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Faith Stories from an Irreverent Architect Building Christ the Light Notes On Loss & Funerary Architecture  
Sacred San Francisco What We Lost When We Came Here In Praise of Fallow Fields  
Without a Trace Kings Day, 2008 In Memory: John Leighton Chase

FAITH & LOSS



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As we began to prepare for this issue, I corresponded with my oldest childhood friend, back in Tennessee: Tom Gibson, who has grown up to be a Methodist minister and semi-professional magician. Here is a bit of our exchange.

[Tim] The fourth quarter issue of **arcCA** this year is on "Faith and Loss"—religious and memorial architecture, but we're also interested in stretching the boundaries; any interest in weighing in?

[Tom] How very thoughtful to pair the two. Sometimes loss calls faith into question and sometimes faith grows from, or at least in response to, loss.

One of my favorite word-of-the-day entries from a calendar a decade or so ago is "cenotaph." The Lincoln Memorial is one. I always thought it would be the perfect name for a church, "Cenotaph United Methodist Church." Folks would ask, "What does that mean?" and I'd answer, "A memorial building dedicated to one whose remains are not there." The stained glass in the narthex would be a depiction of the angels at the empty tomb, telling the women, "He is not here, but is risen."

In the past few years, I have been drawn to labyrinths and their meditative properties. There is a bit of literature on walking the labyrinth as an exercise for letting go of loss, entering into the center of pain and working your way back out. You might look to see where some labyrinths are incorporated into architecture and landscape. Grace Cathedral in San Francisco has a Chartres labyrinth indoors and another on the grounds. California has a number of New Age versions too, but I don't know the scope and range of architectural forms and variations you might find: <http://labyrinthlocator.com>.

[Tim] There was for a while in the architectural theory realm a notion referred to as "the presence of an absence"—the idea that you can shape a space in such a way as to evoke something that is not there. It got all hyped up and not much was done substantively, that I recall, other than academic posturing, but it is a potent idea; the obvious common example is an empty stage. A Dutch architect, Herman Hertzberger, says, less highfalutin'ly, that the building should be a pedestal; the people are the art; that, contrary to the way buildings are usually portrayed in the architecture press, they should give the feeling that something is missing if people are absent from the scene. I like that way of thinking about it, myself.

There's a labyrinth in an old quarry in a regional park near us, and the kids like to run around it. In the rainy season, a shallow pond forms adjacent to it, where the newts breed. There's a road up that way that they close every year for the newt-crossing season. I don't know that the newts have anything more intentional to do with the labyrinth.

[Tom] Presence of an absence? A packed phrase, that one! That's really what loss is about, now that you mention it. Not the absence of a presence; that would just be a void. A never occupied building may give that feeling, but a once-busy-but-not-now-occupied building would better convey loss, the lingering sense of no-longer. A pedestal topped only by the un-discolored circle indicating where the statuary used to stand, or perhaps the statue's crumbling foot and ankle reaching up to the space left by the missing mass once above it, or the distant feet of a broken arch, parenthesizing open air. Loss isn't just nothingness, but a feeling of no-that-thingness, like that ghost image you get when you stare at a spot then turn your head and blink; retention of vision, we call it in magic circles. Empty space can be very calming. Emptied space has an altogether different vibe.

Walk peacefully,  
Tim Culvahouse, FAIA  
Editor



Tom

Tim



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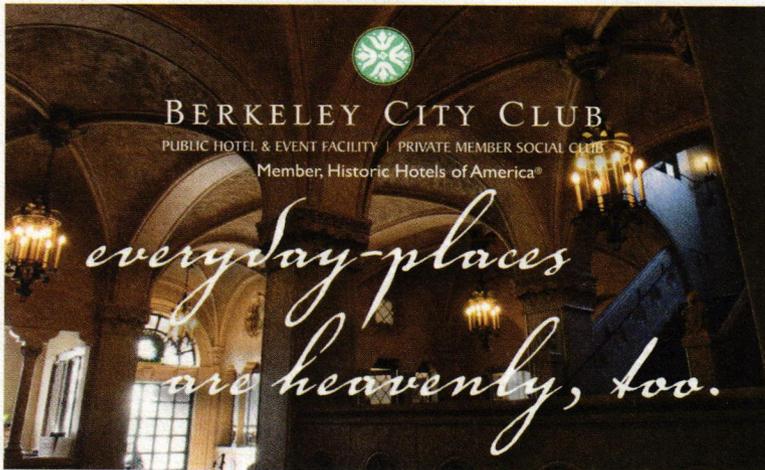
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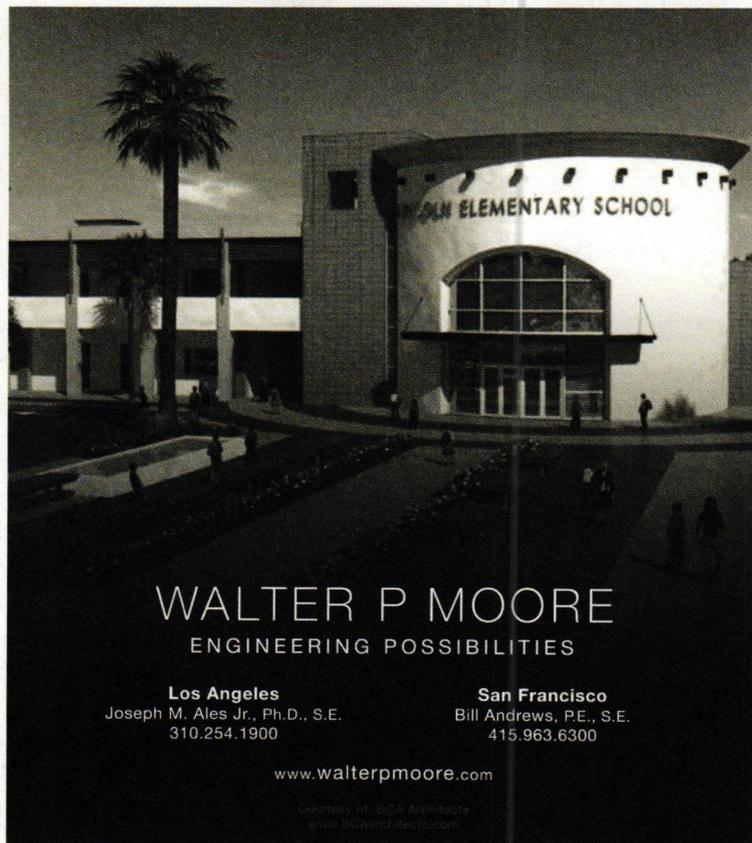
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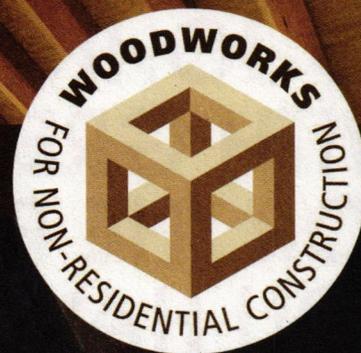
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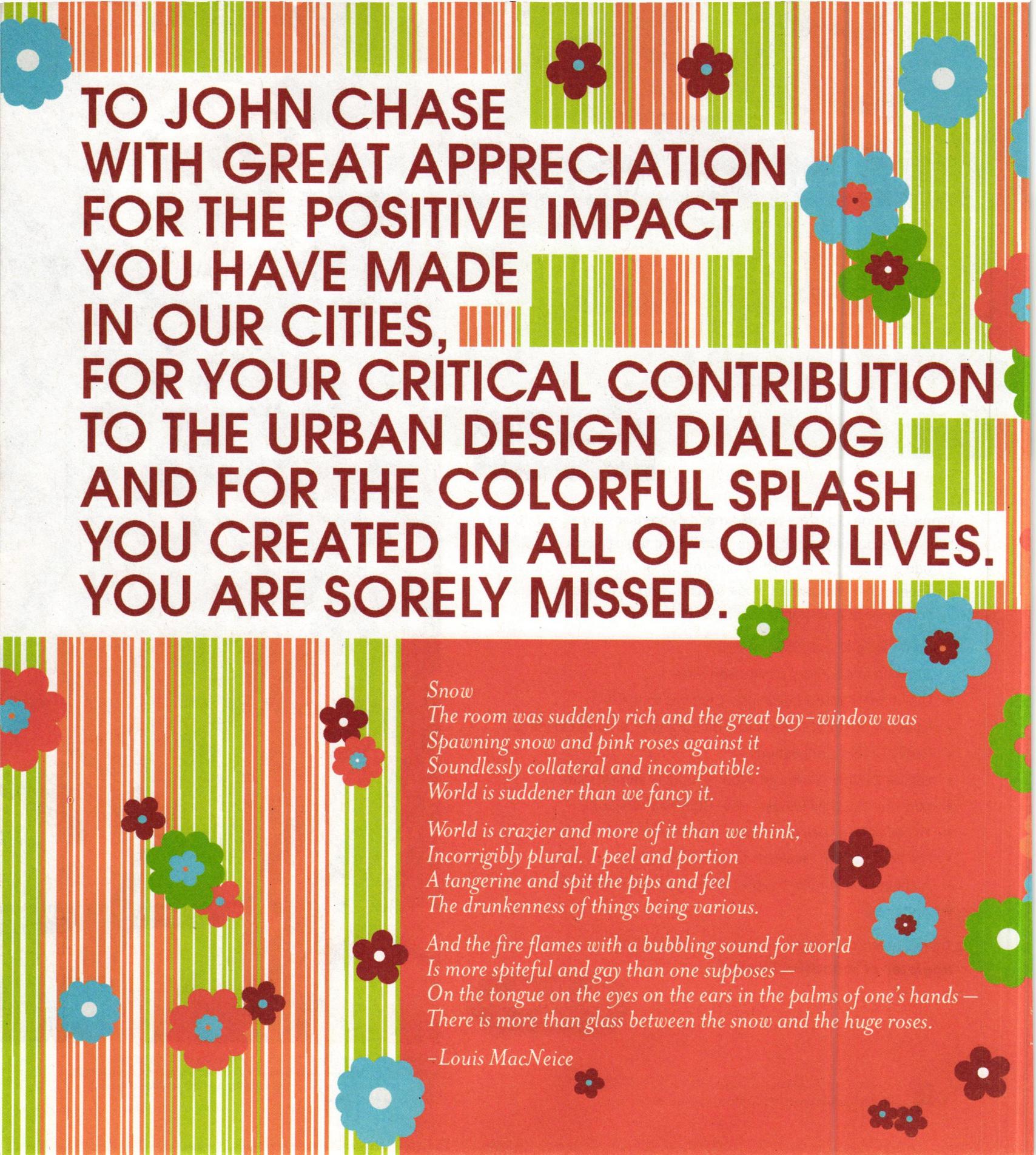
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*Snow*

*The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was  
Spawning snow and pink roses against it  
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:  
World is suddener than we fancy it.*

*World is crazier and more of it than we think,  
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion  
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel  
The drunkenness of things being various.*

*And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world  
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes —  
On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands —  
There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.*

*-Louis MacNeice*

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# Faith Stories

# Irreverent

from an

# Architect

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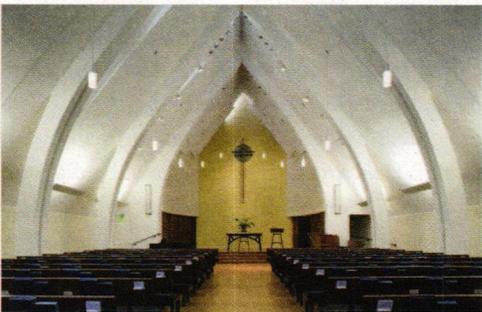
Jim Goring, AIA

My father worked at DMJM for twenty years, and, after missile silos, auto dealerships, post offices, and condominiums, he ultimately worked on a church. Maybe that's where it began. As a kid, I went to construction sites and watched Los Angeles grow up. I do recall the church project as one that made him happy.

My mother was a true Southern California seeker. She was very social, made friends with movie stars, and carted me to a number of churches. We finally settled on Westwood Hills Christian Church in the shadow of UCLA, in part I think because General Omar Bradley's family attended. In high school, I followed the girls and guitars to a Christian group called Young Life. What was memorable was their summer camp, 100 miles north of Vancouver at the mouth of the Princess Louisa Inlet—a stunningly transformed resort at the mouth of the fjord bordered by a narrow, tidal river. In the morning, you would look up from your bowl of Cheerios to see grizzly bears whack salmon out of the water. Timber architecture, god, girls, guitars, and grizzlies—it was an amazing experience of the power of place.

While few architects I have met are overtly religious, all understand that a building—perhaps more accurately, a space—can have great spiritual power. Don Olsen, noted architect and professor at Cal, told a class I was in once about an epiphany he experienced in the Hagia Sophia. For him, it was a completely individual awakening having to do with scale and his place in that volume and an overwhelming sense of infinity suggested by the expansiveness beyond the low dangling lamps. Yet his experience was related to the place, and in a way that others could share in, as well.

Religious institutions don't typically select an architect because of his or her faith. They want a design that meets a budget, and they want somebody with whom they can endure a long project, somebody who can bring many parties to the table and keep them engaged. They understand their faith but are less clear on how to reflect that in physical terms, involve donors, staff,



Montclair Presbyterian Church, photo opposite by Lee Aurich;  
above by David Wakely



above left, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Belvedere, photo by David Wakely; right, St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Walnut Creek, photo by Mark Lutheringer.

committees, and congregants and keep them interested, not to mention how to get a permit.

Sometimes the committees are very secular: a meeting begins with coffee, a status report, and, unless someone is angry or frustrated, nothing spiritual is mentioned at all. Sometimes they are full of faith, opening with a round of prayer that can seem almost competitive. My favorite clients mix business with faith and intellectual rigor comfortably and naturally. At the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, just about everybody involved was an ordained Jesuit priest. Being an educated bunch, at any point in a meeting they might diverge into an evidently humorous round of Latin quotations that could go above a door—relating simultaneously to the story of Christ, the ridiculous cost of the project, and their frustration with the building department. Design mattered to them, and they were acutely aware of the history on which they can draw. Their architecture connects strongly to their theology and their mission. Working with them felt a lot like going to a college where there was a room full of professors and I was the only student.

Most architects end up specializing in particular building types by chance. In my case, it fortunately began at William Turnbull's office, with Saint Andrew Presbyterian Church in Sonoma. It was a rural area, so Bill and Mary Griffin designed the building to recall the local barns yet clearly be a church—a marker of faith. The gabled building was simple, elegant, and economical—sort of wine country Gothic.

Then a master plan project for the Episcopal Church of Saint Mary the Virgin in San Francisco came into the office, and I was project manager. They had three buildings, including a church building dating back to the 1890s and a parish hall next door that was in bad shape. You had to walk through all their Sunday school rooms to get anywhere, and none of the floors of the buildings lined up with each other. After I was “graduated” from Turnbull's practice (it was a bad year), I started a firm with Tomas Frank, and we finished the project together with the mother office. We turned the parish hall upside down by putting the meeting room upstairs under a big skylight, and renovated the sanctuary minimally—new floor, lighting. At that point, we had completed two or three churches and were therefore experts.

Faith can find a home in surprising places. We helped a Unitarian congregation assess several possible sites in and around Santa Rosa. “Site shopping” was fun in the rolling hills of Sonoma County, where it was easy to imagine an idealized rural sanctuary. Until they added in the cost of parking and access and transport. They settled on a vacant 1980s multiplex downtown, which was perfect. It was a sustainable reuse of a structure that seemed destined for them. Committee members marveled at the serendipity that, with very little change, the “United Artists” sign could transform into “Unitarian Universalist.” The building was also inexpensive—the market for used multiplexes was not big. And a 2,000-space city-owned parking structure ten feet away was

free on Sundays. The closeness of the parking was a sign from ... someone.

Like many of our projects, Montclair Presbyterian Church started out as a seismic rehabilitation—and an opportunity to remedy forty years of deferred maintenance. The sanctuary, a fragile and dated A-frame building, had a wood ceiling and a brick wall behind the pulpit that folks really didn't like (many could tell you the exact number of bricks in that wall). They were an active congregation and wanted something reflecting their sense of dynamism. Plus, it was The Church That Ate Sound, and they had a spectacular music program. We replaced the old plywood arches with smaller pieces of steel and covered up the wood decking with articulated sheetrock, which brightened the space visually and acoustically.

You never know what you'll learn from a church project. A member of the Montclair building committee came to our office one day unannounced and very agitated and asked, “How can we talk about church and not talk about God? Sometimes I think even our ministers are afraid of God.” He was a landscape contractor by trade but had a degree in divinity and had clearly been thinking about this a great deal before coming over to finally let it all out. He started describing how the diagram of a church represents our spiritual progress through life. The narthex is birth, the dark tunnel through which we emerge into the community. Then we're together in the sanctuary—human and flawed, but together as the body, and we move towards the light—the sun,



Dharma Publishing, Berkeley, before and after, photos by Goring & Straja Architects.

literally enlightenment, at the chancel. That was the clearest story about church design that I'd ever heard.

While churches typically teach us to love our neighbor, their neighbors don't always love them. The main reasons are parking and noisy kids. But because you can't eliminate either of these, cranky neighbors sometimes focus on design. So context is no longer a formal argument, but a wedge issue.

In Walnut Creek, we were asked by Saint Matthew Lutheran Church to come in after an unhappy first attempt to create a youth center with GE modulares. We saw the neighbors coming with pitchforks and torches, so we looked for ways to tie the church explicitly to its suburban neighborhood. Instead of extending an institutional-scale building, we proposed several smaller blocks, each of which recalled the design and scale of the Eichlers nearby—and we enclosed those noisy kids. It was a simple, clear gesture that showed that the church was serious (this time), about being sensitive to its neighbors. The pastoral leadership was strong—a surfing senior pastor (his automobile license plate read “SurfRev”), and former high-tech executive pastor (license plate “TechRev”) wanted a process that involved their immediate community as well as the larger community around them. After construction was over, a few neighbors even came over to say how well it turned out. It's a truism, but many voices really make a project stronger.

