

Chronicles of Brunonia

Windshield

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Les ingénieurs font de l'architecture, car ils emploient le calcul issu des lois de la nature, et leurs oeuvres nous font sentir l'harmonie. Il y a donc une esthétique de l'ingénieur, puisqu'il faut, en calculant, qualifier certains termes de l'équation, et c'est le goût qui intervient. Or, lorsqu'on manie le calcul, on est dans un état d'esprit pur et dans cet état d'esprit, le goût prend des chemins sûrs.

The engineers make architecture, for they employ the calculations issued from the laws of nature, and their works make us feel harmony. There exists therefore an aesthetic of the engineer, since he must, in calculating, qualify certain terms of the equation, and it is taste that intervenes. But, when one handles the calculations, one is in a state of pure spirit and in that state of spirit, taste takes sure paths.

— Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture*¹

Reflecting the autumn sun of 16 October, 1936, the descending gleam of the aircraft snared the restless gaze of John Nicholas Brown. Waiting at the airport, Brown's mind raced at the prospect of spending two full days in consultation with one of the world's most prominent modern architects. By telephone, he had arranged for the trans-continental flight, hoping that progressive California was home to the man who could build the perfect vacation home on the Atlantic.

Stepping from the burnished fuselage, Richard J. Neutra was momentarily framed by the aluminum machine, and as he confidently crossed the tarmac he projected about himself an aura of confident, unstoppable innovation. After the confines of the airplane, his probing blue eyes took in the daylight and the recently constructed buildings of the airport. Moving forward, he saw for the first time this new client: tall, elegantly dressed, and with a broad mustache attempting to mature his earnest and boyishly handsome face.

As they shook hands, Brown noticed the book stuffed into Neutra's pocket: Emerson.^{II} Neutra had taken advantage of his flights to begin his immersion in the literature and spirit of New England. An avid scholar, Brown immediately took a liking to the intensely professional Neutra. They set off together in Brown's waiting car; with every mile of conversation that brought them closer to Fisher's Island, Brown grew more certain that, in Neutra, he had encountered his ideal architect.

*When I first knew John, he was a classicist, then he was a medievalist.
Now I hear he is a modernist. What are we to expect next?*

— Harvard President A.L. Lowell^{III}

John Nicholas Brown II (hereinafter referred to as JNB) was born on 21 February, 1900, to John Nicholas Brown Senior and Natalie Bayard Dresser Brown. In March of that year, Senior hoarsely delivered a dedication speech on

the steps of the new Providence Public Library, shouting to be heard above the harsh winds. Only thirty-eight at the time, his health had always been fragile; two months later he died of complications related to the influenza that he contracted in the bitter cold at the library ceremonies.^{IV}

His brother Harold, in England when John Senior fell ill, immediately returned to New York via steamer to join his family as the eldest son struggled against disease. In a parallel strike of fate, Harold developed pneumonia while crossing the Atlantic; he died just ten days after his older brother.^V

JNB was only three months old when newspapers christened him “World’s Richest Baby”; as the inheritor of both his father’s and his uncle’s estates, he was raised by his mother and grandmother in a style that never lacked for material comfort.

The Browns were descendants of the Reverend Chad Brown, who, along with Roger Williams, was an original founder of Providence, Rhode Island. Since the family’s auspicious beginnings in the region, the Brown name was synonymous with the expanding mercantile and industrial economy of New England and the wider United States. Their financial success continued generation after generation, and the Browns were also known for their charitable work, especially in the field of education.

In the absence of patriarchs, JNB was raised amidst the stately buildings that the men of his family had built. His first home was the family house at 357 Benefit Street, a wood-framed Georgian leviathan looking out upon the frenetic markets of Providence’s waterfront. Built by Joseph Nightingale in 1791, its towering chimneys and the refined incorporation of classical motifs and colonial

form symbolized the economic and social power of its residents.^{VI} Three stories tall, it broadly caught the afternoon sunlight, and its wide halls and elegantly appointed rooms served as JNB's Providence residence throughout his life. From its commanding location above the bustling urban center, the house was visible to all and proclaimed the heritage of dominance that the Brown name evoked.

