

# arcca

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architect in the community issue

02.2

# *citizen*

# *architects*

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- ❖ How I Became Mayor, and Why
  - ❖ Children and Architecture
  - ❖ Portrait of the Architect as Developer

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# Comment

The failures that beset an editor are of two sorts: those the readers see and those you don't. The former are typically small, but not always insignificant. They range, to give two examples from the last issue (**arcCA** 02.1, "Image Mirror"), from mislocating the University of the Pacific in Modesto (whereas you know it is in Stockton) to misspelling Barron Storey's name. The latter is particularly irksome to me, because a) I *do know* how to spell his name; and b) Barron Storey's stories are anything but barren. (To give you an indication of the fertility of his imagination, I might mention that the drawing we published (p. 34) is from Barron's ninety-somethingth sketchbook, and virtually every page of each of those sketchbooks is just as rich and surprising.)

Other failures you don't see, and, mainly, I'm glad. I should own up to one, however: there is a profile missing from this issue. It would have focused on Michael Stepner, former San Diego city architect, former dean of the New School of Architecture, who is currently the Director of Land Use and Housing for the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation and the 2002 president of the San Diego AIA. If you stand on any street corner in San Diego and pitch a rock, you will hit an admirer of Mike Stepner. Fortunately for you, this admirer won't stop to complain of the assault, because he won't have time. Or so I surmise; I have not actually tried the experiment with the rock, but I have sought at some length someone to write about Mr. Stepner, and many people want to, but everyone is too busy. Perhaps the San Diego Regional EDC has become *too* effective since he joined the staff.

Actually, however, we arrived at this impasse not because of the prosperity of San Diego, but because we (the editorial board and I) are less familiar with writers in San Diego than we are with those in San Francisco or Los Angeles. And that is the case because, as it happens, we all

*live* in San Francisco or Los Angeles, or thereabouts. When we have a story in Fresno or Ukiah—or San Diego—our resources are limited.

In a previous Comment, I noted that we had been neglecting historic preservation, and I said that we would make up for the deficit. We have begun to do so in this issue, and we'll continue to do so in the next. I'd like similarly to amend our SF/LA bicentrism, but I'll need your help. So, citizens of Placerville, arise! Send me your resumes, your writing samples, your story ideas yearning to see print. Let me know how you'd like to contribute to **arcCA**. Invite me to your chapter meetings. Or at least email me: [tculvahouse@ccac-art.edu](mailto:tculvahouse@ccac-art.edu). The big city can be a lonesome place. ☉

Tim Culvahouse, Editor

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*arcCA* welcomes submissions for "Under the Radar." To be eligible, a project or its architect must be located in California; the project must not have been published nationally or internationally (local publication is OK); and construction must have been completed within the last twelve months or, for unfinished projects, must be 60%-70% complete. Architects need not be AIA members. Submissions from widely published firms (as determined by the *arcCA* Editorial Board) may not be accepted. Please send your submissions to the editor by email at [tculvahouse@ccac-art.edu](mailto:tculvahouse@ccac-art.edu), attaching three to five JPG images with a combined file size of no greater than 1.5MB. Describe the project in fewer than 200 words in the body of the email, providing a brief caption for each image, keyed to the image's file name. (If you don't have the capability to submit by email, you may send the equivalent information by regular mail to: Tim Culvahouse, AIA, Editor, *arcCA*, c/o AIACC, 1303 J Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, California, 95814, Re: "Under the Radar.")

# Contributors

**Frances Anderton** is a regular contributor to the *New York Times* on architecture and design on the West Coast. She produces *To the Point* and *Which Way LA?*, national and local current affairs programs hosted by Warren Olney on KCRW 89.9FM. She also hosts and produces *DnA (Design and Architecture)*, a half hour program broadcast monthly on KCRW and Radio@AOL.

**Kenneth Caldwell** is a communication consultant and writer based in Oakland, California.

**Elizabeth Chur** is communications manager at St. Anthony Foundation, a San Francisco homeless service agency. She studied development of free press in Eastern Europe as a Thomas J. Watson Fellow, has worked in arts administration, and has also written for the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Seattle Times*.

**Donald A. Crosby, AIA**, is vice president of Ratcliff, an architecture, interiors, and planning firm in Emeryville, California. He is a registered architect in California, Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, and Texas, and a member of the Old St. Mary's Building Committee. Don earned dual bachelors degrees in art and architecture from Stanford University.

**Daniel Gregory** is the home editor for *Sunset Magazine*, where he helps shape the monthly schedule and directs the AIA-Sunset Western Home Awards Program. He's also co-chair of the Advisory Board for the Environmental Design Archives at U. C. Berkeley, which chronicles the architecture and landscape history of Northern California through the drawings and office records of such figures as Bernard Maybeck, Julia Morgan, William Wurster, Joseph Esherick, Garrett Eckbo, and Thomas Church.

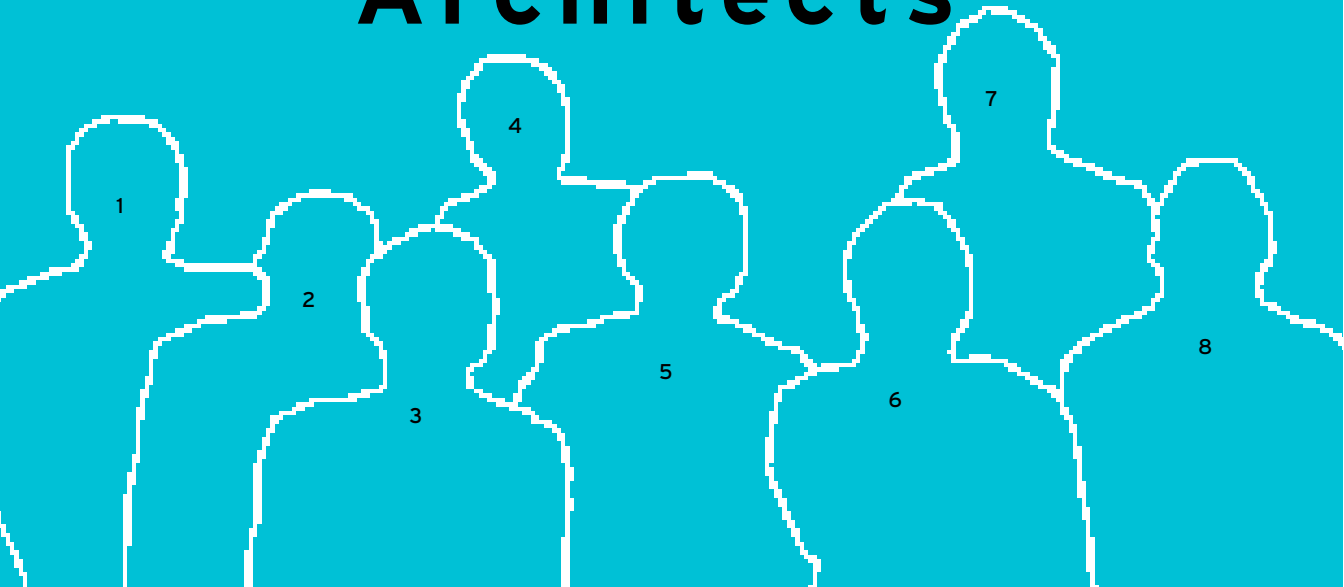
**Vinceena Kelly, AIA**, is a licensed architect and a certified construction specifier. She was president of the Long Beach/South Bay Chapter of the AIA in 1995, has served on the AIACC Board of Directors, and chaired the AIACC Awards Committee in 2001. Ms. Kelly is a regent for the California Architectural Foundation and was president of the Foundation in 2001. She works as the facilities planning officer for the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

**Julie Oakes, AIA**, is principal of Oakes and Associates and is the former mayor of Hermosa Beach, California.

**David Roccasalva, Associate AIA**, is associate principal with Page & Turnbull and is responsible for the firm's marketing efforts. He was previously with the AIA national office in Washington, D.C.

**Richard Thompson, AIA, AICP**, is a principal and director of urban design and planning at A.C. Martin Partners in Los Angeles.

# Citizen Architects



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**Frances Anderton**

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There is more than one way to skin a cat, they say. And there is more than one way to practice as an architect. That's the message of this issue of *arcCA*, which shows the tremendous contribution to the civic realm made by architects who translate their abilities into public service.

In architecture school, students are often told that an architectural education prepares them for any career, and that it is a great education for a generalist as it teaches problem solving, analysis, and big-picture thinking. In reality, however, many graduates go on to become architects in the narrowest sense of the word, designing and detailing buildings, servicing clients, and often limiting their social circles and frame of reference to the architectural profession. As points out Shirl Buss, one of the subjects of this issue, "Most of us were attracted to the profession because we love design, we love imagining something new, and we love problem-solving and thinking about big ideas. Those ideals often get lost amidst the constraints of architecture and design practice."

