

PEARLMAN CABIN
52820 Middleridge Drive
Idyllwild
Riverside County
California

HABS CA-50
HABS CA-50

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Historic Report
HABS
Pearlman Cabin
HABS CA-50

Location: 52820 Middleridge Drive, Idyllwild, Riverside County, California, United States

Present Owner/Occupant: Nancy Pearlman

Present Use: Mountain Cabin/Secondary Home

Significance: Almost a primitive hut, the modest Pearlman Mountain Cabin in Idyllwild art colony-high on western slope of Mt. San Jacinto-was built for accomplished amateur musicians who summered there. A wooden building in a wooded setting, it is essentially a circular room of music, sitting, cooking and sleeping. Two thirds of its perimeter is a solid wall with a clerestory of small rectangular windows. Lined up along this wall are a hearth, a desk for writing, a large window precisely framing an immense oak, two beds, and a tiny kitchen. The other third of the enclosure opens to the surroundings. Two wings extend out from the body of the house to frame this opening, one a terrace, the other a bedroom suite. The roof is a fattened disk with a flat circular center and tapered edges, folded down to the wall at the back, and crimped up at the large opening in the front. The construction of the roof is less complicated than its form may suggest: wooden trusses, braced at the center of the house, radiate out to support it. Across the opening, the roof rest on a row of actual tree trunks. Enormous sheets of glass set directly into these logs form a delicate screen through which one gazes with wonder at the panorama unfolding beyond.

With these matter-of-fact gestures, Lautner developed an idea of extraordinary beauty; the trunks, both the roof's structure and frames for the windows, echo the trees beyond and unite the space with its expansive, sylvan setting, spatially extending the architecture to the "borrowed landscape." The movement the house allow, from the center towards the edge of the back, produces an almost filmic pan, sweeping from the forest, and the enormous boulders strewn about it, up to the mountains and sky. The space like the later Hatherall, Elrod, and Ernest Lautner houses, or the second Harpel House in Alaska, is circular, but not introspective: like an eye, it focuses on the outside and draws that outside in. The house is set precisely on the edge where the ground begins to tumble down the hill. Solidly on the level ground, even burrowing into it,

sits the curved wall, like a cave, to which is fused the delicate glass screen, lifting above the slope on narrow legs that carry the weight of the project down to the concrete foundations. Like a second, unbuilt, project for the Pearlmans in Santa Ana, which reads like the staves of a musical score or the strings of a harp, the cabin suggests a musical analogy in its affinity with the form of a grand piano—a half-open shell sitting on slender legs.

Historian(s): Frank Escher, Jean-Louis Cohen, and Nicholas Olsberg, *Between Earth and Heaven: The Architecture of John Lautner*, ed. Nicholas Olsberg (New York: Rizzoli International Publications in association with Hammer Museum, 2008), 129-133.

Project Information:

Measured Drawings by: William S. Clerk Solares, Cal-Poly Pomona

Photographs by: William S. Clerk Solares, Cal-Poly Pomona

Historic Report by: William S. Clerk Solares, Cal-Poly Pomona

Faculty Advisor: Marta Perlas, Cal-Poly Pomona/Mythograph

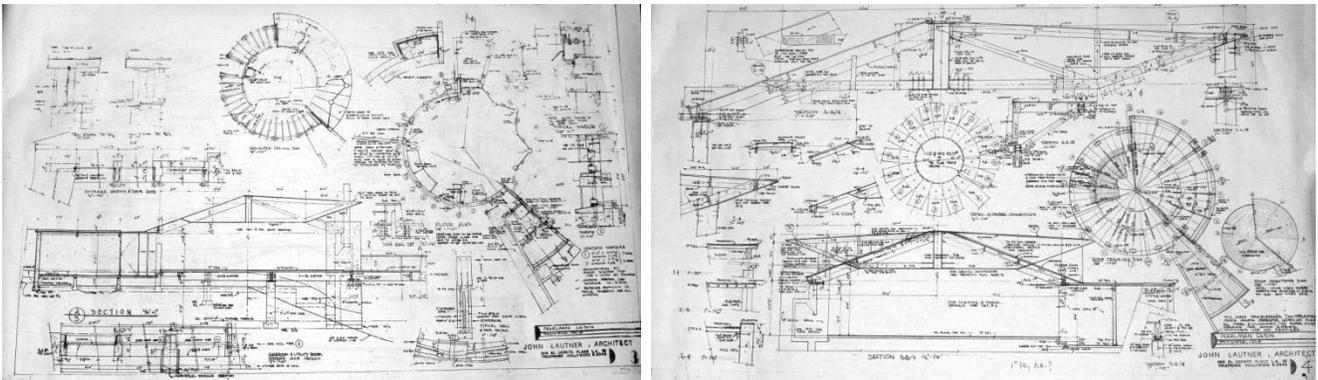
Cooperating Organizations:

- Frank Escher, The John Lautner Foundation
- Nancy Pearlman, Educational Communications
- Luis Hoyos, Cal-Poly Pomona (faculty)
- Roberto Rizo, friend that help survey the cabin

I. Historical Information

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of Erection:** 1957.
2. **Architect:** John Lautner, (1911-1994). American architect, a pupil of Frank Lloyd Wright (1933-1939). He established his own practice in Los Angeles, designing some remarkable original private houses, including the Arago House, Acapulco Mexico, of 1973 (where terraces exploit the view over the bay below), and the Sheats Goldstein House, Beverly Hills, California, of 1960-1963 (which seems to grow out of the rocks and is covered with a massive folded concrete roof). Perhaps his best-known building are the Malin House, or 'Chemosphere', Torreyes Drive, Los Angeles (1960), with the entire structure carried on one pier, and the Elrod house, Palm Springs (1968), with a concrete wheel-like roof of massive 'spokes' framing wedges-shaped windows. Esther McCoy called him a 'lyrical technologist'.
Oxford Dictionary of Architecture, 1st ed., s.v. "Lautner, John."
3. **Owners:**
 - a. Original: Carl & Agnes Pearlman.
 - b. Current: Nancy Pearlman (daughter of Carl & Agnes Pearlman).
4. **Builder:** Agnes Pearlman's brother.
5. **Original Drawings:** Hand drawn at Lautner's office in Los Angeles, provided by The John Lautner Foundation.



6. **Alterations and additions:** The north wing was altered during the original construction. It is wider than shown in the original drawings. A built in closed was added as well in the north wing, this was added during the original 1957 construction.

B. Historical Context:

Pearlman Cabin, located in Idyllwild art community of Mount San Jacinto in California, was designed by architect John Lautner in 1956 and built in 1957 as a mountain retreat for the Pearlman family. It was commissioned by Carl and Agnes Pearlman. Carl Pearlman was a successful amateur pianist from Santa Ana, California, and his musical influence in Lautner's design of the cabin was noticeable at the open living space shape and acoustics. The person in charge of picking the site and the architect to design the cabin was Agnes Pearlman, as her daughter Nancy Pearlman expressed. The Pearlmans acquired the land as the Idyllwild Art Academy and decided to sell some of their mountain slopes, but the site was rendered unbuildable due to a large boulder on the site. Agnes Pearlman still wanted to built a cabin retreat for her family; she wanted an open plan cabin that was open to the outdoors, these requirements made John Lautner a perfect designer for this cabin.

II. **Architectural Information:**

A. **General Statement:**

- 1. Architectural character:** "Almost a primitive hut, the modest Pearlman Mountain Cabin in Idyllwild art colony-high on western slope of Mt. San Jacinto-was built for accomplished amateur musicians who summered there. A wooden building in a wooded setting, it is essentially a circular room of music, sitting, cooking and sleeping. Two thirds of its perimeter is a solid wall with a clerestory of small rectangular windows. Lined up along this wall are a hearth, a desk for writing, a large window precisely framing an immense oak, two beds, and a tiny kitchen. The other third of the enclosure opens to the surroundings. Two wings extend out from the body of the house to frame this opening, one a terrace, the other a bedroom suite. The roof is a fattened disk with a flat circular center and tapered edges, folded down to the wall at the back, and crimped up at the large opening in the front. The construction of the roof is less complicated than its form may suggest: wooden trusses, braced at the center of the house, radiate out to support it. Across the opening, the roof rest on a row of actual tree trunks. Enormous sheets of glass set directly into these logs form a delicate screen through which one gazes with wonder at the panorama unfolding beyond" (Escher, 2008).
- 2. Condition of fabric:** "With these matter-of-fact gestures, Lautner developed an idea of extraordinary beauty; the trunks, both the roof's structure and frames for the windows, echo the trees beyond and unite the space with its expansive, sylvan setting, spatially extending