As a boy, JNB was surrounded by family archeology. Already more than six feet tall by the time he was twelve, his body was drawn by its rapid growth; frail and sequestered to lessons with private tutors, he ranged through the spaces constructed and marked by his illustrious forebears.^{VII} Among the volumes in John Carter Brown's *Biblioteca Americana*, the fair-haired boy perused the early atlases and conquistador records that his grandfather had collected and originally housed in a special library on the northeast corner of 357 Benefit. JNB was only the latest scion of his family, unproven by history and fragile compared to the rugged masonry and stout wooden masterworks of earlier centuries. The boy labored to match up to the men he imagined constructing his surroundings.

Adjacent to 357 Benefit, which his ancestors had occupied since 1814, was the house built by the merchant John Brown in 1786.^{VIII} Young JNB grew up beneath the stern façade of the grandiose house that bore the same name as he; as architectural history became more and more his passion, he must have felt both the pride and weight of being associated with such a building.

After a visit to Providence, President John Quincy Adams remarked that the house was “the most magnificent and elegant private mansion I have ever seen on this continent”, and JNB certainly would have examined the house while trying to imagine it in its original splendor.^{IX} An imposing brick cube anchoring

the aptly named Power Street, the house was sold by Brown's descendants to Marsden Perry, a banker and business magnate, early in the twentieth century.^x JNB, ever curious and educated by his formidable grandmother and aunt, and particularly by his progressive mother, Natalie, must have been aware of this separation of house and family. After Perry died in 1935, Brown bought the house, and in 1941, well established as a philanthropist, he donated it, under the name of its original owner, to the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Only blocks away from his house on Benefit Street were the fenced greens of the Brown family's most enduring philanthropic project: Brown University. In his senior year at the St. George's School, in Newport, JNB took a decisive step towards becoming an agent, rather than a mere place-holder, on the family tree. Although still slender, he had broad shoulders and carried himself with the erect posture of one of his family's mansions. After living in the fortified seclusion of privilege that was his habitat whether in Providence, Newport, New York, or Europe, he yearned to define his life on his own terms.

In 1918, he graduated from St. George's, and the following autumn, enrolled in the Class of 1922 at Harvard College. Reflecting on his decision to strike out from the path well-trodden by his progenitors, he stated

Concerning my going to Brown... I looked forward to going to the college of my ancestors. But... something happened which made me first stop and think and then change my plans. Mr. Diman, who was then headmaster of St. George's School received a letter from Dr. Faunce [President of Brown University], which said that things

would be made as easy and pleasant for me as possible. The one thing, above all others, which I wish to avoid is to be favored. The main reason that I now think Harvard will be my alma mater is that is so big, such a university in the true sense of the word, that my name and standing will have nothing to do with my life there.^{XI}

Cultivating the mustache that he would wear for the rest of his life, JNB thrived at Harvard, receiving his B.A. in art history in the spring of 1922. His zeal for study gained him the distinction of designing his own field of concentration, “the Influence of Classical Culture on the Middle Ages.” While the sway of his name may not have been left entirely in Providence, JNB did his utmost to justify any special treatment conferred upon him.

Following graduation, he won a grant to further his studies. “I roamed over Europe, especially the shores of the Mediterranean, laden down with heavy photographic equipment and the omniscient Baedeker.”^{XII} Rigorously consulting his guidebook, Brown documented his travels with photographs and drawings. He loved Europe’s gothic cathedrals; their enormous volumes of spirituality must have made him feel like a boy again. Standing in the crossing of Chartres, he craned his neck and look upwards, once again slight and enveloped by great structure.

JNB returned to Providence after his travels to take his place in the finance department of the 150 year old family business. Stationed in the dim reaches of the office, through a labyrinthine combination of doors and corridors, he set

aside the study of bonds and trust indentures. Unearthing *The Divine Comedy* from his bottom desk drawer, JNB escaped his stolid quarters on Dante's words. It became clear to him that he had neither purpose in the office nor desire to be there; he returned to Harvard and received his Master's degree in Fine Art in 1928.^{XIII}

Along with receiving his A.M., in 1928 JNB had the satisfaction of dedicating the new chapel at St. George's. While he was still an undergraduate at Harvard, JNB began to contemplate the noble causes to which his money, kept from his full control until adulthood, might be applied. He determined that his high school was in need of a properly magnificent place of Christian worship, and drawing from his studies, began to envision a gothic sanctuary.

