The guidelines provide the City with a set of policies and design criteria that will "provide sensitive integration of new infill development within the district." This statement is found on page1 as is the following: "Through these guidelines, the City is attempting to enrich and preserve the historical character of the District." I am opposed to the acceptance of the design since the proposed house does not fit in with the overall character of the District. I have concerns that the builder is not trying to fit in to the District, let alone contribute to it. His lack of concern for following required procedures for demolition attests to that. We have design guidelines to preserve our historic district. If someone does not wish to follow them, there are many other building sites around Riverside that have no guidelines in place. My vote is NO. Sincerely, Molly Morris

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

Dear Members of the Cultural Heritage Board:

Before getting started we want to state that we resent having to stress about this issue in the middle of a pandemic. We are worried about decisions required of us regarding the new school year. This hearing should have been delayed not rushed. We understand that there is great pressure by a small number of loud voices to move on, but we are entirely unsympathetic. Our neighborhood did not create this situation and we should not be distracted by it now.

We thank the Cultural Heritage Board for your efforts to move forward according to standards that protect the integrity of our community. We depend on you and you have been there for us. We are writing you today to speak on behalf of:

- Process. There is a carefully developed system in place that supports responsible development. That process has not been respected.
- Precedent. If people can destroy properties without process only to replace them with the latest hot homestyle the integrity of our community will not endure.
- Heritage. Fashions come and go. No one builds a home that they do not believe in, but time has a way of revealing poor choices. Our neighborhood preserves a particular era of quality and grace. The proposed structure represents a contemporary form quite alien to our local aesthetic.

We live adjacent to the property that was illegally destroyed last year. After receiving a notice from the City that your Board was to consider an application for demolition, David visited the property only to discover that our opportunity as a community to have input had been stolen. David contacted the architect about the application for a new building. He was told that the owner was “just looking for a place to retire and that I could trust him.” David could only reply most uncomfortably that it was hard to have faith in someone who tore town an existing structure depriving our community of any opportunity to testify to the personality and value of what is now only a sad memory. The architect replied that he disagreed with the decision to demo.

We are very close with our neighbors. They are wonderful people who mean the world to us. We respect and help each other all the time. We desperately want to trust this new neighbor, as his architect suggested, but the scheming, disrespect, and anger in evidence thus far worry us.

The farmhouse architecture proposed for this site elevates the structure considerably. A huge transom with no apparent purpose will illuminate it in a fashion that is *totally* unrepresentative of the character of the area. Farmhouse

designs are very trendy today. We are glad that they are replacing the McMansion style in suburban popularity, but the design is part of a fad that will pass (see the attached article) and it is altogether inconsistent with our neighborhood. We have design guidelines for downtown. We are very disappointed that City staff are not able to respect them.

It is not our nature to rant. Our ties to this town are deep and, like you, we are also committed to its service. We believe in data, measured responses, and in real respect for different viewpoints. Unfortunately, the proposed precedent offered by this violent incident worries us greatly. It threatens both our past and our future. We are writing this letter of opposition with sadness and reluctance but are forced to do so by the obvious point that our neighborhood's integrity is precious, fragile and irreplaceable. We have complete faith that you will vote according to your best judgement after fairly considering different opinions. City Council will also consider this question and they should have your un-rushed opinion. Thank you for listening.

David Crohn

Kara Crohn

3587 Mt. Rubidoux Dr.

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ARTICLES

How Normie Minimalism and Farmhouse Chic Took Over Contemporary Design

An aesthetic of minimalism in architecture and interior design has been sold to consumers of high design for decades now in the pages of *Dwell* and the endlessly scrollable interfaces of websites like designboom and ArchDaily.

Kate Wagner May 31, 2020



An image of *Dwell* style minimalism (image courtesy Pxhere)

This article is part of Sunday Edition: “Minimalisms”.

When one thinks of minimalism, they may picture a sculpture by Donald Judd or a piece of music by Philip Glass.

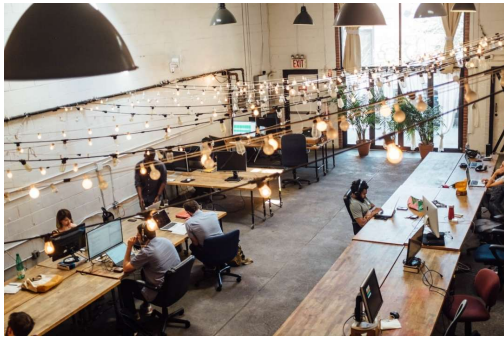
Architecturally, their mind may dwell in

the realm occupied by sparse, cubic forms and white, empty window-walled rooms filled with naught but a rug, a monstera plant, and a mid-century sofa, perhaps framed by tasteful stairs. Indeed, this is the aesthetic that has been sold to consumers of high design for decades now in the pages of *Dwell* and the endlessly scrollable interfaces of websites like *designboom* and *ArchDaily*. It’s the

aesthetic that has been co-opted by Silicon Valley headquarters, your Instagram feed and AirBnBs alike, one that has described by the critic Kyle Chayka as “airspace”:

“[Airspace is] the realm of coffee shops, bars, startup offices, and co-live / work spaces that share the same hallmarks everywhere you go: a profusion of symbols of comfort and quality, at least to a certain connoisseurial mindset. Minimalist furniture. Craft beer and avocado toast. Reclaimed wood. Industrial lighting. Cortados. Fast internet.”

