

# Into the great wide open: The West-German modernist bungalow of the 1960s as a psycho-political re-creation of home

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It was in the late the 1950s—on the brink of a prospering, forward-looking era after the re-building of destroyed cities—that the term ‘Bungalow’ arrived in West-Germany, where it took on specific cultural connotations that differ from those in the Anglo-American world. Paradoxically, in Germany the term itself is understood in reference to this world until today, even if the West-German bungalow differs greatly in its architecture.

The West-German bungalow marks the intersection of two global phenomena: bungalow culture and modern architecture. Its cultural significance however, can only be understood in relation to the particulars of German history. I will therefore briefly sketch a genealogy of the West-German modernist bungalow, then discuss the cultural climate and historic circumstances in 1950 and 1960s West-Germany, and finally present two examples, the Quelle™ mail-order bungalow (1963) and the Chancellor’s residence in Bonn by Architect Sep Ruf (1963-64).

## **Global Culture of the Bungalow**

In his seminal book *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, English sociologist Anthony King depicts the bungalow’s historic development: how—from its seventeenth century beginnings as the house for Europeans in India, via holiday homes in England and America—the bungalow developed into the most important component of twentieth century suburbia (King



**Image 1**

Redwood  
Bungalow,  
USA, 1931.

Image:  
Lancaster, Clay.  
*The American  
Bungalow*  
1880–1930.  
New York:  
Abbeville Press,  
1985, 197.

Socio-economically, the situation King describes for bungalow boom times in Great Britain in the 1890s or in the USA at the turn of the twentieth century is largely similar to that in post-war West-Germany: When the colonial bungalow first arrived in England in the late eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution and mercantile profits from the colonies provided the historic background to its increasing influence as purpose-built leisure or holiday dwelling over the next century, when the countryside changed from agricultural production to recreational consumption, and the bungalow developed into a specialised dwelling type for country and sub-urban use.

Similarly, the arrival of the bungalow in West-Germany in the late 1950s coincided with growing economic prosperity. The growing industrialisation of the *Wirtschaftswunder*—the “economic miracle”, the economic boom in West-Germany during the 1960s—released agricultural areas for suburban residences. Among the public, surplus capital met an interest in contemporary lifestyles, recent construction techniques and holiday homes in the countryside.

King’s research also establishes what he calls the bungalow paradox: Although “in the country” the bungalow was never “of” the country, its occupants—whether Europeans in India and Africa, or urban riches in the wild woods—were not part of the local community (King 1984, 124). And while the therapeutic trip to the wilderness had to offer “all the comforts of modern life” it also had to supply “all the picturesqueness of pioneer days.”

(see King 1984, 136, quoting *Woman's Home Companion* (1916)). In the American bungalow this paradox is expressed in stylised prairie architecture with wide verandas, overhanging eaves and "natural" materials like raw brickwork, wood and shingles.

However, what lies outside the scope of King's profound sociological analysis, is a discussion of architectural differences on the European continent. In late-1950s, the term bungalow developed specific architectural connotations in West-Germany (and in some other central European states like Belgium and the Netherlands). Instead of the American bungalow's overhanging low-pitched roof and its arts-and-crafts aesthetics, bungalows in Germany were predominantly flat-roofed houses, their architecture strictly modernist. And, until today, the German word "Bungalow" does not only refer to the detached single-storey modernist house but also to the three decades from the mid-1950s until the early 1980s, when modern bungalow architecture became unfashionable and fast-rising land prices rendered single-storey buildings a luxury.

This paper focuses on two important influences on West-German bungalow architecture: the overall cultural circumstances in post-war West-Germany, which I will discuss later, and the particular role of the modern American residential architecture—since architecturally, it was not the American bungalow that shaped West-German bungalow architecture, but the contemporary modernist American home, most notably the Californian *Case Study Houses* by Charles and Ray Eames, Richard Neutra, Pierre Koenig and others.

When we look at the bungalow's formative years in West-Germany during the 1950s, we find, for example, that contemporary literature praised Neutra's American houses as "the most contemporary and technically most accomplished form of [the bungalow]" (Betting 1959, i) and that *Modern California Houses*, Esther McCoy's overview about the *Case Study House* program (McCoy 1977), was tellingly titled 'New Ways in Housing: Showhouses and Bungalows' in German in 1964 (McCoy 1964, my emphasis and my translation).

