



*The House Ear Institute's  
research and education  
facility today*





# *How Technological Breakthroughs, Research and History Complement Each Other*

## **an Interview with John W. House**

Located in Los Angeles, California, the House Ear Institute and affiliated House Clinic, have been dedicated to the advancement of hearing science for over 60 years. In the following interview, its president, Dr. John W. House, comments on his father's legacy, the Institute's mission, as well as the facility's long-standing close collaboration with Carl Zeiss.

Established in 1946 by Howard Payne House, M.D., as the Los Angeles Foundation of Otology, and later renamed for its founder, the House Ear Institute has been engaged in the scientific exploration of the auditory system from the ear canal to the cortex of the brain for over 60 years. The House Ear Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing hearing science

through research and education to improve quality of life. Under the leadership of Howard P. House, the Institute became internationally recognized as a center of excellence where researchers and physicians work together under one roof, investigating novel treatments for those with hearing loss and related disorders. Today, the House Ear Institute's five-story facility

accommodates more than 160 staff members within 22 departments. It is a leader within a vast global network of organizations dedicated to the field of hearing health.

Research is at the core of the House Ear Institute's mission. The international medical science community looks to the House Ear Institute as a leader in the quest to understand the nature of the human auditory system as well as hearing loss and related diseases. The Institute is renowned for developments in sensory aid technologies for hearing loss, for understanding the basis of hearing and hearing-related disorders at the cell and molecular level, for the complex neurological interactions between the auditory system and the brain, and for diagnosis and treatment advancements to improve the quality of life for people with disorders affecting the auditory system and related functions.

The Institute's discoveries have helped millions of people receive successful treatments. Moreover, founder Howard P. House believed that knowledge is only meaningful when it is shared. The Institute continues that philosophy in its work today, and shares its knowledge with the scientific and medical communities as well as the general public through its education and outreach programs. Since 1946, the House Ear Institute's professional education programs have been attended by more than 22,000 doctors and research fellows. The House Ear Institute and the House Clinic, originally established as a private practice in 1939, are both located in Los Angeles and work closely together to enhance the quality of life for people with hearing loss and related disorders. The House Clinic is internationally recognized as one of the world's foremost neurotology medical practices. Patients



*In 1974, the Los Angeles Foundation of Otology was renamed the Ear Research Institute which was later renamed the House Ear Institute in 1981.*



*Howard P. House in surgery, 1960's*

**“ My father was one of only a few people in the country performing an operation called fenestration to restore hearing in patients with otosclerosis.”**

worldwide visit the House Clinic, seeking leading-edge quality care for hearing loss, ear diseases, and related medical concerns.

INFORMED met with Dr. House, President of the House Ear Institute and clinician and surgeon at the House Clinic.

**INFORMED: Please describe the history and development of the House Ear Institute and the House Clinic.**

**House:** The House Ear Institute was founded in 1946 by my father, Howard P. House, in Los Ange-

les. Upon finishing his residency in 1938, he traveled around the world and studied with leaders to learn the latest techniques in ear surgery at the time. When he returned to Los Angeles to set up his private practice, he was one of only a few people in the country performing an operation called fenestration to restore hearing in patients with otosclerosis. In 1946, he operated on two individuals who were so grateful for the restoration of their hearing, they presented him with a donation to begin an institute dedicated to the research and education of hearing loss and related ear disorders. Since its inception, the non-profit institute

has grown from a one-person office to a five-story building with a \$20 million budget and 160 employees. The House Clinic, which was also established by my father, originally started out as his private practice in 1939. The clinic today consists of nine physicians, including one neurosurgeon and the rest otologists and neurotologists. At the clinic, we see 6,000 new patients annually and 25,000 returning patients. We perform over 300 acoustic neuroma surgeries per year in addition to countless other otologic procedures.

### **INFORMED: What is unique about the House Ear Institute, and what are some of its accomplishments over the past 60 years?**

**House:** Since 1946, the House Ear Institute has led the way in defining the causes of hearing loss and balance disorders, improving medical treatments, surgical procedures and prosthetic devices. The Institute's scientific discoveries and breakthroughs have helped millions of people receive successful treatment. In addition to our research programs, the Institute has been dedicated to education, and thousands of physicians from around the world have visited the House Ear Institute to observe surgery, visit the clinic, take courses and perform research.

an engineer named Jack Urban to develop a side arm for student doctors to view the surgeries from around the world. It was called the House Urban Viewing Tube. Mr. Urban also developed an adapter for a 16 mm camera and a camera to take the first motion pictures through the ZEISS microscope, and later closed circuit TV for teaching physicians how to perform specific surgeries.

In 1958, my uncle William House introduced the use of the ZEISS microscope for removing an acoustic neuroma which, at that time, was a condition that had a 40 percent mortality rate. Because of William House's use of the ZEISS microscope for removing acoustic neuromas, it is now the gold standard for almost all neurosurgical procedures.

### **INFORMED: How has the House Ear Institute influenced Carl Zeiss Meditec in the development of surgical microscopes?**

**House:** Our history with ZEISS goes back to 1956. ZEISS is truly the pioneer in the entire area of otologic surgery, and much of what we do today wouldn't be possible without the use of its operating microscope. As far as what the House Ear Institute has contributed to ZEISS, I would say it really has been a life-long supportive relationship

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There have been many accomplishments we are proud of over the past 60 years, but I will only highlight a few that have both historical merit as well as a significant impact on the practice of medicine today. In 1956, my father traveled to Germany to visit the ZEISS factory in Oberkochen and met with Dr. Littmann. He was introduced to the OPMI® 1 surgical microscope and was instantly impressed. He brought back the operating microscope which he used in his private practice for years. Additionally, because of his interest in education, he worked with

where the Institute has made improvements in medical treatment as a direct result of ZEISS technology and, at the same time, the Institute has contributed to the development of new technologies. For the past three years, I worked closely with the engineering team on the OPMI Pen-tero microscope. The team would bring a prototype microscope to the clinic for feedback, and I would use it for ear surgery as well as skull base surgery. Prior to the microscope, I worked with the engineering team on the YAG laser in the



*Howard P. House (on the right) is showing two visiting doctors the original ZEISS surgical microscope undraped and with a camera attached.*

same capacity. My relationship with ZEISS goes back 10 years, and prior to that, my father and uncle both worked with engineering teams on product development.

**INFORMED: What impact has Carl Zeiss Meditec had on the House Ear Institute and the House Clinic?**

**House:** A tremendous impact. ZEISS is the gold standard in the industry, and they have made excellent lenses for a very long time. Their product history is solid, and because of their revolutionary contributions in technology, we are able to use micro dissection techniques to safely remove tumors, preserving adjacent structures. The ZEISS technology has significantly reduced mortality rates.

**INFORMED: It was a pleasure to meet you. Thank you very much for this interesting interview.**

**Image courtesy:**  
House Ear Institute, Los Angeles, CA, USA

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