Before making his plans public, JNB commissioned the help of Ralph Adams Cram. Familiar with the Brown family after designing Emmanuel Church, a memorial to John Nicholas Brown Senior, and Harbour Court, the brick chateau in Newport that Natalie Brown built for JNB in 1904, Cram eagerly accepted the chapel project. He was an ardent supporter of gothic style, and as one of America's foremost purveyors of gothic buildings, was employed as Princeton University's consulting architect throughout the time that he worked with JNB.

Construction on the chapel began in 1924. Crossing and recrossing Europe as he searched its cathedrals for inspiration, JNB collaborated intensely with Cram, supplying the program to be executed by the building and valuable research to support it. Mesmerized and walking the maze ornamenting the floor at Chartres, JNB later hunched over drawings for a similar ambulatory maze at

St. George's.^{XIV} In 1928, in sweeping academic robes and towering above the bespectacled Cram and his dotting mother, JNB posed for a photograph before the intricately carved stone of his creation. In 1936, carefully typing one of his earliest dispatches to Neutra, JNB remarked, "The chapel took four years to build, and I enjoyed every moment of the building intensely."^{XV}

As a young art aficionado in the first third of the twentieth century, JNB was fascinated by the very latest developments in art and architecture. Especially in the years following World War One, a powerful turn towards the restrained and abstractly classical forms of "modernism" had gripped the European avant-garde. As a subscriber to the publications *Architectural Forum* and *Architectural Record*, JNB kept up on the creations of the new legion of architectural heroes—Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies Van der Rohe, Philip Johnson, and many others. Carefully informing his design with magazine photographs, he gave himself a creative outlet from the office and in 1924 built the "first modern room in New England" into his mother's Boston house.^{XVI}

In 1928, he was a founding trustee of the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art; striding through crowded openings of the works of ground-breakers such as Buckminster Fuller, Alexander Calder, Matisse, and Picasso, JNB spoke passionately for the new age of art against more conservative critics.^{XVII} In 1929, he joined the Junior Advisory Committee of the fledgling Museum of Modern Art, which in 1932 displayed the landmark exhibition "The International Style". One section was dedicated to new California architecture, and most prominently featured was Richard J. Neutra's Lovell Health House.

The first American residence with a steel frame, the Lovell Health House was a composition of rectangles that looked as though it were perilously suspended from the side of a steep ravine. Entering on the top floor, one descended through the house's expansive stairways and moved through an open, flowing floor plan bathed in the light of many plate-glass windows. Although he was Austrian by birth, Neutra loved the United States and its fast-paced industrial culture. Standing on the concrete foundations during construction of the Lovell House, Neutra looked up at the cage-like frame that he had designed and was thrilled by the opportunities that building for wealthy American clients afforded.

He used Ford headlights for light fixtures and, skillfully promoting his work, made an agreement with his clients to open the house for public tours in the first month after it was completed.^{xviii} Wandering through the immense and starkly decorated building, thousands of Los Angeles citizens were awestruck by the low-slung furniture and open plan unlike anything they had seen before. The house was a built example of what was becoming known as the 'International Style', and with its flat roofs, stripped-down detail, and emphasis on raw building material as the interior's finished surfaces, it introduced many Californians to the new age of building. As word of the house spread, Neutra's fame went along with it, and it was not long before he was recognized as one of America's leading architects.

Neutra was born in Vienna on April 8, 1892, to Samuel and Elizabeth Neutra. Samuel Neutra was a small scale industrial artisan, forging brass and bronze parts for Vienna's gas and water meters, and although he did not move in

high society circles, his well-educated and artistically-minded children did. As the epicenter of the decaying Hapsburg Empire, Vienna at the turn of the century was thick with history, culture, and counter-culture. Through his older siblings, the young Neutra met Vienna luminaries such as Sigmund Freud and the composer Arnold Schönberg. One afternoon, he was taken by his brother in law to a one-story house obscured by a wild and overgrown garden. As they approached the door, they were confronted by two sleeping heads carved from boulders, but could rouse nothing from inside as they knocked. Finally, after circling the house to another door, a frowning, bearded man wearing a blue and white tunic emerged. Shaking Neutra's hand, he simply said, "Klimt."^{XIX} Walking through the painter's home and studio, Richard took the opportunity to cast his appraising eye over the work of one of Vienna's most celebrated new artists.

