

# REMEMBERING THE FUTURE WITH HERB GREENE



In the 1950's when the American Dream was being built out of cookie-cutter architecture, a radical countermovement emerged from an unexpected place

# STORYLINE

An architect explores the intricate legacy of her great-uncle and the groundbreaking organic architecture movement he ignited from Oklahoma under a changed name.

Herb Greene disregarded the rigid midcentury mentality of a one-size-fits-all solution during the post-WWII era, and instead emphasized individuality and environment in architecture. Maligned and misunderstood by the mainstream, and his contemporaries, Greene abandoned his career at the early age of 51. Searching for answers to questions surrounding Greene's legacy and his abrupt departure from an explosive career, his great-niece Lila Cohen discovers a story of unbounded imagination among misconceptions & marginalization.

## THE FILM

Architect and first-time filmmaker Lila Cohen embarks on a mission to capture the multifaceted narrative of her 93-year-old great-uncle, whose work as an architect and artist defied the status quo of the 1950's and still resonates today. A story of admiration and discovery, Cohen peels the layers surrounding Herb Greene's life, from his Jewish upbringing in depression-era New York to him pioneering a radical Organic Architecture movement that grew out of Oklahoma.



This project is my attempt to repair the misconceptions surrounding my Great-Uncle Herb Greene's legacy and the rise and fall of the overlooked Organic Architecture movement that runs parallel.

The inspiration for this film comes from countless conversations with Uncle Herb, often while sitting on a rock wall near his home.

As I approach the age when Uncle Herb made a life-altering decision four decades ago, I strive to understand his choices and am driven to reckon with a history that's been in the shadows.

I invite you to join me in unearthing an overlooked trailblazing movement and rediscover the imagination of an unassuming visionary whose impact is as great as his humility.



LILA COHEN  
**DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

## HERB GREENE

Approaching his 94th birthday, Herb's imagination is still strong. He marvels at the mind's innate appreciation for beauty and the evolution of human perception. He reflects often on the vastness of the universe.

Herb broke boundaries as an American architect and artist after leaving New York in 1948 to study under the highly original architect and teacher, Bruce Goff, in Norman, Oklahoma. In 1961, at the age of 32, Greene's Prairie House caused an international sensation after being discovered by famed photographer Julius Shulman and was featured worldwide starting in LIFE magazine.

Herb's explosive career came to a halt less than 20 years later, leading him to focus on collage paintings and conceptual works that explore theories of perception and the power of images.

Unphased by his own accomplishments, Herb is both perplexed and delighted by the influence of his work around the world. When questioned about his decisions in life, he unsure whether he's at peace with them.

## LILA COHEN

At 8 years old, Lila decided she wanted to be an architect, unaware of her famous great-uncle's architecture and unbeknownst to him. Now as a seasoned professional in her career, she regrets not having been exposed to Herb's work earlier in life and is saddened that he stopped working in the field so young.

# FOUNDATION & CONTINUATION

Although two generations apart, Lila and Herb's lives have become intertwined. Over the last 20 years she's become deeply familiar with Herb's work, his influences, and the ideas he cares about most.

Fearing Greene's legacy is largely misunderstood and will remain overlooked, Lila delves deep into the history of his life and career while grappling with understanding Herb's decisions and motivations. Seeking to capture Herb on film while he is still alive, Lila is driven by a sense of urgency to complete the documentary.

Lila wants to achieve a sense of completion and continuation surrounding her uncle's story while clarifying her own creative purpose.



International Recognition

ARCHITECTURAL FORUM  
LIFE MAGAZINE  
LOOK MAGAZINE  
AUJOURD'HUI  
A+U MAGAZINE  
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

## ORGANIC ORIGINS

In an era when the American dream included the pursuit of cookie-cutter architecture, a radical countermovement emerged. Organic Architecture proposed an alternative to the conventional structures of post-WWII USA, challenging the corporate culture of the 1950's. This approach was rooted in the philosophy that each individual, region, and historical context is distinct, and architecture should be a reflection of those differences. The departure from standardized norms was a resounding call for a future characterized by unique creativity that honors both nature and culture. Just as curiously as it appeared however, it vanished.

