

# THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

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BEVERLY HILLS' NEW CULTURAL CENTER



COURTESY SPFA ARCHITECTS

## Going Postal

Almost a decade after they first submitted a proposal to renovate the Beverly Hills Post Office, Culver City-based SPFA:architects received EIR approval in January from the Beverly Hills City Council to begin work on transforming the building into the centerpiece of a new cultural center. The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts will use the original 1933 post office for administrative, exhibition, and workshop spaces, while a separate new building will contain a contemporary **continued on page 13**

A PLANNED MENTAL HEALTH FACILITY IN TUCSON AIMS FOR A MORE STRESS-FREE EXPERIENCE



COURTESY CANNON DESIGN

## HEALING WAYS

The planned Pima County Behavioral Health Pavilion and Crisis Response Center in Tucson, Arizona, represents a new way of thinking about mental health facilities. In the past, this building type has received short shrift when it comes to design, a result of scant funding and a desire to go unnoticed by NIMBYs. If an expected national wave of health care reform translates into a facility building boom, the Pima Pavilion could become a model to watch.

The \$60.3 million, 208,000-square-foot

project due for completion in 2010 was created by the San Francisco office of Cannon Design. It not only has a striking (and sustainable) profile, but it reformulates mental health design by combining uses that are usually scattered across many facilities, and streamlining a process both wasteful and often dangerous for those involved.

The project's three-story Behavioral Health Pavilion, a 96-bed psychiatric hospital, offers extensive care and treatment and has its own courtroom and **continued on page 12**

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CONTENTS

03 BRIT BEACHED AT BACARA

05 MARVIN RAND: HE WAS A CAMERA

18 FRESH SALES

04 EAVESDROP  
13 AT DEADLINE  
26 MARKETPLACE

STIMULUS ACT'S CALIFORNIA IMPACT STILL UNKNOWN

## LIFE SUPPORT?

According to White House projections, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signed into law by President Obama on February 17 is expected to add or save 396,000 jobs in California over the next two years. While the Golden State may benefit more than **continued on page 11**

GLUCKMAN MAYNER OUT AT SF PRESIDIO



COURTESY WRNS

## PARADE'S END

Dissent from the public and from preservationist groups over Gluckman Mayner Architects' modernist-style proposal for a museum in the Presidio has succeeded in convincing Donald and

Doris Fisher, founders of the Gap, to rethink the location, size, and architect for the Contemporary Art Museum of the Presidio (CAMP) they had proposed for the site at the foot of the Golden Gate

bridge in San Francisco. "The Fishers are going with [locally-based] WRNS Studio to do the redesign," Alex Tourk, a spokesperson for the Fishers, told AN in January. "It's their feeling that it would be best to go with a local firm."

And so in late February, the museum released new designs by WRNS that call for less new construction, retain historic buildings that had been marked for demolition, and substantially reconfigure the art museum. Two new buildings comprising the museum (and connected by an **continued on page 4**

CRIT: MORPHOSIS' CAHILL CENTER FOR ASTRONOMY & ASTROPHYSICS. SEE PAGE 10



ROLAND HALBE



1	2
4	5
	6

1. KITCHEN BY VALCUCINE
2. "VICTOR" BED BY EMMEBI
3. "DORSIA" DOOR BY RES
4. WALK-IN CLOSET BY MISURAEMME
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## HARD TIMES 101

With the AIA's Work-On-the-Boards Survey hitting its lowest level ever, I don't need to tell you work is sparse right now. The temptation for many may well be to go radical: not just freeze salaries, reduce benefits, or furlough workers, but to slash large chunks of staff. But before pushing the ejector button, there are other options. As London Business School Professor Don Sull puts it, instead of slamming on the brakes, companies should just ease them and look for the opportunities that our current economic condition presents, adapting instead of shedding too many workers.

Opportunities, right now, seem to be funneling only to the largest firms with the connections to tap into the stimulus billions slated for construction of new schools, health care facilities, government buildings, affordable housing, transportation-related buildings, and infrastructure.

But perhaps the more valuable—and procurable—new opportunities for architects in today's economic climate relate to reuse. With new construction at a standstill, people are going to have to make do with the spaces they already have. That doesn't have to mean no architecture. The way is paved for renovation, preservation, adaptive reuse, infill development, and interiors projects. And that's a good thing. The truism is worth repeating: The greenest architecture is building from what's already there. There's nothing like a slow economy to curtail the wasteful habits we've been trying to legislate away with efforts like small-lot ordinances, sprawl-containment measures, anti-teardown rules, brownfield-development incentives, and efficiency standards.

Reuse makes financial sense, too. As Michael Din, AIA/LA's Director of Development and Marketing put it, work is still getting built, just on a smaller scale: "Rather than tearing down and rebuilding clients are tending to renovate." For the first time, the AIA/LA has made renovations the focus of its upcoming home tour on April 19. Din added that the downturn could highlight the fact that most architects are quite skilled—even if they don't want to admit it—at interiors work, always part of their larger projects but not always the part that gets featured most. "The public perception is that there are architects and interior architects, and the twain should never meet," Din said. Now is the time to show the public that architects boast a broad range of design chops, not only in interior work but in other fields like product development, graphic arts, and environmental design.

Planners are catching on that many Americans seem to prefer to live in denser locations where there is far less new building and far more reusable building stock. In the stimulus package, there's a lot of money headed to reuse and retrofitting. And that includes \$6 billion for the renovation and repair of federal buildings, plus other grants, loans, and incentives for energy retrofits and green housing investments. For renovation and preservation projects, about \$28 billion of the stimulus is aimed at the modernization, renovation, and repair of schools, and \$2 billion has been set aside to help communities purchase or rehabilitate foreclosed or vacant properties to create more affordable housing.

These are huge numbers. But I'd like to see even more money invested in an even more diverse range of preservation and sustainability efforts. It's a step that could quickly open up jobs in areas that are sometimes neglected by the architecture community at large. There are of course plenty of firms that specialize in preservation, interiors, and reuse, but that doesn't mean that other architecture firms can't expand their repertoire to include these offerings, too. Just as firms have in recent years expanded into the fields of planning, landscape architecture, and sustainable design, they can just as easily move into reuse. Maybe it's not as sexy as a shiny new building, but these are not shiny times. Just time for reinvention. **SAM LUBELL**

GOLETA BOARD BALKS AT BEACH  
RESORT BY JOHN PAWSONTROUBLE IN  
PARADISE

Santa Barbara's omnipresent Mission aesthetic is about to be tested to an extreme. British architect John Pawson, known for favoring rich materials and stringent lines, put forth a proposal to build a modern addition to the upscale Bacara Resort and Spa just west of the city in a town called Goleta, unleashing a conflagration in the process. Residents and several of Goleta's design review board members complained at a first conceptual review presentation that the project clashes with the area's historic look, is much too large, and pushes the public away from the popular Haskell's Beach. The review board criticized Pawson's proposal on January 27, and the architect was set to bring revised plans back for board review at a meeting scheduled as of press time for March 10.

Bacara, a Mediterranean-style beachside complex, contains about 360 rooms and suites, as well as two golf courses, a 42,000-square-foot spa, and a large ranch. Pawson's roughly 200,000-square-foot plan, which would add 56 condo/hotel rooms, would be composed of 10 two- and three-story buildings arranged in a crescent pattern, unified by long, sleek, white balconies and inset windows. Building materials would include rustic stone, ashlar-bonded limestone, and pale bronze. The proposal also calls for green roofs and rooftop photovoltaic installations. Rooms range from 2,300 to 2,990 square feet, and buildings reach up to 35 feet tall—although "international style" horizontality was one of the board's complaints about the project. The development would be built on the site of a public parking lot, tennis courts, and a path to Haskell's Beach, which, according to the resort's proposal to the review board, would be "relocated."

"With all due respect, I really don't think this style fits this site," board vice chairman Thomas Smith told Pawson at the meeting. Another design review board member, Carl Schneider, added, "This is kind of an international style, and I'm not sure this is the right place for that," according to a report in *The Santa Barbara Independent*. Neighbors at the meeting seemed most upset by the possible limit to beach access, adding that the resort has tried for years to put up barriers between itself and the public.

The project has been planned, at least on paper, since Bacara's preliminary development plan was approved in 1985, paving the way for the resort's present buildings. This second phase is known as the "completion phase." Reached by telephone, Pawson told *AN* he had been working hard on the project for over a year. "They said it contrasts too much with the nature of the area, many of the trees are tall but the beach has high bluffs and some low dunes with boulders and a lot of washed-up driftwood. Our first go-round was horizontal and, of course, I liked it," he said, "but my way is to listen to what people have to say. It's not in my nature to take a stubborn stance. At the end of the day, you want people to like what you've done, even if you can't please everyone."

**SAM LUBELL AND JULIE V. IOVINE**

## LETTERS

## TOUCH NOT

You are correct that there has been a furor over the Richard Meier-designed, two-story, 205-foot-long, glass-and-steel monster proposed for Pasadena's Civic Center, one of a handful of civic centers on the National Register of Historic Places ("Holy Furor," *CAN* 01\_01.28.2009). You are incorrect, however, in assuming that this represents a conflict between traditionalists and modernists. As a resident and a strong

opponent of this project because it violates established design guidelines, I would welcome more modern structures in Pasadena, but not here. If architecture can have masterpieces, our civic center is our Mona Lisa. Altering it would be a sacrilege. A church should certainly understand that.

CHRISTLE BALVIN  
PASADENA, CA

## CORRECTION

In the article "A-Listers," (*CAN* 01\_01.28.2009), about the LA Conservancy's preservation report card, the area of Los Angeles County is incorrectly cited as 9.9 million square miles. It is 4,083.2 square miles. (Los Angeles County's population is 9.9 million.) We regret the error and thank Gunnar Hand of the Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning for his close reading.

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LARA SWIMMER

Seattle firm SRG Partnership has opened the T. Evans Wyckoff Memorial Bridge, a pedestrian structure over a busy industrial road, linking the city's Museum of Flight to a large lot across the street where the museum's often-visited commercial aircraft are parked, and where a retired Concord is especially popular. The museum is located south of downtown in the industrial area called Boeing Field. Made from steel, glass, and a lightweight extruded aluminum decking, the \$6.3 million icon for the museum, paid for by private and public donations, helps educate visitors on aviation and technology.

Inspired by the vapor trails left by airplane engine exhaust, SRG worked closely with Tacoma-based Jesse Engineering to execute the structure, which is made of curving steel components woven into a tubular form. The bridge is also clad with glass, tilting at 15-degree angles to create a shimmering effect and to reinforce the lightness of the structure. The 200-foot and 160-foot sections of the bridge were prefabricated at Jesse's warehouse, delivered to the site via barge and truck, and then welded to the bridge's reinforced concrete piles within 24 hours of arrival. Future expansion plans for the museum are under consideration, in which case a third bridge section could be added. **MARTINA DOLEJSOVA**

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EAVESDROP: ALISSA WALKER

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE PICTURES?

We know these are tough times for newspapers, but something wasn't right with the list from *The Los Angeles Times* at year's end entitled, "The best houses of all time in L.A." The panel assembled was stellar, if odd: **Ray Kappe**, **Hitoshi Abe**, **Ron Radziner**, **Steven Ehrlich** (none of whom were allowed to nominate their own work, even though Kappe's own house made the top 10), **David Travers**, **Crosby Doe** (uh, real estate agent who represents *plenty* of the top picks), **Linda Dishman** (LA Conservancy=agenda), and non-LA-based **Karrie Jacobs** (why not choose a voice from our own city—we don't know, maybe the newspaper's own architecture critic?). Jurors were given no guidance other than to pick the "best houses," and thanks to a bizarre point-assigning metric, the result was rather narrow. Although the paper defined Southern California as "Santa Barbara to San Diego, including Palm Springs and the desert," the top 10 consisted of mostly midcentury homes built from 1920 to 1960 ("of all time"?), almost all of which can be seen on a short drive around the Hollywood Hills. No Spanish Colonials, no Victorians, no **Frank Gehry** residence, none of the bazillion houses built since 1968. Concerned, UCLA professor **Dana Cuff** asked a group of advanced architecture students to determine what the heck went wrong with this experiment. The verdict? Even seasoned critics fell victim to the fame game, said student **Esra Kahveci**: "The absence of a guide led the jury to the most banal version of exploration, and the question of what constitutes 'the best' becomes the question of iconic image," noting that 80 percent of the selected houses had been photographed by **Julius Shulman**. Even more icky was the accompanying story, an opportunity squandered with descriptions that mostly focused on all the movies shot within them.

