

architecture california
the journal of the american institute of architects
california council

night panorama of downtown Los Angeles

arcca LA

Dashboard Reflections

Ripped Open Like a Bag of Potato Chips

The Polymorphous Polyvalent Polis **Alien Like Flynt**

Rediscovering Reyner Banham's LA

Content

**Rediscovering Reyner Banham's
Los Angeles**

18

→ Michael Dear

Industrial Los Angeles

22

→ Greg Hise

Rootlessness: 26
a *DnA* Conversation from KCRW 89.9 FM

→ Frances Anderton, Thom Mayne,
Annie Kelly, Jeffrey Herr, Julie D. Taylor,
Cara Mulio, Alan Hess

Fourteen Ways of Looking at Los Angeles 30

Panoramic L.A.

42

→ Jay Mark Johnson

Under the Radar 46
Hustler Casino, Gardena

→ Tom Marble, AIA

Component Feature: LA Chapter

48

→ William Fain, FAIA

**Richard Neutra's Los Angeles Hall
of Records Building**

52

→ Barbara Lamprecht

**Continuation: Working Drawings for a
Temporary Structure: The Palace of Fine Arts**

54

→ Alexander Ortenberg, AIA

05

Comment

05

Contributors

12

Correspondence

63

... and Counting

64

Coda

Editor	Tim Culvahouse, FAIA
Managing Editor	Laura Schatzkin Culvahouse Consulting Group, Inc.
Editorial Board	Paul Halajian, AIA Chair John Leighton Chase, AIA Peter Dodge, FAIA Wendy Kohn Kris Miller-Fisher, AIA Eric Naslund, FAIA Pierluigi Serraino, Assoc. AIA Kelly Walker Thomas M. Anglewicz, FAIA
Design	Bob Aufuldish Ragina Johnson Aufuldish & Warinner
Production	Greg Delviscio Lorraine Sacca
Publisher	Kathy Varney (206) 378-4700
AIACC	Lori Reed Director of Marketing and Communications

arcCA is dedicated to providing a forum for the exchange of ideas among members, other architects and related disciplines on issues affecting California architecture. arcCA is published quarterly and distributed to AIACC members as part of their membership dues. In addition, single copies and subscriptions are available at the following rates:

Single copies: \$6 AIA members; \$9 non-members.

Subscriptions (four issues per year): \$24 AIA members;

\$15 students; \$34 non-members, U.S.; \$38 Canada; \$42 foreign.

Subscriptions: arcCA, c/o AIACC, 1303 J Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95814, www.aiacc.org

Advertising: 877.887.7175.

Inquiries and submissions: Tim Culvahouse, Editor: tim@culvahouse.net; c/o AIACC, 1303 J Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95814; 916.448.9082; fax 916.442.5346. Bob Aufuldish, Aufuldish & Warinner: bob@aufwar.com.

Copyright and reprinting: © 2006 by AIACC. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Permission is granted through the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923. arcCA is a trademark of AIACC.

arcCA (ISSN 0738-1132) is published by The McGraw-Hill Companies on behalf of The American Institute of Architects, California Council. McGraw-Hill and AIACC are not responsible for statements or opinions expressed in arcCA, nor do such statements or opinions necessarily express the views of AIACC or its committees. Contributors are responsible for credits and copyright permissions. Third class postage paid at Lebanon Junction, Kentucky. Printed by Publishers Press.

Dodge
Sweets
Architectural Record
ENR
Regional Publications

**McGraw Hill
CONSTRUCTION**

AIACC
The American Institute
of Architects, California Council
1303 J Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95814
916.448.9082 p 916.442.5346 f
www.aiacc.org

2006 Executive Committee
President
John Melcher, AIA
**First Vice President/
President-Elect**
Pamela M. Touschner, AIA
Treasurer
John P. Grounds, AIA
Secretary
Rose McNulty, AIA
**Vice President of Regulation
and Practice**
Jeffrey T. Gill, AIA
**Vice President of Legislative
Affairs**
Philip J. Bona, AIA
**Vice President of
Communications/Public Affairs**
Thomas M. Anglewicz, FAIA
Executive Vice President
Paul W. Welch, Jr., Hon., AIA

AEP Representative
Evelyn M. Lee, Assoc., AIA

2006 Board of Directors
AIA Regional Directors
David J. Brotman, FAIA
Stephan Castellanos, FAIA
Clark D. Manus, FAIA
Gordon N. Park, AIA, CDS
Regional Associate Director
Evelyn M. Lee, Assoc. AIA
Association Director, North
Jess Wendover, Assoc. AIA
Associate Director, South
Tenille D. Jones, Assoc.
Student Director
Lynne Reynolds, AIAS
AIA California Desert
Lance Christopher O'Donnell, AIA
AIA California Central Coast
Jeffrey J. Emrick, PE, AIA
AIA Central Valley
Richard T. Conrad, FAIA
Cynthia Easton, AIA
Virgil C. Hancock, AIA
AIA East Bay
Bonnie Blake-Drucker, AIA
David W. Byrens, AIA

AIA Golden Empire
Bruce M. Biggar, AIA
AIA Inland California
Herta Maria Gaus, AIA
Gary L. McGavin, AIA
AIA Long Beach
Frank O. Bostrom, AIA
AIA Los Angeles
John R. Dale, AIA
William Fain, FAIA
Michael Enomoto, AIA
Edmund Einy, AIA
Katherine Spitz, AIA
Nick Seierup, FAIA
AIA Monterey Bay
Michael L. Waxer, AIA
AIA Orange County
Andrew M. Cupples, AIA
Cynthia A. Mabus, AIA
Brian J. Pratt, AIA
James T. Wirick, AIA
AIA Pasadena
Scott F. Gaudineer, AIA
John S. Miller, AIA
AIA Redwood Empire
Charles L. Beavers, AIA
AIA Santa Barbara
Kristin Story, AIA

AIA Santa Clara Valley
Frank Edward Jesse, AIA
Alan E. Turner, AIA
AIA San Diego
Larry Allen Hoeksema, AIA
Robert L. Noble, AIA
Paul E. Schroeder, AIA
AIA San Fernando Valley
Joel A. Jaffe, AIA
AIA San Francisco
Karen I. Fiene, AIA
Gordon G. Hoy, AIA
Anne Laird-Blanton, AIA
Toby S. Levy, FAIA
Richard L. Parker, AIA
Linda A. Sobuta, AIA
AIA San Mateo
Wayne E. Gehrke, AIA
AIA Sierra Valley
Christina D.B. Frankel, AIA
AIA Ventura County
Howard E. Leach, AIA

AIACC Staff
Executive Vice President
Paul W. Welch, Jr., Hon. AIA
**Director of Marketing
and Communications**
Lori Reed

Comment

I am co-teaching an architecture studio this term, and a student recently grumbled that an exercise we had given was not important enough to bother with. The grumbling raised the question of how an architect handles the relations between some factors, which seem important or noble or profound, and others, which seem less so. I took this stab at it:

Architecture is thick with reciprocities, between use and setting, between capital and desire, the seen and the known, stone and thought, welfare and will.

A singularity is foregone. *Use* is a rock rolling down a hill; so are *context* and *structure* and *process* and *material* and *sustainability*: separately, so many rocks rolling down a hill.

But we want them to act together, so we invite a conversation:

"This is what I am; here is where I tend. What about you?"

We give each a voice, so that *context* may speak to *use* and *use* to *material* and *material* to *capital* and *capital* to *desire* and *desire* to *use* and *material* to *context* and so on and on and back around. What can each offer? What are the terms of *context*? What is the coin of *use*?

None of these things need be, in themselves, complex or difficult or obscure. Complexity is in the relationships, forged in conversation, full (like any conversation) of tensions and silences.

What we want to do is to say clearly and simply whatever we can say about each factor that goes into the making of a building, not to judge one factor worthy and one not, one profound and another superficial, one current and one passé.

For three reasons:

- first, because architecture is the weaving together of a superabundance of possibilities, not their reduction;
- second, because a building must have many ways to move people, because people are differently moved; and
- third, because we ourselves must speak to many different sorts of people, if we are to make buildings at all.

Tim Culvahouse, FAIA, editor

Contributors

Frances Anderton is host of 89.9 KCRW radio's *DnA: Design and Architecture* and the producer of *To The Point* and *Which Way, LA?*, Warren Olney's current affairs shows also aired on KCRW. She is the Los Angeles Editor for *Dwell* magazine and a regular contributor to *The New York Times*. She may be reached at dna@kcrw.org.

Michael Dear is Professor and Chair of the Department of Geography at the University of Southern California and Honorary Professor at the Bartlett School of Planning at University College London. He may be reached at mdear@usc.edu.

William Fain, Jr., FAIA, a native Californian, is the Direc-

tor of Urban Design and Planning and Managing Partner of Johnson Fain. His urban design work has received awards from the AIA and *Progressive Architecture*, and his Greenways Plan for the Los Angeles metropolitan area was shown at MOCA in their Urban Revision Show. He has won two Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and was a Rome Prize Fellow in 2002. He has taught at USC, SCI-Arc, and UCLA Extension. He may be reached at wfain@johnsonfain.com.

Greg Hise is an urban historian and associate professor in the School of Policy, Planning & Development at the University of Southern California. As author or editor, he has published four books and numerous articles examining city building and social relations in Los Angeles.

Architectural writer and historian **Barbara Lamprecht, M.Arch.**, is the author of two books on Richard Neutra. Her third book, *Reconceiving Ornament for the 21st Century*, considers ornament post-Adolf Loos and in light of new science.

She may be reached at blamprecht@covad.net.

David Meckel, FAIA, is Director of Research & Planning for the California College of the Arts (CCA) in San Francisco. He may be reached at dmeckel@cca.edu.

Alexander (Sasha) Ortenberg, Ph.D., AIA, is an Assistant Professor at Cal Poly Pomona. He is an architect and a historian of architectural practices. The article for the current issue of *arcCA* is drawn from his doctoral dissertation, *Drawing Practices: The Art and Craft of Architectural Representation* (UCLA, 2005). He may be reached at aortenberg@csupomona.edu.

Barton Phelps, FAIA, is principal of Barton Phelps & Associates, Architects and Planners, Los Angeles, and a former chair of the AIA Committee on Design. His article, "Serial Colonizations, Succession Landscapes, and the California Problem," appeared in the fall 2005 issue of *Places, a Forum of Environmental Design*. He may be reached at bpala@aol.com.

Marian Keeler responds to the Vinyl Institute's critique (Correspondence, 06.1) of her article, "PVC: the Controversy Summarized" (05.4):

As a trade organization, the Vinyl Institute's mission is to promote vinyl. As such, it is keen to defend against the precautionary principle, responsible building, and environmental activism. Most of the VI's defensive posturing takes the form of asserting that other materials are doing just as much harm as PVC, using the fallacious logic that vinyl is no worse for the environment or human health than other bad building materials. Doing "less bad" is not good enough when it comes to health and the environment.

PVC & Dioxin

The VI is correct in noting falling dioxin emissions in recent years. These falling levels are partly due to Health Care Without Harm's significant work in helping to close all but 100 of the 5000 medical waste incinerators in this country and to remove substantial amounts of PVC from the rest of those incinerators, previously one of the largest sources of dioxin.¹ The dioxin emissions from copper smelting have also fallen, because recyclers are now removing PVC insulation from post-consumer copper wire. The U.S. EPA data indicates that landfill fires currently may be the largest single source of dioxin. EU studies in turn show that PVC probably "accounts for the overwhelming majority of chlorine that is available for dioxin formation during landfill fires."² We will probably never know if the vinyl industry has actually reduced its dioxin emissions from manufacturing to the low point they claim, as long as the industry is the only source of that data.

PVC & Heavy Metals

Contrary to what the VI would like us to believe regarding reduced use of heavy metals in PVC, lead continues to be the stabilizer of choice for electrical wiring (check for Prop. 65 warnings on your holiday lights and extension cords). Cadmium and questionable organotin stabilizers continue to be used in many flexible PVC products.

PVC & Fire Hazards

As I stated in my article, firefighters, a group that can be safely characterized as understanding flammability, have asked designers to stop specifying PVC-containing products because the combustion of PVC adds another lethal level to the blazes they battle. NASA has banned PVC in the construction of its shuttle fleet, the New York City transit system doesn't allow PVC wiring or products, and the London Underground has banned halogenated cables (containing chlorine) in their system due to similar fire concerns.

PVC Toxicity Studies

It should be noted that the two principal studies cited by the VI to support the use of PVC have been significantly questioned. The life-cycle review commissioned by the European Commission is generally considered inadequate by experts other than from industry, and the EC has distanced itself from the study.³ The USGBC's PVC Task Group draft report prompted an enormous volume of critical analysis from over 100 reviewers in higher education, government, health care, USGBC chapters, manufacturing, and environmental health research organizations. As a consequence, the Task Group was forced to rethink its approach and, over a year later, is still in the process of preparing a revised report. The Task Group has repeatedly requested that the draft report "not be quoted or considered final in any way relative to its analysis or conclusions"—a request the VI continues to disrespect.⁴

Finally, I do not agree that "product design is more important than material selection," as the VI asserts. Toxic materials do not belong in any consumer product, regardless of its design. Design for health and the environment must take place in an integrated fashion, considering everything from site to materials to energy to waste. This is where I take solace in the fact that there are thoughtful designers out there who, using their faculties of critical thinking, will decide that designing with PVC is not a choice they are willing to make at the expense of the health of their clients, themselves, or their families. ☉

1. USEPA, *The Inventory of Sources and Environmental Releases of Dioxin-Like Compounds in the United States: The Year 2000 Update* (External Review Draft, March 2005; EPA/600/p-03/002A, http://www.epa.gov/ncea/pdfs/dioxin/2k-update/pdfs/Dioxin_Chapter_1.pdf).
2. Costner, Pat, "Estimating Releases and Prioritizing Sources in the Context of the Stockholm Convention," 2005, International POPs Elimination Network, Mexico, http://www.pvcinformation.org/assets/pdf/IPEN_Dioxin_Report.pdf.
3. "Life Cycle Assessment of PVC and of Principal Competing Materials," <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/chemicals/sustdev/pvc.htm>, and http://www.healthybuilding.net/news/summer_blockbuster-061604.html.
4. <http://www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CMSPageID=153>.

Regarding “The UC Merced Debate,” 05.4

I was very interested in the article in the AIACC journal regarding UC Merced. The idea that a university should be located in the urban area of a city is intriguing but is “pie in the sky” thinking. Where is there a city in California that has the hundreds of acres available for a major university? Or where could the hundreds of thousands of square feet necessary be found even in existing buildings? Worse yet, the cost of adding the necessary major utility services through the established urban “jungle” would be a fiscal and physical nightmare.

The Merced campus is situated on a former golf course, as the authors pointed out, because experience showed that it would have been impossible to build it on undeveloped land because of environmental concerns. The facility, as built, is not on prime farmland. In fact, before the golf course, the property was mostly wetlands.

While the campus was originally located six miles from town, there is now a major housing development of 6,000 homes within three miles of the site. Even closer housing projects have been built and/or approved by the Merced County Planning Commission. It would be safe to say that the town will grow to the campus boundaries within five years, or sooner.

It would seem to me that the blending of the university and town would depend not as much on location as on the philosophies of the institution and the town. There is already a “TriCollege Center” at Merced College, which is a joint venture of Merced College, UC Merced, and California State University Stanislaus. This center has been in existence for several years and gives the students the opportunity to plan their continuing education in any of those institutions or their branches. UC Merced has participated fully in this program, and there have already been numerous town activities on the new campus.