Herb Greene, who was influenced by Bruce Goff and Frank Lloyd Wright was a pivotal figure in the movement. The ideas had momentum before being cast aside and subsequently forgotten. Greene's story is a mirror reflecting American culture and conflicting versions of the American dream, while also revealing the price of embracing originality.



(L) Herb Greene with Bruce Goff reviewing the Bavinger House Drawings, 1950

(R) Bavinger House by Bruce Goff, elevation drawing by Herb Greene, 1950

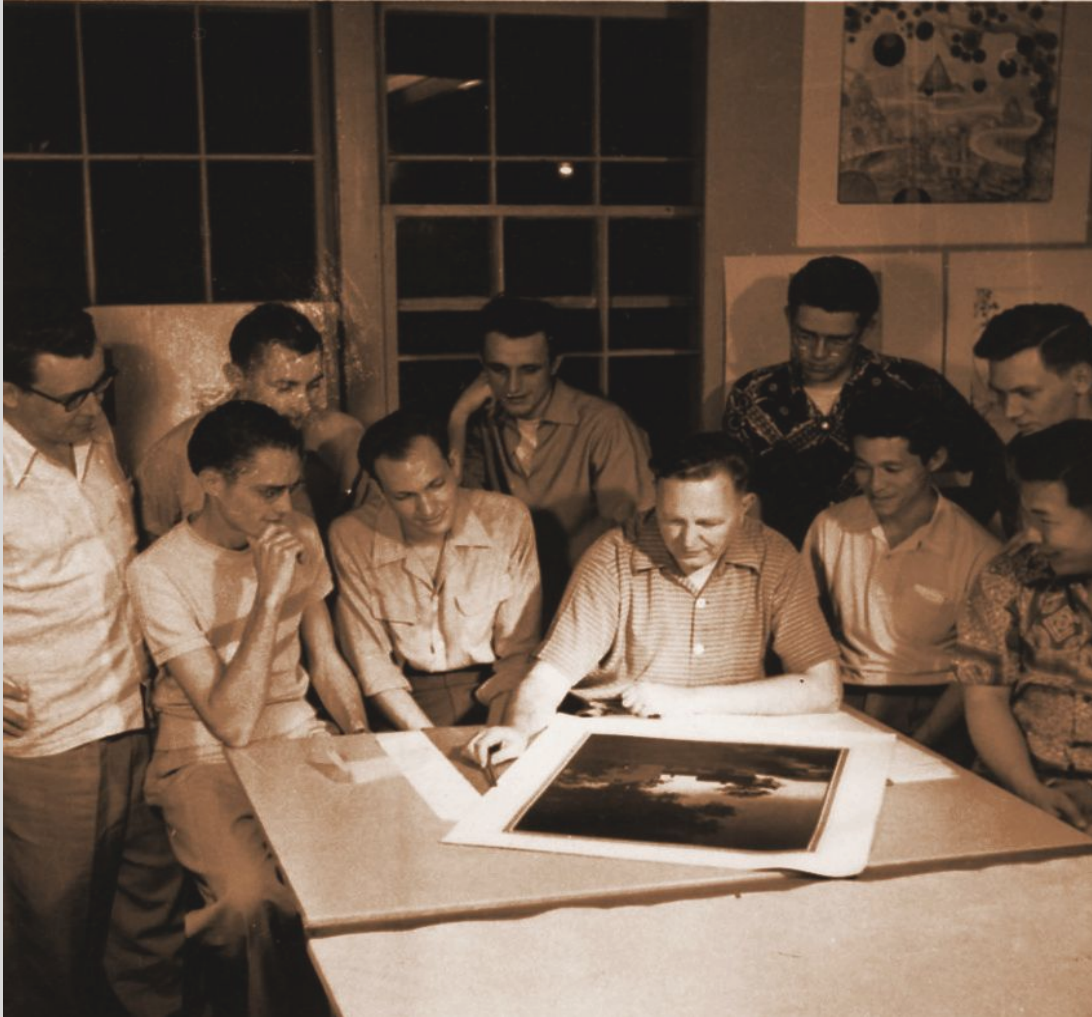


THE PRAIRIE HOUSE IS AN  
INTERNATIONAL SENSATION AFTER  
BEING PUBLISHED WORLDWIDE.



## HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE

Prairie House, Norman, OK, 1961  
LIFE magazine 1961, photos by Julius Shulman



Bruce Goff and Students, University of Oklahoma, 1950

ACT 1

## BREAKING CONVENTION

The film begins against the backdrop of post-WWII United States, where an unexpected architectural program was flourishing at the University of Oklahoma under revolutionary architect Bruce Goff. Individuals seeking an alternative to the status quo gravitated to Norman, Oklahoma, to learn under Goff. Among them was Herbert Greenberg who would be known later as Herb Greene from the state of New York.

Frank Lloyd Wright first coined the term “Organic Architecture.” Wright’s well documented visits to Bruce Goff’s program reinforce the movement while examples of the progressive work are showcased.

The film focuses on three of Greene's most renowned Oklahoma residences, designed during his late twenties and early thirties, through extensive visual documentation, eyewitness accounts, Greene’s reminiscences, and interviews with historians. The Prairie House, Joyce House and Cunningham Residence are published worldwide and met with both praise and ridicule in the US.

A conflict with the dominant architecture, International Style, and architectural institutions is introduced by highlighting buildings that dramatize an emerging culture war.

Stepping back in time, Herb’s evolution is seen through animation, historical footage, and readings of his writing and letters from his wife. The filmmaker’s role is introduced on-screen as investigator trying to understand her uncle’s career.



A photograph of Herb Greene, an elderly man with glasses and a green beanie, sitting in a black chair outdoors. He is wearing a green jacket and light-colored pants. The background is a dense thicket of yellow and green foliage. The name 'Herb GREENE' is written in a white, stylized script font over the top left of the image.

# Herb GREENE

## ACT 2

# A LEGACY CUT SHORT

In an emotional turning point, at the age of 92, Herb revisits Oklahoma with his great-niece, Lila, at his side. He walks through the homes he designed over 60 years earlier. With awe and heartbreak, Lila addresses the deterioration and questions Herb about his feelings.

Through interviews and location footage, we learn Greene's career was cut short at 51 after being unable to get work. Meanwhile, Organic Architecture has been pushed to the margins. Lila searches for what led to the fading of Organic Architecture and through archival publications and interviews reveals the effects of media misrepresentation, regional prejudice, trends in education, and the principles of capitalism.

Herb continues his focus in painting, the conceptual design of public spaces, and

the study of philosophy. Herb's collage paintings are explored in detail and his unbuilt public spaces are brought to life through 3D animation.

Through interviews and location footage, the counterculture of the 1970's is depicted as adopting principles of Organic Architecture. Mickey Muennig's Post Ranch Inn and home in Big Sur, California are visited as a potent embodiments of Organic Architecture's influence and relevance.

A geographical leap is made to present-day Hungary, where the "Living Architecture" movement partly influenced by Greene is thriving. Lila experiences a glimpse of what might have happened if Herb had kept working and Organic Architecture had flourished in the US.

The film moves toward the conclusion of Lila's exploration. Herb speaks at a coveted architecture and design conference and receives a standing ovation while surrounded by admirers of his work.

In Oklahoma, Lila finds people working to restore the homes Greene designed. She visits the Joyce House during a complete restoration and tours the progress with the new owners. The first gallery show of Greene's paintings also takes place in Oklahoma.

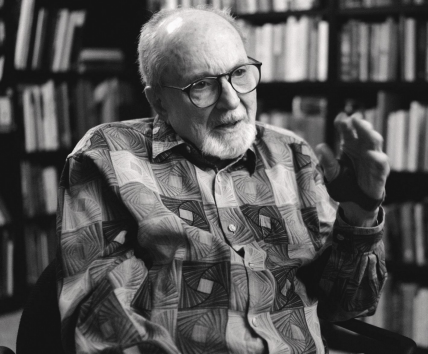
At the beautifully maintained Cunningham Residence, Lila sits down with the current owner to talk about the architecture and how it has enriched their family's lives.