We like to think of ourselves as modernists in the Bay Area tradition. We like strong

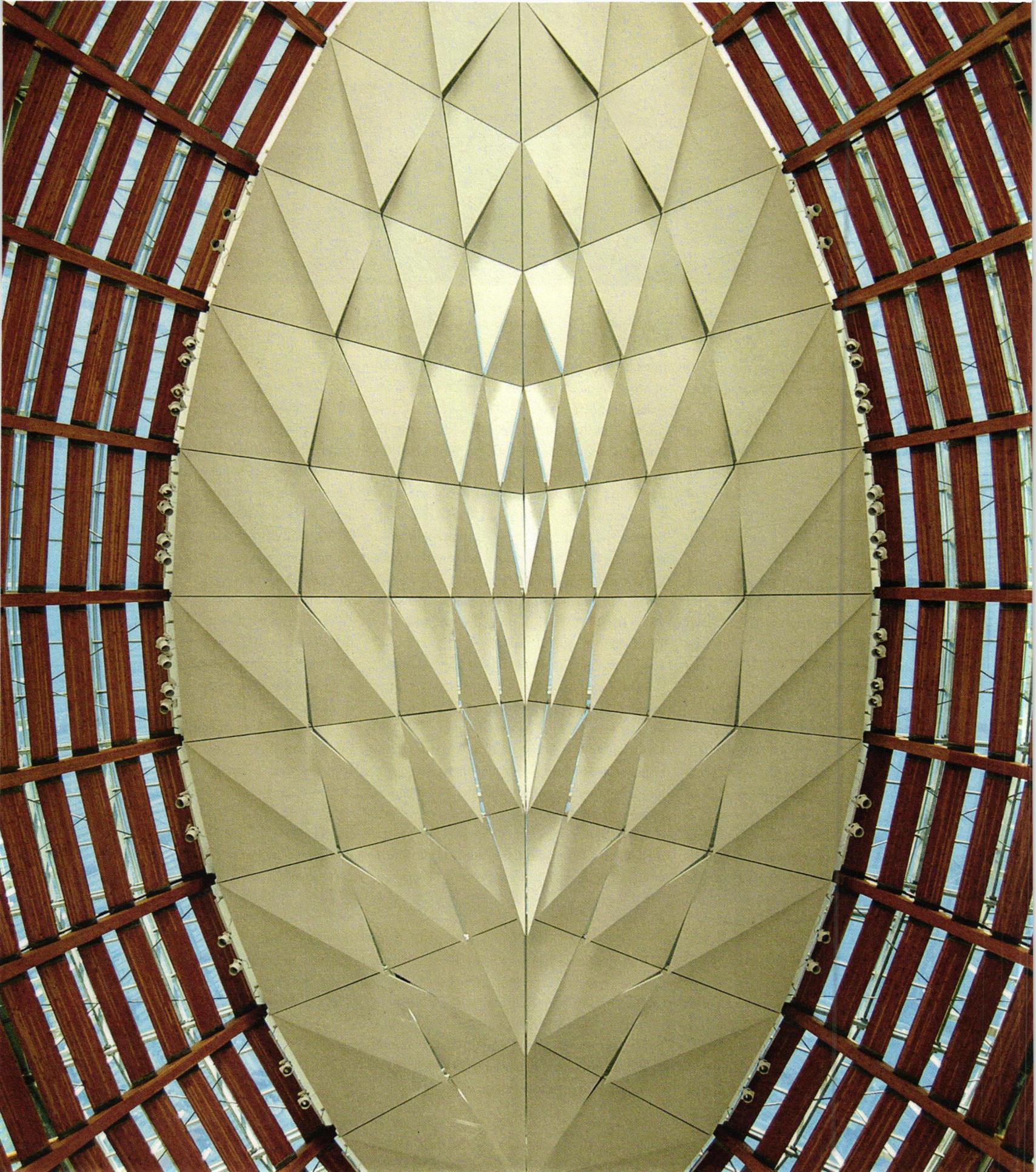
lines, formal rigor, glass, the warmth and craft of wood. But sometimes a building asks for something different. That's happened a few times recently, and it's been an education. In Ross, we are working on a new parish hall for St. Anselm's Church. They have a 1908 sanctuary that is an attractive and richly trimmed Tudoresque pile. Like good Bay Area modernists, we went into the first presentation with something respectful in massing but with a decidedly Sonoma coast bent. But in the middle of the meeting, we paused and said, “Why fight it? What if we really run with that 1908 spirit of joyful, historicist enthusiasm?” You could feel the whole committee relax, and we embraced mannered half-timber, eclectic in the spirit of Ernest Coxhead. Everything in Ross is a revival of one kind or another. We had a corner folly window that drew some attention. In one meeting, a design review commission member—another architect—looked at us knowingly before the vote to approve, and shared that of course the windows are eyes into the soul of the building. Our building committee chair, a very senior executive at a very big bank, turned to me with an incredulous look and asked, “Is this normal?”

In downtown Berkeley, my partner Tom Beil recently transformed a former auto shop nestled between two historic Ratcliff buildings into a Buddhist printing plant—from the 18th century. That got some raised eyebrows, too, but it relates to what is going on inside. You go to school convinced you are going to follow the righteous path of modernism, and one day you

find yourself presenting an eggplant purple and saffron orange Tibetan façade remodel to the Landmarks Commission.

Communities of faith come together for different reasons. One might be trying to quiet the passions of the heart and the imagination. Another connects to a tradition that makes sense of history and family and life and death, giving real structure to lives. Another is intellectually engaged, drawing a line of reasoning that goes back through generations of scholars and lines of academic inquiry and philosophy. Yet another might focus on fellowship, creating closeness and connectedness and community through joint commitment/faith/duty. All of these afford avenues to begin designing and thinking about a space.

We ended up designing churches partly by chance. But I think one of the reasons it works is that, although I'm an irreverent person by nature, I admire and am respectful of people and peoples of faith. And from designing a few, we've come to understand how facilities serve and reflect the mission of a faith community. I think each group we work with is also comforted to hear from us that they aren't as lost at sea in the process as they think they are. We can tell them, “Look, you're right in there with all the others. This project will work. We've seen it happen again and again. And praying can only help.” ●



# Building Christ the Light: a Conversation

with Craig Hartman & Father Paul

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Kenneth Caldwell



*The new Cathedral of Christ the Light on the shores of Oakland's Lake Merritt has been widely published. It has become one of the new landmarks that suggest that the Bay Area is no longer a backwater when it comes to striking contemporary design. We had a conversation with the building's lead designer, Craig Hartman, FAIA, of SOM, and Rev. Paul Minnihan, who served as provost of the new Cathedral during much of the process, about how the bold form came together and what it represents. We met in a conference room at SOM overlooking downtown San Francisco.*

**arcCA:** When did you start working together?

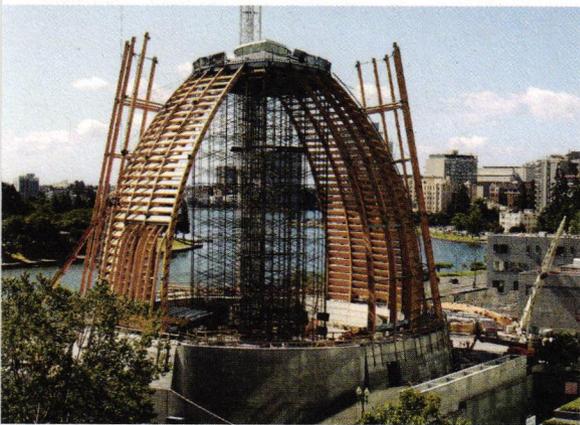
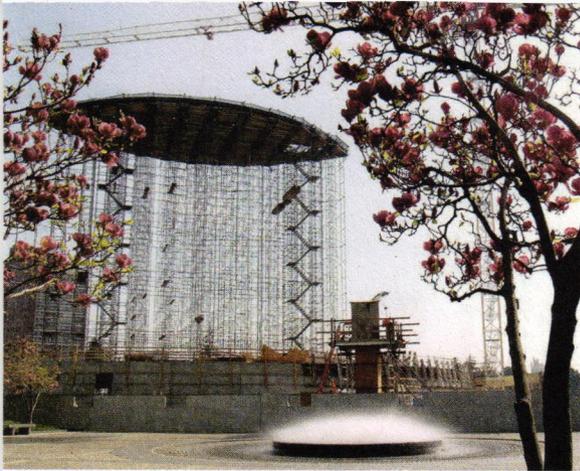
**Minnihan:** We first talked about the cathedral in 2006 when I was pastor of a parish in Moraga. Craig came out with others to share this vision. Initially there was a lot of concern: "Why are we building this?" I jokingly said, "I am cold on cool architecture." Shortly after that, I got a call from Archbishop Vigneron, then Bishop of Oakland, and he said, "I'd like you to become provost of the cathedral." And my response was, "What does that mean?" It came down to working hand in hand with our leadership, the diocese, Craig, and SOM to create the best synergy possible.

**arcCA:** So what changed in your approach?

**Minnihan:** If you consider life as being about learning to learn, it was a matter of my coming into this very room to sit down, listen, and reserve all my opinions.

**Hartman:** Among the most important ideas was that the architecture must be authentic, which I would argue means that it must be of our immediate place, time, and culture.

Another was that its form might spring directly from the Catholic liturgy and the desire for



inclusiveness. From this, the circle emerged as the organizing geometry. Over time, the circle has taken on certain sacred connotations in many religions and cultures, because it has no beginning and no end. But the idea wasn't, "Let's start with a sacred geometry and find a way to make it a church." Instead it was a question of, "What is the essential liturgy of the Catholic Church?" One of the most profound ideas was that a sacred place, a place of worship or faith, is about gathering together as a community. The nature of interior space can have extraordinary impact. As opposed to a traditional basilica—which is linear and hierarchical—the idea of putting the congregation around an altar as one community became the starting point for what this place should be.

**Minnihan:** The fundamental notion that emerged out of the Second Vatican Council was the People of God. Craig is articulating this sense that we gather as one—a single people meant to worship together, gathered around the Eucharistic table to be fed and nourished. And to celebrate culture and art and music.

**arcCA:** Was there criticism about the design?

**Minnihan:** The initial criticisms, as it was going up, were harsh, especially from a certain wing of people of faith. When people say, "But is it a church?" that provides us an opportunity to unpack the metaphor and to tease out the theological reflection that went into it. And so, in the end, people learn about their faith through this building. For example, through the Middle Ages, churches were based in a cruciform—a cross.

**arcCA:** And you see it still in St. Mary's here in San Francisco, a very modern church.

**Minnihan:** Yes. So people walk into this cathedral, and we start talking about the symbol that was prior to the cruciform for Judeo-Christians, which is the Vesica Pisces. That is an "Aha" moment.

**arcCA:** Craig, you wrote something about a stripped-away iconography appropriate for an evolving, multicultural population. I want you to talk a little more about this challenge of abstraction.

**Hartman:** The intention is to cut across class, race, and social conditions, to be welcoming to everyone. We are in a city of many cultures. It's not like Rome or Florence, when the *duomos* were being built for a single culture. This cathedral was built in a democracy. What does this mean architecturally?

I was trying to go back to the essence of space and form and light as the basis of sacred space, as opposed to embellishment. I thought that through light and space and a modesty of materials we could make a strong human connection no matter what your culture, your background. The intention was to achieve warmth, welcome, and a generosity of spirit with modest means.

**Minnihan:** This goes back to Archbishop Vigneron's vision: in this modesty, to capture the faith tradition that is ours. The third verse of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, is, "Let there be light." So it's the very beginnings. And yet, as Craig appreciates, elements of our entire faith tradition up to today weave through the building. The most obvious would be Chartres Cathedral. The pilgrim path that leads you to the great doors of the cathedral is based on the grassy knoll that takes you up to Chartres. And when you come into the cathedral, after the baptistery, you shift direction. Straight ahead you see what is above the entrance to Chartres, the image in the Omega Window of Christ at the end of time.



Opposite, the cathedral during construction;  
above, the Omega window

**arcCA:** This conversation about abstraction brings to mind Father Marie-Alain Couturier's effort to move the Catholic Church to use more contemporary artists and architects, advocating less representational images of the faith. Why did you go back to a 12<sup>th</sup>-century image of Jesus as the focus?

**Hartman:** Archbishop Vigneron supported what we were trying to do, as did our very good art consultant, Brother William Woeger. But the Archbishop felt it was important to have a strong representational image somewhere within this abstract form. I was on board with the idea; I've always thought that one of the great things about the Barcelona Pavilion was the beautiful juxtaposition of the representational sculpture by Georg Kolbe in the pool set within the pavilion's incredibly abstract architectural space.

I wanted to find a way of making an image that would be embedded in the architecture and that, like the architecture, would be understood through light. That was how the pixelated form came about. Once we had arrived at the technique for expressing the image, the question was, what is the content?

Many thought, as perhaps you are suggesting, that we should commission a modern artist. In my opinion, sacred art throughout history has carried with it the cultural prejudices of the artist who creates the work. I wanted to avoid that. So I came to the question, "Through whose eyes and through what cultural lens is this image created?"

Archbishop Vigneron said the image should be what he called the ascendant Christ—not Christ as a corpus on the cross. He had a drawing in his office, an image of Christ framed by the intersecting circles that form the Vesica Pisces shape. It comes from a sculpture above the west portal of Chartres Cathedral. This 12<sup>th</sup>-century image, with its ambiguous, almost Asia-Minor appearance, is the right thing in a building that is trying to go back to the fundamentals of Christian faith in terms of its shape, its materials, and its geometry.

**Minnihan:** You have the Alpha Window, above the great doors as you enter, and then the Omega Window, which is where this image is. Alpha and Omega represent beginning and end, light to light. That image is of Christ at the end of time, seated and embracing people into himself.

And not merely imitating what was but generating something more over the course of years. The Christ figure at Chartres had his fingers up; over the centuries, the fingers in stone began to wear down. He's holding the Book of Life, which has all of our names registered in it, and it got lopped off at some point. Through technology, we were able to return the book and the fingers. If we are just imitating what was, what does that say about us today? We need to be able to say, "Here's what we can do with our abilities and technologies to glorify God."

At Chartres, you see Gothic elements and Romanesque elements. With the Romanesque especially, you ask, "Is it old or is it new?" When you look at the art at Christ the Light—the bronzes in particular—you ask the same thing. And that question achieves what we want to achieve: "It's our faith tradition, so it seems old. But I'm looking at it, and it looks really new."

**arcCA:** It's been two years since the cathedral opened. What have you observed?

**Hartman:** One of the questions that the diocese asked at the very beginning was, "How would you make a building that's both sacred and civic?" I am grateful and moved by how it has been received in the community—both Catholic and secular—as a symbol of cultural rebirth.

**Minnihan:** The aesthetic and the acoustic soar, so all kinds of cultural groups are using the space. I would say the greatest hope that we had is that people would find it a place to gather—whether to worship, meet, eat lunch, meditate, or pray—that people find a home. And that's what's happened. ●



# God is an architect

Jan O'Brien, AIA

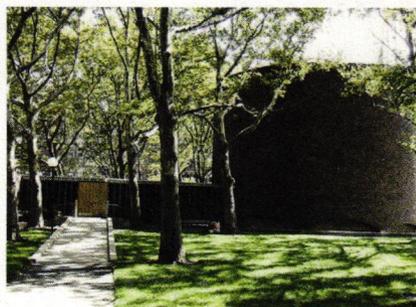
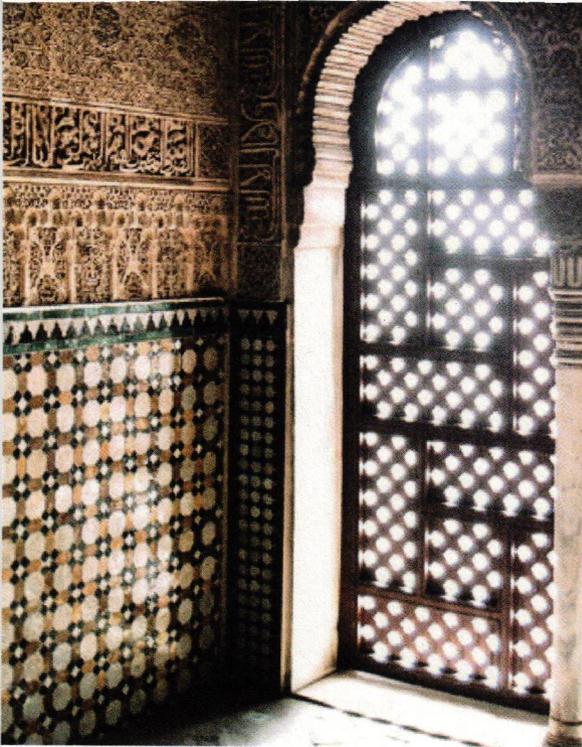
## Genesis 1 (Bible: King James Version)

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.  
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.  
And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.  
And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.  
And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.  
And the evening and the morning were the first day.  
And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.  
And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.  
And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.  
And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.*

God is an architect. In this Judeo-Christian creation story, nothing existed but Darkness and Chaos. Then God swept across the formless void and lifted up an enormous dome to separate water from water, thereby opening up space for all living things to become. Without the help of the sun or stars, God commanded light to pierce the solid darkness. With Spirit alone, God brought order to the universe. Then, within an ordered universe, intelligent life—society, civilization—could begin. When finished, God was satisfied and observed that it was very good.



Opposite, the Alhambra; above, on the streets of Fez; photos by the author.



Left to right: the Alhambra, Eero Saarinen's MIT Chapel, Eladio Dieste's Cristo Obrero, and the Utah desert; all photos courtesy the author.

When human architects set out to create sacred space, we look to breach the chaos and give order to our lives. As modern people, we are constantly bombarded by information, noise, and news and aggressively marketed to by those who want to sell us something. Sacred space can lift up a dome of silence and hold back the tide of modern life. A sacred space can allow contemplation, reflection, and the overview required to make moral choices.

The three major monotheistic religions known as the religions “of the book”—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—depend on sacred gathering spaces. As a Christian, I am most familiar with churches, but I have traveled widely and visited other religious sanctuaries.

I grew up as a Lutheran in Buffalo, New York, gazing each Sunday at stained-glass portrayals of Jesus’s life, with the icy city just a sheet of glass away. I understood images of Jesus, the Saints, and even a white bearded God, to be normal in sacred space. They were there for our edification and inspiration.

Later, as a young architect, I was part of a team working on a hospital in Algeria and a University in Mecca. For these projects, we studied the sacred geometries that make up

the only permissible decoration in an Islamic building. As Jacques Berque has explained, “By definition, as well as by divine decree, Moslem art is non-figurative. God being the Creator by excellence, Al-Mucawwir, and Tacwir, any fashioning of plastic images and especially of three-dimensional ones (sculpture) would be unholy because it represents treacherous competition with Creation.”

