Is the Philosophy of Sea Ranch and it's Integration with the Land Innovative and Ahead of its time?



Design Philosophy

The Sea Ranch located 100 miles from San Francisco, Northern California is a seaside community orientated facing out to sea and situated along the costal line of California, conceptualized by inspiration from historical communities in conjunction with striking architecture to create a facility for creativity, communal living, and an appreciation for the surrounding nature. [1]The idea of a Sea Ranch Project first came into development to serve as second homes for people who wanted to be close to nature and had an appreciation for creativity and art. [2]In 1963, a major developer from Oceanic Properties, Al Boeke, had interest and bought the ten-mile site, along the California coast, which originally had been a working sheep ranch for decades. [3]Boeke alongside his creative design partner Richard Neutra had a vision to completely transform the site to create impact in early modern architecture, in the wave of expansion and need for creativity after a bland era of housing design as a consequence of the post Second World War economic expansion which created a turnout of simpler, cost saving housing architecture.

[4]The leading designer and projects manager, Lawrence Halprin, had the role of landscape design for the project and had a strong vision for what Sea Rach should be. A heavy influence for the project was from Lawrence Halprin's summer holidays as a child, where he often visited Kibbutz, a series of communities in Israel, driven by agriculture and have a rich connection with their land. He was inspired by the ways of living in Kibbutz communities, and the way that their communities worked and wanted his architecture to respond to nature and encourage a similar communal response with clusters of houses nestled with relevance to the sloping of the hill. [5] A Quote from Lawrence Halprin's "Diary of an Idea" book, published in 2003, summarises his intent perfectly, saying, *"Our most difficult task was to find a way for people to inhabit this magnificent and natural system in numbers without destroying the very reason for people to come here."* The Sea Ranch Diary of an Idea includes many original hand drawings, ideas and sketches from Halprin's personal diary dating from 1959, which capturer his thoughts and key ideas from important projects and moments in his life that have led to his inspiration for the Sea ranch project and how the design process evolved to

[1] https://adglighting.com/2019/03/sea-ranch-architecture-san-francisco/

[2] https://www.dwell.com/article/sea-ranch-architecture-7f30ea15

[3] https://www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/halprinlegacy/sea-ranch.html

[4] Lawrence Halprin Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania; © Lawrence Halprin

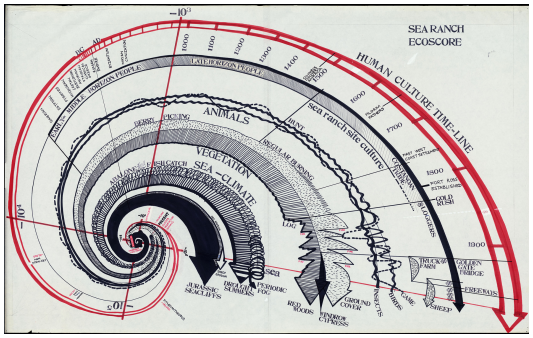
[5] https://searanch.ced.berkeley.edu/s/sea-ranch/item/2076#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0

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everything that it is today. In the opening pages of his Diary, Halprin explains his fascination with natural Californian landscapes, from his family's camping trips at the Leland "punk" Vaughn's cabin in Salt point, which is adjacent to the Sea Ranch site. He describes how his regular visitations immersed him in to the scenery, and "became an obsession" to him, forming his architectural aesthetic over time and created a deep fascination with the area.[6] The architectural form of the design is intended to respond and have a relationship with the surrounding land, by using relevant materials, colours, details, light, and a consideration to local architecture and climate.[7] The building is a part of the landscape, it's rigged form reflects the coastline and its clustered, staggered stance responds to its environment and forms a basis for a community.

[8]An array of some of the most noted American architects at the time were commissioned for building design of the scheme, working beside the main landscaping architect Lawrence Halprin to cover all aspects of the project and to ensure the delivery of Boeke's vision. Architects Joseph Esherick, Donlyn Lyndon, Charles Moore, and Richard Whitaker, were brought on towards the beginning of Halprin's Masterplan development to start the process of considering the structures that coincides with the site and to further develop ideas for the architecture, the Design team worked as a whole to consider a number of factors to ensure every design consideration was met.

[9]Ecological Planning



Investigating the ecology of the site was a crucial starting point to the project, an in-depth ecology report was carried out to gain a full understanding of how the site works and to measure the elements which needed to be considered to ensure that the Sea Ranch community can be a part of the site's ecosystem and for the two to coincide and have a strong relationship. Ecologist/Cultural geographer Dick Reynolds, working alongside the design team, investigated and studied prevailing wind patterns, soil and its permeability, as well as the forestry area, creating an Eco-score diagram demonstrating estimated geological changes in a section of land within the site over the course of a thousand years. The wind soon became obvious to be one of the main challenges of the design, with prevailing winds from the northwest, a large structure on such an exposed site would need specialized solutions to withstand and disperse the wind. Inspiration for solving this issue, came from previous farming inhabitants who planted tightly packed long rows of