Minimalism’s ubiquity in the world of “good design” is well known and well documented. However, in the world of the popular commercial vernacular, it’s managed to go relatively unnoticed, likely because it takes a slightly different aesthetic form, one less peppered with the signifiers of modernist good taste. It does this in the same way Chayka’s airspace colonizes cafes and co-working spaces: through media saturation. In order to explain this form and how it wormed into television sets and later into homes around the country requires an explanation of what came before.



An emblematic co-working space with potted plants (image via and courtesy Piqsels)

Minimalism is one of those words that is reaching a breaking point as to how many things it can possibly mean. Minimalism refers to anything from Marie Kondo’s decluttering ethos to any architectural form devoid of a gable. It has become a stand-in for the equally vague “contemporary.” Succinctly put, minimalism writ large has come to mean a combination of modern design and the ethos of living with less.

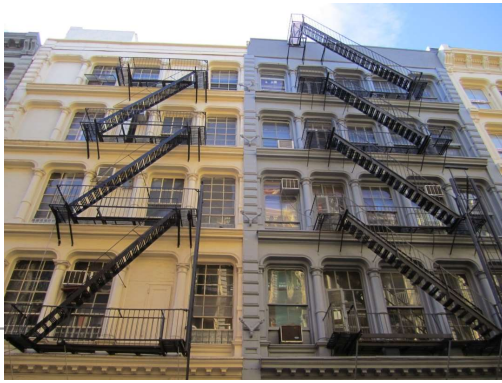
Minimalism, in the historic sense, refers to a movement in art and music dating back to the 1960s and ‘70s whereby artists created sculpture, painting, and musical composition using themes of large scale, cubic and geometric forms, industrial materials, limited palette, and repetition. This movement was an extension of the earlier Abstract Expressionist and Op Art movements in art; in music its origins lie in serialism. Ad Reinhardt, an Abstract Expressionist painter whose monochrome paintings are frequently seen by art historians as a precedent

to Minimalism, described his work's artistic underpinnings succinctly: “The more stuff in it, the busier the work of art, the worse it is. More is less. Less is more. The eye is a menace to clear sight. Art begins with the getting rid of nature.”

Architecturally speaking, the “less is more” dogma begins much earlier than the 1960s. While Minimalism was not a movement that extended explicitly to architecture (which, in the 1960s was in a very different place aesthetically than art), its ethos can be found in the oft-quoted aphorisms and manifestos of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and other kingpins of early 20th century International Style architecture. However, aside from the obvious aesthetic heritage of European modernism, there is an important and underemphasized architectural link to the Minimalism of the 1960s, namely regarding the places in which it originated.

* * *

The SoHo neighborhood of New York City was once a thriving hub of industrial activity. Its 19th-century cast-iron loft buildings once served as the backdrop of garment manufacturing, machine shops, and warehouses. The loft building, characterized by being three to five stories in height, floors consisting of thick beams of wood supported by thin cast iron columns, was once the pinnacle of 19th century structural engineering, and for centuries served their purposes as sites of light industry. However, by the post-war period, these structures had long outlived their usefulness in trades such as manufacturing or warehousing. Structurally, they were inefficient for the machinery and workflows of modern industrial production, which was increasingly being farmed out to massive sprawling factories outside the city. The lofts' urban profile — narrow buildings tightly packed together on even narrower streets — made shipping and logistical operations increasingly difficult. As a result, by the 1960s, blight and business abandonment made SoHo a prime target for the mid-century urban renewal schemes — and yet, much of SoHo was spared the wrecking ball, thanks to the efforts of a specific constituency: artists. In SoHo, artists could rent or purchase a large amount of interior space for cheap, all while being close to transit and the previous arts hub of Greenwich Village, which was increasingly becoming unaffordable. There were downsides, however: The lofts were often structurally deficient, and living in a building zoned for commercial or industrial use was illegal, yet, the artists, including such Minimalist luminaries as Donald Judd and Philip Glass persevered — and thus the minimalist “loft aesthetic” was born.



