SFMOMA PRESENTS
THE SEA RANCH: ARCHITECTURE, ENVIRONMENT, AND IDEALISM
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SAN FRANCISCO, CA (September 5, 2018)—One hundred miles north of San Francisco, perched on the edge of 10 miles of rugged, wind-swept California coast, is a touchstone of 20th-century architectural history—The Sea Ranch. Conceived in 1964 by developer Al Boeke and a group of Bay Area architects, landscape architects and graphic designers including Charles Moore, Joseph Esherick, William Turnbull, Lawrence Halprin and Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, this development was founded as the antithesis of suburban sprawl. With the open-minded optimism of 1960s California as a jumping-off

point, The Sea Ranch was designed as a modern model community combining affordable living with exemplary architecture and a shared commitment to "live lightly on the land."

On December 22, 2018, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will open *The Sea Ranch: Architecture, Environment, and Idealism*, an exhibition devoted to exploring the early concepts and plans of this seminal Northern California Modern development. The exhibition will feature archival and contemporary photographs, original drawings and sketches from the project's designers and a full-scale architectural replica.

"In mid-20th century California, Modern architecture represented social progress. It signaled a shirking of tradition and bold new models for living. The Sea Ranch was envisioned as a place to embrace the land, a particularly moody and memorable land, that could expand California's existing indoor-outdoor lifestyle beyond cloudless skies and manicured golf courses," said Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher, Helen Hilton Raiser Curator of Architecture and Design. "The exhibition at SFMOMA revisits the earliest designs and concepts for The Sea Ranch, which embodied the progressive ideals of the initial team who designed for higher environmental standards and architectural excellence."

THE VISION + THE DESIGN TEAM
In the years after World War II, when real estate expansion created vast, identical suburbs for the burgeoning middle class, several California developers had a different idea. They sought to break this mold through financially viable projects that linked progressive values with modern architecture. One developer, Alfred "Al" Boeke, acquired a 10-mile by one-mile parcel of coastal California property bisected by a two-lane highway. Situated on a craggy shoreline above the Pacific Ocean, the site consisted of a series of meadows bordered by rows of Monterey cypress trees and, across the highway, a dense forest backed by the Gualala River. Formerly home to the indigenous Pomo Indians, loggers and a sheep ranch, it was now the site for a radical experiment in modern architecture.

Boeke's vision was to create a two-phase development plan, first offering affordable homes for weekenders to establish the project's financial stability and then, in phase two, creating a small town with amenities for full-time residents. Boeke enlisted the landscape architect Lawrence Halprin and land, wind and water experts to study the rugged terrain before creating a masterplan. Where Boeke saw financial opportunity, Halprin saw something else—social and environmental possibilities. Halprin, who had experienced the shared purpose of communal living while on a kibbutz in Israel, incorporated those values into the project, as well as his learnings from camping on The Sea Ranch site. His master plan prioritized large swaths of shared meadow and specified that 50 percent of The Sea Ranch land be set aside as common "open space." Ideas included capturing water from the Gualala River in wells to support the community, mitigating the gale-level oceanic wind through thoughtful tree planting and thinning the looming forest to bring in sunlight. "I realized that it was this character that I hoped we might achieve at The Sea Ranch, a feeling of overall place, a feeling of a community, in which the whole was more important and more dominant than its parts. If we could achieve that—if the whole could link buildings and nature into an organized whole rather than just a group of pretty houses— then we could feel we had created something worthwhile which did not destroy, but rather enhanced the natural beauty we had been given," explained Halprin.

Boeke assembled a group of Bay Area architects tasked with designing different parts of the community. Established San Francisco architect Joseph Esherick would create the iconic marker building, a general store and restaurant, and a series of single-family homes within the hedgerows. The young, Berkeley-based upstart team of Charles Moore, Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull and Richard Whitaker (MLTW) was engaged to design condominiums and a recreation center. Understanding that marketing the community would be key to the project's success, Halprin enlisted graphic designer Barbara Stauffacher Solomon to create the project's distinctive branding and graphic identity as well as interior supergraphics in the common buildings.

"The Sea Ranch signaled a new era in building that attempted to hold countercultural impulses and developer-driven financial imperatives in a sympathetic balance. The initial phase of The Sea Ranch development was so transformative that it set off a wave of inspiration in form and typology, radiating well beyond Northern California. It set in place a system for the sensitive occupation of a precious landscape that acknowledged the past while operating from a distinctly modern perspective," said Joseph Becker, associate curator of architecture and design.