the architecture to the “borrowed landscape.” The movement the house allow, from the center towards the edge of the back, produces an almost filmic pan, sweeping from the forest, and the enormous boulders strewn about it, up to the mountains and sky. The space like the later Hatherall, Elrod, and Ernest Lautner houses, or the second Harpel House in Alaska, is circular, but not introspective: like an eye, it focuses on the outside and draws that outside in. The house is set precisely on the edge where the ground begins to tumble down the hill. Solidly on the level ground, even burrowing into it, sits the curved wall, like a cave, to which is fused the delicate glass screen, lifting above the slope on narrow legs that carry the weight of the project down to the concrete foundations. Like a second, unbuilt, project for the Pearlmans in Santa Ana, which reads like the staves of a musical score or the strings of a harp, the cabin suggests a musical analogy in its affinity with the form of a grand piano—a half-open shell sitting on slender legs” (Escher, 2008).



B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The main circular living area is 60'-6 1/4" in diameter measured from interior of walls, the walls are 10" thick. The deck projects roughly 14'-2" toward the west of the circular living

space. The bedroom & bathroom project roughly 25'-9" northeast of the circular living space. The deck is at the same height of the main circular living space, but the bedroom, bathroom and entry are depressed 14" (with two 7" height steps). The building is roughly 14" height from its ground floor to highest point on the conical roof.

- 2. Foundations:** The main circular living area has concrete pier foundations (please refer to drawings for dimensions). The bedroom and bathroom area appear to be built on a slab on grade foundation.



- 3. Walls:** The original drawings from John Lautner call out for concrete walls, but the actual walls are unpainted two layers of cement plaster (stucco) in the exterior and interior of all perimeter walls, and interior walls. The walls of the main circular living room have a one inch edging. There are a few walls that have built-in cabinets, these walls are wood veneers.



- 4. Structural System:** The structural system relies on load bearing walls, at the perimeter of the building, and wood columns at the perimeter area where the serrated glass windows are located. The structural structure of the roof is a truss system.

5. **Deck:** There is one deck that projects out of the main circular living area. The deck is made out of wood, and has a hole in the middle where an existing tree is located.



6. **Chimney:** There is only one fireplace/chimney at the main circular living area. The chimney is made out of concrete, and the fireplace has a brick heart.



7. **Openings:**

- a. **Specialty windows:** The front of the house is where the serrated windows are located. There is a skylight in the roof of the main circular living area, facing the large oak tree, right above the door that leads and frames the same oak tree.



- b. Doors:** There are three doors that lead to the outside, one at the deck, one in the side of the main circular living area leading to a large oak tree, and the third one is the main entrance, which is located in the back of the house leading to the road.



- c. Windows:** The back of the house has small windows. There is one rectangular window at the bathroom, and four rectangular windows at the bedroom.



8. Roof: “The roof is a fattened disk with a flat circular center and tapered edges, folded down to the wall at the back, and crimped up at the large opening in the front. The construction of the roof is less complicated than its form may suggest: wooden trusses, braced at the center of the house, radiate out to support it” (Escher, 2008).

The roof slopes down in to the back of the house, the roof slopes just a little towards the front of the house, and the roof is flat in the bathroom and bedroom area.

a. Shape, covering: There are transitions at location where the roof changes pitch.



b. Cornice, eaves: The house has a wood cornice around the entire house. The cornice is at the edge of the circular roof, and below the roof in the flat roof area. The cornice is made out of wood strips roughly 2x1. The cornice is in bad shape in some locations.



c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: N/A

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor Plan: The main living area is a circular open area, two other living areas project from it, one is a wedge shape deck, and the other one is wedge shape area where the bathroom and bedroom are located.

2. **Stairways:** There are two steps in the cabin. They are located where the main circular area connects to the bedroom and bathroom area.
3. **Flooring:** The main circular living area has exposed 2x4 subflooring running diagonally (finish flooring was never installed). The bathroom and bedroom have concrete flooring.
4. **Ceiling:** At the main circular living area the ceiling is composed of three types of ceiling. At the center of the room it is a flat plywood disk, painted white. At the edges toward the back of the house where the ceiling slopes down to the perimeter walls, the ceiling is wood veneers with exposed beams. At the edge of the room located towards the front of the house, the ceiling slopes up, and it is clad with plywood painted white.

