

Work of Hawaii's master architect Ossipoff christens new Yale Art and Architecture gallery



Thomas Cain/For the Register

The new exhibit space at the Yale School of Art and Architecture, being prepped for Thursday's opening exhibit.

IF YOU GO

- **Event:** "Hawaiian Modern: The Architecture of Vladimir Ossipoff"
- **When:** Thursday-Oct. 24; 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Fridays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays
- **Where:** Yale School of Architecture Art Gallery, 180 York St., New Haven
- **Etc.:** 6:30 Sept. 15, "Hawaiian Modern: An Introductory Colloquium," followed by exhibit opening reception
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** (203) 432-2889



Robert Wenkham

IBM Building, Honolulu



ABOVE: The Goodwill house. RIGHT: Models of Vladimir Ossipoff's work, such as the Dr. Linus Pauling residence, were made by the staff of Dean Sakamoto Architects.

Victoria Sambunaris

By Donna Doherty
Register Arts Editor

NEW HAVEN — When Dean Sakamoto was growing up in Hawaii, he recalls playing basketball against Barack Obama's Punahou School in the Hawaii state championships. But it's unlikely that any of those on the court know who designed Obama's school. Sakamoto does.

It was Vladimir Ossipoff. In a long-anticipated first public look and welcome to the newly renovated Yale School of Architecture building (Paul Rudolph Hall as of November), his work and vision make its mainland appearance in the exhibit "Hawaiian Modern: The Architecture of Vladimir Ossipoff" opening Thursday in a space that was still being painted and polished to perfection just a few days ago.

The exhibit staff, under the guidance of New Haven architect Sakamoto, director of exhibitions at the school and curator of the exhibit, fresh in from its opening stop at the

Honolulu Academy of Arts, carefully followed the exhibit blueprint. Sealed boxes of the images and models of many of Ossipoff's buildings created by Sakamoto's office colleagues, waited to be uncrated and positioned.

Sakamoto took a visitor to the upper viewing area for a panoramic view of the gallery area, pointing out the carefully selected Benjamin Moore paint colors on the display panels as a staffer primed a pergola

looking very much like something from Ossipoff's Hawaiian Modern design style.

It's a significant exhibit for the new gallery, not only because it's the first, but also because it's not just an exhibit.

It's a scholarly work by Sakamoto, a Hawaii native, the first of its kind about the architect who changed the face of Hawaii.

The exhibit shows 30 of the more than 1,000 projects Ossipoff, who lived to be 90, designed in his long career, along with a looping documentary (KDN Films) and a gorgeous monograph/catalog book of color and black-and-white photos of his buildings, both vintage and newly shot by Victoria Sambunaris especially for the five-year project, the latter a collaboration between the academy and Yale University Press.

Sakamoto admitted that since February of 2003, he's been "almost a dual resident of Hawaii and New Haven and still fulfilling my professional duties," expressing gratitude for Dean Robert Stern's enthusiastic support, and that of his colleagues in his New Haven firm.

Travel writer Christine Temin went to Hawaii to get a personal look at Vladimir Ossipoff's buildings. See Travel, E8.



Thomas Cain/For the Register

Hawaii: Ossipoff was masterful in marrying his designs to the island's climate and resources

Continued from E1

Ossipoff fit right into Hawaii, one of the most diverse places in the world. Born in Vladivostok, Russia, he grew up in Japan speaking fluent Japanese as the son of a diplomat, his aristocratic background a definite plus later in working both for clients and with workers in Hawaii. He graduated from the University of California at Berkeley, which may explain some of the California School influence of Richard Neutra and Mies Van der Rohe in his work, which is also often compared to Frank Lloyd Wright, especially in his site planning. He was lured to the islands by friends there during the Depression.

Sakamoto became fascinated with Ossipoff's work when designing for his own Hawaiian clients and also just his own discerning eye.

