

PLACES



San Jose Redevelopment



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**Places, a Forum of
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Caring About Places: Thresholds

Good places need to be excellent in many dimensions.

They need to be structured so that we can remember them,
They need to remind us of important things about our lives,
They need to suggest our position in a sequence of time; not obsessively
marking the moment, but tracing the strands of decisions over time.

Good places need to be stimulating, to be forgiving, to be approachable,
to be more than we first think they are.

Good places need to sustain attention,
to invite and reward the interest that we show in them,
to capture the curiosity and affections of many,
to draw their energy from diverse sources,
to garner and accept continuing investment.

Good places embody imagination,
Good places result from successive generations of care,
Good places engage the landscape, are inscribed with detail,
Good places take advantage of the capabilities of their time; appropriately
and with discretion.

Good places confirm as well as challenge; challenge as well as confirm.

Good places set in motion patterns of social encounter that are constructive;
they are not hermetic
they are not threatening
they allow choices of path and association.

Good places let us see how we could be a part of them;
they have parts that are measurable in human terms —
niches of intimacy, rooms of purpose, spaces of assembly, fields of connection
they register human movement, mask and reveal activity, provide options,
evoke conversation, offer repose.

Good places must be considered at various scales;
they play an evident and welcome part in a larger community, landscape
and region
they have elements that help us to place them in memory
they bear traces of the acts of building, gardening, tending, gathering
they are furnished and give comfort
they are a semblance of thought...the most precious of resources

Good places enrich our lives; they are thresholds between what has been and
what might be.

— *Donlyn Lyndon*

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Donlyn Lyndon

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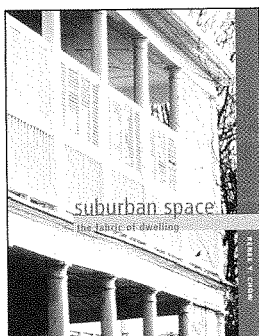


In this issue we present an extended PlaceViews section examining the transformation of San Jose, California. For the last two decades, this self-proclaimed "capital of Silicon Valley" has engaged in an exemplary effort to rebuild and redefine its downtown. After years of neglect during the post-World War II era of suburban dispersal, this effort both tapped into the high-tech boom and was spearheaded by talented and dedicated designers and managers. As a "best-case" scenario, the San Jose experience offers valuable urban design insights — especially when viewed from differing vantage points. This issue also provides two offerings of Research and

Debate, both of which carry on a discussion started by the late Michael Brill in our Fall 2001 issue. There are twelve pages of Portfolio by one of America's foremost architectural photographers; a provocative Speaking of Places; and a Dispatch from a conference which helped improve the research base for both the New Urbanism and Smart Growth movements. We conclude with a Forum section looking into two innovative courthouse spaces created by GSA. —DM

A collage of views looking north along First Street in San Jose, 1950s and now. Photos courtesy of San Jose Redevelopment Agency (SJRA).

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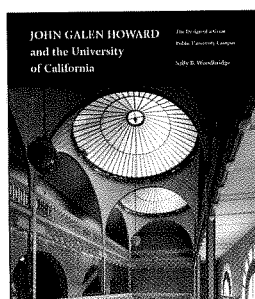
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To Rally Discussion

Dear Donlyn Lyndon,

Thank you very much for the first issue of Volume 15 of *Places* which I read with great interest. Since I have repeatedly been asked to express my opinion on the jury's choice not to give an award to our project for the Cardada mountain in Switzerland, I would like to use this opportunity to comment.

The jury discussion showed that the submitted documents presenting the Cardada project did not sufficiently stress the project's research basis. However, the much-discussed "beauty" and "poetry" of the project are the results of thorough research into environmental processes and phenomena, human landscaping, and landscape perception. As a matter of fact, geologists, biologists and historians were involved in the project. Since I was presenting my project to a highly qualified jury I assumed the experts involved would notice and therefore take into consideration the considerable and important research work accompanying the design process.

Taking into account, if I may dare say, the project's uniqueness, I was taken by surprise when I got to know of the jury's choice. However, reading your last issue I did get the impression that the project started fruitful discussion amongst the jurors, and I hope that it might be helpful for future awards programs and decision-making. I think this is a challenging discussion worth carrying through.

Yours,

Paolo L. Bürgi

A juror responds:

Creating great places goes beyond reliance on an isolated, singular vision. The EDRA/*Places* program assumes that systematic inquiry enhances planning and design processes and products. That inquiry can span boundaries that often divide researchers from each other and the design professions. This is a difficult, messy, and relatively unheralded process. Therefore, the EDRA/*Places* awards honor explicit attention to communicating across disciplines and across design/research boundaries.

"But what I really meant was. . . ." So lament students when I am unable to discern the research between the lines of their papers. Our 2002 jury faced a similar difficulty deciphering the research behind Paolo Bürgi's vision. How did the research of geologists, biologists, and historians help inform particular aspects of this vision? How do visitors experience the site in ways that provide both confirmation and surprise for the researchers and designers? Explicit presentation of such questions and answers to them would have elevated the work "between the lines," and provided a significant and lasting contribution not only on the mountain, but in our professional discourse.

Barbara Brown

President EDRA, juror, 2002

Contributors

Thomas R. Aidala, FAIA, has an active professional practice in architecture, urban design, and planning. He was the Principal Architect and Urban Designer, and Principal Design Consultant, for the San Jose Redevelopment Agency (1982-1998) and directed the design program of its \$1.7 billion redevelopment effort and downtown revitalization. In 1996 he was awarded the Thomas Jefferson Award for Public Architecture, the highest national honor given by the American Institute of Architects for design of public architecture.

Jay Claiborne served as the Staff Chairperson, Downtown Streetscape Committee, from 1984-86 with the City of San Jose. His specialty in master planning led to his most recent project, the Mare Island Specific Plan for Lennar Communities in Vallejo, California. He has an ongoing planning practice in Berkeley, and holds dual degrees in Architecture and City Planning from UC Berkeley.

David L.A. Gordon is an Associate Professor of Urban Planning at Queen's University, Canada. He has received an MBA and a Doctorate in Design from Harvard University, and was formerly Director of Planning for the Kirkland Partnership in Toronto. He is the author of *Battery Park City: Politics and Planning on the New York Waterfront*. His article was written while he was a Fulbright Senior Scholar visiting at the University of Pennsylvania.

Alan Hess has been the architecture critic for the San Jose *Mercury News* since 1986. His books include *The Architecture of John Lautner*, *Palm Springs Weekend*, *Googie: Fifties Coffee Shop Architecture*, and *Viva Las Vegas*. He received his architecture degree from UCLA.

Montira Horayangura learned to look at cities like San Jose as part of a seminar with Allan Jacobs. Before graduate school, she served with UNESCO in her native Thailand, as well as guest-lecturing there and in Japan. She will receive degrees in Architecture and City Planning from UC Berkeley later this year.

Timothy Hursley began his photography career in Detroit in 1971, and established his own studio, The Arkansas Office, in Little Rock in 1982. In 1990 he received an American Institute of Architects Honor Award for contributions to the field of architectural photography, and in 1998 he received an Arkansas Arts Council Fellowship Award. He is co-author of *Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency* (Princeton Press, 2001). His *Brothels of Nevada* is scheduled to be published in the fall of 2003.

John Lund Kriken, FAIA, AICP, is a Consulting Partner with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in San Francisco, where he directs the Urban Design Studio. He has been involved with projects in downtown San Jose on and off since 1980.

Nico Larco is a designer with William Rawn Associates in Boston. He has worked on campus planning projects, the San Jose Downtown Strategic Plan, and aspects of the Boston Central Artery project. He holds Masters degrees in Architecture and City Planning from UC Berkeley. He can be reached at nicolarco@yahoo.com.

Clare Cooper Marcus is a Contributing Editor to *Places* and a Professor Emerita at the University of California, Berkeley, where she taught in both the Architecture and Landscape

Architecture departments. Her books include *Housing as if People Mattered*, *People Places*, and *House as a Mirror of Self*. In 2000 her book *Healing Gardens* (co-authored with Marni Barnes) received an EDRA/Places Award for Place Research.

Rita Skevos has provided management, marketing, writing, and editorial services to firms in architecture, engineering, planning, and graphic design for more than 25 years. She was led by an early passion for art and environmental issues to a lifelong interest in architecture, cities, and regional planning, areas which she has explored through independent study and travel. She continues to serve small businesses through her consulting practice in northern California.

John Wiebenson received his Master of Architecture degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He has taught at the University of Maryland's School of Architecture and has been a visiting scholar at Chinese University of Hong Kong. In addition to a long-standing interest in Pennsylvania Avenue, he served as Chairman of the Building Committee for Resurrection City, Martin Luther King Jr.'s last campaign, which brought thousands to the Washington Mall in 1968.

Another Face of San Jose

Montira Horayangura

On a sunny Saturday afternoon a walk around downtown San Jose hints at the broader effects of the city's recent redevelopment efforts. Along First Street near the transit mall, spruced-up historic storefronts are mostly occupied by trendy cafes, tech firms, music clubs, and theaters. Handsome signs point the way to nearby civic buildings and cultural institutions, and posters advertise the weekly farmer's market at San Pedro Square. Nevertheless, a number of stores are up for lease, and few pedestrians are about.

Meanwhile, half a mile away in the local commercial area south of San Jose State University, the Tung Kee Noodle House at William and Sixth is doing brisk business. Chinese and Hispanic families spill out of cars and wait in line for pearl ice tea and *chow fun*. Nearby, the signs in grocery stores and small businesses are written in English, Vietnamese, Chinese and Spanish, and handmade fliers on telephone poles speak of five local garage sales. Nevertheless, cracked sidewalks, scraggly street trees, and numerous "for rent" signs testify to economic decline and neglect.

Clearly, even the best efforts of the San Jose Redevelopment Agency have had a hard time recapturing the city's pre-World War II urban energy. In part, it has been successful at building a new base of activity downtown. But today these efforts also highlight the shabby gentility of surrounding areas, whose vitality, ironically, seems more genuine than that of the high-wattage downtown.

To address this contrast, the city launched its Strong Neighborhoods Initiative in July 2000. Over the next five years, SNI will target \$120 million toward the needs of twenty older, largely residential neighborhoods which generally surround the downtown. Together, these neighborhoods account for nearly one-third of the city's population.

To date, SNI has been praised by some as a long overdue effort to share the city's redevelopment wealth and boost the fortunes of areas that embody real home-grown potential. But others have criticized it for treating the symptoms rather than the deep-seated causes of physical and economic decline.

New Neighborhoods from Old

The inner-ring residential neighborhoods of San Jose have a rich history. In places, the city's beginnings as a farming and agricultural processing center are still visible in the form of farmhouses or barns from the mid-1800s. But most of the built fabric dates to California's boom years at the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, in areas such as the Hemsley District and Naglee Park, the city's early prosperity gave rise to elaborate Victorian dwellings

along tree-lined streets. Elsewhere, the city's working-class lived in more modest bungalows with deep porches.

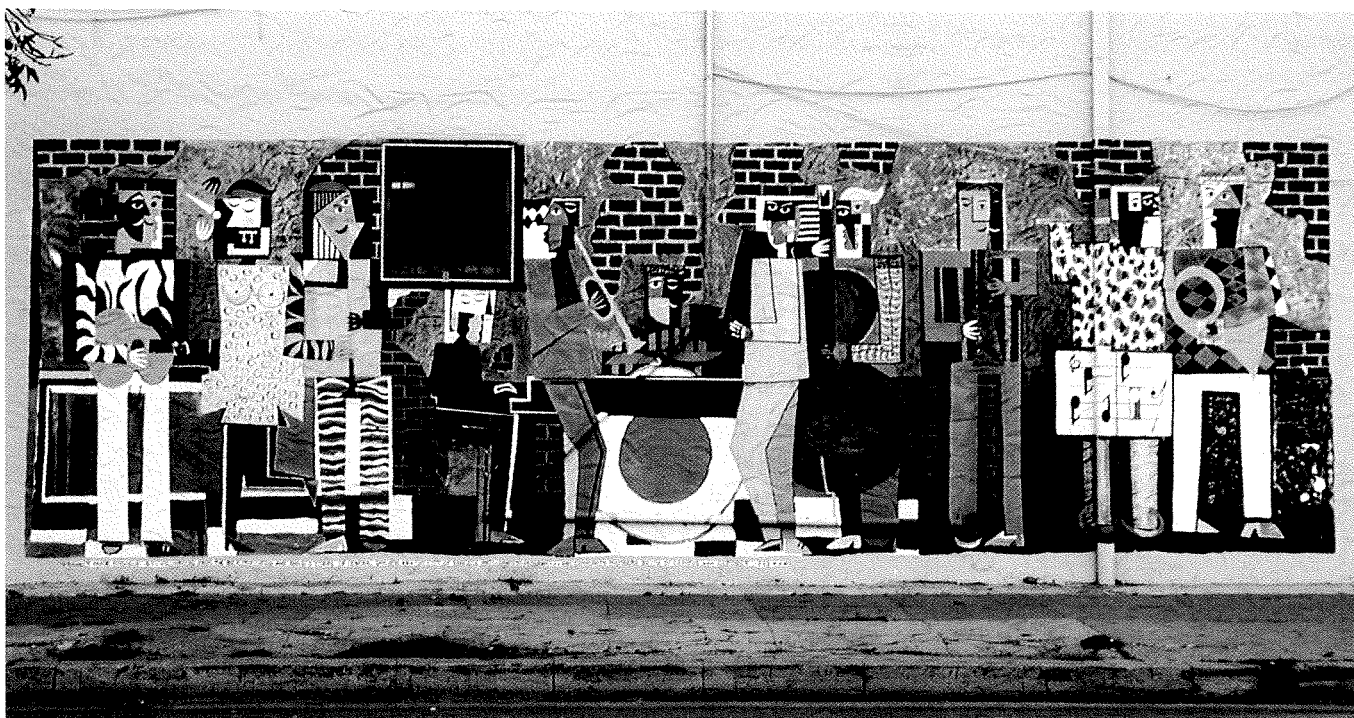
More recently, these older structures have been joined by boxy moderate-income apartments. But along neighborhood commercial corridors, such as Thirteenth Street, small-scale retail buildings still orient themselves to the street. And, in general, these neighborhoods retain a low-density character that gives the city much of its small-town charm.

Today, the residents of these areas are more diverse, poorer, and less well-educated than those of the adjacent downtown or more outlying areas. Nevertheless, they closely mirror the changing face of California. In particular, Asians and Hispanics — many fairly recent immigrants — constitute a significant majority of neighborhood residents.¹

The new ethnic and economic diversity often results in complex physical and social juxtapositions. On the same street, one old Victorian may be occupied by descendants of its original owners, while next door another may have been converted to single-room occupancy. Likewise, immigrants working in low-skill jobs may live on the same block as tech-industry engineers. And well-heeled young professionals on their way downtown for dinner and a show may pass the garage sales of large Hispanic families.

Like downtown, these inner-ring neighborhoods were hard hit by disinvestment following World War II. As jobs, retail, and middle-class residents left for the suburbs, they slipped into physical and social decline, becoming sites of crime, drug trafficking, and blight. Nevertheless, they held on through the lean years. And in 1989, the city launched Project Crackdown, a \$1.3 million program that employed a combination of aggressive police activity and community mobilization.² Today, with serious crime largely controlled, the city believes these communities are poised for a comeback. Toward this goal, SNI is billed as "a partnership of the City of San Jose, San Jose Redevelopment Agency, and the community to build clean, safe, and attractive neighborhoods with independent and capable neighborhood organizations."

Most of the funding for SNI will come from redevelopment tax-increment monies, while the rest will come from parks and library bond issues, grant programs, and the city's general fund. But funding for the program is not large: indeed, when averaged over the twenty neighborhoods, the city's total financial commitment translates to only \$1.29 million per neighborhood per year — roughly enough to complete two very nice intersection improvements. Instead, the expectation is that the neighborhoods will be able to leverage city funds, and the



institutional support of city agencies, to obtain matching grants from other sources.

Proponents for such decentralized strategies have in the past argued that neighborhood mobilization is necessary to build local support and a sense of personal investment in municipal improvements.³ Indeed, SNI is structured around a bottom-up process for prioritizing neighborhood needs. And central to this process is the formation of Neighborhood Advisory Committees (NACs) to focus resident participation in decision-making.

So far, most of the SNI neighborhoods have proposed improvement plans based on input from residents. Prominent in these plans are basic improvements to the public realm, including sidewalk repair, street clean-up, tree planting, street lighting, traffic calming, more parks, better access to community facilities, improved housing and business conditions, and pedestrian/bicycle corridors. In many cases, “top-ten” community priorities include long-neglected needs familiar to residents, which might have languished in the city’s bureaucratic backlog.

Critics Emerge

Despite its good intentions, neighborhood response to SNI has so far been mixed. Among other things, skeptics argue that the SNI process does not adequately represent the concerns of residents. They say NAC representatives have either been co-opted by the city, or have focused too narrowly on their own interests. Meanwhile, they point out that the cost of San Jose’s new city hall alone is \$380 million — casting doubt on the city’s stated commitment to the residents of the greater downtown area.

Some critics have gone further, claiming the city is deliberately using an unworkable participatory framework to obscure its real redevelopment agenda. Ideally, they say, planning for the future of the SNI neighborhoods should balance gentrification pressures against other scenarios.

This would allow existing qualities to be retained while accommodating changes beneficial to today’s residents. Instead, they worry the city’s real goal is to extend the densification of the downtown to SNI areas. And by declaring the neighborhoods redevelopment areas, the city has opened the door to the use of eminent-domain powers.⁴

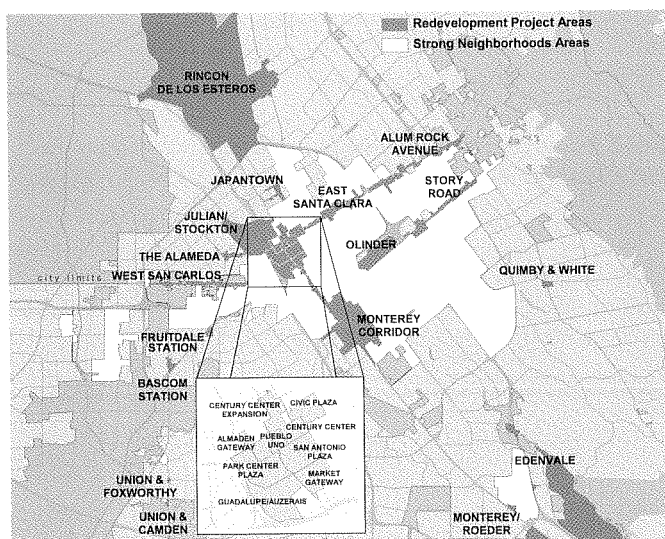
Critics also point out that most of the recommendations emerging from the SNI process involve largely mundane one-time capital improvements. Meanwhile, more socially oriented programs, such as homework centers at local schools and commercial revitalization, which could make a long-term difference in the lives of residents, have not been included. Critics claim these have been left out because they would require an ongoing funding commitment the city is unwilling to make.

Finally, critics argue that SNI shifts the onus of decision-making to local residents. They say city agencies should determine programs of basic neighborhood services and improvements that are conceptualized, maintained, and funded as part of a coherent long-term effort. Such programs should not be the responsibility of neighborhood representatives, whose technical knowledge and familiarity with citywide issues may not be on par with their enthusiasm.

The Task Ahead

Some of the problems the SNI program faces were revealed in work by a Fall 2002 community-development class in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley. Specifically, the class set out to investigate the feasibility of implementing pedestrian corridors in two SNI neighborhoods. As part of this research, discussions with residents and neighborhood

Above: A mural in one of the SNI neighborhoods indicates how San Jose has become ever more diverse in the last decade. Photo by Vu Bang Nguyen.



groups soon revealed a multiplicity of voices. And while door-to-door surveys reflected the areas' ethnic diversity, it soon became apparent that their sizable Hispanic and Asian populations were underrepresented at public meetings.

Among other things, the class discovered that many residents walk to conduct daily errands and get to and from work — with 15 percent of respondents walking upwards of 40 minutes each trip. This seemed to call into question the city's overall vision for the pedestrian corridors — that they should serve primarily as cross-town connectors between recreational trails along Guadalupe River and Coyote Creek.

Other major ongoing projects in the city also demonstrate the difficulty of balancing public and private voices. For example, in an unprecedented partnership, the new eight-story Martin Luther King, Jr., library at Fourth and San Fernando Streets will soon make the resources of San Jose State University accessible to the general public. But at the southeast corner of the SJSU campus, a new dormitory complex, stepping up from seven to fifteen stories, will soon bring 5,600 new faces to the surrounding area, increase competition for already-scarce parking spaces, and physically dwarf the adjacent low-rise neighborhood.

Similarly, the new BART extension to San Jose, scheduled to start construction in 2005, will eventually create a transit hub that will benefit the entire downtown. But the project will cause years of disruption, as East Santa Clara Street, a historic neighborhood commercial corridor, is dug up for underground tracks.

Residents of inner-ring neighborhoods are also fighting to save the San Jose Medical Center, the only hospital downtown.⁵ In the context of increasing downtown land values, they are lobbying the city council to prevent the hospital's new owners from redeveloping the site as high-end housing.

In theory, SNI is meant to empower neighborhoods and spread the wealth of the city's successful high-tech-driven downtown redevelopment. But with regard to downtown, a central public powerhouse was able to direct the revisioning process based on a clearly understood message about

the future of the city. By contrast, the community-led SNI approach may result only in a diffuse raft of small-scale projects driven by disconnected, parochial interests. Thus, while the former effort may be faulted for inadequately considering the social aspects of redevelopment, the latter may be impeded by the very diversity which enlivens the neighborhoods it intends to serve.

The challenge for the city today is to provide a high level of institutional support for the SNI program to ensure the broadest array of input from local residents. It must then frame these interests strategically in the context of ongoing municipal, transportation, and development planning. Otherwise, the SNI initiative may fail to create neighborhoods that are stronger after all, and instead create new barriers to communication, and accentuate fundamental differences in priorities.

Notes

1. Citywide, people of Asian descent made up 26.9 percent of San Jose's population in 2000, up from 19.5 percent in 1990. The percentage of Hispanic residents similarly increased from 26 to 30 percent. In economic terms, during the 1990s, per-capita income in the Bay Area shot up from \$19,629 to \$30,769. However, in San Jose, the "Capital of Silicon Valley," incomes trailed the regional average (\$16,905 in 1990 to \$26,697 in 2000). Indeed, in some city census tracts, per-capita incomes dipped to as low as \$16,867. Such geographic averages may also obscure local socioeconomic contrasts. For example, per-capita income for whites in 2000 averaged \$33,367, compared to \$25,051 for Asians and \$14,799 for Hispanics. (All statistics taken from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census.)
2. According to the FBI Unitary Crime Report, May 2001, San Jose has the lowest crime rate of any city in the U.S. with a population of 250,000 or more.
3. For example, the community organization model created by activist Saul Alinsky in the 1960s advocated mobilizing communities as a mechanism for countering the disproportionate share of power wielded by government and corporate interest groups.
4. City residents concerned about the possible abuse of this power have contested the city's definition of blight. While state law calls for blight to be "so prevalent and so substantial" that it becomes "a serious physical and economic burden on the community," San Jose's blight survey primarily turned up cases of code infractions, including overgrown weeds, lack of landscaping, overflowing garbage, residential overcrowding, garage conversions, and crime levels higher than the rest of the city. See Mike Zapler, "Designation of Urban Decay Raises Redevelopment Plan Questions," *San Jose Mercury News*, August 11, 2002.
5. The hospital is located between 14th and 16th Streets, and E. Santa Clara and E. St. John Streets, in the Thirteenth Street neighborhood.

Above: Strong Neighborhoods Initiative areas surround San Jose's downtown, shown enlarged as inset. Over the years, San Jose's redevelopment effort has been fueled by high-tech investment in its outlying Rincon de los Esteros and Edenvale industrial areas. Map courtesy of SJRA.



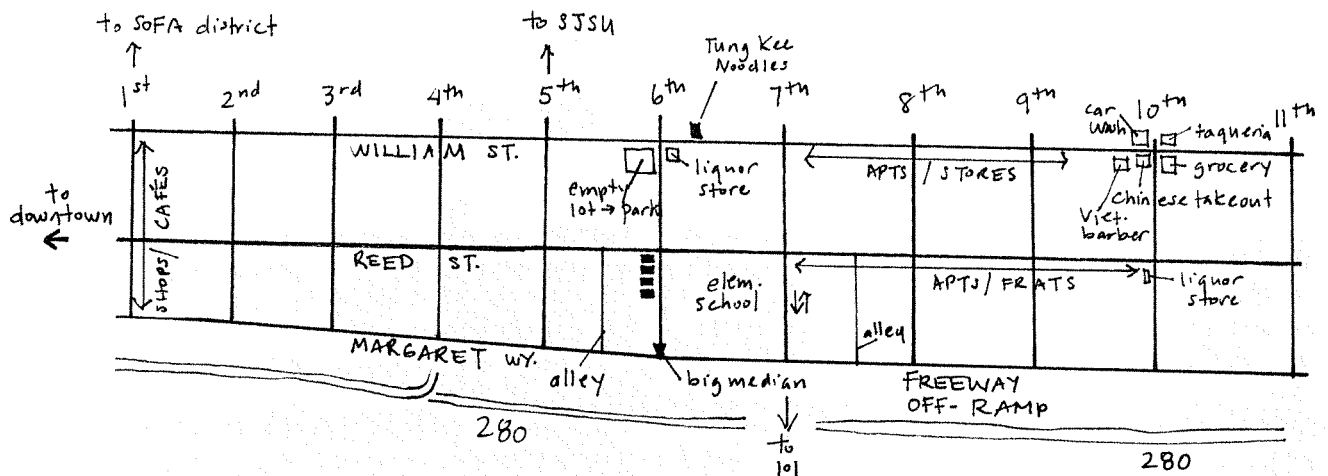
Monterey 9/21/02

- #633 ↓
- lush lawn
 - decorative fountain on lawn
 - porch with wicker sofa, plant stands, flag
 - paint work in good shape
 - curtains are lined and match throughout house
 - elaborate roof joists - carved wood

- #621 ↓ 9/21
- rental property
 - open front door
 - different curtains/window covering in each window
 - longer grass on sidewalk, lawn
 - open fence
 - multiple mailboxes
 - back fire escape

- #617 ↓
- more modest house
 - some shingles in disrepair
 - blinds down but not drawn shut
 - foil on door
 - low wrought-iron fence

- #601 ↓ 9/21/02
- corner lot
 - good paintwork
 - excellent landscaping: grass, trees
 - blinds drawn
 - foil on front door
 - no fence
 - shingles in good shape



Above: A closer look at four historic residences (near the intersection of South Sixth and Reed Streets) reveals a range of tenure types, inhabitants, and maintenance levels that reflect the changing fortunes of San José. Drawings and field notes by author.