What follows in these pages are descriptions of the work and contribution of eight architects who have taken those skills and channeled them into

public service. They are the so-called "citizen architects," and they work with and for the betterment of the city. They are not necessarily seeking the glory of authorship of an object building but achieving their ends more quietly and anonymously. They do not necessarily use drawing instruments, but the instruments of negotiation and diplomacy. They work through political channels, through community workshops, through collective urban design, through educating children about the joy of problem solving, and through the development of more architecturally sensitive environments.

I feel particularly drawn to these stories, because their experience somewhat resonates with my own. I, too, traded a conventional architecture career to get involved in public debate. Having studied architecture and realized early on I did not have the right characteristics for the profession (attention to detail, patience, salesmanship), I became an editor on the *Architectural Review*, the British publication, which sent me to Los Angeles to edit a special issue on this city. I arrived, I fell in love with L.A., and four years later I moved here to edit *LA Architect*. At that time, in the early nineties, Los Angeles was recession-hit

but relatively complacent; architects were concerned more with designing stylish baubles than grappling with the civic realm; the sun shone brightly, but most of us did not see the glaring social fissures. But barely had I arrived when the riots of April 1992 hit, snapping me and many others out of oblivion.

Over the next few months, architects and planners turned their attention to the city in its entirety. They held community-building seminars and workshops; they made plans to rebuild the inner city and to create better buildings on the sites of burnt-out, much-maligned mini-malls. It was an era of tremendous soul-searching and desire to contribute, but, sadly, many of the grand plans landed on the shelf, and the city was largely rebuilt by developers and politicians. Having believed since childhood that architects built cities, I became disillusioned, feeling the profession was marginalized and out of touch with the dynamics that shape the built environment. I became gripped by a local radio program, *Which Way, LA?*, that started on KCRW-NPR radio in response to the riots. Its host, Warren Olney, conducted daily discussions with all the diverse players in the city about its problems and potential solutions. How ironic it was to me that the ephemeral realm of radio should have a more solid and relevant conversation about the city than I felt able to have within the confines of the architecture world. I eventually left my job as editor to become a volunteer and then paid producer on Warren's show. Now, in a sweet turn of events, I will host a monthly program on KCRW on the topic of architecture; having left architecture to engage with the public, I now hope to engage the public with architecture.

This is a long digression that I hope illustrates how passionately many architects and I feel about the city, while feeling limited by the tools of building design. In the following pages you will read about citizen-architects who have transcended those limitations and engaged deeply with the political, economic, and community channels to accomplish great, often seemingly impossible achievements.

Take Martha Welborne, for instance, an architect with an enviable career in large architecture firms, who, prompted by a trip to Curitiba, Brazil, came up with the notion of a rapid transit system for L.A. Through sheer force of personality and political skill, she managed to persuade key decision-makers

of the wisdom of the system. Now L.A., the city least associated with sensible public transit planning, has such a system. As Richard Thompson writes, Martha Welborne "has simply found that 'it is often more about politics than it is about good planning.' That doesn't diminish the need for quality in the design of the urban environment, but without the support of the political and governmental community, there will be no realization of the dreams."

Like Martha Welborne, Arthur Golding has poured his skills as an architect into urban planning and community-based design. I remember Arthur ten years ago when he was conducting workshops for civic plans for industrial areas adjacent to the L.A. River. At that time, his dreams seemed quixotic, given the seeming lack of interest then in the revival of the river or of community-driven urban planning. But his incredible patience and tenacity paid off. The coalition he is part of pulled off a coup; thanks to their efforts, Chinatown Yards, one of the sites, is slated to be turned into a park and mixed use development rather than industrial sheds. But the message needs to be spread. Golding, who also teaches at USC, points out the galling truth that, even by the fifth year, architecture students "have relatively little sense of either the regulatory or political climate in which they will operate." He tries to impart this knowledge to the students.

Julie Oakes, of Oakes and Associates architects, has taken the lesson about political education one step further; to better her city, Hermosa Beach, she thought: what better way to do it than to run the city itself? And so she became mayor. As she points out, "very few architects are or have been involved in politics." This is a very significant point that, I believe, contributes to a separation of business, politics, and the urban realm at the highest political levels. If one looks to the Latin countries, for example, architecture and civic design occupy a far greater position of importance in decision-making circles. Oakes became two-term mayor and was able to initiate a slate of street and urban improvements. She believes taking leadership is essential to implement an urban vision and says, "There are many roles that architects have and can have in and around City Hall. Architects now serve on many planning commissions and boards. But to implement policy and change, one must go further." She concludes, "I do not know if



“Most of us were attracted to the profession because we love design, we love imagining something new, and we love problem-solving and thinking about big ideas. Those ideals often get lost amidst the constraints of architecture and design practice.”

anyone has suggested that Jefferson was as good a president as he was because he was also an architect, but it might, just might be worth looking into.”

There will be no visionary leaders if there is no education to prepare them, and Shirl Buss recognizes this, devoting much of her time to sharing her passion with children. She teaches kids from kindergarten through fifth grade, engaging them in “very real design problems in their own schools or communities and [letting] them project themselves into an imaginary future world.” She concludes, “Working with children brings us back to the joy and delight that attracted us to architecture in the first place and keeps that passion alive.”

One way Doug Gardner kept his own passion for architecture alive was by joining the side of the developer. As a member of Maguire Thomas development team for Playa Vista, he tackled the “huge and fascinating” challenge of assembling a team of architects “to create a master plan for a 1,000 acre site that was encumbered with complex political, financial, environmental, and community issues.” First there, and now at his current position with Catellus Urban Development Group in San Francisco, Gardner is trying to enable the creation of master-plans for commercial development that incorporate the best ideas about town planning.

Also in San Francisco is Charles Hall Page; his career demonstrates that not all architects want to mow things down to make way for their own masterpiece. Appalled by the wholesale urban renewal that was wiping historic treasures off the map in the ‘60s and early ‘70s, Page co-founded San Francisco’s Architectural Heritage, an organization that became instrumental in saving much of SF’s heritage as well as inspiring like-minded organizations across the country. Through preservation, he learned the lesson offered by all the architects in this issue, which is, “Architects have a great deal to offer beyond proper detailing and flashing. Their ability to conceptualize shelter—for individuals, families, neighborhoods, businesses, and beyond—is a tremendous asset locally and nationally.” This issue of *arcCA* offers an education in how the skills of architecture can be used to achieve one of the oldest concerns of architects: urbanity. ●



# Urban Design Advocate

Martha Lampkin Welborne, FAIA



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Richard Thompson, AIA

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Martha Welborne has an agenda...an agenda of accomplishment. As a highly skilled architect and urban designer, that accomplishment is measured in terms of achieving improvements to the urban environment. “Although I never actually met him, I learned a lot about the art of city building from Nat Owings, one of the original founders of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. It is a part of SOM’s culture, and I learned it well while I was there.” What she learned was the very real and technical side of city building. Not just making beautiful buildings and urban spaces, but addressing the sometimes unglamorous yet necessary supporting components of implementation: traffic, utilities, economics, even politics—the requirements for accomplishment in building cities.

As architects, planners, and urban designers, we are trained to solve problems, create solutions, but not necessarily to push them through the political process, to make them happen. Martha Welborne has come to realize that, if you want to practice the art of city building, you often have to be an advocate.

Some have even called Martha Welborne a “crusader,” and it is certainly true that she has forcefully advocated and overseen the implementation of

a number of powerful ideas to improve the urban environment. But that’s not the whole story about this straight talking, MIT educated architect and urban planner. Her stellar career with some of the country’s most outstanding architectural and planning firms—with a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard along the way—has led her to the understanding that achieving real impact in urban design and planning sometimes requires extraordinary, perhaps unorthodox techniques. She’s simply found that “it is often more about politics than it is about good planning.” That doesn’t diminish the need for quality in the design of the urban environment, but without the support of the political and governmental community, there will be no realization of the dreams.

Martha’s most recent crusade is Grand Avenue in downtown Los Angeles. As the managing director of the Grand Avenue Committee, a non-profit organization focused on improving the civic and cultural district of Downtown Los Angeles, she is charged with creating a vision for and implementing improvements to the cultural core of the city. A public/private partnership, the Grand Avenue Committee was established as a fund at the California

“it is often more about politics than it is about good planning.” That does n’t diminish the need for quality in the design of the urban environment. Without the support of the political and governmental community, however, there will be no realization of the dreams.

Community Foundation, and Martha Welborne was invited to lead the effort based on her recent success in advocating a “Rapid Bus” system in Los Angeles. Located in the heart of downtown L.A., Grand Avenue is home to the city’s music center, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), the Colburn Center for the Performing Arts, over 3,000,000 square feet of private sector office space, and LA’s civic and government center (second in size only to Washington D.C.’s). Add to this mix the soon to be completed Walt Disney Concert Hall, by Frank Gehry, and the Cathedral of our Lady of Los Angeles, by noted Spanish architect Rafael Moneo, and you have the ingredients of an enormously powerful urban center.