The Prairie House, on the other hand, faces a precarious future. In a series of interviews, Lila speaks with a nonprofit group trying to save it as well as with the current head of the Architecture School at the University of Oklahoma. The significance of the building is acknowledged but raising funds for the extensive restoration remains uncertain.

In final interviews with Lila, she speaks of the continuation of her uncle's legacy. Lila connects with educators and writers using Herb's work in their own teaching and finds young architects, artists and philosophers inspired by his creative visions.

## ACT 3

# REDEMPTION



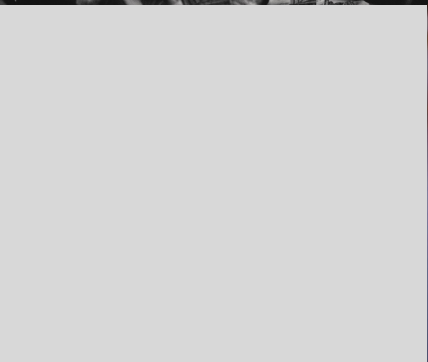
# CONTRIBUTORS

## **ROBERT ALAN BOWLBY**

Architect and photographer who studied under Bruce Goff and worked with Herb Greene in Texas and Oklahoma after graduating from the University of Oklahoma in 1956. Bob has photographed and shot many buildings, including Herb Greene's, for various publications.

## **STEPHANIE PILAT, PH.D.**

Director in the College of Architecture at the University of Oklahoma. She co-leads efforts to bring the legacy of the American School of Architecture—the pedagogy and practices that emerged under Bruce Goff, Herb Greene, and others—to light.

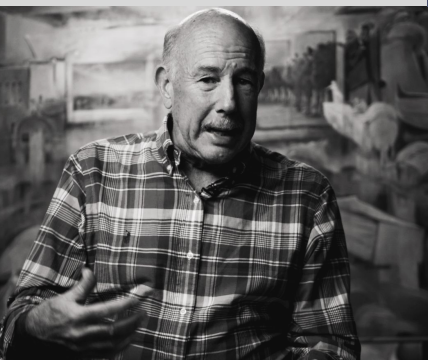


## **ALAN HESS**

Architect and historian that advocates for the preservation of 20th-century works. He has been an architecture critic and written numerous publications on architecture including on Guggie Modernism, Frank Lloyd Wright and John Lautner.

## **JOHN HURTIG**

Architect and artist who transferred to the University of Oklahoma after seeing an exhibition on Goff at the University of Kansas. He became one of the leading students in Goff's program and his work was a profound inspiration for Greene's Prairie House design.





## HOUSE ON THE QUARRY

Joyce House, Snyder, OK, 1961  
Photos by Julius Shulman

“

The Organic view seeks to accommodate time. It seeks to devise modes of organization that will encourage the perception of multiple perspectives.

– Herb Greene

## 2024 PRODUCTION

Remaining Shoots:

February 2024

- Phoenix, AZ
- Berkeley, CA

March 2024

- Lexington, KY

April 2024

- Snyder & Norman, OK
- Berkeley, CA

## 2024 POST-PRODUCTION

Milestones:

- Assemble 80+ hours of production and archival footage for the editorial team
- Secure an award-winning documentary editor
- Complete 3D animation of Herb Greene's unbuilt Armature Plaza in California
- Compose original score

## 2024 FESTIVALS

Goals:

- Premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2025
- National Submissions:
  - Sundance Film Festival
  - Tribeca Film Festival
  - Chicago International Film Festival
  - Oklahoma deadCenter Film Festival
  - Architecture and Design Film Festival
  - San Francisco Jewish Film Festival
  - DOC NYC
  - Full Frame Documentary Film Festival
  - Camden International Film Festival
- International Submissions:
  - Berlin International Film Festival
  - IDFA (Netherlands)
  - Venice Biennale
  - Budapest International Film Festival
  - Sheffield Doc/Fest (UK)
  - Hot Docs (Canada)

## 2025 DISTRIBUTION

Targets:

- Hire a sales agent to acquire a documentary distribution company
- Seek limited theatrical releases in Oklahoma City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, NYC, Lexington, Houston
- Kanopy, Arte, True Story
- Community screenings
- Find home streaming platforms like HBOMax, Netflix, Showtime, Apple TV+

# PRODUCTION TIMELINE

# PARTNERSHIPS

Partnered with the Norman Arts Council in 2021, who received funding from the Kirkpatrick Foundation, for initial filming in Oklahoma.