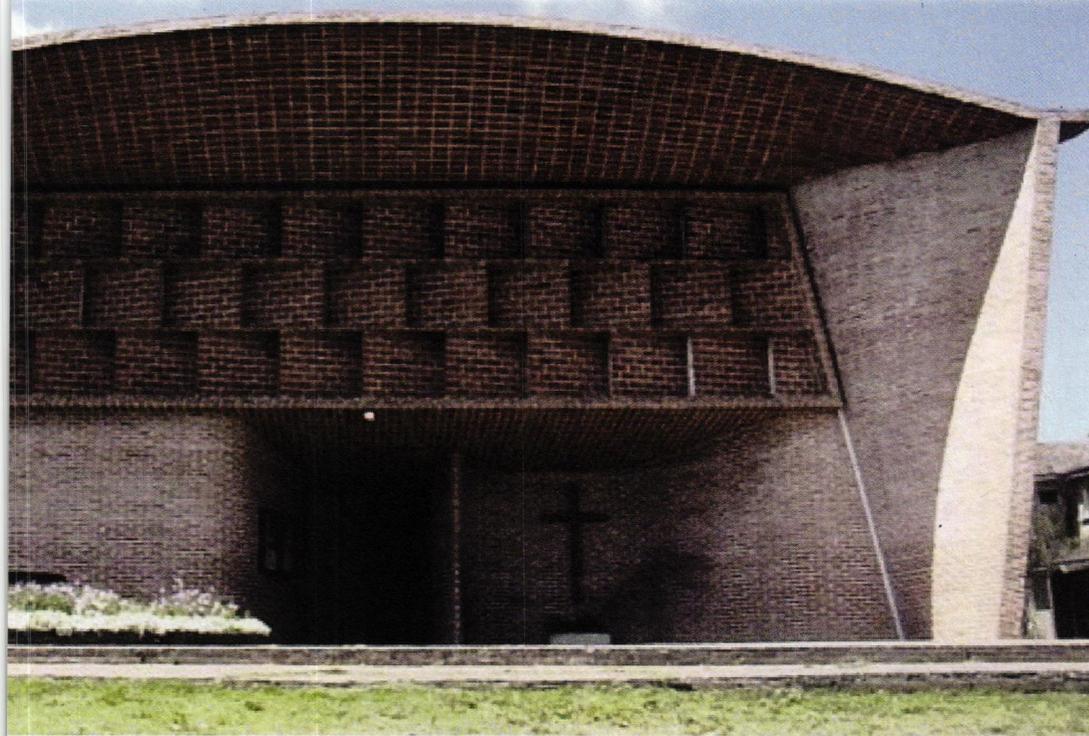
I became fascinated with these pattern games and longed to see them applied as mosaic tiles, arches, and domes. Islam had been the dominant religion of Spain for centuries, until it was pushed out in 1492 and Christians reclaimed the country. So, while mosques in Africa are reserved for believers, Spanish sites are open to everyone. Eagerly, our team tagged a visit to Granada and Seville to the end of a trip to Algeria. Here mosques have been converted to churches, and I experienced first-hand the wash of color and texture of these interrelated geometries. Also, the rigid buildings of this desert people were partnered with courtyards—paradise gardens—where the sacred geometries came to life in fountains and well-ordered, fragrant plantings.

Is a space ordered by mathematics cere-

bral? Is it less instructive or inspiring than murals and paintings that include human faces? Why are these sacred spaces so distinctly different? Islam came into being after Christianity had made its mark in the Mediterranean region, in 610 AD. Were the founders of this new religion reacting to the art and sculpture of Christianity? Perhaps.

Many years later, back in the States, I watched a congregation in New York City grapple with how to modify the stained glass windows in their church that depicted Jesus with pale skin and blue eyes, to reflect the current multi-racial membership. The universality of geometry or unadorned walls serves changing times. Religious art in churches may promote “my God” rather than God alone.

Eventually, I found what I was longing for in the MIT chapel by Eero Saarinen, built in 1955. The simple, cylindrical, brick hall is enlivened by light playing off the water that slips under the exterior walls, linking the quiet space to the world outside. This is a humble space, with human scale that reminds us of the Creator by playfully reflecting the changing angle of the sun, daily and seasonally. The movement of light on water reminds us of our



connections to primal forces and the renewing, cleansing power of water.

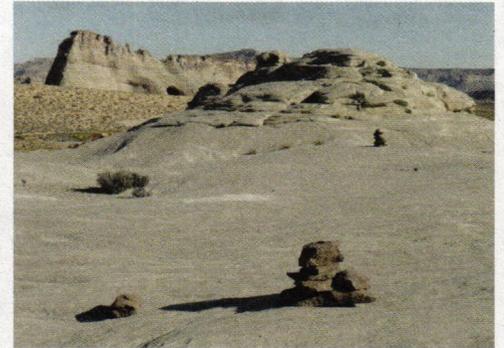
The Church Cristo Obrero in Uruguay, by Eladio Dieste, speaks to me in a similar way. Traveling in Buenos Aires, we took a ferry across the bay to Uruguay. Held up by the fog, we were late getting to the tiny town and missed the Mass. The church was closed, but after seeing the novel exterior we were determined to see more. We sought out the priest who lived next-door and convinced him to let us inside. It is extraordinary. A place of power, it is not grandiose. It symbolizes respect for both God and human creativity. The architect, who is also a structural engineer, used brick for every surface, daringly and playfully, to create the needed respite from chaos. Light glances in, and the repetitive scale of the brick lends order. As Dieste wrote:

*There are deep moral/practical reasons for our search which give form to our work: with the form we create we can adjust to the laws of matter with all reverence, forming a dialogue with reality and its mysteries in essential communion... For architecture to be truly constructed, the materials must be used with profound respect for their essence and*

*possibilities; only thus can 'cosmic economy' be achieved... in agreement with the profound order of the world; only then can have that authority that so astounds us in the great works of the past.*

Two years ago, I stood in the new Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland, before the large pixilated image of Christ dominating the far end, the Omega wall (see page 19). It felt universal, open to my imagination, not so rooted in time, with only the play of light on the wooden louvers and concrete walls. But I wondered: without the Christ figure, hand raised in blessing, and the nearly life-sized crucifix by the pulpit, would its members consider it a Catholic church?

Tradition continues to be embraced by the Church, frustrating many architects, who are seeking to renew church buildings. When I was on the building committee of a San Francisco church a few years ago, we investigated using chairs instead of pews in the 100-year-old church to accommodate a new, playful, evening service. Money was tight, but suddenly there was a special donation earmarked for the renovation of the old pews. As one senior member of the parish later explained, "I sat



in this pew for my daughter's baptism and her wedding. I want to sit here, holding this very armrest and smelling the incense when my grandchild comes to be baptized or for a friend's funeral. A new chair, even in the same space, would not connect me in the same way." "Faith" in the lexicon is often paired as "Faith tradition" and so underscores the idea that faith must be something on-going that links us to our culture, to how we are, in the best sense, a part of a larger whole.

This fall, I sought inspiration in the Utah desert, surrounded by magnificent red stone buttes. A sense of the eternal prevails. Here, in this harsh environment, I can see for miles in the bright light. As I walk across an ancient stone monument, wandering, I am brought back to the trail by dry-stacked rock piles that point the way. Partly to encourage hikers to stay off the fragile desert soil, they tell me that I am not the only human to seek beauty and inspiration here and point me back to the comforts of civilization, when I fade. Our best sacred buildings, and religious groups, do the same: encourage us to seek God, guide and support us as we do. ©

# Loss, Renewal, and Reconciliation

## on the Luiseño Indian Reservation



David Thurman, AIA

*There is no love that is not an echo.*

— Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

### Destruction of a Beloved Place

In Southern California's history, wildfires have posed a near-constant threat to human existence, often delivering rapid and devastating consequences. The Pamoocha Fire in October 2007 on the 3900-acre reservation of the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians in San Diego County continued that unfortunate legacy. Driven by winds exceeding 100 mph, the fire ravaged a beautiful valley that is a focal point of the Luiseño life, destroying 57 homes and eight other buildings. Magnifying the devastation was the loss of St. Bartholomew's Chapel, the tribe's Christian place of worship, and one that had burned and been rebuilt twice in the past. Called the "Luiseños" by early Franciscans for an adjacency to the Mission San Luis Rey de Francia, founded in 1798, the Chapel represented the tribe's vital link to its Parish.

St. Bartholomew's Chapel served as a gathering place for many kinds of events—not just religious ones—in a culture that has long practiced a tradition of oral history. For a tribe whose population has slowly declined to its current level of about 500, preservation of history is a vital concern. "Their elders are passing away, with them much of their cul-

ture, history, myths, and stories. Their tradition is oral, and very few of the younger members speak the dialect," notes Kevin deFreitas, architect for the new Chapel. While it is not surprising that the tribe forged ahead with an effort to rebuild, it did so with a deep sense of loss, concern about losing valued history, and worry about a lack of financial resources.

What ensued was a spirited effort to create a worthy successor to the Chapel. In the end, the intention to replace the small, original structure grew into a surprisingly modern 3,650 square foot sanctuary, a 2,385 square foot social hall, and a courtyard between the two buildings. This journey offers an important lesson about the way a design process can help heal a devastated community and can explore an unusual relationship between a native people and Christian tradition.

### Rebuilding: Early Discussions and Establishing Trust

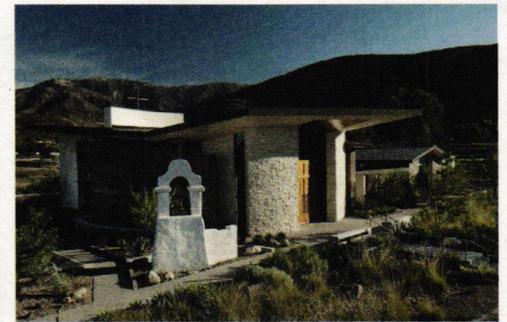
After the fire, one of the tribe's first steps was a hesitant discussion with deFreitas, who learned of the tragedy and approached the tribe to offer assistance. As an outsider, the respectful deFreitas summarized the reserved nature of his clients, who tend to protect the tribe's privacy. "They are just not talkers. They contemplate and they are thoughtful, and they say very limited things. I would ask questions, and there would not always be an immediate response. It was a slow process of gaining trust."

Gradually a relationship developed, as deFreitas worked with the Chapel's planning committee to develop several options. Although the original intention was simply to replace the existing structure, as the

Social hall, courtyard, and Chapel, photo by Harrison Photographic.



Left: the former chapel burns in the Pamoocha Fire; photo by Robert Shaffer. Below, the new design included a rebuilt version of the Bell Tower as it sat previously, recalling the tribe's fondness for the original Chapel; photo by Harrison Photographic.



planning committee refined the program they realized that the beloved Chapel was actually out of touch with their current needs. Fortunately, the tribal council supported the idea of a more ambitious project. Because not all Luiseños are Catholics, the tribal council agreed that the new Chapel could include a social hall used for many kinds of tribal gatherings, not just religious events. The project moved forward, eventually quadrupling in size.

A few key ideas emerged to guide and inspire the project. First, the Chapel's planning committee wanted to capture the spirit of the original Chapel, with its peaceful aura. The committee also imagined incorporating natural materials from the reservation itself, including stone, minerals, and wood. There was a desire to reflect the tribe's long-term commitment to sustainable living. Lastly, they sought ways to integrate the tribe's own history in ways that would be harmonious with Catholic tradition. This last idea would become a key recurring theme for the design.

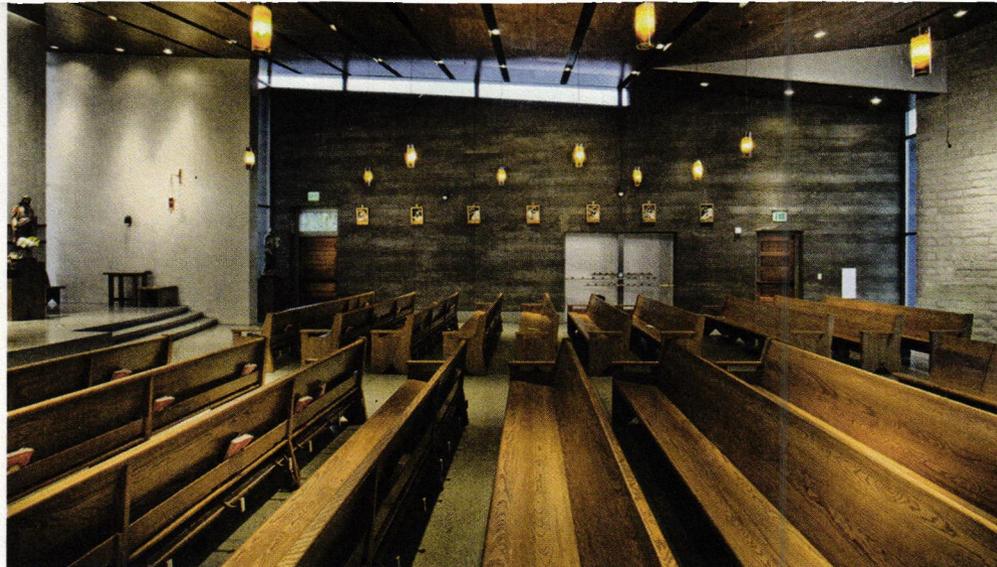
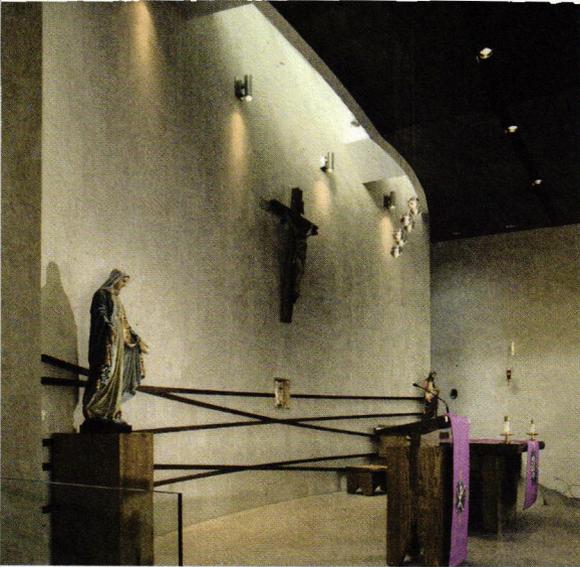
#### Powerful Symbols Drawn From Distinct Traditions

As deFreitas's design evolved, its contemporary character elicited discussion and debate. The committee asked how such a modern design could replace the traditional Chapel and appropriately reflect the traditions of the tribe. George Arviso, one of the planning committee's leaders, was even more blunt. "I didn't like it. Too modern." DeFreitas listened closely as the committee educated him about the tribe's ancestry and rituals, including more than 5,000 years of history in Southern California. In response, his design focused on sensitive integration of both Luiseño and Christian symbols. It was an unusual and potentially controversial approach, but the committee ultimately agreed that the symbols forged important links between the tribe's history and the Christian faith and fit comfortably within the modern design.

Among tribal symbols that appear in the design, the *wamkish* is one of the most important. A sacred enclosure used for rituals such as honoring the dead, the *wamkish* was built

from woven willow and other brush, laid out in an elliptical plan whose dimensions were approximately 38' x 58'. It was extruded as a fence-like structure about the height of a man. In the Chapel's design, the abstracted *wamkish* appears as two curvilinear walls, one behind the altar and the other at the entry. At the altar, the curving *wamkish* wall is dramatically washed in a gentle light from a skylight above. A series of skewed wood bands, embedded in the altar's wall, recall the *wamkish*'s woven structure. Other native symbols are integrated in similarly meaningful, but less obvious, ways.

The design also includes many symbolic references to Christianity. For instance, above the altar, a skylight's elliptical oculus makes an Icthus shape, recalling that St. Bartholomew was a fisherman. The walking route from the entry and main aisles to the altar forms a crucifix, as does a perforated metal pattern in the ceiling. The journey toward holy enlightenment is also reflected in the roughness of stone at the entry, set in horizontal course-



Left, the altar and wamkish wall, photo by Harrison Photographic; right, the Chapel's rammed earth walls and simply finished materials recall the tribe's close connection with the land, photo by Darren Edwards.

work, to the smoothness of marble stone at the altar, set in vertical coursework. The design incorporates a number of traditional statues, a baptismal carved from native stone, and references to numerology found in the Bible.

The design also includes symbolic references that are shared by Luiseño and Christian traditions. The wood banding that represents the wamkish at the altar, for instance, also recalls Christ's crown of thorns. The Chapel's butterfly roof is another example. The dragonfly is a symbol of the Luiseño tribe; in Christianity, the wings of the dove are a recurring image. The sides of the Chapel are drawn together by massive, unfinished two-foot thick, rammed earth walls, a reference to the tribe's close relationship to the earth; the walls are splayed at seven degrees, reflecting the presence of the divinity. As with the rammed earth walls, many natural materials were harvested from the reservation for use in the construction.

The joining of Luiseño and Catholic symbols is significant for those who understand the sensitive history shared by the Catholic faith and the tribe. This includes the Catholic Church's gradual transition—owing primarily to Vatican II reforms—from avoidance of native cultural practices to greater recognition for the customs of people such as the Luiseños. For its part, the tribe always retained its native traditions, albeit through oral history

and underground practices. The new Chapel's design plays an important role in reconsidering these two legacies, assisting with reconciliation.

#### Lessons in Practicality and Courage

The journey to create a new Chapel reflects practical attitudes toward rebuilding, as well as a commitment to expressing deeper meanings. Functionally, the design offers a place of unity, with the project's two primary structures expressed as a simply massed, village-like grouping. The Chapel's butterfly roof gently rises from the entry to the altar, creating a simple but dramatic interior space. Alongside it, the shed-roofed Social Hall includes a generous interior gathering space and handsomely outfitted kitchen. Between the two buildings, an attractive courtyard incorporates native plants, a sculptural fountain, and dramatic views to the mountains. The design's many sustainable features, including the rammed earth walls, daylighting, recycled materials and low energy use, are expected to earn a LEED Gold designation.

Beyond issues of function, the Chapel expresses subtle and historically important references to tribal life. This only came about as a result of the tribe's willingness to rethink courageously what the Chapel might be, despite its beloved status, and Kevin deFreitas's commitment to learning about valued tribal history. By

integrating both native and Christian symbols, the design explored a sensitive and unresolved question—the relationship between native practices and Christian traditions—that could not have been considered in earlier times. In the process, the project also reasserted tribal culture by adding the Social Hall that serves the entire reservation.

#### A New Beginning

Memories of the fire's devastation are not completely gone, but a sense of renewal, hope, and healing has mostly displaced them. Kevin deFreitas adds, "The congregation never imagined that the destruction of the fire could produce a new Chapel that would serve their needs so much better than what they previously had."