## JOHN CHASE UNLEASHED

Is West Hollywood urban designer **John Chase** the most flamboyant practitioner of California architecture? At a December event co-organized by your faithful Eavesdropette, Chase lived up to his reputation and then some: Dressed in a **Prince-worthy** fluorescent orange-and-purple ensemble, he described the too-hot-for-Eavesdrop details of inviting a homeless man into his house to discuss "public vs. private space." (The story was obviously no shock to Chase's husband **Jonathan Cowan**, who shook his head good-naturedly in the front row.) A few weeks later at a panel discussion for the re-release of Chase's book *Everyday Urbanism*, guests entering the Hollywood gallery LACE had to walk past a projected film of naked young men playing an innocent game we'd venture to call Slap the Weenie. We asked Chase if he had anything to do with the choice of that particular film. "That was me," he quipped, "before the change." As the panel started, fellow editor **John Kaliski** thanked his daughter, while Chase thanked **Monica Lewinsky**, "for being such a wonderful subject." Or perhaps you've been on the receiving ends of one of Chase's famous emails that include some very NSFW websites (to be fair, they do prominently feature design as well as, um, other prominent things). Anyway, it's all very, very naughty, John! And we love you for it.

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**PARADE'S END** continued from front page underground tunnel) will be relocated to sites that will soften the visual impact of new construction. The buildings have been designed to the scale of adjacent historic buildings on the parade ground known as the Main Post, and building materials have been selected to complement their palette.

Tourk noted that the new design would include locating large portions of the museum underground and "significantly downsizing" the entire project, which was originally conceived as a work of contemporary architecture of the scale and stature of the de Young Fine Arts Museum in Golden Gate Park by Herzog & de Meuron.

One of the new museum buildings, located south of Morago Avenue, will be buried, with only about six feet of its two-story height above ground. This portion will have a flat roof, with a planted retaining wall facade and small staff entrance. The other new structure, a two-story gallery building, will have only one of those stories above ground (limited in height to 30 feet) and oriented to the Main Post grid. This gallery building will have a broad overhanging green roof with three low-pitched sections. The north facade will be transparent with vertical glazing characteristic of other Main Post historic buildings, and will face a plaza. Porches and deep roof overhangs will serve to reinforce a sense of historic continuity.

Last summer, the Presidio Trust had recommended the Fishers' plan to build a \$150 million museum for their collections alongside the Main Post, to be designed by New York-based Gluckman Mayner. A hodgepodge of historic buildings now stand on the site, including brick barracks from the 1890s and a Mission-style officers' club. The Gluckman Mayner proposal was a two-story shifted glass box designed to mirror the formal geometries of the Main Post and echo the white-columned arcades of nearby barracks with vertical white mullions.

Following prolonged debate about the impact of the new museum, the San Francisco Planning Commission declared that "the design of the proposed contemporary art museum and the associated landscape plan is too stark of a contrast to the buildings and spaces that would flank it."

In December, Donald Fisher agreed to consider major alterations, including moving to a site about 100 yards away. As for putting much of the museum underground, a spokesperson for Gluckman Mayner noted, "Don said from the start that he wanted to build a museum because he never wanted his collection to be stashed in basement storage." He also added that it was "a bit of a surprise" to hear that WRNS, formerly the associate architects on the Gluckman Mayner scheme, was now redesigning the project. **JVI AND ERIC LUM**



COURTESY THE RAND FAMILY

## MARVIN RAND, 1924-2009

Photographer Marvin Rand devoted his life to architecture. Starting in the 1950s, he stood at the shoulders of some of the most influential architectural figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leaving a record in images that still teaches us today.

Esther McCoy, Charles and Ray Eames, Louis Kahn, Welton Becket, Craig Ellwood, Cesar Pelli, John Lautner, Ray Kappe, Frank Gehry, Thom Mayne—a body of work that could have left anyone satisfied. Not Marvin, who died on February 14 at his Marina del Rey home. Close to eighty years in age, he started working with a new generation including Michele Saeed and Greg Lynn.

Never mind that heart problems dogged him, and that he almost always left one essential piece of photographic equipment back in the office. He pressed on despite his body's frailties, and continued working with the support of his wife, Mary Ann Danin. In his mid-70s, he dropped his lifelong habit of developing his own film and went digital, mas-

tering a whole new technology for bringing work to light.

His approach was not simply about images. He advocated on behalf of excellence in our field, and was a champion of great work. He recorded the works of Greene & Greene and meticulously scoured every inch of the Watts Towers.

Through McCoy, he discovered the work of Irving Gill, photographing it for an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1958. Almost 40 years later, he spent a decade traveling across the country to document not only Gill's greatest work, but lesser-known projects that were equally important. For the book that resulted from this effort, Marvin often re-shot Gill homes at his own expense, even those he had previously photographed. When I asked him why, he told me he felt that his original photographs did not adequately capture the spirit of the architect's work.

Marvin liked to walk a structure with the architects he worked with because, as he once said, "I can bring [the

architect's] thinking and my thinking together. And then we have a philosophy that can work for that structure."

We had many such walks. I met him almost 20 years ago when Marvin was assigned to photograph one of my early houses. After the shoot, he came right up and proceeded to tell me what I should have done to make my design better. One might think I would have been angry, but his deep interest in architecture was infectious. We became instant friends and worked together ever since. As he refused to hire staff, I am proud to say that for two decades, I was Marvin Rand's assistant, picking up cigarette butts, wrappers, and all kinds of trash to clear the way for his photos. I was relieved from trash detail only after Marvin went digital. He would yell out to me his new favorite saying: "Larry, don't worry about that trash. I'll take it out in Photoshop!"

Marvin was living history. When he began, Charles Eames offered him work, and McCoy, whom he called his greatest influence, placed his first photographs in *Living for Young Homemakers*. He worked with Ellwood and shot the Salk Institute for Kahn. But, as a youth, Marvin had no intention of being a photographer. He thought he would be a musician. He played the clarinet in youth orchestras, but World War II changed that. He was drafted. "I wouldn't carry a gun," he said, "but I would carry a camera instead."

For more than half a century, he used that camera to fight on behalf of our profession.

**LAWRENCE SCARPA IS PRINCIPAL IN CHARGE OF DESIGN AT PUGH + SCARPA ARCHITECTS IN SANTA MONICA, CA.**

ence center by Marmol Radziner Architects, yurt-like offices, an "eco-tour" course, and several nursery facilities. The newest addition to the complex, the S. Mark Taper Environmental Learning Center, opened late last fall. Designed pro bono by AECOM's Carlos Madrid, the building gives the organization a classroom to teach tree pruning, plant care and maintenance, pest management, and other skills. The 900-square-foot structure, with an entry canopy anchored by eucalyptus tree trunks found in the park, is clad with olive-stained wood siding, which echoes the conference center across the way. Its woody materials are offset by a modern envelope, and by large, dynamic, stainless-steel lighting fixtures. It remains open to the elements, thanks to floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors. The building captures rainwater on its roof, storing it in a 216,000-gallon underground cistern, connected by a rain chain. Solar panels on the roof provide green energy. **SL**



COURTESY TREE PEOPLE

## POWER TO THE TREE HUGGERS

The Tree People Center for Community Forestry, a nonprofit that promotes education, training, and funding for forestry and other ecological endeavors, is at the center of a new movement known as "community forestry," or greening the urban environment. Their hilltop campus in Beverly Hills' Coldwater Canyon Park includes a confer-

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## TAKING BACK THE STREET

Launched in 2006 by LA planning director Gail Goldberg, the Urban Design Studio was created to address the city's lack of urban design standards and to create a more pedestrian-friendly city. The small studio, headed by planners Emily Gabel-Luddy and Simon Pastucha, has already spearheaded the recent creation and approval of a set of Downtown Street & Urban Design Standards and Guidelines, which encourages wider sidewalks (at least 15 feet on some downtown blocks) and the possibility of street life, and a set of Walkability Guidelines. *The Architect's Newspaper* sat down with the duo to discuss these, as well as their most ambitious endeavor: 11 Urban Design Principles, a set of values to which developers would be required to subscribe when seeking entitlements.

The principles range from "reinforce walkability and well-being" to "nurture neighborhood character" to "bridge the past and the future." They are intended as "the first step to the creation of great streets, open spaces, and a more livable city." If adopted by the City Council, these principles will be included in the city's general plan, become part of the findings required for any discretionary action by the city, and eventually be interwoven with the 35 community plans throughout the city. The Planning Commission will consider them within the next two months.

**AN:** The truth underlying the Urban Design Principles is that all the great cities of the world came into being based on the human scale and prior to the advent of automobiles, and it's the design studio's intent to focus back on the human scale. Give me a practical example of what sort of implementation that might entail.  
**Emily Gabel-Luddy:** Let me go to the Street Standards in Downtown Los Angeles. It was our goal that the city move away from an auto-centric proposition to one that emphasizes the pedestrian and mass transit. And so we spearheaded the idea of 15-foot-minimum-wide sidewalks in the dense urban core of our city. The reason this is so significant is because it lets all the developers and property owners have so much more room to put their outdoor cafe accessories—their tables and chairs—which in turn begins to cultivate the kind of social commerce among neighborhoods, residents, and office workers that was really part of cities prior to the automobile playing such an overriding part in how the public realm is defined and utilized.  
**How will the Urban Design Principles dovetail into existing neighborhood plans? Don't architects have enough regulations on their plate already?**

**Simon Pastucha:** Both the Urban Design Principles and the Downtown Design Standards are set up as a set of ideas to incorporate into your design. They're not a set of standard requirements saying that you have to have "this" at a certain point or a certain place. They just say: How do you meet the intent of these?

**EGL:** It's not a design review, it's not an ordinance. It says: Here's the value, now tell us how your project has achieved that value. I don't think true design comes from telling architects how to design their buildings. True design comes from having the architect reflect on how that building achieves value that is expressed in a way that is appropriate to a local community.

**When we talk about design that reinforces a neighborhood's character, aren't we entering the realm of the taste police?**

**EGL:** I disagree with you on that. To me, what we're talking about when we're nurturing neighborhood character is, when a new project comes in—and sure, it may be a little higher-density, because that's what the zoning allows—but the articulation of the houses and the townhouses, they still face the street. Because we still want that street to have the sense that there are people in relationship to one another when they come out of their doors in the morning. Now, to me, that's not the design police. That's wading into a larger issue of community building or community sustaining without saying you must do absolute replicas of bungalows or absolute replicas of what's across the street or on the other side of you. **Each of you has a strong connection to design and yet both chose to be planners. Why is that?**  
**SP:** I love going to other cities and exploring cities that are not aesthetically so pretty but the streets are full of life. And the people are using the buildings just like they would a really pretty building. It's still about the bones and functioning well. People can adapt the building. I look at it and go, "my role as an urban designer is to make the street successful and the buildings relate to the street" and that makes people use it.

**EGL:** And that is 98 percent of the kinds of development we see in the city. The two percent are going to be the Rem Koolhaas-es, the architects that are going to be afforded a big commission to do a significant piece of architecture like a Broad Museum. Those come along two percent of the time. And I think architects and architectural critics tend to focus on those. One of the dangers of that is having architecture continue to be irrelevant to the masses of folks who actually use and appreciate buildings that function on their behalf.