The San Jose Experience: Vision, Plan, Strategy

Thomas R. Aidala with Rita Skevos

Twenty years ago the capital of the Silicon Valley was a place of decay. Two generations had grown up going to shopping malls, and there was no longer a constituency for downtown. If a new cultural and civic center were to be created, we at the San Jose Redevelopment Agency realized a totally new physical infrastructure was needed. In a city whose population kept growing, and whose borders were continually being stretched, we knew this would also require a major overhaul of the city's economics.

In 1982, after two years of intensive work by a thirty-member Work and Review Committee, the agency and City Hall produced a plan to accomplish these things. It aimed to bring new jobs to San Jose, balance residential development, and provide the tax flow needed not only to spur a downtown renaissance but address as many community needs as possible. Among its goals were the following:

- Intensive, high-quality office, retail, and hotel development in the San Antonio Plaza area (the portion of the central business district first flagged for slum clearance in the 1960s).
- A plan to attract national-level events and trade shows through construction of a convention center.
- A strategy to bring retail activity back downtown, including development of a retail center.
- A return to downtown living through development and rehabilitation of housing — including low- and moderate-income units.
- Streetscape improvements, including new lighting, landscaping, fountains, and artwork, designed to create an amiable public environment and provide a strong visual identity for downtown and surrounding commercial areas.
- New parks and park improvements, including a 150-acre Guadalupe River Park to serve as a city gateway, link downtown to the airport, and provide sites for major public facilities.
- Creation of a theater and entertainment district to provide a home for cultural groups and a magnet for nightlife.
- A variety of transportation improvements: new parking, a transit mall serving bus and rail systems, and a new segment of Highway 87 connecting downtown with the airport and Highway 101.
- A program for the revitalization of nearby neighborhood business districts.
- Renovation of major historic structures, including the ornate St. Joseph's Cathedral.
- A 20,000-seat community sports and entertainment arena.

By the time I left the agency in 1998, it had been remarkably successful at achieving these goals. We had built more than a dozen urban parks and plazas and planted some 5,000 trees along downtown streets. We had helped build three museums, two major hotels, two theaters, a multiplex movie house, and the San Jose Arena. We had constructed a 2.7-mile-long light-rail line through the downtown. The Cathedral had been restored, as had two historic hotels. The three-mile-long Guadalupe River Park was underway, as was construction of a direct freeway connection to San Jose Airport. As required by state law, we had also set aside 20 percent of our revenues for low- and moderate-income housing, and close to 2,000 units of affordable and market-rate housing had been built in and adjacent to the downtown.

While I am not suggesting the San Jose experience is replicable, in hindsight I can point to two lessons from our experience. Lesson one (as the title suggests) is we had a vision, a plan, and a strategy. Lesson two was that when setbacks occurred, we did not tamper with our principles; we changed our tactics.

Local Determination

One of the great strengths of San Jose's redevelopment effort is that it has been rooted in San Jose. Early on, we recognized the social, economic, cultural and recreational interconnectedness of all civic activity. And we knew that private retail/commercial development, absent financially leveraged input from the public sector, generally leads only to a maximization of private concerns at the expense of public goals.

As I have found, all good community development is also specific to a time and place. And what a time and place it was! To our great good fortune, our work in San Jose coincided with an incredible national economic expansion. Locally, the impact of that expansion was even more pronounced, since San Jose lay directly in the path of the high-tech revolution.

Of course, the extent of the high-tech boom to come was not apparent as we began in the early 1980s. What we were seeking then was a stable source of funding, preferably with few strings attached.

The economics of redevelopment demand enough initial financing to bring a first stage of public improvements on line. The hope then is that these will generate enough momentum to attract private participation. Yet by 1982,

Opposite: McEnery Convention Center with mural by Lynn Utzon. Decorative manhole covers. Fairmont Plaza / Silicon Valley Financial Center. Photos courtesy of Tom Aidala / SJRA.



downtown San Jose was yielding only a trickle of tax revenues. Worse still, it had a 25-year backlog of needed upkeep and improvements. The masterstroke that propelled our vision for the next fifteen years was proposed by in-house lawyer Gary Reinert: the merger of San Jose's redevelopment areas.

California redevelopment law stipulates that the tax increment realized in a redevelopment district must be spent in that district. At the time, other than downtown, San Jose had two main redevelopment districts. Both were industrial areas — Rincon de Los Esteros and Edenvale. We recognized that once the infrastructure is put in and the trees are planted in an industrial area, there is not much more to spend redevelopment money on. Thus, by obtaining a one-time exemption to California law allowing us to merge all the city's redevelopment areas, we gained a continuing source of funding for the decrepit downtown (or whatever subsequent redevelopment areas we created).

This exemption not only allowed us to define our problems locally; it allowed us to finance our solutions. Merged tax-increment financing was our guarantor that we would control downtown redevelopment, and that investment pools distant to the community would not influence the shape of things to come.

The Public Realm

The matter of a vision was far easier. In San Jose, the mayor, the Redevelopment Agency Director, and I all believed that urban design — the shaping of the public physical realm — should be the role of a municipality, and that the process should create something that looked, and was, authentic.

The public realm is that exquisite confection of commerce, inquiry, chance, contemplation, public space, buildings, and institutions belonging to a city. It is to a large degree the cultural expression of a consensus of civic tastes, values, talents, and intellects. It is rich in complexities, ironies and possibilities; and it flourishes whenever a citizenry senses it can be powerful, abundant and proud.

A true public realm carries a powerful sense of authenticity. It is abundant in spirit, accommodating of opportunity, visually stimulating, and articulated. It occurs over time, and has about it the inevitability of a natural occurrence. It can also be — with hard work and luck — splendidly beautiful.

An authentic public realm is not the result of rogue consumerism or the shaping of private environments. "Shopper-tainment" centers, gated golf-course housing, and nostalgic dream communities can never be truly public. And since an authentic public realm emerges from the

specifics of place, it cannot be conjured in response to the demands of distant investors, developers, or designers. Such forces, which seek predictable returns by reproducing what has worked elsewhere, lead only to cities and landscapes that look the same from one end of the country to the other.

A third danger to the authentic public realm, ironically, is too much design. Any design or fabricated contraption, be it a building, a theory, or a pair of shoes, should have an internal basis for being. The public realm is no different. Its inevitability may be disquieting, even at times unfair. It is, however, correct.

In my experience, too much fashion in the design of the public realm usually masks too little substance; and too much style, theory, or design gums up comprehension. The challenge is not merely to make something new and special. It is to get the design out of the way so that a narrative of place can develop from the real things that go on there. Thus people strolling, talking, window shopping, sitting, eating lunch, or simply wool-gathering need not be forced to endure benches that don't drain, trees that are too far apart, drinking fountains that get in the way, or the myriad other annoyances of overly designed public space.

Importance of the Street

In San Jose we defined the public realm as having two parts: (1) streets, parks, plazas, and open space; and (2) public buildings, private buildings, and public/private developments along their margins. Of these, the first was the more important.

The most significant and memorable work we did in San Jose (and, for me, the most gratifying), remains the rehabilitation of the old network of streets and the introduction of a new overlay of parks, plazas, and miscellaneous open spaces. At a minimum, we would repair or replace broken curbs and possibly enlarge the sidewalks. Ideally, we would redesign and rebuild the entire street: paving, gutters, curbs, trees — the works. We viewed it as housekeeping before the guests or the appraiser arrived.

This emphasis on streets emerged partly from my definition of a city. When I think "city," a grid comes to mind. A grid is a sum of streets. And so keen is the notion of street, that a grid of them, four crossed lines (#), is mnemonic for my experiences of a city.

The street is also that shared public place that contains the history of those who inhabit it. It is where community is possible, where chance is enhanced, movement universal. It is where order is triumphant in a continuing battle with chaos, where communication is ubiquitous.

It follows that the good street is about publicness. The

good street connects, while the bad street separates. The good street allows for maximum activity; the bad street reduces choice. Good streets are particular — you know where you are; they have character and are memorable.

The good street is also comfortable to walk along, and frequently it has trees providing shade, movement and pace. By contrast, the worst streets are those that facilitate only one agenda — such as the incredibly wide rights-of-way called for by the formulas of traffic engineers.

So strong was our belief in the importance of the street that I put together sixteen rules that we could present to private developers and architects when they first contacted us. They embodied our expectations at the Redevelopment Agency about how a building should get inserted into the downtown (see *sidebar*).

The rules dealt with sidewalk materials, curbs, building to the property line, having all entrances face the main

street. They called for clear glass and retail uses at ground level. They contained requirements for orientation, access drives, trees, materials, etc. In sum, they spelled out how individual projects should contribute to our primary goal of shaping street spaces and activating them. After that, what happened within a building (other than in the semi-public spaces that were an extension of the street) mattered little.

We were not indifferent to architecture. We just believed that urban quality has little to do with who designs the buildings that frame streets and open spaces. In particular, urban design quality does not follow the hiring of “archi-stars.”

Buildings are correctly about individual concerns and agendas; even public buildings are specific to an interest. The street, on the other hand, should remain a neutral collector.

16 Rules for Developers

(from a memorandum to Redevelopment Agency Staff dated May 13, 1996)

What follows are a few simple-minded rules you should be alert to whenever a project proposal comes your way. In the predrawing/discussion stage, the appropriate rule should be made clear to the developer team so that they do not waste time and money preparing drawings that will have to be changed. Changes to drawings are expensive, acrimonious, and sometimes can cause us political embarrassment. Like all rules, however, they are made to be broken by the truly gifted — a condition I have realized once. The list is not inclusive; design staff will take care of both filling in the blanks and know how to apply, and when to bend, the rules.

The Universal, Eternal, Inviolable 11th Commandment:

Thou shalt not allow one more mansard roof in San Jose.

Sidewalks within the public R.O.W. shall be concrete.

Certain streets can have a special treatment as determined by policy and design. Building lobbies shall not spill out into the public way.

Crosswalks/intersections shall be striped with paint and not tarted up with “special” materials or designs.

Curbs shall be straight, without bump-outs or duck-ins.

Trees belong on and in the ground. No trees in pots or on building roofs.

No more redwood trees or *agapanthus* shall be planted in the Downtown.

All buildings, except special public or symbolic buildings, shall be built to the street property line.

The main entrance of all buildings shall be off of the street and not a parking area.

All buildings shall be oriented orthogonally. That is normal to the grid of the Downtown.

Ground levels of buildings in the Downtown shall contain retail uses. The doors to these uses shall be on the street.

Ground level windows shall always be clear glass.

No mirrored glass or bronze glass shall be allowed in the Downtown. Ideally, glass should be clear. However, since we live in an imperfect world, only light green tinted glass or light grey glass shall be used.

Quality materials, i.e., stone, shall be used at the base of major buildings, offices, hotels, etc. Other approved materials can be well-made precast concrete, tile, glazed terra cotta, etc.

If a brick building is proposed, it shall be real brick — not Z brick or other such sham material. Color shall not be dark brown or red generally (depending on context) but in the pale tan, beige, yellowish range such as the Bank of America building or the Hotel Sainte Claire.

Avoid all-glass buildings like the plague, except when proposed by the shade of Mies Van der Rohe.

Parking structures shall not have sloped ramps facing the street.

Access drives to the parking structures shall be as few and as small as possible and not the principal street when appropriate.



Above: Gore park (Parco de Los Poblares).

Below left: Pedestrian bridge to Children's Discovery Museum
(Tom Aidala: design).

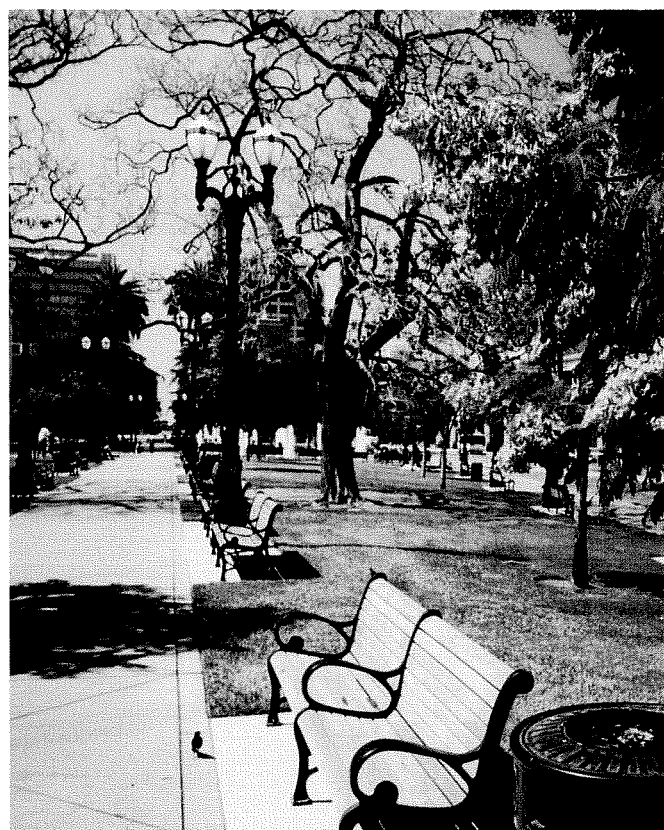
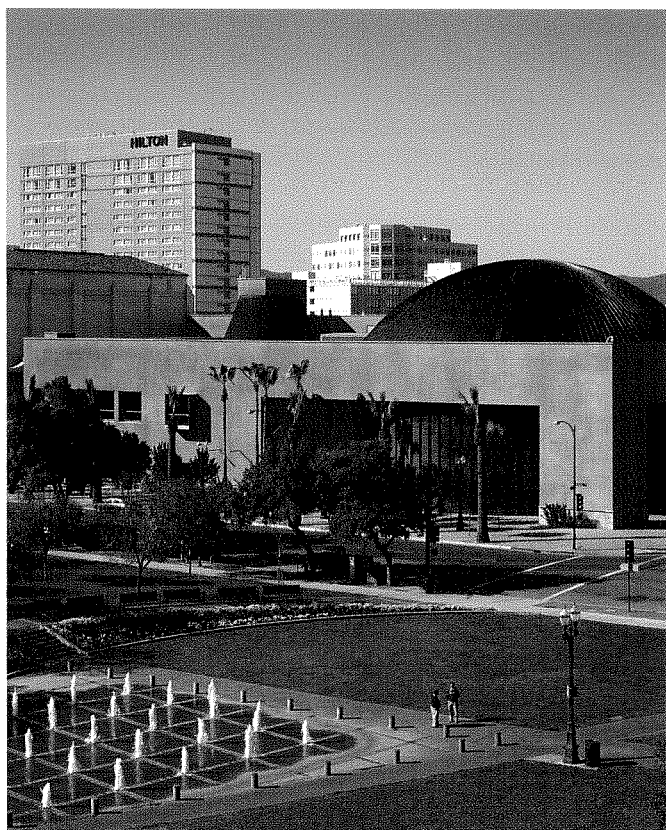
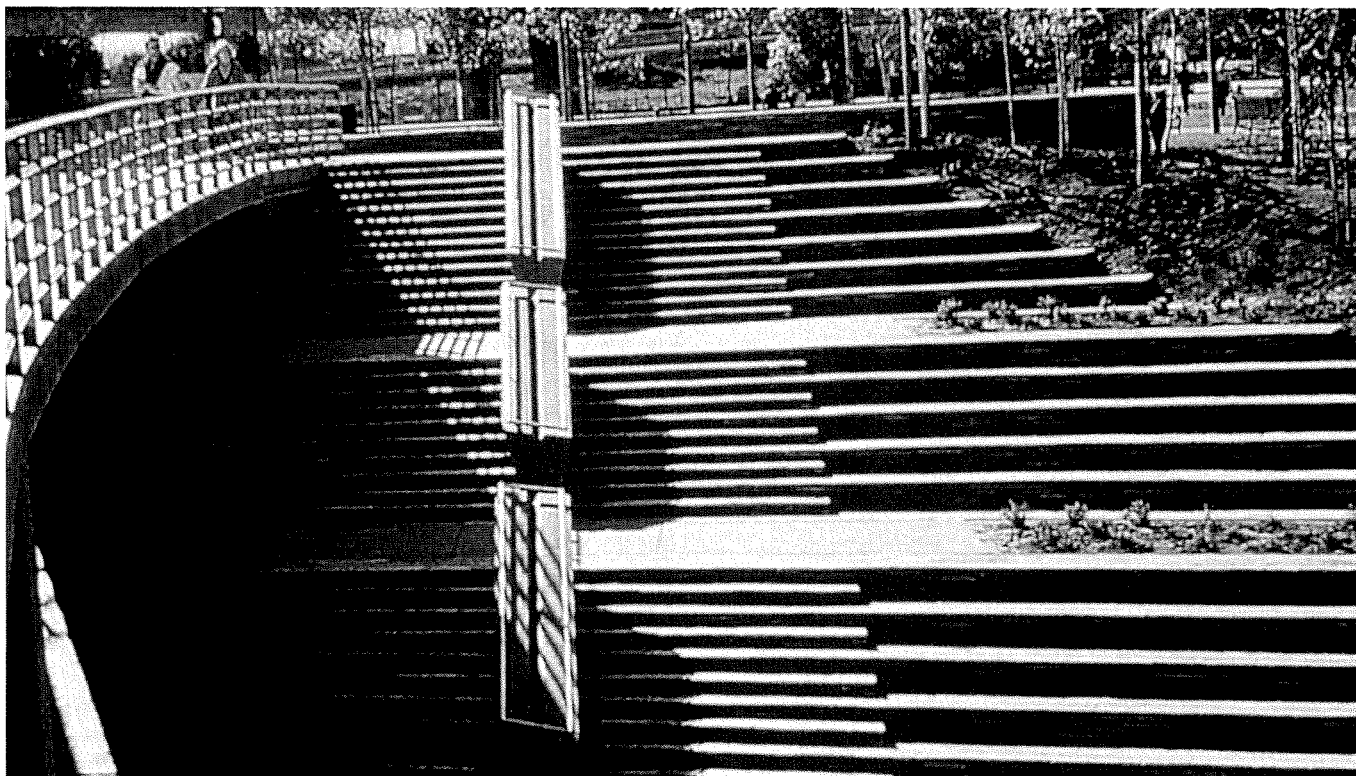
Below right: Children's Discovery Museum.

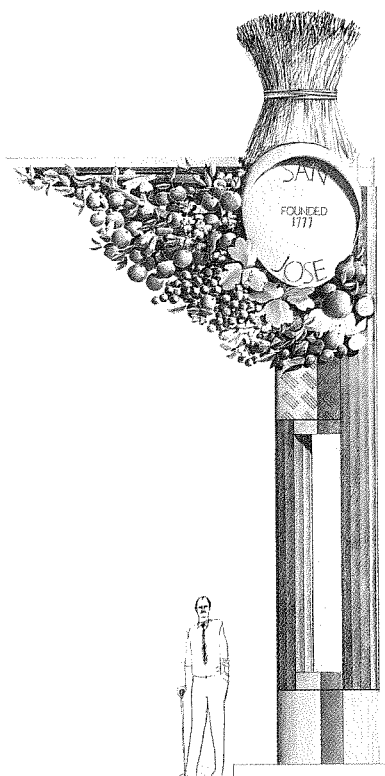
Opposite top: Landscape terracing in Guadalupe River Park.

Opposite bottom left: The Tech Museum of Innovation as seen from the Fairmont
Hotel. Photo by Paul Asper.

Opposite bottom right: Cesar Chavez Park promenade.

All other photos courtesy of Tom Aidala/SJRA.





For this reason we believed our downtown streets should do the civic work of remaining public and accommodating everyone equally. As far as possible, they would be parallel, straight, and sheet-drained. They would not be decorated or furnished as an extension of any building. There would be no ad-hoc bump-outs at corners or bus stops, or pull-ins for service. Sidewalks would be the same no matter where: five-foot grid, 75 percent French Gray, float finish — period.

People

Given a plan for keeping decisions local and a vision based on the importance of the street and an authentic public realm, we were ready to develop a strategy.

The San Jose redevelopment effort I joined as Principal Architect began in 1979, when Frank Taylor was hired as Executive Director of the Redevelopment Agency. Taylor came from Cincinnati, where he had served as Assistant Redevelopment Director. More importantly, he had been trained and licensed as an architect and had practiced in Boston (his home town) and Cincinnati.

With Taylor as Executive Director and Tom McEnery as Mayor from 1980-88, San Jose had a one-two punch. A fourth-generation native of San Jose, McEnery had the shrewdness, force of personality, and dedication to build the political and civic coalitions needed to realize agency goals. And after I was hired as Principal Architect and Urban Designer in 1982, the three of us developed a congenial working relationship based on shared interests and philosophies.

Like myself, Taylor and McEnery were ardent students of history, readers of biographies and autobiographies. Taylor also helped McEnery become an aficionado of cities. Together, Taylor and McEnery relished wit, the idea of a downtown, and big dreams. They were also black-belt politicians — and fiercely ethical.

One key to our early strategy was Taylor's belief in getting good-looking stuff built fast and inexpensively. Tactical maneuverings could be underway toward larger goals, such as the timing necessary for the coincidental delivery of the Fairmont Hotel and a publicly funded convention center. But the public wanted to see results — projects, not paper; product, not process. In particular, Taylor wanted new parks and open spaces right away. Thus, a series of small, good-looking projects, such as neighborhood parks captured from excess roadway and a children's garden for the Main Library, were completed early on and opened ceremonially.

Taylor was also a design zealot, and demanded quality materials and performance. Expediency was not a good

enough reason for anything. And he told his staff that if he or they gave anything less than their best to every project they applied their talents to, they would be cheating the City Council, the Agency Board, and the city they served. Such a contemptuous attitude toward the community could only poison projects from the start. A quality public environment could never grow from “cynical roots.”

My role was to build an in-house staff of architects, landscape architects, and graphic designers. Among our major tasks were to provide design services to City Hall; win converts among other public agencies (mainly the Planning Department, Department of Public Works, and Mayor’s Office); preach to the community at meetings of the Rotary, Lions, etc.; and educate and support the Redevelopment Agency Board.

Over the years, we succeeded in gaining respect and influence by telling the truth, avoiding jargon, and delivering good work. Perhaps more importantly, we struggled to defend the integrity of designs in the face of value engineering, cost overruns, program changes, and changes in developers, designers, and mortgage holders. We understood that good design is essential to creating the type of environment that can support an agreeable life.

We used a full array of persuasive devices to ensure design quality. These ranged from expressing our desires for particular sites, to performing discretionary review, writing guidelines, and engaging in strong-arm tactics. On certain occasions we might withhold review by the Urban Design Review Board. Couple lack of review with a developer’s need to exercise a land option on schedule, and our goals for a site could usually command attention.

City building, I came to realize, is like everything else in life: it implies losing one’s innocence, building consensus, and knowing when to bite one’s tongue and leave the field — only to return later to chew throats. It involved learning to make the very best sausage with what was left after a particular beast (the project) had been gnawed over by the hyenas of development — the Home Builders Associations, various social victimhood groups, labor organizations, other city departments, and real estate interests — all of whom wanted theirs off the top, steaming.

A Final Word

Over decades of observation, practice and reading, I’ve come to understand a few things about good urban design. One is that the redesign of cities should not be a referendum on popular taste. Opinions are not equal in value; nor are they universally held. Indeed, some serve only to waste time and elevate the blood pressure.

Our work in San Jose proceeded according to a few

simple principles. One was that a city undergoing redevelopment courts a second-rate environment and diminished quality of life without a first-rate design staff to make informed judgments and avoid straying from agreed-upon goals. By having respected professionals on staff, the City Council and Agency Board were able to make informed decisions on development and design. As a result, environmental quality became more than a professional concern; it became a matter of public pride.

To paraphrase Dave Wallace: every moment in the life of a city appeals simultaneously to three realms of consciousness: memory of the past, preoccupation with the present, and dreams of the future. The ongoing and inescapably contentious discourse among these realms defines the essence of human endeavor.

The city is both the principal arena of debate and the cumulative, absolutely authentic, minutely accurate record of its outcome. Despite all the miracles wrought by science, the city remains in the words of Claude Levi-Strauss “the human invention, *par excellence*.”

Opposite: Pencil concept sketch for a downtown San Jose gateway. Although sculptor Robert Graham was eventually commissioned to execute final designs, the project was cancelled. Drawing by Tom Aidala.

A Vision Still in the Making

Alan Hess



The kids playing in the burbling fountain of Plaza de Cesar Chavez reflect the present and future diversity of California. They are the grandchildren of Vietnamese boat people, and the descendants of pioneer suburbanites from Eichler tracts. They are Latinos whose ancestors arrived two, or two hundred, years ago; and they are the scions of newly minted dot-com millionaires. As they dance through the geyser-like plumes of water, their parents, grandparents, babysitters, older sisters, or big brothers watch from park benches or blankets on the nearby lawn.

In the 1980s, when the plaza (until 1958 the site of a Victorian wedding-cake city hall) was redesigned by Hargreaves Associates, it became an instant success. Mayors and redevelopment agency chiefs could point with pride. It seemed to prove that downtown San Jose, long a wasteland of parking lots created by over-eager redevelopment plans in the 1960s and 1970s, was again becoming a people place.

But in 2003 that promise has still not been fully realized. One reason may be that the downtown has not followed through on the very diversity – and strength – represented by the children in the fountain. True, there is great craftsmanship in many of the city's new downtown spaces and buildings. But a successful downtown is ultimately measured by its ability to sustain itself economically, civically and socially.

As a new generation of planners and architects looks ahead, there is much good work for them to build on. But they may also want to revisit a fundamental question: what is the purpose of a downtown in an era of suburbanization?

A Bold Vision

When the twin horsemen of suburbanization and redevelopment struck San Jose full force after World War II, its downtown had served as the vigorous urban center for a rich agricultural region for more than half a century. Through the 1960s and 70s, as the downtown struggled to regain its footing, its leaders engaged in a number of false starts — from Park Center Plaza (a typical windswept Modernist office plaza) to a bold Taliesin Associated Architects design for the Center for the Performing Arts.

By the 1980s, however, San Jose was still scrambling to regain its former stature as the central business, retail, political, and cultural locus for an area now reborn as Silicon Valley. That was when a new mayor, Tom McEnery, launched a bold campaign to rebuild downtown. To rapidly create an economic and architectural foundation for his vision of a 24-hour city, he hired Frank Taylor,

Above: Cezar Chavez park fountains. Fairmont Hotel in the background.
Photo by Paul Asper.

an architect and planner from Harvard via Cincinnati, as Redevelopment Agency Director. Armed with redevelopment funds tapped from outlying high-tech campuses and backed by a solid political consensus welded together by McEnery, Taylor set to work at shoring up the sagging townscape.