Historic SoHo cast iron buildings in 2010
(image courtesy La Citta Vita via Flickr)

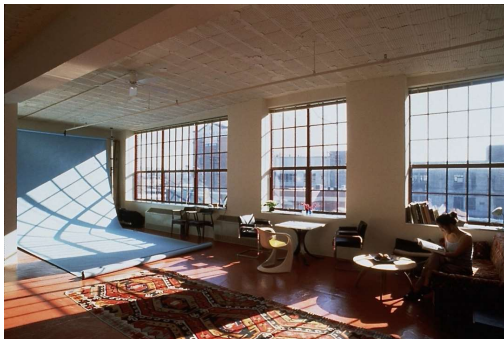
In his book *The Lofts of SoHo*, Aaron Shkuda succinctly describes this transformation and how it led specifically to the minimalist “loft aesthetic” of high ceilings, sparse furnishings, and an emphasis on natural light:

Taking these challenges into consideration, it is remarkable that a group of relatively poor artists created a new housing form in

former industrial space. They did so by transforming the very features that made lofts increasingly obsolete for industry into the hallmarks of a new type of living space: the residential loft. Through hard work and ingenuity, artists (and smaller numbers of non-artists) converted what amounted to factory interiors — cavernous rooms filled with decades’ worth of accumulated trash, old paint, and machinery — into attractive, light-filled apartments and workspaces. Through their renovations and interior design choices, SoHo artists also developed a new loft aesthetic that blended art and industrial space, urban life, and minimalist serenity. Artists were willing to put up with the difficulties of living in lofts because of the community that developed around them, a population that nurtured their creativity and supported their decision to live in a loft both practically and emotionally.

This specific combination of art and architecture — one of adaptive reuse — blended a specific moment in modern art and late-19th and early-20th-century industrial architectural features such as high ceilings, open floor plans, exposed brick and structural elements, and bays of large windows. This mélange would over the years solidify into a highly desirable aesthetic of urban living that would be endlessly reproduced in lofts, daylight factories, and, in the early 21st century, new-build apartment buildings. The origins of Chayka’s airspace lie in the lofts of SoHo and similar urban regeneration stories replicated across the country. By the late aughts, the post-industrial loft aesthetic could be seen in everything from tapas bars to tech headquarters to university dorm lobbies. Its ubiquity can be attributed to a number of factors, namely the availability of empty industrial spaces and thus the spread of tax-deductible, adaptive reuse as a tool for urban

regeneration (and, by extension, gentrification); the prestige of the aesthetic's art history roots; the vast proliferation of identical spaces across social media; the coalescence of high-brow interior design magazines around urban living and a specific style of furnishing; the end of the dominance of postmodern architecture and the subsequent rehabilitation of modernism in the period after the Great Recession; and, finally, the fact that the use of open-plan structures and exposed services and surfaces saves a lot of money for developers wanting to capitalize on a trend.



An artist's loft (image courtesy artspaceprojects [via Flickr](#))

A side effect of the fetishization of the industrial is that it aestheticizes the backdrop of labor within capitalism, in many ways erasing labor's histories of toil and struggle. In effect, this both capitalizes on a strange kind of nostalgia for the old pre-Chase Bank on every corner city while offering in exchange a simulacrum of old-school urban life. It's important to note that the appropriation of the urban

industrial landscape by architecture is not new; in fact, the architectural historian and critic Reyner Banham's book [A Concrete Atlantis](#) extensively documents how the industrial buildings of the US were used by European modernists like Le Corbusier as "an available iconography, a language of forms, whereby promises could be made, adherence to the modernist credo could be asserted, and the way pointed to some kind of technical utopia."

As successful as it may be, this brand of "minimalism" seemed staunchly rooted (somewhat by architectural availability) in urban areas, precisely because of its association with factory labor and old-city nostalgia. Its escape into the suburbs seemed limited to breweries and the inside of Starbucks and Chipotles. By the early 2010s, it was high time minimalism hit the burbs, and waiting, with open arms, was Home and Garden Television and their blockbuster couple, Chip and Joanna Gaines.

* * *

The fetishization of and association with regional manifestations of a labor past is what ties together the minimalism of the industrial loft to an aesthetic that has been increasingly dubbed "modern farmhouse." Just as the loft romanticizes the



Designmilk image of the Hewing Hotel in Minnesota (photo by [@canarygrey](#) via [Flickr](#))

backdrop of 19th century urban industry, the modern farmhouse romanticizes the similarly Steinbeck-ian plight of the agricultural worker. It makes sense that an aesthetic marketed towards suburban homeowners would be based off agricultural work, since the history of the suburbs from the Garden City movement to gated communities is based off escape from urban plights and the further-flung expansion into greenfields, or previously agricultural, areas. This fetishized and aestheticized use of the motifs of agriculture also enabled marketing to areas such as the regional South, whose economic production still revolves around

agriculture and which never urbanized to the same extent — or in the same way — as the Northeast.