Turn of the century Vienna was rife with artistic developments and debates, revolutionaries and entrenched nobles. In this maelstrom of culture, Neutra grew more certain with each passing year that he was destined to be an architect. His middle and high school years progressed in the shadow of the ongoing construction of Otto Wagner's Postal Savings Bank. By the time the last sheet of white marble had been fastened into place with conspicuous bolts, in 1912, Neutra was studying architecture in his first year at the local *Technische Hochschule*. A member of the Vienna Secession, Wagner built in a style at once respectful of the ornate architecture that decorated Vienna and departing from the imitative Beaux-Arts structures being built by less adventurous architects.

Walking into the light-filled banking room of Wagner's bank, Neutra ran his hands over the gleaming aluminum "heat-blowers" and admired the pre-

fabricated curves of the vaulted glass-paned ceiling. Recording his visit that night in his journal, he noted the buildings “sublime proportions”, and, still moved by the experience, hastened to add three exclamation points to close his thoughts.

Neutra also had the fortune to study architecture under the instruction of the confrontational Adolf Loos. The author of numerous articles and manifestoes, Loos was a man of eclectic tastes and opinions, well known for his declaration that “ornament is crime”. As a teacher and practicing architect in Vienna, he instructed Neutra’s second-year studio. Equally educational were the hours spent in cafés with several other pupils listening as Loos quietly and tirelessly proffered his opinions. Leaning forward over tables laden with empty glasses, Neutra listened critically, furrowing his brow and sweeping his hair back as he considered Loos’ words. “His standpoints are almost never invulnerable, but they are always interesting and probably honestly founded.”^{xx}

In 1914, at the outbreak of World War One, Neutra was sent to the Balkans as an artillery officer, effectively halting his education just one year short of completion. Although he saw limited combat, he was mired in military life until the end of the war, suffering most significantly from depression and malaria. Like many of the forerunners of Modernism, the war profoundly influenced his work: among the rampant waste and senseless destruction realized by the over-wrought empires in conflict, Neutra craved an environment of substance, beauty, and function in the service of humanity.

On medical leave in November of 1916 he watched the funeral of Emperor Franz Joseph from the roof of the museum where his brother-in-law worked. Pale and huddling into his military overcoat, Neutra was disgusted by the trickle of

pomp below. In his journal that night, he wrote “All of this pageantry without any bearing, without form, without direction, even without any seriousness... I am wiped out, sad, frustrated...”^{XXI} His only opportunity to build during the war came in 1915, when he designed a simple rectangular tea pavilion for the officers of his regiment. It was easily built, with no frills and making graceful use of scant wartime materials, and Neutra must have been proud, even among the gloom of his military service, to enjoy a hot drink within his earliest built creation.^{XXII}

Still weakened by disease, Neutra convalesced in Switzerland and gradually regained enough strength to begin working as an architect again. Among miserable jobs and harsh temperatures, Neutra did enjoy working for landscape architect Gustav Ammann in the summer of 1919. Eager to strengthen his body and delighted by the growth around him, he quickly became learned in botany and adept at maintaining the plant nursery; to supplement his modest income, his employer allowed him to pick from the vegetable garden, and in the afternoons he could be seen crouched among tomato plants and squash vines, still gaunt in his threadbare clothing.

In Zurich Neutra also met Dione Niederman, who would become his wife after a protracted, and initially clandestine, courtship. Dione was a source of comfort for Neutra as he labored at uninteresting jobs and came to hate the grim winter months in Europe. Passing the train station one morning, the shining beach and lush colors of a poster reading “California Calls You” caught his eye, and visions of idyllic America gave Neutra a goal towards which his energies could be applied.

For four years, until 1923, Neutra gained experience in various offices, working with American Quakers on social projects in post-war Germany, as city architect in the town of Luckenwalde, near Berlin, and most importantly at the firm of expressionist architect Erich Mendelsohn.

Arriving in New York in October 1923, Neutra was immediately thrown into the pace of the Metropolis; walking through the streets lined with trash, hurrying immigrants, and hurtling automobiles, he craned his neck to admire the skyscrapers emerging serenely from the chaos. He stayed for in New York for several months, and upon hearing that Dione, still in Switzerland, had successfully given birth to their first son Frank, he headed west to Chicago in search of his child's namesake, Frank Lloyd Wright.