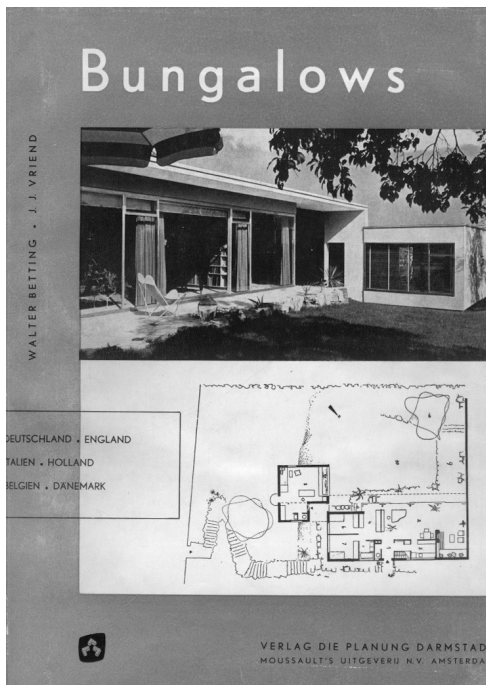
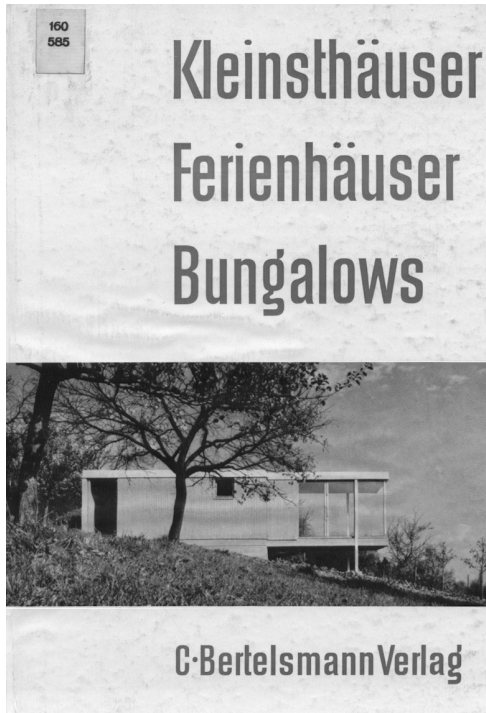
However, none of these houses were considered "bungalows" in America, and the word bungalow does not appear in the U.S. edition of McCoy's book.

Images 2, 3

Two West-German Bungalow publications: Small Houses, Holiday Homes, Bungalows, 1959 – Bungalows, 1959.

Image: Deutsche Bauzeitschrift, ed. Kleinsthäuser, Ferienhäuser, Bungalows. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1959.

Betting, Walter, and J.J. Vriend, eds. Bungalows: Deutschland, England, Italien, Holland, Belgien, Dänemark.



The *Case Study House* were model homes of technological elegance and architectural beauty, an idealistic elaboration of the post-war house. Conceived to embody a new post-war way of life with new construction methods, they were mostly designed with educated or artistic upper middle-class families in mind—as Dolores Hayden has argued in her critical analysis of the self-set briefs, imaginary clients and their representations in the drawings. In his article “The Search for the post-war house” however, Thomas Hine, has claimed that from its inception, the *Case Study House* programme in its model character had included potential for people of more modest means, despite what he calls its negligence of “the sprawl happening in the valleys.” (1989, 181)

The German edition of *Modern California Houses* picks up on this model character: in the preface, editor O. W. Grube, who addresses potential buyers rather than an architectural audience, stresses the rarity of the custom-made *Case*



Image 4

Architect's  
Bungalow,  
Klaus Gessler,  
Stuttgart, West  
Germany,  
1950s.

*Study House* even in America (1964, 5), where "almost all residential houses are ordered from catalogue" (1964, 6), and underlines the differences to ten times more densely populated West-Germany with higher prices of land and smaller plots, different climate and higher energy costs.

The conflation of the contemporary American house with the term bungalow is especially interesting, since the Case Study Houses themselves already represent a hybrid architecture, a development of the modern residential architecture of Central European descent in the surroundings of Southern California, aided by US-steel construction expertise of former war-time industries.

As Helen Searing (1989) has pointed out, the *Case Study House* programme stands in the "Grand modern tradition" of model home shows in Europe, like the *Weissenhofsiedlung* 1927, or the Berlin Building Exhibition 1931. In its hybridised form, American modern residential architecture had shed much of its earlier ideological character and become more "natural, casual and cool" (Buisson and Billard 2004, 15). Nevertheless it is surprising that in 1950s West-Germany, publishers, architects and the public did not claim the new typology by stressing the architectural lineage and the European roots of this modernist architectural typology, but instead stressed its American pedigree by labelling it as "bungalow."