The problem with the concept of blending town and university so tightly together is it would not follow the concept of UC Merced being a regional and even state-wide institution. Its primary service area is not Merced but the whole of the Central Valley and then the State of California. The university was not placed for the benefit of Merced, although the city will reap great benefit from it. Merced is centrally located in the service area. The campus is easily accessible from

the north/south corridor of Highway 99 and on the east/west corridors of Highways 59 and 140. It is well placed.

The concept of the campus being located on the Highway 99 corridor has some merit but would cause problems the authors did not explore. The highway goes through prime agricultural land for its entire length, the type of land the authors rightly noted should be preserved. Highway 99 is very busy, noisy, and highly commercialized. There are plans in existence to make it an interstate freeway, which will only magnify these problems. A university campus in that type of environment would be completely wrong. Locating UC Merced ten minutes away, with interchange access from the north and the south seems a much more desirable solution.

To compare UC Merced to other institutions such as Davis and Santa Cruz is not necessarily valid. Davis grew from a small agricultural college into a major university and took the town with it. UC Santa Cruz is in a forest, hidden from the town. Much of the interchange between it and the town has been political, and from a distance. Neither conditions occur in Merced. The idea of emulating the ancient universities of Europe, while attractive, would be impossible in the Central Valley. Those schools began slowly in the small (at the time) towns. The system has blended the town and school, but whether it has provided better educational systems has not been proven. The example of Cergy Pontoise is interesting, particularly in its similarity to Merced. However, the authors pointed out exactly why that condition does not happen here: Private investment always leads the way for better or worse. It would be unreasonable to expect the State of California to change that deeply embedded system. We do live in a real world.

The authors used the example of the school district of Cypress-Fairchild to illustrate cooperation between the institution and the town. They would not have had to go so far away to find the same situation. They could have visited Merced College, which serves the same range of age groups and interests as described in the article. I am eighty-four years old and, like many other seniors, am enrolled in the college. There is no *town center* at the college, however. Why should there be?

It will not take fifty years for UC Merced to become part of its community—it is already well on its way. Before its opening, the university received more financial support for construction, program, and establishment of chairs than any other UC campus. The Regents of the University commented on the enthusiasm exhibited by the people of Merced for the campus.

I do have a concern with the physical campus, however, because of its design. The complex seen from a distance looks like a group of industrial buildings. The impression from close in changes some, but not much. The complex shown in the article, with its rigid grid pattern, completely ignores the shape of the landscape. This is a gently rolling site with sweeping views across the plains to the High Sierras. The rectangular, boxy buildings would have been better located in an urban setting. The land and the mountains have beautiful profiles, these building don't. The Fairy Shrimp would not like the view from their vernal pools.

Lastly, I have yet to find anyone in Merced, especially in my coffee group, who can interpret “utilizing already-existing, undervalued resources as a way to build together toward a common future.” What undervalued resources?

Henry DuPertuis, AIA Emeritus
dupert@cbcruiser.com



Rediscovering Reyner Banham's

Los Angeles

Michael Dear

Always contextualize. This was Reyner Banham's golden rule in his book *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Now thirty-five years old, the book should not be consigned to some antiquarian bookstore, nor smothered by respectful scrutiny or canonization. Banham discovered new ways of seeing and writing about cities that are just as vibrant and relevant in today's urbanizing world. His was an architecture *in place*; he wrote a new kind of urban history, and in so doing irrevocably changed the way the world understood Los Angeles. When observers scornfully mocked L.A.'s "monotony, not unity" and "confusion rather than variety," Banham claimed that the fault lay with them, not with the city. Their misapprehensions, he averred, resulted because the "context" had escaped them. Any perceived chaos was a product of their minds alone, for it was not something present in Los Angeles.

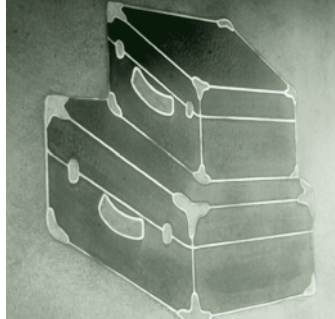
In place of urban chaos, Banham offered four ecologies as a way of unpacking Los Angeles. To this day, I still use his thumbnail sketches of these cardinal geographies to orient newcomers to the city:

Surfurbia (the beach cities): The beaches are what other cities should envy about L.A., Banham swooned. "Sun, sand, and surf are held to be ultimate and transcendental values," and one way or another the beach is what "life is all about in Los Angeles."

Foothills (the privileged enclaves of Bel Air, Beverly Hills, etc.): The foothills are where "the financial and topographical contours correspond almost exactly: the higher the ground the higher the income." The foothill ecology comprises "narrow, tortuous residential roads serving precipitous house plots that often back up directly on unimproved wilderness even now [in] an air of deeply buried privacy."

The Plains (the central flatlands): This is where Los Angeles is most like other cities: "an endless plain endlessly gridded with endless streets, peppered endlessly with ticky-tacky houses..., slashed across by endless freeways..., and so on... endlessly."

opposite: Fence at U.S.-Mexico border, Tijuana River, California.
Photo: Michael Dear.



Autopia (the freeways): The L.A. freeway system “is now a single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life” where Angelenos most feel at home. It is one of the “greater works of Man,” on a par with the streets of Sixtus V’s Baroque Rome or Haussmann’s Paris boulevards. The Santa Monica-San Diego freeway intersection is a work of art, and daily conversations about traffic are a standard rhetorical trope, much as the English constantly carp about the weather.

Writing with a characteristic grace and wit that even his most pungent critics were obliged to concede, Banham’s four-part ecological symphony was constantly interrupted by dissonant improvisations on urban and architectural history. These chapters included riffs on fantasy architecture and architects-in-exile, as well as a brief note on downtown L.A. (because, he claimed, “that is all [it] deserves.”) The text’s non-linearity upset many readers, but Banham clearly intended it as a deliberate metaphor for the fragmented and discontinuous nature of the L.A. urban experience.

I was a graduate student in University College London when Banham taught there. This was at the tail-end of the “Swinging Sixties,” when self-absorption and extravagance were at a premium. It was (supposedly) all happening in London at that time: Twiggy, Carnaby Street, Archigram, and all that. Yet Banham appeared to turn away from it all. Instead, he wrote in hallowed terms of what others regarded as the armpit of urban America. His overheated brain celebrated L.A. surfboards, automobiles, and even hamburgers as works of art. But he was not being inconsistent or obtusely contrarian. In London, Banham had been engrossed in Pop Art, and through it he found easy entry into Los Angeles. He regarded L.A. as urban

art, an honorific he wittily extended to Las Vegas, “which takes some of the established trends in the Los Angeles townscape and pushes them to extremes where they begin to become art, or poetry, or psychiatry.”¹

Everything Banham wrote still seems fresh, but what would this forensic urbanist make of contemporary Los Angeles? He would probably be most taken aback by downtown L.A., which has experienced several building booms since 1971. Downtown L.A. now even looks like a conventional downtown: a cluster of high-rise office towers, some starchitect-designed civic and cultural buildings, sports venues, top restaurants, and burgeoning residential neighborhoods. Yet it still remains only one out of many Southern California “downtowns,” and I suspect Banham would agree that the best thing to do with Bunker Hill is to put a fence around it and to charge admission.

Always driving, rarely a flâneur afoot, Banham would be unmoved by the proliferation of pedestrian-oriented shopping malls, seemingly so essential to today’s urban experience. He would feel less warmly toward those “psychotic forms of territorial possession” that we call “gated communities.” But he would be genuinely delighted by L.A.’s resurgent sense of history, most evident at the grass-roots level in (for example) the murals of the Great Wall of L.A., or the Power of Place projects in Little Tokyo commemorating the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans, or Biddy Mason Park. These are much more democratic forms of remembering than conventional forms of public memorializing, which in any case remain rather rare commodities in L.A. I believe Banham would cherish these small spaces as something completely consistent with L.A.’s cartography of diverse, fragmented memory.

The sheer size of contemporary Los Angeles would likely leave Banham speechless, if only momentarily. The five-county metropolitan region (incorporating the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura) is today home to more than sixteen million people, twice what it was in Banham’s locust days only thirty-five years ago. It comprises 177 cities spread over 14,000 square miles. It is an emergent world city, molded by an urban dynamics that Banham could not possibly have imagined. His immediate reaction to L.A.’s demographic diversity might simply be annoyance that his 1971 book could so underplay race, immigration, and gender issues. But then he would remind himself: Always contextualize! What are the forces that today determine L.A.’s efflorescent urban ecologies? In my judgment, five matter more than most:

- *Globalization*, the rise of an integrated global economy characterized by the emergence of a closely linked hierarchy of world cities that act as centers of command and control;
- *Network society*, the transformations wrought by the arrival of the “Information Age,” including a global media connectivity;
- *Social polarization*, the ever-increasing socioeconomic divide between the very rich and the rest of us;
- *Hybridization*, the mixing of racial and ethnic groups and traditions brought about by the shrinking of distance, an ubiquitous media, and large-scale domestic and international migrations; and
- *Sustainability*, the emergence of a global consciousness regarding the finitude of resources, habitat, flora, and fauna, plus the consequent threat to planetary survival.

These five tendencies—globalization,



photos (left to right): *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, Tujunga Wash, Los Angeles. © Judy Baca. Sponsored by Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC); *Remembering Old Little Tokyo* (sidewalk engraving), Little Tokyo, City of Los Angeles. Power of Place project: Shiela Levrant de Bretteville, designer; Los Angeles River at North Spring Street, Glendale Narrows, City of Los Angeles; *City of LA: Made in Mexico*, manhole cover, campus of the University of Southern California. All Photos: Michael Dear

network society, polarization, hybridization, and sustainability—are common in the landscapes of Southern California. In the “wild east” around Ontario, for instance, vast acres of distribution centers house and move the goods that arrive at the nation’s largest port complex (Los Angeles-Long Beach). In West L.A. and the Valley, names like Sony, Yahoo!, and MTV attest to L.A.’s role in a globalized media society. The landscapes of poverty are everywhere; in downtown L.A., for example, the region’s largest concentration of emergency shelters for homeless people emerged during the mid-1980s. The rise of “ethnoburbs” in the San Gabriel Valley testifies to the arrival of affluent Chinese immigrants who take up immediate residence in well-to-do suburbs, bypassing the traditional immigrant experience of inner-city Chinatown. Finally, the Los Angeles River was a forgotten, channelized, concrete gulch until the Friends of the L.A. River (FOLAR) began to make the river a centerpiece in a revitalized region-wide environmental consciousness.

Banham taught us to see Los Angeles differently, but he made no large claims about the wider lessons of L.A. for other cities at home or abroad. He remained wedded to the notion of L.A.’s uniqueness, and yet his book contains the seeds of a more general urban theory whose potential is only now being realized. At the core of Banham’s putative revisionism was the observation that L.A. “has no urban form at all in the commonly accepted sense” of an “outward sprawl from a central nucleus.” For him, downtown L.A. would never qualify as the heart of the city, partly because Wilshire Boulevard already existed as a “linear downtown.” The problem, in Banham’s view, was that observers of L.A. had once again got it

wrong; they were forcing the city “into categories of judgment that simply do not apply.” What we are in fact looking at in L.A. is an agglomeration of suburbs without a single center, an arrangement that profoundly contradicts existing conventions in urban theory.

Although Banham himself did nothing to develop the implications of these observations, the revolutionary potential of his L.A. road trips was recognized by Tony Vidler in his introduction to the 2001 reissue of Banham’s book. Vidler observed that *Los Angeles* provided a “tightly constructed part manifesto, part new urban geography.”² For myself, looking back over two decades of research and practice in L.A., only now do I appreciate the extent to which I absorbed the insights of Reyner Banham’s *Los Angeles*—though with consequences totally different from Vidler’s.

My involvement in the emergence of the “Los Angeles School” of urbanism is profoundly rooted in Banham; so is my approach to “postmodern urbanism”—whose core conviction is that contemporary urbanism no longer follows a modernist core-to-hinterland logic, but instead insists on a postmodern conceit in which the hinterlands organize what remains of the urban center.³

Any revitalized urban theory, in which urban peripheries dominate what is left of the core, will require a new language for describing urban growth and change. For example, in many cities it no longer makes sense to speak of “suburbanization,” understood as a peripheral accretion to a center-dominated urban process; edge cities may look like suburbs, but they are not. Neither can “ethnoburbs” be equated with traditional concepts of immigrant ghettos, as I have already explained. New ways of seeing cities will also require a fresh

approach to making urban places. For instance, it seems hopelessly naïve to assume that an urban policy for downtown renewal can restore vitality to a city center that has been bypassed by a non-core-oriented urban process.

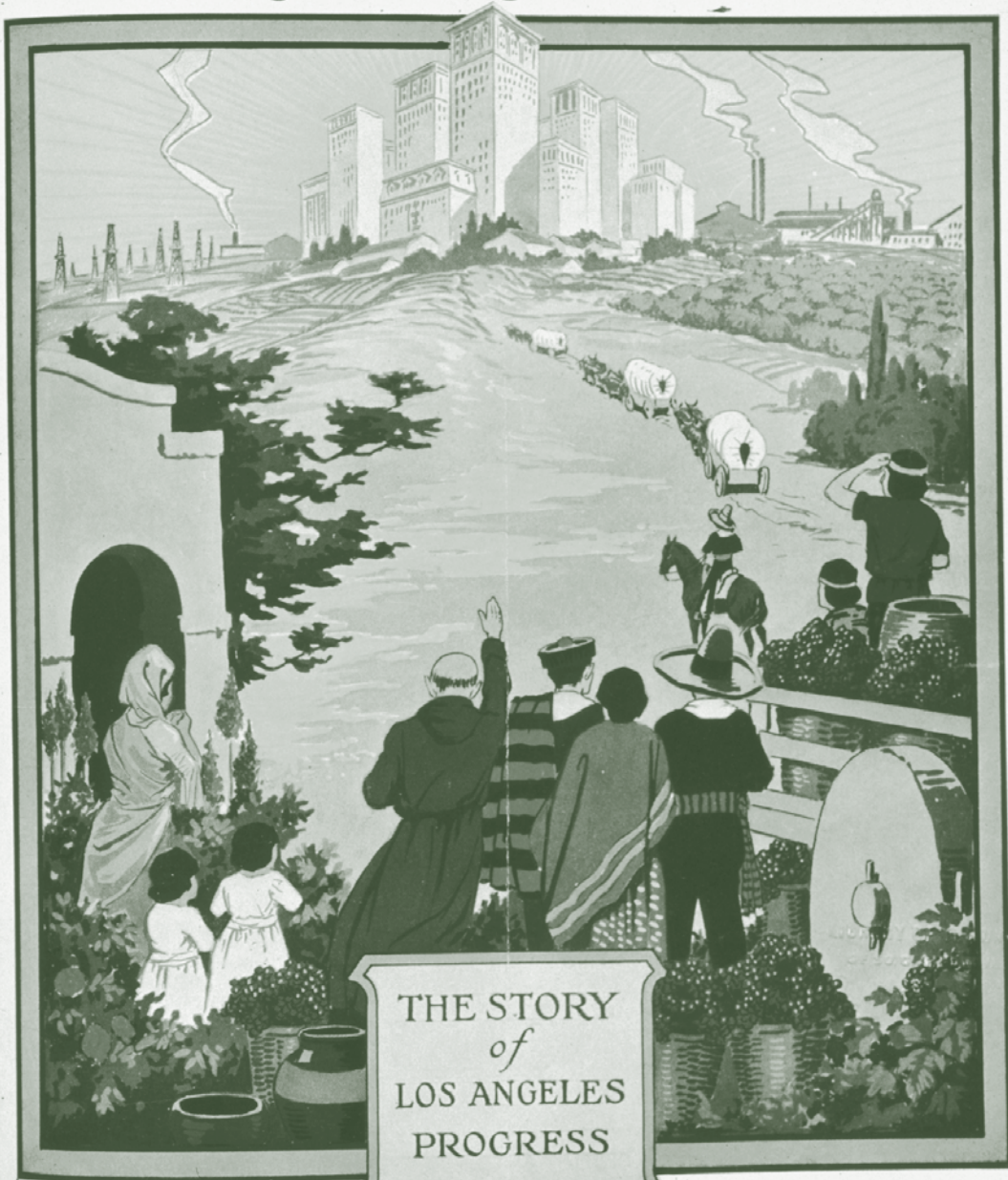
Reyner Banham loved L.A. because it was (and is) a place permeated by a palpable “sense of possibilities still ahead.” He understood that L.A. “threatens... because it breaks the rules” of conventional theory, practice, and pedagogy. Thirty-five years after *Los Angeles*, Banham would still get a kick out of L.A. He would extend his ecologies to include the San Diego-Tijuana borderlands and the miles of fencing today separating the U.S. from Mexico. He would revel in the mestizaje urbanism of L.A.’s phenomenal diversity. He would drive every corner of the Inland Empire and find a prominent place for the desert in his urban ecology. He would be amazed by the variety and geographical reach of Southern California’s artistic, intellectual, and cultural scenes. He would grieve over L.A.’s status as the homeless capital of the USA. And he might even agree that L.A. has altered the ways we understand cities everywhere. ●