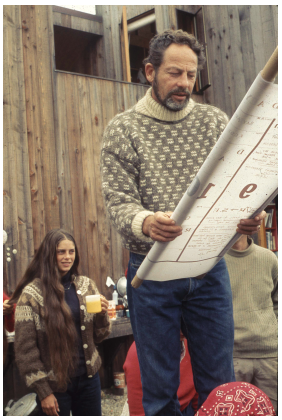
[6] https://www.dezeen.com/tag/the-sea-ranch/

[7] https://www.tsra.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/VIPBooklet.pdf

[8] https://www.dwell.com/article/sea-ranch-architecture-7f30ea15

[9] Ecology report diagaram Lawrence Halprin Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania; © Lawrence Halprin

greenery along the outline of the coast to control the wind flow and act as a form of windbreak in the most organic of ways, and so a similar approach was used in the new landscape. [10]Halprin believed modern architecture could have a relation to nature and a link to organic materials, with the vision of achieving the same wholesomeness and character that he's experienced from his favourite architectural structures from around the world and from the California area.
[11]Halprin and Reynolds studied the indigenous "Pomo" culture which once occupied a large region along the coast of Northern California and lived in strongly constructed roundhouses, which Halprin saw as the original expression of community to transfer into his design. Pomo cultures relied on fishing, hunting and gathering forestry mushrooms and berries, while living in a sustainable balance with nature by spiritually understanding and respecting the land. Dick Reynolds gathered information on the history of the Pomo communities, to gain an insight on how they're communities lived on the land and what they could learn from their village functions. Lawrence Halprin's sketchbook is filled with watercolour sketches of surrounding architecture of mid 19th century, local sheep sheds and timber barns, which are common to the area, that gradually influenced his design aesthetic for this project.



[12]Masterplan and Landscape

[13]The Sea ranch Masterplan was completed in 1963 by Halprin, landscape architect, and was the first step to designing an effective community space by studying the site ecology and levels, prevailing winds that would need manipulating, planting of greenery, microclimates and other factors that could dictate the form of the staggered structures, such as sun path and key views. Because of the nature of the project. [14]Halprin's aim was to have as little impact on the land as possible, to create a non-noticeable difference to the natural environment by working with the site. [15]The site levels vary from grassed low hills, some rocky surfaces, leading down to a flatter fields along the edge of the coast. Some of the structures make use of the higher steeper



[10] https://architizer.com/blog/inspiration/collections/ranch-home/

[11] https://archive.curbed.com/2019/2/20/18231590/sea-ranch-northern-california-sonoma-county-coast-history

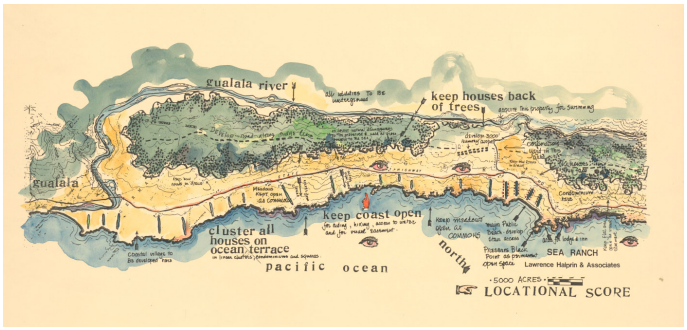
[12] Lawrence Halprin and Daria Halprin at a workshop. Lawrence Halprin Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania; © Lawrence Halprin Photo by Jim Alinder

[13] Experiments in Environment, ca. 1968; Lawrence Halprin Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania; photo: © Lawrence Halprin Photo by Jim Alinder

[14] https://spacesmag.com/stories/history/the-architecture-of-sea-ranch-at-sfmoma/

[15] https://www.jlja.com/sea-ranch-lodge

ranges, for the main purpose of taking advantage of the spectacular sea views, while the smaller dwellings are nestled from the wind by plants and hedges for protection from prevailing wind. Only indigenous species of trees were planted throughout the plan to ensure a balanced ecosystem and to conform with the idea of allowing original nature to dominate the land despite the development of the structures. The landscape design is intended to look as you would imagine it to naturally, to express the feeling of belonging to the land and corresponding with its placing.



[16]In addition to an intimate relationship with nature, a crucial aspect of The Sea Ranch was to evoke a community lifestyle, and to create a well thought out, efficient, happy way of living to bring life to a once heavily populated land with a huge amount of potential. By approaching the scheme correctly, and with consideration to details with a wide skill set from the design team, the project was able to serve as a true community, planned purposefully to cater for a healthy and happy lifestyle for creative individuals, or anyone with a deep fascination with the beauty of the region. The finished Masterplan outlines the definitive outcome for the project, while space was purposefully left clear for future development and a lot of this free space was used for recreation in the meantime.[17] Roughly half of the whole project's land is cleared for mixed uses for all occupants to use for leisure and sports, as well as a golf course, two swimming pools and a small tennis court to fully facilitate the community and encourage healthy living. Sea ranch also has links to the Gualala River, adjacent to the site, with boating, canoeing and swimming facilities giving opportunity for communal use. The community has detailed landscaping including the design of roads and pathways, fencing, and heavy greenery in areas for wind protection. The [18]site is sign posted and labelled with purposeful information ensuring a detailed system to function as a village of its own.