Over the terms of McEnery and his successor, Susan Hammer, Taylor primed the pump with money generators: a new convention center to draw in visitors; hotels (including the upscale Fairmont) to house them; high-rise offices for brand-name Silicon Valley companies like Adobe Systems and IBM. To attract crowds from the suburban diaspora, San Jose built a sports arena to house mega-concerts and an ice hockey team; a retail pavilion for upscale boutiques; a Children's Discovery Museum and a Tech Museum of Innovation; a new wing to the San Jose Museum of Art; and a Repertory Theater.

To trundle people in from the hinterlands, the county built a light-rail line through the heart of downtown. And to increase the number of people around after work and on weekends, large new housing projects — both upscale and affordable — were built in the center city.

Today, the jewel in the crown (and one of Taylor's final involvements) is under construction: a new City Hall to bring city government back downtown. It is an explicit declaration that San Jose claims the business, cultural and political mantle of Silicon Valley.

Throughout, the strength of Taylor's vision lay in his predisposition as an architect. And by hiring Tom Aidala as the agency's chief architect, he signaled the city's intent to put a premium on quality. This vision was ultimately conveyed through the public Urban Design Review Board and Aidala's behind-the-scenes cajoling.

Most importantly, Taylor, Aidala, and Redevelopment Agency staff paid close attention to the design of public spaces. Frequently, last-minute injections of agency funds would be used to upgrade materials or add amenities. One example: when the station platforms and shelters of the new light-rail system suffered from banal design, the agency foresaw the potential disaster. For several blocks through the heart of downtown, it devoted its own funds and design talent to upgrading paving materials from concrete to stone, installing wood benches, and custom-designing stations at the Children's Museum and Convention Center.

For major monuments, Taylor and Aidala and their successors brought in Modern architects with national reputations, usually resulting in distinguished designs. Mitchell/Giurgola designed the Convention Center in a series of low vaults, with a lofty concrete colonnade as its

street-to-street lobby. Its main entry was spectacularized by an enormous abstract tile billboard by Lynn Utzon — one of the best pieces of public art downtown. The Children's Discovery Museum and the Museum of Technology were Ricardo Legoretta designs, whose brilliant colors, deeply carved arcades, and windows suit the strong light of the Santa Clara Valley.

The sports arena (later the Compaq Center, soon the HP Pavilion) by Fentress Bradburn Associates is as enormous as any of these formless masses anywhere in the country, but it is unified by large-scale corrugated stainless-steel cladding.

The most avant-garde of the new designs is the Repertory Theater, designed by Holt Hinshaw Pfau and Jones. Its cascading blue metal sides provide a well-tuned contrast to the rest of downtown. In terms of housing, Dan Solomon designed two apartment projects that introduced European densities and concepts. Finally, the ultimate brand name in high design has arrived in the form of the new city hall by Pritzker Prize-winning Richard Meier.

As might be expected, the high quality of these new civic buildings has not been matched by the high-rise office structures that have filled out the rebuilding effort. Most commissions here have gone to the usual architects favored by commercial developers: HOK, SOM, Gensler. The results have generally been acceptable, but an FAA height restriction (downtown lies on the approach path to San Jose International Airport) has imposed a uniform appearance on the skyline. Consequently, the most striking tower remains the Bank of America building, a 1928 Mediterranean Renaissance block with a slender cupola spire.

So how has it all worked? Walk around downtown San Jose and the deliberate effort to unify is evident. The placement of most major buildings reinforces a walkable core. Cultural buildings are found on premium sites. The web of plazas, paseos, parks and sidewalks is well conceived and executed. Landscaping, street furniture, and paving are all consciously designed and well planned. On First and Second Streets, the addition of light-rail tracks and medians slows vehicle traffic and creates a pleasant, pedestrian-friendly space. With shade trees lining the sidewalks and a mix of Victorian, Classical, Moderne and contemporary architecture, this historic core is one of the best parts of the city. The care and intelligence reflected in the majority of urban design decisions is evident.

Paths not Taken

What is there not to like about all this success? One might begin by recounting some of the opportunities that were missed.



One tantalizing project that never saw the light of day was a sophisticated 1986 proposal for four “gateway” arches or sculptures at the four main entries to downtown. This major work (to be produced by artist Robert Graham, a San Jose State University graduate) was shot down by callow and misguided criticism, much of it from the local media — indicating that sometimes San Jose deserves its reputation as sophisticated San Francisco’s gawky little sister. Since that daring reach for excellence, the city’s public-art program has been mired in politics and blandness.

There have been other aesthetic disappointments as well. A hotel designed by Arquitectonica and symphony hall by SOM were never built. But the demise of these projects could be traced to the high mortality rate of real estate deals.

More avoidable (and therefore more serious) failures can be traced to the fact that the Redevelopment Agency under Taylor was only intermittently mindful of historic preservation. The city did subsidize the restoration of a historic medical office tower for housing, and it helped restore two handsome c.1930 landmark hotels as boutique hostelryes. A major remodeling of the historic Fox Theater, a magnificent 1920s movie palace, is also underway for Opera San Jose.

But Taylor’s Redevelopment Agency often put new construction ahead of the preservation of older buildings — a serious lapse in the historic core; and only the active

lobbying of the San Jose Preservation Action Committee compelled it to save certain key buildings. Eventually, mayoral regime change was necessary to ensure the rehabilitation of the 1904 Jose Theater (reopened as a comedy club in November 2002) and the handsome 1916 Montgomery Hotel. Other outstanding buildings were lost outright, including the excellent 1959 Pestana Building (a ten-story tower with a checkerboard facade of white marble panels, recessed windows, and a stylish, space-age roof sign). A law office by Taliesin-trained Aaron Green was also demolished.

Other missteps have been of a more strategic nature. For example, a new Retail Pavilion was to have transformed most of a block adjoining the historic district into an upscale boutique shopping center. It included some commercial space facing out to the light-rail lines. But most of its shops and restaurants lined a two-level open-air pedestrian way that cut diagonally through the block.

Though designed by mall wizard Jon Jerde, this project failed miserably. And three years ago, in stark Info Age irony (since the site skirts a major trunk communication line), its internal pedestrian way was filled in and converted to an AboveNet Internet data storage facility. But computers don’t go out to lunch, shop downtown, or live within walking distance. The push to turn downtown into an upscale consumer destination — with all its tantalizing economic benefits — failed.

Other fashionable urban design ideas were grafted onto

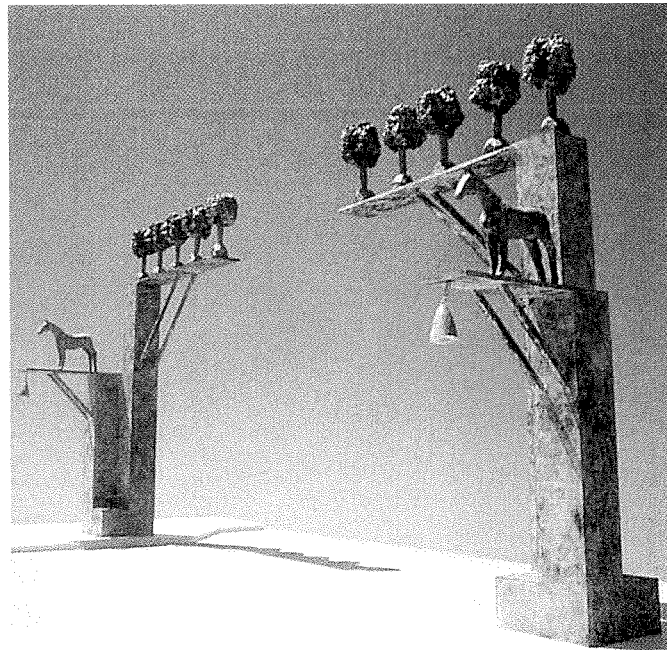


San Jose but didn't take. One was the introduction of sidewalk stoops and front doors for several large residential projects to encourage the kind of street life found in Boston's Back Bay (a favorite Taylor reference) or Manhattan's Upper West Side. But along noisy, one-way arterials like Third and Fourth Streets, the forlorn stoops have been abject failures. Everyone enters their homes the sensible way, via the elevator from the basement garage. Even when the stoops faced onto a quiet mews, the city permitted developers to gate them off, destroying whatever urban qualities they might have generated.

Likewise, a major effort to clean up the Guadalupe River and turn it into a downtown park — a joint effort between the city, county, and Army Corps of Engineers — has made the river more accessible, but so far missed major opportunities to orient offices or restaurants toward it.

Finally, such piecemeal critiques mask an even harsher judgment on San Jose Centro: after almost twenty years, a billion dollars in city subsidies, and a historic economic boom all around it, downtown has still not become a self-sustaining urban center, and there is still little private, unsubsidized development of any noticeable size going on.

Make no mistake, San Jose is now a remarkably livable city, with restaurants and entertainment, new housing, culture and parks, with handsome sidewalks and refreshing prospects. It has its own appealing character, made up of sunshine, small-town friendliness, safety, and invigorating entrepreneurial energy.



The efforts at redevelopment have mostly supported those qualities. But the emphasis on building more housing downtown since the administration of Mayor Susan Hammer has still not triggered regular evening crowds — which are evident only during the scheduled festivals and holidays that the many ethnic populations of the region hold downtown. Neither has a shift in emphasis from retail to entertainment as the city's redevelopment engine fully achieved this goal.

Thus, while San Jose Sharks games at the sports arena have helped to spur restaurants, many of these are hanging by a thread in the current economic downturn. And while Adobe Systems and a few other high-tech firms have moved their headquarters downtown, most prefer the ranch-like spreads of the outlying Golden Triangle or South San Jose.

Opposite left: Boutique on the Paseo de San Antonio. Photo courtesy of SJRA.

Opposite right: The Paseo de San Antonio provides a mid-block connection between Cesar Chavez Park and San Jose State University. Photo courtesy of SJRA.

Above left: Housing adjoins the Paseo de San Antonio near the campus of San Jose State University. Photo courtesy of SJRA.

Above right: This proposal by sculptor Robert Graham for a downtown gateway would have celebrated San Jose's agricultural past. Photo of model courtesy of Tom Aidala/SJRA.



A True Urban Population

One possible explanation for downtown's sluggish revival is a miscalculation of the ethnic and social facts of San Jose. Following conventional development wisdom, San Jose grabbed for the gold ring. The Retail Pavilion was but one embarrassing miss at this upscale market. But in so doing, it crushed the seeds of a true urban population. The *taquerias*, Vietnamese *pho* restaurants, western clothing stores, wedding-gown emporia, and other mom-and-pop retail outlets of its historic core were businesses that could have formed the foundation for a lively, unique public realm. But these were run out of town, or out of business, during the long and messy late-1980s construction of the light-rail tracks.

Furthermore, Taylor's aggressive, close-to-the-vest style often stymied community consultation, creating political conflict. Meanwhile, in San Jose's suburban areas, its new ethnic groups — whose children are among those playing in the fountain — were developing active, economically successful centers of their own. For example, there are now at least a half dozen large suburban shopping centers financed by Asian money and devoted exclusively to the needs of Asian customers. Though still an evolving

type, they have begun to adapt the standard strip-mall form to the social patterns of that community. And a down-home flea market remains the city's most active public melting pot. It is held on a dedicated site, with a remarkable array of permanent and semi-permanent Butler buildings, tents, and pipe structures to accommodate the booths. This diversity was rarely factored into downtown planning or architecture.

Whither Downtown?

In the late 1990s hopes were still high that downtown would soon blossom under a new mayor, Ron Gonzales. But by the time a new Redevelopment Agency Director, Susan Shick, had enlisted a major developer to transform five downtown sites with infill housing, offices and commercial buildings, the high-tech bubble had burst.

If downtown San Jose didn't take off during the high-tech bonanza, it's going to be even rougher during the *borrasca*. San Jose has sought a downtown in the traditional mold. But now it has stiff competition. At one end, charming smaller towns like Mountain View and Los Gatos are thriving as restaurant and shopping areas. At the other, massive regional malls like Valley Fair and Eastridge

are continuing to siphon off department-store shoppers and moviegoers.

The multinodal urbanizing suburbs of the region are serving the public very nicely, thank you, for its shopping, employment and cultural needs. They are convenient, close, with good parking and sufficient variety. And with the opening of new mixed-use developments like Santana Row — a creatively designed faux-urban district on a commercial strip 3.5 miles from the city center — downtown San Jose may need a new way to define itself.

The big question yet to be faced is if a downtown in the traditional sense — the early-twentieth-century sense — is necessary, or possible. There is a difference between being the singular urban hub in a sprawling region of orchards (as San Jose was in 1940), and being only one in a network of distinct but equal urban nodes, from Mountain View to Milpitas to Sunnyvale to Santana Row.

Two decades of redevelopment have left downtown San Jose with many strong ingredients. It has two garden-like parks — Plaza de Cesar Chavez on the south, and St. James Square, surrounded by historic courthouses and churches, to the north. Single family residences — mostly winning Victorians and modest stucco bungalows — border the downtown to the north and east. And despite the potential urban synergy, the proximity of San Jose State University, a low rise well-landscaped quad to the east, has not been fully exploited — though a joint city-university library may help to link the two when it opens later this year.

There are other bright spots. San Pedro Square, a small collection of older buildings (Paul Masson gave birth to the California wine industry right here) is one of downtown's few commercially successful areas restored without city subsidy. Today it is filled with restaurants, theaters, offices and museums. Similarly promising are plans for a new transportation node around the old Cahill railroad station, where rail, light rail, bus, and BART (in the next decade or so) will all connect — a unique convergence on the West Coast.

Finally, another developer, the CIM Group, is planning infill projects on vacant lots in the historic core. This may strengthen the one significant asset of downtown San Jose that can never be matched by a shopping mall. But had the redevelopment agency focused on filling these gaps and restoring the historic district years ago, such an intimate, focused retail center might have been finished by the early 1990s — in time for the real boom, now passed.

Today San Jose is riding the screaming downward curve of the high-tech roller coaster. Twenty years after the ride began, the creation of a real 24-hour city still remains just around the next corner — despite what the children in the

fountain might seem to indicate. Though hardly as abandoned and bereft as it was in 1980, when my main memory of downtown was of the domes of old St. Joseph's Cathedral surrounded by vacant parking lots, the urban lightning that struck Pasadena's Old Town or Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade has not hit here.

San Jose's high-tech industries redefined commerce and community for the twenty-first century. In the years ahead, San Jose needs to redefine its culture of public life with similar imagination. When that happens, the precious infrastructure created over the last twenty years will be there.

Opposite: Downtown housing has been a major component of the San Jose redevelopment effort. In the foreground is the 101 San Fernando project by San Francisco architect Dan Solomon. Photo courtesy of Solomon E.T.C.

Lessons from Downtown San Jose

John Kriken

My involvement with San Jose's downtown planning and architecture began in about 1980 with SOM's work on the Silicon Valley Financial Center, and it has continued on and off to this day.

In light of all that has happened, it is interesting to remember that within our team for that early project the most fundamental debate was how "urban" this place should be. Some team members argued for a more suburban feel to the downtown. Their view was of a retail mall, smaller but in the same manner as San Diego's Horton Plaza, broad landscape setbacks between new buildings and streets, and complete acceptance of the car as the primary means of transportation.

The aspirations of the Redevelopment Agency and SOM were quite the opposite. To create the strongest possible sense of place, we wanted downtown San Jose to be urban and in every way different from its surroundings. Yet, to respond to the comfortable climate, we also proposed making downtown uniquely green, with a significant number of street trees, landscaped courtyards, and paseos. As our planning work was concluding, I had the good sense to introduce my old friend and colleague Tom Aidala to Frank Taylor, who was just then beginning his tenure as San Jose Redevelopment Agency Director.

Reflecting back on this experience, it is clear to me how unique and valuable the study of urban revitalization presented in these pages is. In the case of San Jose, one has the opportunity to consider a place where every conceivable incentive has been applied to make a revitalized downtown attractive, diverse, and both economically and environmentally successful. Here, one might say, it is possible to finally discover what works and what doesn't.

The plan for San Jose has also followed the "ideal" mixed-use model for downtown districts. According to this model, a downtown should contain a balance of open spaces and residential, retail/entertainment, cultural, civic, office, and visitor-serving uses, organized into a compact, walkable area so as to maximize amenity, convenience, and economic strength. In the case of San Jose, the means for achieving this model have also followed best-practice principles. This has involved the use of Redevelopment Agency powers to provide incentives, including infrastructure, public facilities, an attractive landscape, and direct financial support to desired private development investments.

With a clear vision, talented leadership, political support — and best of all, the money to back it up — the result has been an extraordinary public realm. In my experience with downtowns throughout the world, I've never seen a comparable situation or such a comprehensively realized outcome. So why, one may reasonably ask, haven't

developers been breaking down the door? Why, after twenty years of intense public effort, in one of the most successful economic environments in the world, is downtown San Jose still struggling to find willing and eager investors?

One answer, it occurs to me, must surely involve the applicability of the ideal model, itself. To show what I mean, let me take a brief detour through two elements of the model and our experience with them in San Jose.

Office Use

It is not easy to build office buildings in downtown San Jose. The city wants density, and yet the nearby international airport puts a severe limit on building height — approximately 16 to 25 floors, depending on location. At the same time, a high water table limits how deep you can go below ground to three levels, and a high parking program is necessary to compete in the regional market place. With every thousand square feet of office space requiring three parking spaces, you must build almost as much area for cars as for people. Dallas and Houston build to these parking ratios, but they have no height limit and no comparable urbanistic aspirations.

We have found these constraints dictate a typical building that is a kind of mixed-use sandwich: three levels of parking below grade; lobbies, shops and services at ground level; five floors of parking above; and finally eleven floors of office — for a total of seventeen floors above grade. Design guidelines appropriately require architectural treatment to conceal the parking floors from public view. For the architect, it is difficult to make such buildings appear graceful.

There are other difficulties facing office buildings in downtown San Jose. From a financial viewpoint, while a downtown location offers unique amenities to workers, these must be weighed against development problems that add an increment of cost and effort. And when compared to other siting options in the region, downtown has strong competition.

Finally, while there is nothing inherently wrong with a low-profile, flat skyline, we know it does not appeal to some developers. They firmly believe corporate America is most attracted to tall, high-image office buildings, and they have a clear record of looking elsewhere for investment opportunities.

Retail Use

As the articles in this issue clearly indicate, retail and entertainment uses also have been difficult to attract and sustain in downtown San Jose. One would not think this

possible given the success of urban “village” main streets in many of the smaller cities nearby, the many new shopping malls within the city, or, most importantly, the growing population of residents, workers, and students within the downtown itself.

For example, Palo Alto’s central, main street area is a good urban place. It has pedestrian scale and interesting one- and two-story buildings. It is also easy to get to, and you can park near your destination. But at this low density, parking is easily provided in small, distributed lots or on the street. To provide a comparable experience in downtown San Jose requires the construction of parking structures, which cost more and seem less convenient. Existing large-scale retail and entertainment centers do not require parking structures, and they also provide stiff competition for new retail development.

Such difficulties in attracting retail have a ripple effect. In particular, they reduce the sense of community and livability. After dark the streets are still empty, and residents of San Jose’s award-winning new residential projects still feel like pioneers.

The Mixed-Use Model

One must consider these problems in relation to the “ideal” of a good downtown. San Jose has renewed its civic center (with the pending completion of its new city hall), its cultural attractions, its visitor services, and its open spaces. But it has had more trouble attracting retail, entertainment, and office uses. Perhaps the fact San Jose has been only partially successful in achieving the mixed-use ideal has more to tell us about the ideal than San Jose.

What I would like to suggest is that it is inherently more difficult to create mixed-use downtowns at San Jose’s mid-density scale than it is at the scale of truly high density, transit-served downtowns like San Francisco and Boston, or low-density “village” centers like Palo Alto. There are many examples today of good urbanism at the extremes of high and low density. But at mid-level densities, where the car must be accommodated and there is strong market competition from surrounding suburban areas, the mixed-use ideal has had problems.

Most mid-density downtowns only partially realize the ideal mixed-use model. For example, downtown Oakland is weak in shopping and housing uses; downtown Sacramento is weak in shopping, entertainment, and housing uses. Interestingly, downtown San Diego is weak in office and cultural uses, but strong in shopping, entertainment,



and housing. But shopping is strong in San Diego because Horton Plaza is bigger than nearby retail competition, and it exists because it was a virtual gift to the city by its developer to stimulate downtown renewal. By contrast, downtown Los Angeles is weak (for its size) in destination shopping, office, housing, and visitor services, but it is extremely strong in specialty retail serving a citywide Hispanic community. All of these downtowns have limitations similar to San Jose.

The Special-Role Downtown

Is it possible to realize the ideal mixed-use model when the downtown is surrounded by strong competitive commercial development? Perhaps these downtowns will always have a slightly more specialized role that is defined by uses that are not otherwise provided in the vicinity. For example, the common core of “the special-role downtown” might be civic, cultural, and visitor-service uses. These uses are most often provided and supported by public funding. The amount and type of other downtown uses, shopping, entertainment, housing and office would be based on their ability to compete with outside forces.

If the “special-role downtown” could be made an acceptable public goal, think how much grief and wasted effort could be avoided. The city of Oakland struggled for twenty years to attract major downtown retail, which never materialized. This was done at tremendous cost, and at the expense of addressing other opportunities and public needs that could have been realized.

Downtowns can be made in suburban metropolitan areas. They are just different. We can and should define mid-density downtowns as the civic and cultural hearts of their regions. Thus, downtown San Jose is the center of the city’s public life. Today it includes government facilities, a convention center, a sports arena, three museums, music and theatrical performance spaces, and the main library — to name some of its principal assets. It is a good example of the “special-role downtown.” This, I believe, is the lesson we can learn from San Jose.

Right: Aerial view of San Jose looking north to San Francisco Bay. Downtown is at the center. Photo courtesy of SJRA.

Shared Outdoor Space and Community Life

Clare Cooper Marcus

Mike Brill, in a provocative 2001 *Places* article, pointed out that spatially defined social relationships have three basic forms — private life, public life, and community life — and that many critics of contemporary urban life have failed to distinguish between the latter two. According to Brill, “Some of our nostalgia and mourning is not for public life at all, not for the world of strangers; it is for something quite different, real and precious: local neighborhood life, community, a world of neighbors and friends, the parochial realm.”¹ In the discussion that follows, I will attempt to define in design terms, and describe in social-use terms, valuable settings for community life that have often been overlooked or poorly understood.

In contemporary Western cities, there are four broad categories of outdoor space. The most private are spaces owned by individuals and accessible only to them and their guests. In this category would be yards of private homes, private estates, and so on. At the other extreme is what is generally termed public space — areas such as neighborhood parks and streets which are publicly owned and accessible to all. A third, intermediate, category consists of spaces such as corporate plazas or a university campus, which are privately owned but generally accessible. The fourth category, what I term “shared outdoor space,” consists of spaces owned by a group and usually accessible only to that group. Such spaces include community gardens and the common landscaped areas of condominium developments, clustered housing, assisted-living facilities, and cohousing.

As a form in which buildings enclose a shared landscape, this category of space has many historic precedents — from monastic cloistered gardens, to the collegial courts of Oxford; from the common greens of Radburn, N.J., to the courtyards of contemporary clusters of live-work lofts. If such spaces are carefully understood and sensitively designed, they can provide an important transition space between the privacy of the dwelling and the public domain of parks, streets, and town centers. As such, they can serve as a setting for local social life, and for the safe play of children, the most environmentally sensitive residents of cities and towns.

Shared Outdoor Space in Four Communities

I begin by describing five examples of shared outdoor space. The examples are St. Francis Square, a mid-density housing co-op in San Francisco; Village Homes, a residential subdivision in Davis, Calif.; Cherry Hill, an affordable housing scheme in Petaluma, Calif.; Southside Park, a cohousing community in Sacramento, Calif.; and The Meadows, a traditional block in Berkeley, Calif., where the

backyard fences have been removed.

Completed in 1964, *St. Francis Square* was the first of many similar medium-density, garden-apartment schemes built in San Francisco during the era of urban renewal. The client for the 299-unit project (the Pension Fund of the ILWU) challenged the designers (Robert Marquis, Claude Stoller, and Lawrence Halprin) to create a safe, green, quiet community that would provide an option for middle-income families wanting to raise their children in the city. The project occupies an 8.2-acre, three-block site in the city’s Western Addition, and it has an overall density of 36.5 units per acre. Its design is based on a pedestrian-oriented site plan, with parking on the periphery and three-story apartment buildings facing onto three landscaped interior courtyards.

The shared outdoor space, which is owned and maintained by the co-op, is critical to this community. Its trees screen the view of nearby apartments, reducing perceived density, and its grassy slopes, pathways, and play equipment provide an attractive place for children’s play. Sitting outside with a small child, or walking home from a parked vehicle (or from one of three shared laundries), adult residents frequently stop to chat with one another. The courtyards at St. Francis Square are, in effect, the family backyard writ large. If these spaces were public parks, parents would not allow their children to play there alone, and residents would be less likely to help maintain them, question strangers, or help neighbors in need.

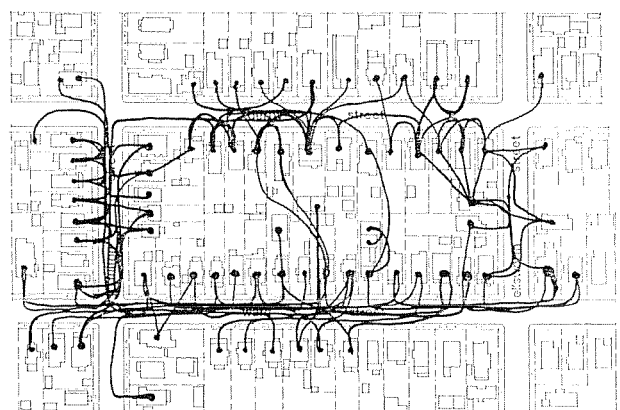
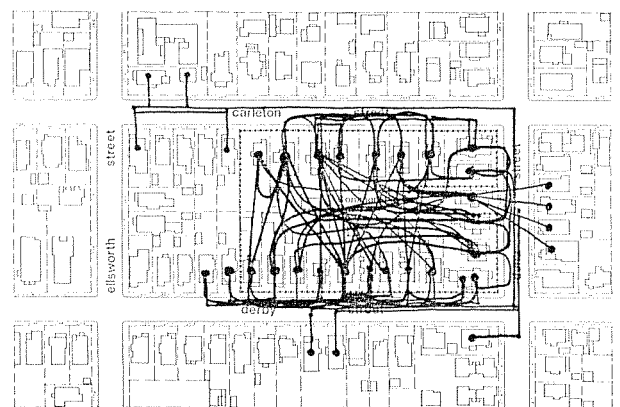
A postoccupancy evaluation of St. Francis Square was conducted by this author in 1969–70, and its findings were confirmed and expanded by a further year of observation when she lived there with her family (1973–74).² Numerous site visits since, plus conversations with the current management, confirm that the basic findings of almost thirty years ago are still relevant. In particular, there appear to be several reasons why the shared outdoor space at St. Francis Square is highly valued and well-used by residents: (1) narrow entries between buildings clearly mark the passage from the public space of street and sidewalk to the shared space; (2) the size of the courtyards (c. 150 x 150 ft.) and their height-to-width ratio (c. 1:6) give them a human scale; (3) the courtyards are bounded by the units they serve, and almost all units have views into the outdoor space (facilitating child supervision); (4) considerable attention and financial resources were focused on the quality of the common landscaping; (5) a clear distinction is established by fences and/or “keep-off” landscaping between private outdoor patios and the shared space of the courtyards; and (6) there is easy access from apartments and patios to the courtyards.

