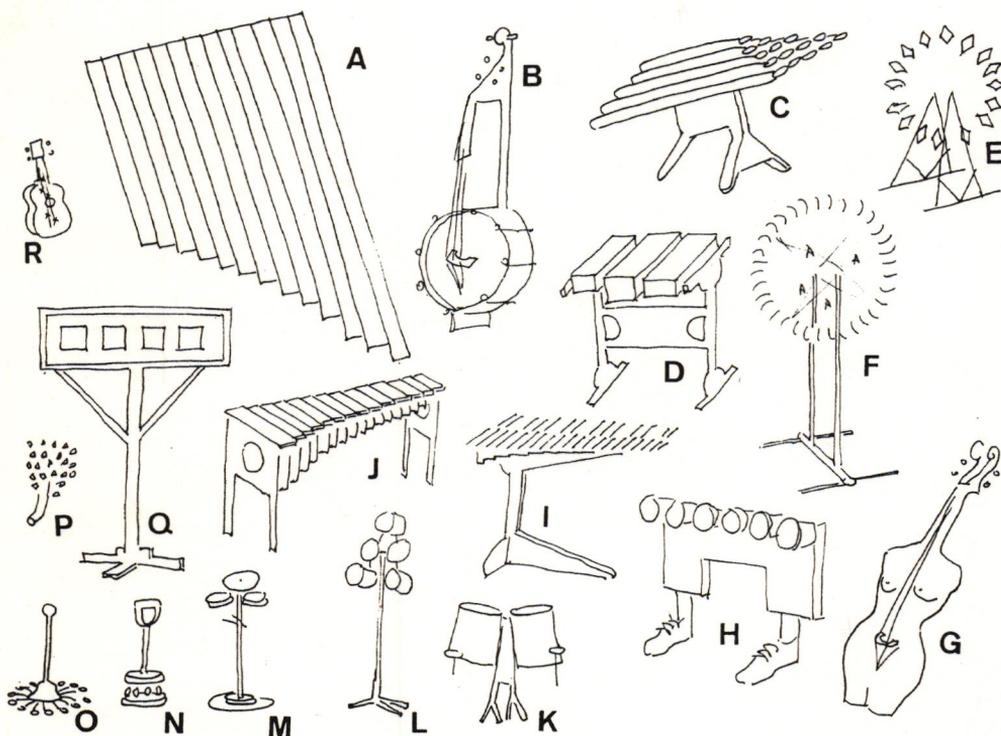
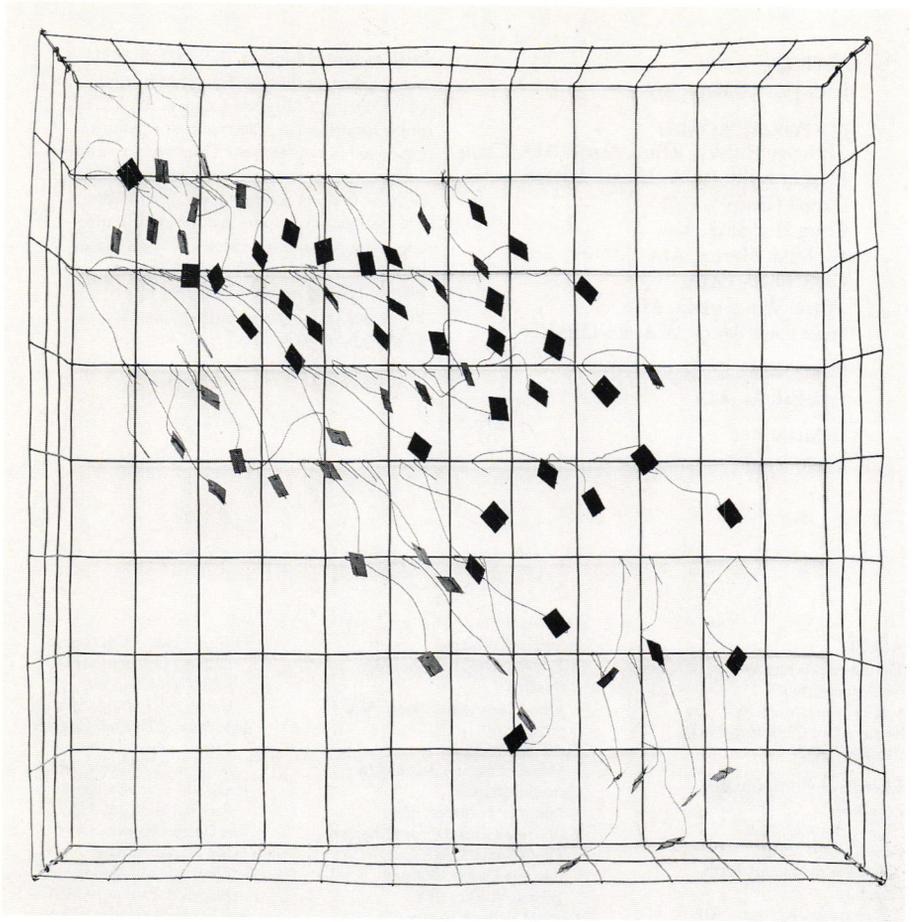