1. Banham, “Las Vegas,” *Los Angeles Times*, *West Magazine*, November 8, 1970, pp. 38-9.
2. Anthony Vidler, “Introduction—Los Angeles: City of the Immediate Future” in Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. xxxi.
3. An introduction to the precepts and concerns of the L.A. School is to be found in Michael Dear (ed.) *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002); see also Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja (eds.) *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the end of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). My personal view of the L.A. urban problematic is found in: Michael Dear *The Post-*

33.9105 V
\$797
2-9
June 19 23

Los Angeles REALTOR

Official Organ Los Angeles Realty Board



CLEVELAND CONVENTION NUMBER, JUNE, 1923

Industrial

Los Angeles

Greg Hise

This article is a slightly modified excerpt from “Sixty Stories in Search of a City,” published in California History, vol. 83, no. 3, 2006, and reprinted here by permission of the author and of the California Historical Society.

Recent scholarship in cultural and literary studies has shown how narrative and the stories we tell shape knowledge and our perception of the world. This is true for understanding people, politics, cultures, and economies as well as our assessment of cities. Through story, we have come to know Pittsburgh as a city of steel. Chicago we know as hog-butcher to the world. Detroit is the motor city. We talk about Los Angeles as the city shaped by automobiles, a metropolis of sunshine, citrus, and surf viewed through a windshield or rear view mirror. Southern California has been fertile ground for such narrative invention.

However, for all the talk of futurity, modernity, and progress in the fictive geography of the “Southland,” most Los Angeles stories ignore, obscure, or misinterpret a preeminent aspect of the modern city: manufacturing and industrialism. Recovering that history is critical for understanding economies and ecologies as well as immigration and demographics in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century metropolis.

What could be more modern than manufacturing and industrial production? Modern industry transformed every aspect of American society and culture; the nature of work and social reproduction, transportation and communication, finance and the legal system, politics and institutions. Think of Ford’s assembly line; Taylor’s time-and-motion studies; the rise of corporations and the corporate skyscraper; Marx and theories of the working class; unions, strikes, the eight-hour day; workers’ compensation; leisure and mass consumption—the list goes on. It is a history so fundamental to contemporary life that we know it intellectually as a history and experientially as our lives. Where are California and Los Angeles in this history? Mostly absent, despite the fact that the state is now the world’s sixth largest economy and that it leads the nation in manufacturing jobs with nearly twice the number of Texas, which is ranked second in terms of absolute employment. Yet histories of industrial development are centered elsewhere, in New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Detroit.¹

left page: Los Angeles Realtor (June 1923). “Progress” portrayed as a narrative of ascension. In the foreground a padre and dons, framed by an adobe facade and a carreta, face the future city, a cluster of gleaming towers on a hill, surrounded by but seemingly unsullied as a result of proximity to smokestack industry. Settlers in wagons traverse a middle ground between an old world based in custom and a modern world of height, speed, production, and spectacle.

Uncovering a history of production and industry in Los Angeles requires the reconstruction of a landscape that was largely invisible to contemporaries and that has remained almost invisible up to the present. When industry has been included in the southern California scene, every decade or so, it has been presented as a revelation rather than a historical formation. For example, a 1930 Automobile Club of Southern California guidebook sent tourists on a windshield survey of the city market, refineries, packinghouses, and industrial plants stretching from its Figueroa Street headquarters east to Vernon. In 1949, a journalist for *Fortune* magazine described a drive east from Redondo Beach along 190th Street as passing through a “truck farm landscape with acres of new factories.” This trope played off readers’ conceptions of Los Angeles as both a place of agricultural abundance and a boom city: “In and around the city in the space of a very few years there has grown up one of the great industrial complexes in the world.”²

The historical record suggests Angelenos overlooked both the industry associated with agriculture, such as beet sugar refineries and canneries, and the factories sprouting in fields (as described in *Fortune*) where workers produced metal goods, glass, fertilizer, ceramics, and the like. Angelenos shared with their contemporaries across the nation and in much of

the industrialized world a belief that industry meant heavy industries with smokestacks, a large number of employees, and the command and control associated with vertical and horizontal integration. Up to the 1920s, there were few firms in the region that fit this description. Local firms tended to be family-owned, to produce for a regional market, and to be responsive to changes in market demand. Note these attributes are precisely those that economists, economic geographers, and historians of business and technology associate with a putatively new paradigm, flexible specialization or flexible production.³

Realtors, property owners, and associations such as the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce’s Industrial Department advertised nationally to entice firms either to move to southern California or to establish their West Coast branch plants in the region. The chamber and other promoters mounted industrial fairs, exhibits, and parades touting “Nature’s Workshop,” the chamber’s stock phrase intended to promote the benefits of a benign climate for production and social reproduction. At the same time, local firms such as Southern California Packing and Los Angeles Soap were constructing their plants in a mixed-use zone stretching from Elysian Park south to Ninth Street, straddling both sides of the Los Angeles River between Alameda Street on the west,

extending into East Los Angeles and along the base of the bluff below Boyle Heights. For a half century or more, the manufacturing district along the river housed a diversity of activities and people similar to the central city industrial districts we associate with New York, Chicago, and other cities where specialty firms, small jobbers, mercantilists, and warehousing all contributed to regional economies.⁴

As in Manchester, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and other production centers, Angelenos were at odds over the relative benefits and costs associated with industrial development. Boosters in favor of manufacturing extolled the benefits associated with the “golden smoke of industry.” Residents living adjacent to manufacturing plants, in districts with a mix of residences and production, or in a district zoned for industrial development such as those along the Los Angeles River and in the Eastside (a district parallel to the river and the railroad stretching to present-day Commerce) challenged elected officials to reconcile the effects industry had on the landscape and local ecologies. For example, in December 1901, property owners from the seventh ward petitioned the city council regarding smells emanating from oil refineries. Petitioners suspected there were too few “well to do” citizens living near these oil refineries to make petitioning effective. “Besides, the line of demarcation between

The neglected story of industrial Los Angeles is also the story of the beginnings of zoning in the United States.

smells in the ‘muddy eighth’ [council district],” they wrote, “is not plain enough to make out a case against any [single] law-breaker. There’s the soap factory on First; the hide warehouse on Ducommon; the gas plant on Aliso; Chinatown on Alameda; Cudahy’s meat shop on Macy; [a] bone fertilizer works on Macy; the pickle factory on First and several more establishments for curing, drying, burning, embalming and issuing vile smells. [T]he people that own these money-making plants are very careful to live on the other side of town, where their children can grow up in a healthy atmosphere.” Note that this litany of nuisance and residents’ response is akin to what we would call NIMBYism (NIMBY = Not In My Back Yard). Note too the inclusion of Chinatown in their accounting of sources for “vile smells.” A conflation of race with nuisance land uses was common in Los Angeles and other cities, as Kay Anderson has shown in her analysis of Vancouverites’ “imagined geography” of Chinatown.⁵

From the 1880s forward, the city council minutes record a sustained and often divisive contest over the use and regulation of land among block and neighborhood-level alliances, manufacturers and other business leaders, and elected officials. One pragmatic, functional response to these struggles was to segregate activities, and the council, following upon Ger-

man precedent, enacted a series of ordinances parsing the city into two residential and seven industrial districts. Though consistent with a history of policing “nuisance” or noxious activities by restricting these to less desirable sections or forcing proprietors beyond municipal boundaries, the Los Angeles statutes of 1904, 1907, and 1910 were the first such regulations in an American city. The neglected story of industrial Los Angeles is thus also the story of the beginnings of zoning in the United States.⁶ ●

1. David O. Whitten, ed. *Manufacturing: A Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990); James S. Olson, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Industrial Revolution in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002). “California is No.1 for Manufacturing Jobs, U.S. Census Figures Show,” *Los Angeles Times* (November 22, 2000). The relative ranking of California’s economy varies with fluctuations in currency markets and the like; the sixth place cited is from an Associated Press report “California Rises to 6th Place on List of Largest Economies,” *Los Angeles Times* (Oct. 5, 2000).
2. Touring Bureau Automobile Club of Southern California, *Metropolitan Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Auto Club, 1932); Perley Poore Sheehan, *Hollywood as a World Center* (Hollywood: Hollywood Citizen Press, 1924); “The Undiscovered City—To All Wonders of Southern California Add Another: Industrial Los Angeles Turns Out More Dollar Product Than Pittsburgh,” *Fortune* 39, 1949.

3. Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Philip Scranton, *Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
4. Greg Hise, “‘Nature’s Workshop’: Industry and Urban Expansion in Southern California, 1900-1950,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 27/1, 2001, pp. 74-92. For practice nationally, see Mansel G. Blackford, *A History of Small Business in America*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
5. Petition to Council, Los Angeles City Archives (LACA), box A-11. Daniel Johnson, “Pollution and Public Policy at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds., *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005). Christine Meisner Rosen, “Noisome, Noxious, and Offensive Vapors, Fumes and Stenches in American Towns and Cities,” *Historical Geography* 25, 1997, pp. 49-82 and Joel A. Tarr, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1996). Kay Anderson, “The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77 (Dec. 1987), pp. 580-598. Greg Hise, “Border City: Race and Social Distance in Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly* 56/3 (Sept. 2004), pp. 545-558.
6. Hise, “‘Nature’s Workshop.’”



Rootlessness

a DnA Conversation from KCRW 89.9 FM

Frances Anderton, Thom Mayne,
Annie Kelly, Jeffrey Herr, Julie D. Taylor,
Cara Mulio, Alan Hess

A segment from DnA: Design and Architecture, hosted by Frances Anderton and heard the third Tuesday of each month from 2:30 to 3:00 p.m. on KCRW, 89.9 FM in Los Angeles and 106.9 FM in Santa Barbara, and on-line at www.kcrw.org. Reprinted by permission of KCRW.

Frances Anderton: Last month, L.A.'s own Thom Mayne was awarded the Pritzker Prize, the Nobel of the architecture world. Thom Mayne and his firm, Morphosis, have designed bracingly innovative buildings, like Caltrans in Downtown, the Diamond Ranch High School in Pomona, and the Science Center School in Exposition Park. About Tom's work, the jury wrote, "He's sought throughout his career to make an original architecture, one that is truly representative of the unique, somewhat rootless, culture of Southern California." I was struck by this characterization of Los Angeles as "somewhat rootless," and decided to ask a few experts what they thought about it. I started with Thom Mayne himself.

Mayne: It's not rootless; it's multiply rooted. That's the issue of L.A. That's the relationship of the polyglot, and it's what makes L.A. so interesting, and it is this incredible heterogeneity of the city. And the issue is where to take this and how do we deal with this and what are the potentialities and what are the issues within this set of complexities.

Anderton: So, when people look at your buildings, you're expecting them to look at them with that understanding of L.A. being this place without a strong, coherent architectural tradition.

Mayne: Yes, but, you know, I think that the public is very confused about how it even looks at architecture. In one sense, it's interested in ideas and continuity within a European context, say, a Paris, or a London, or a Madrid, or a Barcelona, but if you really look at how that continuity was formed, it had to do with a time in history when there were more monolithic forms of government: monarchies, aristocracies—Versailles, Champs-Élysées, the Louvre, etc., etc., L.A. is what you'd expect. You'd expect a very discontinuous number of things in terms of the visual characteristics or what architects they represent, and that differentiation which the public seems to have

If you want to look at it in a slightly narrow view, historically speaking, then you can look at the icons of the twentieth-century modernists, like the Neutra house and the Schindler house on King's Road that were hugely influential, and you could call that the roots of modernism, if you want to go that far. I think the thing is that we're diverse, not rootless. - Annie Kelly

a problem with is a direct reflection of the nature and the richness of the culture. And you can't have it both ways. Right?

Anderton: That was Thom Mayne. Next I spoke with Annie Kelly, a decorator and design writer living in Old Hollywood.

Kelly: I'm indignant that the jury for the Pritzker Prize claimed that California culture was rootless. It just is a typical East Coast attitude, because they're aware of their culture and its ties to England and the founding of the country. It doesn't mean that we don't have our very own ties and links. After all, California did once belong to the King of Spain, and we have centuries of traditions: The beautiful Spanish colonial buildings all through Los Angeles and Southern California and Santa Barbara are really firmly rooted in the traditions that were started by the Spanish when they came here in the seventeenth century. But if you want to look at it in a slightly narrow view, historically speaking, then you can look at the icons of the twentieth-century modernists, like the Neutra house and the Schindler house on King's Road that were hugely influential, and you could call that the roots of modernism, if you want to go that far. I think the thing is that we're diverse, not rootless.

Jeffrey Herr: A lot of cities are characterized architecturally by skyline architecture, and yes, L.A. does have some of that . . .

Anderton: Jeffrey Herr is Arts Manager for the Cultural Affairs Department of the City of Los Angeles.

Herr: . . . but I think we find our best architecture not so much in that skyline architecture, and in terms of the rootless aspect of it, I think you get to the point where all the architects that have been working in Los Angeles have brought a myriad of ethnic thoughts with them that have formed what's been actually built in the city. And, in a sense, it's rooted now, but it was the rootlessness of the people coming here.

Julie Taylor: I would say that in L.A. our culture is unique but not necessarily rootless.

Anderton: Julie Taylor is editor of the newsletter of the Society of Architectural Historians, Southern California chapter.

Taylor: What really intrigues me about L.A. are the different layers of history that are here that sometimes other people don't see; I mean, it's not like any other place. We've got our mid-century architecture, which might still be thought of as contemporary by someone in New York, or Spanish Revival work, you know, of the 1920s, which is very historical to us in L.A., but someone in Europe might laugh and say, "Don't you mean 1620?" L.A. has always been a place where people come to reinvent themselves, and here I think we also reinvent what history is, and what that means.

Anderton: I asked Thom Mayne about the perception of L.A. as a place that, in fact, has roots: Spanish, early Modernist, and so on.