Village Homes is a 240-unit neighborhood completed in 1981 on the outskirts of the university town of Davis. A recent book by its designers, Michael and Judy Corbett, documents how it began as a “hippie subdivision” derided by banks and the local real estate industry, but has now become “the most desirable neighborhood in Davis.”³ Village Homes uses shared outdoor space as a successful aesthetic and social basis for neighborhood design. Individual houses are accessed from cul-de-sac streets and surround a central green. The long, narrow, tree-shaded, dead-end streets keep the neighborhood cooler in summer, save money on infrastructure, eliminate through traffic, and create quiet and safe spaces for children to play and neighbors to meet. The extensive pedestrian common area at the heart of the neighborhood includes spaces for ball games and picnics, community-owned gardens, and a vineyard and orchard. Lastly, drainage swales take the place of storm sewers, reducing summer irrigation costs by one-third and providing environments for wildlife and exploratory play.

This attractive environment — though accessible to outsiders bicycling and walking through — is definitely *not* a public park. Bounded by inward-facing residences, it provides a green heart to the neighborhood, a safe and interesting area for children’s play and adult exercise, and a strong sense of identity. A survey quoted in the Corbetts’ book indicates that residents of Village Homes know, on average, 40 neighbors and have three or four close friends in the neighborhood. In a nearby standard subdivision, residents know an average of 17 neighbors and have one friend in the neighborhood.

Cherry Hill is a 29-unit development of townhouses for low- and moderate-income families with children in Petaluma, a small town in Sonoma County north of San Francisco. The first residents moved into the project, built by the nonprofit Burbank Housing Development Corporation, in January 1992. Site planning hoped to establish a safe environment for the many children expected to live there, and support a sense of community among the residents. The Project Manager (John Morgan) had read about *woonerf*, residential precincts used to calm traffic in northern Europe, in a book by this author, and asked the designers (the woman-owned firm Morse and Cleaver) to pursue the idea.⁴

The resultant site plan consists of a narrow (22-ft.) access road which creates a one-way loop around a central green. Off this loop are four paved courtyards that permit cars to drive up to each house, and that create hard-surface play areas. As in European *woonerf*, cars and pedestrians coexist safely without sidewalks since the speed of cars is regulated by the narrow roadway, speed bumps, and the



Opposite: The Meadows neighborhood, Berkeley, Calif. In a 1974 study, residents knew more neighbors from all four adjacent streets (middle image) than did residents of a control block (bottom image). Drawings by Roger G. Cavanna.

dead-end nature of the street pattern. Unlike the standard gridded neighborhood, no cars enter Cherry Hill except those belonging to residents or known visitors.

The success of these design decisions was confirmed by a study conducted by architecture graduate students in April 1993 under the direction of this author, whose methods consisted of interviews with 17 of the 29 households and 7.5 hours of observation and activity-mapping in the shared outdoor spaces.⁵

Eighty-eight percent of the interviewed sample socialized with other families in their immediate courtyard; 64 percent with families elsewhere in Cherry Hill. Asked where they were most likely to bump into people they knew and stop for a chat, 94 percent cited their courtyard, 38 percent the central green, and 30 percent the street. Eighty-eight percent reported they would recognize a stranger walking in Cherry Hill, and two-thirds were very satisfied with the site plan. Reasons cited for satisfaction were that it is safe for children, close, intimate, simple, homey, convenient, and encourages community. The 18 percent “not satisfied” thought the courtyards created a “fish-bowl” effect, that the whole site was too tight, and that the central green needed to be more visible. When asked how they would rate the sense of community at Cherry Hill, 71 percent rated it “strong” or “very strong.”

Revisiting Cherry Hill today, it is clear its site plan has been highly successful in creating safe play spaces for children. During daylight, nonschool hours, children engage in such activities as rollerblading, rolling on the grassy slope, going round the loop on scooters, watching adults working on cars, and clustering around an ice cream truck. Two sections of the roadway have been formally designated for games — four-square and basketball. It seems reasonable to assume that were this a standard grid-pattern neighborhood with through traffic and no shared outdoor space, there would be less of a sense of community and much less outdoor play. Significantly, 50 percent of parents said their children watched less TV since moving to Cherry Hill. The other 50 percent said they had no TV, or that their children watched about as much as before.

Southside Park cohousing is a 25-unit urban infill development in inner-city Sacramento. It was designed by Mogavero Notestine and Associates in consultation with the residents, who number 67 (40 adults and 27 children). Completed in 1993, it contains fourteen market-rate, six moderate-income, and five low-income condominiums.

The site plan for Southside Park fits into Sacramento’s existing street grid, with most of the houses clustered around a common green on the interior of the block, and the remainder (two rehabbed Victorians and several new

units) in a smaller cluster across an alley. Front porches mark house entries from the street, while back porches and patios look out onto the common green. Residents eat meals together several times a week in the 2,500-sq.ft. common house.

While there has been no systematic postoccupancy evaluation of Southside Park, many casual visits by this author confirm what residents and designers hoped for: that the many children who live there are attracted to play on the common lawns, pathways, and play-equipment area; and that adult residents frequently meet while outdoors with their children, using the common laundry, working in the raised garden beds, walking back and forth to their cars, and in the common house. As at St. Francis Square, Village Homes, and Cherry Hill, the sense of community and the range of children’s outdoor play opportunities at Southside Park are largely the result of a site plan that curbs traffic flow and creates a central pedestrian green. Ironically, the street-facing porches at Southside Park are used by residents when they are seeking *privacy*, since the shared outdoor space on the interior of the block is such a social space.

The Meadows occupies a city block in Berkeley where backyard fences were removed to create a park-like shared space. From 1963 to 1973 a lecturer in real estate at the University of California acquired 27 properties on a block bounded by Derby, Dana, Carleton and Fulton Streets, most of which were single-family residences built between 1900 and 1920. Then, in a conscious experiment to create a unique residential environment, he began (from 1971 on) to remove backyard fences, unused garages, extraneous outbuildings, and paved areas, replacing them with grass, flowers, shrubs, trees, and walkways. The residents — who were all his tenants at the time — retained semiprivate patios, lawns, or planted areas close to their dwellings.

In a 1974 MLA thesis, Roger G. Cavanna compared this block with an adjacent control block (with regular fenced backyards) using standard techniques such as a questionnaire, a survey of behavior traces, and a recording of activities.⁶ Compared to residents of the block where the fences had not been removed, residents of *The Meadows* felt safer in the areas around their houses, had a higher opinion of their neighborhood, spent more time outdoors at the back of the house, and considered their backyard environment to be more open, attractive, and better maintained. The residents also knew more neighbors from all four adjacent streets (whose houses backed onto the shared space). By contrast, those in the control group knew mostly people on their block (i.e., next door or across the street).

While this study was conducted almost thirty years ago,



recent visits to this block revealed that the backyard fences have not been replaced, despite the fact that most dwellings are now owner-occupied. The central open space is very well used for children's play, studying, sunbathing, barbecues, basketball, and gardening. Residents maintain their own private (but unfenced) yards and patios, as well as adjacent portions of the shared outdoor space.

One might assume The Meadows is a "Berkeley 1960s" innovation, but in fact it follows other historic examples. In Boston's South End, for example, Montgomery Park comprises one-third of an acre entirely enclosed by 36 brick row houses. Established as a formal garden by the original builder of the houses in 1865, by the mid-twentieth century it had become run down, and the shared space had been virtually abandoned. From the 1970s on, however, a new group of residents removed debris, improved drainage, planted a lawn and perennial borders, took down fences, lobbied to have phone lines buried, removed a service road that circled the park, and restricted access from adjacent streets by installing locked gates. By the 1990s, the orientation of most of the buildings was toward the back, with a brick pathway delineating private backyards from shared space. The lush interior of the block is now equipped with moveable garden furniture and is used for informal dining and play, annual potlucks, weddings, birthday parties, and garden tours.⁷

A recent article in the *Atlantic Monthly* surveyed how variations on The Meadows and Montgomery Park may provide ways of redesigning conventional suburban blocks where the residents — especially those with children — are

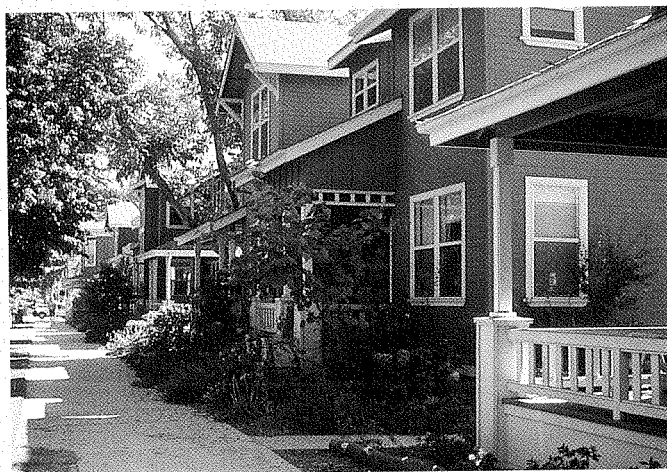
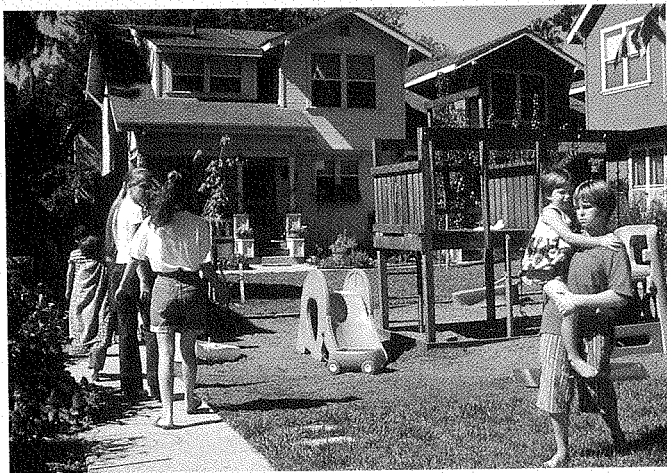
looking for more neighborly lifestyles, and for settings for play that are safer and more stimulating than conventional sidewalks.⁸

Characteristics of Successful Shared Outdoor Space

A review of the sites described above indicates that shared outdoor space can be a highly significant component of the neighborhood landscape if it meets the following criteria.

- (1) It is bounded by the dwellings it serves and is clearly not a public park.
- (2) Entry points from public streets or sidewalks make it clear it is not a public space.
- (3) Its dimensions and the height-to-width ratios of buildings and outdoor space create a human scale.
- (4) Each dwelling unit bounding the shared outdoor space has access to an adequately sized private outdoor space (patio, yard, balcony) to form a buffer between the residence and the common area.
- (5) There are clear boundaries and easy access between what is private (dwelling unit, patio, yard) and what is shared.
- (6) Care is focused on the layout, circulation pattern, planting, furnishings, lighting, etc., of the shared outdoor space. In particular, the design needs to focus on the needs of children (play equipment, paths for wheeled vehicles,

Above: A precedent for shared outdoor space — 1920s bungalow court, Berkeley, Calif. Photo by author.



areas for exploratory play, etc.). Research shows that children will comprise more than 80 percent of the users of such spaces if they are designed with the above criteria in mind.

(7) The nature of such spaces can vary from the rectilinear courtyards of St. Francis Square to the more rambling suburban greenways of Village Homes as long as all the above six guidelines are followed.

The above details are critical. It was the *lack* of many or all of these characteristics that rendered the shared outdoor space of many postwar public-housing projects, and many suburban Planned Unit Developments of the 1960s, non-functional. Unfortunately, those who criticized such spaces as being poorly maintained no-man's lands assumed (wrongly) that they could never work.⁹ There is ample evidence that if they are appropriately designed, not only do they work, but they become actively sought by people with a choice over how they live. For example, all 51 cohousing communities so far completed in North America (as well as an additional twenty under construction) feature site plans where units face onto shared outdoor space.¹⁰ Further evidence for the success of such schemes has been compiled by Community Greens: Shared Parks in Urban Blocks, a nonprofit initiative based in Arlington, Virginia.¹¹

The Need for, and Benefits of, Shared Outdoor Space

There is a further reason why we should look seriously at the forms of communities discussed above — typically, clusters of approximately 25 to 250 households. People are not being *forced* to live in such groupings, they are choosing to live there, and in the case of cohousing, they are working long and hard to bring projects into being. What is happening, this author speculates, is a yearning for a community of neighbors where one can recognize everyone, where numerous casual encounters occur each day (the “compost” of community), and where a sense of ownership and control allows subtle modifications to be made

to the shared environment as community needs change. People have a need to relate to a group which is larger than the family unit but smaller than a planner-designated neighborhood. In brief, there is a need for community life as distinct from public life. Toward this end, shared outdoor space needs to be reconsidered as a venue for neighborly interaction — one that is parallel and complementary to the public life of streets, plazas and parks.

There are demographic, economic, and psychological reasons why a reconsideration of shared outdoor space is particularly appropriate at this time. With increasing numbers of families where both parents are employed, the presence of a safe and interesting communal play space *right outside* the house is particularly attractive. This is equally true for single-parent families. Gone are the days, for most families, where a mother is home all day to walk or drive children to a nearby park. The potential sociability of a traffic-free, green area at the heart of a community (the shared outdoor space) is also appealing to the increasing number of single-person households (both young and elderly).

The presence of outdoor space whose management and maintenance may be shared by the group also provides an opportunity for people to have some sense of control over their nearby environment. The residents of the St. Francis Square co-op, for example, have made numerous changes to the shared outdoor areas of their community over the last forty years. Outside the private dwelling and its associated private outdoor space, there are relatively few opportunities for small groups to have the same sense of accomplishment through hands-on manipulation of the local environment.¹²

There may be larger social benefits to such activities as well. For example, a study of a low-rise housing project (Ida B. Wells, Chicago) determined that residents involved in greening activities (planting flowers or caring for plants and trees in shared outdoor spaces) experienced stronger ties with neighbors and a greater sense of community, felt a greater sense of ownership, picked up litter more often, and felt a greater sense of control over their environment, than residents who were not engaged in such activities.¹³ Evidence from interviews in communities with shared outdoor space indicates that such “working together” provides

Left: Southside Park Cohousing — shared outdoor space.

Right: Southside Park Cohousing — fronts of houses face the street, with a narrow entry path leading to shared outdoor space in the interior of the block.

All photos by author.

a profound sense of shared responsibility and community.¹⁴

Orientation to Shared Outdoor Space and Orientation to the Street

Does orientation to shared outdoor space mean that the street frontage does not engage the larger city environment? This could happen, but doesn't have to. In the case of Southside Park, Victorian-style houses with porches face the street across from similar neighborhood dwellings, while the backs of houses face a shared landscape in the rear.

St. Francis Square is not successful in this regard. Its porches, patios, and quality architectural detailing face the inner courtyards, while rather bland facades with fire escapes face the surrounding streets. Each group of six apartments shares an interior stair, with entries from both the street and the court. Because of activity in the courtyards, considerable personalization on balconies and patios, and the presence of a busy eight-lane highway (Geary Boulevard) on one long side of the development, the life of the Square is definitely introverted. However, later redevelopment schemes in this part of San Francisco took note of this, and some were designed with attractive porches on the street side as well as landscaped shared space and private patios at the back. Just because interior-block shared space exists does not mean that street life is ignored. The Meadows and Montgomery Park are good examples of successful orientations to both community life inside the block and public life on the street.

Does the creation of a community that is partially introverted result in an "exclusive enclave?" It could. But in many cases, the opposite is true. In many cohousing communities the strength of neighborliness has "spilled out" into the surrounding environment, allowing defunct neighborhood associations to be resurrected (as at Southside Park). Indeed, the cohousing common house may become the venue for neighborhood meetings. And one architect involved with many cohousing projects believes that when people become involved in a small group, such as a typical cohousing community of 30-40 households, they are *more* likely to become engaged in wider neighborhood concerns and meet people outside their "enclave."¹⁵

Shared Outdoor Space and Health

Americans are becoming more sedentary; obesity is on the rise. Between 1977 and 1995, walking and bicycle trips by children aged between five and fifteen dropped by 40 percent. For trips to school of one mile or less, only 31 percent are now made by walking.¹⁶ And according to the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and

Health Promotion, "physical inactivity has contributed to an unprecedented epidemic of childhood obesity that is currently plaguing the United States. The percentage of young people who are overweight has doubled since 1980."¹⁷

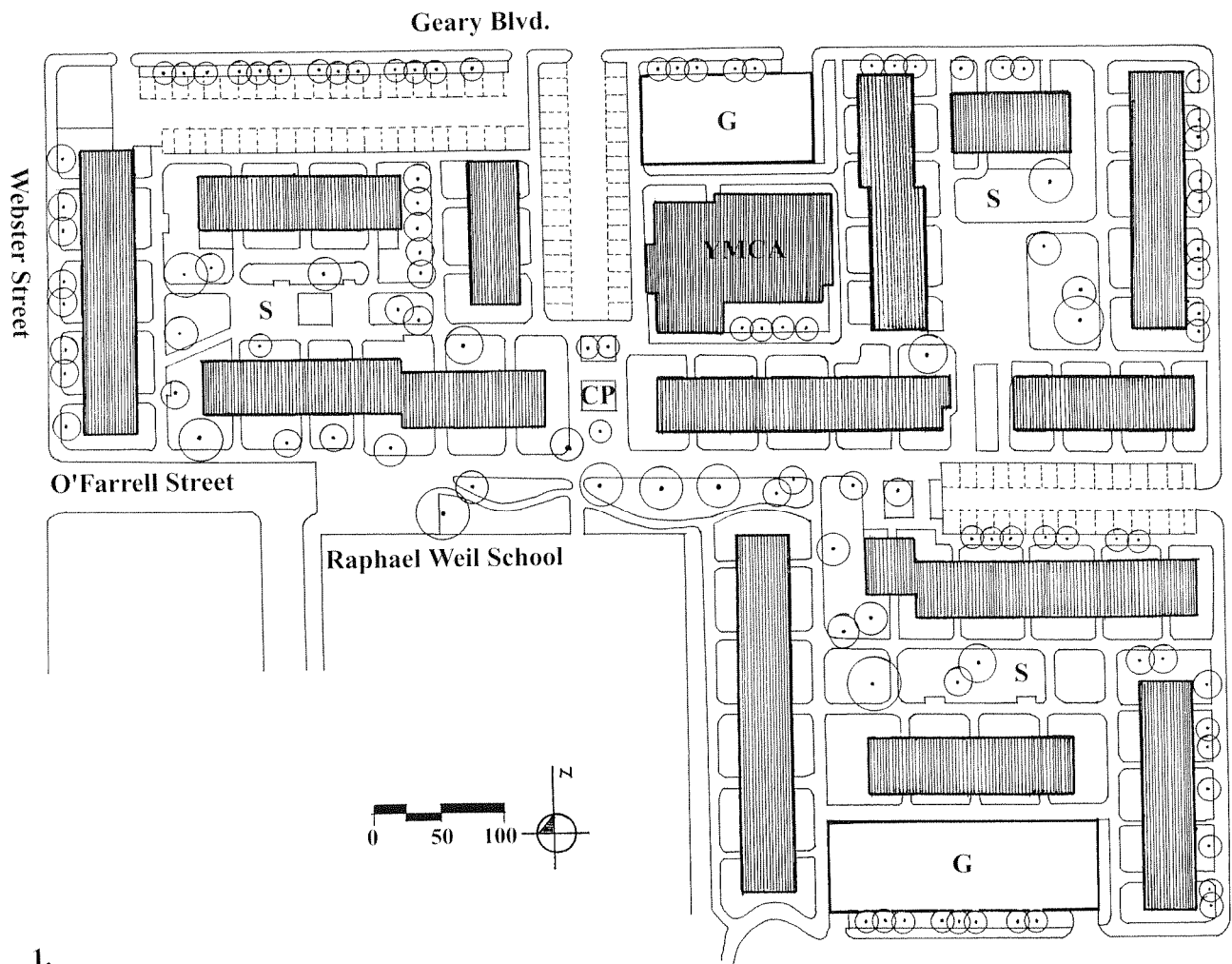
Particularly alarming — and underreported — is the fact that an increasing number of school districts are eliminating recess. According to one newspaper report, "As many as four out of ten schools nationwide, and 80 percent of the schools in Chicago, have decided there's no time for recess. Instead of romping in playgrounds, kids are being channeled into more classes in an effort to make their test scores rise on an ever-higher curve. . . ."¹⁸

This regrettable policy provides one more argument for the provision of attractive, usable, safe outdoor space immediately adjacent to home. It is not sufficient to provide sidewalks and neighborhood parks — though these are important — since most parents will not permit young children to play unsupervised in such public spaces. A shared space right outside the back door is much more likely to be used for unsupervised play after homework, before dinner, after dinner, on weekends, or during school holidays, thus promoting health through exercise.¹⁹

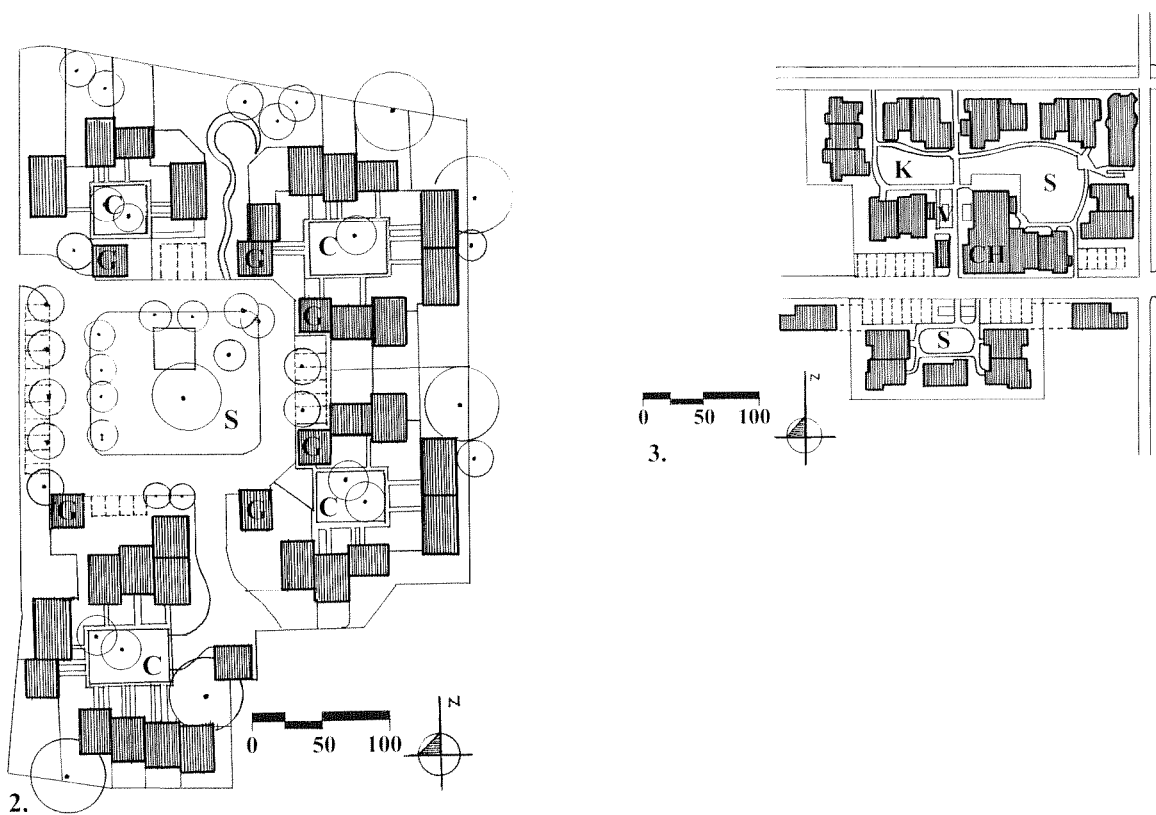
Shared Outdoor Space and the New Urbanism

It is important that we reconsider the communities and research discussed above and pay attention to existing research on site planning and community.²⁰ This is particularly important in light of current New Urbanist views regarding suburban design and public-housing redesign. Combing the New Urbanist literature, the most frequent reference to space shared by a group (that is not fully public) is the alley. In many New Urbanist communities the presence of alleys allows houses to be sited closer together and ensures that curb cuts and garages do not mar the streetscape. While these are laudable goals, it seems unlikely that a sense of local identity can be facilitated as well by these utilitarian passageways as by the provision of common greens bounded by the units they serve. Even more disturbing is the assertion by some New Urbanist developers that alleys are suitable places for children to play. It doesn't take much imagination to suggest that the experience (and possibly the subsequent environmental values) of children offered play space that doubles as a setting for cars, trash cans, recycling bins, and power lines will be vastly different from that of children (such as those at Village Homes, for example) who grow up amid creeks, fruit trees, wildlife, and gardens.

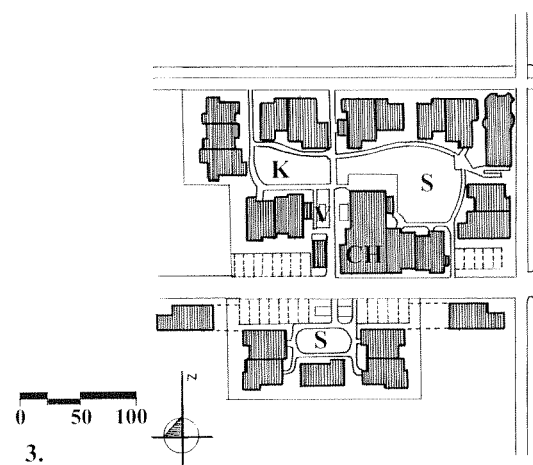
The most recent version of the *Municipal Smart Code* refers to five categories of public outdoor space — park,



1.



2.



3.

Drawings by Marianne Stück and Dipti Garg.