The Chapel is also a source of pride for planning committee members such as George Arviso, now a strong supporter of the design. He views it as both a place of worship and a means to teach the tribe's history. "New memories will be created in this place, in this Chapel. We tried to put symbolism and stories into the building that we can tell our children, that they will tell their children, when they start coming here to worship. It will be in this building, it will be new memories." ●

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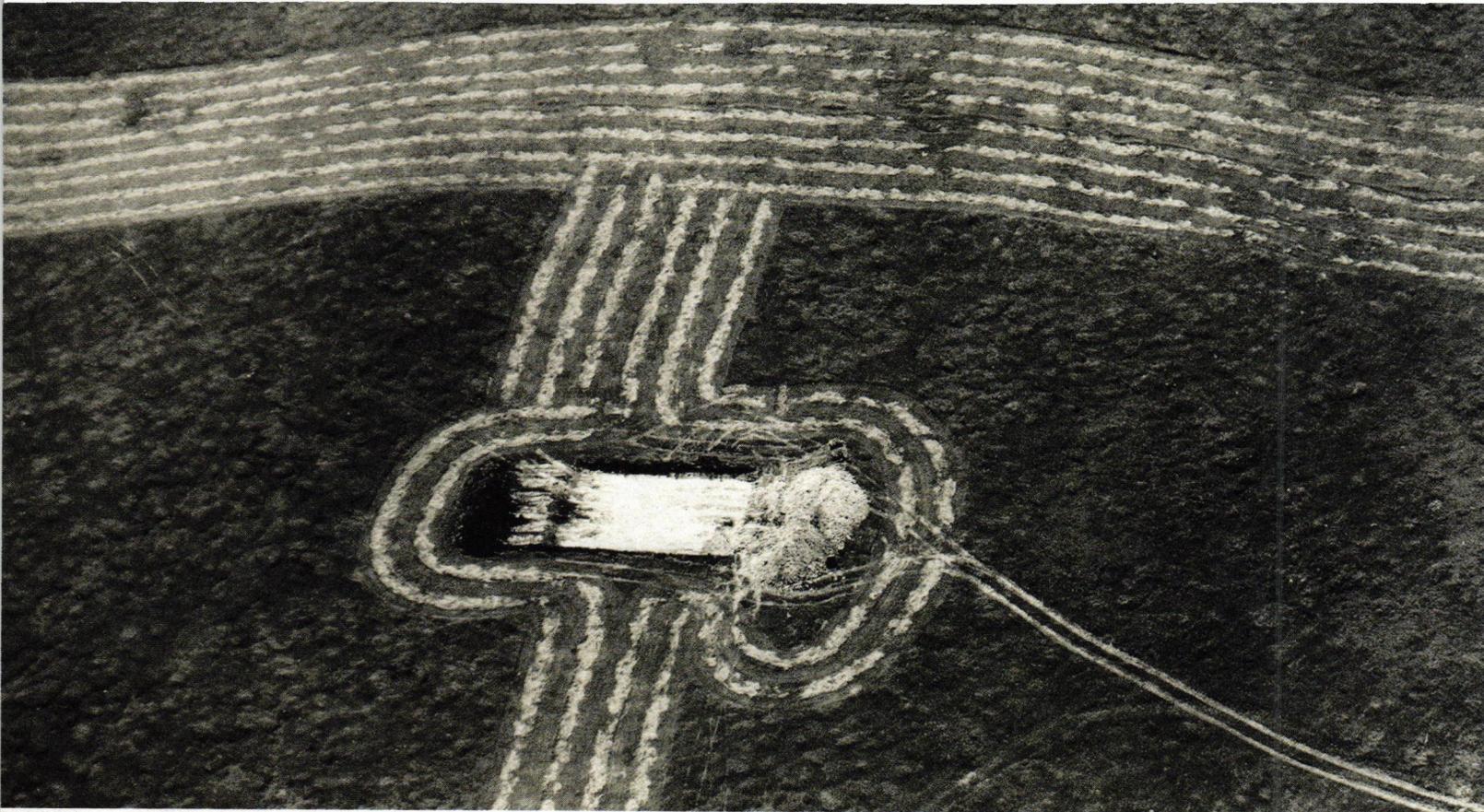
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## In Praise of Fallow Fields

Kurt Lavenson, AIA

**fal·low** [fal-oh]

1. (of land) plowed and left unseeded for a season or more; uncultivated.
2. not in use; inactive: My creative energies have lain fallow this year.

~From [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

Let Everything happen to you: beauty and terror.  
Just keep going. No feeling is final.

~From a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke

The economic downturn has hit my architecture business rather hard. For years, decades actually, I have had a list of clients waiting patiently for me to design their projects. I plowed steadily through my workload, and the waiting list extended into the future just as steadily. Now the backlog is gone. I have worked my way through most of the jobs and have large blocks of unscheduled time. I live and work only in the present tense, not quite sure of the outlook next year or even two quarters ahead. This can be awkward to discuss with friends and colleagues. I see the pained look flicker across their faces when I answer the ubiquitous “so how’s business?” with an unequivocal “really slow.” Apparently, I have offered more than they really wanted to hear, violating an unspoken rule by giving voice to loss. Occasionally I go further, adding “... and I like it.” Perhaps I am expected to say business is great, or at least pretty good, or, at the very least, picking up again. It is apparently safe to talk about loss in the past tense, but not in the present. Some colleagues

Livermore Fields, photo by Kurt Lavenson.

We are realizing, not for the first time but maybe for the last, that an economy that primarily measures success in terms of speed and quantity of production will eventually yield toxic products and cannibalize its own resource base.

are relieved to discuss loss in the open, taking comfort that they are not alone, but most react as if it might be contagious and pull back. For my part, I am learning to embrace the slowdown for its cathartic qualities. The stillness has within it another kind of wealth—one of reflection, grounding, and opportunity. I have come to appreciate the fallow period.

Until the modern era of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, it was common practice for farmers to let alternating sections of their fields go fallow to regenerate. This gave the soil and organisms a chance to rebuild the nutrient base for the subsequent crops to draw upon. More recently, as emphasis shifted toward maximum production, the soil was never allowed to rest. Nutrient flows were subsidized and accelerated by artificial means. As we have learned, these methods deplete natural resources, pollute the aquifers, and often yield toxic food products. The latest counterbalancing result has been the rise of organic and sustainable farming, including fallow soil periods—a less “efficient” but healthier alternative.

I see a metaphor here for the fatigue in the construction industry and the economy as a whole. The boom cycles are unsustainable without artificial subsidies and become unhealthy when pushed past their natural limits. We are realizing, not for the first time but maybe for the last, that an economy that primarily measures success in terms of speed and quantity of production will eventually yield toxic products and cannibalize its own resource base. I am not arguing against efficiency, just appreciating the elegance of certain natural

processes that may appear inefficient, like the plowed fields left unplanted and uncultivated for a season. They are actually quite efficient and self-sustaining. When we think with a long-term perspective, not doing can be as valuable as doing. There is opportunity in stillness.

Many now claim their design practices to be focused on sustainability. I’m not convinced, however, that specifying bamboo floors and solar arrays is enough to deserve that moniker, if the underlying business cannot survive without constant production. What if our own business practices were designed to incorporate fallow periods? Perhaps it would make the business itself more sustainable if it were designed to allow, or to celebrate, pauses in the economic cycle. I have an image in my head from my childhood on the east coast, where we would awake to “snow days.” Schools and businesses were unable to open due to an overnight blizzard. Roads were impassable. Everything was closed. They were wonderful ad hoc days, filled with inventive play, family bonding, and regeneration of spirit. The interruption of business as usual was a blessing, and the days that followed were better for it. This example is obviously more simplistic and rosy than the depths of a recession, but most of us have heard similar descriptions of communities banding together during severe natural disasters, as well. The point is that the surprise and the loss of control can be considered normal occurrences. They are unpredictable and overwhelming at first, but ultimately manageable and useful in their own way, even if that way is not obvious at the outset. How many of us have said at one time or another

that we learned more from a test we failed or a job we lost than from the others?

The specifics of a truly sustainable business model will vary for different practitioners and firms. For some, the consequences of a slowdown are more dismal than for others. What is common to all is the need to become less afraid of loss and stillness. Embracing fallow periods allows change to enter the equation. Clearly, we don’t need to seek sadness or emptiness; we just need to stop pretending that we can entirely prevent them and to end our amnesia about natural cycles. We need to find balance. If we become adept at managing seasonal or cyclical slowdowns, we can build healthier businesses focused on more modest booms and less drastic busts. Architects understand process and change more than most people. We are visionaries, expert in the creation of new patterns. It is important to use these skills right now to redesign our own livelihoods.

The economist Juliet Schor, in her book *Plentitude*, addresses the concept that there are other forms of wealth and strength available in the economy if we learn, or remember, how to value them. She suggests that, historically, as more labor time went into the marketplace, time for community disappeared along with relationships. We lost “a potent form of economic wealth which people can turn to during financial instability or adverse climate events.” We became too busy to cultivate this source of wealth and security. Perhaps we can add it back into the balance sheet now. Similarly, the concept of “slowness” might now be associated with value rather than with scarcity or failure. Slowness allows time to savor, reconsider, and

choose wisely among opportunities. Slowness is sometimes just thoroughness, which is a prerequisite to mastery. If a sign of craziness is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result (to paraphrase Einstein) then why are we simply hoping for the economy to “recover”? Do we really want to go back to what we were doing? Or would it be better to lie fallow, pause, reconsider, and redirect? In other words, if where you are now is what you want in the future then plant the same “crops” again. If not, then plant something different. This is your chance. The emptiness of the fallow field becomes less frightening when we have faith and confidence that it will produce again in the future, or more specifically that we can make it produce what we really need and want in the future. Rather than being dead, the bare ground is alive and filled with potential.

Recently, I spoke with Sim Van der Ryn, a leading proponent of sustainability before most of us knew the word. Sim emphasizes whole systems thinking and approaches design as a naturalist and a philosopher. I still draw upon the lessons he taught when I was an undergraduate student of his at Berkeley in 1980, following his tenure as the California State Architect. He had us study the rhythm of energy flows, urban farming ... and compost. We spent a lot of time on how things decay and regenerate. We learned to delight in the breakdown of materials into basic nutrients that became available for the growth of new forms. Only then did we get back to the creative business of design. In the tradition of great teachers, Sim distracted students from their assumptions and expectations about

architectural form and opened a pathway to the underlying organic principles. Similarly, we might now set aside our negative assumptions about the current economic decay and look for the lessons and opportunities that lie under the surface. Sim also introduced his students to the hazards of monoculture—the planting of vast tracts of land with a single crop in the name of efficiency. Monoculture makes that entire crop vulnerable to singular disaster. One particular bug infestation or disease wipes out everything or requires radical intervention and subsidy. The parallels between that scenario and the recent business sector failures are rather striking.

I asked Sim to share some comments with me about the fallow field metaphor. After hours of conversation and a lunch made from ingredients that Sim raised within 100 yards of his table, I had only one word circled on my notepad: Presence. We always came back to presence. In order to advance and to evolve, it is essential to stop doing things that distract us from the wisdom that resides within nature and within ourselves. If ambitious, hyper multi-tasking is a skill of the head, then mindful presence is a skill of the heart. Valuable knowledge and insight reside in the heart, where they are often ignored in the rush to success or the panic of a crisis. Taking time to pause allows us to connect with them and to become available for a fundamentally new kind of productivity.

Endings are required before we can have new beginnings. They are inflection points in the cycle. The cusp of profound change is similar to the demolition phase on a construc-

tion project. Before building something new, it is necessary to destroy old structures that are interfering—to clear the ground. We have to accept loss, and sometimes destruction, in order to grow. We must release the past and its hold on us. During a biographical interview for USC, Frank Gehry described a period in 1978 when, at the age of 49, his work came to a sudden halt. During dinner at his home, in a conversation with his biggest client, the president of the commercial developer Rouse Company, he admitted that he had not really liked most of what he had been designing. So they parted ways amicably, and a few days later Gehry had to cut his staff of fifty down to three. He called the experience “seeing the devil” and said it wasn’t the first or last time something like that happened to him. But the moment was also a turning point when he committed his attention to the kind of design work that aroused his passion. The rest, as we say, is architectural history. He is now one of the most notable and celebrated architects in the world, having fundamentally redefined building form and process. Gehry allowed himself to acknowledge his sense of loss and disappointment. He spoke from the heart. He stopped what he was doing, took the hit, and remained present. Then he was available to follow his inspiration and to use his gifts in new and more meaningful ways.

So, the next time you pass a fallow field or experience one coming into your life as a metaphor, breathe deep and welcome its regenerative power. Embrace the stillness and the potential. ●

# The Eternal Flame

Harold L. Adams, FAIA, RIBA, JIA

*Editor's note: Architect John Carl Warnecke died in early 2010. The author told this story at the memorial celebration at Warnecke's ranch near Healdsburg.*

I started in the Washington office of John Carl Warnecke in May of 1962. The office worked on a number of projects for the Kennedy administration, along with private commissions for Mrs. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, the President's brother. Warnecke was also among the team working with the President to select a site for the Presidential Library. So, by fall of 1963, in my capacity as Warnecke's office director, I had been in multiple meetings with the President and Mrs. Kennedy. Little that led up to that terrible day in November, though, or anything in my training as an architect, prepared me for the next twelve months.

On November 23, 1964, one day after the assassination, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara called the office looking for Warnecke, who was in Hawaii working on a new state capital. Warnecke caught an overnight flight to Washington to attend the funeral and help a small team, which included Mrs. Kennedy and Bobby, then the U.S. Attorney General, to select a suitable gravesite at Arlington Cemetery.

Once a site was chosen, we launched an intensive research effort into gravesite and memorial design. We studied the graves of famous people, military leaders, politicians, especially those who had been assassinated. We studied the history and protocols of Arlington Cemetery and of our great national memorials. By January, we submitted our findings, which consisted of a mountain of research and some preliminary design criteria.

After two extremely emotional meetings with Mrs. Kennedy and Bobby, we set out on the design. We knew that the site called for a landscape solution, so we called in Lawrence Halprin, Hideo Sasaki, and Thomas D. Church for advice. This was the beginning of more than sixty meetings and work-sessions with well over a hundred architects, sculptors, advisors, cabinet members, and virtually every member of the Kennedy family. In our minds, each voice was to be heard, and each opinion mattered. By spring of 1964, we developed what we felt was a suitable design.

While the design was progressing, however, a debate had been going on within the family over symbolism. The Kennedys were an intensely religious family, and John was the nation's first Catholic president. Some felt that the grave should have a more literal representation

of the President's faith, perhaps a cross, while others thought it should be more secular. Mrs. Kennedy instructed us to bring in as many advisors as we needed to resolve the issue, so that spring and early summer were spent consulting with liturgical experts, religious sculptors, theologians, and every Kennedy who had an opinion. The issue seemed unsolvable until Eunice Shriver suggested a meeting with Rev. Martin D'Arcy, S.J., a Jesuit and old Kennedy friend. (Later I learned that Father D'Arcy was one of the world's most respected Christian philosophers.)

Father D'Arcy reviewed the design, the stacks of reports and meeting notes, and he seemed quite pleased with the outcome. With regard to symbolic elements, he advised that religion need not be advertised; it is something between an individual and his God. He felt that the grave must be fitting, noble, and intimate; it was not essential to have a cross as a vertical element. If a cross were to be used, it would be preferable to have it as a part of the element that covers the body. He suggested that we have a marker with the name and the dates of life with a small cross above the name. We had a solution—a simple, elegant solution.

The rest of the summer was spent reviewing the design with the family, adjusting things slightly, and working through the technical issues of the eternal flame. Little about the design was without controversy, but Father D'Arcy was a powerful advocate. The team prepared for a November 16 press conference (though nobody called them press conferences back then) and an unveiling of the design at the National Gallery of Art—almost one full year after the assassination.

The afternoon before the unveiling, we received a call from Bobby, who had been talking with family members who were concerned that the symbolism issue had not been satisfactorily addressed. We had come so far and everyone knew we were so close—but it looked as if everything would come to a screeching halt. Undaunted, we put our heads together and wrote a one-page statement on the "Religious Significance of the Design." The family loved it, and we held the press conference the next morning. ●



Photo courtesy of Martin C. Doege.

# Death in Texas

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Jim Williamson

*For most people, this is a story about Texas, for some, a story about architecture. And to a few who know about both Texas and architecture (I am thinking here of the late "Texas Ranger" John Hejduk), it is a sort of myth: an intersection of human beings with place, grounded as much in our imaginations as it is in reality—as such places inevitably are. When I tell the story to my students, I tell it for all three of these reasons. It is also a coming of age story: the story of my first job and my first project.*

*As most stories do, this story has an ending, and the ending is so strange that I will break with convention and reveal it now: They buried her in a martini shaker...and a Dixie-cup.*

Mid-way between El Paso and Fort Worth, Midland was peculiar even by Texas standards. The land it rested upon had once been an ancient seabed, now lifted up to become the Texas High Plains. It is full of tumbleweeds, high winds, and dust storms—and, at that time, oil: lots of oil. A small city of sixty thousand, Midland had more millionaires per capita than any other city, more private planes, more Rolls Royces.

Like others in the fifties, architect Frank Welch found his way to Midland as part of a phalanx of Texans and northeasterners who traveled to West Texas to find success. He was handsome and talented, and he had married a kind and gracious banker's daughter. He was also a favored protégé of O'Neil Ford, the granddaddy of Texas architecture, and was as likely to give his staff lectures on architecture as on a Picasso show at MOMA. A good architect and a bon vivant: Frank was exactly the kind of person I wanted to work for.

I had been in the office two weeks when Frank came to me and said that his best friend had called to tell him that the wife of one of his several brothers had passed away, and his brother wanted us to design a gravesite for her on the Soren family ranch in the foothills of the Davis Mountains. Frank wanted me to design the gravesite and—in what must be one of the oddest combinations of tasks—to turn an old adobe chicken coop into a guesthouse.

I set to designing and laboriously rendering what I hoped to be a minor *de Stijl* masterwork: a set of finely proportioned, low, gray granite slabs in contrast to the rough exposed red granite of the site. In my view,

the scheme was elegant and artistic; I was happy with the results.

The Soren family apparently was not. I eliminated some of the slabs; they sent back an untrained sketch of a lone star that filled a sheet of oil-company stationery, dimensioned to fit into a twelve-foot diameter circle. I thought, "Were they going to visit in a helicopter?"

A few years earlier, Frank had struggled with the design of his own son's grave, and he understood the exaggerations of grief. Somehow, he talked them out of the star. The minor *de Stijl* masterwork was, however, never to appear again; instead we settled on a non-descript, simple, rose-granite square within a square about two feet on a side. Our thinking was: "At least its not the star."

And then a new requirement arose: a cross on a nearby hill, like, of course, Calvary. Even though I am a Christian, it was simply painful and disheartening even to make a drawing for the stonemasons; it seemed as unfortunate an idea as the star. To make things worse, we weren't renovating the chicken coop anymore.

During all this time, several trips were made to the ranch either by car, which took several hours, or by private plane. Mr. Soren would sometimes fly up to Midland from San Antonio to meet us, and then we would fly down to the ranch together. We would land on the ranch's own landing strip and then drive up a single-lane asphalt road to the ranch. The main house was big and straggled a hill and full of western art. Cowboys worked outside, mirroring the art inside. On some visits, we would arrive early enough to eat cabrito that the Tejana cooks would prepare for lunch. The ranch had a gritty romanticism to it and struck me as its own world.

Charlie O'Donnell, the ranch foreman, in his sixties, was tall and slim and really did look like John Wayne. When young, he must have been what some women called "a tall glass of water." He was an admirable man; he would go out to the campsites along the migrant trails that crossed the ranch and leave food for the illegal workers. He did this because it was the right thing to do and because he knew their lot was terribly harder than his—it was a different Texas back then.