Image: Betting,  
Walter, and J.J.  
Vriend, eds.  
Bungalows:  
Deutschland,  
England,  
Italien, Holland,  
Belgien,  
Dänemark.  
Darmstadt:  
Verlag H.  
Müller-  
Wellborn, 1959.

In the following I will argue that this labelling was part of a complex re-creation of national identity as part of a cultural and political discourse that was largely centred around the private home.

### **Modern Architecture and the Bungalow in 1960s West-Germany**

The architecture of the West-German modernist bungalow must be seen in the light of a wider cultural disposition. Obviously, the cultural symbolism of the modernist bungalow is part of the general connotations permeating modern architecture in post-war West-Germany. In the 1960s, Germany was perceived to have in many respects “lost time in comparison to the rest of the world due to its political fate and the subsequent cultural vacuum” (Betting 1959, ii).

With regard to architecture, modernism apparently suggested itself as a new idiom to fill this perceived ‘vacuum’. Internationally successful, contemporary modernism offered an aura of the great wide western world of freedom, wealth and democracy. Furthermore, despised by the Nationalsocialists as ‘non-Germanic’, modern architecture appeared ideologically uncontaminated. Founded on Bauhaus ideas and developed by many German exile architects, it could be understood as inherently German. American architectural historian Carter Wiseman for example, even refers to an “almost entirely European—and overwhelmingly German air” (1998, 151) during the rise of architectural modernism in the United States.

Yet we shall not forget why this new identity was so urgently sought. The cultural symbolism of post-war modern architecture in Germany cannot be discussed without reference to the immediate history of the Third Reich. The cultural vacuum had a profound emotional counterpart in the emptiness left by the general feeling of *Heimatverlust*—the loss of home or homeland.

Depending on personal circumstances, this might have been the loss of one’s material home by wartime devastation; the loss of one’s broader homeland for the expellees of, for example, Pommerania, or Silesia; the loss of one’s emotional home in the form of lost relatives, spouses, parents and children, whether by war, persecution or in concentration camps; it might have been the psychological loss of the idea of the Third Reich by the lost war—or the loss of an ideal of Germany that was shattered by the revelations of the Third Reich’s deeds and atrocities; or it may indeed have been many of those at once. The individual experiences may have differed greatly, yet the unsettling

**Image 5**

Exhibition  
 "America lives  
 like this"  
 Frankfurt /  
 Main, West  
 Germany, 1949.

Image:  
 Nerdinger,  
 Winfried.  
 Architektur der  
 Wunderkinder.  
 Aufbruch und  
 Verdrängung in  
 Bayern 1945–  
 1960. Salzburg:  
 Pustet, 2005.

thought of a loss of home reached through all ages and classes, and left a nation divided and shaken by numerous—and often incompatible—forms of loss.

This paramount historical factor is amplified by an altogether different one—by the impact of Americanisation during the first two-and-a-half decades after

the war. The Cold War had aligned the Western victors with the defeated, West-Germany became America's 'occupied ally' against the Soviet Union. In West-Germany, early post-war modernisation thus went hand in hand with re-education, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. By means of the ever-present *Amerika-Häuser* and their libraries, American magazines and culture were unusually common and available to the West-German public.

The effects of Americanisation have been analysed widely over the last decades. Suffice it to cite Bernd Greiner here who has argued that, among the citizens of Germany, the thought of Americanisation seemed to have "lost its fright when it gave the illusion of speeding up history and being able to gain a new identity quickly" before he quotes German sociologist and psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich, who even mused about a certain West-German delusion of absorbing the victory by adopting the victor's lifestyle (Greiner 1999, 34).

It is important to note here how, in general, West-German prejudices and ideas about the "American Way of Life" were strongly influenced by Southern California, partly because émigrés like Theodor Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School had spent the 1940s there, and returned with a Californian understanding of America. Generally, Southern California in its suburbanised form is often hailed as the ideal form of the American way of life, a notion that also affected the reception of the *Case Study House* programme both nationally and internationally.

Thus, on the whole the modernist bungalow was not a German "invention": The connotations of the term "Bungalow" in German are the result of a new label for the imported modernist house, the contemporary hybrid of Central European residential modernism and a post-war ideal of a new American Way of Life.