Map 1
St. Francis Square, San Francisco, CA

CP: Central Plaza
S: Shared outdoor space
G: Parking garage

Map 2
Cherry Hill, Petaluma, CA

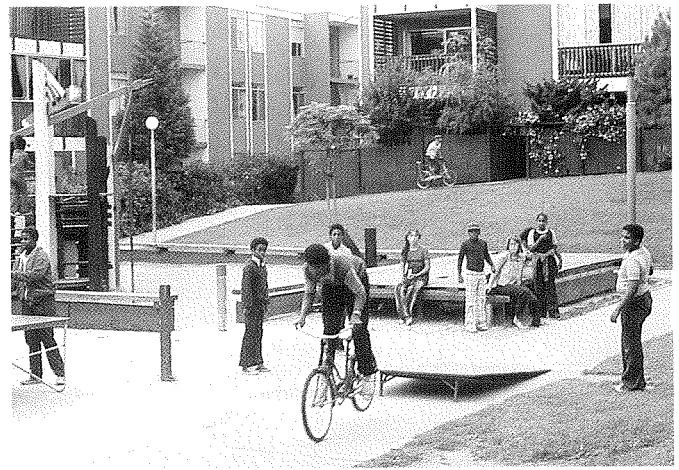
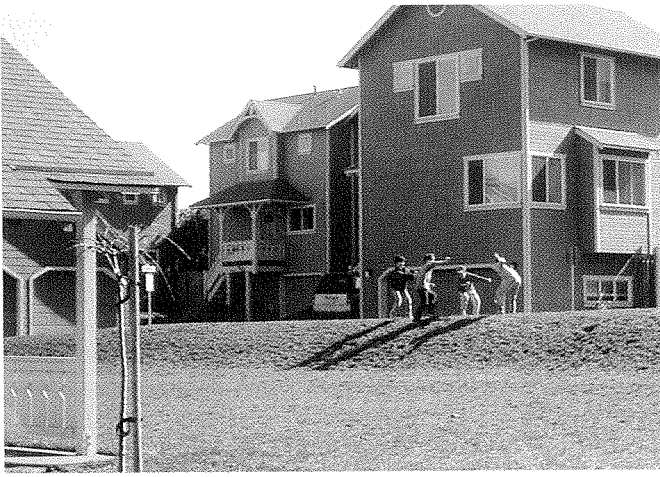
S: Shared outdoor space
C: Courtyards
G: Garage

Map 3
Southside Park Cohousing, Sacramento, CA

K: Kids' play equipment
V: Vegetable garden
CH: Common House
S: Shared outdoor space

Map 4
Village Homes, Davis, CA

C: Community center
D: Drainage swale
S: Shared outdoor space



green, square, plaza and playground — but has no category for shared outdoor space as defined above.²¹ The most recent version of *The Lexicon of the New Urbanism* defines only two categories of open space comparable to that defined in this article — the close and the quadrangle; it defines two comparable categories of housing arrangement — the private block and the compound.²²

Recently revised guidelines for “Designing and Developing Hope VI Neighborhoods” recognize the importance of shared outdoor spaces in revitalized public housing projects.²³ Unfortunately, these same guidelines recommend two elements in their design which may seriously compromise their usefulness: that they be accessible to outsiders by bike and footpath; and that the shared outdoor space be separated from homes by a street. Ease of accessibility by outsiders, either by footpath or by an encircling street, will most likely transform the image of shared space into that of a public park, thus compromising its function as a setting for social interaction, territorial monitoring, and safe children’s play. Territorial clarity and the delimitation of shared space that is not accessible to “outsiders” is especially important in public housing and high-density urban settings.

Above left: Cherry Hill — shared outdoor space.

Above right: St. Francis Square — courtyards are detailed so as to be attractive to children.

Below left: The Meadows — private and shared outdoor space.

All Photos by author.

In the above-cited publications, as in much planning and design literature, these categories of place are defined and described in general terms of location, form, landscape, etc. — but not in terms of how they are likely to be perceived, appreciated, and used. Nor are they designed in terms of the exacting attention to design detail described here. New Urbanism-inspired building codes are increasingly being adopted. And yet, while many of their goals and principles are undoubtedly positive, the successful types of site plans documented in this article are, in places, being legislated out of existence.

For example, the recently designed site plan for an affordable housing scheme in Windsor, Calif., incorporated shared outdoor space and was welcomed by its client, who had previously noted the success of Cherry Hill. However, the City Planning Commission, citing New Urbanist principles, insisted that the site must have a through street, that shared outdoor space “doesn’t work,” and that clustered housing around such a space creates “a ghetto.”²⁴ Such misunderstandings of the social implications of site planning are unfortunate, and point to the need for design judgements to be better supported by research.

The conclusions of all the above-quoted studies suggest that the category of outdoor space which has been defined here as shared outdoor space is of great significance in providing a setting for casual social interaction; for strengthening social networks at the local neighborhood level; for children’s play; and for enhancing a sense of responsibility and safety in the neighborhood. These findings are particularly pertinent in lower-income settings where residents may not be able to sustain wider social networks or take their children to areas of public recreation. They are also pertinent in all settings where there are likely to be families with children.

An Ongoing Discussion

Recently, another *Places* article appeared to take issue with the argument presented by Mike Brill, with which I began this article. In it, Emily Talen wrote:

The best that can be done is, first, to make sure that design doesn’t actively get in the way of social interaction and, second, to provide venues that allow for a variety of types of civic

*engagement. It doesn't matter if one then meets strangers or neighbors in these places. Both types of interaction can happen, both are important, and it is neither necessary, desirable nor plausible to focus on venues that exclude one or the other. . . . The issue of community life versus public life is thus a straw man.*²⁵

This statement, with which I respectfully disagree, appeared in the section "To Rally Discussion." Let us hope that the debate continues and that we look at other kinds of settings that may enhance community life. Above all, let us pay heed to one of Brill's main conclusions:

*A piece of important work for us all would be to seek more appropriate forms, by understanding community life more fully (and how it differs from public life), in some joint effort by those in psychology, sociology, anthropology, urban design and landscape architecture, and by citizens.*²⁶

Notes

1. Michael Brill, "Problems with Mistaking Community Life for Public Life," *Places*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Fall 2001), 53.
2. See Clare C. Cooper, "Resident Attitudes towards the Environment at St. Francis Square, San Francisco: A Summary of the Initial Findings," Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California, Working Paper No. 126 (July 1970); and Clare C. Cooper, "St. Francis Square: Attitudes of its Residents," *ALA Journal* (December 1971).
3. Judy Corbett and Michael Corbett, *Designing Sustainable Communities: Learning from Village Homes* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000).
4. Clare Cooper Marcus and Wendy Sarkissian, *Housing as if People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium-Density Family Housing* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986).
5. Clare Cooper Marcus et al., "Postoccupancy Evaluation of Cherry Hill, Petaluma, CA," unpublished study by students at the University of California, Berkeley, 1993.
6. Roger G. Cavanna, "Backyard Options in Residential Neighborhoods," MLA Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1974.
7. "Community Greens," information pamphlet on Montgomery Park, Boston, MA, (no date).
8. William Drayton, "Secret Gardens: How to Turn Patchwork Urban Backyards into Neighborly Communal Parks," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 285, No. 6 (June 2000).
9. Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: H. Shipman, 1985).
10. *CoHousing: The Journal the Cohousing Network*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Summer 2000).
11. See their Web site at www.communitygreens.org.
12. Some opportunities that do exist are Adopt-a-Park schemes, Earth Day clean-ups, Sierra Club trail maintenance, house repair or construction through Habitat for Humanity or Christmas in April, volunteer maintenance or gardening on church or school properties, and community gardening.
13. Liesette Brunson, Frances E. Kuo, and William C. Sullivan, "Sowing the Seeds of Community: Greening and Gardening in Inner-City Neighborhoods," *American Journal of Community Psychology* (in press).
14. Clare Cooper Marcus, "Architecture and a Sense of Community: The Case of Cohousing," unpublished manuscript, 1992; and "Site Planning, Building Design, and a Sense of Community: An Analysis of Six Cohousing Schemes in Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer 2000).
15. Conversation with Chuck Durrett, McCamant Durrett Architects, Berkeley, CA.
16. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, "Promoting Better Health for Young People through Physical Activity and Sports," report to the President from the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Education, 2000.
17. Ibid.
18. Matt Schudel, "City Talk," *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, Nov. 9, 2001.
19. Though not the topic of this article, the continued popularity of culs-de-sac is partially due to their use as safe, near-home play spaces for young children.
20. Jan Gehl, *Life between Buildings: Using Public Space* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987); Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian, *Housing as if People Mattered*.
21. See Civic Space Standards, section 6.10.
22. The Lexicon of New Urbanism (Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company, Nov. 1, 1999).
23. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The New Face of Public Housing: Designing and Developing Hope VI Neighborhoods* (draft, 2002).
24. Conversation with Chuck Durrett, McCamant Durrett Architects, Berkeley, CA.
25. Emily Talen, "Exorcising the Ghost of Emily Latella," *Places*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall 2002), 69.
26. Brill, "Problems with Mistaking Community Life for Public Life," 51.

Portfolio: Timothy Hursley

When does the camera show a place? The answer might seem to be: whenever we've pointed it at one. In the real world, "place" suggests some special qualities, perhaps a relationship between buildings, and a relatively unchanging character. If we go back to a place we once knew and it has not changed, it's still the same place.

But in photographs what gives a sense of place is a reference to change (and sometimes to loss) and to time passing. Take a photograph that does not give that sense of change, and the subject of the picture will be seen as simply design, not place. Evidence of the passage of time, time that may be seen as carrying the place with it or leaving it in its wake, will be accompanied by an inevitably more disinterested view of structures. The place, not the success of the design of its components, will have become the point.

Though photography is not as much the architect's medium as pencil or pen-and-ink once were, there is a belief in the architectural world that a symbiotic relationship exists between the two media (and a confidence that one can judge a work of architecture from a photograph). In a standard architectural photograph, a photographer speaks on an architect's behalf, taking the pictures the latter would take if he were as skilled at using a camera as wielding a pencil (or computer mouse), and could say in photographs how his buildings were well designed and a gain to the community. Showing that is the occupation of the architectural photographer.

One of the other long-time occupations of American photographers has been describing their country and its parts as places. In this, there has been a tension, not between place and design, but between two approaches to describing America. One is based on a cross-country drive and was especially in evidence in the years after the World War II (one thinks of Robert Frank's book *The Americans*). The other concentrates on a locale as especially significant and characteristic of a region (or of the entire country). It is not uncommon for a photographer to shift from one approach to the other: thus, Berenice Abbott, who began her work in America with *Changing New York*, ended with a project to photograph Route One.

Neither approach has held much attraction for professional architectural photographers. In this respect, Timothy Hursley, whose photographs appear in this issue, is an anomaly: over the years, partly by chance and partly by choice, he has gone out of his way to photograph sets of buildings as places rather than simply designs.

Based in Arkansas, Hursley often has long distances to drive to jobs. With an eye open for photographs other than those he has been commissioned to make, he often takes back roads rather than highways. Generally, he finds such

drives interesting, but aimless. "Zeroing in on a subject," he says, "is far more productive." In this regard, commissioned work in the 1990s took him repeatedly to the Rural Studio in Alabama; and over a longer period, it took him to within driving distance of Nye County, Nevada. Two projects developed from these places — one emphasizing signs of adaptation with use, the other showing changes over time.

The first of these projects grew out of a magazine assignment to photograph completed work at Samuel Mockbee's Rural Studio, the extension of Auburn University which has won worldwide attention for its students' efforts to design and build houses and other structures for the poor of Hale County, Alabama. Hursley's work here eventually continued as an assignment to illustrate a book on the studio, published by Princeton Architectural Press. Simultaneously, and continuing into the present, he made a point of photographing, in pictures not shown in the book, the houses that client families inhabited before they moved into their new structures. Eventually, Hursley also found himself rephotographing the Rural Studio buildings as they changed with use, and he continued this work even after publication of the book (indeed, only two of the pictures reproduced here appeared in it).

Hursley initially worked on the pictures in the second project from 1985 to 1990. With a book contract, he recently resumed work on them. They show the rebuilding of brothels in Nye County as a reflection of business decisions and changes in fashion. During the late 1980s these buildings were modest motel-like structures, but today they have been transformed into something closer to convention centers — an occasional tree providing the only sense of continuity.

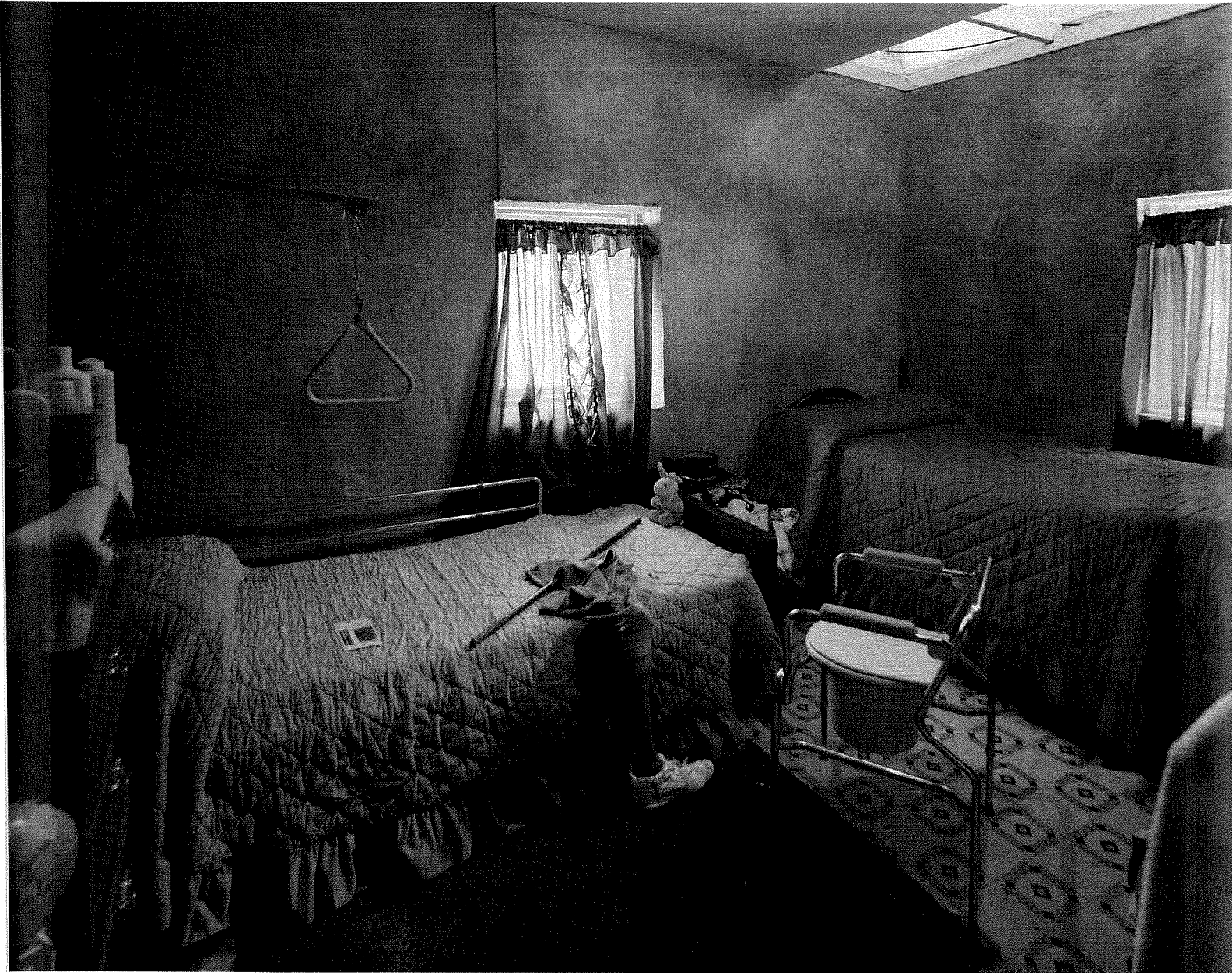
Recently, I accompanied Tim to Hale County, Alabama, where he talked about his work both there and in Nye County. The pictures which we publish here are from these two projects. Separate photo essays, they describe two communities in particular counties in different states. One tells of rural poverty; the other of a business that is legal in Nevada, but (as gambling used to be) illegal in the other 49 states.

—Cervin Robinson



Bryant (Hay Bale) House, Mason's Bend, 1994.





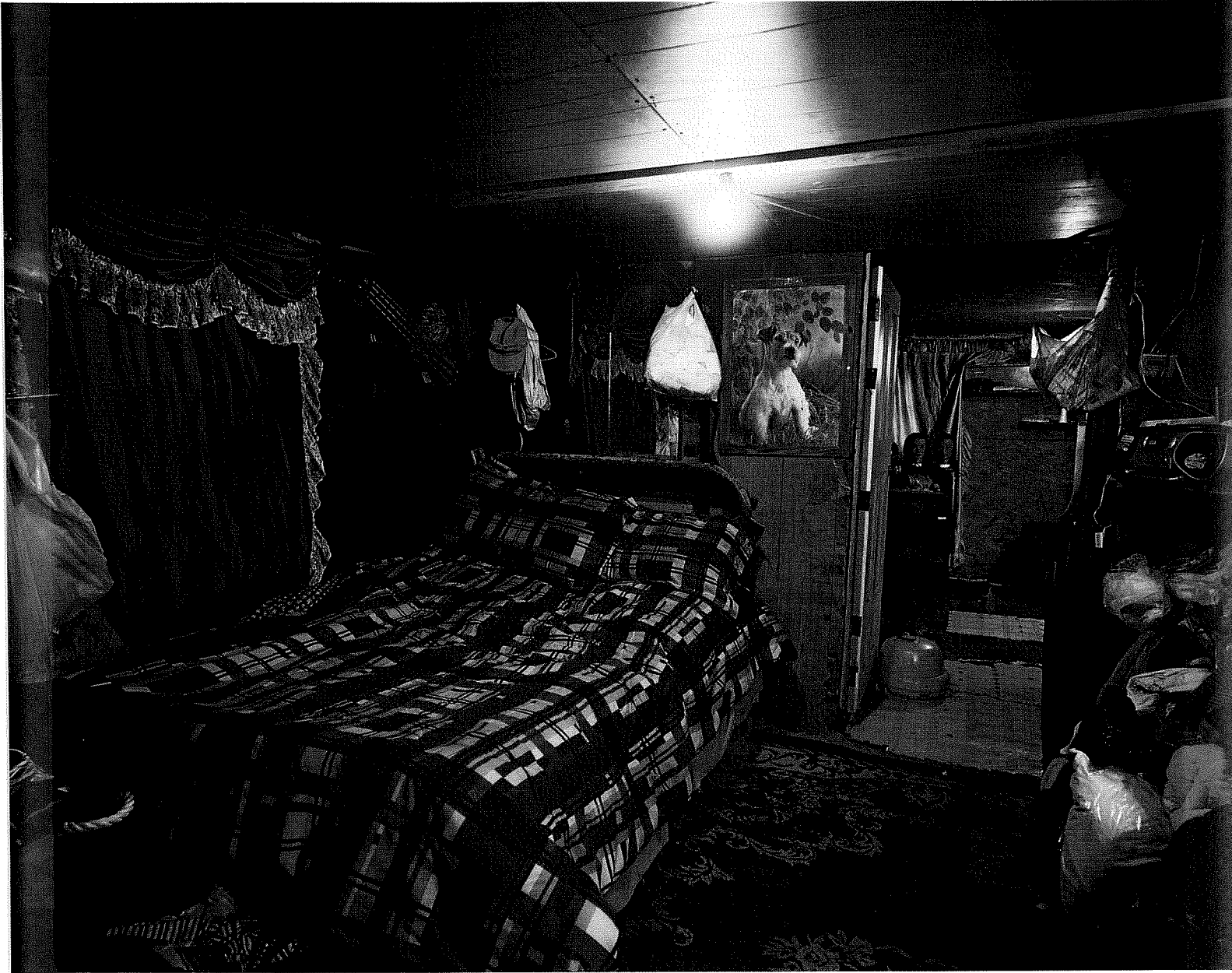
Opposite top: Living room, Bryant (Hay Bale) House, Mason's Bend, 1994.

Opposite bottom: Shephard and Alberta Bryant and a granddaughter in their living room, Hay Bale House, 2002.

Above: Bedroom, Bryant (Hay Bale) House, Mason's Bend, 2000



Lucy Harris's old house, Mason's Bend, 2001.



Lucy Harris's old house, Mason's Bend, 2001.



Lucy's (Carpet) House, Mason's Bend, 2002.



Lucy Harris in her Carpet House, Mason's Bend, 2002.

H: *Architectural Record* commissioned my first work at the Rural Studio. But I had already worked with Sam Mockbee on at least two other projects, houses for private clients. At the Rural Studio the first house I did was the Hay Bale House. The building was just finished but they were well moved into it. Right away it was evident that we should involve the people [who lived in the house], and that was the way I photographed it; there wasn't really any prodding from Mockbee.

R: Did he have any suggestions?

H: He had already worked with me in the past, and he had never been one to suggest. Actually, he did make a suggestion last year, that I photograph the Newbern Baseball Club without people as well [as with them]. He wanted to get some photographs of its sculptural quality. As I arrived in town Sunday for a game and shot the game, the place was trashed with some five hundred people showing up, so I told Sam, we can shoot it tomorrow morning, but you have to come up with someone to clean the field, and I heard that he and Jay Sanders and another student cleaned the field that night so I could shoot it empty the next morning.

The first three visits to the Rural Studio as I remember were assigned. The second year I came and photographed the "Tire Chapel," and that was a magazine assignment, and in 1997 the Butterfly House. So after those first three projects and a number of portraits that I did of Sambo and the students, we began to publish these photographs as a group. And then Sam was sick. He was out and he didn't come back to the studio for about a year and a half. When he came back he phoned me up that he was at the Rural Studio — and this must have been about two years later — and at that point I went on my own to see the new work that had been developed —

the student "Pods" [cottages for second-year students], the Hero Children's Center, and the Goat House. I just shot those on my own.

R: When did you start rephotographing buildings?

H: In late 2000 I went back to shoot the Mason's Bend Community Center and was blown away by it. That was the third structure at Mason's Bend. *Architectural Record* asked me if they could be the first to run those photographs, but I was on my way to take them anyway. And that's when I noticed the changes. It had been three years since I'd photographed the Butterfly [Harris] house, and I hadn't been back to the Hay Bale [Bryant] house in about six years. Right away when I drove in I saw the Butterfly House had not only changed in color and looked weathered but all the vegetation had grown up around it, and I was shocked by that. But I hadn't started photographing Harris's place yet because I was starting at the Community Center.

And then I had either run into some bad weather or such, or I had done what I could with the light that I had, and I went over to the Hay Bale house. I went in there and it was apparent to me that I should do new pictures. I started doing portraits of the Bryants, I started photographing the changes. When I'd started doing the first Rural Studio pictures, well, there just weren't that many interior opportunities, or so I thought. But later at Hay Bale I was interested in the bedroom . . . the couple's bedroom. I guess it had to do in part with, you know, the people becoming more important than the architecture. I think everybody at the Rural Studio at that point knew what I was doing out there and agreed with that approach. That's why the focus changed.

So that was the end of a two- or three-day trip. I went back home, but

I had reason to come back again, I still wasn't satisfied with what I had on the Community Center. I came back about a week and a half later, and Mr. Harris of the Butterfly House had chopped down all his vegetation! It was fall and he had chopped it all down, and I hadn't photographed it, all the growth that was around his house! So that was always in the back of my mind, that I needed to keep a watch on Harris's house. So by the time I came back after this trip I had already begun taking new photographs, I had already done shots inside the Harris's house. I was really enthusiastic about returning to these particular two houses. And then I signed on a contract with the Princeton Architectural Press, so we had a book going.

R: You talk about the balance between design and use . . .

H: I'm very interested in what the students have done, but what interests me even more is to include the people and their belongings. I'm interested in the home now and the architecture has melted away.

R: Today you asked a child to ride his bike into a picture.

H: Right, I wasn't going to wait any longer so I guess I was looking there and I said wow, there's just more information if I have the child in there. And so I had to say to myself, do I shoot this, I've got as much context as I possibly can, I've got the old car, the road, and the trailer, but the kid's standing next to us, and I go, well, I'd like you in it too.

R: You have a reputation for including people in pictures when other photographers might not.

H: Well, I think that when I'm doing public spaces people are really important unless maybe the composition is very good and the light is, say, the main thing. It seems to me that there would be situations where you're

totally missing the assignment if you don't capture the people. It may not matter so much to architects; they'd be interested in their design first. But if you decided you would introduce people, you know they would leave it up to you. An architect may suggest you take a school at a certain time because there won't be any people around because they're on vacation. I would think that was a bad idea; I'd rather have the option to work while school was going on.

R: Do you include people because they explain the architecture in some way?

H: Well, I guess you might make a faster read of a space if you saw some people in it. But, you know, they help date the photograph. I guess I've come to like other photographs that are dated. The dress style, hair style, furniture can do that. They show economic status too.

In the year 2001 I might have made four or five more trips, and every trip I was back out at Mason's Bend getting photographs of those two houses mostly.

R: What was Mockbee's response to your photographing the changes?

H: Well, he did have a comment once. He was looking at the photographs I was doing, because I showed them to him as I worked. When he was here, we would get together at the end of the day and I would hand over all my Polaroids, so he knew what I was developing. Seeing the changes, he said "Boy, this makes the early photographs look a bit vanilla." So, he was enjoying it.

R: In your view, what do the Alabama and Nevada photographs have in common? How do you see the two sets as making a pair?

H: Well, when I first saw the Nevada buildings I'd been photographing too many residences where the pictures were about the architect or interior

designer not about the people in a house. Maybe the architect hadn't chosen the furniture and said: let's do it before they move any furniture in . . . There were too many buildings designed less for use than to say something about the designer. In Nevada it was my editorial instincts that took me to Nye County, where the buildings turned out to have a less finished and packaged quality, and I liked that. That's also the thing I've liked about the buildings at Mason's Bend. I had the same sensibility in doing the Nevada photographs back in the 80s as I do taking the Rural Studio interiors today.

R: You expect to have a book of your Nevada pictures published. How did that project come about?

H: I was working on assignment at the new airport and heard while I was out there that brothels existed in Nye County. I was shooting for *House and Garden* at the time and my instincts said get on out there, and as soon as I saw it I thought, wow, this would make . . . Well, we went out to the Chicken Ranch and that was all gated and I got refused there, but next door there was a new building setting up, and the manager liked the idea of having anybody interested, because basically he needed the exposure. He let me in, so I showed him my photographs in *House and Garden* — I was carrying the magazine — and they let me in. And right away I started doing the interiors. There weren't any women in the photographs. I actually returned there and saw the place grow. Eventually when I told the owner of the Chicken Ranch that I was out to photograph the architecture of the brothels he went along with it.

