This book documents with nearly archaeological precision each house’s original design, structural skeleton, materials, furnishings, landscaping, and owners in as much detail as is available in archival and published materials, as well as from current owners and descendants of the original clients. Each project description is accompanied by a dimensioned and labeled original plan, site plans, elevations, and perspectives (when available), and black and white photographs of the houses in context, many dating to the periods of initial occupancy. The houses that have been well preserved and maintained are illustrated with new images taken by the author to consciously emulate the tone, cone of vision, and general character of those from the 1950s and ’60s.

The catalogue includes a foreword by Stephen Fox and a series of essays that address the architectural origins and theoretical underpinnings of modernism in the United States and particularly in Houston. Koush divides modern architectural trends in postwar Houston into three categories: Usonian, Contemporary, and Miesian. Neuhaus’s oeuvre belongs to the Miesian trend, inspired by the German modern master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, whose approach Koush characterizes by “sobriety of form, strict separation of materials according to structural function, lack of ornamentation, and tectonic economy.” Neuhaus’s homes reflect the stark minimalism and integration of interior and exterior spaces introduced by Mies in his house projects from the 1920s and in his famous Barcelona Pavilion from 1929. (A formative experience early in Neuhaus’s career was serving as the local architect supervising construction of Philip Johnson’s house for Dominique and John de Menil, which in large part introduced Houston to Mies’s modernism.)

However, the Houston architect inflected Mies’s purity by introducing vernacular components such as wood lath sunscreens and, occasionally, exposed wood structural members and stucco wall finishes. In the most general theoretical terms, modernism in architecture was a revolutionary movement, a rejection of the historically eclectic styles that had dominated 19th- and early 20th-century architecture. It was also linked to a democratic ideal that espoused “good” design for all economic strata. In Houston, however, Miesian modernism came to be linked with privilege. Neuhaus’s clients (and he himself) came from what is described by both Fox and Koush as the city’s “patrician” class, the moneyed elites who had the ability to influence the architectural direction of the cityscape. Those in this group, like the de Menils, who were conscious of, and engaged in, contemporary culture, philanthropy, and social justice, often turned to a handful of architects committed to modern design. Neuhaus was one of those architects. Though Houston became known for its mid-century modern design, many wealthy families nonetheless opted for more traditional architectural solutions. Fox acknowledges this when he concludes that the “paradox, and poignancy, of Hugo Neuhaus’s architecture is that it embodied a nobler standard of excellence and beauty than the Houston social class to which he belonged was prepared to invest in, appreciate, and conserve.”

We see the dignity of Neuhaus’s residential designs in the attention to industrial materials, exposed structural members, strict structural grids, and open plans. A number of Neuhaus’s symmetrical designs reflect his interest in the Palladian nine-square plan, interpreted through the Miesian structural grid. Koush concludes that the Houston architect must have understood that his work might some day be compared to classical architecture. However, according to clients’ wishes, the architect also at times employed indigenous materials such as brick and pine, concealed the structure with brick facing or wood panels, made adjustments in the structural grid for the sake of space planning, and compartmentalized his plans. His work was, as Koush asserts, “consistently varied.” In other words, “modern” in terms of Neuhaus’s work doesn’t mean any one thing except perhaps the conscious rejection of historicist forms like Corinthian columns, classical crown moldings, or pediments over windows. As Gwendolyn Wright puts it, modern architecture is as “lively and mutable as quicksilver.” “Mid-century modern,” then, is an overarching sobriquet that describes the variety and richness of postwar American design production. Koush has produced a thoroughly researched and finely written piece of cogent scholarship that is a relevant and much needed contribution to the documentation of Houston’s mid-century architectural heritage. Though the author is not a trained architectural historian, he is an accomplished architectural critic. But my praise begs the question: for whom is this catalogue written? Those who use a loupe to read the drawings that recapitulate the text will probably already be advocates of the architectural legacy that is Houston Mod’s calling. However, the mission of the organization states that it seeks the support of the general public in its mission and, therefore, it might also consider introductory publications for those outside the hermetic architectural community.