May 1993

# ARCHITECTURE CALIFORNIA





Tim Prentice, *Untitled*, 24" x 24" steel wire and aluminum. Cover: Sketch of homemade instruments by Tim Prentice and Steve Silverman from the recent exhibition *Please Play* at the Century Association, New York. A. Pan Pipe (whack on the open ends); B. Mother Plucker (base drum & clothes line); C. P.V.C. Bach (pat on the flattened ends); D. Tongue Drums; E. Mo Bell I; F. Mo Bell II (vanes from plastic milk containers); G. A Little Night Music; H. Pot Belly (strike gently); I. Spike (ten penny nails); J. Two-by-phone (mahogany & mailing tubes); K. McThump (pickle jugs from MacDonald's); L. Pentaphone; M. Le Rouge and le Noir; N. Goat Bells; O. Tinkle; P. Handel; Q. Petra Phone (roof slate from old Belvedere in Central Park); R. Protest Song.

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A R C H I T E C T U R E  
**CALIFORNIA**

Volume 17 Number 1 May 1995

## Other Than Architecture

- 4 From the Editor
- 6 Architecture As Language  
JOHN L. FIELD, FAIA
- 8 "Painting, sculpture, and architecture...the main element is pastry making"  
JEREMIAH TOWER
- 10 Movement in Play  
TIM PRENTICE
- 17 An Architect in the Garden  
KATHERINE SPITZ, AIA, ASLA
- 22 Onto Pressing Matters  
ANN E. GRAY, AIA
- 25 Perspective of a Winged Eye  
ALEX MACLEAN
- 32 On a High Note  
ANN HUGHES
- 35 For the Good of the State  
BRIAN A. SEHNERT, AIA
- 38 Building Ecology Is My Destiny  
HAL LEVIN
- 41 Los Angeles into the Future: Two Hills One Vision  
ELPIDIO ROCHA
- 47 "The Airplane and the Garden City":  
Regional Transformations During World War II  
GREG HISE
- 55 The Architect of the New Public Realm  
HARVEY B. GANTT, FAIA
- etcetera**
- 60 School Funding Sketches  
JIM GILLIAM, AIA
- 64 The Architecture of the Jumping Universe  
CHARLES JENCKS
- 69 Latinos in California's Future  
LEO F. ESTRADA
- 72 Light on a "Temple of Art"  
RICHARD BARNES
- 74 Particular in the Global  
ENRIQUE NORTEN, ASSOC. AIA
- 76 Local Lessons on College Avenue  
DONALD WARDLAW, AIA
- 78 Civic Innovations
- 79 Letters

# From the Editor: Who Is An Architect?

*Let him be educated, skillful with the pencil, instructed in geometry, know much history, have followed the philosophers with attention, understand music, have some knowledge of medicine, know the opinions of the jurists, and be acquainted with astronomy and the theory of the heavens.*

*Vitruvius, c. 90 B.C.*

The profession of architecture is going through tremendous change. The public image of the architect is transforming. The very definition of architecture practice is open for reconsideration, as licensed architects pursue a wide variety of creative practices—from project development to product design—and many who are not ‘architects’ tackle traditional architectural roles—from “theming” a building to managing constructing. Who is an architect?

As we all participate in the design of our emerging profession, the Editorial Board is pleased to focus this edition of *Architecture California* on a variety of talented, trained architects who have been compelled to pursue work—“other than architecture”—outside of the traditional parameters of the field. The contributors to this edition illuminate the particular talents that drew them to study architecture but then led them on to invent and define entirely new careers. They give us insight into the interdisciplinary relationship between architecture and the arts and social sciences. And they help us embrace the question, what is architecture anyway?

The Editorial Board’s premise in planning this theme was that architec-

ture education prepares us to do a lot more than we often realize, that artistic talent and problem-solving aptitudes are interconnected, that the common root of generative thinking is transferable to a wide range of applications.

Three distinct responses to the question “why did you leave ‘architecture’?” appear: some were driven by creative impulse to employ another medium better able to express their talents; some sought expertise in a specialization tangential to architecture and have refined it; and others, due to recession or economic necessity, pursued alternative means to make a living and found entirely new fields in which to engage themselves. In each case a unique link to architecture still appears in the particular character of their work. The seeming dichotomy between creativity and problem solving is collapsed when we look at the commonality between the diverse creators featured here: they each manifest a highly generative synthetic imagination.