Filmmakers Collaborative offers low-cost fiscal sponsorship to independent filmmakers around the world. For 35 years FC has provided sponsorship and support to hundreds of filmmakers managing more than \$50 million in grants and donations.

Many foundations will only issue grants to nonprofits. Instead of forming their own 501(c)3 organization, filmmakers often align themselves with FC, allowing them to apply for a wide range of funding opportunities and to offer their individual donors a tax deduction.

## FISCAL SPONSORSHIP



# DONATE

## A TAX DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTION

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### Mail a Check to:

FILMMAKER'S COLLABORATIVE

6 EASTMAN PLACE #202

MELROSE, MA 02176

Project: *Remembering the Future With Herb Greene*

### Donate online:

<https://filmmakerscollab.org/films/remembering-the-future-with-herb-greene/>



## HOUSE ON THE GREEN

Cunningham Residence, Oklahoma City, OK, 1963

Photos by Julius Shulman

A symphony of forms flow from inside to outside, grounded into the earth and lifting in aspiration.



### **LILA COHEN, DIRECTOR, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Lila Cohen is an architect committed to collaborations with community nonprofits that provide housing for underserved populations in the San Francisco Bay Area. Cohen co-authored "Herb Greene's Generations: Six Decades of Collage Art and Architecture Generated with Perspectives from Science" (ORO Editions, 2015) and has presented lectures on Greene's work at Palm Springs Modernism Week and multiple universities. A designer of small spaces that promote the use of repurposed materials, she appeared on Tiny House Hunting and has worked with international organizations such as the Mmofra Foundation in Accra, Ghana.



### **JOHN ROGERS, PRODUCER**

A founding partner at Ideas in Motion, John has worked worldwide for 40 years on a variety of documentary productions. Recent credits include: Director/Producer/Editor of "Rova Channeling Coltrane"; Director of Photography for "Pursuing Beauty: The Architecture of Bernard Maybeck" and "Designing With Nature: Arts & Crafts Architecture in Northern California"; and Director/Writer/Editor of "A Balcony on the World" on the Aquatic Park Bathhouse building in San Francisco. Ideas in Motion has received awards from the Chicago International Film Festival, Philadelphia International Film Festival, Intercom Festival, Cine Latino Festival, and the Tokyo International Science and Technology Film Festival.

## **FILMMAKER TEAM**

### **ADVISORS**

**Luca Guido, Ph.D.**  
Architect, Historian, Author, Curator  
Independent Scholar

**Greg Castillo, Ph.D.**  
Professor, Historian, Curator  
University of California, Berkeley

**Craig Lee**  
Curator, Historian  
Art Institute of Chicago

**Pierluigi Serraino, AIA**  
Architect, Author, Educator  
University of California, Berkeley  
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute



# FUNDING TIERS & CREDITS

**≥ \$4,000**

## **ADDITIONAL FUNDING BY**

Inclusion in this section of the end credits and/or a static funder/company logo (if applicable) in the logo section of the end credits.

**≥ \$10,000**

## **CONTRIBUTING PRODUCER CREDIT**

A credit at the end of the film and a static company logo (if applicable) in the logo section of the end credits.

**≥ \$30,000**

## **CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER CREDIT**

A credit in the main titles at the start of the film or in the end credits, along with a static company logo (if applicable) in the logo section of the end credits.

Remembering the Future with Herb Greene is sponsored through Filmmakers Collaborative, a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor, making contributions fully tax-deductible.

**≥ \$40,000**

## **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER CREDIT**

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**≥ \$80,000**

## **IN ASSOCIATION WITH CREDIT**

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**≥ \$200,000**

## **PRESENTATION CREDIT**

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**THANK YOU**