With all these significant components, the street nevertheless lacks the simple urban amenities

and supporting uses, such as restaurants, cafes, and housing, that an urban cultural and civic district demands. Under the auspices of the Committee, Martha is leading a group of design consultants in creating a plan to fill these gaps: first, designing a pedestrian-friendly street with widened sidewalks, street trees, and lighting that links together this unique series of cultural and architectural venues; second, planning for the development of vacant publicly owned land through the private sector, with uses that will give life to the district; and, finally, revitalizing the civic center mall to become a true “central park” for downtown Los Angeles. Creating the vision is the easy part; orchestrating agreement among a committee composed of the city, the county, the music center, and wealthy citizens, coupled with securing funding across multiple jurisdictions, is another matter. But, as Martha has observed, this kind of leadership is often the only way good design in the public realm can be achieved. Still in the process, Martha has her hands full.

Martha Lampkin came to Los Angeles in 1994 to marry John Welborne. At the same time, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill had asked her to head their local office as managing director, where she was responsible for a variety of architecture and urban design projects.

After several years, when SOM decided to change the orientation of their office in Los Angeles from large-scale urban design and architectural work to interiors, Martha’s first opportunity in urban design advocacy presented itself almost by coincidence.

During the course of a casual gathering in her neighborhood one evening, the subject of Curitiba, Brazil, had come up, since one of her friends was preparing to attend a board meeting of the W. Alton Jones Foundation in that city. Martha mentioned that she had met the Mayor of Curitiba, Jamie Lerner, also an architect, and had studied their innovative and wildly successful transit system. The concept combines the best features of both rail and bus. Express buses occupy dedicated lanes running down the center of the street, with stations approximately every mile. Traffic signals give priority to the buses, and, with the multiple wide doors, passengers are loaded and unloaded rapidly, making the system speedy and efficient. During the course of the afternoon’s conversation, Martha also suggested that this

type of “rapid bus” system might in fact translate quite well to Los Angeles.

After the trip to Brazil, the W. Alton Jones Foundation board enthusiastically agreed. They suggested that Martha submit a proposal for a grant to study the idea of applying the Curitiba type rapid bus system to the streets of L.A.

The concept of busways was hardly new at the time, but the possibilities they offer had not been fully understood by many of the key decision-makers. Martha decided to apply for the grant with the purpose of educating key public officials about surface transit possibilities and ultimately building portions of the system in Los Angeles. During the course of the next few years, Martha organized several trips to Curitiba for transit officials, the mayor, and county supervisors, all of whom became avid supporters. She also worked closely with MTA staff to adapt some of the Curitiba ideas for Los Angeles streets and rights-of-way. Ultimately, two demonstration lines were created and implemented to test some of the concepts and their acceptability in Los Angeles. (see *arcCA* 01.3)

Today these two demonstration lines have been an outstanding success and are being expanded to other areas of the city. Martha modestly takes credit only for the politics, since, as she points out, the technology is not new. However, if, as she notes, “transit systems are designed by politics, not by planning,” then she certainly did an outstanding design job.

Prior to coming west, Martha honed her considerable skills as an architect and urban planner while working for some of the premier architecture and urban design firms in the United States. She learned to love “the nitty-gritty of cities,” living in Chicago, Boston, and now Los Angeles, reacting to each city through her work in architecture, urban design, and planning. Her interest in urban design and planning had its genesis earlier, while she was an undergraduate studying architecture at the University of Notre Dame. One of her undergraduate years was spent in Rome, where she became enamored with the idea of architecture at the scale of cities. Several years later, she entered the MIT School of Architecture and Planning, where she received masters degrees in architecture and in city planning. After graduation, she joined the Boston office of Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill, working on a variety of large-scale urban

revitalization and planning projects, including Boston’s Downtown Crossing and Post Office Square. During her years in Boston, Martha began to understand the value of *pro bono* work through the AIA. She found that, by using the bully pulpit of the AIA, she could make far more impactful statements about city building than simply as a project advocate. Moving to the Chicago offices of SOM, Martha continued to work on significant urban design projects, such as the Chicago World’s Fair and major urban streetscape improvements.

In 1983, Martha was lured back to Boston to become a principal in the firm of Sasaki Associates, directing institutional planning and design for major university campuses and continuing to lead major downtown urban design projects.

In addition to her notable professional career, Martha Welborne has taught and lectured around the country on urban design and transit issues, served as president of the Architectural Guild of the University of Southern California and as a member of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. She is currently an appointed member of the Visiting Committee for the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT and recently served on the Alumni Council of Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design. In recognition of her contributions to the profession, Martha Welborne was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1993.

In the last several years, Martha Welborne has been exploring ways to practice the art of city building without necessarily having a traditional client. Through her *pro bono* work back in Boston, she found that she had greater credibility in this type of role being perceived as what she calls an “honest broker.” Architects, planners, and urban designers, she notes, are often looked on with some suspicion when they advocate for a particular idea, under the assumption that they may have some vested interest in its implementation. Martha has been testing whether working for non-profit organizations might remove some of this suspicion and allow her to operate with more credibility and to move projects forward more effectively. She still does not know if it is possible to maintain a practice as an urban designer and architect in a non-profit setting, where the primary client is the public good, but, so far, the results look promising. ●



# Urban Design

# & Civic Involvement



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Kenneth Caldwell

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Arthur Golding, AIA, is the founder of Arthur Golding and Associates in Los Angeles. He is a member of the LA River Advisory Committee and Chair of the AIA LA River Task Force. He also teaches architecture and urban design at the University of Southern California.

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**KC: Could you give me a little background on your practice?**

AG: I founded my firm in 1983. We have participated in a number of design competitions and charettes. We won the national competition for the Rancho Mirage Civic Center. Our design was a one story complex of pavilions planned around a civic garden. Unfortunately, it didn't get built. We were the master planner for an expansion of the Loyola Marymount campus and the design architect for a central utilities plant and a school of business. We have also completed a supercomputing center at Caltech and some buildings at Pitzer College in Claremont. A great deal of our urban design work has been *pro bono*, and it informs our other work. Of course, we have been very involved for some time around the river system here and were part of a team that recently produced a report entitled *Common Ground: From the Mountains to the Sea*. It's an overview open space plan for the double watershed of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers.

**KC: Who were some of your mentors?**

AG: At a great distance was O'Neil Ford: I remember reading that he played a major role in the revitalization

of the San Antonio River and wondering about how that could be. A little closer was Ian McHarg. I heard him lecture on several occasions, and his seminal book, *Design with Nature*, remains an inspiration. The closest example was Emmet Wemple, an extraordinary man and landscape architect. He introduced many of us to the Los Angeles River and its potential.

**KC: How did you get involved in the Los Angeles River issue?**

AG: The process began about thirteen years ago, when I became interested in the urban design potential of a couple of large sites, unused rail yards near downtown LA. I participated in an urban design workshop, sponsored by the planning department and the NEA, in 1989, focused on City North, from Union Station and Olvera Street to the River. That was my first attempt to consider the Cornfield rail yard and its surroundings. That plan proposed a new, mixed-use urban neighborhood, with a school and small park, but made only an initial gesture to the river. A little later, I was one of the organizers of an AIA-sponsored design charrette for Taylor Yard. Much later, for the River Through Downtown conference in 1998, I was part of a team that proposed a large park





ahead of time. Bring in people with serious expertise in particular aspects of the problem. With the LA River, the issues are always complicated because of overlapping jurisdictions, multiple regulations, a variety of property owners, and the frequent presence of toxic substances. There are rail lines, highways, and other urban infrastructure. In order to address sites along the river meaningfully, you have to have a pretty good briefing on flood protection, too. Every time we organize a charette, we put together sessions that may last a few hours or a full day, with briefings by the people who are involved on a daily basis with the issues.

**KC: Have you influenced others?**

AG: Not so much myself personally, but the LA River effort has. A whole group has sprung up around Ballona Creek, which drains West Los Angeles. This has been spearheaded by an architect, James Lamm, AIA. Jim says that he got into it by looking at what was going on with the LA River and saw the same opportunities over there.

**KC: Are there other large-scale civic design issues that you are involved in?**

AG: There is another huge issue in Los Angeles that has been in the back of my mind for a long time. It is the problem and the opportunity represented by the hundreds of miles of boulevards with underutilized retail frontage. These are not boulevards in the classical French sense of quadruple rows of trees with monuments at periodic intervals. Here, our boulevards are arterial streets spaced about a mile apart and commercially zoned along most of their length. The city, with its framework plan, laid out the idea that denser, urban, mixed-use development would be encouraged at transit and commercial nodes. But the plan has not addressed this huge inventory of boulevard frontage and what might be done with it.