For me, in fact, this selection of writers is most interesting because of their similarities, rather than their differences. They reveal the personal aptitudes that draw people to study architecture, and the talents that are cultivated through architecture education. Rather than explain the authors’ separation from architecture, their essays begin to explicate the basic elements that define architecture practice in its broadest sense.

Yet, the particular essays do bring different things to us for consideration. Some authors have engaged us directly, detailing how their training in architecture evolved into their present line of



Sketch by Jim Gilliam from *School Funding Sketches*.

work. Tower, Prentice, MacLean, and Hughes each convey the power of their creative impulse to lead them in entirely uncharted directions. Spitz, Gray, Sehnart, and Levin show the potential of architects to become leaders in tangentially related fields. Rocha, Hise, and Gantt—activist, historian, and politician, respectively—are selected to show the force of their present work.

Whether these architects were drawn to architecture's artistic dimension or its place in the real world of problem solving, their desire and ability to delineate a path into the unknown replicates another basic attribute of architecture practice. This also explains why people not trained as architects but possessing similar endowments are able to grab hold of aspects of traditional practice and master them.

In this edition of *etcetera*, Gilliam's sketches put a time-honored skill to work in capturing the social, political, professional experience of practitioners who have struggled to advance the

cause of public school construction. Jencks's excerpts outline the possible impacts in architecture of the new chaos theory. Estrada's demographic lesson deepens our grasp of the State's future Latino populations.

We welcome Barnes again, to shed his unique light on seemingly familiar subject matter. Nortén's comments whet our appetite for the discussion in the next edition on the issues involved in practice along the Pacific Rim. Wardlaw's account of the College Avenue walk provides a model of possible contributions by local AIA chapters to their communities. And the recognition of the Civic Innovations competition winners brings this edition of *Architecture California* full circle: The creative talents of architects—released from the bounds of conventional practice—hold tremendous potential to establish a new place for architecture in transforming our culture.

Lian Hurst Mann, AIA

# Architecture As Language

*John L. Field, FAIA*

The changes wrought by each recession have as a byproduct a profound rethinking about what we as architects are doing with our lives. That is one reason we hear so often today from all of the professions that plying their special skills is no longer what it was; it is no fun anymore. Is that because we had all of our fun in the eighties? Or perhaps we made fun out of something serious that would long outlast our humor. Or, it may have been only a private joke in the first place, and we were the only ones laughing. No matter. Today, professions such as architecture, medicine, and law remain the same, but our professional lives are radically different, and we liked it better the way it was.

Architects by the nature of our training are unusual in modern life. We are nineteenth century creatures, even if we use computers instead of drafting boards. We are unique in the endless learning our profession requires from project to project. Our natural skills and talents combined with this established process of inquiry ever broaden our life experience rather than constantly reducing it. This process fits our abundant curiosity and without our realizing it prepares us to undertake a variety of avenues other than traditional architecture practice. The constant thread in our work and our training is the experience of learning to make meaningful relationships between elements and functions that are seemingly unrelated.

But we would undervalue our skills if we saw ourselves as being only build-

ing designers. The Bauhaus was based on bringing together all the creative arts. Charles Eames combined his many skills as architect, furniture designer, film maker, exhibition designer, and collector. Thomas Jefferson was an architect, a philosopher, a statesman, an author, and a politician. Our natural turn of mind endows many of us with the talent to “design” more than buildings.

We tend to see our training too much as a trade school. Instead, we should view architecture education as we would an education in mathematics or philosophy: the opportunity to learn an intellectual approach to be applied to complex problem solving. There is hardly a politician who wouldn't be better off having studied to be an architect first.

Beyond the visual, creative design involves all mediums wherein it is possible to touch the human response systems. The common element in all forms of creativity is the ability by means of a unique language to bring concepts from the mind and give them a form that can be commonly understood by others through one of the human senses. Architecture, literature, music, film, cuisine, dance, painting, sculpture: all have their form of communication. We as creators share the ability to see, or hear, or feel, or taste something that doesn't exist for others until we give it a form and language all can share.

Just as buildings need structure, so does the novel. If we, as architects, excel at imagining places, what else is the novelist creating? We listen as does the

novelist to hear unspoken truths. The chef seeks the nature of basic ingredients as we look for the site features and the climate of the surrounding environment to give our designs roots of place. The mixture of flavors is no less design then steel next to glass next to brick. Light defines our buildings as it does any sculpture. The composer reveals and develops a theme by motivating the listener's senses as the architect forms a path for the body to follow by motivating the human eye. Lucky is the novelist, however, for few readers are going to start at the end of a tale or begin reading in the middle. The architect is the only one of the creative spirits who is once removed from the reality of the medium of creation, separated by the drawings that precede the actuality of the building.