Charlie was in love with two women, Mrs. O'Donnell and Mrs. Soren. His love of Mrs. Soren wasn't romantic but out of a bond they had made through generosity and respect. Some of the other ranches in the area were merely weekend retreats, but Mrs. Soren had instructed Charlie that he was a ranch foreman and not a caretaker. He was to make the ranch a working and profitable one, and he did. He dug her grave himself, blasting a hole in the rock with dynamite.

Somewhere around the time that Charlie was blasting this hole and not long after we'd been asked to design the cross, Frank came to my drafting table for a talk. He understood that the project had not gone as either of us had expected, and I understood that he had been doing his best to finish it with understanding and grace. Grace was important to Frank. He had been wise and carefully empathetic. But what he was about to say was clearly too much.

He had just finished a telephone conversation with Mr. Soren. The

family would have a memorial service on the ranch in two weeks. Mr. Soren wanted us to drive down and place Mrs. Soren's remains in the site and seal it before the memorial service. Standing by my desk, he said, "Jim, Mr. Soren is putting Mrs. Soren's cremated remains into a martini shaker. It was an anniversary gift to him from Mrs. Soren." He looked weary and dismayed.

The day before the memorial service, Frank and I arrived at the gravesite early in the morning. Charlie was already there with one or two ranch hands. It was almost mid-day for them, and they had come on horses. A slightly befuddled stonemason from San Angelo was there, too. We gathered around the grave. The granite slab and plaque lay next to the hole on a portable lift. The atmosphere was sad. Not much was said after the handshakes and hellos.

Then Frank turned to Charlie and told him that Mr. Soren had wondered if Charlie would like to place Mrs. Soren's remains in the grave. Charlie's eyes welled up, and he silently nodded. Frank reached into a cardboard box he had received the day before and brought out the shaker, which was wrapped in brown packing material, and began to unwrap it.

And we stared, blindsided by a small, unexpected epiphany. The shaker was startlingly and exquisitely beautiful. It was simple and unadorned and subtly shaped in a way you could only call feminine. It was 24-carat gold. It was gleaming. The treasures from an Egyptian tomb had just toured the country, and it looked like it would belong.

Charlie took the shaker in his rancher's hands and placed it gently in the grave. Frank looked happy and relieved; I felt a thickness in my chest; somehow, something made a kind of wondrous sense. We had entered some unpredictable and paradoxical place where beauty trumped all. And where architecture doesn't have much of a stake.

The slab was glued to the concrete, the grave sealed, and we started to say our goodbyes. And then Frank reached into the box again and brought out something else wrapped in brown packing and turned again to Charlie to say, "Charlie, they were not able to put all of Mrs. Soren into the martini shaker. Mr. Soren was hoping that you would take what is left and take them someplace on the ranch to spread them out."

He unwrapped the packing and pulled out something that looked too much like a Dixie-cup not to actually be one.

He handed it to Charlie, whose eyes had watered up again. Charlie nodded. He took the cup from Frank.

Frank and I, the stonemason, and the one or two ranch hands left Charlie at the gravesite and drove or rode away. I am not sure what happened next; I know that Charlie got on his horse and rode out to some part of the ranch to spread the rest of Mrs. Soren's ashes. But I also imagine that he returned a few hours later for the lunch that he had every day with Mrs. O'Donnell, carrying with him an empty Dixie-cup. ●

*Editor's note: A fuller version of this story is being published simultaneously in Places, <http://places.designobserver.com>.*

# Kings Day, 2008

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Barton Phelps, FAIA

On January 6, Karen and I at last got to see the Buffalo Dance in the snow at Taos Pueblo. There's always an animal dance on the Christian feast day of Epiphany, but if there's no snow it's likely to be a Deer Dance because it is said traditionally around the pueblo that the buffalo bring the snow with their stomping. The buffalo are special. The Taos people haven't hunted them for almost a century, but they still associate the hard, starvation-staving winter trip hunters used to make, sometimes eastward into Texas, with the padres' story of the three Magi, and they call the celebration Kings Day. In dutiful preparation, they briefly repopulate the powerfully paired, nearly abandoned adobe buildings dating from the mid-fourteenth century that frame and structure the performance.

Seasonal weather and daylight set emotional tone in Northern Pueblo dances, and the impresarios of Taos are masters of timing and low-tech stagecraft. I observed their expertise in theatre lighting once on a golden October afternoon at the start of the Vespers Dance performed only by old men and women packed inside the little churchyard on the feast day of San Geronimo, the village patron. That dance was delayed well past the advertised time, and, as I waited for it to start, my tourist self grew increasingly worried that I would miss the last plane out of Albuquerque. The dance manager was clearly aware of the tension he was creating in the audience as, with patient precision, he let the lowering sun reach the correct angle to produce its maximum dramatic effect and also, perhaps, to remind dancers and onlookers of a ritual confluence of cosmic and animal/human dynamics. At just the right moment, the latter takes over from the former and, at an unseen signal, the silver-haired dancers hold aloft quivering yellow aspen branches that catch the raking light and ignite into a dazzling visual fire cloud—a breathtaking contradiction to the quiet, shuffling dance itself.

The pueblo website had billed the much longer Buffalo Dance as starting "tentatively" at 2:00 p.m. But we had learned at a curio shop in the town square that it had been moved an hour earlier, to keep it as bright and unsentimental as possible, I guessed, and it was getting colder.

“... gradually they abandon humanity to become animals, working hard to invoke the power of their animal world.”

We drove over, parked our car, and paid the modest entry fee. The plaza seemed almost empty. We watched as an uncostumed man hurriedly strewed what would be the dancer's path with fresh, gold-green straw, marking and enlivening the dull-looking surface. (Later the straw would hold the mud together, improving their footing.) Just then, dancers from the south building could be seen in the distance, descending from the roofs of their kivas. After some bantering and a brief warm-up, they crossed the creek that halves the pueblo, filing over the narrow log bridge at the far end of the plaza to pick up a smaller group that had emerged from the kivas of north building. We counted about forty buffalo in all; young men, old men, fat men, little boys—naked except for red body grease, plain kilts, and high-cut moccasins (these very wet) with, huge, horned, eyeless buffalo heads uncomfortably balanced on their own. There were also three sad-looking deer, five or so hunters, a hunt mistress (I think) and eight drummer/singers. Choruses of women ululated loudly to excite the buffalo at the start of each movement. They danced seven formal sets and a few informal ones at the beginning and end. It was all remarkably similar to Vincent Scully's vivid explication of the 1974 performance in his study, *Pueblo: Mountain, Village, Dance*.

The architect's eye finds the route the dancers follow around the northern half of the great square to be symbolic and functional,

freighted with iconography and tribal politics but also responsive to performance requirements for dramaturgy and acoustics. Over the course of the dance, the herd moved from the low east wall that signifies a separation between the built pueblo and the sacred mountain's animal world, across to the opposing church (modernity perhaps, the White Man's god?) and back.

They stopped to dance three times before and after the church set, always staying close to the north building, which gives an acoustic throw to the small chorus of women off its dense, adobe walls and provides elevated source positions for their high-pitched cries. The drumming, on small, hand-held drums, was gentle compared with other dances we've attended, but its sound, too, was strong and bright. It looks as if the different responses of bass and treble wavelengths have long been understood and choreography adjusted accordingly.

We found the formal simplicity of this winter dance to be deceptive. The guidebooks are not much help, often flatly labeling it as being about “abundance,” but clearly there's more to it than that. You can't mistake a general concern with unity and communal strength, and there appear to be key elements denoting vision and leadership. Looking at the range of minor characters, I found it easy to imagine layers of moral complexity, but that may have more to do with my own Protestant conditioning than with animist reality. The

overall message must be happy and reassuring, because the event cheers the whole village even in the cold, penetrating damp of a gray New Mexico winter's day.

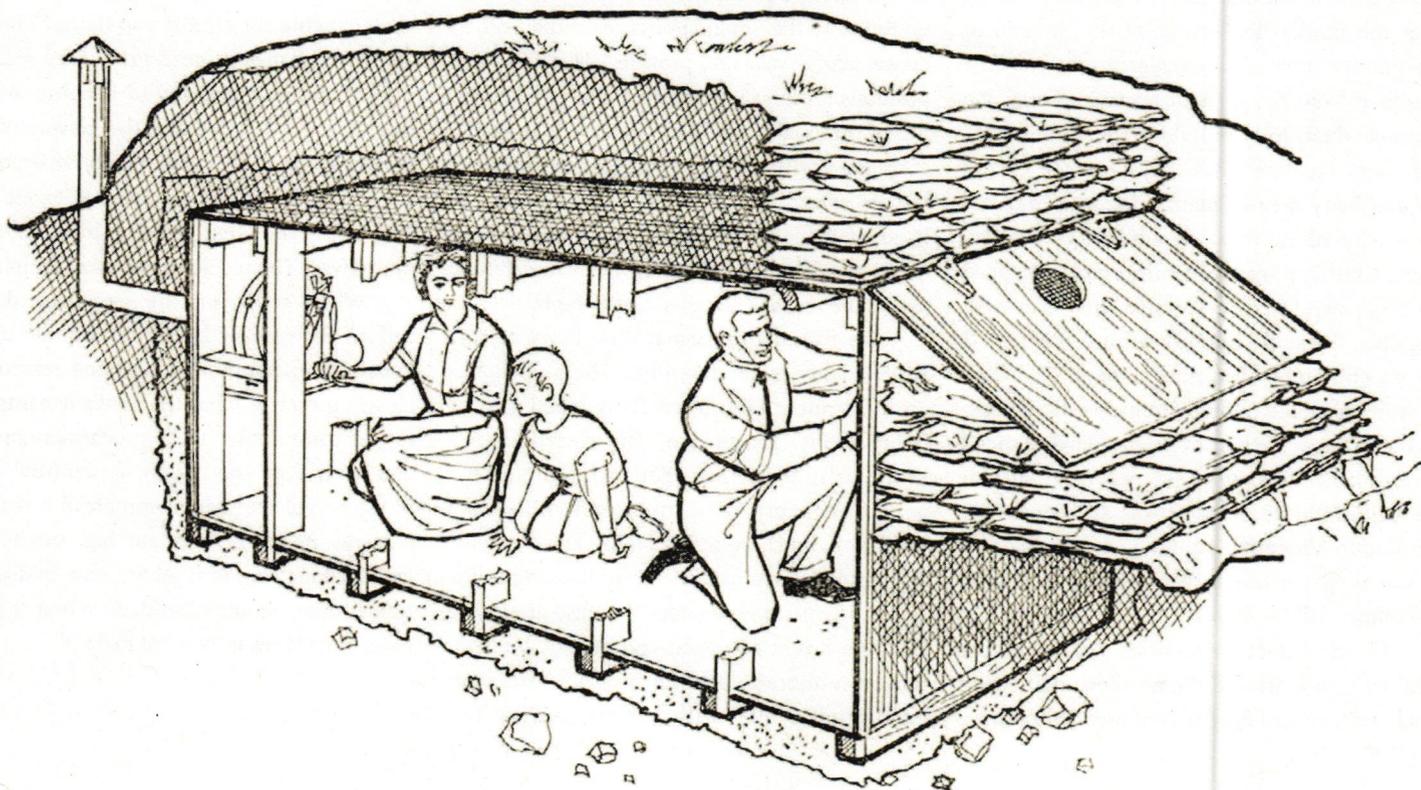
Between movements, the buffalo graze aimlessly. Suddenly, in response to a louder drumbeat and the women screeching, they stomp their right feet with the beat hard on the muddy ground, whirling then filing. I'm sure the dancers can't see well (so that the buffalo can), and it looks impossibly exhausting. The buffalo sweat and steam, but somehow they all keep dancing for almost two hours. The dancers' rhythm grows more precise as, gradually, they abandon humanity to become animals, working hard to invoke the power of their animal world. In the end, finally separated, the north and south groups compete to see which will outlast the other, dancing informal sets by their kivas. The old song becomes antiphonal.

When it's over, the steaming dancers unload their heavy heads and double up with exhaustion, happy and perhaps relieved but clearly proud of what they have accomplished for the community. It's all much more primitive and scary than the mostly agricultural dances of the rest of the year. Commercial it is not. No cameras, no cell phones, and big, tough-looking guys making sure of it. About sixty cold-looking, non-Indian people attended. When it ended, none of us knew quite what to do. ●



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# What we lost when we came here

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D. J. Waldie

## Home

We were housed in Lakewood. We were sheltered. But we didn't have a home yet. In this sudden place—sudden in the way California generally has been but even more spectacularly sudden here—17,500 houses were built and sold in just 33 months between the end of 1949 and the middle of 1953.

Before we came here, some of our parents had been homeless for years, the result of the agricultural depression begun in the early 1920s or because of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl diaspora of Okies and Arkies in the 1930s or the dislocations of war and its housing shortages through the end of the 1940s. Coming to Lakewood, our parents thought they had found a home, but they hadn't. Some of our parents stayed only long enough to imagine that home was somewhere else and then moved on. Home eluded them. (It may elude them still, as it does so many of us.)

The idea of home in Lakewood was sold with a superb sales pitch. When you bought a house you were buying a piece of the big newness that the 20th century was going to deliver to everyone's doorstep, even yours. A van would pull up, and tomorrow would be rolled into your living room. Most of my neighbors, while accepting this optimistic premise, found that some assembly of the future would be required.

## Mothers

In 1953, a reporter for *Harper's Magazine* asked young wives living in my suburb what they missed most. The women usually replied, "My mother."

The loss extended to parents generally. Motherless moms and fatherless dads, with advice books and parenting magazines in hand, attempted to raise us to be a better, healthier generation. *Their* parents, located in what everyone called "back East," were distant, tinny voices on a party-line telephone, helpless to spoil or correct.

left top, courtesy of the City of Lakewood historical collection;  
bottom, "Outside Semimounded Box Shelter," from *Family  
Shelter Designs*, U.S. Department of Defense, ca. 1961.



top left photo, City of Lakewood historical collection; top right photo courtesy of the author

### Some of our whiteness

So quickly had the building been that in 1950 almost no one lived here, but in 1960 there were nearly 70,000 of us. Of course, we were nearly all Caucasian (as we were called then). The Census that year counted seven people in Lakewood who admitted they were black.

Nevertheless, our whiteness wasn't pure. Coming to southern California, whatever else it meant, introduced a tinge of otherness, something that might lead to greater complexity. There were Jews, after all, living in surprisingly large numbers throughout Lakewood (whose Jewish developers, unlike Bill Levitt, omitted the covenant that restricted ownership to Christians). Jews had become white only recently and provisionally, as had Mexican Americans. They lived here, too (but they had always been indigenous, in the background). Our whiteness had holes through which even Filipinos and Japanese Americans slipped.

### The abundant land

I lived among families on my block who knew a meal only as the opposite of going hungry, with husbands in their 30s who still insisted on eating poorly because they had been fed poorly for most of their lives. Meals reflected what they stubbornly held on to. If they ate to

remember, many of the memories were of loss.

In Lakewood—"The City of Tomorrow, Today!"—the future of food hadn't arrived yet. Shopping was mostly done on foot, since most housewives either couldn't drive or didn't have a car. The Helm's Bakery truck, with its smoothly sliding, glossy wood drawers, came by every day. And so did a guy who had converted a bus with shelves and a cooler to bring milk, eggs, and cigarettes to the carless.

The Boys Market at the distant end of my block had long aisles of packaged and canned goods, but the fresh vegetable counter still followed the seasons. Heads of iceberg lettuce—the only kind available—dwindled in winter. Corn on the cob only arrived in July. Some grocery stores showcased an aisle of frozen food, but the Coldspot refrigerator at home had only enough room in its freezer compartment for one or two rectangular blocks of peas.

As a percentage of family income, food in the 1950s was comparatively expensive. But on a \$100-a-week paycheck you could still feed a family. The results were hardly memorable if all you knew was Wonder Bread and margarine, a Sunday roast cooked dark and hard, watery string beans, plenty of mashed potatoes, and Jell-O for desert.

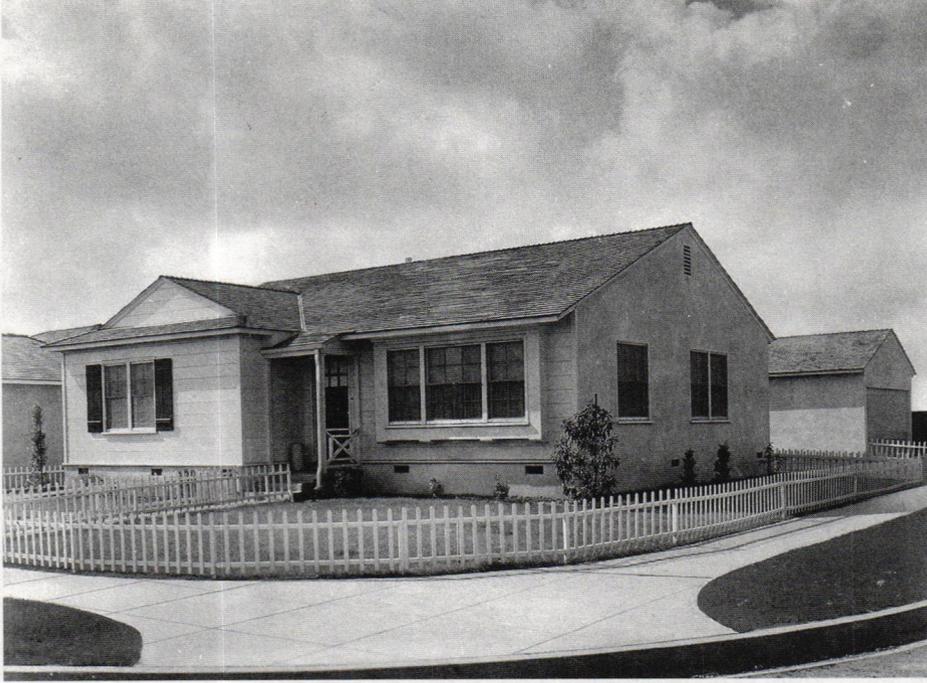
We were fed in Lakewood, but many of

us were not sustained very well, with scraps half-remembered from a high school home ec course and what TV commercials told our mothers they could do with Cheeze Whiz. We hardly noticed, but all around us was extravagant California. Backyards in Lakewood delivered apricots, plums, peaches, pomegranates, nectarines, tangelos, guavas, and tangerines with casual overabundance. The winy smell of fallen fruit in summer was overwhelming.

### Our roots

The children of my youth were a newly made tribe. A typical block with 36 houses might have as many as 80 boys and girls under the age of 15. Out of necessity, we shared the task of civilizing each other, stepwise from oldest to youngest. Perhaps we could have done better.