We should address the potential of these major streets not as simple lines of movement, but as attractors of denser mixed-use development. In the process we could make boulevards that are worthy of the name. The issue here is that there is too much commercial zoning, which results in the underutilization. At the same time, we have a tremendous housing shortage in Los Angeles. These boulevard frontages could be rezoned residential with mixed use.

We are convinced that we can build a better world and optimistic about actually doing so. Our role is a positive role, as opposed to professions where the roles are defensive or adversarial. We imagine possibilities beyond those that are evident in a given situation.

Recognizing that this city consists of a large number of single-family residential neighborhoods, it will be important that, if we densify the boulevards, we do not disrupt the fabric of the existing neighborhoods. If we are going to create a more sustainable city, we do need to densify, but we need to develop in ways that are humane and resource-efficient.

We are also one of the most “park poor” cities in the country. Rethinking the river, its tributaries, and its watershed is one way to address the lack of parks. The boulevards may be a way of addressing the housing crisis.

If you take the model of the river, we articulated the vision and then built the support. Support begins with a vision. Then one must build consensus. Consensus building is slow. You begin with a few people, but gradually you enlarge the field of involvement. The rivers and the boulevard corridors present extraordinary civic opportunities. ●



# How I Became Mayor,



## and Why

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**Julie Oakes, AIA**

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On the surface, I do not have a lot in common with Thomas Jefferson. For one, he's dead and I'm not. Then there's the fact that he was a man and...I'm not. Furthermore, he lived on the East Coast and never saw the Pacific Ocean, while I live a five-minute walk away from its sunny shores.

Still, there are a few important areas where Tom and I are somewhat similar. He was an architect and so am I. And though I have not yet become president, we have both been deeply involved in politics. I am a two-term mayor and city council member of Hermosa Beach. This, apparently, makes Tom and me rather unique. There are—and have historically been—very few architects involved in politics.

Certainly it was not with any zealous forethought that I chose to correct the professional imbalance by storming the ranks of my local city government with protractor and parallels. I was very busy as an architect, business owner, and thinking of starting a family. The demands of the building industry, family needs, and necessity of making a living tend to keep architects focused on architecture. This, in fact, I see as the most plausible reason why there are so few architects in the halls of both national and local

government. We are not a consistently well-paid profession, and most often cannot afford the time required to run for and hold political office.

Why, then, did I decide to mix these usually unmixed activities? Perhaps *how* I did it will answer the why.

In 1987, my husband Lee and I started our architectural company, Oakes and Associates. Energetic and somewhat foolish, we gleefully began the roller-coaster ride of the architectural business owner. Locating on what was then the Santa Monica Mall—a run-down outdoor shopping area—we became involved in the efforts of the city, a newly formed business assessment district, architects like ourselves, and the community to create the very popular Third Street Promenade out of the old “mall.”

At about this time, we bought our first house in the beach community of Hermosa Beach. Immediately, I could see that my experience with the Third Street Promenade could be of use to this community of lovely beach front homes and its deteriorating downtown. I put together a design package. It was a set of fairly typical architectural responses to a community's need—create a plaza, improve the landscaping,

signage, relax parking standards for diverse types of business, etc. I cited examples of our involvement on the Third Street Promenade—both in private development and public projects, e.g. our involvement in creating the outdoor dining standards, streetscape improvements, pier circulation, and entry treatments. I included sketches of what could be done for downtown Hermosa.

I submitted this to the city council and...heard nothing. Not that I expected an immediate opening of the floodgates, but *nothing*? My proposals, however, had not been ignored by all. A few months later, an incumbent city councilman running for reelection came to my house and asked me to volunteer for the planning commission. A movement was afoot in the community to improve the downtown; they needed help figuring out how to implement it.

Clearly, the built environment is a reflection of a community, and ten years ago when I started out in public office, that reflection in Hermosa Beach was a bit tired and run-down. So, seemingly, was the attitude in and around City Hall. When I would ask why things had not changed before, I typically got the response, “We’re just Hermosa Beach.” Clearly, my first challenge was to build a coalition and change this torpid attitude. Then, we could get down to some real building.

It became evident to me that the concerns and challenges put to a planning commission, indeed any commission, are ultimately taken up by the city council and mayor. Driven by my desire to continue the process and see the community turn around, after two years on the planning commission, I ran for city council and won. I can only guess why I was chosen out of the twelve other people running that year. Perhaps because the community knew it had a mission of revitalization before it, and, with my professional and company background, the voters felt that I could lead them down a focused path towards that exciting—and buildable—community vision.



Architects are uniquely well suited and trained for a role of leadership. It is my opinion that architects can go into the political arenas with the challenges of juggling family, profession, and political life more adeptly than other professionals. We can think in three dimensions and visualize the impacts of developments and planning and zoning changes. And we are able to envision a future that cohesively brings together the ideas of many.

As mayor, running the city was much like running my company—but on a large scale. The city council came to rely on me for opinions on the various aesthetic considerations and land-use issues. The issues of water concerns, energy needs, and impositions on open space, agricultural lands, and wildlife lands are going to be increasing challenges as California continues to grow and create further demands on our environment.

My desire was not to change the whole shape and structure of our community but to deal with the meaningful details in a coherent way. City departments, for example, are expected to create public structures that are safe and easily maintained. This is usually interpreted to mean structures that have no regard for design, quality, or innovative use of materials. But is the best solution simply to meet the bare minimum requirements? Or could we create not just a more sanitary and convenient environment but one that would enrich the image of the community, as well?

Such questions are relevant to all community projects. For instance, the remodeling and replacement our park and beach bathrooms would cost about \$30,000 more per structure to create more airy wood roof lines and use better quality materials on the interiors. Some of the council members worried about this. My response, however, was that these structures would be a reflection of our community—no matter how large or small. In the 20 or 30 years that people would be using them, would these buildings invoke a sense of place or, I asked rhetorically, would people say as they walked away, “Gee those are ugly, but, gosh, we saved \$30,000?”

I don’t think so.

We maintained our company offices in Santa Monica for ten years and Culver City for another



Bijou Theater Building



Beach House



Pier Plaza



New Municipal Structure

five. This year we have opened up our Hermosa Beach offices. Having a company that has been in existence for fifteen years, winning awards and creating large, successful projects, has helped assure others that my success was already in place when I went into politics and that I was not dependent on political gain to make my career and company.

One might ask, however, how my political position helped my company. On a day to day basis, it has not helped a whole lot. In fact, there have been few professional benefits from my tenure as leader of a community. But there have been subtle advantages. I now have a perhaps overly confident sense that I can walk into any city we are doing work in and go right to the top if need be. Although I have not pushed this, many city engineers and plan checkers in various cities are aware of my status, and maybe that makes a difference, I don't know. I was always politely pushy at building departments even before my political career.

And then there are those who have tried to push advantages my way. I remember one incident with a private developer who had a commercial development up for public review in downtown Hermosa. He knew it was fraught with problems that the city could not accept. Unwilling to make changes to his plans, he called me one day. He knew of our architectural company, as we have a number of commercial developments in cities that he is working in. He explained that, if I could see my way to allowing his project to go through in Hermosa, he would certainly like Oakes and Associates to do some of his projects in other cities. While I like to eat, I like to sleep at night even more. I remember telling him that, since he thought we were such a great architectural company, I fully expected him to look us up...despite the fact that I was not going to approve his project. Needless to say, he hasn't called.

The personal benefits have been enormous. I am proud of the work the city has accomplished, the new plaza, parking structure, skateboard park, tennis recreation area, remodeled parks, the pier renovation, and the list goes on.

There are many roles that architects have and can have in and around City Hall. Architects now serve on many planning commissions and boards. But to implement policy and change, one must go further. Not all are cut out for the life of mayor. My husband and fellow architect has no desire whatsoever to pursue a political position. Why me? Admittedly, I enjoy being a leader. I am not sure how my family takes to that, but they have survived and so has my company. It was my architect background that brought me in, but it was my leadership desire that kept me going.

Where I will go from here, I do not know. I enjoy the political arena and I enjoy architecture. Perhaps I will pursue a higher political office or some other role that my political and architectural experience can benefit. I do know that communities can only gain from having more architects share the reins and use their skills to envision more practical and attractive environments.

I do not know if anyone has suggested that Jefferson was as good a president as he was because he was also an architect, but it might, just might be worth looking into. ●

## Portrait of the Architect as Developer:

### Doug Gardner & Mission Bay



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#### Daniel Gregory

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Turning to the window in his office on the second floor of San Francisco's Mission Bay Visitor Center, Doug Gardner gestures at the view northeast to the Embarcadero. A construction site fills the glass: 1,000 units of housing is taking shape across from Pac Bell Park. Doug is a former architect and president of Catellus Urban Development Group, which is responsible for the morphing of a former sea of parking lots and random industrial buildings into San Francisco's newest neighborhood. So how does he bring an architect's skills and conscience to bear on such a large construction project?