Mayne: It's a critical-mass problem. If you looked at the sixteen-and-a-half million people over the ninety-mile horizontal distance of L.A. as a metropolis, unlike the European city, where there's

I think that architecture here
in the city is liberated. It's so fresh,
the ideas here are being looked at
from around the world
and things that germinate here
you see setting precedents
for other places and other forms
of architecture. - Cara Mulio

not just history but a critical mass—in L.A., you could find those roots, little fragments of Pasadena, fragments of Long Beach, fragments of Downtown, but essentially to look at the city as a whole, it's a post-World-War-II city, and the newness, or the construction which took place within a very rapid period of time, completely overpowers. There just isn't the density of history that can make that argument convincing.

Anderton: That was Pritzker-Prize winning L.A. architect Thom Mayne. Alan Hess is architecture critic for the *San Jose Mercury News*. He's also author of many books dealing with post-war L.A. architecture, including *Googie: Fifties Coffee Shop Architecture* and *The Ranch House*.

Alan Hess: I was surprised that the old cliché about rootlessness in Southern California has been dredged up again. Yet this is, apparently, the perception of the area from Easterners, and perhaps many Southern Californians accept it. I think the facts, though, go the exactly opposite direction. Thom Mayne's work is just one example of a very well-rooted, very long-standing, very well-developed concept of architecture which Southern California has evolved over the past hundred years or so. You see the same sort of forms, the same sort of dynamic shapes, the same sort of anti-gravity architecture in, for example, the work of John Lautner. Lautner, of course, was a great Southern California architect who worked from the 1930s into the 1990s. Take such houses as Lautner's Garcia house, a great arching wave on Mulholland Drive, or the Chemisphere house, a spaceship perched atop a pylon on a hillside of the Hollywood Hills. Another aspect of California architecture which reflects this are the Googie coffee shops, like the Norm's—there's one still standing on La Cienega—floating roofs that were jutting out in different directions, dynamic angles, huge stretches of glass that enveloped the buildings in unusual ways. They were teaming with modern materials, which at the time were plastics and plate glass and different forms of metal and beams and so forth. And, remember, that these are buildings that were meant for the average person, the average Angeleno. And the average Angeleno loved them and embraced them, because they did give a sense not of rootlessness but of a very specific place. You knew you were in Southern California when you were in these sorts of buildings.

Cara Mulio: I'm glad I was asked to talk about rootless culture, because when I first heard this I almost became defensive . . .

Anderton: Cara Mulio is the co-author of *Long Beach Architecture: The Unexpected Metropolis*.

Mulio: . . . and I understand that the Pritzker Jury made it as a compliment, and, when you think about Los Angeles, you think about its history, you think about Frank Lloyd Wright coming to Los Angeles to be liberated, for a sense of freedom, and Los Angeles provides that. And I think that architecture here in the city is liberated. It's so fresh, the ideas here are being looked at from around the world, and things that germinate here you see setting precedents for other places and other forms of architecture.

Anderton: Alan Hess.

Hess: The ultra-modern homes of John Lautner, certainly the work of Frank Gehry today, the Googie coffee shops, the ranch house found in hundreds of tracts all over Southern California, these also have been taken up by other people across the country as a new way of living. So, we are not rootless here, we are the base of the root. We are where the plant starts growing, and it stretches out across the country. ●



Fourteen Ways of Looking at Los Angeles

For this issue dedicated to the City of Los Angeles, **arcCA** sought views of L.A.'s built environment from a diverse, super-baker's-dozen of authorities. These are their thoughts, grouped under six arbitrary sub-headings: Getting Better, Getting Denser, Getting Around, Getting Down, Getting Out and Getting About.

Getting Better

What Kind of Paradise?

A native of Los Angeles, David Thurman is an Associate at Moule & Polyzoides Architects and Urbanists in Pasadena, where he was project leader on master plans for Occidental College, New College of Florida, and the Olympic and Soto mixed-use center in Los Angeles. Thurman has written for periodicals such as World Architecture, Center, and Texas Architect, as well as arcCA. He may be reached at dthurman@mparchitects.com.

I grew up during a time of tremendous growth in L.A., the 1960s. I recall playing on home construction sites in the hills of South Pasa-

dena and collecting the metal punch-outs from electrical boxes as if they were gold coins. At that time, it felt as though we lived in a quite rural place, happily climbing trees and roaming hidden corners of the undeveloped landscape. This was an abundant natural environment full of giant eucalyptus trees and rolling hills. For most of the time until the 1960s, this could have described many parts of southern California; the idea that it would soon dramatically change was far from anyone's mind.

The transition from this child's paradise to a denser and grittier Los Angeles has been a difficult one, probably because no one wanted to admit it was our destiny; no one wants to change one's own version of paradise. Yet by the time I graduated from high school in 1976, there were signs of extreme crisis. We had over 150 first stage smog alerts in the year that I took up distance running with the school track team. Despite such horrors, the 1976 attempt to integrate the first HOV lane in Los Angeles was a famous political disaster, resulting in the installation (and hasty removal) of "diamond

lanes" on the Santa Monica Freeway. Other hopes for transportation relief, such as regional rail transit proposals, had failed in both 1968 and 1974. By the time I graduated from college in 1980, things had further deteriorated, and we had over 200 first stage alerts. It obviously was difficult for people to make concessions to the freedom offered by the automobile and the desire to retreat to the private realm; it would require much more time for public opinion to adjust to the idea of Los Angeles as an urban place. It has taken some rather hopeless years in which Angelenos have suffered the pressures of growth. We have had to weather freeway shootings, riots, excessive pollution, and two-hour commutes in order to realize that there must be a better way to live.

Finally, we have responded. Population growth, pollution, and the cost of housing have encouraged us to build greater density, to seek transit alternatives, and to revitalize our aging downtown. The results are encouraging. By 2002, we had gone through two consecutive summers without a single, first stage

opposite: Grand Avenue South View,
illustration by Scott Lockard for AC Martin Partners

smog alert. Our ailing downtown has experienced a renaissance, with nearly 20,000 residential units planned or under construction. Southern California now has a total of seventy-three miles of light rail and subway lines, nearly 700 miles of HOV lanes, and an express bus that inexpensively connects the airport to downtown. There are signs that people are finally aware that long commutes from low-density suburbs are not the only way to enjoy living in Los Angeles.

Although Los Angeles has a long way to go to become a truly integrated urban environment in terms of housing, social needs, transit, place-making, and sustainability, it is striking how far we have come. Thirty years ago, we knew there were problems but were reticent to embrace meaningful solutions. In contrast, today there is incredible optimism and an eagerness to try new approaches. Although my pleasant childhood memories are difficult to forget, it is now possible to imagine Los Angeles as a new and very different kind of paradise.



above: Los Angeles Design Center by John Friedman Alice Kimm Architects
photography by Benny Chan

Getting Denser

The Polymorphous Polyvalent Polis or Can Sprawl Spawn Splendor?

Buzz Yudell, FAIA, is a partner in Moore Ruble Yudell Architects & Planners, winner of the 2006 AIA National Firm Award. He may be reached at byudell@mryarchitects.com.

L.A. is a sprawling metropolis metastasizing beyond control. /L.A. is a fertile and flexible urban network supporting innovation and adaptation.

As in all clichés, there are truths in both statements. L.A. has its share of dysfunction, often observed with *schadenfreude*. It has its inequalities, its pretensions, and its noir secrets. But its other secret, particularly to those who know our city only in passing, is that L.A. is a rapidly evolving ecology, which supports innovation in the arts, science, and industry, and which accommodates a diversity of patterns of living and working.

The overlay of horizontal sprawl (of some 1600 square miles) on a landscape limited only by mountains to the north and the ocean to the west has allowed the development of a polymorphous urban network. L.A.'s very problems—sprawl, lack of focus, lack of density—are ironically becoming its strength.

The city seems to be at a point of inflec-

tion, where local densification is creating viable mixed-use communities within the larger network. Like a neural network, new pathways are formed where energy circulates, and the accumulation of these formations leads to a densification of activity and use. One urbanist has referred to Los Angeles as polynucleated. We are beginning to see that the lack of a single downtown has not inhibited the formation of lively neighborhoods and communities of varying scales, functioning in both complementary and independent fashion. From Pasadena to Chinatown, Los Feliz, Hollywood, Culver City, Mar Vista, Santa Monica, Inglewood, and beyond, densifying neighborhoods are creating greater opportunities for choice in living, working, and cultural life. (See “Many Theres Here, p. 40.)

Twenty years ago, I wondered how young architects joining our office would be able to afford to live in Los Angeles. By then, they had been priced out of many parts of the city. Yet, in successive waves, they and others found new niches in evolving communities. When priced out of Santa Monica, they found refuge in Venice or Hollywood. When priced out of Venice or Hollywood, they moved on to Culver City or Los Feliz. Now, they might be finding reasonable housing near Mt. Washington, Chinatown, or Inglewood. With each of these waves, more neighborhoods become focal points for densifi-

cation and cultural amenities.

In addition to the spatial diversity, there is a marvelous overlay of ecological diversity. We recently visited an architect-chef who had found her perfect nest in an affordable rental of a mid-century house, nestled in the hills of Silver Lake with spectacular views and connections to the land. Within sight of this house, we dined with an architect-writer north of Chinatown, whose urban setting allowed guests to drive into his converted factory loft, guided by candles like the lights on an airport runway, to arrive at a dinner set alfresco in this capacious factory. Both of these friends spend part of their time working from home.

The mutability and even the much derided disposability of a great deal of Los Angeles's “provisional” architecture has allowed fragile and sometimes marginal initiatives to take hold, as well. For years, small entrepreneurs have been able to rent out bare-bones quonset huts and lofts adjacent to the Santa Monica airport. The derelict lofts of Bergamot Station have become an economical setting for a vibrant art and design center.

Such renewal is happening not only in the more affluent Westside, but is sprinkled throughout the city in such places as central L.A., the site of the new L.A. Design Center by John Friedman Alice Kimm Architects, the “Brewery,” an artists collective north of down-



The city seems to be at a point of inflection, where local densification is creating viable mixed-use communities within the larger network.

town, or the many conversions of early twentieth-century downtown office buildings into work-live lofts.

For years, L.A. has been a place of private opportunity and occasional splendor counterpointed by public apathy and occasional squalor. We're all aware of the welcome increase in iconic architecture, from the Getty to Disney Hall to the new Cathedral and the Cal-Trans Headquarters. A less known and perhaps ultimately more powerful trend is occurring in the fabric of the city. Throughout the city, we see small and large initiatives in the improvements of streetscapes. Mass-transit, while it sputters, is gaining traction with major initiatives in clean and sophisticated bus systems, which add to the progress of light rail and metro transportation. To the surprise of many skeptics, new zoning initiatives that encourage mixed-use, transit-oriented development are being realized from Pasadena to Hollywood and beyond.

Developers who might never have considered taking on urban infill, mixed-use, or street-oriented retail projects are gravitating to the city in numbers we have not seen before. While the classic urban problems of traffic, environmental quality, affordable housing, good schools, and social and economic equity are all clear and present challenges, Los Angeles appears to have a real chance of evolving into a city not only of private choice, opportunity, and creativ-

ity, but of diverse and dynamic public opportunity and urbanism.

Los Angeles: Density with Intensity?

Doug Suisman, FAIA, is principal of Suisman Urban Design in Los Angeles. He is the lead author and designer of The Arc: A Formal Structure for a Palestinian State (RAND: 2005), winner of a 2006 national AIA Honor Award. He may be reached at suisman@suisman.com.

From the air at night, Los Angeles is as stunning as a pointillist painting—millions of separate dots adding up to a luminous tapestry. But on the ground, the dots atomize into an often disappointing landscape of parking lots and drive-ins. In Sondheim's musical, *Sunday in the Park with George*, a jealous rival points to a painting by the pointillist Seurat and mockingly says: "It has no passion, no life—just density without intensity." Critics of Los Angeles have often said much the same thing, except they have assumed the density was missing as well.

No more. According to the *Washington Post*, the 2000 census shows that the Los Angeles urban area is now the densest in the country. At 7,068 people per square mile, L.A. out-densifies metropolitan New York by 25 percent, doubles Washington, quadruples Atlanta. So the density exists—but what about the inten-

sity? Is there passion and life in the streets of Los Angeles? Even with all those people packed together, is L.A. urban yet?

The conventional benchmarks for such urban intensity—tall buildings, tight spaces, honking taxis, and sidewalks packed with people—can be found in certain L.A. districts, but, like Seurat's dots, they tend to be disconnected (at least for those on foot), leaving stretches of dead space in between. The discontinuity and fragmentation are due in part to the city's vast expanse (a vastness actually exceeded by New York's); to the still strong allure of the verdant suburbs and their laidback lifestyles; and to more than 100 years of nearly hypnotic accommodation of anything the automobile demanded from an entranced population and its civil service engineers. This too is changing.

The land has pretty much run out, as the city hits the walls of the Santa Monica and San Bernardino mountains, and the talk is everywhere of "infill," which is code for packing more people onto existing urbanized land. The talk is also of "mixed use," which means there's a growing market of people willing to live above the store, trade a backyard for a balcony and, god forbid, occasionally take the bus or train.

Does this mean a sudden explosion of intense urbanity? No—you have to go to China for that. It does mean that L.A. is palpably intensifying within its existing frame. While



above: L.A. downtown, photography by John Uniack

residential neighborhoods are limited to modest increases in density, the boulevards are springing to attention. Typically undercooked, with low-rise commercial buildings and parking, boulevards are sprouting ingenious new building types from three to fifteen stories, well crafted architecture with urban ambitions, much improved signage and streetscapes, and even, in some segments, a bunch of people actually walking around. Where two boulevards cross and produce one of the “nodes” so beloved of planners, bus and rail stations are appearing next to mid-rise apartment buildings with shops, producing a subtle but perceptible uptick in sidewalk activity.

In the big momma of nodes, “Downtown,” several billion tax dollars have produced a credible hub of regional mass transportation. Long neglected, steel-framed, terra-cotta clad treasures on the avenues are being converted into lofts, bolstered by a clutch of shiny new housing soaring to fifteen, thirty, or even fifty stories, either planned or in construction. They’re grounded by streetfront shops and even a new supermarket—the first in a generation.

Whether all of this intensified density and sporadic urbanity means that passion and life will spill onto L.A.’s boulevards in some form other than the scenes in *Crash* remains to be seen. The next generation of screenwriters will surely let us know—stay tuned.

The Los Angeles River: Our Future

Deborah Weintraub, AIA, LEED_{AP}, is chief architect and Deputy City Engineer for the City of Los Angeles. She may be reached at deborah.weintraub@lacity.org.

The Los Angeles River is a western river, flashy with winter rains, most of the year a dry bed. Flooding and development pressures led to its channelization in the 1930s and to its current condition as an ignored water right-of-way, which passes by the backs of property, offering almost no civic value other than flood control. The alignment of many interests has led to the current effort to master plan a revitalized river through the City of Los Angeles and to reclaim this resource for the region. I am fortunate to be helping to lead this effort.

Touring the Los Angeles River by helicopter is, at this moment in time, the best way to imagine the linear park—the green spine—that would connect the city’s neighborhoods and eventually extend through neighboring cities to the south to the ocean in Long Beach. As the helicopter circles downtown and comes up from the south, the historic Merrill Butler bridges in the downtown reach are spectacular examples of “City Beautiful” infrastructure that have been aesthetically isolated in the barren, concrete-lined flood channel, with railroads and warehouses lining the river. At Chinatown, the

open site commonly known as the Cornfields is full of potential as a new state park in a “River District” that could extend from Chinatown to the river to the east, and could recall the origins of Los Angeles, as the city’s first water infrastructure (the Zanja Madre) passed through this area, drawing water from the river.

At the confluence of the Arroyo Seco and the Los Angeles River, the amount of publicly-owned land allows one to imagine greened open space, new housing, and community facilities. A connection across the river here to Elysian Park could join to a bikeway that would extend up the Arroyo to Pasadena.