In her research on the Americanisation of the post-war West-German single-family home, Alexandra Staub (2006) argues that although American everyday culture greatly influenced West-German post-war life, the houses themselves did not become Americanized. The influence of the *Case Study Houses* and the contemporary American modernist house on the West-German modernist bungalow suggests a more complicated reading of this relationship.

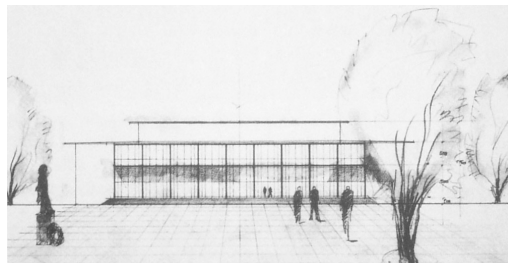
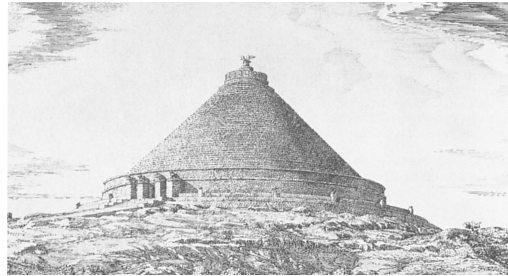


The modernist bungalow reveals a rare intersection of two different cultural spheres: the high culture of modern architecture, led by architects, and the popular culture of the bungalow, developed by the construction industry. In the following, I will present two examples from the far ends of the spectrum.

### The “Democratic” Bungalow”

The elegant Residence and Reception Building for the Head of West-German government in Bonn, the so-called “Chancellor’s Bungalow” completed in 1964, was built for Ludwig Erhard, the successor of long-term Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Architect Sep Ruf was Erhard’s personal choice; he had already built Erhard’s private house, a bungalow near Ruf’s own at the Tegernsee Lake. A professor in Munich, Sep Ruf was internationally renowned for his and Egon Eiermann’s German Pavilion at the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels.

In post-war West-Germany, modernism in art and architecture had soon become a symbol for democracy. Openness and transparency, in particular, were hailed as symbols of a new architecture and society against the monumental classicism of the Third Reich and its earth-bound homes and monuments. German Art historian Walter Grasskamp argues that modernism could only become this symbol for democracy in West-Germany, precisely because its citizens were regarded with educational reservation with regard to both—democracy and modern art—after World War Two (1989, 138). From the point of view of the “apprentice,” the inconsistency of the idea of democracy with the fundamentally



**Image 6 and 7**

Wilhelm Kreis, “Design for a Death Mound,” 1944

“Design for the Beethoven Hall,” Bonn, 1954.

Image: Nerdinger, Winfried. *Architektur der Wunderkinder. Aufbruch und Verdrängung in Bayern 1945–1960*. Salzburg: Pustet, 2005, 15.

**Image 8**

Kanzlerbungalow, interior view. Image: Swiridoff, Paul, and Erich Steingraber. *Der Bungalow. Wohn- und Empfangsgebäude für den Bundeskanzler in Bonn*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1967. (image re-formatted, original in color).



**Image 9**

Sep Ruf, Kanzlerbungalow, Bonn,  
West Germany, 1964.

