



A-frame

By Chad Randl

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A-frame By Chad Randl

"A" was the architectural letterform of leisure building in postwar America. Eager to stake out mountain and lakeside retreats, an entire generation of high-end homebuilders and weekend handymen found the A-frame an easy and affordable home to construct; its steeply sloping triangular roof distinctive and easy to maintain (almost no exterior walls to paint!). Fueled by A-frame plans and kits, the style became something of a national craze, with tens of thousands of houses built.

Indeed, the A-frame was an icon for recreation, and acceptable form of modernism (although its origins go back thousands of years), and a convenient tool for marketing a wide range of products, including gas-powered toilets, motorcycles, and canned vegetables; Fisher-Price even made one for children. So popular on the domestic front, the A-frame was eventually adapted to other building types, from roadside restaurants to churches.

In a fascinating look at this architectural phenomenon, Chad Randl tells the story of the "triangle" house from prehistoric Japan to its lifestyle-changing heyday in the 1960s. Part architectural history and part cultural exploration, *A-Frame* documents every aspect of A-frame living using cartoons, ads, high-style and do-it-yourself examples, family snapshots, and even an appendix with a complete set of blueprints in case you want to build your own!

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A-frame architecture was a jaunty symbol of the good life in postwar, mid-century America—easily built and architecturally distinctive, tens of thousands of these triangular-silhouetted residences popped up in vacation sites all over the country. In this prettily designed volume, Randl gives the A-frame movement some context, beginning with its architectural antecedents, and then outlining the A-frame's populist birth, which started with D.I.Y. building kits such as Campbell & Wong's Leisure House and Free-Time Homes. (Randl also discusses A-frames made by well-known architects like George Rockrise.) The book's main strength is its easy dexterity; Randl is as comfortable describing the mechanics of A-frame design (plywood and two-by-sixes dictated angular lines), as he is analyzing the social circumstances (rising wages, increased leisure time) that sped their popularity. It's in the latter category where the book really takes off, showing the A-frames' increasing popularity, as well as their expansion in use, from motels to restaurants to churches: "During the 1960s, the A-frame passed from object to idea." Sections like "A-frames in ads" show how home-furnishings manufacturers made use of A-frames to advance their own sales prospects, thus gelling the A-frame as a certified economic success, as well as a pop culture coup. To illustrate the wide influence of the architectural genre, Randl even includes a photograph of Fisher-Price's toy A-frame house. It's such careful research that earns this title an A. 150 color & 75 b/w illus.

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About the Author

Chad Randl is an architectural historian working at the National Park Service. He resides in Takoma Park, Maryland.

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