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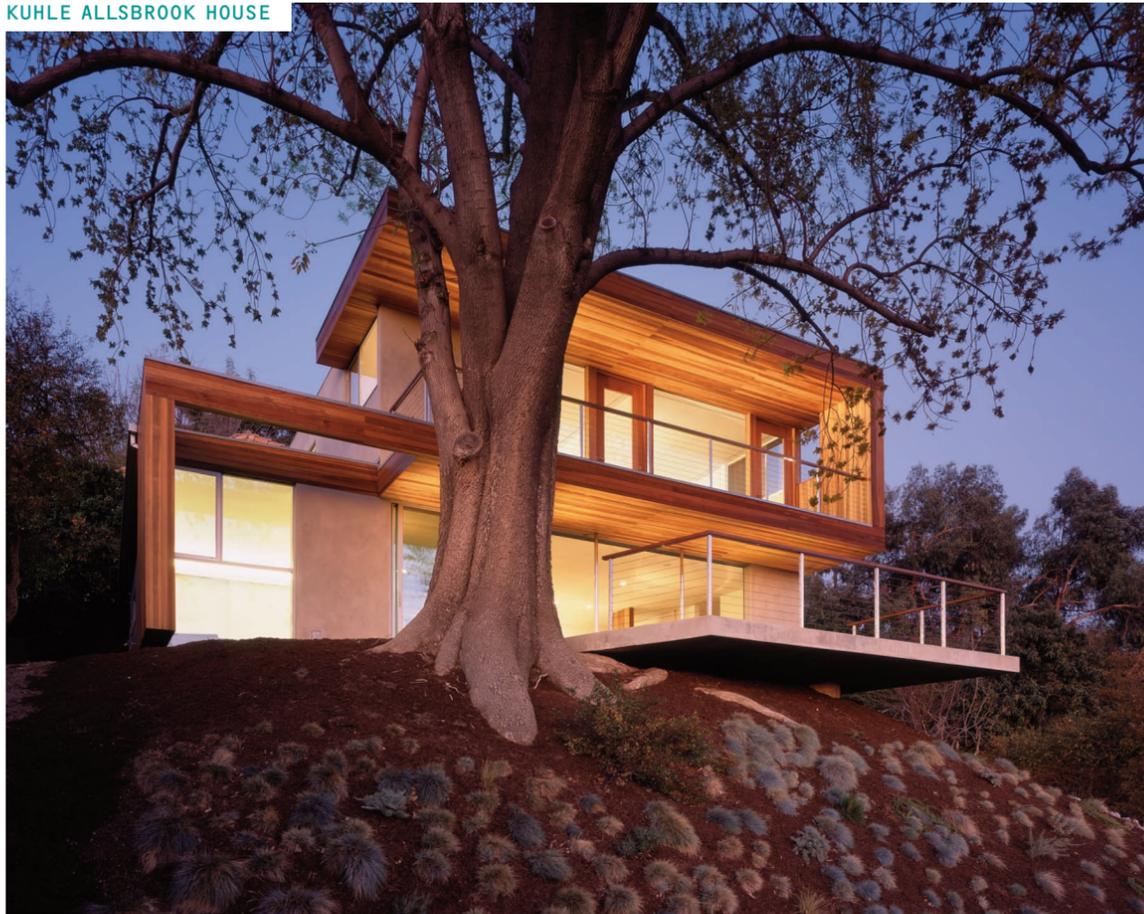
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KUHLE ALLSBROOK HOUSE



BENNY CHAN

Silvia Kuhle and Jeffrey Allsbrook, who started their Silver Lake architecture firm Standard in 1996, have not only cultivated a sharp, sophisticated style, but perhaps more importantly, they've developed an affinity for comfortable, domestic-scaled environments. Kuhle, from Germany, worked with Morphosis and George Yu before starting the firm with Allsbrook, an Ohio native who got training while

working at British firm Munkenbeck and Marshall, and with Mark Mack in Venice. A focus on comfort and warmth well served the two architects, who are also married, when they were starting out with houses on LA's east side, full of natural light and natural materials. Now, drawing on that success, the eight-person firm has received a slew of commissions on the swankier, other side of LA to design

high-end new stores that, while edgy, spacious, and reflective of their often historically-gritty contexts, also embrace light and texture in contrast to colder neighbors. It seems that some clients, at least, are getting tired of mimicked perfection and are embracing an arts-and-crafts modernism that is still cool and minimal, but tactile and full of character.

SL

#### KUHLE ALLSBROOK HOUSE SILVER LAKE

Like many designers, Standard got a jumpstart by designing their own house. The 1,800-square-foot project, situated on top of a steep hill in Silver Lake, is fronted by an S-shaped redwood balcony that defines the building and serves as a helpful sunshade. The interior is warmed with redwood walls, walnut floors, and douglas fir doors. Thanks to effective cross ventilation and the shading of a huge Mexican ash tree, the couple doesn't need air conditioning, and floors have radiant heat. Like all classic California modern houses, there are expansive, uninterrupted views via continual glazing on both floors.

#### REVOLVE WEST HOLLYWOOD

Built into a cavernous, two-level former industrial space-cum-coffee-shop-cum-club in West Hollywood, Revolve has maintained much of that building's unique grittiness, keeping exposed rafters, corrugated metal walls, and industrial-style concrete floors. But inside this shell, the space is cleverly organized by white, vertical laminated-pine fins that separate hanging mannequin displays, and by new, boxy, interlocking black metal-and-MDF display stands that were built by the firm. The 2,500-square-foot space is now warmly lit by large skylights treated with wood laminate slats, and connected to the outdoors with a rebuilt concrete patio that contains an exhibition-style display of unique clothing collected by the company's owners.

#### JAMES PERSE BEVERLY HILLS

The firm's 5,000-square-foot James Perse store in Beverly Hills on Cannon Drive is one of eight boutiques the firm has designed for Perse, including four in LA, two in New York, one in Las Vegas, and one in San Diego. Perse even wanted a similar look for his own house, which the firm designed in 1999. The store is warmed with horizontal planks of teak, stained mahogany, and alder. It has white oak and limestone floors, and exposed douglas fir ceiling joists. Everything flows into a large courtyard, which lights the space in turn and uses the same mahogany pivoting doors that the firm used at Hidden House. The patio, complete with lounge chairs and desert-like landscaping, feels more like a private patio than the interior of a Beverly Hills store. The exterior is finished with white smooth-trowel stucco, inlaid with teak slats.

#### HIDDEN HOUSE GLASSSELL PARK

This 3,500-square-foot project was an extreme renovation and addition to a 1940s residence overlooking a valley just adjacent to downtown LA. The firm stripped the place to its studs, then warmed the T-shaped project with dark redwood siding (contrasting with white stucco) and hemlock flooring. They also opened up the house with a slew of floor-to-ceiling sliding and pivoting glass doors, including pivoting doors on both sides of the living room and a pocketing door in the family room.

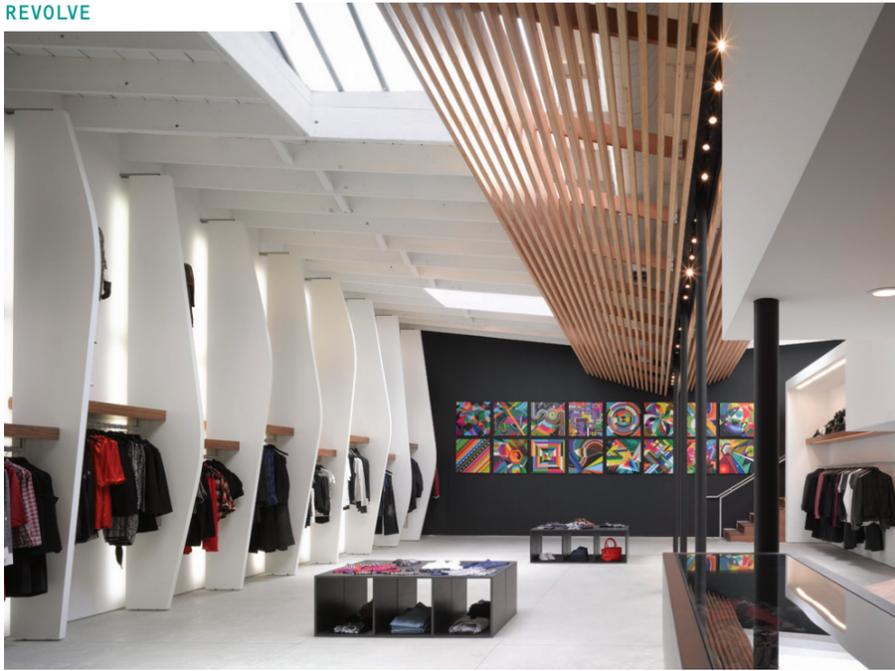
#### MAXFIELD GALLERY BEVERLY HILLS

The 2,400-square-foot project, built into an old furniture gallery that was once a former factory warehouse, contains an amazing collection of modernist art belonging to owner Tommy (father of James) Perse. His store chain Maxfield, including one that Standard designed in Beverly Hills, is known for its displays of high-design objects and furniture. Highlights include a Charlotte Perriand shelf unit, Mouille lighting fixtures, a vintage Italian racing motorcycle, and huge sliding Jean Prouvé doors. Due to be completed in March, the renovation looks minimal but was quite extreme. All electrical was moved to the roof to leave an exposed ceiling, the interior was stripped to the brick shell, and the once aluminum storefront window was completely recast with frameless steel glass.

#### JENNY KANE (NOT SHOWN) WEST HOLLYWOOD

The firm exploited a former factory building to create a transformative new space for a reputable fashion store. The firm re-imagined the lofty, 2,400-square-foot brick building—which already boasted huge, clear-span exposed steel beams—with a palette of bamboo plywood shelves, cherry tamber-paneled walls, and recycled insulation materials ranging from denim to cotton. A full-height window in front connects to the street and is echoed by square recesses in back that mimic clerestory windows. Small skylights are located over the dressing rooms in the back of the store.

REVOLVE



JAMES PERSE



HIDDEN HOUSE



MAXFIELD GALLERY



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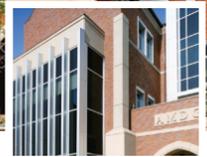


Loyola High School Hannon Science Hall

Clad in brick and precast concrete, the 60,000 sf William H. Hannon Science Hall and Frank J. Ardolf Jr. and Frances R. Ardolf Academic Hall is a three-story steel-frame structure that includes eight science classrooms and laboratories, 12 traditional classrooms, a computer center, a lecture hall and faculty offices.

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# WHY REACH FOR THE MOON?



Morphosis' newly opened Cahill Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics at Caltech in Pasadena is among the firm's more subdued works. Low-slung and clad in Swiss Pearl cement-board panels the color of aged terra cotta, the three-story building lies along California Boulevard like a chunk of displaced red-rock sandstone. Although the facade is cracked and tilted, its small scale, combined with the soft, warm color, lends the science facility a sense of repose—an attitude not usually associated with the brazen architect Thom Mayne. The building looks restrained, but not too much, as if it had recently suffered damage in an earthquake. Anyone driving along the boulevard looking for the Caltech Seismological Laboratory can be forgiven for thinking he's arrived at the world-famous earthquake lab—which is actually next door in a rather plain and decidedly un-seismological Spanish colonial revival.

The confusion is cued by the features that make the Cahill building unique. On the exterior, vertical planes not only list to either side of 90 degrees, but also appear to have shifted horizontally relative to one another, much the way two pieces of the Earth's crust slip along a fault. Dark, deep, diagonal voids, left without the cement-board cladding, emphasize these thrusting plates.