At Taylor Yards, the remaining rail land adjacent to the river would permit the river to widen, supporting restored wetlands that could provide natural habitat in the heart of the city. Just to the north, you fly over the soft-bottomed stretch of the Glendale Narrows, which already attracts birds and supports in-channel vegetation. The adjacent industrial uses have traditionally turned their backs to the river, but the local residential neighborhoods have understood the value of this piece of nature. A river walk along this area could connect via pedestrian bridges across to Griffith Park and build a green river edge with cafés and lookout points.

Around the corner in the San Fernando Valley, existing open spaces could be reconfig-



above (left to right): L.A. downtown map, drawing by AC Martin Partners; City Hall, illustration by Scott Lockard for AC Martin Partners

ured to address the river and to embrace water during high flows, recreating the natural attributes of the river. As the river passes through mostly single-family residential fabric in the San Fernando Valley, it is possible to preserve this residential fabric and to green the channel and the adjacent easements. Underused commercial property next to the river could be new development facing a reconfigured river walk.

These are just a few of the opportunities being discussed, and, with the cooperation of the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Water and Power, the County of Los Angeles, and others, our dialogue has been amazingly open and visionary. The helicopter tour brings home the potential of the riverway to knit the city together, to reinforce existing urban neighborhoods, and to create new river-focused environments that would add richness to our city. We have seen this happen all around the world with other river projects, and our opportunity to transform our waterway is coming.

There is a river in Los Angeles, and in my lifetime it will be transformed.

The Myth of No Downtown

Richard W. Thompson, AIA, AICP, Principal in Charge of Urban Design and Planning at AC Martin Partners, has lived in an historic fire station in downtown Los Angeles for the last eleven

years and has been involved in the revitalization of downtown L.A. for over thirty years. He may be reached at richard.thompson@acmartin.com.

Unlike its European and East Coast predecessors, and certainly unlike any city in Asia, Los Angeles grew up accommodating the automobile. Its network of freeways, perhaps the greatest in the world, circles its downtown core and radiates to its suburban communities. Ironically, it is the very strength of those freeways that has diminished the importance of downtown Los Angeles as the focal point of business, and certainly as a place to live. As a result, despite its uniqueness as an urban prototype, L.A.'s downtown is strangely like every other downtown across the United States—struggling to redefine its role in a modern urban society where accessibility is defined more by telecommunications than by wheels.

Over the last ten years, L.A.'s downtown has begun to reinvent itself through the convergence of a series of major landmark projects followed by a huge influx of urban housing. While each of the major projects was significant in itself (Staples Arena, the L.A. Cathedral, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall among others), their power to reinvigorate downtown was in their collective change of focus from office to cultural/entertainment uses and in their ability to change the perception of downtown as a

destination within the region. This change in perception in turn finally laid the groundwork for downtown to become an attractive location for housing.

In the early 1990s, Los Angeles was experiencing a deep recession. The downtown area was particularly hard hit: its primary real estate focus was on office space, but there was a huge inventory of vacant older historic buildings, and businesses were rapidly fleeing to suburban centers. The Central City Association (an association of downtown business leaders) realized the time had finally come to address two issues: the shortage of housing in the region, particularly in downtown, and the vast inventory of vacant and underutilized building stock already in place. What better way to address both issues than to reuse these older buildings for housing? The idea was not new—other cities have accomplished major revitalization efforts by encouraging housing. But in Los Angeles, this idea had never taken off in any meaningful way, due to added concern with seismic safety and archaic and complex building codes.

A new “Adaptive Reuse Ordinance” was designed to ease regulatory requirements and encourage the conversion of downtown's vacant building stock to housing. This single regulatory act has largely been responsible for the current boom in residential construction.

Since 1999, almost 7,000 residential units have been rehabilitated or newly constructed. Another 100 projects totaling over 9,400 units are under construction or at the permitting or planning stages. By the year 2015, 26,500 residential units are projected for development in downtown Los Angeles.

City officials have recognized the importance of connections to and within downtown and are preparing plans to invigorate the Grand Avenue and Figueroa Avenue corridors, with more than \$5 million in public and private commitments for streetscape, local transit, and other physical improvements.

Regional attractions, urban housing, street retail, and pedestrian-friendly streets are finally arriving in downtown Los Angeles, creating the long-envisioned, around-the-clock vitality of people who actually live there—making that magic where the total is more than the sum of its parts.

Getting Around

Dashboard Reflections

Liz Martin is a founder of A+D Architecture and Design Museum in Los Angeles and principal of alloy projects. She may be reached at liz@alloy-projects.com.

Timing, that's what Los Angeles is all about, timing. How far is it from Silver Lake Boulevard to Virgil? During rush hour, it could take twenty to thirty minutes to go ten blocks, but on a good day probably five to ten minutes if you're able to time the lights. Distance has become obsolete in L.A.

Nothing is more fitting to the Los Angeles experience than driving. With its massive freeway system and lack of a decent and accessible transit system, Los Angeles is a region where one cannot survive without an automobile. Yet, with its increasingly overcrowded environment, driving around the southland can prove to be quite a hassle. Nowhere is the argument between car lovers and car bashers more

salient than Southern California, a corner of the world synonymous with both the agonies and ecstasies of the automobile age. This is the place where an exhilarating Sunday drive on the curves of Mulholland or Sunset Boulevard can be followed by weekdays spent imprisoned in rush hour traffic. Driving in L.A., you quickly begin to understand the "hidden languages" of driving and gain insight into the "laws of survival" on the road.

Avoid stop-and-go traffic at all costs: it is the reason road-rage was born. Be polite to all those other stressed-out jacks on the road, because they will follow you. And you do have to go home eventually. Is road-rage hyped media or reality? Hmm... a bit of both, but anyone with claustrophobia should not even think about driving in L.A.

For me, if I cannot take the Red Line to my destination, surface roads are the way to go. Once you're off the freeway, you can catch up on your phone calls, listen to your favorite album, or simply contemplate. Who ever has time to think anymore? I do... and in my car. Dashboard reflections are my favorite L.A. pastime. Driving by those sexy billboards along Sunset Boulevard, I learn almost all there is know about pop culture, current trends, and vanity.

In the early '80s, having a trainer was the rage. Gyms popped up on every corner, along with big billboards trying to lure you in as you drove by. Then, with the self-help '90s, everyone had a therapist, later moving on to a life coach, but only after a life-changing yoga experience. There was a very brief moment around the turn of the millennium when some folk were getting a personal concierge. I never even *understood* that one!

Now, driving on Sunset, I've learned it's time to move on to the next vanity experiment, one that will give us all material for dozens of dinner-party conversations to come. It's time to track down your own personal "hair coach"—fashion astrology at its best. A hair coach's services look too attractively absurd to resist. I might actually jump on the bandwagon this time!

An Exaltation of Cars

D. J. Waldie is the author of Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir and other books about Los Angeles. He may be reached at dwaldie@lakewoodcity.org.

Riding through another L.A. night on an MTA bus that takes nearly two hours to traverse the string of immigrant neighborhoods from Boyle Heights to North Long Beach, I don't see any of the middle-class commuters the transit authority hopes vainly to lure from their cars.

On the night bus, only tired working people are on display. Unlike motorists at night, who are invisible inside their cars, bus riders travel in the glare of overhead lights that turn the bus windows into showcases washed in hard, greenish yellow.

The motorists outside are oblivious, though, wrapped in their second skin of automotive PVC, safety glass, and sheet metal. They won't ever see, as I have on the night bus, the civil gesture of the tall, young black man toward the old, white man whose leg he must brush aside to pass down the crowded aisle, a light double tap with the side of the young man's hand on the old man's shoulder and a word of excuse answered with a nod, the old man's mild face half turned to the young man.

We're the ones always at the periphery of your gaze, if you're an L.A. driver. We're the transit dependent who stand in a shelterless cluster of five or six at the intersection where you've just turned right on red without even slowing.

As you turn, the most anxious one among us, who had been peering in hope into the on-coming traffic, steps back from the curb, a bulging discount store bag digging a red band into the flesh across the back of the hand she had thrust through the plastic handle (that red line across a numbed hand is the pedestrian stigmata).

And the most resigned one of us hangs back, leaning his left shoulder against anything (a light standard, the stucco wall of strip mall, a struggling tree), his head down and hands jammed into the pockets of a drooping jacket, and the rest of us in anonymous poses of silent

attendance on the traffic bunching and flowing in its minute-long systole and diastole as the lights change green to red on the imperial grid of Los Angeles, none of us observing with anything like the exaltation it deserves the glowing arc of bright cars turning left against the flow of traffic, as lovely and self-possessed as the line of dancers in a ballet.

Real City

Erik Lerner, AIA, is an architect practicing as a Real Estate Broker in Los Angeles and on the Internet at www.RealEstateArchitect.com. He may be reached at eLerner@RealEstateArchitect.com.

My house is vibrating. The windowpanes are rattling, the mini-blinds are fluttering, and the floor is bouncing. Elsewhere it might be a passing subway train. Here these are familiar symptoms of an incipient earthquake. Fault-zone conditioned, I prepare to take cover. But the shaking doesn't come.

Instead, there is the mechanical sound of a helicopter engine outside. In this far-flung town with a low ratio of police officers-to-square miles, aircraft keep tabs on fleeing suspects until the squad cars catch up. But on this night there are no sirens.

The TV picture is flickering to the rhythm of the rotors overhead, distorted by the airborne interference. Viewers worldwide are seeing the same thing as I, except without static: live aerial video of my neighborhood.

It's Oscar night, and two post-ceremony parties are getting underway nearby. The Vanity Fair party is at Morton's, down Robertson at Melrose. Elton John is holding his annual AIDS fundraiser at the Pacific Design Center over on San Vicente. The choppers are covering the story.

Crash has won best picture. In the film, a character muses about L.A.'s legendary isolation: "In any real city, you walk, you know? You brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass..."

I step out the front door for a closer look.

The street is lined with trees and cars. Otherwise, save for a woman and a dog, it's deserted, as usual. Down at the end of the block, though, the boulevard is bumper-to-bumper with party-bound black limousines. In the distant sky, a caravan of jets floats silently over the vastness toward LAX. A smaller plane buzzes low on its way to Santa Monica airport. Party sounds and traffic noise mix in the air. Over my neighbors' rooftops, the news-copters hover, collecting celebrity video. Behind them, the silhouette of the Hollywood Hills twinkles with the lights of a thousand houses. Close by, searchlights scan the dark sky.

It's a cool night in L.A. I button up my coat and start to walk.

Getting Down

L.A. Shortcut

Rana Cho was born in Los Angeles and has called home Seoul, Providence, and Berkeley. She is co-founder and principal of Gingerworks, which provides qualitative research and brand strategy. She may be reached at: rana@ginger-works.com.

Navigating Los Angeles requires a lexicon of intersections, numbers, and cardinal points.

How does one get to this nomenclature? Sunset and Vine, Third and Fig, 710-North, 5-South. It's shorthand for L.A.'s meridians. Critical while interstate and Port of L.A. traffic increases, no new freeways planned for the next ten years.

Times like these, when time and space seem in short supply, shortcuts are valuable. And what are shortcuts but the reuse and revision of an existing path? One man's discovery of a shortcut is another's everyday routine.

During a condo conversion project, local interviews yielded this insight: Koreatown is a wealth of local surface road shortcuts (Olympic, Pico, Vermont) bypassing the heavy 10, 101, and 405 freeways. The major shortcuts, Western and Wilshire, intersect each other in the heart of Koreatown. Streams of Asian res-

taurants, car lots, strip malls replace freeway scenery. What does an L.A. shortcut look like?

What's at Western and Wilshire? The resurrected, Art Deco, giant Wiltern. An unearthed subway station. And a white, twenty-two story building so typifying the modern that it has been everything and nothing: a vocational school, bank, numberless small businesses.

Yet, the white building originally commissioned for the Getty Oil Company headquarters sits on Hollywood history: Both *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Sunset Boulevard* were filmed here.

This is the intersection of fire during the 1992 Rodney King riots. This is the intersection in dispute during the early '80s redistricting of L.A.'s minorities. To the west, Hancock Park, the oldest Jewish community in L.A. To the east, the Alvarado corridor that seems to have a tunnel straight to Mexico. Southward lies Compton, and the 101 blocks the northward ascent toward the hills.

Instead of a shortcut to Hollywood, Santa Monica, or Pasadena, Los Angelenos are finding shortcuts to home by living at the intersection. These shortcuts, once places of passing, are early anchors committing this city to its communal grid.

The shortcut to the future is the present.

Our Los Angeles

Yareli Arizmendi is a Mexican-born actress, writer, and producer who has lived in California since 1983. She played Rosaura in the film Like Water for Chocolate, and wrote, with her husband, Sergio Arau, and Sergio Guerrero, the 2001 feature mockumentary, A Day Without a Mexican, in which she played the lead role of Lila Rodriguez. She may be reached via her website: www.yareli.com.

—Have you been to Los Angeles?

—The city?

—No, the set.

Welcome to my city, where the people, the buildings, even the sun are willing and able to accommodate the camera. We live in a city dangerously comfortable with constructing reali-

ties that “hold” only long enough to trick the eye. We starve ourselves so the lens won’t make us fat, not noticing that in real walking-life we look emaciated. But who cares about the here and now when the camera teases and dangles the key to forever... to immortality?

And so our industry of dreams goes on to colonize the psyches and expectations of people on the receiving end of our images, too far away to hear the deafening sounds of the swing crews striking down the West Wing of the White House—the set, that is.

“Heretodaygonetomorrow” is our mantra. Impermanence lends all who arrive in Tinsel Town permission to build and to destroy, as long as we promise to put up the “next big thing.” In a town that fears the old and used, we applaud and admire those—the plastic surgeons, art directors, architects, advertisers, designers, lawyers even—who can recreate a reality down to its minute, desirable detail, while conveniently leaving out those deemed not so attractive. Experiencing the original, the unaltered rawness of the real, is rendered dispensable: too imperfect for the camera and posterity.

But we, in our quest to “matter,” race against erasure. With little awareness or respect for what has come before, we rush to tag the town with the bold “I was here” that we hope will outlive the next coat of paint. Few make it, cross over into immortality with that one film, book, or scandal that rings the town’s overnight success bell. Entering the Winners-and-We-Know-It Club, they move to the hills, out of reach and out of touch.

And the others, left outside, do we keep trying? Do we desist, or do we go on to make Los Angeles our home, a place to raise our children and grow old? The faint calling of “the flats” grows louder.

Our freeways—that cruel joke Detroit played on us—have rendered Hell-A sprawl, arms and legs that lead too many places and none. But the surface streets, leading someplace, whisper, begging to be discovered. We are their hope. As we debate “should I stay or should I go?” we jump in the car—our weapon

of choice—and get off the roads most traveled: the 5, the 10, the 405. Willing to not know where we’re going, we take time to peep behind the walls that line the boulevards and avenues, suddenly discovering where we’ve stood but never really been.

There before me is a monument to a misunderstood L.A.: On the outside, a nostalgic recreation of someone’s Koreatown pagoda, once majestic, now faded, it hardly calls attention to itself. But take the time to go inside and let the color walls blast you awake: yellow, magenta, blue. “La Guelaguetza,” pagoda-turned-Oaxacan-Mexican restaurant, is at home with its fused destiny. And so are we: this is our Los Angeles. The city.

Ripped Open Like a Bag of Potato Chips

Scott Saul, an Assistant Professor of English Literature at UC Berkeley and author of Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties, is currently working on Just Enough for the City: Black Arts and Black Life after Watts.