We ate the same store-bought food (as my neighbors from Oklahoma called it). Boys wore the same after-school uniform of tee-shirts and denim jeans (my neighbors from New Jersey called them dungarees). We made rough accommodations with divergent folkways, adopting a few, abandoning most of the baggage our parents carried. For us, the grid-ded streets were unbounded by class or place of origin. Lakewood was one block of houses repeated 500 times.



top left photo courtesy of the author; top right photo courtesy of the author

The tribe's lawgivers were Sheriff John and Engineer Bill and the "Miss Frances" of Ding Dong School. Our epic poets were the journeymen directors of the previous decade's B pictures shown on local television. From them, we made up endless games involving cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, and the army and Germans (because the war still lingered in Lakewood; it still lingers).

Our parents and their parents had been Poles or Lithuanians or Irish or Dutch or Swedish or something else with old grievances and older faiths and a long history of brokenness. Their children weren't anything. We were the homogenous, the brand name, the nationally advertised, the Californian, and we were unbroken then.

#### Innocence

In 1961, the federal Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization published "The Family Fallout Shelter"—a homeowner's guide to atomic survival, printed on newsprint and costing 10 cents. The OCDM advised that a contractor-built shelter would cost about \$1,500. (That was 10 percent of the cost of a house in Lakewood.) If \$1,500 was too much, dad could build a less adequate shelter in the basement, using plans in the OCDM guide, for about

\$500. Only no southern California tract house has a basement. A pre-fab shelter dealer in Downey, across the street from the Rockwell Aviation plant on Lakewood Boulevard, sold fiberglass shelters for burial in the backyard. I don't know how much they cost.

My parents never considered buying one, nor did any of our neighbors. We knew that we lived at "ground zero," surrounded by Douglas Aircraft, Rockwell International, a Nike missile battery, and the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. We knew that the thermal pulse from a single 20-megaton fusion bomb could set fire to everything inside a 10-mile-wide circle.

In 1962, during the week of the Cuban missile crisis, my parents stood at the kitchen sink after dinner, washing up and listening to the news on the TV. They turned to my brother and me and told us what we should do, if something happened. My brother and I—he was 16 and I was 14—should not try to come home from our Catholic high school. We should go to the school chapel to wait. My parents said they would come for us there.

My parents mouthed these lies, and my brother and I quietly repeated them. We knew that our parents would not come for us, and that the school chapel was a fit place in which to die.

#### Our way

When Lakewood was brand new, no one knew what would happen when tens of thousands of working-class husbands and wives—so young and inexperienced—were thrown together and expected to make a fit place to live. They had no instruction manual.

Mostly, they found enough space to reinvent themselves. Later, some of them learned that the work of reinvention had gone badly. Some of them, the men particularly, gave up what little adolescence they had kept. That loss made them seem remote to their sons and daughters, for whom everything new and disorienting was perfectly ordinary.

Tomorrow's city was difficult for all of us to map, but my neighbors gradually filled in what they lacked as ordinary people who had taken up the protracted burdens of living together. By necessity, they found a way. And most came to understand what they had gained and lost by owning a small house on a small lot in a neighborhood connected to more square miles of exactly the same. More men than just my father have told me that living here gave them a life made whole and habits that did not make them ashamed. ●



# Without A Trace

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Elizabeth Ranieri, FAIA

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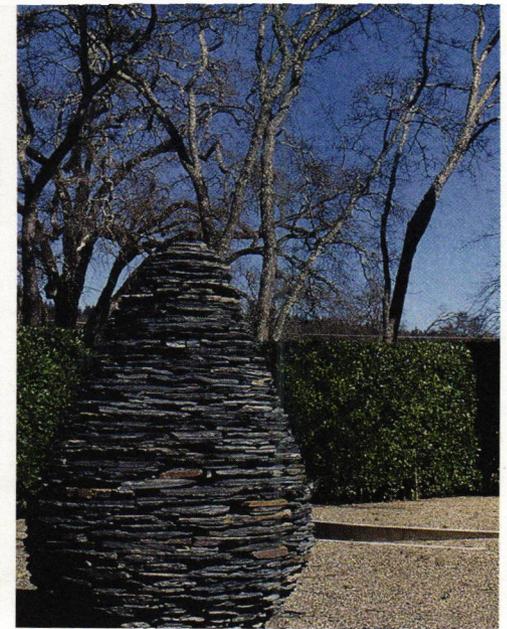
*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.*  
— Henry David Thoreau, Walden

High on the hills of Marin County lies a new sacred ground, a sustainable cemetery where one pays a premium to be buried in unencumbered open space—as an act of land preservation—to return to the earth without toxicity and without markers, in a final exchange between man and nature. This ecological participation is an active call to feed the earth, rather than forge a memory within it.

The Bay Area has long been a hotbed of cultural change, from home birthing to the Sierra Club, the *Whole Earth Catalog*, the progressive Edible Garden project, and most notably the organic movement. If this boomer generation has rewritten the practices of birth, created the eternal summer of love, and brought us back to regional living, why wouldn't it rewrite the rituals of dying and death? Green burial highlights the debatable loss of our last landscapes, their architecture of remembrance, and the brave act of dying without a trace.

Forever Fernwood is situated in Mill Valley off of Tennessee Valley Road, a provider of green burials since 2004 and the only sustainable burial cemetery in Northern California. The 32-acre parcel backs up on the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and is open to the public 24/7, accessed by car through a limited network of hill roads or via hiking trails connecting the grounds to open space. Because the cemetery has existed since the late 1800s, the traditional section and the natural section lie side by side, yet are two distinct landscapes, one cultivated, requiring irrigation, the other a native landscape that is lush in the spring and brown in the heat of summer. In both sections, every grave is dug by hand to limit noise and disruption of the sloped land.

In 2009, Fernwood opened what is the first green Jewish cemetery in the United States.



Left to right: Woodland Cemetery, near Stockholm, Sweden, photo courtesy Kuth/Ranieri Architects; an Andy Goldsworthy "Cone," photo by Ron Lutsko.

Situated along its western edge, it is delineated in three sections: orthodox, conservative, and renewal reform. The natural process of green burial is not new to the Jewish traditions, but merely consistent with historic practice; embalming and viewing are avoided, and the body is buried in a plain white shroud, because cremation is against teachings. The belief is that the body is a gift from God, and we should return it as soon as possible and in the best condition possible. Islamic burials are green as well, and, in addition, the body is placed to face Mecca. Christian customs, however, often include a funeral home service, which at the Fernwood facility is more typically used as a memorial rather than as a viewing or wake. All families are offered a virtual memorial, a biographical filmic story created by a partner company.

Our choices in death have a wide range of effects on the earth. Traditional inhumation (to bury or entomb), common to Christian and Anglo traditions, generates the greatest impact to the environment, due to toxic formaldehydes for embalming, and it requires the highest amounts of embedded energy for the production of caskets, concrete or polycarbonate vaults, and foundational headstone footings. These practices sit in contrast to green burials, where the shrouded body is either lowered into the ground by hand with cotton straps or

coffined in a pine box, basket, or biodegradable urn. No chemicals are used, and no markers. Bodies are identified only through a GPS grave locator. One caveat is that the baskets available to purchase at Fernwood were made in and shipped from China.

Cremation negatively impacts the atmosphere, both in the amount of energy—natural gas fueling a three- to four-hour process at 1,800 degrees F for one cremation—and in the high level of emissions. The choices here are personal, spiritual, and economic. With green burials, western rituals of internment come full circle. In the wave of living simply, we are merely embracing what was done before—simple living.

The graveyard and cemetery are part of our regional memories as places of remembrance, landscapes of quietude and of retreat from the intensity of urbanity. They offer specificity within the endlessness of the rural landscape and provide sacredness to the profane commercial strip of the American suburb. They are where we have gone to think back and look forward, yet the distinct role of these fields of rest is to put us reverently in the present—and that has been inherently a function of their design and architecture. The historic Pere-Lachaise Cemetery, the largest park in Paris, is precursor to the city public parks of the United States. With its pictur-

esque cobbled streets dense with trees, mausoleums, tombs, and miniature civic structures, it is a fiction of the city at rest, romantically depicting the tragic narrative of mortality and eternity. The Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Watertown, Massachusetts, close to Walden Pond, was established in the 1830s with the rise of American Transcendentalism. It is an Arcadian thereafter, with the traces of human existence set within a lush garden context. The cemetery was a cultivated landscape in the great outdoors, an intersection of leisure and sacred space depicting death in an idealized harmony with the earth and stars beyond. The beginnings of sustainability can be found in Transcendentalism, as well, in the 1836 publication of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*, a life philosophy reuniting man with nature.

However, many American cemeteries today have fallen into disrepair, been abandoned, or been completely reinvented. The Ventura Cemetery Memorial Park in Ventura, California, for example, opened in the late 19th century as St. Mary's Cemetery and later religiously diversified. It fell into disrepair after the last body was buried in 1943. The property was sold to the county in 1964 after many of its headstones were removed. Now renamed Cemetery Park, with a field of unmarked graves, it is presently used for recreation under the shadow of its hidden sacred history. The



Above: Fernwood Cemetery, photo courtesy Kuth Ranieri.

Bayside/Acacia Cemetery in Queens, New York, is another ruinous beauty. Overgrown with chest-high weeds and filled with overturned headstones, it is a restoration challenge overwhelmed by both vandalism and nature's aggressive repossession; maintaining the yards for its 35,000 residents has been difficult without a sufficient operating budget. Hollywood Forever, on the other hand, is thriving as a new financial model. Located on 64 acres in Los Angeles, and home to such residents as Cecil B. DeMille, Jayne Mansfield, and Rudolph Valentino, the cemetery is an active tourist and event destination. The grounds have recently been restored, but, more importantly, they have been renewed as public space.

The globalization of our cities and the increasing migration from places of birth have changed the ethos of the cemetery, and a new virtual geography has emerged, with online memorial sites like the [worldwidcemetary.com](http://worldwidcemetary.com), [foreverlifestories.com](http://foreverlifestories.com), and [myspaceafter.com](http://myspaceafter.com). The act of "visiting the grave" and the intimacy of grieving can be experienced from anywhere in the world, and the space between us and our dearly departed have both collapsed and expanded to immeasurable distances. However, within the striking contradiction—the sobering task to sustain our natural world and the unconditional promise of virtual immortality—lies a new question: what role will

architecture have, if any, in representing us in death? In the drive to conserve resources, we may choose no longer to leave the evidence of marks on the earth.

Green burials offer new opportunities for merging contemporary sensibilities with environmental politics and artistic expressions; at their highest level of commitment, these sacred acts are basic ecological unions that thrive on pure participation with the earth's natural systems—without the traces of memory. However, as creators of the built environment, we have every reason to invest in the new architecture of death and its markings. Will future memorials embrace new cultural programs to integrate virtual and visceral geography; explore radical and global visions for cemetery planning; embrace the abstraction and emotion of death; and reclaim the universal desire to be physically remembered in our last exchange with the sublime stretch of the American landscape?

Oddly enough, some partial answers may lie in the past. Monumental acts of funerary architecture, from the indigenous burial mounds in North America to the engineered Egyptian pyramids, speak through impressive reformations of the land itself and interrupt our understanding of the world.

Transfiguration of the land is familiar territory to the land artists of the late 20th cen-

tury, as well; the works of Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, James Turrell, Maya Lin, Andy Goldsworthy, and Bill Fontana, environmental interventions made with the site's soil, rock, and water, as well as climatic elements and ambient sounds, bring forth ideas in art and culture through the rearrangement of ordinary ground. Heizer's *Double Negative* at Mormon Mesa, Nevada, is a land excavation project of two massive trenches cut in alignment at a great distance from each other to imply an invisible and unattainable connection. Goldsworthy's *Cone* sculptures, constructed with small fragments of rock and wood found within a site, are arranged in massive primitive totems to heighten our perceptions of the organic world around us. Turrell's *Roden Crater* (not yet completed) centers our physical relationship with the sky. And Bill Fontana's Sound Island, a live auditory transmission from France's Normandy coast at the Arc De Triomphe in Paris, provides an unexpected sense of memory. Like the 19th-century picturesque, these works intensify our relationship with nature, yet the artists' approaches are sensual and existential, driven by process versus product and abstraction versus representation. Might these tactile physical gestures combined with virtual remembrance be our precedents for sacred traces and replace the tombstone tracings of the past? ●



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TO DREAMS LIST  
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I DO NOT ADMIT  
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AWAKE SOMEONE  
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Love you  
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You are my  
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I miss you  
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I WISH THE BEST FOR ALL

COME  
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SANTA CRUZ

LOVE

SIANO

The Temple

at Burning Man:

# A Lesson in Impermanence

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Amy E. Cranch

Be it a decorated altar, grove of trees, or cozy corner of the couch, most of us need a sacred space to turn to for tranquility or connection to a higher power. For the residents of Black Rock City—the bustling yet ephemeral home to the annual weeklong Burning Man festival in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert—that sacred space comes in the form of a wooden temple.

Rising from the flat, powdery earth, or playa, the temple serves as a spiritual refuge from the wild happenings elsewhere, a gathering space to meditate, mourn, or simply seek shelter from the sweltering sun. While most temples are meant to stand in perpetuity, the Temple of Flux, as it was called in 2010, was incinerated in a carefully composed performance at the end of the event—a fiery reminder that everything changes and eventually disappears.

## An Organic Counterpoint

Whereas previous Burning Man temples were typically elaborate, multistoried structures that called to the imagination shrines of foreign lands, the Temple of Flux took a radically different approach. Inspired by natural landforms, it appeared as a series of five graceful peaks that were broad and heavy at the base and ascended to a porcupine-like edge angling toward the sky. The walls were laid out in linear overlapping layers of plywood, from large rectangles to long, thin strips, and framed a central chamber that signaled to visitors they had wandered inside. Each dome contained at least one cave-like hollow. Light and shadow, both on the walls and in the chamber, gradually shifted throughout the day to reflect the pathway of the sun.

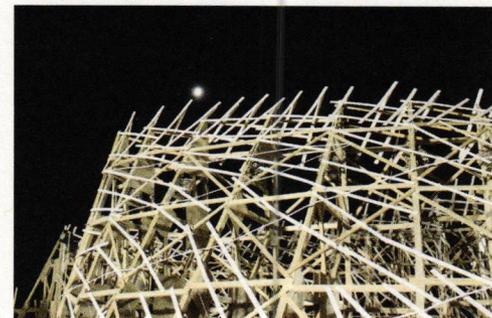
Led by Rebecca Anders, Jessica Hobbs, and Peter Kimelman, the design explored the continuously shifting relationship between humankind and the physical environment.

“We were prompted to ask where we came from,” said Anders, a Bay Area sculptor and metal fabricator, during an onsite tour at Burning Man. “Humans originally sought shelter in the land, in caves and canyons. Then we tried to alter these formations, then build our own structures.”



The 2010 Temple of Flux, detail left and in flames, above.

Photos by Jill Brown.



Above, left, the 2010 Temple of Flux, photo by John DeVenezia; above, right, the Temple of Flux during construction, photo by Jill Brown; opposite, the 2004 Temple of Stars, designed by David Best, photos by Walter Kolon.

As an organic, sensuous art piece, the temple stood in unexpected contrast to this year's festival theme of metropolis, in which one might anticipate seeing a more rectilinear form. In fact, the team consciously opted to create the first temple that was not a traditional building.

"We were interested in these shapes for their special abilities to enclose, to limit exposure to the outside," said Kimelman, a Bay Area architect. "Visitors were forced inward, with only the earth and sky to focus on."

While the Burning Man organization has historically selected its temple designers by proposal, it invited these artists directly. Once they settled on the idea of the urban canyon, they generated sketches and models while simultaneously beginning the intense process of cutting, painting, and piecing together plywood at American Steel in West Oakland, an enormous workspace run by established Burning Man artists. Several teams were developed, including structural engineering, construction, burn logistics, and fundraising. The smallest structure, which served as the test case, was

rebuilt several times to perfect the design and prepare the team for the overwhelming task ahead—building all five structures in the desert's extreme, unpredictable environment of high winds, blinding dust, and blistering heat. Over the next four months, more than 250 volunteers lent a hand, from seasoned builders to people who had never picked up a power tool.

"Burning Man, as a culture, is built on collaboration," said Kimelman. "Teaching volunteers how to cut wood, what shapes to use, or how to use a nail gun is part of the goal of making large-scale art."

#### A Place to Reflect

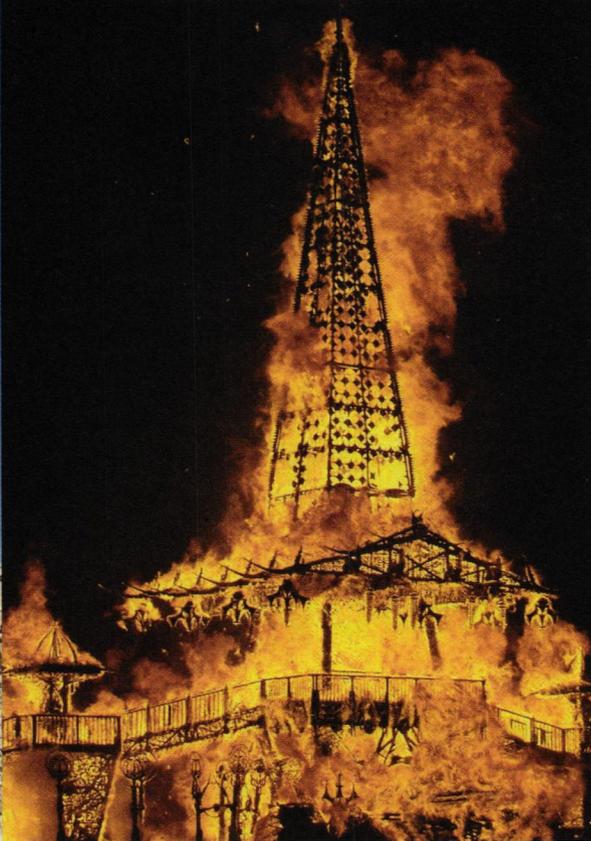
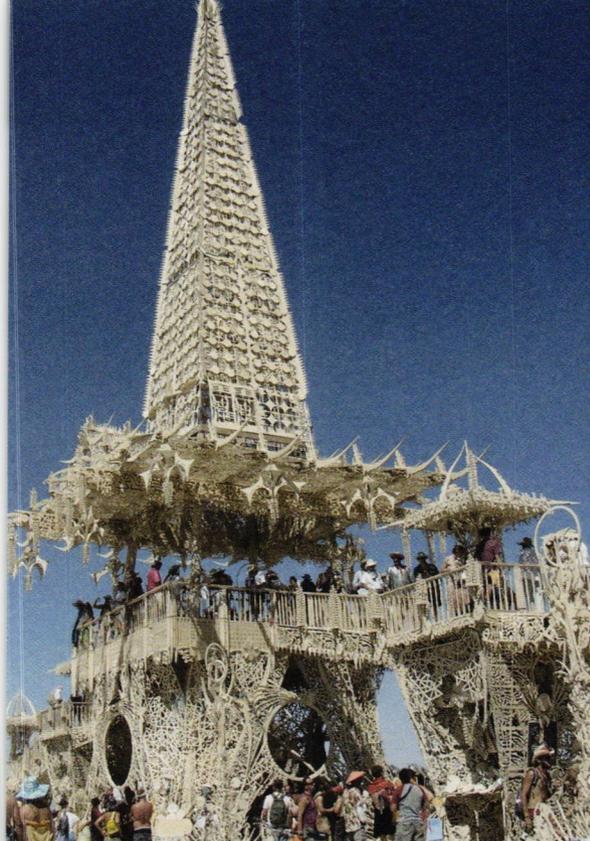
Some of the world's most poignant memorials, such as the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., invite visitors to interact with them in some way, to make an offering. That opportunity, in fact, drives many people to attend Burning Man. With busy lives that often lack a strong spiritual outlet, visiting the temple may be their only chance to reflect, to grieve, or to

let go—of a person, belief, or bad habit. By the end of the week, the temple, which starts off as a nude wood form, is embellished with photos, letters, affirmations, objects, and other contributions that run the gamut from humorous to hurt, celebratory to sad.