Inside, the \$50 million, 100,000-square-foot center contains classrooms, offices, underground

labs, a public auditorium, and a library. The initial focus is a dramatic, white, central staircase that is supposed to be about astronomy. The stair is what you notice first upon entering the lobby, and it's all about light—the key component to understanding the cosmos. The firm developed a circulation shaft made up of walls that look like shards of light refracted through the lens of a telescope. These fractured walls cascade and collide, come to a knife's edge, or seem to extend to infinity. Windows allow sunlight to fall on the walls, casting long, flat beams and truncated wide ones, as well as trapezoids of shadow, depending on which piece of wall the light hits. At the pinnacle of the stairs is an oculus, an undisguised reference to the telescope and to the human desire to ponder the heavens. Meanwhile, stair treads alternate between concrete and steel mesh, between solid and void, impenetrable and clear, meant to suggest the dance of scientific exploration.

On the upper two floors, the hallways jog and bump, never following a straight line along the 350-foot length of the building. Mayne has said he wanted to “attack the institutional nature of an entity. The wiggle (in the corridors) is more relaxed, more like a medieval city, like Sienna.” The idea, really a commonplace, makes offices less isolating by making the hallways more collegial. The firm has placed large windows with window seats at

the ends of four hallways that bisect the floors. Mayne has dubbed these physical breaks “stitches.” The windows frame views of the campus and the soaring San Gabriel Mountains to the north and the flats of San Marino to the south. These are pleasant, quasi-public spaces in which you can imagine overhearing chit-chat on the imponderable essence of, say, dark matter.

Throughout the project, Morphosis has transferred the tilts and slants of the exterior to the interior, producing a strange, dizzying effect. East-facing walls slant east, west-facing walls slant

west. The hallway walls tilt in one direction from the floor up and another from the ceiling down—creating a modified chevron, or boomerang-shaped space. Those corridors are also painted in powdery hues (one floor sports an aqueous blue reminiscent of Neil Denari's palette). Of course, there is nothing new about sloped walls, just as there is no surprise that such walls can throw the human body off-kilter.

It is unclear if Mayne wants these walls to actually put the body off-balance or if he sees them strictly as metaphors for the dynamic, unsettling forces

The building is clad in tilted, sliced, and angled cement-board panels (left and below left). Its central stair transports, and disorients, visitors (below right).

at work in the universe. Unfortunately, the metaphor, intended or not, has become reality, and the question is whether the congenial window-seat hang-outs will provide a sufficient antidote to the vertiginous walls that line every hallway, conference room, office, and grad student's cell.

At bottom, Mayne is an architect who isn't especially comfortable using form to induce feeling. When he delivers a sensation, he does so with a body-blow—such as the doom you feel as a lonely pedestrian, passing beneath the overhanging weight of the Caltrans building in downtown Los Angeles. More often his work is about conveying a visual punch. His buildings are generally experienced as an in-your-face wallop, and less as a subtle accumulation of critical moments or passages more felt than seen.

The new Caltech building is agreeably lively as a surface and as a volume that looks as if it is falling to pieces. The central staircase speaks eloquently to the search for knowledge buried in the mysteries of deep space and time. Yet the building lacks Mayne's characteristic bravura, his willingness to take a great leap, however messy the result. The building looks like a repetition of so many other Morphosis projects, only scaled down and scaled back. Several decades ago, the intellectual historian Thomas Kuhn wrote in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that science, like evolution and history, grows by leaps and bounds, rather than in a steady, linear fashion. Mayne knows this to be true about architecture.

GREG GOLDIN



**LIFE SUPPORT?** continued from front page any other from the stimulus effort, the effect the bill will have on California architects and designers remains unclear. Although the original House plan had tentatively allocated \$37 billion to the state, it will be some time before the final bill's \$787 billion is apportioned and distributed. As California's share remains up for grabs, some clearer national estimates predict which sectors may ultimately get the cash.

According to a congressional summary, \$48 billion will likely be divided among the states for transportation-related infrastructure projects, including \$27.5 billion to build and maintain roads and bridges, with another \$8.4 billion going to mass transit.

In the housing sector, \$4 billion will be allocated for energy-efficient improvements and repairs for public housing. In addition, \$2 billion is to be set aside to redevelop foreclosed and abandoned homes, and \$1.5 billion will be directed toward homeless shelters. Another \$2 billion will be used to pay off a shortfall in public housing accounts. In an effort to revitalize the troubled building sector and deliver an immediate jolt to the economy, the bill requires half of the funded projects to be "shovel-ready," or set to begin work within 90 to 120 days. As a result, the architecture and design sector may not feel the full restorative effects of the stimulus package as early as some had hoped.

According to the nonprofit tracking site StimulusWatch.org, California has 1,971 shovel-ready projects for which mayors throughout the state have requested federal funding, totaling over \$23 billion. Most are infrastructure-related, but millions have been requested for residential, school, and transportation-related buildings such as airports and terminals. Those priorities contrast with the AIA's Rebuild and Renew Plan, which suggests funding projects that could commence over 24 months to sustain the recovery over a longer period of time. It also suggests funding a wider variety of projects, including livable communities and preservation.

So how will the provisions in the package impact California architects? "The answer is, not much," said Christopher Thornberg, principal of Beacon Economics, a California-based research and consulting firm. "Nothing in the stimulus package is going to bring construction back any time in the near future," he added, pointing out that the financial turmoil caused by unsustainable building costs falling back to earth has significantly diminished incentives for new construction.

"It's not really aimed at rescuing the real estate markets, because there's not much you can do about the real estate markets," he said. "That's not to say that stimulating the economy, or shortening the length of the downturn, won't help the architecture community. Of course it will. But it won't help the architecture community any more or less than any other part of the economy."

Then there's California's projected \$41 billion deficit, which could soak up as much as \$10 billion from the state's portion of stimulus funds. "These are gloomy times," Thornberg concluded. "But I think the economy is going to emerge in a healthier place when this thing finally ends. **MIKE SCHULTE**



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HOUSE OF THE ISSUE &gt; LORCAN O'HERLIHY

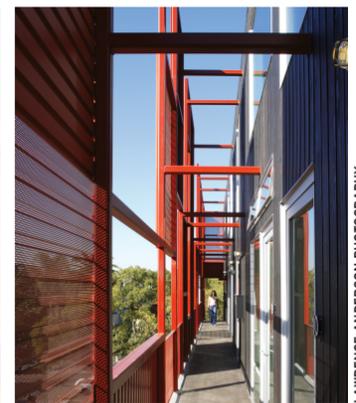


Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects (LOHA) and local developer The Habitat Group have pioneered a new type of LA housing. They have collaborated on three multi-family dwellings that deconstruct and reinterpret the way public and private spaces are typically conceived and arranged in southern California. The latest of these to be completed is Formosa 1140, a four-story, 11-unit building that totals approximately 16,000 square feet of living space. The project reserved almost a third of its 4,600-square-foot lot for a public park designed by Katherine Spitz Associates that

has been donated to the City of West Hollywood.

"LA is so much about 'what's mine is mine.' We're trying to break that down," said Donnie Schmidt, creative director for LOHA, as he gave a tour of one of the units. "This is a new way of living: What does it mean to live closer to your neighbors?" Possessing what Schmidt calls a brand of "ruthless optimism," LOHA has relocated the space that would traditionally be a private courtyard within the units to an adjacent park that they hope will engage the residents as well as the neighborhood.

A screen of off-the-shelf corrugated steel panels shrouds the building to create an arcade. Some are solid, while others are perforated, adding up to a semi-permeable privacy barrier that, in its geometries and composition, resembles a game of Tetris. Painted in a vibrant red and orange palette inspired by Formosa Café, the famous eatery that anchors the end of the block, the panels attach to the building's otherwise dark-stained cedar plank cladding by steel posts. The screen also acts as a shade for the structure and reduces heat loading from the sun.



LAWRENCE ANDERSON PHOTOGRAPHY

The interiors of the units maintain the exterior's semi-private ethos. By stacking and shifting volumes, the architects made way for glassed-in recesses that flood the interior with light. Terraces blend into the living space, and the variety of window shapes, some spanning more than one floor, are placed unexpectedly within the walls. The open and flexible floor plans rely on curtains to divide space rather than doors, creating the space-efficiency sensation of a boutique hotel.

The two-bedroom, loft-style units are about 1,500 square feet

each. LOHA and The Habitat Group's previous experiments with the public-private continuum—at Habitat 825, next door to the Schindler House, and the Homes at Gardner—quickly sold out. The architects see this as proof that there's even more opportunity for innovation in this realm. "Architects often see multi-family housing as mundane," said Schmidt. "We see it as an exciting type that can start to create a new dialogue with the city." **ALISSA WALKER**



COURTESY CANNON DESIGN

**HEALING WAYS** continued from front page examination area, which allows patients to be assessed in a more efficient way than before. Meanwhile, its two-story Crisis Response Center, which focuses on stabilization, frees up long-term beds in the hospital by handling clients who don't need to be admitted. Before this model, points out Carl Hampson, vice president and design leader at Cannon, a lot of these people would simply wind up in jail.

"[Prisons] weren't equipped to deal with people in this type of position, and they would just hold them there."

Both buildings will be rectilinear in form, oriented around long bars containing administration functions. Treatment spaces and hospital rooms near the edges of the building will be placed around central courtyards. Unlike many mental health facilities, all patient rooms in the pavilion will have access to natural light, while 75 percent of the entire complex will be naturally lit. Each floor will be interspersed with patient activity decks, and all rooms will have outdoor balconies. To minimize confusion, each level will repeat this layout.

"It's a very complex system," added

Hampson, "but it's still simplified to keep wayfinding and organization straightforward."

The visual highlight of the pavilion will be a bronze-colored, perforated aluminum screen facing south, which will not only be the project's centerpiece, but will also reduce peak energy loads on the building by 30 percent. It will measure about 45 feet high and 230 feet long. A void carved out of the second and third floors of the Behavioral Health Pavilion will contain a large public outdoor space, which continues in the adjacent double-height interior corridor, which in turn connects visually to the patients' courtyard.

Built in the desert, the building is designed to minimize its environmental impact. Aside from the large screen in front, the project is oriented on an east-west axis to lower heat gain. It will be built with locally produced concrete block and recycled metal panel systems, as well as low-VOC paints. Landscaping will include native Sonoran desert plants, permeable paving in parking areas, and assive water harvesting. The associate architect is Tucson-based CDG Architects.

The whole point of the design, said Hampson, is "to see it as a healing center, not a detention center." **SL**

SPF:architects' proposal for a copper-clad performing arts building in Beverly Hills.



COURTESY SPF:ARCHITECTS

**GOING POSTAL** continued from front page performance center. The firm is midway through schematic design and hopes to start construction on the estimated \$35 million project within a year.

Built as a Works Progress Administration project, the Italian Renaissance Revival structure was designed by Ralph C. Flewelling with Allison & Allison Architects and sits on a trapezoidal lot facing Beverly Hills City Hall. It was in danger of being demolished after the United States Postal Service vacated the premises in 1993. Eventually, it received landmark status and was sold to the City of Beverly Hills, which in turn leased the building to the Beverly Hills Cultural Center Foundation with the intent to preserve and restore it. The center is named for the foundation that has already made a \$15 million donation.

SPF:architects has entered a total of three proposals for renovating the post office as the anchor of a new performing arts center: one in 2001 when they were not shortlisted, and a year later when they were, although their proposal was not selected. In 2006, a third competition selected their concept. The proposals selected previously by Barton Myers and Pfeiffer Partners focused on gutting the post office to make room for a 400-seat theater and designing a separate building for education and administration, according to SPF:architects principal Zoltan Pali. "I just reversed that," he said. "I put all the little pieces—the little offices and classrooms—that fit into the building perfectly, without having to do any structural renovation, and then we built a brand-new state-of-the-art theater."