The architect has not always worked at such distance from the object created, which may explain an unconscious need of the creative spirit that has led so many of us out of the profession, even after years of success in practice. Whatever the reasons, the creative drive persists. The well known chef Jeremiah Tower designs food and its presentation as much as he composes the environments of his very successful restaurants: form, color, texture, light, space, and sound.

I find this drive to create through all variety of mediums a more likely explanation for architects moving out of the profession than the lack of adequate money. Modern life is increasingly made up of dehumanizing experiences, synthetic sensory stimulation, and nonsensical regulation. We are looking for new ways of dealing with our problems, and we need a larger view that sees synthesis as solution. It may be that our profession has been missing opportunities to participate in society and that students who crowd into the architecture schools should be encouraged to take their training into the world and

apply it way beyond the traditional practice of architecture.

If a diplomat can be referred to as the "architect" of a foreign policy, the word clearly suggests broader meaning than merely the builder. After all, we never hear of anyone being called the lawyer of a foreign policy doctrine.

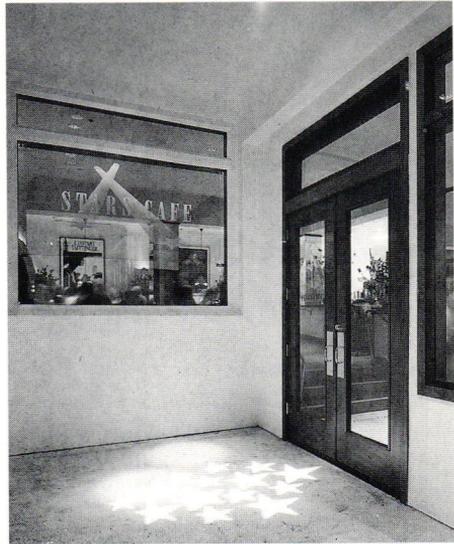
# “Painting, sculpture, and architecture ...the main element is pastry making”

*Jeremiah Tower*

*Now leader of StarTeam, Ltd., Jeremiah Tower is the creative hand behind Stars San Francisco and Palo Alto, Stars Cafe, Stars Oakville Cafe, and Starbake. Educated as an architect, Tower is a father of California cuisine.*

The quote from Fournier—“Three branches of Art: painting, sculpture, and architecture, of which the main element is pastry making”—expresses the similarity between the plastic arts: the structuring of formal elements. It has always been a very funny part of my history that I trained as an architect at Harvard and then ended up becoming first a chef, and then a restaurateur. Both are professions that require an enormous amount of creativity, balanced with logical planning. You cannot design a building without adhering to code, and you cannot prepare a dish without making certain the flavors of the ingredients work well together.

In recent years, as I have opened new restaurants and overseen the remodeling of others, I find I am using my architectural training even more. Obviously, most architects are not restaurateurs and sometimes place the aesthetic over the practical. Restaurants must be practical, not only for the customers (where is that restroom?), but also for the restaurant staff. A waiter, while preparing coffee or busing dishes, should never be in a customer’s way. Circulation is so important in restaurants, yet many architects I have worked with would rather sacrifice circulation and install an art-in-architecture program, or perhaps a dais in



Entrance to Stars Cafe. The spotlight of stars on the sidewalk clearly indicates the entrance as well as providing an unobtrusive design detail.

the restaurant’s entrance, or hand-stenciled lettering on a wall near the kitchen (which would be a nightmare to clean if a waiter tripped and spilled soup on the wall). All might be beautiful, but not necessarily practical.

Anyone who works in the restaurant industry looks at a restaurant space in a completely different way from an architect designing the space. My training has given me the language and the knowledge to design most of the restaurants myself, with the architects providing knowledge of code requirements and essentially translating my vision to paper and then to reality.

My training has also given me the skill to ask designers the right questions, and to know when an architect is



Stars Bar. The bar runs the length of the restaurant providing a geographical point as well as a clear circulation path.



Stars Cafe upper level dining area. A clear circulation path meets a dining area with flattering light and unobtrusive design elements.

designing for their own portfolio, and not for the good of the restaurant's customers and staff.

Also, my appreciation for many kinds of architecture and design has helped me to better design my own restaurants. While I love certain periods and styles of architecture, restaurant design makes a logical synthesis of various style elements, again because of the need for practicality, and the need to accommodate changing technologies, such as in the kitchen and restaurant computer systems.

The point, common to the design of an extraordinary menu and the design of a successful restaurant, is to create excitement by simple means.