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This three-level home in Laguna Beach opens almost completely to spectacular ocean, whitewater and Catalina Island vistas.



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Family Affair

We get an exclusive look inside the family archive of a renowned modernist architect.

By Maile Pingel | Portrait by Robert Benson

When Catherine Cody speaks about her father, midcentury architect William F. Cody, it's almost as if there's a smile in her voice. "We had a good rapport," she reminisces. Though born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1916, the iconic architect's family moved to Los Angeles in the 1920s. His talent appeared at a young age and was encouraged by his mother, an interior designer. "She guided him," Catherine says. "She taught him plain air and watercolors." It's those childhood drawings that form the heart of the family's archive.

After studying architecture at USC, William worked with Cliff May. He opened his own firm in the 1940s and in no time had offices in Santa Monica, Phoenix and Palm Springs, where he built a spectacular home for his growing family: three daughters and a collie, a relative of Lassie (the producer was a client). "I knew people respected dad," continues Catherine, "but he was never starstruck, even with clients like Frank Sinatra and the Eisenhowers. He got excited about his work, no matter the project. Everything was an opportunity." And everyone was interested. Homes, offices and especially country clubs were commissioned in California, Arizona, Mexico, Central America and even Cuba.

"I'd go to work with him when I was little," Catherine recalls. "Sometimes I sat in on planning commission meetings. Everyone would be in their suits and Dad would arrive in a Hawaiian shirt—with me! I had no idea what was going on but I knew to sit still. At lunchtime we'd go to the market and picnic in the office. Dad made things fun, and always had paper and colored pencils." Those doodles led to her own degree in architecture.

In 1973, William suffered a debilitating stroke. "His partners brought boxes of stuff to our house," remembers Catherine, who lives in San Diego now. The bomb shelter he included in his Cold War-era design proved a convenient holding place. After his death in 1978, some of the work transferred to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, where family friend George Hasslein was dean of architecture. When Catherine's mother passed, the remaining boxes went into storage until they were retrieved in 2006.

"Since then, things have just gravitated to me. I've been piecing it together, noting dates and creating a chronology, in hopes of an exhibition and book," she says, and now a 2015 exhibition is in the works. The archive, housed in San Diego, includes his immaculate renderings as well as those by artists like J.R. Hollingsworth and Gene Shrewsbury, who freelanced for the firm during its busiest days. But it's not all work; a few love notes were tucked away too. After all, William had two passions: architecture and family.



FATHER KNOWS BEST Clockwise from top: Catherine Cody with one of her father's many renderings; William F. Cody's design for Round Hill Country Club in Alto, Northern California; a rendering for a Palm Springs midcentury modern residence; William with his three daughters and beloved collie (Catherine is in the middle), 1955.