The new 28,000-square-foot building, which will be called the Goldsmith Theater, will be rectilinear in form with a copper front textured with an abstract pattern suggesting envelopes. The rear of the building will be clad in glass, overlooking a new sunken courtyard that will face west toward downtown Beverly Hills. Inside, the building will have some 500 more seats than those of the two other proposals. A three-story glass bridge will connect the theater to the post office, which will house the box office, rehearsal rooms, classrooms, and other offices. A courtyard and sculpture garden will provide landscaped public spaces around the buildings. To include enough parking for events, the plan calls for removing the lawn of City Hall to add submerged parking, then restoring the landscape.

SPF:architects' design will also play on many elements of the post office's former use. The Grand Hall includes two WPA-era fresco murals depicting the birth of the U.S. mail service and life during the Great Depression, both of which will remain. The cages where stamps were once sold will, appropriately, be the box office, and the old mail sorting room is slated to become a rehearsal space and studio theater. "I never really saw this building," said Pali. "It's a great example of that period of architecture and is a very respectable building, but I don't think it responded to the site as well as it could have." Pali sees it as a chance to invigorate this busy corner in Beverly Hills in a way that will allow it to interact with City Hall across the street as well as with the bustling business district nearby. **AW**

AT DEADLINE

**WRITING ON THE WALL?**

The Los Angeles City Council has endorsed a proposed two-year moratorium on electronic billboards across California. The legislation's author, Assemblyman Mike Feuer, argued that a two-year ban is necessary to study whether the signs are safe, and several efforts are under way to investigate. The proposed state ban would go into effect January 1. Meanwhile, the city was expected to vote on its own sign regulation—this one for signs in Los Angeles—in early March.

**LANDMARKED PARK**

The Los Angeles City Council in late January declared the 4,218-acre Griffith Park a historic landmark in a move to protect the land from development. The 13-0 vote came after several months of discussion about the request by Griffith Van Griffith to protect the land. In 1896 Griffith's grandfather, Colonel Griffith J. Griffith, deeded the former Rancho Los Feliz to the city for use as parkland.

**DEEP BREATH FOR NEUTRA**

Richard Neutra's Mariners Medical Arts Center in Newport Beach—recently threatened with demolition—has been spared. The property owner, Westcliff Investors, is cooperating with the city of Newport Beach to preserve the original building, and to design an architecturally compatible addition.

**THE WHEEL DEAL**

SF Mayor Gavin Newsom announced that San Francisco will implement a bike sharing pilot program later this year. The program will include 50 bikes located at five stations on non-city property (as required by a court injunction until environmental review of the city's bicycle plan is complete). Each station will have either nine or 12 bikes. The stations will be in the Financial District, Mission Bay, the Presidio, Civic Center, and the City College campus.

# Architectural experience, think Trespa

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# BEST IN SHOW

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And in these tough times, no one can afford to waste time or money with anything but the best.

So here it is: our second annual California Favorite Sources issue.

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### Turner Special Projects

555 South Flower St., Los Angeles; 213-891-3000  
www.turnerconstruction.com

"Hinerfeld-Ward is amazing. They ask a lot of questions. They understand things from an architect's perspective. They understand architectural detail, they like challenges, and they never say no."

Jennifer Siegal  
Office of Mobile Design

"Erickson-Hall was everything an architect could ask for: focused, involved, creative, and reasonable. The New Children's Museum project in San Diego required the placement of several gigantic concrete tilt-up panels measuring 20' by 52' and weighing 170,000 pounds each. This was an intricate and

dangerous bit of work. Erickson-Hall went to great lengths to ensure that the process went smoothly, including holding regular safety and coordination meetings with all involved. The construction was completed on time, and their finished work was superior."

Rob Wellington Quigley

"Turner Special Projects produced Camino Nuevo High School at an exceptional pace, about 14 months from start to finish. One reason this was the case was the quality of the subcontractors they brought onto the project. The supervisor from the masonry subcontractor coordinated multiple crews, full-time inspections, and picked up the pieces when the steel truss fabricators fell behind schedule."

Kevin Daly  
Daly Genik

CANDY FACTORY/  
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"Woodbridge Glass & Werner Systems did an exceptional job in designing the technical details for the independent structure supporting the exterior curtain wall of the Santa Monica parking garage. They were always responsive, and brought great precision and understanding to the project. They also designed the layout for the photovoltaic panels on the top floor of the building. We would work with both Woodbridge and Werner again. We would love to find another project for us to collaborate on in the near future."

James Mary O'Connor  
Moore Ruble Yudell

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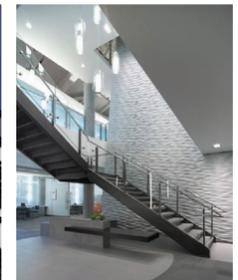
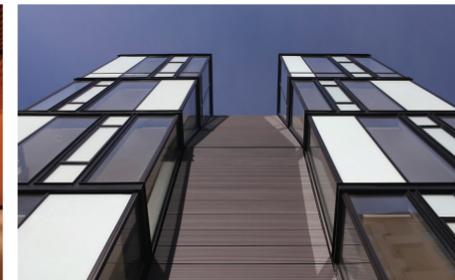
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Linda Taalman  
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Steven Lombardi  
Steven Lombardi Architect



ERIC LAIGNEL

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT:

- ABRAMSON FOUNDERS ROOM  
SPECTRUM OAK  
BELZBERG ARCHITECTS
- PINE STREET CONDOMINIUMS  
SHILDAN TERRA COTTA  
OWEN KENNERLY ARCHITECTS
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who worked tirelessly to provide the highest level of product and support, and produced an excellent result." John Meachem Clive Wilkinson Architects

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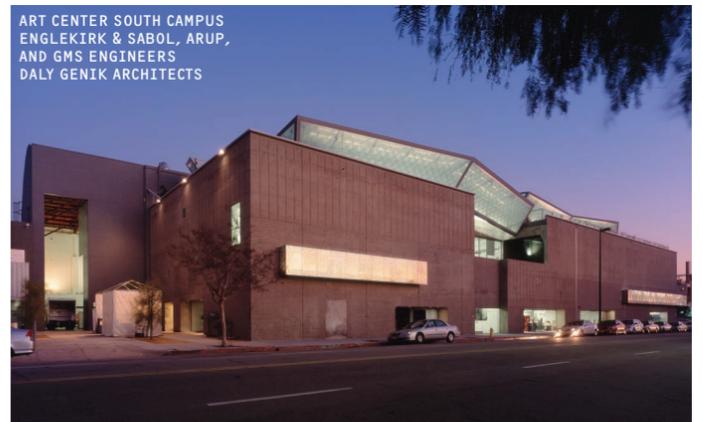
**“CM Peck Engineering worked with us to develop a structural strategy for the Tigertail scheme. The solution was a steel frame made up of a series of bent moment frames. The structure straddles the existing building to minimize the impact on the hillside site. This allowed for a dynamic building influenced by the need for transparency and privacy as well as a cantilevered roof plane for sun protection.”**

Patrick Tighe  
Tighe Architecture

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**“Mary Feграus has been involved ever since the beginning. Her drive and passion made the Nix Nature Center a reality. She worked on the master plan for the project. She made sure quality was implemented at every step of the way. She worked with some of the major donors to help bring in more money for the project. Without her I don’t think the project would have gone very far.”**

Rick España  
Roesling Nakamura  
Terada Architects

**“Long & Levit have a specific arm that focuses only on the design profession. I’ve worked with Steve Sharafian for ten years. Steve is trained as an architect, has a degree in architecture from Berkeley, and realized he was never going to be the architect he wanted to be. He went to law school and trained as a lawyer. He does this because he loves the architecture community and he thinks it’s important to find ways to**

support them. He is uniquely able to both understand the architect and the law. His focus is contracts. For us, that is an amazing thing because he’s as knowledgeable as they are. Any time I’m working with a client who has an attorney, he always knows more than they do.”

John Peterson  
Public Architecture



UC BERKELEY RESIDENCE HALLS  
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RETAIL  
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AND OUTDOORS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Sadly, the mall was invented in California, and most of the state's stores are still carefully cloistered, with frigid air conditioning and bright lighting that make us forget where we are. But some of the newest retail ventures are taking advantage of California's beautiful and diverse surroundings, bringing the outdoors in through courtyards, alleys, skylights, natural materials, and other inventive solutions, and reaching out to the neighborhood to foster a sense of community instead of self-containment.

One of the most novel examples is Hollywood's Space 15 Twenty, a series of lighting warehouses-turned-stores in Hollywood that spans a full block just north of Sunset Boulevard. The unique conglomeration, which combines the best of the mall and the boutique by creating intimate outdoor connections, forms a neighborhood of its own.

A courtyard leads from each of 13 establishments—which include Urban Outfitters (anchoring the complex with



COREY WALTER



COURTESY COMME DES GARÇONS

an 11,000-square-foot store), Hennessy and Ingalls, and clothing and art stores for the young, hip, and creative—to an outdoor open space, with a stage used for performances, flea markets, and other public events (concerts are programmed by neighboring Amoeba Records). It also has its own eatery named Snackbar, and an art gallery featuring local artists' work. Each retailer was invited to customize its own space within the stripped-down, exposed-brick and bow-truss interiors that evoke the structure's former use as a warehouse.

On Beverly Boulevard in West Hollywood, Heath Ceramics' new showroom, designed by LA firm Commune, also has an outdoor gathering space notched into the back of the building, used for parties, private dinners, barbecues, and pottery classes. Inside, in contrast with many of its slick neighbors, the store has a lived-in, bohemian feel that belies the firm's goal to create a "Scandinavian-artisan-meets-Conran's-Habitat" aesthetic. They achieved this

through the use of brick industrial walls, knotty pine floors, unfinished pine cabinets (mimicking the drying racks for a potter's finished work), powder-coated metal surfaces, hand-painted signs, and faded blue tiles.

In other instances—particularly evident in West Hollywood—nature is wrapped into the building itself. It started back in the 60s when Fred Segal adorned his West Hollywood store on Melrose Avenue in Ficus plants that crawl up the outside, planted in flower-pots or holes in the ground. "It really softens the building and makes for a beautiful presentation," said Segal's son, Michael.

Now West Hollywood's Melrose Avenue shopping area is saturated with natural facades. Marc Jacobs has covered both of its West Hollywood stores in ivy, as did the new boutique for Spanish fashion house Balenciaga, whose planted facade contrasts dramatically with the store's cool, futuristic interior. Max Azria took the idea a step

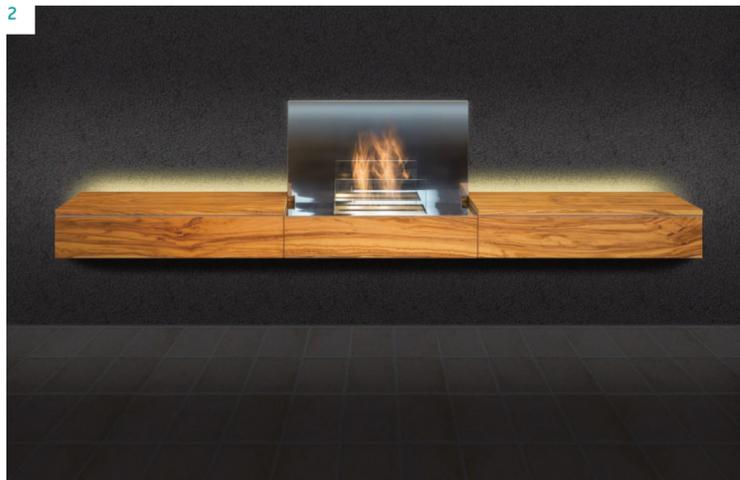
further, covering its Melrose Avenue store in a swirling facade of interwoven stick bundles (placed on a grid-like wire-steel frame) created by artist Patrick Dougherty. His work, explained art curator Linda Johnson, "alludes to nests, cocoons, hives, and lairs built by animals, as well as the man-made forms of huts, haystacks, and baskets." This is no Bed Bath & Beyond experience.