R: How many did you photograph in the late 80s?

H: I think I've been in and out of near twenty or so. Some were abandoned.

I had a guidebook that didn't have any photographs, but it showed where they were. I think you can still buy it. We wrote letters and phoned them that we were coming.

R: You had a picture of a very big room with sofas on the sides . . .

H: That was the Mustang Ranch, where there is a big bar and a big room. I think when they actually have a customer, the women available come up and stand in a line, they do a line up.

R: You're going back now. How many years since you've been there?

H: It's been twelve years.

R: The Rural Studio buildings change with use. How have the Nye County buildings changed?

H: Well, there have been changes. The Chicken ranch has gone from a penitentiary look to a Victorian one. They've softened their image.

Sherry's has gone from what was a pair of trailers to attempting to be a resort. They're talking about adding a golf course now, and they seem to be the talk of the industry. There were always some abandoned buildings, and there still are. It's still the same place.

R: Do you think your work in Alabama and Nevada will have an effect on your commissioned work for architects?

H: I was just thinking back, the answer is yes for Alabama: I was shooting a Herman Miller interior in Atlanta, and the architect said, he actually asked me to "go and shoot some of those interiors for us like you did such a beautiful job at the Rural Studio." My clients were asking for it. Which is great. It frees you up.

Overleaf top left: Chicken Ranch, exterior, 1986.

Overleaf bottom left: Chicken Ranch, exterior, 2002.

Overleaf top right: Sheri's Ranch, exterior, 1987.

Overleaf bottom right: Sheri's Ranch, exterior, 2002.







Sheri's Ranch, interior, 2002.



What Is Urban?

Nico Larco

Much attention has been paid recently to the need to create and foster urban qualities in new development. As part of this newfound concern, a variety of New Urbanists, Old-Urbanists, and Post-Urbanists have made repeated accusations and proclamations that certain areas are truly urban, others do not quite reach this threshold, and still others are simply posturing as such. Throughout the debate, little thought has been given to how the urban can be defined. As a result, what is actually built is frequently disappointing.

This article attempts to step back and synthesize a broader definition of the urban environment. It does so not by prescribing thresholds or milestones, but by identifying critical dimensions of the urban experience. The intent is to better shape the lenses through which we critique, admire and create urban environments.

Interaction, Not Form

Most people recognize urban environments intuitively. Shown an image of downtown Tokyo or Chicago, we immediately sense the urban qualities of those cities. At the same time, concrete definition of what makes it urban frequently evades words.

Often, architects or urban designers will define the urban condition by its physical attributes. Attempting to tread on familiar ground, they suppose that form is what is important. This, however, is not the case. New York City empty of people would be no more urban than the Piazza del Popolo transplanted to suburbia. Urban is a social condition first.

In sociological terms, it is the concentration of potential and forced interactions that makes a place urban. Potential interactions are those that are sought after, but which only become possible within an agglomeration of people. Examples might include finding a group of like-minded people who collect Nigerian dolls, or who enjoy and study architecture and urbanism.

Forced interactions, by contrast, are encounters that may not be directly sought, but arise anyway. In general terms, these may be thought to range from positive to negative. A positive encounter might involve a chance meeting with a friend on the street; a truly negative one might involve being robbed.

Most interactions in the urban environment float somewhere between these examples. Nevertheless, they are rich in the sense of the unexpected that we expect from an urban setting. Seeing a Hasidic Jew, passing a homeless person, smelling unusual food, helping a blind woman find a seat: these are the types of interactions that expand the experience of the city. Clearly, they cannot be as readily

obtained in a more tightly defined village setting, or in the country. To be in an urban setting is to partake in, and surrender to, such interactions.

In an urban setting, such interactions also need not be direct. Interactions with the signs of other people's presence also play an important role. Passing graffiti, finding a newspaper on a seat, or imagining the impending rush of commuters through an empty train station are all moments that help create the urban condition. An urban space continually tells hidden stories of other people's beliefs, actions, attitudes and histories.

In light of these thoughts, the following sections identify five critical dimensions of the urban. Individually, each is a necessary but not sufficient condition for an urban environment. They should also be understood as ranges, not thresholds. The five dimensions are density, public space, variation, memory, and "the stranger."

Density

In simple terms, density is the number of people or the amount of activity that exists in a defined area. It is through density that the chance of an encounter is heightened and the range of qualities these encounters represent is expanded. Density is the most frequently cited dimension of urbanity. This may partly be because it is easy to quantify. But density also enhances other dimensions of the urban.

Density is not as easy to gauge as one might expect. The United States Census defines as "urban" any area having a density of more than 1,000 people per square mile.¹ Converted to acres, this represents only 1.56 people per acre. And if divided by typical dwelling-unit size, a settlement with just more than one half a dwelling unit per acre would be considered urban. Most would argue this hardly creates the conditions for a large number of forced and potential interactions.

A larger issue, however, is the difficulty of defining a threshold density for the creation of urban conditions. Such an evaluation may vary by culture, region, climate, and historic period. Numbers alone clearly cannot tell the story.

A better measure might involve juxtaposing numerical measures of absolute density with an understanding of how people live in a given area. A prison filled with inmates in solitary confinement might be extremely dense, but it would not be in the least bit urban. It is important to remember that density is critical only in so much as it affects interaction.



Public Space

While the public nature of space in an urban setting is often taken for granted, its role is crucial. Although density sets up the potential for interaction, it is in public space that this potential normally plays itself out. It is in public space that almost all forced interactions occur, and where many potential interactions take place as well. Public space may take many forms: a park, a street, a lobby, or even a store.

In his book *Great Streets*, Allan Jacobs writes at length of the importance of public space — and specifically streets — to the urban condition. In his view, streets are what allow people to interact with each other and with the past. They are the gateway to the urban experience. Jacobs writes that “maybe a particular street unlocks memories or offers expectations of something pleasant to be seen or the possibility of meeting someone, known or new; the possibility of an encounter.”² He goes on to say that “communication remains a major purpose of streets,” and that streets are “places of social encounter and exchange.”³ Certainly, without the public realm, density is mute and interaction is impossible.

In a sense, it is exactly the public character of space that is taken away in today’s cities by the automobile (a mobile private space). When a street is dominated by automobiles, it is no longer a space in which interaction can happen; it is reduced to a conduit for private movement. Widespread automobile use may rob even a moderately dense area of the interactions needed to establish urban conditions.

Variation

As stated by Leonard Reissman in *The Urban Process*, “the city is a place of contrasts, an environment of extremes.”⁴ Variation adds a sense of richness to potential and forced interactions. Variation can take a number of different forms. It can be physical (color, size, type, location); social (age, race, religion, income, lifestyle); or related to use and activity. In whatever form it occurs, variation is a key differentiator between the urban condition and the more homogeneously defined communities of villages or towns.

In an essay “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” Louis Wirth once stated that the city “has not only tolerated but rewarded individual differences. It has brought together people from the ends of the earth *because* they are different and thus useful to one another, rather than because they are homogeneous and like-minded.”⁵

In the urban condition, individuals are not held to a common system of beliefs or mode of action. Instead, differences are allowed to blossom. Without the constraint of a single mode of thought, there is a greater acceptance of divergence, a greater degree of experimentation, and an expanded sense of freedom. In an urban condition, variety is not seen as alien or as a challenge to stability, but is often a sought-after goal.

The stranger is omnipresent in the urban condition, both unknown and different.
Photo by author (Aix en Provence, France).



Memory

Memory is the legibility of layered actions over time. The urban condition involves a compilation of stories — some catalogued in the physical environment, others carried in collective thought, most manifest quietly in an individual's mind. Like variation, memory adds richness to the urban experience. Specifically, interaction with the past adds depth to the urban condition. As lives play themselves out, and as a continuing stream of individual decisions is inscribed in the built fabric, history becomes manifest in form. The city becomes a retainer of memory, a cacophony of individual and shared stories spoken out of time, simultaneously.

The absence of such layering of memory is why areas developed quickly and completely often initially lack a sense of urbanity. Thus, new towns may be designed with many formal urban qualities, but until they take on a patina of time and a layering of stories, they seem sterile. Imaginary interaction within them is limited to the present. There is little sense of the past — or of an imagined future.

To nurture an urban environment is to accept, and even instigate, uncertainty. It is to allow unforeseen actions to take their course, either grinding against or extending the existing environment, always marking what is there while inviting change.

The Stranger

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs wrote, “Great cities are not like towns, only larger. They are not like suburbs, only denser. They differ from towns and suburbs in basic ways, and one of these is that cities are by definition, full of strangers.”⁶

The role of the stranger represents two relationships: the stranger as something that is not known, and the stranger as something that is different. As something not

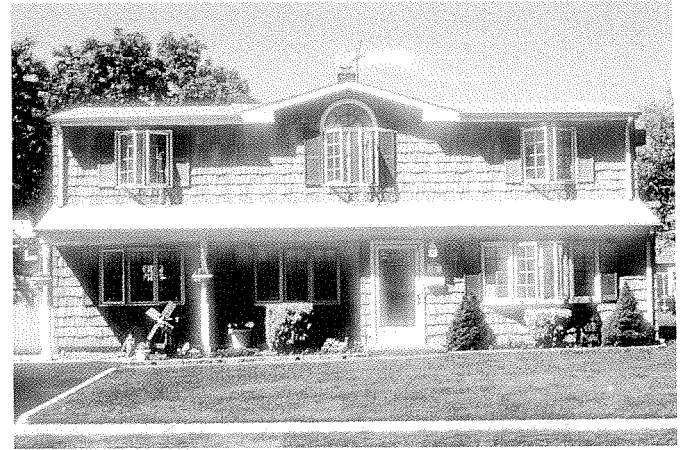
known, the stranger is the experience of seeing or interacting with people, things, or situations that are new. This can be as simple as walking down a busy street or visiting an area one has not explored before.

The sense of the stranger as different, however, implies the presence of people, things, or situations that may not only be unknown, but may differ fundamentally from yourself or the context around you. The urban dimension of variety is fully engaged here. Such encounters may range from seeing a homeless person, to passing a leather-clad punk, to hearing the distant chant of a Hare Krishna. This dimension adds to the excitement, surprise, and risk of potential interactions in an urban setting.

In a Fall 2001 article in *Places*, Michael Brill wrote that it is precisely the presence of the stranger that differentiates “Community Life” from “Public Life.”⁷ According to Brill, Community Life encompasses interactions with people with whom one is familiar. Public Life, its markedly different cousin, encompasses interactions with people one may not know at all. While this distinction may seem insignificant at first, it has substantial ramifications.

Brill claims the existence of Community Life without (or in lieu of) Public Life creates environments in which the growth of individuals and cultures suffer. Years ago, Louis Wirth suggested the lack of Public Life creates village-like environments where much of the energy, surprise, risk — and arguably, freedom — of urban environments is lost.

This is not to deny the importance of Community Life; village environments have much to offer. But they are substantially different from urban environments. And the presence of “the stranger,” in both its forms, is critical to creating the social conditions that foster the urban.



Urban as an Analytical Tool

The above five dimensions of the urban can be used to analyze and better understand existing developments. And they can be particularly helpful in guiding the transformation of these places into more urban environments — if this is a desired goal. By understanding the five dimensions, designers may be better able to see what is missing, and possibly what cannot be added by design alone. The dimensions can also be used as guides in the creation of new urban environments.

The following examples of this type of analysis primarily concern developments located on the periphery of large cities. They have been selected specifically because the transformation of these areas has been central to much of the newfound interest in the urban condition.

Levittown

Levittown, the early poster child of suburban development, is interesting to investigate because over the years it has acquired a more urban character. Levittown initially lacked density, viable public space, and (of course) the stranger. But what was originally constructed as a sea of identical salt-box single-family houses has now been largely transformed, as individual owners have added new floors and wings, changed finishes, and altered windows. Countless moments, decisions, and memories are now cemented into the fabric of the area, as houses have been modified, sidewalks marked, and the landscape altered. Time has given a physical richness and depth to this

development that could not have been imagined at its conception.

In addition, changes to individual houses have differentially altered their value. Houses originally sold for more or less equal amounts now vary widely in price. This, along with changes to the housing stock itself (i.e., in the number of bedrooms/bathrooms/amenities) has expanded the variety of lifestyles that may be accommodated in the area.

Because such changes occurred only slowly at first, Levittown was described for years as repetitive and sterile. But today it provides a layered and interesting fabric which houses an increasingly diverse population. A similar fate may await much suburban development in the U.S. Local spatial interaction may still be minimal, but interaction with the past has begun to register, and variety has bloomed where standardization was once the norm. Eventually, a more fully urban environment may emerge.

Opposite left: The plaza, the park, and the street are the mediums through which interaction can happen. It is the stage upon which density has the opportunity to transform the urban condition (San Jose, Calif.).

Opposite right: Eccentricity is the norm in the urban condition, with the stranger manifest in a variety of forms (Portland, Oregon).

Above: Levittown, New York. The original prototype cottage is at the top left. Over the years homeowners have modified the basic form to create a mixed housing stock that caters to different lifestyles, stages in the life cycle, and incomes. Variety and memory are now manifest in what began as standardization.

All photos by author.

New Urbanism

As its name implies, New Urbanism promotes itself as an alternative to current patterns of suburban development. Indeed, it has created communities which are much denser and have more viable public space than much development in this country since World War II.

Admittedly, New Urbanism has grown from a singular idea to a large and diverse movement. Today, there are many versions and variations of New Urbanism, and each incorporates ideas of the urban differently. One of the primary branches of New Urbanism involves development of entirely new communities on the peripheries of major cities. But even although these developments are often denser than their suburban neighbors, they still limit or lack some of the fundamental dimensions that create the urban experience.

If the urban is truly a goal of New Urbanism, contradictions internal to such developments would seem to be impeding its realization. Specifically, an emphasis on Community Life instead of Public Life and certain aspects of their underlying economic framework are limiting the development of the five dimensions that define the urban condition. For example, many New Urbanist communities lack variety and time, and embody an extremely sanitized approach to the stranger. This is not to say they lack merit. Instead, it suggests they might better be considered products of a New Village movement, since they encompass a very different sociology than the urban condition.

Brill's article masterfully described some of the ways New Urbanism has almost unknowingly championed Community Life over Public Life. Although New Urbanism refers repeatedly to "urban" qualities, much of this discourse surrounds meeting neighbors, knowing local shopkeepers, visiting the village green, and creating a close-knit community. Some of the most noted New Urbanist developments — including Seaside, Kentlands,

and Laguna West — thrive on the ideas of community, familiarity, and shared values. Intrinsic to this view, however, is the elimination of the stranger, both as someone not known and as someone different. Public Life is thus "normalized," and a potentially urban environment becomes more like a village environment.

Their underlying economic framework is often one reason the stranger, along with other dimensions of the urban, is left out of such communities. Many are structured around a "master developer" who plans the community, structures its financing, acquires the property, and phases its construction. In this master-developer approach, uncertainty directly increases financial risk. Likewise, to promote a diversity of lifestyles or values would be to invite confrontations among residents. And to allow certain areas to remain indeterminate would be to raise questions about the nature of the investment.

Since New Urbanist developments are usually conceived as finished wholes, memory and time also have little room here (although Levittown may teach us something about this in the long run). And while variety is sacrificed to an agreeable rate of return, the stranger is left out in favor of a more homogeneous and predictable population. Of course, such qualities are not necessarily at odds with the desires of the New Urbanist target market. Nevertheless they simply diminish the urban quality of such communities.

The Mall

Potentially the most urban area in suburbia today is the shopping mall. If there is interaction or some semblance of urbanity anywhere in suburbia, it is here. In her essay "The World in a Shopping Mall," Margaret Crawford described the mall as the agora of twentieth-century America — a hub of activity where consumption is the primary driving force.⁸

But even if the mall is a strong example of density and public space, it lacks other key dimensions of the urban. In fact, malls provide a very strange form of urban



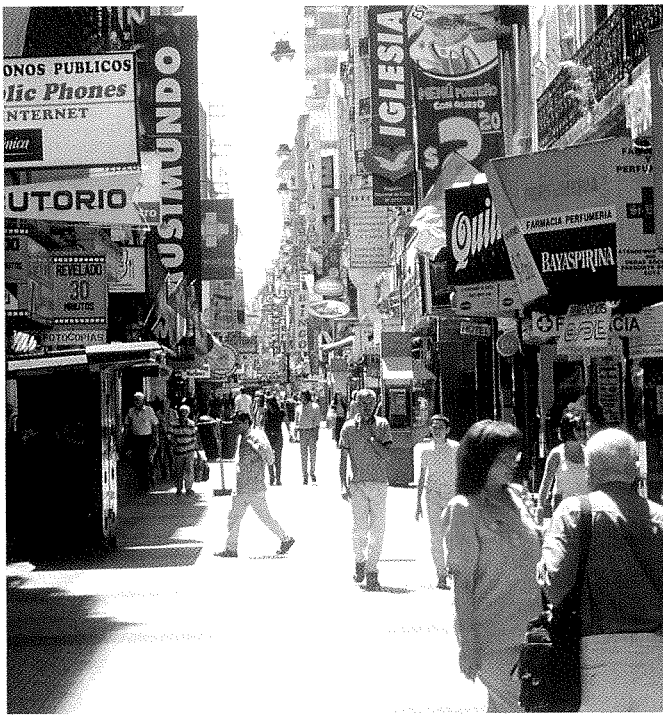
Left: New Urbanist developments thrive on the idea of familiarity (Seaside, Florida).

Opposite left: The urban condition allows and fosters a variety of choices for any given taste. From lifestyle, to menu, to apparel, all can be found and much is accepted (Buenos Aires, Argentina).

Opposite Right: Malls may provide a new version of urbanism for our time. They offer the thickest concentration of activity and interaction outside of central cities, bringing some aspect of urbanity to the suburbs (Mall of America, Bloomington, Minnesota).

All photos by author.

Nico Larco / What is Urban?



environment. At the mall, people temporarily forfeit the disconnected quality of the automobile, but their activities are monitored, some people are excluded, and the environment is specifically created to manipulate them. The stranger as someone unknown may be allowed, but only a very narrow sense of the stranger as someone different is present. Control is omnipresent, and precisely because of that control, there is little variation.

In addition, a continual fascination with the new and its ability to promote spending frees the shopping mall from any sense of time. The time of day, time of year, or time in history all give way to cyclical and constantly changing shopping events. Valentine's Day gives way to Easter, followed by Memorial Day — which leads to the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and finally Christmas. Each event is wheeled in as a complete experience, set up, and taken down to make room for the next shopping experience. The mall may allow and promote interaction, but it limits its breadth and depth.

Creating the Urban

No longer seen simply as containers for marginalized lives, urban environments have a new place in the public imagination today. Such renewed attention has often come in reaction to the isolating qualities of developments at the perimeters of our cities. We have started to acknowledge the many positive aspects of the urban condition and attempted to re-create them. In doing so, however, romanticized views have sometimes clouded clear understanding of the urban environment, resulting in sanitized, uninspiring imitations. To understand why these experiments fall short, it is critical to see the core components of the urban. Only then may we understand how to properly foster, develop, and create urban environments.

This article defines the urban as first a sociological, not a formal condition. Forced and potential interactions are

the most important aspect of a truly urban area. And, as described above, density, public space, variety, memory, and “the stranger” are the dimensions that are necessary to create it.

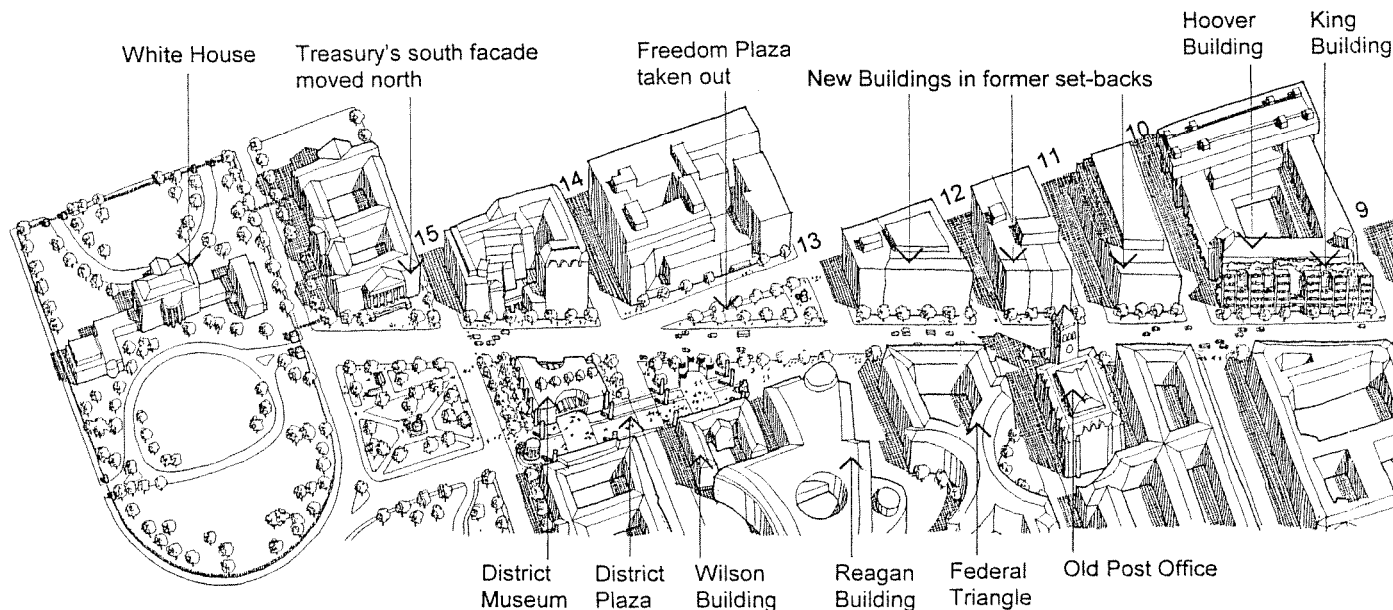
This article does not attempt to define thresholds for these dimensions; it does not attempt to prescribe any set density or degree of variation. Instead, by simply defining the dimensions of the urban, it aims to improve both the critique and the creation of urban areas. The definition of urban and its dimensions can help guide the transformation or creation of areas which have an urban condition as their goal. It can help point to what should be modified, what needs to be added, and, just as critically, what might be left to change on its own.

Notes

1. United States Census Bureau, Geography Division, Geographic Areas Branch, *Urban and Rural Definitions*, March 20, 2002. Available at http://www.census.gov/geo/www/ua/ua_2k.html.
2. Allan Jacobs, *Great Streets* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 4.
3. *Ibid.*, 2.
4. Leonard Reissman, *The Urban Process: Cities in Industrial Societies* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 4.
5. Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 1938, 69.
6. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 30.
7. Michael Brill, “Problems With Mistaking Community Life for Public Life,” *Places*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Fall 2001), 48.
8. Margaret Crawford, “The World in a Shopping Mall,” in Michael Sorkin (ed.), *Variations on a Theme Park* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

Fixing Symbol Problems along Pennsylvania Avenue

John Wiebenson



Our buildings tell us things. They use their shapes and sizes, their styles, materials and locations to form symbols in a built language that tells about their use, their ownership and — often accidentally — about community values.

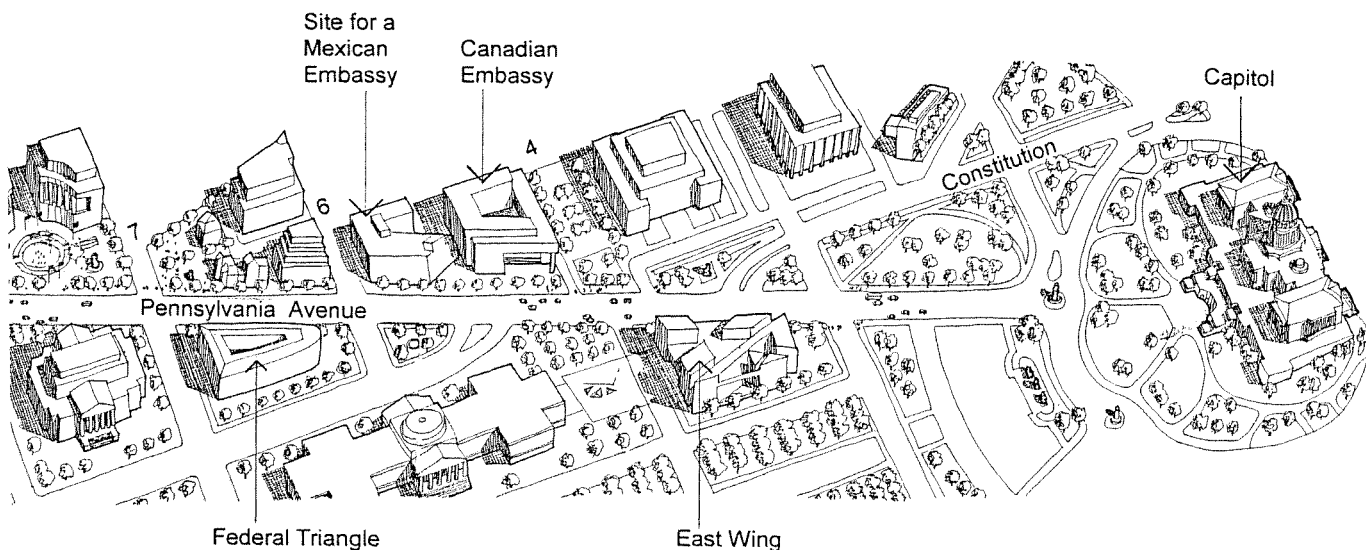
These built-in symbols can speak gently, but they can also speak with such great force and spirit that they can enrage an adversary or rally a citizenry. Two centuries ago, for example, when the British invaded Washington, D.C., they focused their efforts on burning the White House and the Capitol. L'Enfant's plan for the city had made these its principal architectural features. To the British, they embodied the successful challenge of a small, spirited nation to their great empire.

Just as the burning of the White House and the Capitol made them symbols of British wrath, so their rebuilding made them symbols of the American resolve to remain independent and democratic. Today, the White House and the Capitol remain great national symbols. And, by association, the street connecting them, Pennsylvania Avenue, has become another great symbol.

By further association, the buildings along this street have also become national symbols — although on a less majestic scale. After building and rebuilding, we have turned Pennsylvania Avenue into a veritable chain of symbols. Some of these are clear and focused. But the location and/or design of others offer a more muddled expression. Some, as it happens, even challenge what we claim to be our nation's highest values.

Built Symbols of History

Its great dome rising on axis with this short street, the Capitol has long been Pennsylvania Avenue's most visible built symbol. The Capitol's designers intended their building to be symbolically powerful in form, as well as location. Since there were no domed structures in the nation at the time, a dome was, for George Washington, a means to make the Capitol significant. (As it happened, Washington never lived to see the Capitol — nor the domed Massachusetts State House that shortly preceded it; the only domes he ever saw were in paintings and drawings.)



