

Coveted and Crash-Proof

As houses by famed architect Wallace Neff continue to trade at big numbers, a book shows his original designs

By Degen Pener

It's been a busy 12 months for **Wallace Neff** trading. In June, designer **Serge Azria** plunked down \$16.5 million for a 1920s Spanish home in Bel Air co-designed by Neff and **John Byers** and once owned by **Diane Keaton**. In May, **Ry Cooder** paid \$2.5 million (\$300,000 above asking) for another Spanish home built by the architect-to-the-stars of



Keaton



Pitt

Hollywood's golden age. In 2019, **Bill Bell**, an heir to the *Another World* soap opera fortune, and wife **Maria** sold a Bel Air estate, built in the 1930s for producer **Sol Wurtzel**, for \$31 million.

Born into one of the families that founded map publishers Rand McNally, Neff, who died in 1982 at 87, is known as a creator of what's called the California style, a mix of Spanish and broadly



PITT AND ANISTON LIVED HERE



2

- 1 Listed with Hilton & Hyland for \$44.5 million.
- 2 The new book on Wallace Neff.
- 3 This Neff was sold in June by Rodeo Realty's Josh Flagg to Serge Azria.

Mediterranean influences. Neff's most famous commission was renovating Pickfair for **Mary Pickford** and **Douglas Fairbanks Jr.** into a grand Tudor estate.

Now, a new book, *Wallace Neff* (Angel City Press, \$60) — written by real estate agent **Bret Parsons**, architect **Marc Appleton** and design expert **Eleanor Schrader** — includes the original *Architectural Digest* stories that ran when 28 Neff homes were built. “Neff was sublime at buildings that appear to organically emerge from the earth. He liberally used adobe, plaster, beams and tile floors, all made from ingredients



FORMER HOME OF DIANE KEATON

3

available locally,” says Parsons, executive director of the architectural division at Compass Beverly Hills. The book offers peeks inside estates built for the likes of **King Vidor** and director **Fred Niblo** and houses later owned by **Reese Witherspoon**, **James Murdoch** and **Madonna**. It is part of a series, *Master Architects of Southern California*, that began with a tome on **Gordon Kaufmann** in 2016 (the Hancock Park house of

Netflix's **Ted Sarandos** was on the cover) and will continue this fall with a volume on **Paul Williams**, the first Black member of the American Institute of Architects.

There are two Neffs now on the market, a 1934 home (listed for \$44.5 million) built for actor **Fredric March** and later owned by **Brad Pitt** and **Jennifer Aniston**, and a 1929 residence (\$15 million) in Beverly Hills that was significantly enlarged. Parsons' one plea to potential buyers: “If you are going to tear them down, go buy something else.” He laments the destruction of Neff homes over the years, including Pickfair (almost entirely torn down by **Meshulam Riklis** in 1990) and houses demolished by **Jon Peters** (the Vidor residence) and **Paul Allen**, who in 2000 took down a Beverly Hills estate called Enchanted Hill built for Hollywood couple **Frances Marion** and **Fred Thomson** in the 1920s. Says Parsons, “It was like destroying a Picasso.” **THR**



Listed: Homes by Modernist Masters

714 6TH AVE., VENICE This three-bedroom, 2,800-square-foot Brutalist-style home was built in 1988 by architect **Charles Ward**. It's listed by Douglas Elliman's **Mark Kitching** at \$3.5 million.



949 TORO CANYON ROAD, MONTECITO Architect **Barton Myers**' four-bedroom pavilion-like abode on 39 acres is for sale by Sotheby's International Realty for \$8.2 million.