Sometimes bringing the outside in can get a little grittier, as with the Comme Des Garçons Guerrilla Store, a temporary space in downtown LA that just reached the end of its stay. The space, set up in one of the area's oldest buildings, incorporated off-white tiles, a metal skeleton of fixtures, fluorescent lighting, and a towering installation of empty shopping carts—the kind usually left outside and strewn across parking lots because who ever said the outside was all roses?

**SAM LUBELL AND ALISSA WALKER**

Space 15 Twenty's alleys and courtyard create an urban fabric (opposite, above); Max Azria's woven wood facade by artist Patrick Dougherty (opposite, below); Comme des Garçons' Guerrilla store brought urban elements inside, like a tower of shopping carts (above right); and Heath Ceramics' store (above left) features warm, artisanal materials like timbers and bricks, along with an outdoor courtyard.

THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER MARCH 11, 2009



IN THE DRIVE TO TAKE BACK PRIDE OF PLACE IN THE CONTEMPORARY HOME—OR EVEN THE CORNER BAR OR RESTAURANT—SOOT-FREE AND PORTABLE FIREPLACES HAVE BECOME THE LATEST IN CUSTOMIZABLE FURNISHINGS

# WARMING TRENDS

## 1 FIREScheme THE PLATONIC FIREPLACE COMPANY

Started by architect Henry Harrison in 1984, the Platonic Fireplace Company continues to provide creative and innovative contemporary designs that aim to reinstall the fireplace rather than the widescreen plasma screen as the hearth of the home. One of Harrison's latest conceptions, firescheme, allows clients to get at least a piece of an original design by one of Britain's leading interior architects. Shown here is firescheme with a steel extraction system instead of a chimney and a canopy clad to match. The fire—an "invisible" Socrates burner—is ignited through the company's own fire pebbles and sits upon a limestone shelf with a granite facing and fireback. [www.platonicfireplaces.co.uk](http://www.platonicfireplaces.co.uk)

## 2 FIREBOARD SCHULTE

Germany-based Schulte Design recently released a line of "fire furniture," in which everyday pieces of furniture—here, a sideboard—are transformed into mobile fireplaces. Each piece is made from Schulte Design woods and covered with sheet steel, powder-coated black, heat-resistant safety glass, and a stainless-steel reflector. It includes a double-walled combustion chamber with a ceramic foam inside that provides low fuel consumption, even flames, long burning, and unlimited usage. The Fireboard is a beautifully crafted storage space, as well, with two drawers, 27.5-inches wide, with a reflecting hinged back plane that romanticizes the burning light or folds down to make a continuous surface. [www.schultedesign.de](http://www.schultedesign.de)

## 3 THE LINEAR BURNER SPARK MODERN FIRES

Spark Modern Fires, the designer and manufacturer of modern, clean, and elegant gas fireplaces, recently announced a new customizable modular burner system called The Linear Burner. This new system gives designers and architects the ability to create custom linear fireplaces with a nationally certified and approved burner system. The burner is completely customizable and available from lengths of 24 to 96 inches in one-foot increments, as well as multiple views: one-sided, two-sided, three-sided, or completely open with an overhead vent. [www.sparkfires.com](http://www.sparkfires.com)

## 4 EF5000 ESCEA

In the hands of New Zealand-based Escea, the outdoor fireplace is anything but primitive. Their new range of gas fires, just introduced in the United States, is available in a variety of finishes to complement any room or outdoor setting. Escea's EF5000 open-front outdoor gas fire features vent-free technology, requiring no chimney, simplifying the installation process and ensuring that all heat generated is directed to the desired area. Available in marine-grade stainless steel with stone inserts (granite, marble, or similar), and Florentine Bronze, the fire measures 51 by 25 inches and comes with an electronic touch pad ignition with three settings to control its CSA 56,000-BTU vent-free heat output. [www.escea.co.nz](http://www.escea.co.nz)

## 5 BONFIRE B+D DESIGN

Tunisia-born artist Cathy Azria wants to blur the boundary between fireplaces and art by creating one-of-a-kind installations in which fire animates a structural composition. Her inspiration draws from natural materials, organic forms, and the interplay of light to make "fire sculptures" that work. Bonfire is Azria's latest, and reminiscent of fallen tree branches. Made from steel rods, customized to fit any opening, this is a sculpture that glows while emitting a cracking and popping sound as the steel begins to expand, simulating a real campfire experience while suitable for gas, electric, or solid fuel fireplaces. [www.bd-designs.co.uk](http://www.bd-designs.co.uk)

## 6 FUSION ECOSMART FIRE

The Fusion fireplace joins a line of freestanding portable fireplaces that are fueled with environmentally friendly ethanol. Streamlined in shape and made of modern materials, the Fusion fireplace is a flexible piece of furniture for any home or restaurant in need of a visual warm-up. With no installation or building work required, you simply unpack and position. Made with an MDF timber surround that is coated with a fire resistant topcoat, and constructed around a stainless steel firebox insert, the Fusion features a double opening with a "see-through" effect made with tempered, heat-resistant glass. [www.ecosmartfire.com](http://www.ecosmartfire.com)

DR

**Click on the Red Dot! [www.archpaper.com](http://www.archpaper.com)**

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## MARCH

## WEDNESDAY 11

## LECTURES

David Adjaye

**In Celebration of Louis Kahn and The Salk Institute**

7:00 p.m.

Salk Institute

10010 North Torrey Pines Rd.,

La Jolla

www.mcasd.org

Livio Sacchi

**Cities and Architecture:****Looking Ahead**

7:00 p.m.

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

## THURSDAY 12

## LECTURE

Mark Anthony Wilson

**Julia Morgan's Unique Place in American Architecture**

6:00 p.m.

AIA San Francisco

130 Sutter St., San Francisco

www.aiaf.org

## EXHIBITION OPENING

**Franz West, To Build a House You Start with the Roof: Work, 1972–2008**

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

5905 Wilshire Blvd.,

Los Angeles

www.lacma.org

## FRIDAY 13

## LECTURE

Robert Davolio

**From Concept to Fabrication: Building Non-Cartesian Structural Systems**

1:00 p.m.

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

## EVENT

**ArtNight Pasadena**

6:00 p.m.

Various venues in Pasadena

www.artcenter.edu/artnight/

## SATURDAY 14

## EXHIBITION OPENINGS

Edward Hagedorn

**California Modernist**

Couturier Gallery

166 North La Brea Ave.

www.couturiergallery.com

William Kentridge

**Five Themes**

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

151 3rd St., San Francisco

www.sfmoma.org

## SUNDAY 15

## EXHIBITION OPENING

Roger Kuntz

**The Shadow Between Representation and Abstraction**

Laguna Art Museum

307 Cliff Dr., Laguna Beach

www.lagunaartmuseum.org

## WITH THE KIDS

**Arts of Iran:****Celebrate the Persian New Year**

12:30 p.m.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

5905 Wilshire Blvd.,

Los Angeles

www.lacma.org

## MONDAY 16

## CONFERENCE

**Green California Summit and Exposition**

Through March 18

Sacramento Convention Center

1400 J St., Sacramento

www.green-technology.org/

gcs Summit/

## WEDNESDAY 18

## LECTURE

Eric Owen Moss

**The Latest and the Latest**

7:00 p.m.

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

## THURSDAY 19

## LECTURE

Charles Phoenix

**Southern Californialand!**

7:30 p.m.

Neighborhood Church

2 Westmoreland Pl.,

Pasadena

www.gamblehouse.org

## EXHIBITION OPENING

**Carvers and Collectors:****The Lasting Allure of Ancient Gems**

The J. Paul Getty Villa

17985 Pacific Coast Hwy.,

Pacific Palisades

www.getty.edu

## SATURDAY 21

## LECTURE

Stephen Kanner

6:00 p.m.

Palm Springs Art Museum

101 Museum Dr.,

Palm Springs

www.psmuseum.org

## EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Mary Heilmann, Chris Martin,****Rebecca Morris, et al.****The Ballad That Becomes An Anthem**

ACME.

6150 Wilshire Blvd.,

Los Angeles

www.acmelosangeles.com

Ranjani Shettar

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

151 3rd St., San Francisco

www.sfmoma.org

## EVENT

**A New Infrastructure:****Innovative Transit Solutions for Los Angeles**

2:00 p.m.

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

## SUNDAY 22

## EXHIBITION OPENING

Adam Silverman and

Nader Tehrani

**Boolean Valley**

Museum of Contemporary Art Pacific Design Center

8687 Melrose Ave.,

West Hollywood

www.pacificdesigncenter.com

## MONDAY 23

## TRADE SHOW

**GlobalShop 2009**

Through March 25

Sands Expo

201 Sands Ave.,

Las Vegas

www.globalshop.org

## TUESDAY 24

## EXHIBITION OPENING

Wang Qingsong

The Hammer Museum

10899 Wilshire Blvd.,

Los Angeles

www.hammer.ucla.edu

## WEDNESDAY 25

## LECTURE

Elena Manferdini

**Design is One**

7:00 p.m.

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St.,

Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

## EVENT

**WESTWEEK 2009:****The Business of Design**

Through March 27

Museum of Contemporary Art Pacific Design Center

8687 Melrose Ave.,

West Hollywood

www.pacificdesigncenter.com

## FRIDAY 27

## LECTURE

David Ross

**Variants**

1:00 p.m.

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

## SATURDAY 28

## LECTURE

Bill Butler

**Donald Wexler**

12:00 p.m.

Palm Springs Art Museum

101 Museum Dr.,

Palm Springs

www.psmuseum.org

## EXHIBITION OPENING

Joe Bradley

Peres Projects

969 Chung King Rd.,

Los Angeles

www.peresprojects.com

## WITH THE KIDS

**Union Station Family Walking Tour**

11:00 a.m.

Los Angeles Conservancy

523 West 6th St., Suite 826,

Los Angeles

www.laconservancy.org

## SUNDAY 29

## EXHIBITION OPENING

**Daughters of India:****Photographs by Stephen P. Huyler**

Fowler Museum of Art

308 Charles East Young Dr.,

Los Angeles

www.fowler.ucla.edu

## CONFERENCE

**Countdown to a Sustainable Energy Future...Net-Zero and Beyond**

Through March 31

Hyatt and Fisherman's Wharf

555 North Point St.,

San Francisco

www.aiaf.org

## MONDAY 30

## FILM

**Robert Todd's Cinema of Discovery**

8:30 p.m.

Roy and Edna Disney/

CalArts Theater

631 West 2nd St.,

Los Angeles

www.redcat.org

## TUESDAY 31

## EXHIBITION OPENING

**Made for Manufacture**

The J. Paul Getty Center

1200 Getty Center Dr.,

Los Angeles

www.getty.edu

## APRIL

## WEDNESDAY 1

## LECTURE

Mark Gonzalez, Suzanne

Lacy, et al.

**Be The Change**

7:00 p.m.

Roy and Edna Disney/

CalArts Theater

631 West 2nd St., Los Angeles

www.redcat.org

## EXHIBITION OPENING

**Human/Nature: Artists****Respond to a Changing Planet**

Berkeley Art Museum and

Pacific Film Archive

2625 Durant Ave., Berkeley

www.bampfa.berkeley.edu

## FRIDAY 3

## LECTURES

Jessica D'Elena

**Graphitecture: The Graphic Designer Draws Lines in the Architect's Sandbox**

1:00 p.m.

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

## ENRIQUE NORTEN

**In Celebration of Louis Kahn and The Salk Institute**

7:00 p.m.

Museum of Contemporary Art of San Diego

700 Prospect St., La Jolla

www.mcasd.org

## SUNDAY 5

## EXHIBITION OPENING

**The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850–1900**

The Hammer Museum

10899 Wilshire Blvd.,

Los Angeles

www.hammer.ucla.edu

## WEDNESDAY 8

## LECTURE

Jason Payne

**American Gothic**

7:00 p.m.