At the funeral of Louis Sullivan, the Chicago architect responsible for much of the development of the skyscraper and Wright's early mentor, Neutra first met the striking father of American modernism. Wright stood removed from the many social and professional enemies that, in his solipsism, he had made over the years in Chicago. In a letter to Dione, Neutra noted his fine clothing but wondered if the finery wasn't meant to serve as some defense against his critics.^{xxiii} Neutra introduced himself, and the dinner that the two shared eventually led Wright to offer the young Austrian a job at Taliesin, his home and studio in Wisconsin. Shortly thereafter, Dione and Frank arrived from Europe, and the family stayed with Wright until February 1925, when, at last, they headed west to California.

Working with his friend Rudolf Schindler, who had also worked with Wright before launching his own Los Angeles based practice, Neutra immersed

himself in the Pacific realm of his dreams. As Neutra undertook larger and larger projects, it became clear that Schindler, with wild black hair and complete disdain for what he termed 'the Establishment' was not as driven as his collaborator. Neutra adapted quickly to the businessman's ethic of LA, and relentlessly promoted his work through publications and by submitting to international competitions.

Most significant for the advancement of Neutra's ideas was the publication of his first book, *Wie Baut Amerika?*, or, *How does America Build?* Throughout his time in the United States, Neutra carefully documented construction sites, drawing and photographing them to convey to his eventual readers what was happening at the center of the industrial universe. Often with automobiles in the foreground, Neutra's illustrations made special note of the materials and efficient construction practices allowed by large-scale production. When reviewing the book for LA's *City Club Bulletin*, Pauline Schindler, wife of Rudolf, wrote in reaction

Worn out symbols are discarded. Changing social and economic forces modify our manner of living... Development of the new style is characterized by an impersonal generality. It is being created not mainly by the professional architect, but by manufacturers of building materials and specialties...^{XXIV}

Neutra embraced this age of materials, stripping his buildings of excess and engineering graceful displays of the capabilities of modern techniques. Based on the success of the Lovell Health House, Neutra was invited to display his work in “The International Style” show at MOMA, curated in 1932 by his contemporary Philip Johnson.

At the opening, martini in hand, JNB saw Neutra’s work in the context of his contemporaries. Peering through the windows of the Health House model and looking at the accompanying photos, he must have admired the ease with which the house was integrated into its surrounding environment. Next to Corbusier’s Villa Savoye of 1929, which had already suffered weather damage despite its famed design, the Health House was an ideal integration of site, materials, and aesthetic.

In 1936, when JNB and his wife, Anne Kingsolving Brown, decided to build a summer house on Fisher’s Island, New York, JNB looked back on his recent forays into building and architecture. His chapel at St. George’s, the restoration of 357 Benefit to its colonial origins, and his work with the restoration of the John Brown House, which he was just beginning, all were projects founded in the styles of the past. In creating a house that was distinctly his, JNB wanted to break with the architecture that had defined the family for so long. He resolved to set himself apart as a man of his own time, and in September of 1936 placed a long distance telephone call to the office of Richard J. Neutra.

Neutra’s sister answered the phone and told Neutra “Richard, it is a Mr. Brown from Newport. He wants you to design him a house.”

“Good, tell him I’ll meet him in half an hour.” Neutra assumed that this prospective client was in Newport Beach, California.^{xxv} Upon discovering that JNB was in Rhode Island, he asked for topographic maps of the Fishers Island and information regarding soils and climate, certain that his experienced scientific eye could discern the requirements imposed by the environment from secondary sources. Never having seen Neutra’s work in person, nor having met the architect, JNB insisted that Neutra visit the site in person, and sent a check for the expensive transcontinental flight. Sending a letter shortly before Neutra’s arrival, JNB made clear his larger intentions for hiring the renowned modernist.

In closing I wish to say in summary that my purposes in building this house in the modern style are threefold: first, I wish the house to be comfortable and convenient to live in; secondly, I hope it will be a distinguished monument in the history of architecture; thirdly, I look forward to these ends attained as economically as possible and particularly in a way which will insure the minimum cost for upkeep and running expenses.

For two days, the men clambered over the windswept knoll of rock and beach grass, considering possible orientations for the house and getting to know one another. Neutra immediately began work on the designs, and by the time JNB saw him off at the airport, the architect already had a collection of notes and rough sketches from which to work. Writing from Providence after Neutra’s departure, JNB told his architect, “We are still tingling with the thrilling

excitement of your visit”, and he hurried to complete the lifestyle questionnaire that Neutra had sent to clarify the programmatic demands of the client.