Other Americans maintained that a dome for their new Capitol would symbolize nature's blessing, since it would replicate, in their thinking, heaven's vast dome.

Years have passed, and the Capitol's dome has so successfully suggested "capitol" to Americans, that domes mark state capitols — even county courthouses and city halls — all across the land.

Another clear symbol on Pennsylvania Avenue is the Canadian Embassy, just west of the Capitol. Its location — in among strong symbols of American identity — allows it to suggest remarkably strong ties between Canada and the U.S. Its vigorous, modern design also implies that Canadians are a spirited people who welcome the times in which they live.

A few years ago, Mexico tried to buy a run-down building beside the Canadian Embassy as a site for its new embassy. The State Department gave its permission, but the cost apparently proved too high. As it happened, State Department aid had allowed Canada to buy its property at half-price. But Mexico was not similarly supported, and

this corner of Pennsylvania Avenue now symbolically celebrates only Canadian-American friendship. The Mexican Embassy's present location, far away and quite out of sight, suggests that Mexican-American relations are not very close, possibly even tenuous.

Another nearby notable building is the East Wing of the National Gallery. Its spirited design suggests imaginative owners. But other buildings on the avenue's south side are more sedate. Most are part of the Federal Triangle, a tidy arrangement of buildings of similar design, unblemished by commercial life and unmarked by intrusive forms. These buildings were generally put up during the Great Depression, when most governments believed that symbols of national continuity and cohesion were vital.

The exception in this area of the city, of course, is the Old Post Office. A great pile of Richardsonian masonry, it once posed such a strong challenge to the government's urge for stylistic order that it was scheduled to be torn

Above: Proposals for change on Pennsylvania Avenue. Drawing by author.



down. Ironically, the threat transformed it into a symbol of the larger grievances of city residents against their government, and inspired them to join a successful program to preserve it.

Inadvertent Problems

Other challenges to the order of symbols on Pennsylvania Avenue seem more accidental. For example, neither L'Enfant nor any later planner sought to put the Treasury Department building where it is today, partially blocking the avenue. In fact, the city's original layout embodied an inspired symbolism of national government. Since the Constitution divided the day-to-day duties of government between two major branches, it called for symbolic physical separation between the White House and Capitol as well. Connection was also needed if a government was to function, however, and this was symbolized by having Pennsylvania Avenue run straight, without interruption, between them.

Last-minute efforts were made in Congress to halt the work on the Treasury building when it became apparent it would violate this symmetry. But dithering led to what Paul Spreiregen, in an article on Washington planning, has called the present "inadvertent" blockage.¹ Today, neither branch of government has an unobstructed view of the other down Pennsylvania Avenue. Indeed, the location of the Treasury Building is something of a symbol of governmental disconnection.

Federal planners compounded this problem in the 1960s when they sought to replace four blocks beside the Treasury with a plaza big enough to provide a visual destination for parades heading toward the White House. Although this big plaza was never built, the idea lingered, and in the 1970s planners succeeded in building a smaller

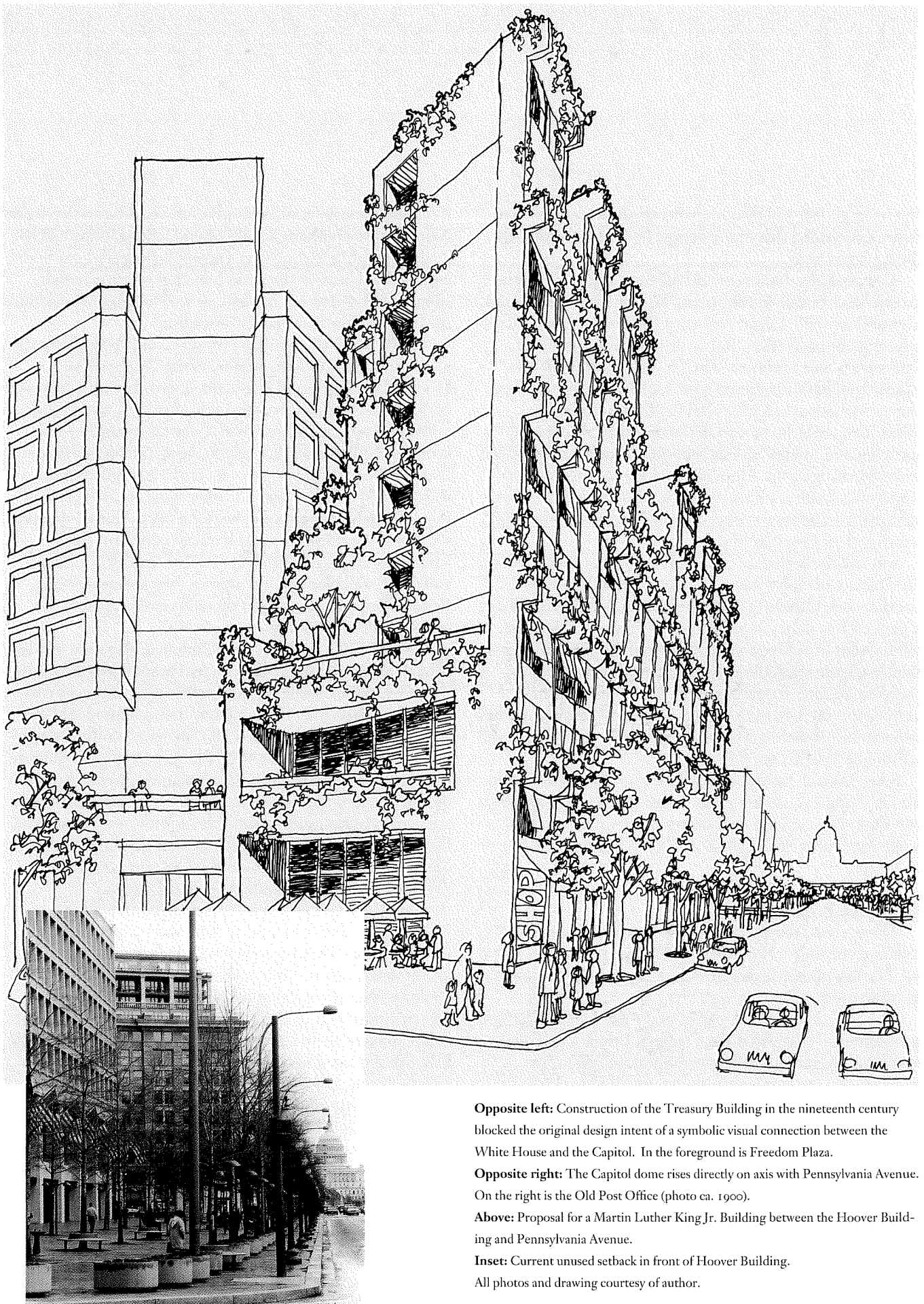
plaza. This plaza was raised above the avenue, adding further to the sense of blockage. And although they named it "Freedom Plaza," it serves as yet another built symbol of the conflict and division between branches of government.

Much about Pennsylvania Avenue's current architectural appearance seems similarly inadvertent. The story goes that as President Kennedy was being driven to the White House on his inauguration day, he was joined by his future Secretary of Labor. In his limousine Kennedy was invited to notice how the avenue's two sides didn't match — the south side's Federal Triangle was orderly, while its north side was not. And he was told this was a symbolic problem, one that signified a "failure of government."

In the years that followed, Kennedy and his immediate successors attacked poverty, communism, and, in Washington, symbolic failure. In particular, a commission was established to draw up plans to line the entire north side of Pennsylvania Avenue with big new buildings, all of which were to be set 50 feet further back. But when these plans were revised in the 1970s to preserve landmark buildings, the result was a different form of disorder. Today, with some buildings on the old alignment and others built to the new 50-foot setback, the sense of facades that advance and recede seems symbolic of yet another "failure of government" — that of irresolution.

More Modern Problems

Another symbolic challenge appeared in the 1990s when the Ronald Reagan Building was added to the Federal Triangle. Its style was somewhat similar to that of older Triangle buildings, but its bulk was far greater, and its corridors were so twisted that internal destinations often proved hard to find. The appearance of the Reagan Building was probably meant to symbolize a forceful presidency.



Opposite left: Construction of the Treasury Building in the nineteenth century blocked the original design intent of a symbolic visual connection between the White House and the Capitol. In the foreground is Freedom Plaza.

Opposite right: The Capitol dome rises directly on axis with Pennsylvania Avenue. On the right is the Old Post Office (photo ca. 1900).

Above: Proposal for a Martin Luther King Jr. Building between the Hoover Building and Pennsylvania Avenue.

Inset: Current unused setback in front of Hoover Building.
All photos and drawing courtesy of author.

But its large size and devious pathways soon came to symbolize everything that many people believed wrong with their government.

A symbol of a darker sort had already appeared on the avenue's north side in the 1970s. To some the block-sized monolith of the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building symbolizes government protection. But to others it is symbolic of a massive police presence. The Hoover Building is also a built symbol of the nation's unresolved conflicts of race, since it honors a man who used the bureau to attack minorities, and who smeared Martin Luther King Jr. in speeches and sought his destruction through wire-taps and leaked investigations. Hoover has since passed on, but his antagonisms still fester in our national soul, and on Pennsylvania Avenue they are celebrated day after day by what seems a giant Freudian slip.

A small, fairly elegant building that serves as city hall for the District of Columbia embodies a symbol problem of another sort. Officially titled the John A. Wilson Building, it generally matches its tidy Federal Triangle neighbors. When built, it appropriately suggested the subservience of the District to the federal government (the district was then just another federal agency). However, time has passed, and the District now has its own elected mayor and council. Nevertheless, the building's style and location still symbolize federal control.

Since District residents still have no voting representation in Congress, such a symbol may still be apt. However, this symbol — and the conditions it represents — challenge some of the nation's most cherished democratic ideals.

Fixing the Problems

There seems to be a cycle in planning for Pennsylvania Avenue, one that seeks improvements every thirty years or so. The last plans were drawn in the 1970s, suggesting that it's time to try again.

This time, there is no need to make the avenue brighter and shinier — that was done last time. Instead, we could make it more symbolically meaningful, helping it to speak clearly and accurately about our values as a nation. In the process, we could also seek to rid it of accident and inadvertence.

Fixing the symbol of blocked connections between the President and Congress would best be accomplished by having Pennsylvania Avenue run straight and true, once again, all the way between the White House and Capitol. This would involve, first, taking out the intrusive Freedom Plaza. Second, as Washington architect Robert A. Bell proposed in an unpublished paper in the late 1960s, the

Treasury's south facade should be moved a bit to the north. Adjusting this building would offend fans of Robert Mills, its designer; but leaving it as a symbolic impediment to the connection between the main branches of government should offend fans of L'Enfant, as well as those who admire the design of our nation's Constitution.

A solution to the symbolic presence of J. Edgar Hoover would start by removing him from the avenue. The Hoover Building could be renamed, possibly for a member of the Bureau actually worthy of honor. But, more importantly, the opportunity exists to clear the avenue of a symbol of police presence by returning the big setback in front of the FBI Building to use. If a new building here were named for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., this piece of Pennsylvania Avenue could be transformed into a shining symbol of American interest in racial harmony. Such a building might also be designed with roof-top gardens and front-wall planters. By putting foliage on its facade, Pennsylvania Avenue might thus also gain a symbol of national concern for the environment.

The symbolic problem of an excluded Mexico could be solved by supporting a Mexican purchase of property next to the Canadian Embassy and encouraging an imaginative Mexican design for a new embassy there. This would elevate Mexico to equal status with Canada as a valued neighbor and equal member in NAFTA. As part of this solution, the organization now proposing to build a private museum on the site could be helped to find another location. There are many symbolically significant sites for museums in the District of Columbia, but only one that can suggest that relations between Mexico and the U.S. are as close and cordial as those between the U.S. and Canada.

Finally, fixing the symbol of federal control of the District of Columbia could be achieved by increasing the visibility of its city hall, and by transforming it — and its immediate area — into a District Center. There could be several components of such a solution. First, a District museum (which is now being developed far away) could be installed in a new building beside the existing city hall. Second, the District War Memorial (a classy little marble temple which honors losses in the Great War) could be moved here from the Mall, where it is both lost and unheralded. Third, the statue of a District hero, one "Boss" Shepherd, could be brought back here from where Pennsylvania Avenue planners banished it in the 1980s (despite its originally having been bought and installed by District residents). Fourth, a plaza could be added, along with more statues of local heroes. The result of these initiatives might be a District Center significant enough to lend strong symbolic support to the notion of local



identity and local democracy.

Surprisingly, it would not be difficult to finance the fixes suggested above. To start with, changing the Hoover Building's name would only mean making some new signs. Other repairs might be more costly, but a big subsidy is handy — it's built right in. The big setbacks in front of Pennsylvania Avenue's new buildings could be sold, and used for building sites. Filling in these setbacks would also improve the avenue's appearance, bringing back the coherent sense of linear space originally envisaged for it.

In 1984 these setbacks were estimated to be worth about \$20,000,000, and adjacent empty "vista" land between the Capitol and Union Station another \$150,000,000.² Both would clearly be even more valuable today. This would be enough to fix every symbol problem here. It would be enough to erase symbols of hate, enough to install symbols of continental friendship, enough to enlarge symbols of District identity, and enough to bring back symbols of a White House and a Congress meant to work together.

Notes

1. Paul Spreiregen, "The L'Enfant Plan for Washington," *AIA Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 1963), 31. For a more complete discussion of the Treasury Building design, see Daniel D. Reiff, *Washington Architecture, 1791-1861: Problems in Development* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 1971), 37.
2. These estimates appeared in my article "Unless People Live on Pennsylvania Avenue," *Washington Post*, April 15, 1984. The "vista" land is several blocks of tree-lined grass originally intended to afford people arriving by train an unobstructed view of the Capitol and its immediate environs. However, since the trees are now so thick, the original purpose of this open land is no longer served, even in winter. Instead of cutting down the trees, it would now make more sense to build apartments, shops and restaurants on the interior grassy portions of these blocks, creating a pleasant urban environment. There is already plenty of open grassy area on the nearby Mall, and a marvelous view of the Capitol dome could be retained down the short, diagonal Delaware Avenue.

The statue of Boss Shepherd was moved from its former location in front of the John A. Wilson Building to an anonymous new location. Photos courtesy of author.

New Urbanism and Smart Growth: Twins Separated at Birth?

David Gordon

"New Urbanism and Smart Growth: A Research Symposium," conference sponsored by the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education (NCSGRE), University of Maryland at College Park, May 3-5, 2002.

As more communities are built following the principles of the New Urbanism, serious researchers have begun to check whether the underlying urban design instincts and chosen precedents of its practitioners are truly effective.¹ Indeed, the many New Urbanist projects now nearing completion are being seen as laboratories in which to test the movement's key claims. Among the questions researchers have started asking are these:

- *Can a walkable neighborhood really reduce automobile trips?*
- *Does a neighborhood designed with New Urbanist principles demonstrably improve its residents' sense of community (or civility) when compared to conventional suburban development?*
- *Can New Urbanist design reinforce ecological planning?*²

If New Urbanism's principles are supportable in practice, its advocates should have little to fear from such research — and much to gain. Thus, it was a sign of New Urbanism's coming of age that the Congress for the New Urbanism's 2002 academic conference, "New Urbanism and Smart Growth," was the most relaxed, most interdisciplinary, and most focused on research of that organization's gatherings to date.

In recent years the CNU has also tried to widen its focus. In particular, it has formed partnerships with the federal government's HOPE VI program for inner-city projects, and with the Smart Growth Network for regional planning. In this regard, the May conference was also a coming-

out party for the new National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education, its co-sponsor.

The location of the conference at the Center's home base, the University of Maryland at College Park, signaled these new allegiances. This institution is well situated to analyze Smart Growth, and its School of Architecture is open to the ideas of New Urbanism (its dean, Steven Hurtt, is chairman of CNU's education task force). By contrast, CNU has had a tough time infiltrating many elite architectural schools, as demonstrated by the mixed results of its first four academic conferences. In particular, the fierce discussions at Harvard, UC Berkeley, and Michigan that followed the 1998 Seaside debates generated much smoke, heat and press, but not much light.³

There is much in the field of urbanism that remains unsubstantiated by rigorous peer-reviewed research, the standard of proof in the academic world. This often places urban designers at a disadvantage in relation to other specialists, most notably landscape ecologists and transportation planners. A lack of hard research is particularly damaging in forums where scientific data is valued, as in administrative decision-making and the awarding of government funds.

It was particularly encouraging, therefore, that many of the papers presented at the 2002 CNU academic conference succeeded in establishing a clear research agenda. Such an objective stance not only helps define what we think we know, but more importantly, what we do not know about urbanism.

The Design-Transportation Link

The conference opened with a stimulating exchange between its keynote speakers, Maryland's

Governor Parris Glendening and the CNU's Andrés Duany. Glendening proudly pointed to how Maryland had created the nation's leading Smart Growth program, targeting state infrastructure expenditures to shape development and conservation. Duany, meanwhile, cleverly proposed Miami as a poster child for Smart Growth, citing its metropolitan government (1957), urban growth boundaries (1976), unified school district, higher regional densities, and Metro-Rail system as evidence of the kind of policies that Smart Growth advocates recommend.

Duany also challenged those in attendance to see how a regulatory response may not be enough to enhance overall quality of life. Without attention to place and community, he said, planners may just create "high-density sprawl."

Such comments about the value of urban design clearly touch a nerve in the fledgling relationship between New Urbanism and Smart Growth. While the CNU was one of the founding partners of the Smart Growth Network, New Urbanists may still be surprised to find that Smart Growth does not require their vision of good urban design — particularly on transportation issues.

The conference's dual mandate was examined in more detail in later paper presentations. In particular, Susan Handy (University of Texas) presented an exemplary transportation research review. She reported there is still much to be unraveled in terms of the complex interaction between built form and travel.⁴ However, research results are fairly definitive on several issues:

- *New highways do not cause sprawl, but they help determine its location.*
- *As a corollary, a moratorium on new highways will not prevent sprawl.*
- *Travel increases after new road*

construction, but it also increases after no road construction.

- *Light-rail transit will only increase density in corridors with strong intensification policies in place.*

However, on a key issue of interest for *Places* readers — whether good urban design reduces automobile use — Handy's findings were more disappointing. Apparently, urban design matters somewhat, but good regional land-use planning matters more. Thus, a centrally located infill project, even if poorly designed, will have more impact on reducing work-related automobile travel than a greenfield project with the finest urban design. On the other hand, we don't know much about nonwork travel, according to Handy, and this comprises more than half of the ten daily trips associated with each new home. These are the auto trips that good community design may have the most potential to replace or reduce, and they are an obvious target for more research.

Among other things, such findings indicate why urban design issues are not a core concern of Smart Growth advocates. Thus, while good urban design of the sort New Urbanists propose could marginally improve the transportation performance of an inner-city infill project, Smart Growth policy analysts might not force the issue. Indeed, such divergences are one reason NCSGRE Director Tom Downs has described Smart Growth and New Urbanism as "twins separated at birth."

Urban Form Research

In comparison to transportation, the academy has hardly pricked the surface of issues like public health, community, information technology, and urban form. But in his presentation, landscape architect and planner

Larry Frank (Georgia Tech) suggested that the relationship between health and urban form is a promising avenue for future research. In particular, air-quality problems and the recent attention to obesity in North America have already attracted substantial funding for rigorous long-term studies.

Frank explained how partnerships between urban designers and public-health advocates go back to the origins of the planning movement in the late nineteenth century. But the burden of proof today is much higher. Merely asserting that good urban design would have public health benefits may have been sufficient in the era of Frederick Law Olmsted. But the public-health lobby has clout today because it is able to cite rigorous clinical trials in support of its policy recommendations.

In comparison, we barely know how to measure the composition of a city, according to the presentation by Emily Talen (University of Illinois). Terms like sprawl, density, and mixed use lack specificity and encompass a wide range of phenomena, she said. As a result, they are considered unreliable for analysis.⁵

There has also been much general discussion of "community" in New Urbanist literature. Sociologist David Brain (New College) argued that the concept of "community" might be the wrong one for designers to pursue — after all, Herbert Gans was able to find it even in Levittown. Instead, Brain argued that a good place may depend more on civility (the normative order of behavior) and social capital. The pending completion of more New Urbanist projects may be particularly telling in this regard. The first rigorous social studies of these communities are just appearing. Through the late 1990s, researchers had little to go on other than the evidence of

Seaside, the Kentlands, and Laguna West.

In contrast to such vague declarations of social value, landscape ecologists are often far ahead of urban designers in their ability to analyze the phenomena that concern them. They use Geographic Information Systems to analyze road patterns, stream networks, impervious cover, and habitat fragmentation at a regional scale. However, such a radical difference in scale and orientation aroused the sharpest exchange of the conference. This occurred during Maria Alberti's presentation on ecology, environment, and sustainable development. Her work made it evident how little common ground there may be between regional landscape ecology and traditional neighborhood development (TND). In particular, urbanists in attendance raised concerns over the low level of human use proposed after metropolitan environmental protection.

Can human diversity and biodiversity coexist? Recent research indicates that effective ecosystem planning should be done at a regional scale, long before neighborhood design.⁶ By the time urban design begins on a 640-acre TND the potential for environmental conflict is much higher, since development impacts may extend well beyond the site. Smart Growth initiatives and the "West Coast" strain of New Urbanism may address environmental issues with less conflict.⁷

Economist Anthony Downs concluded the conference by giving a cold shower to the enthusiasms of Smart Growth and New Urbanism advocates. He warned that local and state governments in the U.S. have a dismal record in implementing regional planning (the state is often the only level that can do planning at this scale, and few do it well). The author of *Stuck in*

Traffic, Downs's warnings carry weight, because he has had a successful long-term record observing urban-policy issues.⁸ Some benefits have emerged from New Urbanism, he said, especially at the neighborhood level. But the market economy places limits on how far developers and designers can push the behavioral reforms some New Urbanists propose.

Downs did predict that some benefits will emerge from New Urbanism by self-selection. Specifically, people who want a walkable suburb will finally be able to buy into one. But good streetscapes may not be enough to get other people out of their cars. And he warned against any suggestion that Smart Growth policies or New Urbanist designs will reduce road congestion on a regional scale. Complicated and powerful forces are pushing travel in ways that are not well understood.

Finally, Downs challenged New Urbanists to conduct more research on how their projects will benefit lower-income people, particularly by creating more affordable housing through higher levels of density on greenfield sites.

Reflections

In many of these fields, New Urbanist planners are attempting to design the built environment to shape human behavior — an endeavor that is no longer automatically rejected as “environmental determinism” by informed observers. Evidence exists that the physical environment can condition some behavior, by design or default.⁹ But, as Doug Kelbaugh noted, the real power of architects and urban designers may lie in their ability to lead by representation. The ability to envision and prepare a persuasive proposal for the future remains a powerful tool for change.

Furthermore, while changing human behavior is a difficult and long-term objective, the anti-smoking campaign has shown it can be done — even in the face of tobacco advertising that rivals Detroit's promotion of automobility. Thus, as Dr. Howard Frumkin (Emory University) noted, there is much that urban designers may learn from public-health advocates:

- *Stronger evidence is more compelling than weaker (clinical trials vs. case studies).*
- *Policies with multiple benefits (TND) are more effective, since at least one of their elements may work.*
- *Future benefits for the health and quality of life of our children are very compelling in the public-policy arena.*
- *Such tactics may help the Smart Growth Network and the Congress for New Urbanism shape new research agendas for transportation, environmental and social issues.*

To date, the academic debate over New Urbanism has not shed much light on these issues. In some ways the situation recalls the “Garden Cities vs. Garden Suburbs” debate of the 1920s. At that time, there was tiny, struggling Letchworth to evaluate — and maybe Hampstead Garden Suburb as an alternative — but little else.

The literature from that era was similarly spirited. But not much of it was informed by close observation of built work, until the New Towns were developed in the 1950s. Both critics and proponents of New Urbanism now have a similar opportunity to investigate whether their rhetoric reflects reality.

Notes

1. Congress for the New Urbanism, *Charter of the New Urbanism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000).
2. Scores of books and peer-reviewed research articles have recently been published. For a detailed bibliography of the wide range of academic research relating to New Urbanism and Smart Growth discussed in the article, see www.cnu.org/cnu_reports/academic_biblio.pdf.
3. Todd Bressi (ed.), *The Seaside Debates: A Critique of the New Urbanism* (New York: Rizzoli, 2002).
4. The NCSGRE will publish the proceedings of the conference in 2003. For Handy's and other papers, see www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/publications/ConferencePaps.html.
5. Emily Talen, “Exorcising the Ghost of Emily Latella,” *Places*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall 2002).
6. David Gordon and Ken Tamminga, “Large-Scale Traditional Neighbourhood Development and Pre-emptive Ecosystem Planning: The Markham Experience, 1989-2001,” *Journal of Urban Design*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Winter 2002).
7. Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton, *The Regional City* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001).
8. Anthony Downs, *Stuck in Traffic* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992).
9. See Donald Appleyard, *Livable Streets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); W. H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); and Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1990).

U.S. General Services
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Courthouses: Community Catalysts, Civic Places



Courthouses are among the most traditional and symbolic of federal buildings. They carry the identity and communicate the values of the American federal system to every corner of the country. To this day, the government's Public Buildings Service regards courthouses as its highest profile public projects — shouldering an expectation that post offices, custom houses and federal office buildings once shared.

But courthouses can be complicated from a community development point of view. The sensitive nature of the activities that occur inside them make it difficult to design buildings that encourage multiple uses. The number of people who work in courthouses or visit them is often less than for a comparably sized retail or office building.

These case studies explore two federal courthouses that demonstrate different approaches to being good community partners. In Boston, the design and management of the John Joseph Moakley Courthouse are very

much oriented towards encouraging everyday public use. In Tacoma, an abandoned train station was turned into a courthouse as part of a strategy of reinvigorating a neglected area of the city.

Across the country, one can find stories of federal courthouses where activities like festivals, markets and concerts take place, and more. For more details on the case studies presented here and examples elsewhere, visit www.better-buildings.org, sponsored by the U.S. General Services Administration in conjunction with related organizations. These places are testimony to GSA's commitment to making federal buildings a positive, active force in shaping urban development and the life of urban communities.

Above: The conversion of Tacoma's historic Union Station into a new federal courthouse sparked additional investment in the area, including a University of Washington campus, several museums, and new waterfront housing. Courtesy City of Tacoma.