Some people love L.A., some people hate L.A.—and then there are those (many L.A.-based artists and intellectuals among them) who love to hate L.A., who find a perverse pleasure in scrutinizing the city’s dark carnival. Between the boosters and the debunkers stand the boobunkers. I think I’m among them.

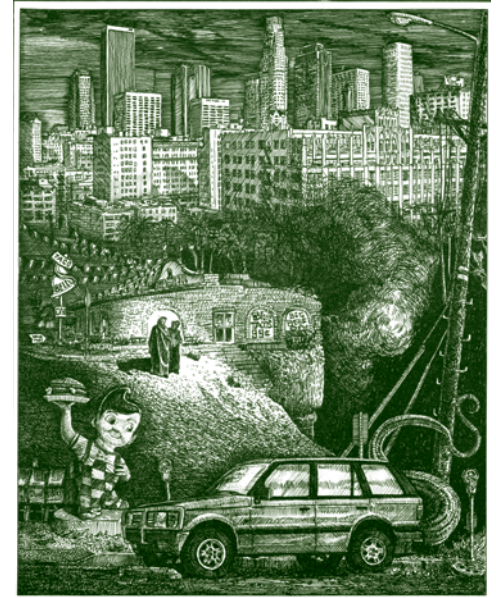
I’m led to such thoughts by Sandow Birk and Marcus Sanders’s recent edition of Dante’s *Inferno* (Chronicle Books, 2004), which renders the medieval Italian’s descent into hell as a guided tour of a grotesquely noirish Los Angeles. Half-dispiriting, half-hilarious, their *Inferno* translates Dante’s Florentine dialect into surfer-skateboarder vernacular, taking considerable liberties along the way (e.g., “I saw a sinner who had been ripped/open like a bag of potato chips or Cheetos”). Its narrator—as depicted in Birk’s gloomily detailed etchings, where every cross-hatching seems touched with grime—wears a hoodie, baggy pants, and a perpetually harassed expression, as if he had no idea what he was in for.

What he sees—what Birk’s imagination offers—is a hyperbolic extrapolation of L.A.’s extreme class divides and its dizzyingly commercial landscape. The company of hell’s hypocrites (forced to wear leaden shawls that make them move “slower than a tai chi class”) is dominated by businessmen with briefcases and members of the L.A.P.D. Gluttons writhe naked on a street littered with pizza cartons, doughnut boxes, Big Gulps, and KFC buckets, while the signage of McDonalds, the Sizzler (“all you can eat”), and In-N-Out suggests how they (we?) got in this mess. The giant Antaeus appears as a huge inflatable-balloon Fred Flintstone, ever-cheerfully lowering Virgil and Dante into the deepest pit of hell. The moral of the story—we are amusing ourselves to death—is disclosed to the viewer with a cunning smile.

For all their keen interest in imagining L.A. as literally hell on earth, Birk and Sanders should not be classed with those who bash L.A. from a place of moral superiority: slackerese is not the voice of the high-and-mighty. There are smaller self-critical gestures too: throughout the book, Virgil’s own cloak is decorated with a variety of commercial snippets (the Dodgers logo, “WAXING FACIALS PEDICURES”), and one telephone booth even sports an advertisement for the DVD edition of an earlier Birk project, winking at the artist’s own participation in a culture of buzz.

Will we, like Dante, emerge from our sojourn in this infernal L.A. and, in our wised-up and chastened state, be able to glimpse the stars? I’m hopeful that artists like Birk and Sanders can help us see more clearly the nightmare that Los Angeles has become, is still becoming; and I would like to think that the realms of purgatorio and paradiso will not be too far off, especially for those who suffer most rudely the city’s injustices and inequities. Unfortunately for Angelenos, though, Birk and Sanders will not be our guides to this higher ground. They set their *Purgatorio* in San Francisco, their *Paradiso* in New York, leaving boobunkers such as myself to wonder at the limits of our critical imagination.

Sandow Birk and Marcus Sanders, plates from Dante's *Inferno*.



Getting Out

Jay Mark Johnson is an artist and writer living in Venice, California. His photographs appear throughout this issue. He may be reached at jay@jaymarkjohnson.com.

I can't seem to keep both feet on the ground in Los Angeles. I've been living and laboring here for fifteen years and I still don't think of it as home.

Part of the problem is the landscape. It's so sparse. Sure, there was a river, but it was never a Fertile Crescent. Take away the buildings, roads, and irrigation systems, and the basin will return to dry scrub brush, with a thin line of craggy mountains in the distance, perhaps a few damp spots here and there. And a tar pit. Everything else is wide open to the sky. Death Valley by the Sea might be great for the motion picture industry, which loves small apertures, fast shutter speeds, and a clean-swept stage, but it does leave one pondering the rest of the city's history. Why here?

Another difficulty for me is an unsettling condition that results from the confluence of two greater problems of the built environment. When a dearth of history is combined with unchecked urban expansion, the result is an indecipherable entanglement of street grids and boulevards, of clover leaves and shopping malls, of gas stations, billboards, road signs...

How does one make sense of it? How do you navigate through it? Where are the markers on the landscape? Where are the centers? Where is the recognizable skyline?

Try to think of a single image that represents Los Angeles. Blue skies framed by evenly spaced palm trees? Polished pink stars on a pebbly gray sidewalk? An eighty-year-old real estate sign? Those images are all tight "close ups." Where is the wide shot? Where is the iconic cityscape? Wide, panning shots of L.A. reveal its flat, chaotic, brutally routine sprawl. Like a soundtrack composed entirely of background noises, the pieces fall haphazardly together into a singular indistinguishable cacophony. No dialogue. No soloists. No virtuoso. White noise with smog.

In recent weeks, I have traveled to a number of cities that are enduring the world's most uprooting cases of explosive urban sprawl—Shanghai, Bangkok, Vancouver, and Las Vegas. None of them seems to have a clear idea of what to do. Each of them may in fact be losing both the battle and the war. But each benefits from a distinct character and a readily recognizable identity drawn from a combination of its landscape, its history, and the fantasy employed in the construction of its most prominent new structures.

Like so many of the world's cities, L.A. has plenty to deal with in addressing the complexi-

ties of a runaway metropolis. And the city could definitely benefit from a few well-conceived, even interventionist, urban design projects. But unlike what is accomplished every day in the movie industry, the city is unable to fabricate, instantaneously, a more rich natural setting or a more entrenched history. It might nonetheless employ on the broad urban landscape what it uses to great effect on the giant silver screen: pure artifice.

Tinsel Town needs an improved skyline, more vested urban centers, and a distinguishing posture on its landscape. If in the next few decades it can build up its centers and cut back on its cars while keeping the whole place from going underwater, it might be worth sticking around for. Or at least coming back for the occasional visit.

When Opportunity Knocks...

Shant Yemenjian is a graduate architecture student at the Southern California Institute of Architecture. He is particularly interested in studying architecture as a means of shaping and promoting culture. He believes that architecture can be aesthetically pleasing but must first be responsive to be considered great. He welcomes any and all comments: shant@sciarc.edu.

Resembling the web-like pattern of inbound



photography by Shant Yemenjian

flights to an international airport, most U.S. architecture students must first make their way to a major metropolis to pursue higher education. Unlike international travelers, however, students often find difficulty in making it back to their point of origin—*physically*.

The local practice paradigm has changed over the past twenty years, with advances in modern telecommunications. We now have the capability of visiting sites “virtually,” sharing drawings online, communicating at high speeds with consultants, and so on. These advances have given us the ability to live in Zurich and build in Las Vegas. Adapting this model to domestic practice has allowed more architects to pursue small town commissions without actually having to move back home. In essence, it allows young architects to make their way back to their point of origin—*virtually*.

Each year, towns like Peoria, Ashville, and Eugene lose aspiring architects to cities like New York, Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. We need not look beyond California for evidence of this phenomenon. At the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles, over one-third of the student body (480 students) comes from out of state, and nearly one-half of the students in the architecture program at the University of Southern California (625 students) are not

from California. This phenomenon is confirmed by an informal survey conducted on the SCI-Arc campus. Last semester, of seven out-of-state students in studio, six plan to stay in Los Angeles. This semester, seven out of nine plan to stay. SCI-Arc estimates that roughly 70 percent of graduates from the last five years have remained in L.A.

The issue, though, is not the departure of future architects, but rather that many of these small towns end up filling the gap of designers by looking elsewhere—selecting from a pool of “virtually local designers.” Any city, small or large, should not be forced to compromise design quality as a result of an architect’s lack of familiarity with new territory. Responsive design is rooted deeply in its environment, culturally, politically, historically, and otherwise. The challenge we face as young architects is to invest the time and energy in learning about the places where our work will take us, so that design can reflect the community in which we will work. Are we prepared to meet this challenge?

For a young architect, seizing each opportunity to learn, test ideas, and communicate is often the motive behind career decisions. Arguably, major cities are more conducive to these criteria, and so the number of architects returning to their hometowns after an L.A. education diminishes. But as opportunities

arise, these “virtually local designers” will be given the responsibility to shape the small town built environment. They may have a bit of catching up—or remembering—to do to discern what shapes the character of a less well-known community.

Let’s not look up in twenty years and wonder whether we are in Peoria or French Lick.

Getting About

Many Theres Here

Anne Zimmerman, AIA is Principal of AZ Architecture Studio in Santa Monica. She is on the Board of Venice Community Housing Corporation and on the AIA Documents Committee. She may be reached at azimmerman@azarchitecturestudio.com.

Imagine flying into Los Angeles for the first time and seeing the vast, homogenous, light-colored expanse of buildings and roads, dotted with a pool here and there, some mountains through the smog. Reyner Banham’s Plains of Id... but not really.

Observe more closely, and you see that L.A. is an amazing warren of neighborhoods, with their own character, demographics, amenities, and often charming homes. (Not even counting the separate, unique cities that are within



above: Boyle Heights and Atwater Village, Los Angeles
 photography by Anne Zimmerman, AIA

L.A. County but not in the City of Los Angeles: Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Culver City, West Hollywood, Burbank, Glendale, Pasadena.)

There are so many heres in Los Angeles, you need a guide. Venice, for example, is rapidly gentrifying, although it retains much of its beach funky character, from the Boardwalk to Abbot Kinney to the pedestrian walks and canals.

Jeffrey Valance has his benign, appreciative, artistic view and Larry Sultan his not quite porn view of the San Fernando Valley, but a visit to North Hollywood brings you to a Thai street food market at Wat Thai on Coldwater Canyon near Roscoe. Here, enslaved Thai garment workers fled after they escaped their El Monte sweatshop/jail. Heading south on Coldwater Canyon and Lankershim, you pass a slew of good to very good Thai restaurants in mini-malls before the NoHo Arts District with street banners (!) and a critical mass of small Equity waiver theaters, cafés, and restaurants. You have to love the Emmy statue and courtyard in front of the new Television Arts and Sciences Building.

Leimert Park, often irritatingly referred to in the same breath as South Central Los Angeles, is a part of the Crenshaw district. This area was planned in 1928 with the assistance of the Olmsted Brothers and is an off-the-grid triangular pocket of park, homes, and apartments

with a small business area nurturing black-owned and Afrocentric businesses, cafés and music clubs. A drum circle on Sunday afternoon in the park sets the tone. Unfortunately, Phillip's Barbeque is not open on Sunday!

Atwater Village, nestled between the L.A. River and the Golden State Freeway (I-5), has a business center along Glendale Boulevard with views to the San Gabriel Mountains and Griffith Park across the river. This neighborhood feels like a small town complete unto itself with bucolic homes, businesses, and pace. How wonderful if the L.A. River became more accessible here.

Cesar Chavez (formerly Brooklyn) and First Streets in Boyle Heights are a bustling Latino marketplace. The area has experienced dramatic shifts from multi-cultural and Jewish to Japanese-American to its current Latino multi-cultural community. The Breed Street Synagogue—the last remaining of twenty-seven synagogues in the neighborhood—is being restored. Mariachi Plaza attracts musicians for hire, and there are restaurants galore, including the upscale Serenata di Garibaldi.

Other neighborhoods well worth the wander include:

Chinatown: Cornfield park-to-be, Chinese and Vietnamese restaurant community.

Highland Park: Southwest Museum (Native American treasures), Lummis house El Alisal (arroyo stone).

San Pedro: the Port of Los Angeles, very Jack London, Mexican-style seafood overlooking the port and on weekends Mariachi music at Ports O'Call.

Silver Lake: alternative rock music, cafes, restaurants, vintage clothing and furniture stores, Neutra, Schindler, and more architecture.

With the Lonely Planet *Los Angeles*, David Gebhardt/Robert Winter's *Los Angeles: an Architectural Guide*, Reyner Banham's *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, Charles Moore, Peter Becker, and Regula Campbell's *The City Observed: Los Angeles: a Guide to its Architecture and Landscapes*, and a Thomas Guide, you have it made. ☉

Panoramic L.A. Photographs: Jay Mark Johnson





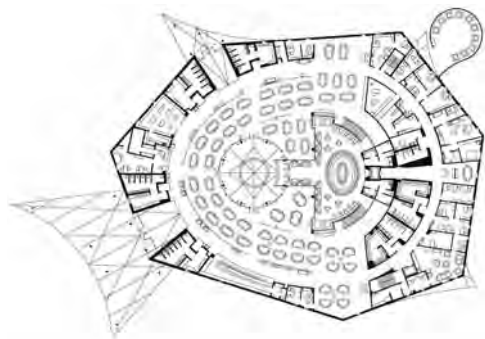






Under the Radar

Alien Like Flynt



above: plan and section drawings by Godfredsen-Sigal Architects

Tom Marble, AIA

Los Angeles is a complex plaid of a city, streets running North/South and East/West, carving up a submissive landscape into cities and neighborhoods without regard for geology, topography, or natural features. The pattern is simple and indifferent and virtually without organizing force other than the crude mechanics of commerce. Which is why the city of Paramount is filled with steel fabricators, why San Fernando has more than its share of stone yards, and why the town of Gardena is home to a cluster of casinos, pawn shops, and purveyors of guns and ammo. Yet in Gardena is an improbable gem of a building built by Larry Flynt and housing his Hustler Casino, part of the ever-expanding Hustler empire.

By virtue of signage as well as its distinctive profile, the casino asserts its presence at the corner of South Vermont Avenue and West Redondo Beach Boulevard. Although the architects, Ron Godfredsen and Danna Sigal of Godfredsen-Sigal Architects, sold the design to Mr. Flynt as a stylized crown, it comes across as a makeshift tent thrown up at some desert oasis. But this is no ordinary tent; made up of tilt-up concrete panels, the surface is articulated with a continuous pattern of twelve-inch pyramids that renders the skin as a light, billowing, tufted fabric perforated with colored circles and ellipses. Not until you get close do you register the construction joints and sense the structure's massiveness.

Inside you see why this concrete tent was thrown up in the first place—to conceal an immense alien spacecraft charged with drawing in unsuspecting humans and sucking the life out of them, presumably to



above: These images, as well as those on the cover and on pages 42-45, were photographed with the Spheron HDR camera. Using a very wide angle lens, the Spheron camera rotates slowly on a tripod, scanning outward in all directions, capturing 26 f-stops of light exposure in a single pass, producing a fully spherical, seamless, very high resolution digital image. The photographer, Jay Mark Johnson, was trained as an architect and has worked for decades in the film industry. For more information, visit www.jaymarkjohnson.com.
below: photography by Claudio Santini

fuel extra-terrestrial life in Beverly Hills and beyond. The metallic belly of the UFO, which curves up right to the burgundy-mohair-upholstered inner skin of the gambling pod, is punctuated at regular intervals by glittering ganglia masquerading as glass chandeliers dropped from glowing red apertures. The center of the spacecraft is carved out and open to the sky for smokers but could easily double as a way station for the intergalactic transport of indigent gamblers. The petaled opening at the top of this conical room is both beautiful and terrifying as it opens and closes, a sort of man-eating Venus fly trap straight out of *Little Shop of Horrors*.