"Every time I came back, there was his architecture, and I'd say, 'Who designed this?' The answer always was Vladimir Ossipoff," says Sakamoto. "That was in 1980. I thought, maybe I should work for this guy."

But by the time Sakamoto was a practicing architect, Ossipoff's firm was already slowing down. In the late 1990s, Sakamoto had three commissions for homes in Hawaii and, "being a responsible architect, I decided I should do my research."

But when he started to research the man whose style captivated him, with whom he shared similar sensibilities — capturing the sense of place, using natural materials — there wasn't much information.

He found one of Ossipoff's surviving partners, Sydney Snyder, who not only shared some information, but suggested the idea of an exhibit, contributing some original items and filling in Sakamoto about Ossipoff's near-cult status in the 50th state.

Sakamoto proposed the show to the director of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, but he was

about to retire. A year later, he got a call from Yale-educated art historian Stephen Little, who introduced himself as not only the academy's new curator, but also as someone who knew

said to be the master at realizing his limitations."

Ossipoff "didn't just make buildings that looked nice; they enhanced the understanding of the site," he says, noting the use of the nearby natural spring in the design of Thurston Chapel.

Sakamoto divides the exhibit into five parts which he says are recurrent themes in Ossipoff's work:

■ **Revealing Site:** Again, his ability to marry building to site, with consideration to climate, ventilation and daylight;

■ **Hawaii and Modern:** Ossipoff's ability to merge traditional and modern (Hawaiian Life Insurance Building) address environmental concerns and combine the modern and tradi-

tional aesthetic;

■ **Darkness and Air:** Sakamoto calls Ossipoff "the master at bringing daylight into buildings, of using the dark and shade as media (Goodsill home). He realized that what brings comfort to local architecture is shade."

■ **Native Materials and Modern Tectonics:** The islands' remoteness made it necessary and appealing to the frugal but progressive Ossipoff to utilize the native hardwoods k'oa and ohia, as well as mixing volcanic rock with sandstone, and he's credited with designing the first pre-stressed concrete high-rise in the world (Diamond Head Apartments); the exterior grid pattern of the IBM Building combined steel and natural materials for sun shielding.

■ **The Living Lanai:** Ossipoff's "non-building" designs incorporate the look of the open lanai room, melding interior and exterior (Honolulu Airport, Outrigger Canoe Club), "one of Ossipoff's greatest contributions to modern architecture," says Sakamoto.

For the ultimate in authenticity, Sakamoto said he'd proposed installing a tropical garden at the exhibit, "But the dean vetoed it because of a fear of insects," says Sakamoto with a laugh. Maybe on its next stop in Germany.

Donna Doherty may be reached at (203) 789-5672 or ddoherty@nhregister.com.



Robert Wenkham

Architect Vladimir Ossipoff, left, and the living room of the house he designed for his own family on Oahu.

Tom Hair



Ossipoff, too.

"He said, 'You MUST do this show,' and hired me as guest curator and primary researcher. I took it on as an academic project," says Sakamoto,

who immediately made some fascinating discoveries.

"Hawaii was the hotbed of modern architecture in mid-century. Looking back at the '50s and '60s architecture magazines, Ossipoff was published everywhere," says Sakamoto, designing private residences, schools, the Honolulu International Airport, the IBM Building in Honolulu, in a style in which he translated European and Western American Modern to the Hawaiian Islands.

Sakamoto says that Ossipoff understood "Hawaii's special requirements," such things as orienting buildings to optimize sun shading, or a beautiful vista, and a penchant for utilizing the latest techniques.

He fascinatingly designed homes, says Sakamoto, that invite you in, make you go left, or right, perhaps up or down and then, suddenly, there's the vista, a gift you "have to work for a bit," says Sakamoto.

"Also, his Japanese upbringing gave him a respect for nature and sort of a built-in sustainable attitude and aesthetic. One realizes the constraints in Hawaii pretty quickly, and Ossipoff was