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

## FRIDAY 10

## EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Eric Owen Moss Architects: If not now, when?**

SCI-Arc

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

Walid Raad

**Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Arab World**

Roy and Edna Disney/

CalArts Theater

631 West 2nd St., Los Angeles

www.redcat.org

## SATURDAY 11

## LECTURE

Toyo Ito

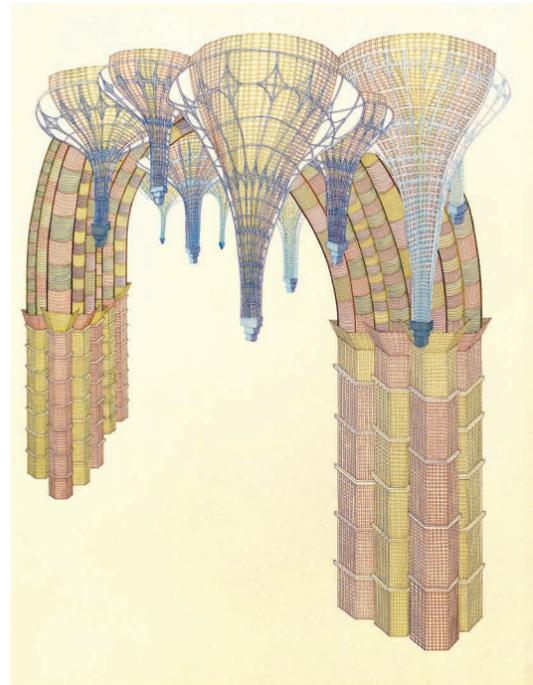
**New Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive**

7:00 p.m.

UC Berkeley Campus

Wheeler Auditorium, Berkeley

arch.ced.berkeley.edu



COURTESY TAYLOR DE CORDOBA

## MELISSA MANFULL: TESSERACTS

Taylor De Cordoba

2660 South La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles

Through March 28

Los Angeles-based artist Melissa Manfull creates an alternate reality of built form through intricate ink-and-graphite-on-paper compositions. In her latest series, Manfull uses the tesseract—a four-dimensional analog of a cube—to push beyond the confines of a three-dimensional world. Inspired by science fiction, Gothic architecture, and mineralogy, these visions of towers, arches, and organic shapes blur the boundaries between the natural and built worlds. In *Arch* (2008, above), crystalline spires seem to hang like stalactites in some architectural grotto. Other recent works use the formal qualities of smoke, geodes, and webs as the basis for imaginary constructions that bloom in an exuberant tumult. With their oddball energy, these drawings sometimes recall the Dadaist montages of Hannah Höch or Kurt Schwitters. But their obsessive detail gives Manfull's finely drawn structures—Eiffel Towers twisting into the sky, and space frames that sprawl to the horizon—an architectonic style all her own.



COURTESY HOSFELT GALLERY

## MICHAEL LIGHT: NEW WORK

Hosfelt Gallery

430 Clementina Street, San Francisco

Through March 21

Part of photographer Michael Light's ongoing documentation of the arid West, *New Work* presents a metropolis incongruously rising from the American desert. Drawing from his latest large-scale book *Salt River, Deadman Wash, Paradise Valley*, the images on view are shot with a large-format camera from a self-piloted aircraft or rented helicopter. The San Francisco-based artist uses both color and black-and-white film to reveal the transformation of the landscape into endless acres of sprawl. His view of Paradise Valley, Arizona (above), captures the confounding scale of the region's real-estate boom. "At the right height and angle, aerial work can offer a miniaturized universe, and this image is about that shrinkage," Light explained. His long-running project also offers an intriguing comment on socio-economic differences. A wide-angle view of new subdivisions shows how opulent estates back up against the hilltops, while shoddy worker housing occupies less desirable land in the valleys.

Stadthaus Scharnhäuser Park, Ostfildern, Germany (2001).



DAVID FRANCK/COURTESY SFMOMA

## DATA DECOR

Patterns of Speculation: J. Mayer H.  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
Through July 7

When you first hear the premise behind much of Berlin-based architect Jürgen Mayer's work, it seems like a joke. Most of it, explains the text to his eponymous show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), comes from an investigation of data protection patterns: those sets of numbers, shapes, letters, or symbols used on the insides of pay

slips and IRS envelopes to hide the information inside. The patterns, writes SFMOMA's architecture and design curator Henry Urbach, "recapitulate important properties of architectural surfaces—such as the way boundaries control movement and visibility across space—while providing a contemporary language of ornament."

It's no joke. This "language of ornament," inspired by what appears to be a random exploration, has led to some of the most intriguing formal designs in the world. Clients in Europe have embraced the conceptual practice of his firm, J. Mayer H., and built or are building over 35 of his projects, which move the already tenuous line between fine art and architecture that much closer to the side of art.

At first look, the presentation of his work seems equally ridiculous. Three huge, white, abstract plaster sculptures that slightly resemble dogs sit among a crisscross of floor and ceiling graphics, projected images of Mayer's

work, and video clips of these protection patterns, all accompanied by buzzing, race-car-like noises. As you linger, the impact of the work seems to grow in significance.

The most obvious connection comes from the videos of the work itself, beamed from openings in the sculptural installations that, it turns out, are themselves giant versions of the data patterns. The slideshows capture mishapen architectural forms such as the fractured, off-kilter Court of Justice in Hasselt, Belgium; the mushroom-like Metro Parasol in Seville, Spain; and the web-like Mensa Moltke, a student canteen at the Karlsruhe University

in Karlsruhe, Germany. Images of some of his sculptures, like his wavy green blob called *beat.wave* for the Pulse art show in Miami, are difficult to distinguish from the architecture.

Shots of the buildings and sculptures are mingled with images of the data protection patterns, also projected and warped, on small TVs built into the sculptures and drawn on the floor and ceiling. If you listen carefully, the hectic sounds around you. Every part of the show is made up of these patterns, which infuse and overwhelm the senses. They also make the point that this formal

investigation, while perhaps random, has the capacity to create and warp just about anything. Mayer is a master at studying and manipulating pure form and pattern, and the potential outgrowths of this investigation seem endless. They produce designs made possible with today's sophisticated building and computer technologies. With the help of engineering firms like Arup, which contributed to several of his structures, they also showcase the fantastic structures that this combination can create. In Mayer's architecture, this investigation of data patterns epitomizes a desire for new, integrated ornament, and crystallizes in built form the chaos of our times.

The show, like most architecture exhibitions, is hemmed in by the limitations of trying to capture an art best experienced in person. But its array of media provides ample inspiration to begin thinking about the possibilities of Mayer's work. If this degree of thought can go into a building's envelope, imagine how Mayer's talent could transform buildings as integrated systems, or conceive of whole urban environments.

**SAM LUBELL IS THE CALIFORNIA EDITOR FOR AN.**

## WHAT LIES BENEATH

Cecil Balmond: *Solid Void*  
Graham Foundation Madlener House,  
4 West Burton Place, Chicago  
Through June 20



Danzer at the Madlener House (2008).

MICHELLE LITVIN/COURTESY GRAHAM FOUNDATION

Beneath the dense and multidimensional appearances of our world lies an endless cascade of numbers; an irrigating flood of numerical updates, cross-references, algorithmic feeds, averages, and distributions. They do not interact with one another through the predictable linear protocols of classical geometry, but behave more like the mysterious webs and catalytic reactions of chemistry. That is the cosmological premise of *The Matrix*, the 1999 film whose depiction of an unending tide of numbers suggested that physical reality, far from being the brute guarantor and foundation of all other realities, is itself the result of a complex set of mirages provided by the hydraulic pressure of numbers surging and organizing behind it. The lived world is fragile, magical, and unstable, but most of all, the movie showed it to be a secondary effect contingent on a relentless calculus of relations. Individual numbers may well be pure abstractions—false or "misplaced concreteness," as the philosopher-mathematician Alfred North Whitehead once declared them—but their interactions within moving streams are entirely real.

The current exhibition of work by Cecil Balmond at the Graham Foundation in Chicago provides just this kind of improbable excursion into the metaphysics of numbers, as well as into the invisible but intensely active plenum that is space. But most of all, it is about the art of making buildings stand up in entirely new ways. *Solid Void* is primarily an installation: a three-dimensional metallic filigree "sprouted" on a simple isotropic (eight-inch or so) grid that propagates itself

like a repeating digital flora—hence its name *H\_edge*—throughout the ground floor of Chicago's Graham Foundation. The work is intended to invoke digital modalities of assembly, patterns of biological propagation and variation, as well as the more architecturally familiar mechanical-tectonic principles and especially their limits. Balmond's *H\_edge* is at once marvelous to look at, to press on, and to contemplate, and it concisely and clearly sums up Balmond's entire project within a simple, almost homemade structure—a notable feat given that he inhabits the rarefied stratosphere of magician-engineers. *H\_edge* demonstrates to all who visit it that a building does not have to "stand up" in order to maintain its erect dignity and stability; it can snatch its structure elsewhere than from the clichés of gravity and its classical counterpoint, the post and lintel. *H\_edge* posits the idea that tension and compression are present like a foam in space, hidden by nature and disposition within every point and molecule, waiting only to be harvested by some ingenious trick. With astounding simplicity, *H\_edge* transposes the compression members into tension ones and vice versa: The "matrix" of cut aluminum plates flexes against the limits of the chain link's potential for expansion along its length and converts the chain into a taut and scalable column, like in the famous Indian rope trick to which Balmond refers in his commentary to the work. More accurately, *H\_edge* abolishes the compressive column entirely by showing that counterpoint is discoverable everywhere, and can be **continued on page 24**

THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER MARCH 11, 2009

**WHAT LIES BENEATH** continued from page 23 tapped to hang one's coat on, anywhere one wishes. It is of course not magic at all, as every one of his demonstrably stable structures clearly proves. Void is solid; solid is a type of matter or "materiality"; and matter is rife with counter-forces that need only be selected and put at the service of global structure. Sailors, for example, know that sailing close to the wind delivers more efficiency than sailing downwind. Balmond is the first to have brought this counterintuitive insight into the world of solids as well.

The second floor of the Graham manse provides an extended documentary storyboard of Balmond's intellectual trajectory, a kind of Natural History Museum of the history of numbers and forms that is no less imaginative than the great metafictional displays of the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles. The display is saturated with exquisite demonstrations and concrete architectural details, models, video clips, animations, algebraic demonstrations, and speculations on the nature and future of form. It also contains the room-filling quasi-crystal structure *Danzer*, in which every glyptic facet connects with, and participates in, the articulation of every other in an unstoppable, but this time imploding, fractal cascade. But Balmond's world is not exclusive, and while his deepest current inclinations tend toward dissymmetry and disequilibrium (extreme architectural performance), he does not shy from including loyal reflections on classical

proportion and balance, or even on the numerological curiosities of quasi-science (which, to be fair, did not frighten Newton either). Balmond is one of those rare engineers with a license to speculate, to experiment and invent, and not only to solve. His emerging specialty is the architectural "thought experiment": As director of the Advanced Geometry Unit at Britain's Arup engineering firm and now as an independent designer himself, he is a collaborator on high-profile "hypotheses" such as the Libeskind, Koolhaas, Ito, and Siza pavilions for London's Serpentine Gallery, and he designed the Coimbra pedestrian bridge in Portugal, his first solo project. While his business is numbers, his vocation is form. And he knows that the relationship between the two is where the openness of life and nature reside. His exhibition is a form of scientific autobiography for the generation of designers—curiously, mostly in advanced phases of their careers—that is just beginning to emerge revolutionized and reborn. Young computer-based designers ought to take a long soul-searching look here to be reminded of what density of insight they may be forsaking in the name of the hastily-conceived radicality they have proclaimed for themselves, which may not be all that it is cracked up to be.

**SANFORD KWINTER IS A VISITING PROFESSOR AT THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN AT HARVARD, AND THE AUTHOR, MOST RECENTLY, OF *FAR FROM EQUILIBRIUM: ESSAYS ON TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN CULTURE* (MIT PRESS, 2008).**



*H\_edge* (2008), installation view.