The carpet is an overscaled version of a Stephanie Odegard design, expanded to a twelve-foot repeat with colors drawn from the rest of the interior: gold, burgundy, purple. With the mohair walls, the looming underbelly of the UFO, the crenellated fortress of the sports bar mezzanine, and the delightful graphics program, the architects have created a gestalt strong enough to overpower the chaos and inevitable cheapness of the gambling

tables, with their scantily-clad hostesses plying prey with food and drinks.

The design clearly appealed to Larry Flynt's ego, summoning all the requisite tropes of royalty; yet it did so without sacrificing conceptual rigor. Informed of the client's distaste for modern architecture and love of Victorian, die-hard modernists Godfredsen-Sigal sought common ground. They presented the work of the Secessionists and hoped Mr. Flynt would be responsive. He was. Drawn to the use of color and gold leaf—not to mention the subject matter—he encouraged the designers to follow the palette of painter Gustav Klimt. (At the same time, he commissioned a series of Klimt knock-offs for display in the Casino.)

The result is an unexpected synthesis; as art critic Jan Tumlir puts it, "This is what good design has always done, seeking the ideal solution that would reconcile and integrate the various oppositions—the perfect fit." Such a strange, unanticipated merging of a client's desires and an architect's skill has produced a work so completely imagined and so scrupu-

lously realized, it can only give birth to tragedy.

Leave it to entropy or to greed or to the state of architecture in America, time would not be kind to the Hustler Casino. Even before the building had been completed, a dispute between owner and architects caused an irreparable rift, severing the delicate chord that united, for the briefest of moments, their disparate visions: in addition to committing minor design infractions, management has already engaged another architect to do an addition. So, as the power of the Godfredsen-Sigal design erodes over time, the Hustler Casino will become—sadly, for us as architects—just another casino in Gardena. ●





Civility and Public Space

William Fain, FAIA

This article, the second in an ongoing series featuring AIA component chapters, looks at issues being addressed by AIA Los Angeles.

As the Los Angeles Chapter AIA is now deeply involved with preparations for this year's AIA National Convention, June 8–10, most staff time and board priorities are directed to programming the Host Party, coordinating local design awards with the national program, arranging a multitude of tours of Southern California's cherished assets, and identifying a healthy list of outstanding Presidential awardees for recognition at the convention. Yet, during my tenure as president, I am intent on addressing an overall theme for the year, as previous presidents have done. In attempting to understand this, one needs to reflect on our firm's work here in Los Angeles over the past twenty-some-odd years and to see it in the context of the region. This seems appropriate, since much of our work is in urban design as well as in architecture. We view our projects in an understanding of the broader social, cultural, and economic context. With this in mind, my focus centers on the civility of our city.

In the early nineties, my partner, Scott Johnson, and I found ourselves planning commercial projects that proposed significant densities in various parts of the Los Angeles region. At the time, we were working with three nationally prominent developers in significantly sized projects in the Warner Center area of the Valley. Although Los Angeles has one of the biggest public bus systems in the U.S., we are dominated by a dependence on the private automobile. Consequently, we found ourselves evaluating intersection capacities and roadway widths with a goal of widening vehicle rights-of-way to allow for larger densities. This seemed nuts to us. What about the pedestrian? What about spaces for people, not cars? Where are the plazas and parks in this city?

I asked our office researcher, Katherine Rinne, to compare the amount of public park space in Los Angeles to other cities. She came back with an astonishing result. Los Angeles has approximately half as much space devoted to public parks as Boston and San Francisco, one-third that of Seattle, and one-quarter that of New York City. It became apparent to us that Los Angeles, often described as a "garden city," is in fact a city of private gardens, consisting of private back-

opposite: photograph, *Not a Cornfield*, courtesy of Steve Rowel; illustration, *Blue Crash* by Carlos Almarez, courtesy of Patricia Correia Gallery, Santa Monica



photography by Charles LeNoir

yards with barbeques and frequently a swimming pool. With such a focus on the “private,” this city’s “public” has been relegated to third- or fourth-tier importance, with token gestures to place-making as found in suburban malls, fake main streets like the Grove, or entertainment connectors like City Walk in Universal City. We seem to be dominated by a culture of “hyper individualism,” at the expense of the social interaction that promotes a high degree of civility.

David Hockney, Ron Davis, Ed Moses and other L.A. artists have remarked positively about the “freedom” Los Angeles offers the artist for individual expression. Yet, what is the balance between an emphasis on individual expression and collective will? Can this city bear another riot (’65 and ’92); or the fear between people expressed in the movie, *Crash*, this year’s Academy Award winner for best film; or what was similarly expressed in the earlier film *Grand Canyon*, which explained the deep abyss we feel between neighborhoods? A kind of isolationism exists in our city—a disjointedness in the “public realm” between roads and buildings as expressed in paintings by Wayne Thiebaud, or a frustration with the private automobile as expressed by Carlos Almaraz’s pastels of crashing cars.

“Can we all get along?” Rodney King asked during the ’92 riots. We have so much separation—we have no places to see and greet each other or, as Jennifer Lee puts it in her book *Civility and the City*, for opportunities to negotiate everyday life between peoples of differing backgrounds. Based upon her work in Philadelphia and New York City neighborhoods, Lee found significant evidence that these daily urban interactions allow people to get to know each other, breaking down misunderstandings, stereotypes, and fears.

An important point to remember is that our city is relatively new and terribly raw. It has not benefited from eras of civic-mindedness such as the City Beautiful Movement of the late nineteenth century, which shaped cities like San Francisco, Boston, New York, and Chicago. Consequently, the L.A. city metro region became filled out in an ad hoc fashion during the years following World War II, when there was a call for providing soldiers and their families with the American dream house. Los Angeles needs complexity—complexity that necessitates social interaction at all levels, whether at the store purchasing groceries, a casual encounter in public transit, a gathering in a public plaza or park. People need to become acquainted, learn how to respect each other, and realize that everyone benefits from developing and nurturing the social contract between citizens of the city. This contract is ultimately more important than the self-centered culture of individual gratification that we have today.

Los Angeles needs a renewed commitment to rebuild and maintain civic space in our great city. I believe that our new mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, has the energy and vision to accomplish this. He has become a leading advocate for reestablishing a broad range of transit initiatives, including reinstatement of the subway line under Wilshire Boulevard from the downtown business district to Santa Monica and the extension



Urban Freeways, 1979,
by Wayne Thiebaud

of light rail and exclusive busways such as the Orange Line in the Valley. He is also a great supporter of public parks, the Grand Avenue cultural district, and L.A. River projects—significant endeavors underway that will help cultivate civility in the city.

Two new emerging public park projects have exciting potential—one in northeast Chino, and the other at the Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.) in West L.A. Both are offerings to all of Los Angeles' citizens.

The “Cornfield,” located between north Broadway and Spring Street near Elysian Park and the L.A. River, is a thirty-two-acre brownfield site which was previously home to Southern Pacific railroad yards and the site of an early cornfield during the Pueblo era. The property was rescued by the State Parks Department, who put up enough funding to purchase the land from a developer intent on turning it into an industrial park. Situated between the original Pueblo and the River, it is teeming with memories. Portola's original encampment in 1769 at the narrows of the L.A. River was immediately north of the Cornfield site. The original Zanja Madre (“mother water trench”) that provided water to the Pueblo was located along the northwestern boundaries of the site, and the first water wheel and reservoir were located there not far from the Gonzalez adobe, one of the first homes in the Pueblo era. Thus, the site holds a great deal of promise for recalling a collective memory of the city origins. Now the subject of a request for proposals, the State is positioning the site for a new landscape design that will include interpretative elements as well as satisfying local residents' desires for recreational space.

The Veterans Affairs property in Westwood is ideally situated to become the “Great Westside Park.” Originally called the “Soldiers Home,” it is similar to eleven others built nationally. Like the Yountville Soldiers Home in Napa Valley, it was built for recuperating soldiers following the Civil War. Over the years, these properties have become increasingly public. It is apparent that the V.A. hopes to generate additional revenues from future use of the property. Councilman Bill Rosendahl and former Mayor Richard Riordan, who is championing the property as a new park, both support the property for veterans' services and open-space uses. Where revenue-producing activities are necessary, they have stated these uses should be compatible with local community goals for the property, i.e., museums, galleries, and medical-related services to the hospital south of Wilshire. Over the years, the property has suffered from a piecemeal approach to development, and an overall vision is critically needed for the entire site. Peter Mullins, Tom Jones, Brad Freeman, and the Veterans Park Conservancy have supported the beginnings of this open space idea by developing a small park at the very important San Vicente/Wilshire Boulevard corner, and, hopefully, with Riordan's efforts to develop a broad vision, the V.A. Park can be realized.

Great cities of the world have great public spaces. Their civility depends upon them. Well-distributed parks, walkable streets, public plazas, and effective public transit all contribute to the life of the city and the ways in which people interact with each other. They enable the development of a civic culture that supports a shared collective will. Such spaces, places, and occurrences help to establish mutual understanding and help us, as Rodney King put it, “all get along.” ●



Richard Neutra's Los Angeles

Hall of Records Building

Barbara Lamprecht

I had always considered the Los Angeles County Hall of Records, 1962, to be a soldierly and stolid example of mid-century Modernism. Reconsidering it through a visit and through looking at correspondence was a revelation. In fact, this building, primarily famous for the technical prowess of its striking 120-foot-tall, south-facing aluminum louvers, is really a lesson in designing for sustained productivity. When peppered by reporters' questions about the louvers, co-lead architect Richard Neutra said, "All technical things are auxiliary to human well-being and an aid to vitality.... The most important thing about the louvers is that responsible government officials have been convinced by Mr. Neutra's biological approach to protect the 1,200 employees working inside from unfavorable physiological conditions. The physiology of the eye, of vision, the fatigue and irritations produced were discussed by Mr. Neutra in open political meetings and reported in all Los Angeles newspapers..."

The fifteen-story structure was designed by a consortium of architects led by then-partners Neutra and Robert Alexander, a distinguished architect and urban designer, to house banal but critical government functions such as regional planning, probation, and legal records. The T-shaped building is sited to help define the north edge of the city's civic core. To the west lies the contemporary glitterati of Gehry's Concert Hall and Moneo's Cathedral; to the northeast is the older Art Deco + Beaux Arts-style City Hall. The big, concrete-framed, windowless stem of the T, pointing south and clad in white terra cotta, with floor plates at 8' 6" to maximize storage capacity, stores paper records; offices, with a doubled



photos: Barbara Lamprecht

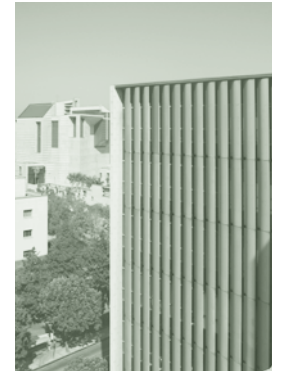


plate of 17', occupy the steel-framed east-west stroke.

Although it's a little rough around the edges, the Hall of Records is an intelligent workhorse, with prescient responses to the ergonomics of working and environmental and solar issues. Its finishes of granite, brown and white terra cotta tiles (vertically oriented to acknowledge their non-structural purpose), stainless steel, glass and aluminum, were chosen to endure hard and incessant use. There is no stucco anywhere. Rendered in various scales, weavings, and panels, these elements often connect indoors to out. On the exterior, the effect is one of layers of subtly rich textures that articulate and soften the large volumes. The strategy speaks to a century of dialogue on cladding: Neutra studied with Adolf Loos, whose views on cladding were informed by nineteenth-century German theorist Gottfried Semper. And then there are minor miracles, like the exquisite, shaded outdoor terraces scattered throughout, a reflecting pool (now empty) near the lobby that "eliminated ground cover and serves the psychology of the entrance," a mosaic wall sculpture by Joseph Young, (slated, with the pool, for restoration), and stainless-steel light fixtures looking like a hybrid of Brancusi and Darth Vader in what must have been a sleekly handsome cafeteria (now converted to office warrens) overlooking all the city. Not a bad place for a county office worker.

The architects layered functions as well. For example, the louvers, built by the manufacturers who built the louvers at Neutra's famed 1947 Desert (Kaufmann) House, were designed to do several things. They eliminated solar gain before sun hit the glass. (The architects presented a cost/benefit analysis showing a \$113,650 savings over five years compared to "air-conditioning and Venetian blinds.") The hollow blades act as flues to encourage air flow outside the building envelope. Their sensual shape and silver coating diffuse light and provide ambient side lighting, reducing glare. ("Perpetually shaded and agreeably diffused, to

the delight to human beings inside, whose comfort and efficiency, not impaired by fatigue and irritation, soon pays back for the millions of dollars investment in psychosomatic health," Neutra wrote to the county.) Finally, the "verticalness" of the louvers saluted the legacy of the columns of a "dignified" classical building and drew on all those "emotional associations that go with wonderful tallness," Neutra and Alexander wrote.

The building is rife with such intelligence. Smaller fixed fins on the north side of the building "provided shade after 8 a.m. all year long."

Because the architects wanted to reduce the cumulative eye fatigue created by intense contrasts of light and dark, the architects argued against "punched-in" windows, noting that the eyes of our genetic ancestors were attuned to sudden contrasts as a survival mechanism, not exactly helpful in an office setting. Instead, armed with research from leading eye physiologists, they proposed "continuous fenestration carried to the ceiling, like the high windows in Georgian architecture or from trees, reducing contrast by reflecting ample light on light-colored ceilings and partitions..."

The 17' plate height also permitted the architects to engage in some good Wrightian (or Loosian, your preference) games in section: offices suddenly change in height, so that employees could feel both protected near the core of the building and then enjoy a feeling of expansiveness near the windows.

As I walked through the building, it occurred to me that I was seeing several moves that I had seen in Neutra houses. That is because on some level, Neutra did not distinguish between humans at work and humans at home. Their cognitive, emotional and sensory systems were ancient. Buildings needed to respond organically, no matter whether the building was home or office, Georgian or Modern. ●

Working Drawings for a Temporary Structure: The Palace of Fine Arts

Maybeck used delicate working drawings, crisply drawn templates, and design tools such as photography—which became available with the new technology—to produce a building whose details gave the impression of incompleteness, improvisation, and pre-industrial methods.



a



b



c



d

Alexander Ortenberg, AIA

Editor's note: This article continues the exploration of architectural construction documents begun in [arcCA 6.1](#).

opposite: (Fig 1) The Palace of Fine Arts, columns' capital's studies: a) a charcoal study (Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley, Bernard R. Maybeck Collection); b) a photograph from Hector d'Espouy's *Fragments d'architecture...*, the Temple of Castor and Pollux (Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley, William G. Merchant / Hans U. Gerson Collection); c) a photograph of an intermediate charcoal study (Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley, Bernard R. Maybeck Collection); d) the current condition (photograph by the author).