[16] https://www.sfmoma.org/press/release/the-sea-ranch/

[17] https://www.sfmoma.org/exhibition/sea-ranch/

[18] Lawrence Halprin's original masterplan for Sea Ranch along the Pacific. Lawrence Halprin Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania; © Lawrence Halprin

Architecture of the time

The [19]1960's saw a large amount of modern and organically inspired architecture fuelled by change and experimentation, setting new norms and pushing boundaries for modern architecture to develop to new heights. Organically inspired design was becoming increasingly popular in America's architecture as people strived for variety and spaces of calmness and relaxation. In contrast to this, post Second World War Created a higher demand and push for pre-fabricated, similarly designed construction materials and methods which was used across the housing market to construct cheaper houses at a faster rate starting the wave of similarly designed dwellings. The publicity around architecture and its effect of the public has become more apparent over time, and the pioneering decades of modern architecture became the ideal aesthetics to a lot of the public and created a wave of new design. There are numerous highly thought of modernist/organic buildings from the 60's and 70's designed by the likes of architects such as Frank Lloyd wright that are still some of most admired structures in architecture. Many famous structures are shaped and formed in accordance to the landscape it occupies but the majority of architecture is planned to be made on a suitable site that easily conforms to a client or brief's needs, whereas Halprin saw a great opportunity at hand and dedicated time and effort to carefully structure the design process to respond to the site to the fullest, to occupy a seemingly un occupiable site. At the planning stage of the Sea ranch project, the idea of building such a vast complex across a mainly un used, natural, but challenging site was very controversial, there were critics who were against constructing the Ranch from fear that it would negatively affect the nature and ruin the landscape. Giving Halprin and the design team the vital challenge of demonstrating the possibilities of intricately designed large scale community architecture which compliments and relates to a difficult site rather than tarnish it's beauty.

Conclusion

The philosophy and ideology behind the Sea Ranch community, is to a degree ahead of its time in the aspect of site restrictions, as its settlement challenges the possibilities for such thriving architecture in the most difficult of weather conditions, creating an impressively designed structure while still executing the site challenges with natural inspired solutions. Although Sea Ranch is an impressive example for early modernist architecture with a personal touch, it isn't often mentioned a great amount in contrast to other pioneering modern structures. Due to the influence of local Northern Californian architecture, the modern form of the design carries a different character, as a result of using wooden cladding on the facades, giving a uniquely beautiful, more traditional housing finish, while also separating it from other modern architecture, creating its own separated

[19] https://archeyes.com/tag/1960s-architecture/

style. Sea Ranch has inspired many similar buildings to be designed and constructed, especially within California, showing its influence on local architecture, such as West Marin Ranch by Turnbull Griffin Haesloop in California, which features red cedar construction and highly designed landscape to compliment the structure. A house in Akureyri, Iceland named Villa Lola by architect Arkis, was partially influenced by Sea Ranch, and is framed by its landscape with the use of wooden cladding and other similar materials, which shows the Nordic aesthetic influence in the design and its notability in architecture outside of America. The design team ensured to carefully considers every aspect of the site's natural ecology, and every aspect of the scheme is designed specifically to correspond with the site to ensure that the nature is kept untouched. All the landscaping claims and intentions were met successfully, however, a bit more of a link from the division of interior and exterior such as a larger front or maybe a viewpoint that protrudes to the exterior space would be effective to soften the change from solid to nature. The level of intricacy and thought that's gone into the development, is very apparent in the aesthetic outcome, as It's rugged, staggered height form, effectively relates to the costal line making the structure look at home, showing an in depth understanding of the location context and how that would relate to the design of the structure. In Halprin's Diary, he notes how they wanted to stay away from heavily manipulating the aesthetic of the landscape by sculpting land or adding flower beds, to keep a natural local vernacular, and it's achieved this by having an equal balance between the man made and organic features on site, and the ecology is that of all other surrounding land, with only indigenous plant species at a regular amount of growth, having little impact of the natural state of the site while giving it a purpose. Sea Ranch is a great example of combining architecture with the ecology, and is a highly praised project for being ahead of its time for organic, modernist, architecture. The Sea Ranch has grown over the years with new dwelling additions to various patches of the 10-mile site, built by a mixture of new and original architects, that echo's the style of the Ranch further, while adding modern features and demonstrating the long-lasting design aesthetic that continues to be admirable in architecture. The Sea Ranch is a series of beautifully designed, uniquely approached, and well thought out community structures that harmonizes with the land and is an example of the possibilities of costal architecture, providing inspiration for many architects.