Caroline Grier of Oakland, a long-time Burning Man participant, visits the temple several times each year, but nothing prepared her for this year's experience. She was having a bad day, a bum knee, broken bike, and other aggravations triggering deep frustration she was experiencing at home. She climbed to the top of the man, the iconic 50-foot-plus effigy set atop an elaborate platform, and suddenly felt a powerful urge to jump.

"I felt the momentum of it, the possibility of it," she said. "I was done with the pain." But she found her way to the temple instead and began reading notes to the departed, including people who had committed suicide. In fragment after fragment, Grier witnessed pure grief and love.

"It occurred to me that some of my camp-



#### Temple of Flux Facts at a Glance

Flatbeds of wood	4
Structures	5
Total square feet	22,000
Highest height	40 ft.
Pre-playa build time	4 months
On-playa build time	17 days
Volunteer builders	250
Burn packs	300
Color flame packs	90
Sawdust cannons	16
Paraffin	2,000 lbs.
Fuse	2,500 ft.
Wire	3,800 ft.
Time of burn	22 minutes
Cost	\$180,000

mates would feel that way about me, and something shifted," she said. "The temple saved my life."

Since then, Grier has made a promise to let people know they are loved and appreciated. It's these kinds of altering experiences for which the temple is revered.

#### Majesty of Flames

The festival's culminating events are the burning of the man and the burning of the temple. After so much work involving so many people, why would these intricate pieces be demolished? Logic aside—lugging thousands of pounds of wood back to the Bay Area is impractical—the act speaks to two cornerstones of the Burning Man community, that the process surpasses the product, and that nothing lasts forever. The entire city is dismantled and the playa returned to its pristine state within days of the festival's end.

Quayle Hodek of Boulder, Colorado, has attended nine times. "The temple holds an amazing lesson of impermanence," he said.

"So much goes into something that's only around for a short time. Then it's set free in a majesty of flames and heat."

The burning of the man is a raucous affair, as if Halloween, New Year's Eve, and Carnival are rolled into one. But the burning of the temple is quiet, solemn, imbued with a tangible feeling of reverence as onlookers set their intentions on letting go. The moment's poignancy is not only in the individual things that are being released, whether that's a broken heart, substance use, or the loss of a parent, but also in the silent, collective witnessing of transformation.

Don Cain, a flame-effects artist for nine years, led the burn team, each member well versed, he said, in "the best ways to burn things up." The team spent four months inventing, designing, testing, and assembling the technology for the burn. On the playa, it took them 10 hours to set up 300 burn packs made of paraffin and sawdust, sawdust cannons that created plumes of blazing wood dust, packs that generated bright blue-green

flames, 2,500 feet of fuse, and other materials. The burn lasted 22 minutes.

Hodek had placed a note and photo in the temple on behalf of a friend whose young sister had died mysteriously just weeks before Burning Man. When the fire started, he was captivated by its immense heat and speed as whirling masses of air and flame engulfed the structures. "It was a powerful experience," he said, "a way to hold space for a friend who needed it, to memorialize a life in the midst of others who were enjoying theirs."

And that, for many, is what Burning Man is all about. Honor your life now, because it could change in a flash. ●

## Energy Efficiency Integration Award Winners

### 2010 Savings By Design Energy Efficiency Integration Awards (EEIA)

**Savings By Design Energy Efficiency Integration Awards Jury:**

Zorana Bosnic, RIBA, LEED AP,  
Vice President, Sustainable Design Director, HOK

Kevin deFreitas, AIA,  
Principal, Kevin deFreitas Architects

Randy Hanna, AIA,  
Principal, ARCHITECTS hanna gabriel wells

Dan Heinfeld, FAIA, LEED AP,  
President, LPA, Inc.

Brad Jacobson, AIA, LEED AP,  
Associate, EHDD

For their outstanding achievement in combining architectural elegance with sustainability and energy efficiency, seven California nonresidential projects received awards of recognition from the 2010 Savings By Design Energy Efficiency Integration Awards (EEIA) program.

Every year, the recognition program acknowledges the extra time and effort it takes to successfully integrate architectural excellence and energy efficiency. The Savings By Design EEIA program is sponsored by Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, San Diego Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison, and Southern California Gas Company, in conjunction with The American Institute of Architects, California Council (AIACC).

For more information about the Savings By Design Energy Efficiency Integration Awards, please visit [www.sbdawards.com](http://www.sbdawards.com).

**AWARD OF HONOR:**  
Yountville Town Center



Photos by David Wakely.

**ARCHITECT:** Siegel & Strain Architects

**OWNER:** Town of Yountville

**DESIGN TEAM:** Timmons Design Engineers (Engineer), John Northmore Roberts & Associates (Landscape Architect), Swank Construction (General Contractor), Coastland Civil Engineering (Civil Engineer), Endres Ware, LLP (Structural Engineer), Pound Management (Construction Manager), Alice Prussin Lighting Design (Lighting Designer), Topflight Specs (Specification Writer), Miller Pacific Engineering Group (Geotechnical Engineer), Glenn Rehbein Companies (Environmental Solutions), Enovity, Inc. (Commissioning Agent)

After many years of planning, the completion of the Yountville Town Center embodies a place designed to enrich community life through integration of new and existing buildings and outdoor rooms. The buildings seamlessly blend with the rural surroundings, while the interiors remain light and airy, with ridge skylighting supported by unique wood and cable trusses. Passive design, efficient technologies, and green materials set the project up for LEED Platinum status.

The Yountville Town Center received the Award of Honor, this year's highest award. One juror noted, "On every level this project excels...it brings the ideals of sustainable design to a great cross section of the public—from kids to retirees." Another juror commented, "A wonderfully scaled project that uses familiar, time honored sustainable strategies with innovative technologies. Rarely are sustainable practices and design so well married into a purposeful and singular statement."

Some of the major accomplishments of the project include 44% energy savings over Title 24; implementation of passive strategies such as daylighting, shading, and natural ventilation; reduction of domestic water usage by 30% through water conserving plumbing fixtures; reduction of irrigation water usage by 51% through harvested rainwater, drip irrigation, subsurface irrigation, and drought tolerant native plants; as well as projected energy savings of 53% through the use of ground-source heat pumps and roof-mounted photovoltaic laminates. More than 75% of the wood used in the project is FSC certified; embodied carbon was reduced by 280 tons through 70% slag concrete and the reuse (instead of replacement) of the existing Community Hall. The building envelope includes low-e2 windows, exterior sunshades, and "cool" standing seam metal roofs.

For more information about the Yountville Town Center, please visit [www.townofyountville.com](http://www.townofyountville.com).



# 2010 Savings By Design

## AWARD OF MERIT:

### Interior Renovation: DPR Net Zero Office



Photos by Hewitt Garrison.

**ARCHITECT:** Callison Architects, P.C.

**OWNER:** DPR Construction, Inc.

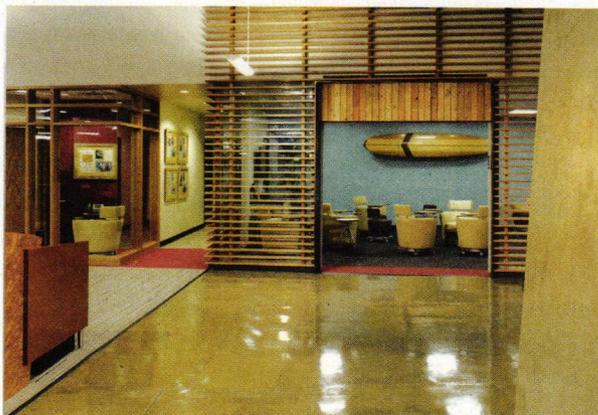
**DESIGN TEAM:** KEMA (Consultant), Pacific Rim Mechanical (Consultant), Bergelectric Corporation (Consultant)

Serving in the capacities of owner, client, and designer/builders, DPR Construction, Inc. completed a remodel of their 24,000 sq. ft. multi-tenant office building in San Diego. The remodel completely transformed a standard suburban office building into a cutting-edge facility embracing the environment, as well as the people and culture of DPR. The building was designed to be Net Zero Energy and is currently pursuing LEED Platinum certification. Environmentally conscious elements such as natural ventilation, daylighting, efficient HVAC and lighting systems, and renewable energy via the Sustainable Communities program were all incorporated.

The interior renovation project helped the Net Zero Office achieve some significant savings, such as decreasing water usage by more than 51% through installation of low-flow fixtures, dual flush toilets, waterless urinals, 0.5 gpm lavatories, and 1.25 gpm shower heads; 60% decrease in landscape water usage by installing drip irrigation, climate control devices, and planting drought tolerant plants; reducing lighting energy consumption by 53% through installation of Solatube skylights, a savings of 29,000 kWh annually; lowering HVAC usage by 79% through the use of cross and stack ventilation strategies, and the installation of operable windows; and installation of a 64 kw-AC roof-mounted photovoltaic panel system. 75% of construction waste was diverted from landfills.

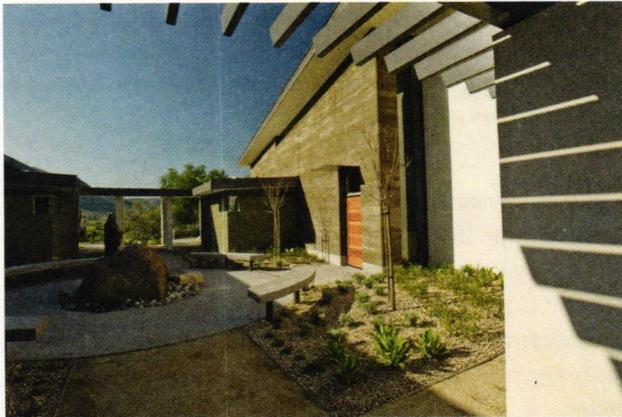
As part of the 2010 Savings By Design Energy Efficiency Integration Awards, the DPR Net Zero Office received the Award of Merit for Interior Renovation. This project was described as "a great example of reuse that demonstrates how focusing on sustainability and energy efficiency can lead in creating an exciting interior office space no matter how ordinary the shell."

For more information about DPR Construction, please visit [www.dprconstruction.com](http://www.dprconstruction.com).



## AWARD OF MERIT:

Community: Saint Bartholomew's Chapel



Photos by Harrison Photographic.

**ARCHITECT:** Kevin deFreitas Architects, AIA

**OWNER:** Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians

**DESIGN TEAM:** Envision Engineering (Engineer), landLAB (Landscape Architect), Lusardi Construction Company (General Contractor), Desai Architects (Design Consultant), Stueven Engineering (Mechanical Engineer), BTA Engineers (Plumbing & Electrical Engineer), The Wood & Iron Factory (Furnishings Consultant)

In February 2010, the reconstruction of Saint Bartholomew's Chapel was completed, after being previously destroyed by a wildfire in late 2007. The design elements of the plan, section, and elevation were conceived to echo the spiritual and communal heart of the reservation. Elements such as rammed earth walls, radial plan elements, a butterfly roof, and extensive use of locally sourced materials all contributed to the thoughtful integration of the chapel into its environment.

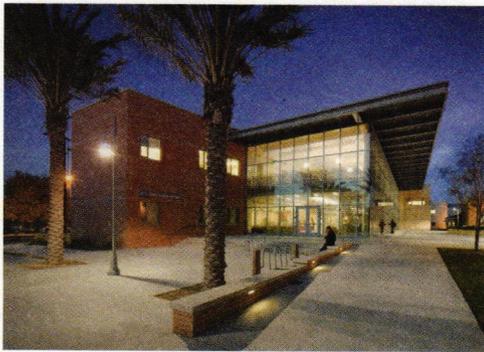
This Award of Merit for Community Project was a standout entry during the jury session. One juror said, "I love the sense of permanence this project evokes, and I applaud the architect for making sustainability a priority for this small but important community project." Another juror commented, "This community chapel doesn't need exotic building systems to communicate its sustainability. Instead, its appropriateness to its site and climate is self-evident in the building materials and care taken in window sizing, placement, and shading."

This reconstruction project was successful in achieving 26% energy savings over Title 24 and 100% natural daylighting through clerestory windows and skylights. 50% of the chapel's electricity usage is provided by an on-site 5.8 kW photovoltaic system; high-performance Solar E glazing was used; ultra long life and low energy consuming LED lighting was installed; an onsite bio-swale storm water filtration system was installed; and nearly the entire structure features exposed finished materials that are sustainable and rated for long life cycles.

# 2010 Savings By Design

## AWARD OF MERIT:

Higher Education: Los Angeles Harbor College



Photos by Paul Turang.

**ARCHITECT:** Steinberg Architects

**OWNER:** Los Angeles Community College District

**DESIGN TEAM:** KPFF Consulting Engineers (Engineer), AHBE Landscape Architects (Landscape Architect), Mallcraft, Inc. (General Contractor), JMC2 (Civil Engineer), IBE Consulting Engineers (Mechanical, Electrical & Plumbing Engineer), Vantage Technology Consulting Group (Technology & AV Consultant), Lighting Design Alliance, Inc. (Lighting Designer), Cumming, LLC (Cost Estimator), Lerch Bates, Inc. (Vertical Transportation Consultant), SM&W (Security Consultant), Davies Associates (Signage Consultant), Schirmer Engineering (Fire Protection Consultant)

Constructed in 2009 on the main campus of Los Angeles Harbor College, the North-east Academic Hall and the Student Services and Administration Building both received LEED Gold status. These two buildings, which serve as the centerpiece of the new campus entry on "L" Street, successfully capture sustainable practices through smart building envelope design, orientation, daylighting and shading strategies, energy efficient lighting and HVAC, and selection of durable and environmentally preferable materials.

Some of the most notable accomplishments of this project include 36% energy savings over Title 24; adoption of passive strategies to create a successful learning environment, such as extensive daylighting implementation through clerestory windows and light wells and minimizing exposure to solar heat gain by orienting classrooms along the east and north facades; treatment of storm water runoff onsite; savings of 45% potable water usage; and diversion of 96% of construction waste from the landfill.

"This project demonstrates the power of getting the basics right—orientation, plan organization, and solar control," observed one juror.

For more information about Los Angeles Harbor College, please visit [www.lahc.edu](http://www.lahc.edu).

## AWARD OF MERIT :

### Innovative Building Systems: David Brower Center



Photos by Tim Griffith.

**ARCHITECT:** Solomon E.T.C. / A WRT Company

**OWNER:** Equity Community Builders

**DESIGN TEAM:** LOISOS + UBBELOHDE (Associate Architect), Integral Group (Engineer), Wallace Roberts & Todd (Landscape Architect), Cahill Contractors (General Contractor), Tipping Mar & Associates (Structural Engineer), Integrated Design Associates, Inc. (Electrical Engineer), Siegel and Strain Architects (LEED & Materials Consultant), BraytonHughes Design Studios (Interior Designer), Auerbach Glasow French (Lighting Consultant)

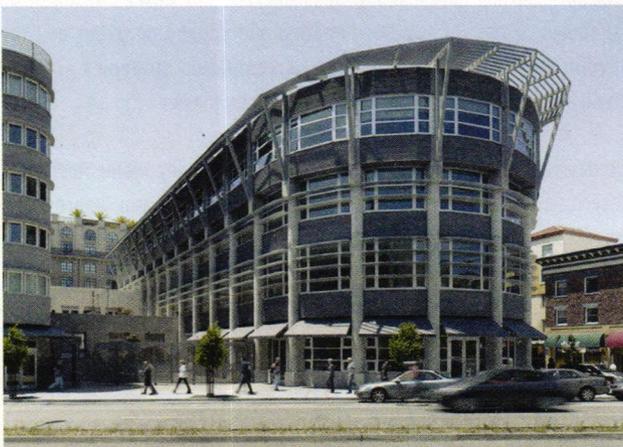


Cited as one of the Bay Area's most advanced green buildings, the non-profit David Brower Center serves as an inspiring home for environmental and social action, with a combination of offices and program facilities housed in this 50,000 sq. ft. facility. The building, which is the first of its kind in Berkeley and one of only ten in Northern California, is seeking LEED Platinum certification. The David Brower Center is a powerful model of sustainability, utilizing the latest in energy-saving technologies and recycled building materials.

Juror comments included: "I applaud the cross-section of this building. It truly shows innovative uses of the available technologies and shows that even large, multi-story projects can be energy efficient." "The energy efficiency strategies are varied and impressive for a building of this scale. There are many lessons that can be learned from this project about energy efficiency in larger multi-story buildings."

Some of the major achievements of this project include 50% energy savings over Title 24; 40% decrease in energy use through installation of a 68kW PV system; installation of high-efficiency lighting with automatic controls; 100% daylighting in all office spaces; and operable windows and low pressure ventilation via a raised floor system to maximize indoor air quality. 53% of construction materials were recycled; rainwater is collected and reused for irrigation and toilet flushing; solar shading devices were installed on all south-facing windows.

For more information about the David Brower Center, please visit [www.browercenter.org](http://www.browercenter.org).



# 2010 Savings By Design

## AWARD OF MERIT:

### Civic: Watsonville Water Resources Center



Photos by Bruce Damonte.

**ARCHITECT:** WRNS Studio

**OWNER:** City of Watsonville

**DESIGN TEAM:** Integrated Design Associates, Inc. (Electrical & Lighting Designer), JEC Structural Consulting (Structural Engineer), RI Engineering, Inc. (Civil Engineer), Integral Group (Mechanical & Plumbing Engineer), Bellinger Foster Steinmetz (Landscape Architect), Devcon Construction (General Contractor), Rick Unvarsky Consulting Services, Inc. (Commissioning Agent)

Designed to achieve LEED Platinum certification, the Watsonville Water Resources Center serves as a functional, educational, and visual extension of the water recycling plant it supports. In occupied spaces, water flows through radiant tubes below the floors to provide heating and cooling; rainwater flows from eaves, down rain chains, into swales, and is stored in retention basins; natural ventilation strategies have been implemented; and a roof-mounted solar panel system contributes to energy conservation.

