

DESIGNING THE DREAM IN POSTWAR AMERICAN SUBURBIA

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ABSTRACT

The American suburban landscape is intrinsically intertwined with our national identity. As a symbol of expansion, safety, success and the “American Dream”, our suburban landscape has provided us with a housing system that is affordable in its anonymity from “sea to shining sea”. While often the topic of debate on its socio-cultural successes and pitfalls, the images of suburbia are forever marked on our young nation’s history. Understanding this history, however, is a multi-dimensional task that forces us to examine our suburban landscape as a piece of our unique visual and material history. The intention of this research is not to critique, but rather, historically document the contents of our suburban material culture, and understand how we translated our intangible societal norms into palpable architectural design. Clyde Kluckhohn, an anthropologist, describes culture as “a set of looking glasses that strongly influence what we see taking place before us” (1949). By examining suburban home design and its importance in media as a piece of visual identity, the goal of the study is to assess cultural desires and commodification of the post war residential landscape.