First, a little background. Doug graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture from Yale in 1973—he and I happened to share the same entryway during freshman year—and received his M. Arch. from Yale in 1975. At first he thought he would be an engineering major and signed up for chemistry and calculus courses but eventually realized he was taking high school all over again.

It was a complicated time, always colored by the Vietnam War. Indeed, I remember a convoy bus trip to Washington—led by Yale's president, Kingman Brewster—to protest the War to our Representatives in Congress. The currents of social responsibility swirled about the campus. In Doug's case, those ideas helped change his academic focus toward the creative arts.

Sophomore year, he found himself taking a course in architecture from Kent Bloomer and Jim Righter—both of whom were proteges of Charles Moore. Vincent Scully's magnetic lectures on the history of American architecture even kept him awake after lunch. "Scully was a great performer," recalls Doug. "In his and Kent's and Jim's classes I realized I was a visual person. I finally majored in architecture junior year and built a 30-foot tall windmill with classmate Carl Pucci. From my desk in Paul Rudolph's A & A building I could see cartoonist Gary Trudeau and colorist Tina Beebe at work."

Doug's thesis project was the adaptive reuse of an asphalt plant on Manhattan's 90th Street, on the East Side: "Harry Cobb was on the jury. He liked my presentation and offered me a job at I. M. Pei's office in New York. I was incredibly lucky. Harry is a brilliant man and my first mentor. So I worked for him for the next 13 years."

But then he was offered a new opportunity on the other side of the country. He joined Maguire Thomas, the developer for Playa Vista, a large project in Los Angeles. "I left the profession of architecture for a number of reasons, one being that I did not feel I had the talent to succeed Harry Cobb and his partners at the Pei office. Playa Vista was my first time on the other side of the table. The challenge was huge and fascinating, as we tried to assemble a team of architects to create a master plan for a 1,000 acre site that was encumbered with complex political, financial, environmental, and community issues, all of which must be manifested in the plan." The Playa Vista plan uses development as a way to knit a community together, which here means relying less on the automobile.

In San Francisco, where Doug now works for Catellus chairman Nelson Rising (who was his boss at Maguire Thomas), the challenges are similar. "Here, the goal is an urban neighborhood; it must have its own sense of place and time but still be a legible extension of the city. Again, the plan tries to accommodate the social, economic, and environmental forces that bear upon it. For example, we must reconcile the need for affordable housing, open space, and Bay water quality. And it must be a place where people want to be."

So how does the architect-developer become a good citizen? How does a responsible developer create a place that responds to so many needs? In Doug's case, he attempts to put into practice the principles of urban complexity articulated by Jane Jacobs—whose *Death and Life of Great American Cities* was required reading in Scully's class—or by Stefanos Polyzoides, co-author of *Courtyard Housing in Los Angeles*. For example, he has limited parking podiums because they compromise street life. And he hires good architects and



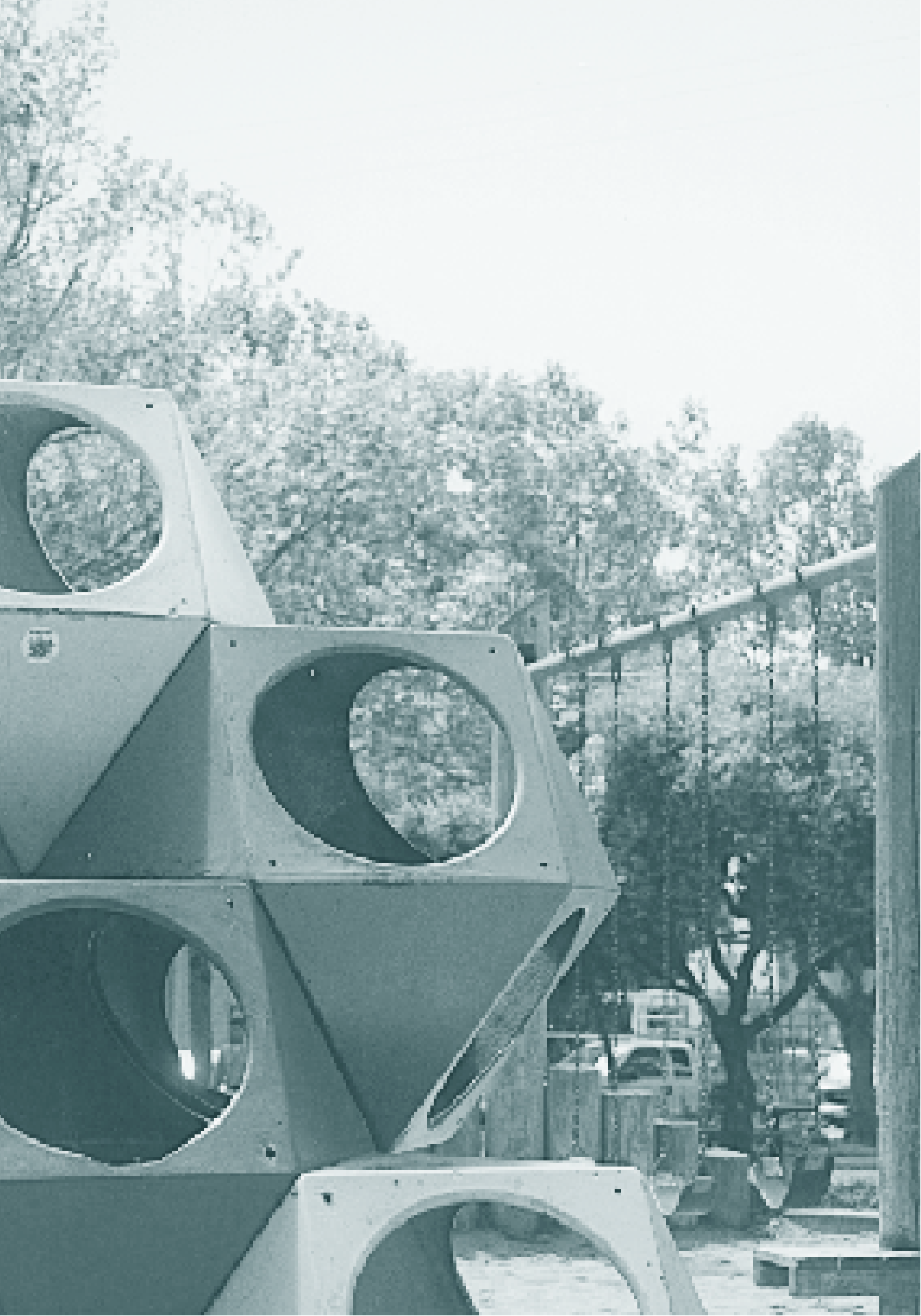
Office building for The Gap / Studios Architects



Mission Place Apartments / Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

uses them as problem solvers on many levels. "An architect is interested in figuring things out, in tinkering," he says. "Architects are not linear thinkers; they can accept many different sets of data. It's not natural to build a city in ten or even twenty years, as we are doing; so we need to be flexible. We're looking for the range of choices that a city provides even as we want the buildings to be about their time and place. I don't favor buildings that are designed today to look like they were designed in a different era. Several different firms work on a given block; compatibility is important, but so is diversity. And I have encouraged the architects to take into account the industrial heritage of the site, and that means speaking to local materials like brick, glass, wood, and metal; not white porcelain tile or reflective glass, for example."

Turning again to the window, Doug says: "This project marries the first two parts of my career; the first as a designer; the second in real estate development. Here at Mission Bay, it's about planning, the entitlement process, and execution." Soon to be installed as president of the L.A. Conservancy, the largest membership-based, local historic preservation organization in the country, Doug is monocoastal but bipolar—he lives in L.A. but heads north to S. F. for part of every week. ●





# Children & Architecture

An Interview  
with Shirl Buss, Associate AIA



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Elizabeth Chur

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Architectural educator Shirl Buss passionately creates joyful intersections between the worlds of architecture and children. Buss, 53, holds an M.Arch. and Ph.D. from the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as an M.A. in Human Development from Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena. After founding and running Building Women, Inc., a general contracting firm in Venice, California, for a decade, Buss went on to teach and direct numerous architecture education programs in Southern California and the Bay Area, including the AIA/LEAP Architects in Schools program in San Francisco. Among her many professional activities, she is currently a lecturer in the graduate program at San Francisco State University's Department of Design and Industry. On a recent sunny afternoon, Buss squeezed in an interview between a morning at Leslie Stone Associates, an exhibit and environmental design firm where she works as a senior associate, and an after-school workshop on bridges which she taught at the Bay Area Discovery Museum, a children's museum located just north of the Golden Gate Bridge in Sausalito.

