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## The Man Who Made California Dreams Look the Way They Do

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(Page 2 of 2)

Elizabeth A. T. Smith, James W. Alsdorf chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the author of several books featuring Mr. Shulman's photographs, said he "not only had a keen eye for and appreciation of good architecture, but he also had a theatrical sensibility which enabled him to stage and compose his images in a manner that subtly dramatized each building's or interior's most outstanding and seductive features."

Although his name is strongly associated with his architectural work, Mr. Shulman talks just as fondly of a Thanksgiving portrait he took while on assignment for Farm Journal magazine in the 1980's. The picture, sitting on a countertop in his studio, shows a family gathered around a large country-style table getting ready to carve a nicely browned turkey. It has the folksy warmth of a Norman Rockwell illustration and seems a far cry from the austere architecture he helped make famous.

Mr. Shulman pointed out that this image required the same willingness to wait for the perfect moment and an ability to recognize when that moment might happen. A photographer's success comes from sticking around

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The Shangri-La in Santa Monica  
(1940)

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and taking advantage of every opportunity offered up, he says, even when it means giving editors something they hadn't requested.

"When they invited me to stay for dinner," he said of the family in the picture, "I said, 'I'd be glad to stay, would you let me photograph it?' So when I got ready to take the exposure with my 4-by-5 color transparency - I knew the kind of light I use, I knew the exposure, as I don't use meters - I said, 'O.K., when you're ready, don't look at the camera, look at each other. Make like you're carving the turkey.' Click."

He sent the transparency to New York and a few days later received a phone call from his editor. "I remember it verbatim," he recalled. " 'Julius,' the editor said, 'How in the world did you get that Thanksgiving dinner photograph? It's like the Last Supper!' "

Mr. Shulman also lovingly points to a photograph of a giggling baby taken in his early lean years as a commercial photographer, when taking pictures for friends was a valued source of income. Virtually all his pictures, he said, even the baby portraits, were achieved in just one shot. He takes pride in getting his prize without wasting film. As a result, his publisher, Benedikt Taschen, calls him "One-Shot Shulman."

Born in Brooklyn in 1910 to Russian immigrants, Mr. Shulman spent his early years on a farm in Connecticut and moved with his family to Los Angeles in 1920. He enrolled at University of California, Los Angeles, as an engineering student in 1929 but quickly changed to the liberal arts and then dropped out. He hung around that campus, and later, Berkeley, for seven years auditing classes, and during that time his sister gave him a vest-pocket camera. He didn't find his calling until February 1936, however, when he took a few photographs of a house

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A Mobil station (1956)

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Case Study House No. 22, suspended over a twinkling Los Angeles (1960)



recently completed by the architect Richard Neutra.

One of Neutra's assistants, a friend of Mr. Shulman, showed Neutra the pictures, and Mr. Shulman was hired to photograph more of Neutra's work. After that, assignments flowed in from other architects, and Mr. Shulman's career took off. In addition to photographing buildings, he took travel photos and also had a special love for street scenes featuring cars. He was as ambitious in marketing his work as he was in making it, often personally delivering images to New York editors.



Marissa Roth for The New York Times  
California architecture, captured by the photographer Julius Shulman.

In his studio, two documents illustrate how linked he has been to the great architects of the 20th century. One is a reproduction of a letter sent to him in 1950 by Frank Lloyd Wright from Wright's Taliesin studio in Wisconsin. Wright was concerned that the pictures Mr. Shulman took during a 12-day stay not be used without Wright's permission. After many lines detailing his restrictions, he concludes by saying: "I admit that no better photos have been made of the camp than those you send. What technique did you employ in making these admirable prints?"

Across the room, on a sketch by Frank Gehry of his Walt Disney Concert Hall (2003), Mr. Gehry has scribbled a note of admiration for Mr. Shulman, who has photographed Mr. Gehry's early buildings as well as more recent ones.

Ms. Smith, the curator, said she viewed Mr. Shulman's greatest contribution to be documenting the range of expression of two or more generations of modern architects. Equally important, she said, "he made these images for hire - or the majority, if not all of them, as assignments for the architects or for magazines."

Yet it took a certain insight for Mr. Shulman to seize on his subject in the earliest days of California modernism, said Wim de Wit, head of special collections and curator of architecture at the Getty Research Institute. "In the 1940's and 50's, people outside Los Angeles did not think of Los Angeles as a cultural center," he said. "But somehow he believed in it, and he documented it, and now everybody is oohing and aahing over these photographs."

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