Some of the many accomplishments of this project include energy efficiency targets to exceed ASHRAE 90.1 by 76%; reduction in water consumption by 50% through the use of rainwater collection and reuse; 70% decrease in irrigation water use through native and drought-tolerant landscaping; 50% decrease in water consumption through use of radiant tubes for sub-floor heating and cooling of water; and the installation of roof-mounted solar panels. Natural ventilation strategies are supported through CO<sub>2</sub> sensors in open areas and building chimneys.

During the two-day review of all project entries, the Watsonville Water Resources Center was described as "an example for the entire region in water, energy, and resource conservation, which is beautifully demonstrated by the repurposed redwood rainscreen." One juror observed, "All of the challenges of integrated design are smoothed over in this graceful, low-slung work of civic architecture. In the end, they make it look easy."

For more information about the Watsonville Water Resources Center, please visit [www.watsonvilleutilities.org](http://www.watsonvilleutilities.org).

## AWARD OF MERIT:

### K-12: Marin Country Day School



Photos: above, Michael David Rose; left center, courtesy of EHDD Architecture; bottom, Josh Partee.



**ARCHITECT:** EHDD Architecture

**OWNER:** Marin Country Day School

**DESIGN TEAM:** Tipping Mar & Associates (Engineer), Conger Moss Guillard (Landscape Architect), Oliver & Co. (General Contractor), Stantec (Mechanical, Electrical & Plumbing Engineer), WRA Environmental Consultants (Ecologist), Arborwell (Arborist), TMT Associates (Lighting Consultant), Miller Pacific Engineering Group (Geotechnical Engineer), Charles M Salter Associates, Inc. (Acoustical Consultant), Sherwood Design Engineers (Civil Engineer), The Fire Consultants (Code Consultant), Van Brunt & Associates (Hazardous Materials Consultant), Simpson Gumpertz & Heger (Waterproofing Consultant)

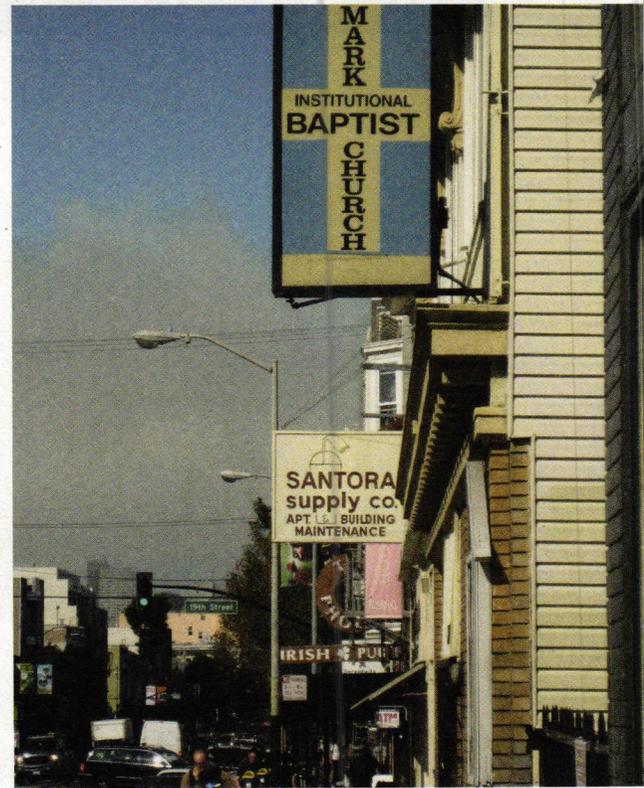
With a development plan deeply rooted in conservation, smart resource management, and the critical role of education in fostering environmental consciousness, the construction of a new library, art studios, and classrooms on the Marin Country Day School campus were all intended to be lessons in sustainability. This LEED for Schools Platinum project seamlessly connects classrooms with outdoor learning environments, integrates water-efficient strategies, makes expansive use of daylighting, and pays particular attention to healthy, non-toxic construction materials.

Some of the major accomplishments of this project include 40% energy savings over Title 24; extensive use of daylighting by way of clerestory windows and skylights; installation of a large photovoltaic system to supply energy use for the new buildings; reduction in heat island effects through use of shade trees, covered walkways, and light-colored, high albedo paving and roofing materials; implementation of water conservation strategies, including utilization of water-efficient fixtures and drought-tolerant landscaping, and collection of rainwater in a 15,000 gallon cistern; building cooling through natural ventilation and a nighttime evaporative cooling tower; and use of FSC certified wood in all rough framing, wood siding, and exterior guardrails and sunshades.

"This is how schools should be built - lots of daylighting with passive protection, natural ventilation, lots of protected exterior spaces, and thoughtful engagement with the landscape."

For more information about Marin Country Day School, please visit [www.mcids.org](http://www.mcids.org).





## Sacred San Francisco: Contrast and Transformation

Sara K. Hayden, Esq.

I doubt I am alone in thinking of San Francisco as a food Mecca rather than a spiritual one. When I exit my apartment onto busy 18th Street in the Mission District, there is Tartine Bakery with its wafting smells of caramelized sugar and butter amidst the Victorian apartment buildings. Crowds gather outside the deceptively modest storefronts of Delfina Restaurant and its adjacent pizzeria; and the line of people waiting to order ice cream wraps around the corner from Bi-Rite Creamery.

Just two blocks from this hub of food idolatry is the Mission Dolores, one of the missions established by the Spanish in the eighteenth century and the oldest building in San Francisco. Despite the Mission District being named after this Mission, I had never paid much attention to it or any other religious buildings or spiritual centers here. Even after living in this neighborhood for nine years, it took a return to the Mission after a three-year stint back on the East Coast for me to see it in a new light. Used to church spires piercing the New England landscape, what struck me when I returned to San Francisco were the number and variety of buildings devoted to religion and spirituality in my neighborhood.

On my frequent walks in the Mission, I began to look for these sacred spaces and spotted at least one on nearly every block. While some of these sacred buildings are obvious—commanding a large piece of real estate or with familiar details (a steeple, a rose window, a dome)—many are more modest in size and without these familiar markers: a modest, two-story building in a row of Victorians; a one-story building, looking like a former mechanic’s garage, marked with a simple cross at its peak; a meditation center nestled on a side street next to a cleaning supply store. Or the normally inconspicuous storefront that comes alive with gospel music on weekday nights, its door flung open and the music of tambourine and electric guitar pouring forth.

In taking an informal survey of these sacred spaces in the Mission, a couple of notable themes emerged; the first is contrast. The Mission District is truly a “mixed use” district, and the sacred often stands side-by-side with the mundane or the profane. Second is the theme of transformation. There are many examples of buildings being transformed from sacred to common uses or from one religion to another. This article begins to explore these themes.

### Contrast

The modern San Francisco we know has its origins in both the sacred and the profane: a half century after the founding of the Mission Dolores, gold mania rushed in, bringing along with it saloons and establishments of “ill-repute,” thus creating the so-called Barbary Coast. This



contrast between the sacred and the profane, or at the very least mundane, continues to be evident today.

Walking two blocks east on 16th Street from the Mission Dolores, I hit Valencia Street, one of the main commercial streets of this District, hosting a parade of all types and ages of people. Just shy of two miles long, Valencia has restaurants of all scales and sorts, cafes, bars, clothing stores, boutiques, galleries, workspaces, locally owned bookstores, and bike shops. Interspersed among these businesses is a cross-section of religious buildings.

For example, commanding most of a city block near 14th Street is the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation. Clad in light stucco and reminiscent of Byzantine monuments, this grand complex includes an educational facility and auditorium. The congregation is on the verge of expanding the complex to include a domed chapel modeled on the Hagia Sophia. In contrast, just a half-block from the Cathedral, and within view of it, is an imposing brick Moorish castle. Equally grand as the Cathedral, this castle is the former Mission Armory and home, since 2007, to the adult bondage website *kink.com*.

Some contrasts are more subtle: farther down Valencia is the unadorned building of St. Mark Institutional Baptist Church, which neighbors the storefront for Santora Cleaning Supplies and is just yards away from an Irish pub in one direction and a neighborhood bar in the other. Santora Supplies may have an affinity for the sacred, because a second Santora store is located just a few blocks away off Valencia on

the side street Bartlett, next to the San Francisco Buddhist Center.

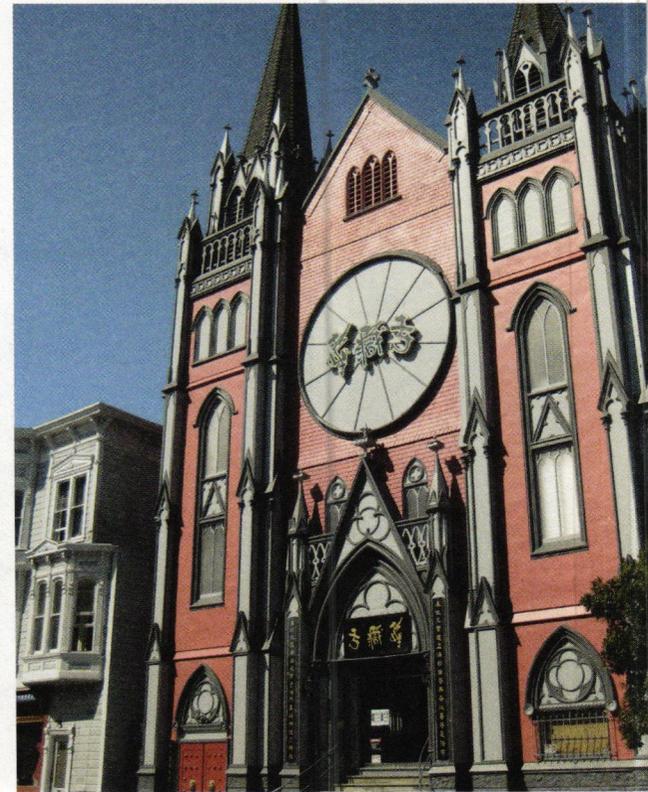
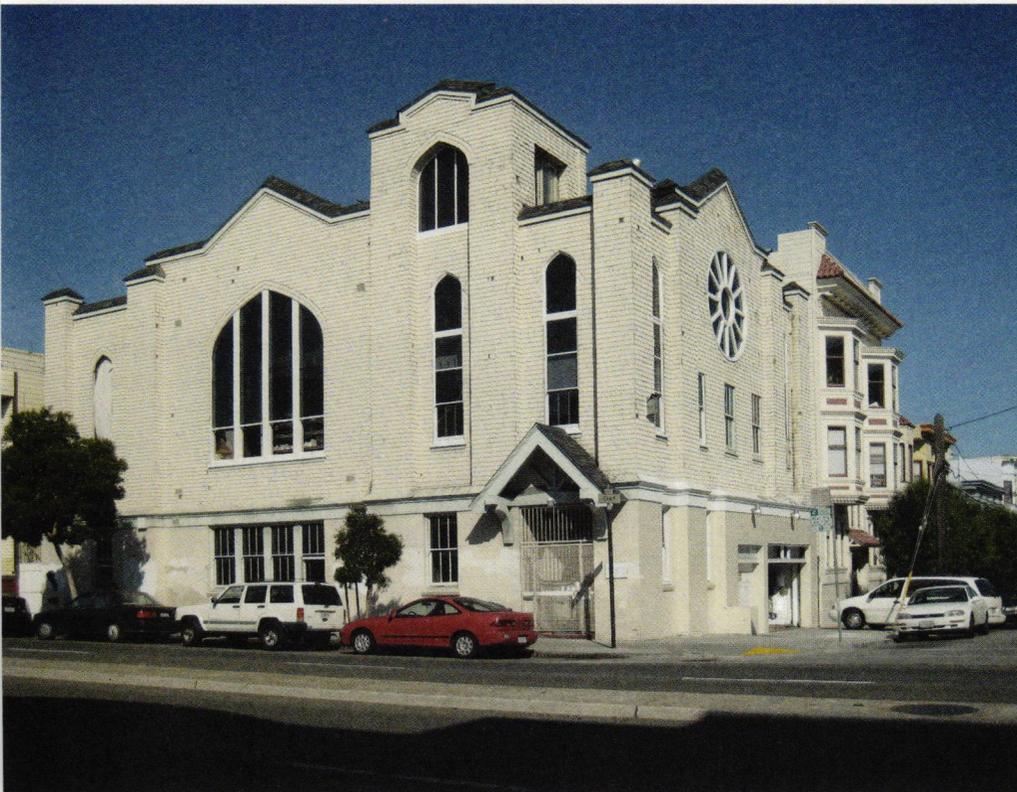
These are just a few examples; while most may not present as extreme a contrast as the Annunciation Cathedral and the *kink.com* Armory, it became clear to me that an important component of the energy of the Mission is the presence of the various congregations and their sacred spaces intermixed with the bars and restaurants. Perhaps it is because these sacred spaces balance the other “temples” of hedonism.

### Transformation

San Francisco is a place of transformation for many people, a welcome place to shift identities. The same can be said for its sacred spaces: congregations shift, religious buildings become obsolete, and new assemblies emerge.

Nationally, there is a recurring issue with traditionally religious buildings being underused because of dwindling congregations and mounting maintenance expenses. At the crossroads of tradition, meaning, and form, these buildings often are the “white elephants” that present issues with redeveloping them for other purposes. But many communities still work to save these buildings because of their symbolism and uniqueness.

In my immediate neighborhood, there are examples of some of these religious buildings in various stages of transition. On 19th Street, the former B’nai David Temple became apartments in 1981. Situated mid-block and partially shrouded by trees, a quick glance may not find its



earlier incarnation, but the building still bears clear markers of its earlier life: Stars of David in its windows and the front gate, as well as a bas relief of the Torah above the main entry.

A couple of blocks away, also on 19th Street and overlooking Dolores Park, is the currently dubbed “Castle on the Park.” This gothic revival castle is the former Golden Gate Lutheran Church (called Norwegian Lutheran Church prior to 1970), which was deconsecrated in 2005. After the church ceased operations due to a shrinking membership and delayed maintenance, a private developer transformed it into a massive single family home, which, as of October 2010, was still on the market for just shy of \$7.5 million.

A far more humble example of the transition from sacred space to mundane is the former Methodist Church at Guerrero and Camp Streets, which is currently residential. The developer is retaining the rose window and large gothic windows, symbols of its previous incarnation.

Not all transformations are from the

sacred to the mundane. Some are the reverse, or even from one sacred use to another. A dramatic example of this in the Mission is that of the former St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church into the current Hua Zang Si Buddhist Temple. Built at the turn of the twentieth century for a mostly German congregation, this gothic revival church retains the structure indicating its previous affiliation—e.g., spire and gothic windows—but has been transformed with a dramatic paint job and additional features, like the Chinese-style doors and Chinese characters.

As a place of diverse individuals, the diversity of forms of San Francisco’s sacred spaces should come as no surprise. Together, these spaces provide insights into the Mission’s diversity of beliefs and shifting neighborhood demographics, and remind us of the sacred surrounding us. ●

Previous pages, left to right: the “Castle on the Park,” St. Mark and Santora Supplies, former B’nai David Temple and its entrance. Above left: former Methodist Church; above right and below: former St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, now the Hua Zang Si Buddhist Temple. All photos by the author.



"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

[www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com)

### Resting spots for some well-known California architects

Bernard Maybeck 1862-1957

Mountain View Cemetery, Oakland

Charles Sumner Greene 1867-1957

Monterey City Cemetery, Monterey

Julia Morgan 1872-1957

Mountain View Cemetery, Oakland

Timothy Pflueger 1892-1946

Cypress Lawn Memorial Park, Colma

Paul Williams 1894-1980

Evergreen Cemetery, Los Angeles

Wallace Neff 1895-1982

Mountain View Cemetery, Altadena

Albert Frey 1903-1998

Welwood Murray Cemetery, Palm Springs

<https://digital.lib.washington.edu>

### Number of cemeteries in the US

100,000 plus

[www.idreamof.com](http://www.idreamof.com)

### The number of mega-churches in California

92

A megachurch is a church having 2,000 or more attendees for a typical weekly service.

[www.angelfire.com](http://www.angelfire.com)

### Cathedrals in California

Oldest: The Cathedral of San Carlos Borromeo, Monterey, completed 1794

Newest: The Cathedral of Christ the Light, Oakland, completed 2008

[www.cathedralsocalifornia.com](http://www.cathedralsocalifornia.com)

### Some contemporary cathedrals with design accolades

The Cathedral of Christ the Light, Oakland, 2008

Craig Hartman, SOM

Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles, 2002

José Rafael Moneo

Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, 1961, 1980, 1990

Richard Neutra, Philip Johnson, & Richard Meier

[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

### Top quarterly published on religious architecture

*Faith & Form: the Interfaith Journal on Religion, Art and Architecture*

[www.faithandform.com](http://www.faithandform.com)

### Number of California architects in the AIA's Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art & Architecture

320

[www.aiacc.org](http://www.aiacc.org)

### Three books on chapels

*The Rothko Chapel: Writings on Art and the Threshold of the Divine*, Dominique de Menil (Menil Collection, 2010)

*The Chapel of St. Ignatius*, Steven Holl (Princeton Architectural Press, 1999)

*Le Corbusier: The Chapel at Ronchamp*

Daniele Pauly (Birkhauser Architecture, 2007)

<http://libraries.cca.edu/>

### Three books on the architecture of loss

*The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, James E. Young (Yale University Press, 1993)

*The American Resting Place*, Marilyn Yalom (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008)

*Emergent Memory: The National AIDS Memorial Competition*, Neal Schwartz, editor (National AIDS Memorial Grove, 2005)

<http://libraries.cca.edu/>

David Meckel, FAIA

### Some religious structures that have received AIACC awards (1984-2009)

First Presbyterian Church of Encino

Fields Devereaux Architects & Engineers

St. Gregory's Episcopal Church, San Francisco

Goldman Architects

First Church of Christ Scientist, Glendale

LPA, Inc.

St. Matthew's Parish Church, Pacific Palisades

Moore Ruble Yudell

St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Sonoma

Tanner Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects

Restoration of the Cathedral of the Blessed

Sacrament, Sacramento,

Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners LLP

The Cathedral of Christ the Light, Oakland

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

Congregation Beth Shalom, San Francisco

Stanley Saitowitz/Natoma Architects Inc.

[www.aiacc.org](http://www.aiacc.org)

### Numbers of Californians born / deceased in 2009

526,774 / 196,190

[www.dof.ca.gov](http://www.dof.ca.gov)

John Leighton Chase  
1953-2010



John Chase brought to the *arcCA* Editorial Board a rare combination of intellect and imagination, voicing a five-octave range of design possibilities. He taught us to enjoy, critically but without prejudice, everything from draperies to general plans, from the precisely engineered to the ad hoc, from the symphony hall to the hot dog stand. John reminded us how very large the world is, how very large architecture can be; and he showed us how to assume our correspondingly large responsibilities with generous good humor, even with delight. **TC**