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**EC: What kinds of projects are you engaged in that fit into a definition of "architect-as-citizen"?**

SB: I have a reputation for being someone who brings architecture to the K-5th grade crowd, and that has been the central joy and pleasure of my life for many years. I've been working with children in design and construction in various incarnations since 1984. When I first started, I was a general contractor, building projects such as affordable housing, women's shelters, and schools. We usually had loads of scrap lumber, which I started to bring to a local park on weekends. Children from the neighborhood, many of whom had no yards or after-school activities, came out in droves for free-form building sessions. As these design/build days gained in popularity, I worked with neighborhood organizations and wrote some grants to sponsor an annual program, called "Building Up the Community," in that same park. In the early years of the program, the children built go-carts, dollhouses and playhouses. Later they designed pushcarts and carnival booths and games. As I got my architectural training at UCLA, the programs evolved, and we added more sophisticated design components. I have continued this tradition of using

design and construction as a tool for community building in a variety of settings ever since.

**EC: Can you give me a taste of your work with K-5 students—what are you trying to bring into their universe, and what do you hope that they carry with them?**

SB: I would back up a bit and say that there are many architects all over the country who do some amazing work with children. I've been honored to work on some exciting projects with many of them. In the Bay Area, that community comes together in the Architecture + Youth Collaborative, a project of the Architectural Foundation of San Francisco. We work in schools, cultural institutions, and recreational settings as formal instructors, resident artists, and resource people.

I am the most excited about five ingredients that we, as designers, bring into the children's universe. First, we whet students' appetites for learning. In the schools, we augment the curriculum and bring it alive in a very exciting way, especially for visual and tactile learners. We engage the students in very real design problems in their own schools or communities and also let them project themselves into an imaginary

Working with children  
brings us back  
to the joy and delight  
that attracted us  
to architecture  
in the first place.

future world. In so doing, the children taste what the learning process is all about in a deep and meaningful way, and they become really motivated.

For example, I just started working with a fifth grade class in a public school. Our first session was about animal architecture. Each of the students was to build a different animal out of clay, and then design and build that animal's habitat. As they realized they didn't know about their animal in enough detail, they asked their teacher, "Can we go to the library?" With her blessing, a cadre of kids ran to the library, and within ten minutes came back with an armful of books. They pored through the pages, examining the wing structure of a red-tailed hawk and discovering what a hammerhead shark really looked like. They were motivated because they had the opportunity to investigate animals in a new way. And they were able to represent the fruits of that exploration in a kinesthetically satisfying form.

We also engage children in the design process, which is similar to, and as powerful as, the scientific process. The students formulate and tackle problems like homelessness, environmental sustain-

ability, or badly designed schools. They conduct research to develop an analysis and a critique. They generate some alternative hypotheses for how that problem can be addressed and develop informed options to solve the problem. They then present their projects to their peers, to the community, and to professional architects, all of which is very exciting.

Our projects usually involve model making and building, which all children really love. We allow them to use new and unusual materials to bring their powerful ideas to life and make them look impressive. Every time I walk into a classroom with these materials, the children can barely contain their excitement. Of course, if we actually build a project to scale, as we have done in a number of schools, the children go nuts! They are so hungry to use drills, saws, sanders, hammers, and lumber—the real tools of life!

Because architecture is a collaborative endeavor, we also give children the opportunity to work in a new way with each other and with adults. Showing them how to bring their strengths to a project and develop a product together that represents that collaboration is very valuable and meaningful.

Finally, we encourage children to think about how to improve their communities and how the built environment can better reflect their needs and voices. For example, since children can't drive cars and rarely have much money, they often design projects with pedestrian paths, safety-oriented public transportation, and inexpensive, sustainable sources of energy. I often tell them, "If children designed our cities, they would be more colorful, fun, safe, and ecological!"

All the ingredients architects bring to the children's universe are important, but I feel the most important is whetting their appetite for learning and enabling them to explore, in depth, something of relevance. Once children have tasted this process in a meaningful way, they want to just keep learning!

**EC: So perhaps the aim is not that everybody in the third grade class wants to become an architect.**

SB: No. In fact, that's not a goal for me at all. Occasionally children will say they want to be architects, and I will encourage them to pursue it if they have the passion. While I usually introduce the children to traditional dimensions of architecture such as geometry, structure, and scale, other aspects of the work are



more important to me. Architecture is merely the excuse—the medium—through which we encourage children to investigate the social and material world around them.

**EC: What kind of feedback have you gotten from the kids or their teachers?**

SB: Teachers often see students, some of whom don't do well in a traditional, didactic learning situation, suddenly flourish. For example, I just heard a teacher say last week, "I had no idea that Javier knew so much about animal architecture! My gosh, he's an expert! And David! He's so chaotic, but when you translate that chaos into built form, he's Frank Gehry!"

Teachers want their students to be involved in multi-faceted, in-depth design projects, but often don't know how to facilitate that process. Most say they love collaborating with a design professional who can bring that expertise into the classroom setting. I recently collaborated with Carole Seligman, a third grade teacher at Sunshine Gardens Elementary School in South San Francisco, on a two-year project called "Here is Where I Learn," sponsored by the Bay Area Discovery Museum and the Irvine Foundation. We focused on interplay of the built, cultural, and natural environments, using different methodologies for looking at and exploring each. The students then investigated the layers of their own community and represented the fruits of that exploration in a variety of media, including sketchbooks, collage, and photography, as well as model-making and actual construction. After studying the Golden Gate Bridge and surrounding environs, the students came back and designed and built a full-scale rainbow bridge, birdhouses, and outdoor nature museum for their school. This was something they wouldn't have done without a resident designer.

**EC: What would you like to say to other architects about your work?**

SB: Most of us were attracted to the profession because we love design, we love imagining something new, and we love problem-solving and thinking about big ideas. Those ideals often get lost amidst the constraints of architecture and design practice. Working with children brings us back to the joy and delight that attracted us to architecture in the first place and keeps that passion alive. ●



# Charlie Page & SF Heritage



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David Roccasolva, Associate AIA

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Charles Hall Page, founding principal of Page & Turnbull, the Bay Area's oldest architecture firm dedicated to historic preservation, loves San Francisco. His passion for his hometown led him to take a stand in the early 1970s—a time when many passions and causes were rising to the fore. Urban renewal, a great plan designed to save America's cities, was instead decimating the century old urban fabric of San Francisco. Replacing the human-scaled neighborhoods and well-crafted buildings for which San Francisco is famous were faceless—and, worse yet, soulless—structures.

In 1971, along with Harry Miller, Page founded the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage. With a Masters in Planning from the University of Pennsylvania and knowledge of how preservation had taken root in Charleston, Annapolis, and Savannah, Page began to stem the tide of demolition and save the face of San Francisco. Almost 30 years later and known simply as Heritage, the organization has a membership of over 2,000 people. From its headquarters in the Haas-Lilienthal House, Heritage provides educational programs and lobbying efforts to preserve the best of San Francisco's historic buildings and spaces.

**DR: What led to the founding of SF Heritage?**

CP: In 1971, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency was tearing down large swaths of San Francisco, mostly in the Western Addition and near Yerba Buena Center. Having been at Penn and familiar with preservation organizations on the East Coast, Harry and I put together the necessary Articles of Incorporation for the foundation, a 501c3 corporation. Although preservation was gaining momentum on the East Coast, we were the first organization of its type in the West. And one of the very first preservation organizations in a major American city. We were pioneers, and others followed in short order.

But what tipped the scales in making us credible to the public was the purchase of a group of houses identified by the Landmarks Board as a resource they wanted to protect. As an alternative to demolition, we encouraged the Agency to offer them for sale to the public, with the understanding that they could proceed with demolition if there were no bidders. As a precaution, we placed bids...on all ten houses...and won. This was really unexpected. You might say that youth and naïveté played a big role in the preservation of San Francisco.

One problem was that the Agency had not provided for any place to relocate the houses. Their project, the rebuilding of the Western Addition A-2 project area, was going to happen, and it would be the new owner's responsibility to find sites and move the houses. After a long period, we prevailed upon the Agency to provide land, and then, after even more time, we found funding in the federal budget for the Agency to cover moving costs. Keep in mind, these steps required months and months of research and lobbying efforts. Then there was a wonderful night of dropping the utility lines, and, beginning at 4:00 a.m., we began moving the houses across Fillmore Street to various westerly locations. This gleaned a lot of publicity for the new organization—in San Francisco and in papers across the country—as well as making Heritage a force in the City.

The next big step in Heritage's development was the acquisition of the Haas-Lilienthal House on Franklin Street, which improved our visibility and proved our commitment to the City. Following that, we nominated the Jesse Street Substation [soon to be the home of the Jewish Museum] to the National Register, preventing it from being torn down. That was at a time when one could do such a thing without the owner's consent.