ARCHITECTURE
The Sea Ranch's proposition foregrounded stewardship of the land, a shared system of values and design rules and the use of forms and materials inspired by Northern California's vernacular. Using the visual language of the region's barns, sheds and other agricultural buildings as inspiration, Joseph Esherick's six "Hedgerow Houses" demonstrated how designing with minimal impact on the environment could also be contemporary, spacious and beautiful. His designs reduced visual clutter to avoid catching the ever-present wind and their sloping roofs mimicked nearby Cypress trees. "We deliberately took the windiest place. If we could provide a comfortable environment for people in this hostile environment, then I thought we were home free," explained Esherick. Key to the design decisions for all of The Sea Ranch was the mandate to keep structures unpainted and sided with wood native to the project to enable them to blend into the environment. A Design Review Committee codified a design language and created processes to ensure conformity among the built projects and restrain visual distractions such as flowerbeds, parked cars and reflective surfaces.

MLTW was engaged to design a new type of housing structure consisting of 10 units around a central courtyard within a single footprint. This project, Condominium One, encouraged communal living, limited environmental impact and provided low cost units for buyers from a variety of income levels. "We wanted the units to be organized together, compact and big and in the landscape, like barns and farm clusters, rather than simply sprinkled across it, to open up more lands for commons but also to bring attention to the larger landscape. The kinds of materials we used were also to be of the place, allowing the landscape to be the dominant influences," said Donlyn Lyndon. In Condominium One, MLTW took a "saddlebags" approach, where a simple core structure holds the central mass of the building and additional volumes are "hung" off this space to serve multiple purposes. "The idea is you draw a relatively simply shaped building and then add forms to it to make special places. For example, a corner window bay that captures the view, a bed nook, or a projecting stair. The 'saddlebag' forms are not pure but respond to the particularity of their site," described Mary Griffin, wife of the late Bill Turnbull. Condominium One's design memo included rough-hewn timber, exposed posts and beams, unfinished siding and a signature, raised loft known as an aedicule that functioned as a bedroom.

"With the strict adhesion to unfinished redwood and cypress siding, a massing of simple volumes, and shed roofs that mimicked the agricultural barn while acting responsively to mitigate the prevailing winds, The Sea Ranch was an evolution of the Bay Area regional styles into something new," added Joseph Becker.

GRAPHICS
As impactful as the architecture and landscape design of The Sea Ranch were, so too were its graphics. Halprin hired Barbara "Bobbie" Stauffacher Solomon to create a logo, marketing materials and the signature interior murals in the development's communal spaces. Using the now classically modern Helvetica font, a clear departure from the swirly '60s typefaces being used in the Bay Area at the time, and incorporating motifs riffing off the site's history as a sheep ranch, Stauffacher created a graphic system that was immediately identifiable with this project. At The Sea Ranch's Moonraker Athletic Center, Stauffacher had free rein to add color to the whitewashed plywood interior. Her now-iconic supergraphics exploded with colorful visual impact in the restrained spaces, and launched a movement within graphic design that was recognized with the cover of *Global Architecture* magazine in 1966.

POSTSCRIPT
The Sea Ranch opened in 1964 with a completed nine-unit condominium, a set of small demonstration homes, a restaurant and general store, and a small pool and tennis recreation center. In its first decade, it seemed that the owners who believed in the original concept both realized and supported The Sea Ranch vision. Yet in the early 1970s, controversy arose when inland residents, fearing that coastal development would limit public access, filed a lawsuit resulting in a 10-year construction moratorium at The Sea Ranch. This suspension shifted the priorities of the developers, who needed to recoup the financial losses incurred over a decade of inaction. Phase two of The Sea Ranch—the town for year-round residents—was never constructed and development was instead recalibrated to continue to focus on weekenders. Yet the spirit of the founders lives on—current owners at The Sea Ranch are actively discussing its future as a collective. The environmentally attentive design philosophies along with the now-iconic graphics resonated globally and still influence architecture and design today. Over 50 years later, The Sea Ranch continues to be a model for 21st-century progressive living.

ORGANIZATION
The Sea Ranch: Architecture, Environment, and Idealism is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher, Helen Hilton Raiser Curator of Architecture and Design, and Joseph Becker, associate curator of architecture and design, are co-curators.

CATALOGUE
An illustrated catalogue, *The Sea Ranch: Architecture, Environment, and Idealism* accompanies the exhibition. Edited by Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher and Joseph Becker, it includes essays by Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher, Joseph Becker and Simon Sadler, with recollections by Anna Halprin, Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, Donlyn Lyndon, Mary Griffin, and Chip Lord and Curtis Schreier of Ant Farm. The catalogue is published by Delmonico Books/Prestel.

SUPPORT
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HOURS AND ADMISSION
Open Friday–Tuesday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Thursday 10 a.m.–9 p.m. Closed Wednesday. Holiday hours: Open December 24 and December 31, 2018 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; open Wednesday, December 26, 2018 and Wednesday January 2, 2019 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; closed December 25, 2018.

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Private guided tours and group discounts for *The Sea Ranch: Architecture, Environment, and Idealism* are available through the SFMOMA Group Sales team. Tours are one hour in length and are not included with museum admission. Tours must be booked at least two weeks in advance. For more information or to submit an inquiry, please visit sfmoma.org/groups.

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