The ceiling at the bedroom and bathroom area is cement plaster ceiling, with a layer of shiny varnish.



5. Opening:

- a. **Specialty windows:** A skylight in the ceiling of the main circular living area. And the serrated glass wall at the front of the main circular living area where the tree trunk columns are located.
- b. **Doorways and doors:** The interior doors are wood doors with no trim. There is a door at the bedroom, one at the bathroom. All other doors are exterior doors or cabinetry.
- c. **Windows:** No trim at the interior of the windows, but the windows of the main circular living area have distinctive yellow window shades.



6. **Decorative features trim:** The perimeter wall of the main circular living area has a one inch lip that resembles the one inch leap in the exterior.

The fireplace has a brick heart.

The built in cabinets for the kitchen are clad with wood veneers.

There is a built in book case.



7. **Hardware:** All hardware used in the house is typical with the exception of the hardware used to connect the tree trunk columns to the roof, floor and concrete piers. The hardware consists of metal plates with welded metal strips that will connect to the tree trunk column with trough bolts.



8. Mechanical equipment

- a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** The HV/AC runs underneath the main circular living area.



- b. **Lighting:** The original light fixture of the main circular living area was stolen and replaced with a similar light fixture. This light fixture is located at the center of the room.



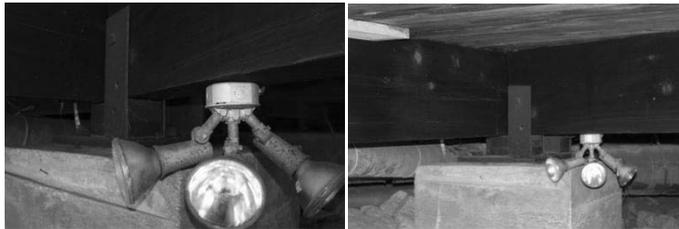
There is a wall mounted light fixture in the vestibule right in front of the main entry door. This light fixture was added after the cabin was completed.



There are light fixtures in the exterior located next to the main entry door and the door that leads to the oak tree.



There is a tree piece light fixture underneath the main circular living area.



c. Plumbing: Typical plumbing and toiletry.

d. Use of appropriate heading: None.

- 9. Original furniture:** The piano next to the serrated glass walls in the main circular living room is the most important part of the furniture. There is a writing desk that was custom made for the cabin. There are two small beds next to the wall on the back of the main circular living area. There is a circular dining table in the center of the main circular living area.



D. Site

1. **Historic landscaping design:** All landscaping is the natural landscaping. Boulders and pine trees were respected, and the cabin was constructed cutting as few trees as possible. The oak tree which has been on site prior to the cabin was a big focal point of the house location and orientation. The mountains beyond determined the location of the serrated glass walls.

A few more pine trees were cut off after construction due to fire hazard.

2. **Outbuildings:** A small stable was built after the construction of the cabin, there use to be one horse, but now that the horse is gone the stable is used as storage for wood and miscellaneous items.

III. Sources of Information

- A. **Architectural drawings:** Two sheets of the original drawings by John Lautner with floor plans, ceiling plans, some wall sections, and roof construction were provided by The John Lautner Foundation in Los Angeles, California.

- B. **Early Views:** N/A

- C. **Interviews:** Frank Escher, director of The John Lautner Foundation.

Interviewed at this Los Angeles Office on June 1, 2012.

Nancy Pearlman, owner of the cabin. Interviewed at the cabin before, during and after taking measurements of the cabin, on June 7, 2012.

- D. **Selected Sources:**

Barbara Ann, Campbell Lange. *Lautner*, ed. Peter Gossel (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2005).

Frank Escher, Jean-Louis Cohen, and Nicholas Olsberg. *Between Earth and Heaven: The Architecture of John Lautner*, ed. Nicholas Olsberg (New York: Rizzoli International Publications in association with Hammer Museum, 2008).

- E. **Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:** N/A

- F. **Supplemental Material:** N/A

G. Survey/Field Measurements: Taken on June 7, 2012 by William S. Clerk Solares.