The appropriation of rural aesthetics for use in the interiors of suburban homes is not new. Its origins lie explicitly with the Colonial Revival of the 1970s in anticipation of the American Bicentennial, where barrel chairs and stuffy plaid valances began populating kitchens all over the country. Post-Bicentennial, this appropriation evolved into the popular 1980s and 1990s practice of theme-ing rooms. Examples of wicker basket and reclaimed wood-laden primitivist kitchens can be found in decorating books by popular designers such as [Mary Gilliatt](#) as early as 1983. These later transformed into the popular “country kitchen” of the ‘90s, categorized by shabby chic furniture, glass-paned cabinetry, and Little House on the Prairie-esque gingham textiles popularized by decorators such as Martha Stewart. (In the 2000s, the kitchen became more aesthetically ornate and more influenced by theming revolving around the European countryside, specifically in France and Tuscany.)

In the late aughts, the previous generation of the HGTV line-up, concerned with the practice of buying and selling real estate, began to shift in response to the bursting of the mortgage bubble. Its offerings, which were once more diverse in that they also featured shows devoted to easy redecorating, landscaping and crafts, began almost entirely centering around “flipping” — that is, the exterior

and interior renovation of older properties. After discovering that the sledgehammer scenes were popular with male viewers, HGTV pivoted hard towards this content, and, by association, an aesthetic that involved, well, knocking down a lot of walls.



Designmilk TriBeCa loft designed by
@andrewfranzarchitect (photo by
@albertvecerka via Flickr)

The modern farmhouse style came into public consciousness with the smash hit show *Fixer Upper*, which first premiered in 2013. By 2018, the aesthetic had reached such dominance that, according to the real estate site Zillow, homes with modern farmhouse interiors and architectural features sold at an average of 30 percent above expected value. Modern farmhouse as a style is characterized by an emphasis on the imitation of historical American vernacular architecture: large, open floor plans and natural light; a neutral, often white or gray-dominated color scheme; furnishing that is sparse, neutral, yet traditional in its aesthetic

profile; shabby chic or upcycled furniture and decorative elements; and the use of specific materials such as shiplap siding, rustic lighting fixtures, and reclaimed wood or building materials. While many of us may not associate painted signs that say “Gather” as representing minimalism, the aesthetic itself is certainly more spare than anything HGTV has ever offered and much of the ethos and even the materials themselves are very similar to those that are emphasized in the minimalist lofts of yore. The loft and the modern farmhouse both place an emphasis on vast, open, high-ceiling spaces, neutral paint schemes, natural light, rustic elements, historic architecture, reclaimed materials, and the meticulous curation of displayed objects, accessories, or clutter.

The now prototypical white kitchen, featuring white walls, white subway-tile backsplash, white quartz countertops, and white or neutral-painted cabinetry, has become a universal feature of new-build apartment buildings and suburban McMansions alike. Combine that with the nationwide popularity of things like the Tiny House phenomenon (another HGTV hit) and Marie Kondo and you’ve achieved peak levels of normie minimalism. The marketing genius of the modern

farmhouse movement is that it manages to repackage urbane design in a way devoid of so-called modernist urban elitism by harkening back to the humble rural farmer — even if that harkening requires affixing an old plow to the wall above your (white) dining room buffet.



White kitchen interior (image via Flickr and courtesy Paintzen)

If you search real estate listings nowadays, sparseness is unavoidable. Houses with period interiors, whether it's Victorian-era parlors or mid-century kitsch or dated '90s theme-ing or even 2000s *MTV Cribs* McMansion chic, are becoming an endangered species. Every interior, from the priciest New York City condo to the humblest exurban rancher, exists in a singular spectrum of gray, Marie Kondo-ed to perfection,

absent of any clutter or unnecessary touches, each accessory and wall hanging meticulously selected and expertly placed. From their ceilings dangle rusticated light fixtures aglow with Edison bulbs; their kitchens are clad in quartz and subway tile; their wall art ranging from huge reproduced metal signs to huge reproduced David Hockney prints; their furnishings boasting either Pottery Barn white sofas or \$11,000 showpieces from Design Within Reach, all atop a streaky, faux-distressed oriental rug. Every realtor, in increasingly aggrandized text boasts each instance of charm and authenticity, each listing's Real-American-ness, be it in the form of tasteful urbane liberalism or rural chauvinism — all available in knockoff form from West Elm or Joss & Main. Their commonality lies in the same impulse for vacuous, petit bourgeois taste to launder itself in narratives of nostalgia and cultural legitimacy. When thinking of minimalism, one can only wonder what the once-avant-garde cadre of artists and musicians would think about this hyper-commodified end product of their ethos, practice, and even their living circumstances. Either way, somebody's making a lot of money.

MORE FROM HYPERALLERGIC