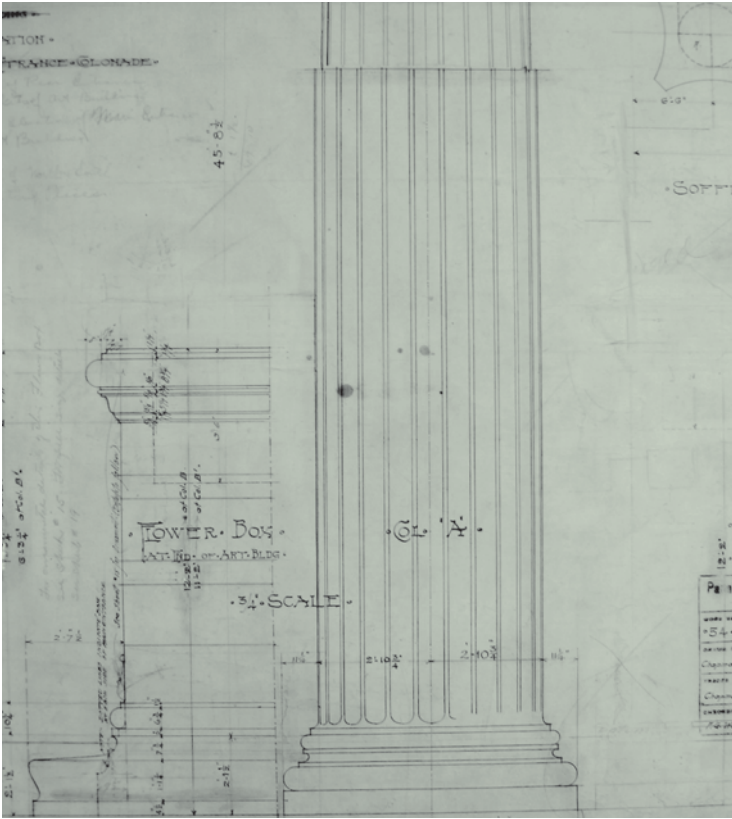
According to a widely held assumption, architectural working drawings have emerged partly in response to new, complex technology, partly because of the necessity to avoid waste while using expensive and durable materials. A study of working drawings produced for Bernard Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco may provide an additional insight into the practice.

Since 1916, when it was built as part of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, terms such as “dreamlike” or “ghostlike” became permanently attached to this structure. Often summarized in comparison with a stage set, these qualities won the hearts of many Exposition visitors. To certain portions of the architectural profession and critics, the same characteristics amounted to an anathema.

Contrasting architecture with scenography—using the latter as a negative term—was typical of architectural discourse in the end of the nineteenth century, when the profession was making an effort to outline its own standards. According to this view, architecture should strive to be an honest and earnest representation of building materials and social conditions, while stage sets may be designed based on less discriminating principles. In an article published soon after the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, certain architects were criticized for practicing their craft as “stage scenery, camouflaging arbitrarily, as suited to the architect's fancy, the real thing underlying it.”¹

The reaction to Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts largely depended on its status. It was somewhat acceptable to architectural purists as a temporary structure. However, when it surpassed this category—when it was spared from demolition after the Exposition's closure in 1916 and, once again, when it was rebuilt in the mid-nineteen sixties in permanent materials—many architects and critics were truly scandalized.

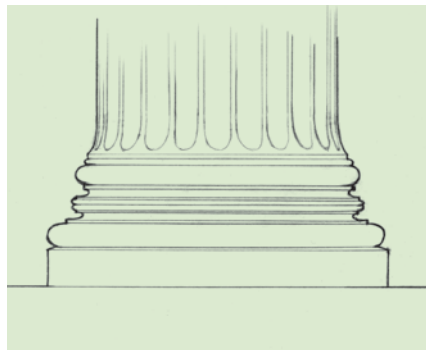
Architectural historian William Jordy, who wrote his seminal *Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* soon after the restoration had been completed, concluded his analysis with a phrase that characteristically contrasted the Palace's dreamlike architecture with



(Fig 2) The Palace of Fine Arts, working drawing. Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley, Bernard R. Maybeck Collection.

below left: (Fig 3) The Palace of Fine Arts, a photograph of a column's capital's mold at a model shop. Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley, William G. Merchant / Hans U. Gerson Collection.

below right: (Fig 4) The Base of the Corinthian column of the Temple of Castor and Pullox. From Hector d'Espouy's *Fragments d'architecture antique*.



earnest design principles, which would have been more appropriate for a piece of permanent architecture. In arguing his point, Jordy used definitions such as “scenographic” and “eccentricity” as derogatory terms, considering it obvious that visual effects used in a stage-set design should not be confused with real architecture.

As Jordy explained his attitude to the project—quite picturesque but short of meeting the standard of rigorous design—he remarked that the project was designed and built without “adequate studies.” Jordy made this observation in passing, simply assuming it self-evident that a temporary pavilion, such as Maybeck’s Palace, should have been built with fewer working drawings than would be required for a typical, permanent structure.²

Jordy could not have been more mistaken. The working drawings for the Palace were quite voluminous and were produced with a very high quality of draftsmanship. Most importantly, the surviving documents witness that the project’s “crudity” and grotesqueness—which Jordy criticized as an outcome of Maybeck’s lack of interest in construction—were in fact carefully planned. They were totally consistent with Maybeck’s concept, recorded in progression from the first charcoal sketches, to the working drawings, to full-size details, and, finally, to full-size molds of details. These were photographed, then pencil corrections made, then the next cast must have been made.

A close look at this process may shed a new light on Maybeck’s intent. Most of turn-of-the-century exhibition pavilions strived to become perfect simulacra of classical buildings constructed in permanent and durable materials. Maybeck’s design, by contrast, emphasized tectonic differences between stone and the inexpensive plaster of which his building was made. While evoking the Corinthian order, Maybeck refused to imitate those characteristics related to the use of stone as the main construction material. In classical originals, the slender proportions of columns and the crispness of details reflect such qualities as firmness and high resistance to vertical stress. On the contrary, Maybeck’s rendition of these details implies a highly malleable and impressionable material. A comparison with the Corinthian order of the Temple of Castor and Pollux—as shown in Hector d’Espouy’s *Fragments d’architecture antique...*—will demonstrate this point.³

Virtually all writers acknowledged that the proportions of the Palace’s column shafts were too short and heavy for the Corinthian order on which they were based. Less often noticed, however, is the equally unorthodox treatment of other elements, which look as if they were made out of a material with greater plasticity and less crispness than stone. It can be seen in the example of Maybeck’s design of column bases—more flattened than those in most interpretations of antiquity (Fig. 2). The same concept is apparent in the treatment of the columns’ fluting. Traditionally made in the form of semicircular concavities, it is much shallower in the case of the Palace (See Fig. 5). Moreover, looking at an intermediate sketch, and their form in the final working drawings, one can see that the design was developing toward a more unusual rendition.

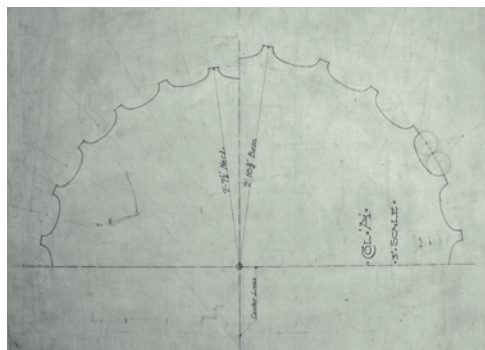
1. See anonymous article “Architect Must Meet Changed Conditions” in *The Architect and Engineer of California*, vol. LIV. n.2. (August, 1918): 107-108.
2. Jordy states that Maybeck’s design was “arbitrary,” that it “happened without premises,” and that the project was “unabashedly scenographic”—which, for the critic, amounts to “perversity” (Jordy, 1972: 276, 288).
3. See Hector d’Espouy, *Fragments d’architecture antique d’après les relèves et restaurations des anciens pensionnaires de l’Académie de France a Rome* (Paris, Ch. Massin, 1905). According to a number of historians and contemporaries, drawings from d’Espouy’s collection were among Maybeck’s major sources. See, for example, Kenneth H. Cardwell, *Bernard Maybeck: Architect, Artisan, Artist* (Peregrin Smith, Inc., 1977: 149). A photograph copy of the plate from the book, showing a column’s capital of the temple’s Corinthian order, survived among Maybeck’s records pertaining to the project of the Palace of Fine Arts (See Fig 1 b).

The same development can be seen in the evolution of Maybeck’s design for the columns’ capitals (See Fig. 1). One of the first full-size charcoal sketches already shows his tendency toward a soft, less-refined shape. If compared with Corinthian capitals after d’Espouy, it becomes clear that he intended to impart a feeling of imprecision. Occasional intermediate overlays on tracing paper show that oscillations occurred between the softness of his original sketch and a more traditional version of the Corinthian order. And yet the capitals as they were finally executed are closer to the charcoal sketch than this intermediate study. Moreover, the series of photographs of full-size models of these capitals serves as convincing proof of the fact that, during later phases of the design process, the architect once again returned to his original emphasis on the visual qualities of highly-malleable materials (Fig. 3). A highly-detailed template, hanging on the wall of the shop, indicates that Maybeck must have taken great care to specify these qualities. Besides, the pencil marks on some of these photographs—which were intentionally overexposed to allow for such marks— indicate that, at this stage of the design, Maybeck was still searching for softer and cruder shapes.

This phenomenon recalls a remark made by architect and historian Edward Ford in the context of his discussion of a project by English architect Norman Shaw. The style of the project was influenced by a medieval half-timber frame, and the drawing that caught Ford’s attention specified unevenly positioned vertical timber elements. Ford noticed the irony in the fact that Shaw “had to specify precisely, how the imprecision was to be achieved.” Accordingly, Maybeck used delicate working drawings, crisply drawn templates, and design tools such as photography—which became available with the new technology—to produce a building whose details gave the impression of incompleteness, improvisation, and pre-industrial methods.

A study of the working drawings produced for the Palace of Fine Arts reveals a number of paradoxes. It supports the notion of this project uniquely combining the sense of tactility with its overall dreamlike image. In addition, the production of meticulous working drawings for a temporary structure built out of inexpensive materials defies a number of assumptions about the origin of contemporary architectural practices. The fact that Maybeck emphasized the thrifty nature and temporality of his Palace makes this paradox even more striking.

It is unquestionable that architectural working drawings—whose production did not become a norm until the mid-nineteenth century—reflected the rapid change in construction technology, such as the use of cast iron, steel, and eventually, reinforced concrete. It is also clear that they evolved as the architect was becoming increasingly removed from the construction site. Finally, their production became possible because new design media—from tracing paper to photography—were becoming part of the late-nineteenth-century architect’s arsenal. And yet, Maybeck’s drawings also witness the architect’s desire to bring the feeling of tactility back to architectural production. Even as they made use of the new design media and facilitated the new construction technology, architectural drawings have often served the modern architect’s desire to return to the image of the craftsman, to be in touch with his design. ●



left: (Fig 5) The Palace of Fine Arts, column’s fluting: a fragment from a working drawing. Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley, Bernard R. Maybeck Collection.

... and Counting

I love Los Angeles. I love Hollywood. They're beautiful. Everybody's plastic, but I love plastic. I want to be plastic. - Andy Warhol

L.A.'s Shape

The most Interesting aspect of the shape of Los Angeles is the long narrow strip known as the Shoestring Corridor, which was annexed by the city in 1906. Sixteen miles long, but just half a mile wide, this strip connects central L.A. to the city's harbor in San Pedro, slicing through the cities of Gardena, Carson, Torrance, and Lomita. On any clearly demarcated map, it appears that the City of Angels has the tail of a devil.

www.thingstodo-losangeles.com

L.A.'s Port

Los Angeles / Long Beach cargo volume annually: \$248 billion.
Next largest U.S. port: New York / New Jersey at \$132 billion.

www.wsj.com

L.A.'s Area

465 sq. mi. (1,200 sq. km.) in the City of Los Angeles, 4,100 sq. mi. (10,600 sq. km.) in L.A. County.

www.thingstodo-losangeles.com

AIA LA

Los Angeles has the largest number of active AIA members out of the twenty-one California AIA chapters at 2,511 members. The next three largest California chapters are San Francisco at 2,181, San Diego at 1,129 and Orange County at 1,113.

www.aiacc.org

Five of California's ten NAAB accredited architecture schools are located in the Los Angeles basin:

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
Southern California Institute of Architecture
University of California at Los Angeles
University of Southern California
Woodbury University
www.naab.org

David Meckel, FAIA

Light up L.A.

Miles of Streets in the City of Los Angeles: 7,300.

Miles of Lighted Streets in the City of Los Angeles: 5,000.

Number of Streetlights: Over 242,000.

Number of Different Styles of Streetlights Currently Being Maintained: Over 400.

www.lacity.org

Drive on L.A.

DPW makes 200,000 repairs a year, resurfacing and reconstructing 150 to 200 miles of roads annually;

... cleans public streets and alleys using a variety of methods including machine sweeping over 600,000 curb miles per year; and

... trims, plants, and maintains the City's 680,000 tree urban forest, trimming approximately 90,000 trees annually, maintains over 290 acres of landscaped median islands, and enforces street tree and oak tree ordinances.

www.lacity.org

L.A. in a Word

Los Angeles's full name is "El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de los Angeles de Porciuncula."

<http://dogman0.tripod.com>

The Biggest Bowl

The Hollywood Bowl is the world's largest outdoor amphitheater.

www.shgresources.com

L.A. Folk

The Los Angeles metropolis is home to 3.6 million Latinos, 1.8 million Asians and Pacific Islanders, 1.3 million African Americans, 90,000 Native Americans, and a balance of European Americans in a head-spinning mosaic of 17 million residents.

www.soulofamerica.com

Dot L.A.

L.A.'s "Digital Coast" fills more multimedia jobs (133,000) than Silicon Valley and New York City combined.

www.soulofamerica.com



For Richer, For Poorer . . .

Barton Phelps, FAIA

From: BPALA@aol.com | Date: Mon, 13 Mar 2006 20:04:52 EST

I wish I could find a picture of what the Melrose Ave. elevation of the Pacific Design Center looked like for its first 20 years or so. The spoiler was a tiny foundry or heavy metal plating operation that had been there forEver. They tried to plant it out but everybody knew what it was.

From: BPALA@aol.com | Date: Mon, 20 Mar 2006 16:54:48 EST

I shot the CAA vs. Starbucks (nee Wilson's House of Suede and Leather) spoiler on Sunday morning at 7:00 AM. I could not get the straight-on shot of the Norman(?) barn in front of the Pei boys.

From: BPALA@aol.com | Date: Wed, 22 Mar 2006 21:31:22 EST

It's a High / Low thing that is tolerated around here. It's also about vanity and venality and self promotion at any cost and the lack of embarrassment and the strength of the vernacular. Pomposity of two different kinds. But it appears to be a natural/human/cultural force—that's where Frost comes in: you know, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that sends the frozen ground swell under it and topples boulders in the sun and makes gaps even two can pass abreast. The work of hunters is another thing..." or something like that.

top left: Creative Artists Agency / former Wilson's House of Suede and Leather, Little Santa Monica Blvd and Wilshire Blvd

top right: Robertson Library / "Hot" Billboard, S. Robertson Blvd at Airdrome St.

bottom left and center: Getty Center / Holiday Inn, W. Sunset Blvd and the 405

bottom right: Olympia Medical Center / L.M. Insurance, W. Olympic Blvd at San Vicente

From: BPALA@aol.com | Date: Mon, 3 Apr 2006 17:50:00 EDT

shit. Do you have time for me to get the Holiday Inn at the Getty? (it's raining right now)

From: BPALA@aol.com | Date: Thu, 6 Apr 2006 13:06:59 EDT

Beautiful morning! I just bagged three great spoilers and am working on captions. Will send them this aft if film comes out ok. New title: "For Richer or Poorer..." a kind of landscape wedding theme...

From: BPALA@aol.com | Date: Fri, 7 Apr 2006 13:00:54 EDT

May I please see this article of mine before it goes to press? ☺