It was the controversy over and ultimate demolition of the City of Paris Department Store [now the site of Neiman Marcus] and the Fitzhugh Building [now the site of Saks Fifth Avenue] that swelled the ranks of Heritage's membership. The loss of those two buildings, along with the Alaska Commercial Building at Sansome & California Streets, brought volunteers out in full force.

**DR: What is Heritage's greatest success?**

CP: By far, the publication, *Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage*, an inventory, classification, and ranking of downtown San Francisco's commercial buildings. The book, in which buildings are rated from A (highest) to D (lowest) importance, has proven to be the Bible of downtown preservation. All of the buildings with an "A" ranking in *Splendid Survivors* were incorporated into Article 11 of the San Francisco Planning Code, requiring their preservation. *Splendid Survivors* had—and still has—a tremendous impact on public policy and downtown



development. It was serendipitous that in the mid-1970s the political climate in San Francisco was also welcoming to Heritage's input.

One needs to remember, however, that many things helped spur on preservation—there was the passage of Preservation Tax Credits in the mid-'70s; the success of preservation efforts in Charleston, Annapolis, and Savannah were becoming well known; and, in general, the public, who had accepted the bulldozer with open arms in the late 1960s, began to realize that perhaps razing everything was not a good idea. Certainly, the demolition of Penn Station in New York was the most high profile case of what was happening nationwide—and people were just tired of it.

**DR: After Heritage?**

CP: I have always believed that involvement at the local and national levels is important. Following Heritage, I served for nine years on the board of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C., and another nine years on the board of the Asian Art Museum here in San Francisco. I also served on the boards of the Victorian Society of America and the Ellis Island/Statue of Liberty Foundation. But my involvement on the national level all started locally, with my involvement in Heritage.

I found moving between local and national arenas very interesting, because no one entity had the answer. The Trust, established in 1949, really didn't do the lobbying they now do. Their political power grew when they saw what could be accomplished on the local level. That dynamism and sharing of ideas, successes, and failures is still very much a part of preservation and one of the reasons I continue to participate locally and nationally.

**DR: What role can the profession play?**

CP: A major step forward has been in the schools of architecture. Preservation programs were once placed off to the side, as sort of a curiosity sideshow. Now preservation is being embraced and integrated into the curriculum.

Play a role in your community. Outside commitment—on the planning commission, on design review boards, on a host of civic boards—helps take us outside of the profession and into the community. Architects have a great deal to offer

beyond proper detailing and flashing. Their ability to conceptualize shelter—for individuals, families, neighborhoods, businesses, and beyond—is a tremendous asset locally and nationally.

Be open to discussion, be open to compromise, be open to change—these are things both architects and preservationists must keep in mind. A city lives and thrives on change, and this change needs to occur or else the city becomes stale. The proposed Prada store on Grant Avenue by Rem Koolhaas is a good example. I think it could be interesting and should be built. If it demolished a rated building or if the city was full of Prada-esque building, then I might think differently. But the Prada store only changes a background building.

**DR: Parting thoughts?**

CP: The great conflict in the preservation community is do you want to save everything. Certainly some people do, but that type of inflexible thinking engenders ill will over the longer term with many involved with city building and with the public in general. There are those who believe that historic preservation precludes change of any sort, and that is too bad. This notion of historic preservation can be rather limiting. Buildings don't necessarily have to be historic—but they need to be distinctive, in their own way sophisticated, possessing some unique qualities. We're really not "preserving"—we're retaining, we're reusing, we're recycling—all kinds of things. We are engaged in urban conservation. It would be a shame to lose more of the top rated buildings, because we've lost a great number, but when something comes along that has the potential of being interesting, I think it should happen.

The city, as a larger organism, needs to change and grow. It always has. ●





# Fighting the Good Fight

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Donald A. Crosby, AIA

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## for Old St. Mary's Cathedral

I fell in love with Old Saint Mary's Cathedral on my honeymoon trip to San Francisco. My wife, Rosalind, and I attended our first Mass as a married couple at Old St. Mary's. The timeless beauty and Old World charm of its brick façade and Gothic Revival architecture worked its way into our hearts. Erected in 1854 as California's first cathedral, this five-story building lays claim to the title "San Francisco's first high-rise," for it was the tallest building west of the Mississippi during the Gold Rush era.

It is hard to imagine how a structure that survived the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989 could still face destruction, yet this venerable building has been fighting for its life for over ten years. A parishioner of Old St. Mary's and a member of its building committee, I serve as one of the devotees working to preserve it.

During the Gold Rush era, newly consecrated Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany determined that San Francisco needed a cathedral and chose to build one on a donated lot at the corner of California and Dupont Streets. The cornerstone for the cathedral was laid on July 17, 1853.

“The strength and permanency  
of the work of Old St. Mary’s  
will be as the Church itself,  
unshaken by earthquake and  
fire, rising from adversity to  
new and greater stature.”

Architects William Craine and Thomas England designed the cathedral to resemble a Gothic church from the Archbishop’s birthplace in Spain. The new cathedral had parapets on either flank, surmounted with embrasures, and buttresses finished with cut-stone pinnacles. Inside, vaulted ceilings with groin arches rose above a Carrara marble altar imported from Rome. The original plan included a steeple, but fear that an earthquake might cause it to topple changed the plans, leaving only a bell tower. The stone for the church’s foundation was cut in China and shipped to San Francisco, and the original bricks were manufactured in New England. Local redwood beams provided support for the structure.

At Christmas Midnight Mass in 1854, the building was formally dedicated as the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception—the first church in the world to be so named. Unfortunately, the glint of this magnificent cathedral was to dim too soon. The neighborhood surrounding the cathedral began to decay from the effects of crime and poverty. The Archbishop determined San Francisco’s cathedral must be moved to a safer place. On January 11, 1891, the new Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption

was dedicated on the corner of O’Farrell Street and Van Ness Avenue and the former cathedral became a parish church known simply as “Old St. Mary’s.”

San Francisco’s famous earthquake of April 18, 1906, caused relatively little damage to Old St. Mary’s, but the next day’s fires consumed everything but its brick outer walls and bell tower. A heated debate began over whether to demolish the structure or to rebuild it. Fr. Henry Harrison Wyman, CSP, was determined to rebuild the church. He was supported by noted architect Willis Polk, who claimed that “to tear down the standing walls of Old Saint Mary’s was to tear down history itself.” Finally, a hefty insurance payment convinced the Archbishop of San Francisco to rebuild Old St. Mary’s from the existing brick shell.

Old Saint Mary’s attained official status from the California State Landmarks Commission on May 7, 1966; the City and County of San Francisco followed suit on March 6, 1968, granting the edifice its number two landmark.

On October 17, 1989, I watched in fear as the televised broadcast of the World Series at Candlestick Park was brought to a sudden halt by the Loma Prieta earthquake. Again, Old St. Mary’s survived with only minor damage: the church’s bell tower shifted a little farther away from the nave, but studies have shown the tower to be more stable than the main body of the church. However, the State of California and the City of San Francisco promptly augmented respective building codes with stringent seismic safeguards. These new codes point to the vulnerability of unreinforced masonry buildings and require that supports for brick exteriors be built or the building be demolished.

In 1991, the Old St. Mary’s Building Committee was formed by a small group of parishioners and enthusiasts with expertise in the areas of architecture, real estate management, and local politics. The first two years of our work were spent interpreting the code as it applied to Old St. Mary’s and determining the restoration goals. Old St. Mary’s was fortunate to have survived both of San Francisco’s major earthquakes, but there are no guarantees for its structural integrity in the future.

In 1994, I stepped outside of my expertise as an architect to head the church’s capital campaign. Forty volunteers strong, we contacted each parishioner



and many civic and charitable leaders to raise the \$8 million in cash and pledges anticipated to complete the restoration. It looked as if the restoration efforts would be complete well before the church's 150th anniversary in 2004.

While Old St. Mary's waited for its plans to be approved by the state and local regulatory agencies, inflation in the construction industry in the late 1990's caused the cost to complete the restoration to soar to \$11-12 million, well over the \$8 million we had raised.

We continued to show good faith and progress to the state and local agencies by revising our plans and keeping them informed of our progress. The State of California and the City of San Francisco, in turn, were lenient and granted Old St. Mary's a reprieve from the 1995 deadline set for all unreinforced masonry buildings to meet the new codes or be demolished.

The Building Committee has divided the work into four phases ranging from seismic retrofitting to liturgical upgrading. First, the nave of the church, from the auditorium downstairs to the balcony above, will be reinforced to meet new seismic requirements. If all goes as planned, scaffolding will go up and Old St. Mary's will begin its path toward structural salvation in 2002.