A skilled yachtsman, JNB noted the sometimes rough climate of Fishers Island, describing “occasional electric storms and squalls with high winds from the northeast. Severe northeast gales at equinox with wind velocity often reaching 60, very occasionally 75, miles per hour.”^{xxvi} JNB sought a house that could be used by the family and that, in turn, would encourage their activity. As a cellist and lover of recorded music, JNB laid out exact specifications for the music room and envisioned a light-filled, spacious area equipped with the latest stereo equipment, storage space for various instruments, and furniture that allowed the family to practice together.

From LA, Neutra used the Browns’ questionnaire to start drawing, and by winter had already sent several renderings to the Browns back in Providence. A long rectangle laid upon the north-south axis, the house was defined early on by the expansive horizontal lines of its overhanging roofs. Examining the colorful sketches, JNB was thrilled that Neutra’s vision so closely resembled his dream; standing at the building site, he imagined the colored-pencil landscaping coming to life and the luminescent building rising from the land like a tremendous glider.

Throughout the design period, JNB sent recommendations back to Neutra, who responded with suggestions drawn into subsequent illustrations. By summer of 1937, it was agreed that the house would be sheathed in clapboards painted with several coats of aluminum paint instead of the white stucco favored by Neutra’s modernist colleagues. The clapboards were a reference to local building traditions, and the aluminum paint echoed the slender, prefabricated aluminum

casements and large panes of the house's many windows, and even in drawings the house shone as the "distinguished monument" that JNB hoped it would be.

Construction began on the island on September 18, 1937, and JNB visited regularly, supervising contractor Elliott Brown's workmen, none of whom had a background in constructing such a departure from the lavish "cottages" built by other upper class locals.^{xxvii} In November, Neutra returned to Fishers Island and toured the site with JNB, the two men again discussing landscaping and admiring the progress as the vertical lumber of the framing was covered. JNB listened intently as Neutra, eager to stay abreast of construction concerns, quizzed the contractors on their techniques and their relationship to the new materials and practices that he had introduced to them.

Long and low on the horizon, the house took shape throughout the spring of 1938, and in April JNB christened it "Windshield", in honor of its glazed defense against the Atlantic breezes. By midsummer, contractors addressed the last details and the Browns began the process of moving in. They were joined for several days by Neutra and his wife Dione, and after the visit Neutra wrote "I expect that the fall season will be most enjoyable and I was glad that you had decided to prolong your stay and at least get a little peace in Windshield this year."^{xxviii}

Following the departure of the last painters, the Browns held a house-opening featuring the Musical Art Quartet playing in the Music Room. After the party, JNB drafted a letter to Neutra and, after making some technical observations on possible improvements for future projects, said "At the moment,

however, the music room is so beautiful and the view from it so inspiring that we cannot worry too much about what fall weather may bring.”

In bed each morning, JNB read the barometer and looked out at his boat at rest in the harbor. Next to him, Mrs. Brown awoke, and smoked her first cigarette of the day before drawing a bath in the spacious bathroom. JNB’s young sons, Nicky and Carter, already awake, could be heard as they ran through the house, still familiarizing themselves with its long corridors and myriad storage cabinets. As summer closed and the chill of fall began to line the days, JNB roamed his house, taking in the panoramas afforded by his enveloping windows.

September 21 dawned bright and clear, though for several days newspapers had warned of a hurricane forming to south. A light breeze batted the flag as JNB hoisted it from the porch, and noting the sky’s yellowish tinge, he climbed the wide stairs to check the barometer on his bedroom wall. By lunchtime, there was a strange tension to the air, so distinct that even Carter, only three at the time, perceived a change in climate.

As the wind mounted, Carter, supposedly napping, could hear muted adult conversation about the wind rising, and peering over the windowsill next to his bed he watched with amusement as a squirrel tried to hold fast to a tree. Although he was not to disturb his younger brother, Nicky, five, snuck in and, helping Carter to tie his shoes, liberated him from nap time and the two boys, excited by the nervous adults and perhaps responding to the strange weather, capered mischievously to hide in another part of the house.

