



Eames & Walsh Architects, *The Meyer House*,
Huntleigh Village, Missouri, c. 1936–1938

Facing page:
Charles and Ray on a Velocette motorcycle

Introduction

Together they dared to disturb the universe, altering it forever with their Eamesian touch. Flashing across the timeline of the 20th century the husband-and-wife team of Charles and Ray Eames embarked on an astoundingly wide range of enterprises. Through the prism of their office at 901 Washington Boulevard (Venice, California) they projected their singular vision of how the world works and how design can enhance the lives of the people who live in it. They fractured and refracted whatever caught their interest, gaining insight as they assiduously followed the path of the chosen subject of their intellectual focus to its logical conclusion. This was a methodology that worked with everything they touched, be it the Case Study Houses, their hundred or so films, including the classic *Powers of Ten*, the series of exhibitions presented all over the world, or, most famously, their furniture. The primary strategy of the Eames Office in Charles' words was to "bring the most of the best to the greatest number of people for the least." Over the years they did just that, leaving as a legacy the indelible imprint of their distinctive design.

"Although a number of substantial figures in the world of design emerged in the decade following the Festival of Britain, none has made so great an impact on the world, both by his products and his personality, as Charles Eames. It was generally recognized that the Eames Chair constituted the first major development in chair design since the Breuer chairs of 1928. After this there followed, in a bewildering succession, toys, films, scientific researches, lecture tours, special exhibits, three further generations of chairs ... and a great number of awards and citations." This observation by British architectural historian Reyner Banham in his 1981 book *Design by Choice* reflects the awe and admiration generated, then and now, in the worlds of art, architecture, and industrial design, by the office of Charles and Ray Eames.

Charles Eames was born in St. Louis, Missouri on June 17, 1907, to a family he later described as "super middle-class respectable." His father, a veteran of the Civil War, worked for the Pinkerton Detective Agency and later as a security guard at the St. Louis Union Railroad Station. His mother performed the traditional duties of a housewife and mother to Charles and his older sister, Adele. When his father died in 1921 the family moved in with relatives, unable to live on the Civil War widow's pension of \$30 a month. From the age of ten Charles worked to help support the family, taking jobs in a printing shop, a grocery store, and a drugstore. By the time he was fourteen he was attending Yeatman High School and working at the Laclede Steel Company as a part-time laborer. There he learned about drawing, engineering, and architecture and first entertained the idea of becoming an architect. In high school he was the poster boy for future success—captain of the football team, a track star, president of his senior class, voted most likely to succeed, and chosen to deliver the valedictory address for his graduating class. In the 1925 high school yearbook he was presciently described as "a man with ideals, courage to stand up for them and ability to live up to them."

At Washington University in St. Louis, which he attended on an architectural scholarship, he continued to excel and was elected president of his freshman class.



A classic vista from the meadow. A green veil of acalyptus trees screens the house from its neighbor, Case Study House #9.

Facing page:
Front elevation before installation of railroad-tie walkway

1945–1949 • Case Study House #8

203 Chautauqua Boulevard, Pacific Palisades, California



It was Christmas Eve, December 24, 1949, when Charles and Ray Eames finally moved into their new home. Their “dream house” was situated on a promontory 150 feet above the sea and when Ray Eames first saw the site she said “we hocked everything we had to get it.” They bought the lot from their friend John Entenza, who had purchased a five-acre parcel in Pacific Palisades from the estate of Will Rogers, with the intent to launch *Arts & Architecture* magazine’s ambitious and idealistic Case Study House Program. As Esther McCoy stated in her book *Case Study Houses 1945–1962*, “In 1945 Entenza abandoned his passive role as editor to play a dynamic one in post-war architecture. He announced that the magazine itself had become a client. Eight offices were commissioned to design eight houses ... including Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen.” The program was to be an experiment in the social use of technology and the houses would be open to the public for six to eight weeks upon completion. The team of Eames and Saarinen was selected to design Case Study House #8 for the Eameses and Case Study House #9 for John Entenza on three acres of the Pacific Palisades parcel; the other two acres were to be used for Case Study Houses by architect Richard Neutra and designer Rodney Walker.

Ray and Charles had met John Entenza soon after their arrival in Los Angeles in 1941. The Eameses became fast friends with Entenza and by the end of the year Charles was appointed to the board and Ray to the advisory committee of *Arts & Architecture*. By the time the Case Study House Program was announced in 1945 the Eameses were an integral part of the magazine’s persona and actively involved in developing the Case Study House Program. The end of World War II was near, and a “guns to plowshares”