"Here we find ourselves in the circumstance of most of the cathedrals in Europe," said Michael Berline, a San Francisco architect and volunteer on the Old St. Mary's Cathedral Building Committee. "Preservation is ongoing and will continue to be so for many years to come at Old St. Mary's."

My fellow parishioners and I are gratified that Old St. Mary's will see new chapters added to its long and wonderful history. We continue to find hope in the words of church historian Thomas Denis McSweeney. "...(T)he strength and permanency of the work of Old St. Mary's will be as the Church itself, unshaken by earthquake and fire, rising from adversity to new and greater stature." ●

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Thomas Denis McSweeney, *Cathedral on California Street* (Fresno: Academy of California Church History, 1952).

Willis Polk, quoted in historical display, Old St. Mary's Cathedral Nave.



## In Memoriam:

### Manuel Perez, AIA, Architect & Activist

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#### Vinceena Kelly, AIA

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When Manuel Perez decided to study architecture, it was because of his interest in the built environment. What he found out along the way was that architecture was the perfect vehicle for his civic activism because it allowed him an influence over the people side of the environment.

Manny was born in Mexico and watched his father active in the chamber of deputies in the State of Mexico. What interested him was not the power that could come with social connections, but the ability to translate that influence into helping others. As a young boy, his family immigrated to southern California. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from Yale in 1971 but decided to move back to southern California to pursue his Masters in Architecture and Urban Planning, which he received from UCLA in 1974.

As with most things, one thing led to another. Work opportunities led to volunteer opportunities and finally to positions of leadership where his training and profession could help influence decisions that would effect the growth and development of the entire region.

Manny's first position after UCLA was Senior Planner for the City of Brea. Becoming active in the Orange County construction industry led to his selection as director of government affairs for the Orange County Building Industry Association. This was during the period of some of the greatest growth in the region. Citizens came to know Manny for his passion about the environment and public service. He was appointed to the Huntington Beach Design Review Board and then to the Redevelopment Commission.

When he and his wife Linda decided to move to Long Beach in 1979, Manny found a community rich in diversity and eager to embrace those willing to work for the good of the whole. His architectural practice led him to meet civic leaders from both the governmental side and the social service side. His knowledge of urban design from a practical and an academic point of view was recognized across many venues. During his 20+ years of public service in Long Beach, he served under 4 mayors and numerous city council members, establishing a broad legacy spanning political parties and agendas.

His architectural practice gave him an insight into the needs and wants of the Long Beach area. He worked with local groups in designing their facilities as well as maneuvering through the governmental process of zoning. It was through those connections that Manny was appointed to serve on the City of Long Beach Community Development Advisory Commission as well as the Planning Commission. And his activism was recognized outside the municipality when he was appointed as citizen member to the Los Angeles County Transportation Rail Construction Committee.

When the Lusk School of Real Estate Development was established at the University of Southern California, Manny was selected as an Adjunct Professor. He continued to teach at USC in the School of Policy, Planning, & Development, reaching university students and community members as well.

The local chapter of the American Institute of Architects benefited from Manny's desire to participate in the interests and concerns of the profession. He served on the local Long Beach/South Bay (formerly Cabrillo) Chapter Board of Directors, was chapter president, and acted as chapter delegate on the AIA California Council's Board of Directors. His urban design training led to his selection as team



member for the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) for Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1990 and later as participant and chair of the AIACC Urban Design Committee. The state recognized his work by giving him an AIACC Public Service Honor Award in 1999.

Manny Perez saw himself as a matchmaker. His greatest pleasure came from making connections between groups and introducing people to others to allow them to make things happen. He seemed to have a knack for putting people together. Each connection made led to the possibility of another connection. It didn't matter what the nature of the organization was, if people needed to meet people, Manny was there. When he served on the City of Long Beach Social Services Task Force, it was his business background that allowed him to recommend guidelines to the City Council for locating social service agencies in the downtown area to balance those needs with the business community's needs. When he worked with the Knight Foundation Long Beach Area Advisory committee, he was able to make recommendations for grants to be awarded to various organizations in the Long Beach area. Or when he participated in the Conservation Corps of Long Beach, Manny helped place at-risk kids in jobs.

Manny used the experience and knowledge gained through his architectural practice to become a vital member of his community. His enthusiasm for working with people was valued and sought after. He lost a long battle with heart disease in September 2001 and will be missed by all. ●



# Under the Radar

## Sharafian Residence

Nick Noyes Architecture



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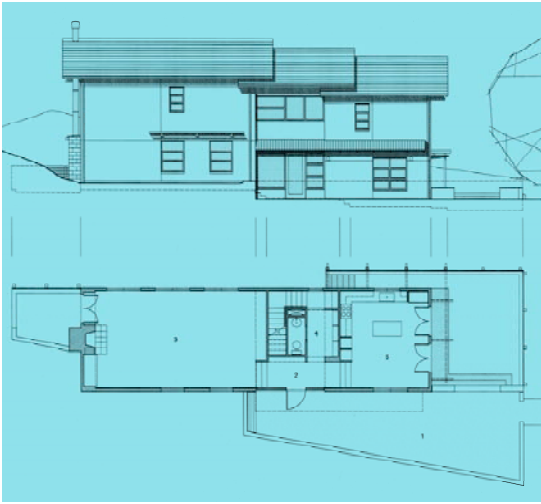
Tim Culvahouse, AIA

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It seems worth asking: how far under the radar can you fly and still make an admirable building?

William Wurster's first published building, the lovely farmhouse near Santa Cruz, was designed for Sadie Gregory, who had been Thorstein Veblen's research assistant at the University of Chicago; and Veblen, you will recall, coined the term "conspicuous consumption" in his 1899 *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Building during the depression years, Gregory and her circle, who came to form the core of Wurster's residential clientele, were determined not to be conspicuous. Wurster was the perfect architect for them. As his wife, the urbanist Catherine Bauer, observed, "No one can make an \$80,000 house look like a \$10,000 house like Bill Wurster."

Wurster was not alone, however. Together with Gardner Dailey, John Dinwiddie, and others, he established a phase of Bay Area architecture whose chief distinction is that it is now almost invisible. It wasn't quite so invisible at the time; its camouflage is largely a result of its having spawned a context that looks like it, rather than the other way around. And this Bay Area modernism was not "under the radar," but was in fact the most widely published American work of its day.



Still, it was an architecture that sought anonymity, and that modest approach toward building has characterized some of the best building in the Bay Area, which is one reason that San Francisco has, until very recently, been such a sleeper, architecture-wise. Now, with the arrival of the international stars, we blush to think what will become of our modesty.

And yet this Bay Area tradition continues, identified not by a style, but by an attitude. The Sharafian Residence, by Nick Noyes Architecture, is an example. Its conception is thoroughly modern: a straightforward plan, with alternating served and service zones. The material nature of its construction is subtly but clearly expressed. Its protective coloring, however, is Tuscan, rather a no-no in our day, when buildings are expected not to reminisce (except, perhaps, about the Weissenhofsiedlung.) There is nothing conspicuously innovative about it—though it employs passive solar principles that, as the architect says, “are ideally suited to the temperate climate of the Lafayette hills.” To make matters worse, it quietly defies what Donlyn Lyndon has referred to as “the dumbfoundingly stupid idea that roofs with shapes aren’t modern.” Modest, allusive, gabled: to the fashion-forward, this well-made building is nearly unpublishable—which is why we’re pleased to present it here.

Which is not to say that the next building we feature will not be thoroughly bizarre. If you’ve ever seen a stealth bomber passing silently over Fisherman’s Wharf during Fleet Week, you know there’s more than one way to fly under the radar. ●

Architect: [Nick Noyes Architecture](#)

Design team: [Nick Noyes, Andrew Feldon](#)

Landscape architect: [Andie Cochran](#)

Structural engineer: [Richard Hartwell](#)

General contractor: [Curt Doughty Construction & Jacuzzi Properties, Inc.](#)

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## Serendipity Saves Neutra's Miller House

Bob Aufuldish

This photograph is deceiving.

In February, while in Palm Springs on vacation, I took some photos of the Miller House that seemed to suggest the house was in dire straits. Through a bit of luck searching the internet, I located current owner Catherine Meyler, and asked about her plans for the house. Soon it became clear that the house was **not** in danger, but had in fact been saved.

Catherine knew the previous owner, who had let the house slip into a dangerous state of disrepair, and was able to convince him to sell to her the house in 2000. She has been diligently restoring it ever since, updating the original 1937 electrical system, replacing the plumbing, reframing the structure, installing HVAC, and bringing everything up to code. That she finally received a Certificate of Occupancy last October is a measure of the level of work needed. Catherine has a special affinity for the house, which she describes as “very easy and a joy to live in,” because Grace Miller was close to Catherine’s age when the house was built.

Significantly, the house should soon have Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site status. This status means that any future changes proposed for the house will have to pass a review board.

A more appropriate front door has been installed since the photo was taken.