The sea had risen appreciably, and JNB could see his boat as it was buffeted by wind and waves. The surf, which had been strong and good for body-

surfing in the morning, now leapt up from the rocks at the bottom of the Brown property. Spray and rain mixed across Neutra's terraced landscaping

Shuddering in the strong wind, the house began to creak and moan, and with a sudden, heart-rending shriek of twisting metal and shattering glass, the windows on the western side of the house imploded from the stress of the weather. As the rain began to pummel the house in earnest, the terrified family, accompanied by their servants, braved the weather to take refuge in the Kingsolving's house next door.

The next morning, as the entire northeast recovered from the most devastating storm in recorded history, JNB wandered through the wreckage of his quicksilver dream. Though the walls still stood, many windows lay mangled by wind. Dashed across the still fresh interiors, the aluminum frames resembled nightmarish counterparts to the streamlined furniture that Neutra had designed.

The roof, whose broad overhangs had served as wings in the high winds, lay overturned and shattered across the beach nearby. In his characteristic three piece suit, JNB threw himself down on the disembodied roofing, and, covering his face with his hat, wept at the fate of his home. Seeing this in an uncaptioned photograph decades later, Carter Brown identified the long legs on the beams as his father's, saying "I never remember having seen him cry, but that hat says it all."^{XXIX}

In the midst of the destruction, JNB resolved to rebuild his summer home. Without ceremony, he hired MIT engineers to assess the damage and design a newly reinforced roof system. In the fall and winter of 1938, Elliot Brown's workmen returned to the site they had so recently left. As the weather grew

colder, they knelt on the flat roof, hammering and rehammering roof joists and the new strapping that would buckle the roof to the house in future winds.

From California, Neutra received news of the hurricane. Dismayed by the house's inability to weather its first storm, his contact with JNB quickly diminished. He returned to Fishers Island only once, in April of 1939, tapping the walls and scrutinizing the work with builder Elliott Brown. JNB did not join them. Looking at the house, now with bulkier, stronger windows that disrupted his careful proportions, Neutra frowned into the collar of his jacket. He was embarrassed by the new, more muscular aluminum casements and their juxtaposition with the building he had brought into the world. The stark, scientific intensity of his design had finally proven too aesthetic; the Atlantic harbored more secret fury than Neutra had reckoned, and his modernism paid the price. After leaving the house, he returned to California, never to build on the East Coast again.

JNB and his family moved into Windshield, for the second time, in the summer of 1939. For two decades of curling color photographs, they stand outfitted in summer suits, with drinks and cigarettes, smiling for the camera. Clustered around their favorite aunt, or with cousins in military uniforms, Nick and Carter Brown grow up, stand as tall as their graying father, smile at the women with them and squint into the summer sun.

His deep set eyes sunken in shadow, and his distinct cheekbones catching the sun, JNB stands resolutely in front of the long, effervescent house. The building rises up behind him, as he stands in his pale gray suit and red necktie, and it looms over the lawn like a thunderhead come to earth. Framed by the

house and surrounded by his family, JNB regards the photographer with the certain eyes of a great man being recorded by a portrait artist. Behind him, his modern castle catches the light, and throws it forth to the future.

Notes

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- ^I Corbusier pp. 7.
^{II} Brown pp. 111.
^{III} Lowell as quoted in Brown pp. 111.
^{IV} Brown pp. 108.
^V Botelho pp. 90.
^{VI} Woodward pp. 56.
^{VII} Brunonia pp. 88.
^{VIII} Ibid.
^{IX} Ibid pp. 59.
^X Ibid pp. 58.
^{XI} Brown as quoted in Botelho pp. 92.
^{XII} Ibid.
^{XIII} Ibid pp. 93.
^{XIV} Brown pp. 108.
^{XV} Questionnaire pp. 6.
^{XVI} Ibid.
^{XVII} Brown pp. 109.
^{XVIII} Hines pp. 89.
^{XIX} Hines pp. 13.
^{XX} Hines pp. 22.
^{XXI} Hines pp. 26.
^{XXII} Hines pp. 25.
^{XXIII} Hines pp. 52.
^{XXIV} P. Schindler as quoted in Hines pp. 65.
^{XXV} As quoted in Brown pp. 110.
^{XXVI} Questionnaire pp. 1.
^{XXVII} Neumann pp. 127.
^{XXVIII} RN to JNB 29 August 1938.
^{XXIX} Brown pp. 119.

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