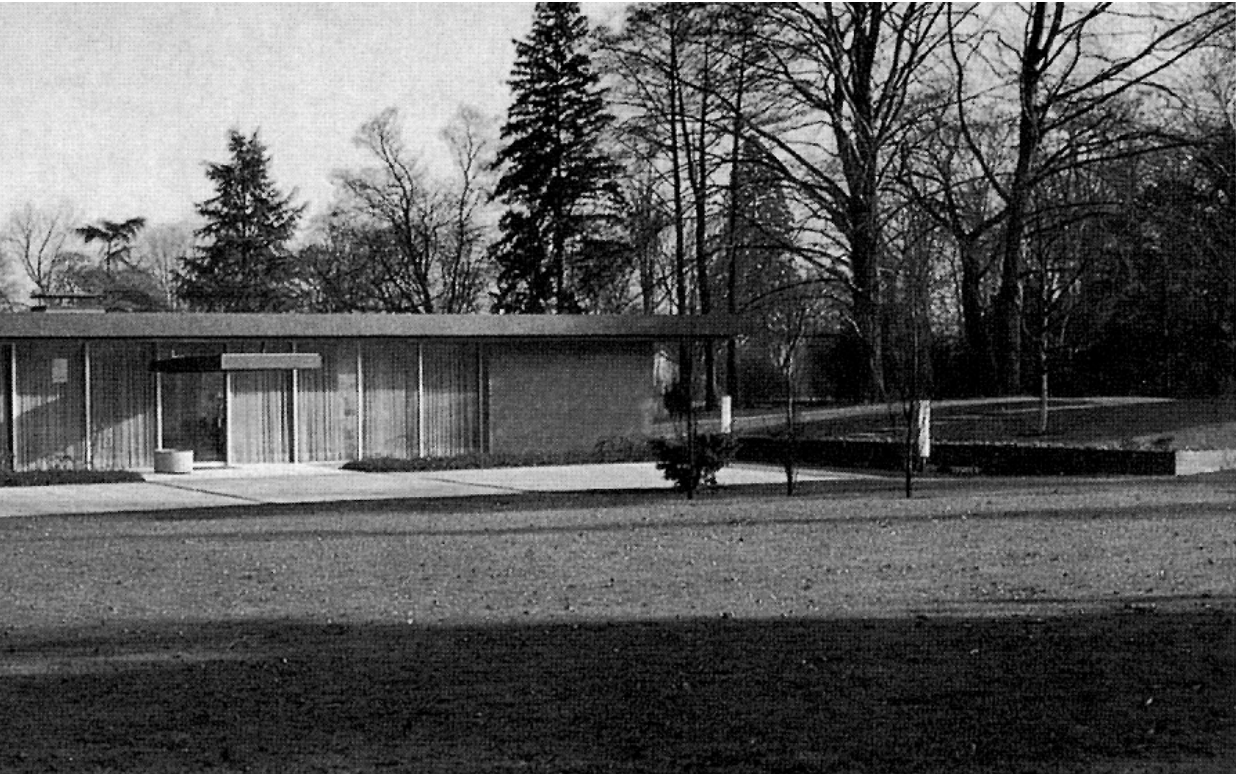
Image: Swiridoff, Paul, and Erich  
Steingräber. *Der Bungalow*.  
Wohn- und Empfangsgebäude  
für den Bundeskanzler in Bonn,  
Pfullingen: Neske, 1967, 8 (image  
re-formatted, original in color).



non-democratic stance and elitist standards that modern art also entailed was both invisible and irrelevant.

German architectural historian Wilfried Nerdinger, on the other hand, has pointed out that the role of modernism is more complex with regard to architecture than with regard to art: given that modern architecture's secret niche in the Third Reich had been industrial buildings—including factories which produced weapons, tanks and ammunition—the political symbolism of modern architecture as democratic is not as natural as suggested by the continuous repetition of this interpretation during the twentieth century (Nerdinger 2006, 236).

The "Chancellor's Bungalow," however, in its combination of minimal steel construction, open space and precious materials, expresses this symbolism as elegantly as the German Pavilion in Brussels. According to its functions, the Bungalow is split into two pavilions: a lower pavilion as private residence and a larger one for prestigious receptions. It was praised by its admirers for its light and weightless elegance, its precise and delicate detailing, its



generosity and transparent openness and was seen to embody the young republic's most urgent beliefs: the belief in Western democracy, in open communication without formal ceremonies, and in modern architecture's technological advance (Swiridoff 1967, 52, my translation).

A description of the "Chancellor's Bungalow" reminds us both of the *Case Study Houses'* locations and bungalow dreams:

'the Chancellor's Bungalow lies hidden behind old trees. The low-stretched single-storey building seems to almost nestle itself into nature. Almost entirely surrounded by glass, the bungalow [...] achieves a transparency, which grants the house a cheerfulness and openness [not ...] usually encountered in representative buildings. From the inside, uninterrupted views expand into the parkland and across the grass slope over to the Rhine and the hills [...]. Secluded and shielded from public view, [...] the house is a place of inner calm and contemplation.'

Hans-Peter Riese, "Glashaus in Verborgenen",  
page 23 (Ebert translation).

### **Bungalow for All**

Politically, ideals about modernisation and growing prosperity in West-Germany were supported by an egalitarian and inclusive idealism that they should reach all citizens.