MICHELLE LITVIN/COURTESY GRAHAM FOUNDATION

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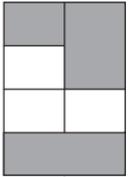


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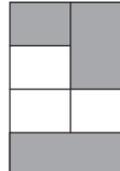
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| <b>Gyford Productions</b> 272           | <b>Taylor &amp; Company</b> 248    |
| <b>Index-D</b> 175                      | <b>Trespa North America</b> 254    |
| <b>Kim Wendell Design</b> 186           | <b>University of Michigan</b> 256  |
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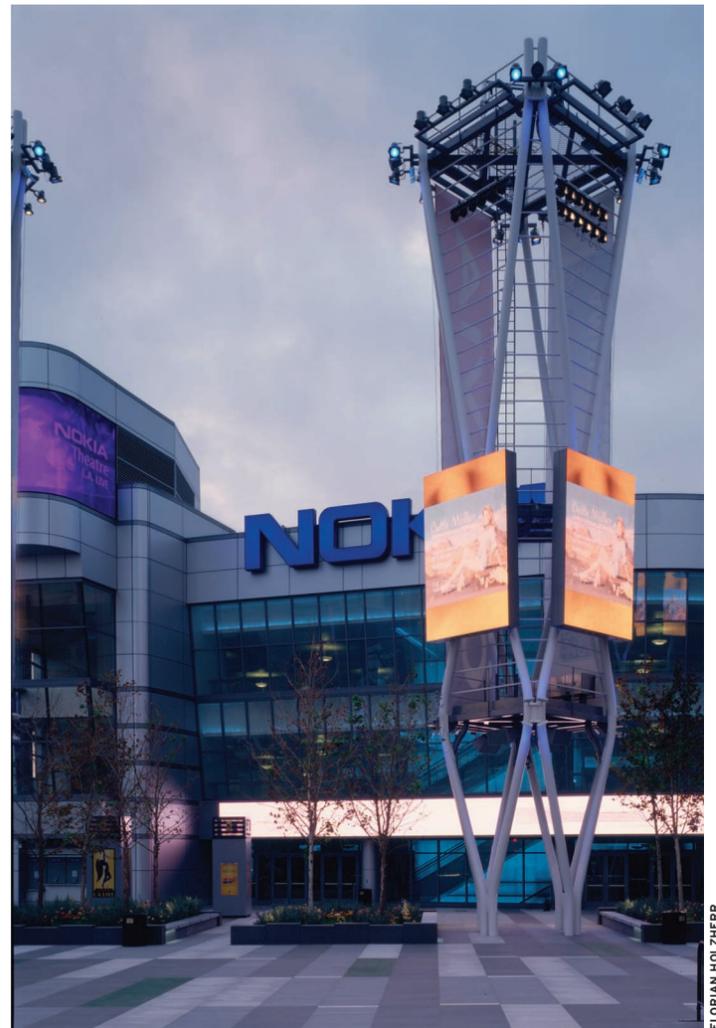
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FLORIAN HOLZHEER

# L.A. LIVE UNPLUGGED

When I googled "Nokia Plaza, Los Angeles," the first result (of about 254,000) flashing across my screen (in 0.16 seconds) was a grandiloquent conceit of the sports and entertainment assemblage L.A. Live, declaring, "Since the beginning of civilization, great gathering places have been the heart and soul of a community."

Few would deny this axiom, or accuse L.A. Live's parent Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG) of modesty. The slightly-less-than-an-acre plaza has been fashioned to serve as a focal point/photo op for the Denver developer's ambitious \$2.5 billion, 27-acre commercial conglomeration of high-end hotels, restaurants, cafes, cinemas, clubs, broadcast studios, and the Grammy Music Museum. There is even a bowling alley—something for every partygoer.

As for the plaza, embraced by video walls and studded with six 75-foot, LED-encrusted towers, it is strategically sited across from two other jewels in AEG's crown: the Staples Sports arena and the Los Angeles Convention Center. It's also within walking distance of the emerging South

Park residential neighborhood. At a glance, this promises to deliver a healthy demographic mix of tourists, suburban day-trippers, and downtown denizens.

Looking back at the early stages of the project, the selection of the solid, if stolid, design firms of Rios Clementi Hale Studios for the plaza and RTKL for the L.A. Live master plan gave encouragement. Both firms have displayed in past projects a welcome sensitivity to the city's urbane aspirations. And then there was City Hall, suppressing its recalcitrant bureaucracy and parochial politics to bless and subsidize the effort, lending downtown a presence at last. It only took 14 years of planning and three administrations, a blink of time in the evolution of L.A. from a cow town to a wannabe world city.

Yet for all these assets and good will, when the construction barriers came down and the red carpets were laid for the plaza's dedication late last year, the heavily hyped effort was generally trashed by a chorus of critics and bloggers as a sterile, over-commercialized stage set.

Even the temporary centerpiece, a 50-foot-high Christmas tree draped with 11,000 LED lights, attracted snickers.

Particularly pointed and painful to the project planners was the critique of *The LA Times'* Christopher Hawthorne, who described the plaza as a still-born space serving "velvet-rope urbanism," another isolated "self-contained outdoor mall" destined to become "a hermetic, inward-looking, and car-centric development in the classic Southern California tradition" and discouraging "any of the activities we traditionally associate with the use of collective space in a city." To top off the put-down, Hawthorne subsequently nominated the project in the paper's year-end cultural wrap as the "Worst Architecture of 2008." And this was apparently written before the tree lights were turned on and the converging crowds caroled in a free concert series promoting the plaza.

To be sure, in this age of digitized delivery of news 24/7, there is a tendency to rush to judgment. This is especially difficult when commenting on architecture, whose true test is not the way it looks in plans or renderings, or at openings, but how it serves the people for whom it was designed.

No longer pressured by editors or deadlines, I waited for the dust to settle before ambling in and about Nokia Plaza over several

days with family, friends, and by myself. As promoted, I found the plaza indeed a focal point, a place to meet and grab a bite, before or after attending some L.A. Live diversion. (Unable to afford Lakers tickets, I went to the engaging Grammy Museum with one of my musical sons.) The free, staged events were also fun, though fleeting, and the reserved sections did not seem very egalitarian for a public space. The people I observed tended not to linger, nor were they encouraged to do so, not even after the New Year's had been desultorily rung in. It is obviously not yet L.A.'s Times Square or Rockefeller Center, and there is a question as to whether it will be, or should be.

As several have noted, Nokia Plaza is not a place to sit and read, or even have a cup of coffee. If a stall vendor offered a cup at a reasonable price, I could be tempted to sip al fresco, but I would never consider parading my dog there; too many smells and shuffling feet for a herding Corgi. Conversations are also hard when competing with the incessant video displays and piped music. As for South Park residents, they no doubt are welcome there, too, but I bet most will find other places for their leisure pursuits. At present, the plaza is not much more than an outdoor lobby for commercial attractions and distractions, and frankly not very neighborly, but it nevertheless serves its prime purpose as a

gathering place, if not as an attraction for a casual crowd.

Nokia Plaza also fails to evoke anything that particularly expresses Southern California. Even the incessant lighting and the video screens seem more Las Vegas, and the LED towers look like discarded back-lot sci-fi automatons, a curiosity from a distance but menacing up close. They could be removed, as could the planters and the plantings, though some temporary shading no doubt will be needed during the hot and hazy months. The transition from landscaping to cityscaping can be challenging.

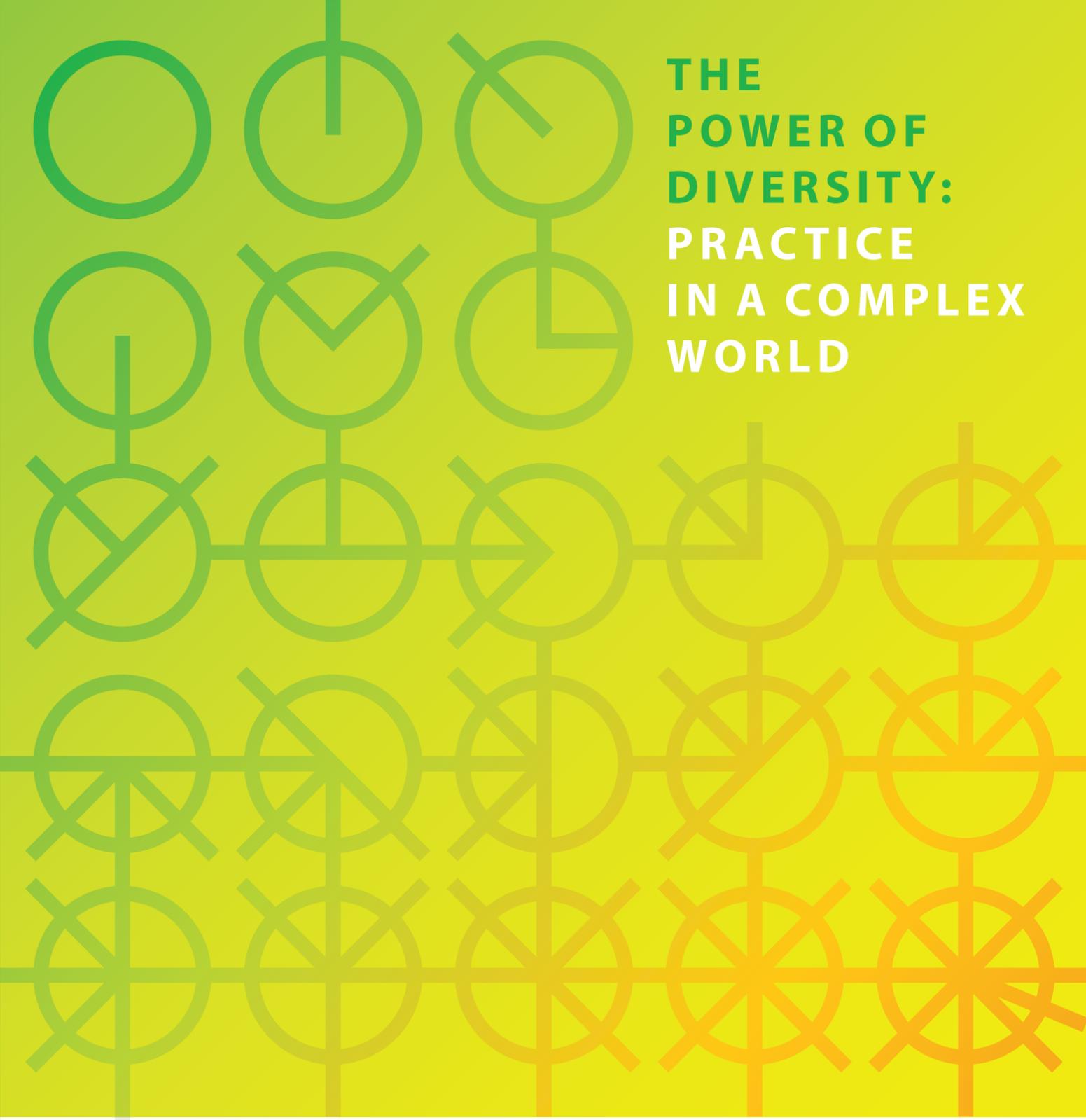
Actually, for my taste, the plaza is too cluttered; certainly for its size. Public spaces should be more open to the ebb and flow of differing crowds throughout the varying days and nights, the shifting seasons and disparate holidays. They need to stretch and breathe to encourage that certain serendipity that generates a distinct identity.

So let the celebrations, festivals, and concerts happen, close the adjacent streets if and when necessary, have chairs and tables at the ready, as well as food stands and stalls. Turn the sidewalks leading to the plaza into promenades. Invite in the buskers. Nokia Plaza, to succeed as a public space, is going to have to become pliable, which will take some creativity, and time.

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