In opposition to the socialist society established in East-Germany (two meanings for the German word 'Bungalow' developed in the different cultures of East and West Germany: the West-German 'Bungalow' as a single-family sub-urban house, and the East-German 'Bungalow' as 'Datscha', a more make-shift holiday home), the West-German urbanistic ideal of the 1950s was "to counter collectivist living in Eastern Germany with the western ideal of a relaxed garden city". Liberal individualism in the tradition of the Western Allies was employed against the socialising tendencies of both the National-Socialist past and the current German neighbour state. The individual home with a garden was acclaimed as an "intimate and recreational refuge from work and society, where the citizen would feel as a human individual". Ownership of one's residence was understood to grant "the most essential personal freedom" and to "contribute positively to the development of democratic virtues". (Bohleber 1990, 64 (quoting a delegate for the Berlin Senate 1954), 59 (quoting Minister for Housing Neumayer (CDU) 1952), 62 (quoting Paul Lücke 1951 (later Minister for Housing) CDU, 59 (quoting Minister for Housing Neumayer 1952) respectively. My translation).

In 1957, a new "Housing Law" came into effect in West-Germany whose declared aim was to promote "family-homes" and to raise the amount of property ownership. Fiscal ameliorations for property owners encouraged potential buyers. In 1961, when the Berlin wall made Germany's political division physical, so-called *Eigenheime* ("owner-occupied homes") amounted to more than 50 % among residential projects completed annually in West-Germany (Bohleber 1990, 197).

In 1963, building prices in West-Germany had risen by 37 % over a 5-year period (Quelle-Fertighaus-GmbH 1962, 11), which led a German weekly magazine to launch a building exhibition that showcased 40 prefabricated houses by manufacturers from Germany, the Netherlands, Britain, Scandinavia, and others. One of the houses shown in the exhibition was the Quelle™-Bungalow, featured the year before in an article titled "Delivered directly to your lawn" (Jäger 1963, my translation of "Haus frei Wiese"). For a fixed price of 50.000,00 DM, the mail-order catalogue company's

## Quelle-Fertighaus-Fibel



**Image 10**

Quelle-Pre-Fab-Primer, "Happy Home."

Image:  
Quelle-Fertighaus-GmbH, ed. Quelle-Fertighaus-Fibel: Vom glücklichen Wohnen. Fürth: Quelle-Fertighaus-GmbH, 1962.

### Vom glücklichen Wohnen

bungalow would be assembled within 5 days. Its interior arrived complete, including fitted bathroom, kitchen tiles, light-switches, doors and handles. It also had its own manual. The *Quelle-Prefab-Primer Happy Home* explained its virtues to prospective buyers who were able to purchase their own site but fearful of a lengthy and expansive building process (Quelle-Fertighaus-GmbH 1962, 26).

The *Primer's* portraits of families and their individual use of the bungalow paint an evocative picture of the average West-German lower middle-class post-war family on their way up and into a more leisurely life—e.g. the Schmidt family: father, mother, 18-year-old Peter, 15-year-old Hans and three-year-old Nicola.

"The family uses the study for the two boys, and once the eldest moves to a university town after school, Hans will have the room to himself. Infant Nicola is granted the children's bedroom so she can be as close to her mother as possible. Herr Schmidt runs a

shop in the town centre. In the evening, he often sits over his accounts, files and new samples. Consequently, the dining area is closed off as a separate room and the family has dinner in the living room.”

Quelle-Fertighaus-GmbH (ed.),  
*Quelle-Fertighaus-Fibel*, page 85.

What makes these portraits so revealing is the fact that the modest middle-class family on the way up was less a statistical average, but—as a bizarre result of the economically homogenising effects of Nazi politics and World

**Image 11**

Quelle-  
Bungalow,  
interior view.

Image:  
Quelle-  
Fertighaus-  
GmbH, ed.  
Quelle-  
Fertighaus-  
Fibel: Vom  
glücklichen  
Wohnen.  
Fürth: Quelle-  
Fertighaus-  
GmbH, 1962,  
39.



War Two—a reality lived by many and aspired by the rest. The middle-class bungalow, paid with a reasonable income, was the suburban private haven, in which the small family lived towards their middle-class dreams: the promise of future affluence in a prospering democracy plus a good university education and a better future for their children.

### **The Bungalow: Home to Citizens of a Modern Democracy**

Architecturally and politically, the modernist bungalow signified West-Germany’s orientation towards its new western allies; its modernism was

to symbolise the historic break from the Third Reich, while as a single-family house it opposed collectivist housing in East-Germany.

The West-German modernist bungalow is important not only as the contemporary component of suburbanisation, but also as a psychological construction of home, privately and publicly. In its international typology the bungalow was especially apt for this construction, since—rather than rooted in the past or the local, which were both tainted by history—it allowed for this new identity to be outward looking and toward the future.

In a twist of the bungalow paradox, the West-German bungalow's significance thus relies on the bungalow's rootless modernity to distance its inhabitants from the local community and its history.

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