These forum pages are produced under an agreement between the Design History Foundation and the U.S. General Services Administration, Center for Urban Development. For more information, contact: Center for Urban Development, Public Buildings Service, U.S. General Services Administration, 1800 F St., NW, Suite 6037, Washington, D.C. 20405, 202 501 1881 www.goodneighbor.gsa.gov

Boston: The People's Courthouse

From the outset, the Moakley Courthouse in Boston has been thought of as the “people’s” courthouse. It’s not that the kind of disputes commonly aired in television courtrooms are settled there. Rather, the judges, architects and GSA staff who designed the courthouse wanted it to play an active part in Boston’s civic life.

The result is a court building that welcomes the public in remarkable ways, especially in today’s security-conscious climate. A second-floor cafeteria and a ground-floor restaurant overlook the harbor. Exhibitions, concerts and lectures, as well as privately organized events, are staged in an upper-level atrium and galleries, as well as in waterfront open spaces. A variety of public education programs are based at the courthouse, including tours, lectures, mock trials and dramas that relate to the history of justice. Altogether, the building welcomes some 4,000 users and visitors a day, and some 150 special events take place there every year.

Several factors make this possible:

- *A commitment from the judiciary.* The judges who planned the building and hold court there have a long-standing commitment to making the building a community and civic center.
- *Attentive architecture.* The building’s design maximizes public access to and views of the harbor, strengthens local pedestrian connections, and provides ample, yet flexible, space for gatherings and programs within a dignified courthouse setting.
- *A unique management structure.* Routine maintenance, public programming and special events are coordinated by a private contractor; educational programming is organized by local non-profit

groups; retail leasing is managed directly by GSA.

Civic Vision, Civic Architecture

The Moakley Courthouse would be an important public building if for no other reason than its prominent location. It is sited on Boston Harbor, just east of Fort Point Channel, and is clearly visible from downtown and East Boston. It’s located at the landing of a busy footbridge that connects downtown with the Fort Point district, where museums, galleries and art-related businesses are being coupled with new development such as hotels and a convention center. And it occupies frontage along the Harborwalk, a public promenade that runs along Boston’s waterfront.

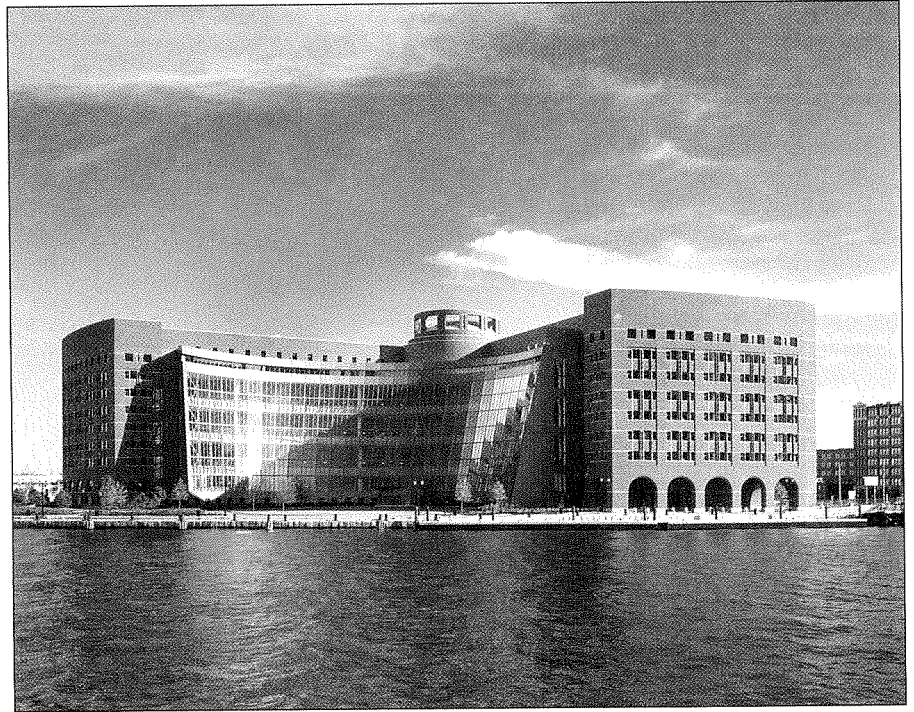
Much of the courthouse’s commitment to public use comes from the judges who hold court there. “If the public cannot use this site and see it as theirs — if every man, woman and child in Boston cannot take a walk on this pier, and see it as theirs . . . then

we will have failed to achieve an important goal of this courthouse project,” wrote U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Stephen Breyer, who helped plan the courthouse as an appeals court judge in Boston.

Large events occur in the courthouse’s “Great Hall,” a second-floor atrium that offers a dramatic, sweeping view of the harbor and downtown Boston, or on the grassy lawn outside. Certain spaces such as courtrooms, the jury assembly room even the judge’s dining room have been used on a selective basis for special civic or educational activities. The judges sometimes get involved in the activities themselves, presiding over mock trials, teaching elementary school students or

Above: The John Joseph Moakley Courthouse, Boston. Courtesy Boston Courthouse Management Associates.

Opposite: The public spaces of the courthouse overlook a harborfront park and public walkway. Tour boats, water taxis, and historic vessels dock alongside the courthouse, which provides space for a restaurant and environmental interpretive center. Photos © Pamela Cobb photography.



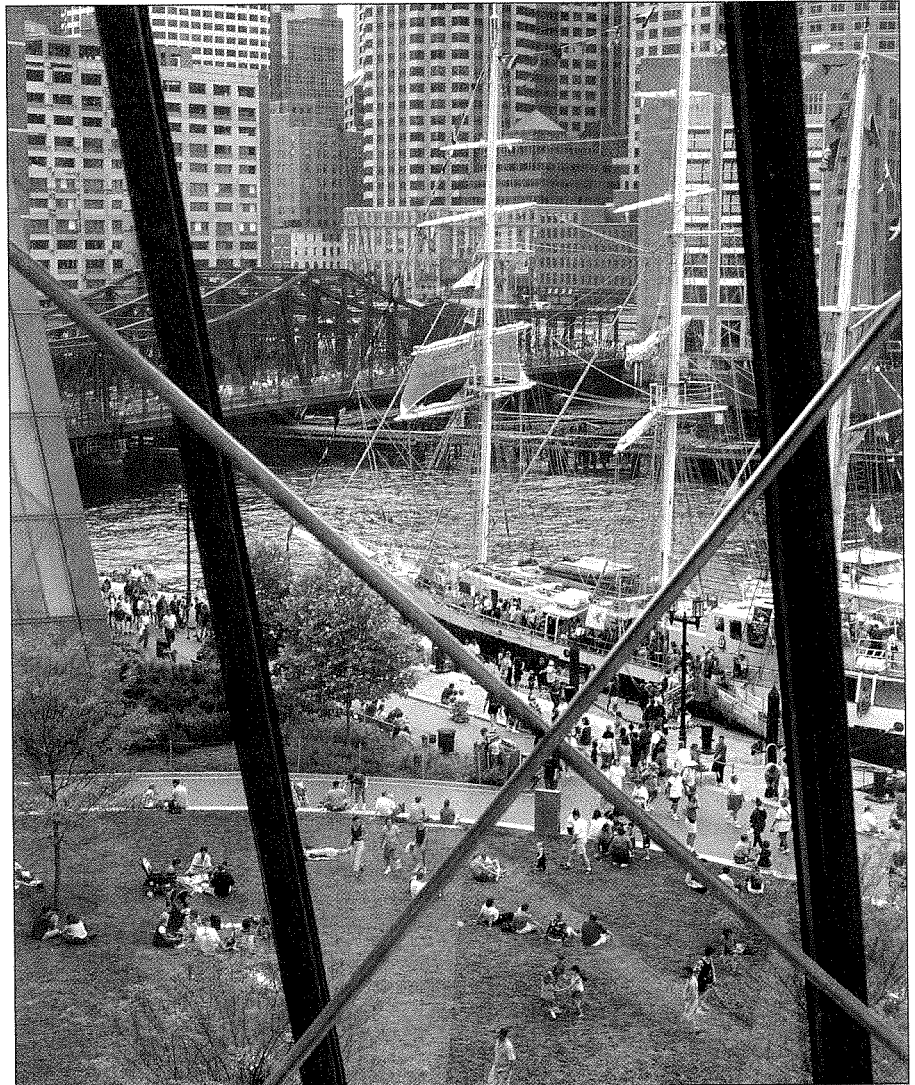
leading behind-the-scenes tours.

The civic intentions for the courthouse, which extend beyond the symbolic role that courthouse architecture usually plays, were communicated to the designers from the outset through extensive conversations with the judges. The designers had three main goals, according to architect Harry Cobb: to assert the principle that the courts are open to the public, to give the public a chance to experience “an extraordinary place where the city meets the sea,” and to show how civic buildings and civic space can confer meaning and value on each other.

The configuration of the courthouse is driven by its harborside location: more than half the site was reserved for generous greens, gardens and terraces that invite public use alongside the waterfront. There is an entry from the waterside, at one point resisted by the U.S. Marshals (who oversee court security) for security and cost reasons, but insisted upon by the judges who were overseeing the design and construction, Cobb noted.

The building addresses the harbor with a curving, sloping glass wall, behind which are the most public of the interior spaces: the Great Hall, a dining area, exhibition space and upper-level galleries that lead to courtrooms. Thus the most spectacular views are dedicated to the general public: “When you walk along the wall from one side of the atrium to the other, you see a constantly changing vista,” said Patrick Sclafani, GSA’s on-site property manager. At night, light glows through the wall, as if the building were a beacon or lighthouse.

Though the courthouse was planned for heavy public use, there are no formally designed event spaces, according to Valerie Reid, BCMA’s director. The open configuration of the Great Hall allows for “enormous



flexibility,” contributing to its success as an event space, she explained. And holding gatherings in the atrium of a courthouse has special cachet, she added: “If the space had been designed specifically for events, it would not have the same appeal.”

At one corner of the building, some small storefronts, an arcade and a dock mark the meeting of Harborwalk and the pedestrian bridge leading downtown and create a hub of activity, especially in warmer weather. Some critics have faulted the building’s southern facade, which addresses a street busy with pedestrian through traffic, but has no storefronts and few entrances or street-level windows, as being relatively lifeless. On the other hand, the base of the building features granite panels, placed at eye level, that are inscribed with quotes that reflect on the justice system. A new streetscape design, with landscaping and benches that take into account current security concerns, is underway.

A Hub of Community and Educational Activity

The complex range of activities that take place in and around the Moakley Courthouse — from trials and other government business, to cultural and educational programs, to the restaurants and boat moorings — are sponsored by a number of groups. Almost everything is coordinated by an on-site contractor, Boston Courthouse Management Associates, with GSA, the courts and security services providing different aspects of oversight.

BCMA has three main responsibilities: handling routine building maintenance, coordinating requests that outside groups submit for using public spaces, and organizing cultural and community programs that are open, at no charge, to the public. GSA handles



leasing for vendors such as the cafeteria and the harborside retail.

The courthouse is marketed to Boston’s event-planning and meeting industry, “similar to the seaport, the Hines Convention Center, the World Trade Center,” Sclafani says. The spaces inside the courthouse can accommodate about 1,300 people, the gardens outside another 600 people. Events include corporate dinners, college reunions, association meetings and awards ceremonies. There are a few basic ground rules: no activity can disturb the workings of the court, events can’t be staged to make a profit, no money can change hands in the courthouse and personal events like weddings aren’t allowed.

Many of the programs that take place in the building are organized directly by BCMA. For example, BCMA works with local cultural groups and artists, associations to curate art shows in the lobby and atrium. The shows generally rotate quarterly, and “the expectation was that local artists would have a place for displaying their work, though we’re not restricted to that,” Reid said.

BCMA also organizes a monthly concert series with the help of local chamber music societies, and is teaming up with local employment agencies to organize a job fair.

Since the courthouse opened in 1998, it has been the base of operations for “Discovering Justice,” an innovative court education program that reaches students of all ages, as well as the general public. The program, run by the James D. St. Claire Court Education Project, includes an elementary school curriculum that culminates with a visit to the courthouse, a legal apprenticeship program that helps middle-schoolers prepare mock trials staged in courtrooms, and courtroom dramas where high school students can engage with the actors in character and discuss the issues with a judge.

Above: Northern Avenue, a busy pedestrian thoroughfare between downtown and the Fort Point district passes by the south facade of the courthouse.

Photos © Pamela Cobb Photography.

Opposite: An event in the Great Hall.

Courtesy Boston Courthouse Management Associates



St. Claire's lecture series invites judges, scholars, attorneys and journalists to speak on issues of justice in the courthouse's Jury Assembly Room, and the group trains docents who give public tours of the building. Last summer, a group of "courthouse apprentices" studied the architecture and symbolism of the building and produced "A Kid's Guide to the Moakley Courthouse," which will be distributed to students who visit this year.

Along the waterfront, an educational and advocacy group called the Harbor Island Alliance runs a "Discovery Center" and gift shop in one of the retail spaces. The center offers exhibits about the natural resources and history of the islands in Boston Harbor, and serves as a launching point for educational cruises. This year GSA will also provide space for a ranger station for the National Park Service.

And GSA is arranging the design and installation of wayside exhibits along the Harbor Walk. Three interpretive panels, under design by Jon Roll and Associates, will look at the

history of the waterfront; other signage will describe the native landscaping. Sclafani said that the steering committee that planned the courthouse had hoped for a museum space within the building, but that there was a concern about the limited amount of space in the new building and about how another structure could be integrated into the site. The idea for the panels came out of a charrette that was organized to brainstorm how GSA might provide interpretive information about the area, he said.

Challenges in Public Use

Making such intensive public use of a federal courthouse doesn't come easy. One of the biggest challenges, both Reid and Sclafani say, is staying on top of the wear and tear generated by the building's extended operating hours and by events that can bring in hundreds of people. "You name it, painting, floor care, freight elevator, service areas, HVAC equipment," Reid said. "It is a concern that needs constant attention."

From a marketing point of view, the courthouse presents both chal-

lenges and opportunities, Reid said. "The security requirements in this building add to the cost of the event, and guests aren't allowed to bring cell phones inside," she explained. The trade-off is that the character and location are hard to compare: "People love the view, the feeling, the architecture," she said. "Once we get event planners and potential clients in the door, they're hooked." And BCMA works closely with clients to prevent security bottlenecks by planning ahead. For example, the courthouse has extra magnetometers in place so guests at even the largest events are not delayed in entering the building.

Another key issue is respecting the dignity of the building's primary function as a courthouse and maintaining good relationships with judges. "We have established a partnership, a shared philosophy, and a working relationship that respects the dignity of the courts while fulfilling everyone's vision for the courthouse," Sclafani said. "And that commitment is as strong now as it was the day we started."

The bottom line is minimizing the impact of activities on the operations and presence of the courts. Daytime concerts are scheduled for the courts' lunch break. Set-up can't start until the end of the day, events can't start until 6 p.m., and everything has to be removed and cleaned at the end of the event. "Court business starts by seven the next morning, and it has to look like nobody was ever here," Reid said. "If you want to keep the clients and the tenants happy, you have to be very good with timelines, and stay on top of the details."

Transforming Tacoma

Not too long ago, Tacoma's Union Station was considered to be on the wrong side of the tracks. Built in 1911 as the western terminus of the Northern Pacific's transcontinental line, it was abandoned after Amtrak relocated passenger service in 1984. The surrounding area was so rough that personnel from nearby military bases were told to stay away, and the nearby waterfront was so polluted that it was declared a federal Superfund site.

In the past decade, however, this forlorn place has seen a remarkable revival. The University of Washington has established a downtown campus there, three museums have been built, housing is going up along a waterfront promenade, and a light-rail line provides links to downtown and to Seattle.

By almost every account, the catalyst for this turnaround was the unlikely marriage between the U.S. District Court and the deteriorating station. The historic station was renovated and a modern wing was added to make a new home for the courts, which moved there from downtown in 1992. The project was instigated by citizen activists, nudged along by a local congressman, backed by Congress, coordinated by the city and funded by the city and state.

The investment in the new and renovated facilities was relatively modest, about \$50 million. But it was hugely symbolic, and has helped trigger nearly a half-billion dollars in public and private investment in the immediate area. "There are things going on that we never expected to see when we moved down here," said U.S. District Judge Robert Bryan, who oversaw the project for the federal court. "The federal presence made things seem possible, rather than impossible."

Assembling Support

Union Station occupies an important place in Tacoma's psyche. The city worked hard to beat out Seattle and become, in 1873, the terminus of a rail line that reached to the Great Lakes and beyond. Civic boosters soon christened Tacoma as the "City of Destiny."

But those high hopes were repeatedly dashed. Tacoma had to lobby the railroad for nearly forty years before it built a station worthy of the city's ambitions. The architects (Reed and Stem, who designed New York City's Grand Central Terminal) designed a station that fully resonated with the spirit of the time, but whose copper dome soon sprung a leak.

And not long after the station was finished in 1911, passenger railroad travel began its long, inexorable decline. The station's usefulness declined, and the railroad converted the waiting and dining rooms to office space. The building's upkeep, never easy because of poor roof design, became increasingly difficult; the rotunda was closed in 1981 because of damage to the ceiling. After Amtrak relocated in 1984, the station was boarded up, the passenger concourse was torn down to make way for a freeway spur into downtown, and thieves looted the brass and copper.

The Burlington Northern Railroad, which owned the station, began making plans to demolish what was left. But citizens organized a grassroots group, "Save our Station," and began searching for a way to re-use it. They sought the help of the city, which had taken the option to buy the station if it could find a new user, and local Congressman Norman Dicks.

The city sought proposals for the station, but found no takers. Then a letter appeared in the local newspaper: Why not use it as a new courthouse? Though the federal government was

looking for more office space in Tacoma, the court itself had no plan to move, Bryan recalled. Nevertheless, Dicks seized on the idea and presented it to the district's chief judge, who acquiesced to the proposal.

GSA was reluctant to come aboard; the complications were considerable. It was difficult to imagine how a building that was designed, after all, as a train station could provide functional court space. Civic leaders were demanding continued public access to the station, while courts were generally cautious about opening their facilities to general use. There was the issue of the building's location, a few blocks too far from the heart of downtown. Dicks kept the pressure on, sponsoring legislation in 1987 that directed GSA to use the train station for a new courthouse and provided funds for an architectural feasibility study.

The first stumbling block to tackle was financing. Most courthouses are funded through Congressional appropriations, but there was no such money for this project. So Tacoma and GSA worked out an arrangement in which the city would manage the project and fund it through lease-revenue bonds, backed by a thirty-year GSA lease. "The real challenge was entering into a fixed-price agreement, not knowing what the building would cost," recalled city engineer Craig Sivley, who managed the project for Tacoma's public works department. "It was a tremendous risk for the city."

Reinhabiting a Classic Building

The next challenge, fitting a modern courthouse into an 85-year-old railroad terminal, touched mainly on two issues. The station did not have enough usable space, and making productive and public use of the space there would require creative modifications of standard court

design principles.

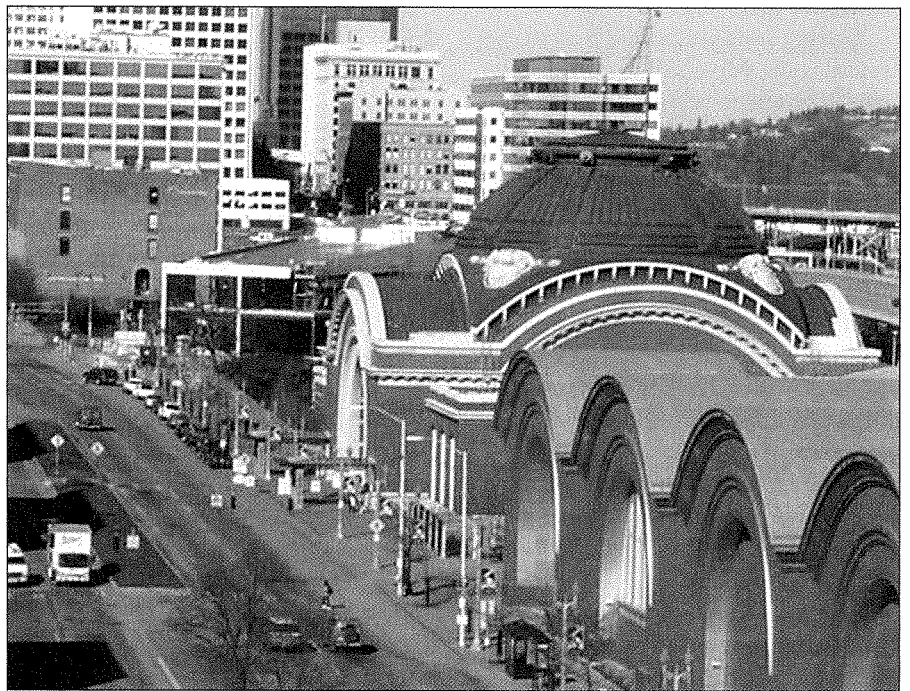
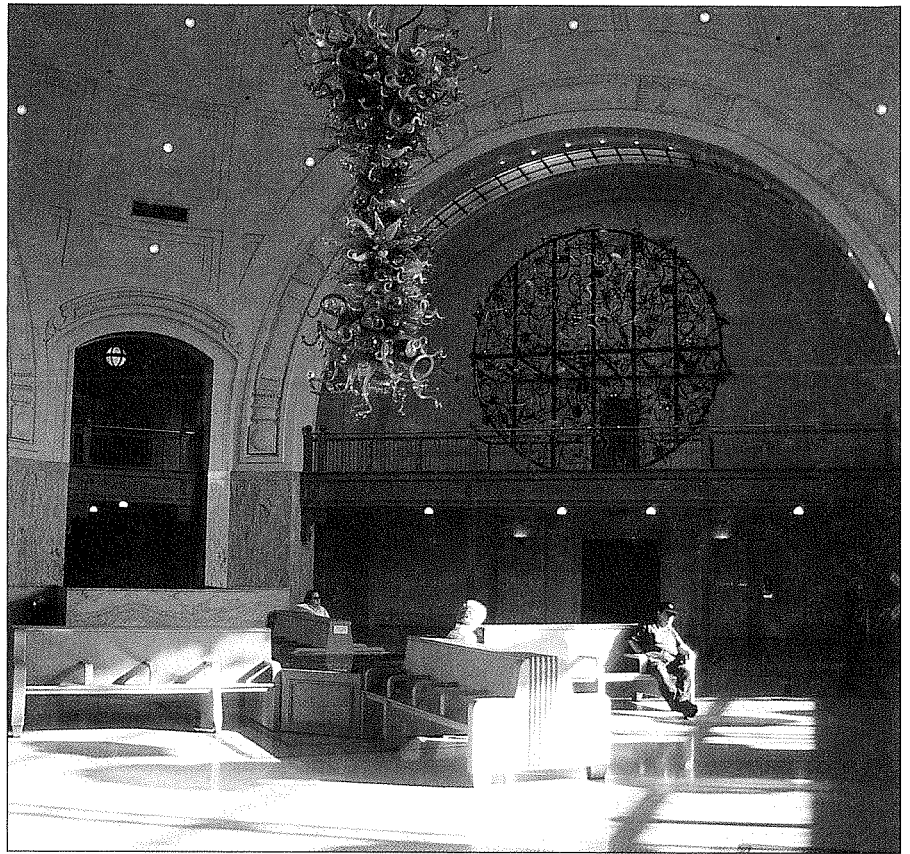
"It's a great big building, but most of the space was in the rotunda, and it was not sufficient for a courthouse," Bryan recalled. "So it became apparent early on that we would have to add on, which nobody had anticipated. And that meant we had to think of some way to use this historic building."

There was not enough floor space in the wings off the rotunda to accommodate a courtroom, chambers and jury room all in one place. But judges and the architects (Merritt+Pardini/TRA) found a solution: the ceilings were so high that an extra floor could be tucked underneath. "When we hit on the idea of stacking the chambers and using a balcony row of seating in the courtroom, we were able to make the station work," Bryan said.

The next problem was balancing public access and security concerns. Since most of the court space would be in a new wing behind the historic station, "we could leave the rotunda open and move security to the rear, except when circumstances would require security at the front door," Bryan explained. That has happened only a handful of times, he added.

GSA's eventual commitment to the project, and assurance that public access to the rotunda could be maintained, unlocked other resources. The Washington State Legislature provided \$4 million to cover the costs of acquiring the building and restoring the exterior. The City of Tacoma borrowed \$41 million to rehabilitate the station and build the new courthouse.

Union Station thus re-opened triumphantly in 1992 as a federal courthouse. Several thousand people showed up for its rededication, wondering perhaps if this civic celebration held any more promise than the one held eighty years earlier. This time, because of the federal government's



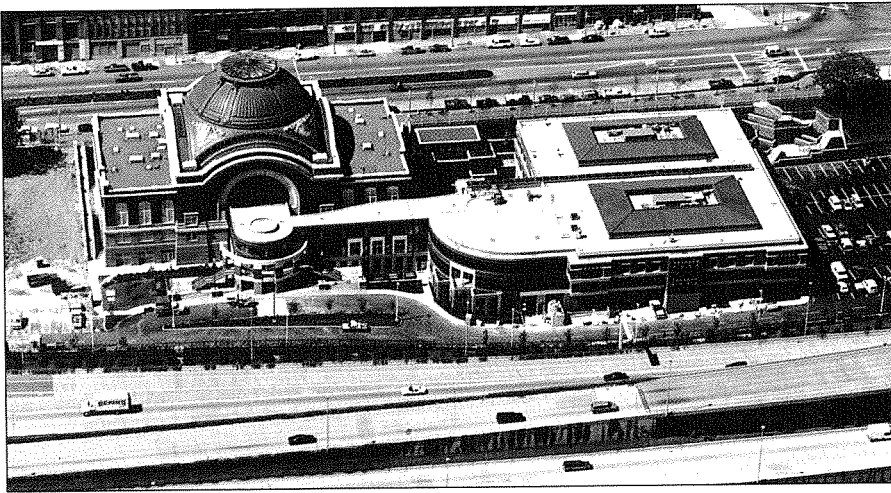
firm commitment to the area, and because of the city's ability to capitalize on that commitment, the story has turned out quite differently.

A Community Gathering Place

Despite the heightened security concerns resulting from the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in

Above: The Union Station Rotunda, with Dale Chihuly's "Cobalt Blue Chandelier" and light cast by "Monarchs" on the floor. Photo by Todd W. Bressi.

Below: Union Station, with the new Washington State History Museum (foreground) and the new Tacoma Art Museum (under construction) flanking it, and the center of the city just beyond. Photo courtesy GSA Public Buildings Service, Pacific Northwest/Arctic Region.



Oklahoma City and the attack on the World Trade Center, the Union Station rotunda has reestablished itself as one of Tacoma's grandest public spaces. Public access has changed little since the courthouse first opened: the rotunda is open to the public during business hours and for special events at other times. Visitors must now show identification at the front door, but the courts' security checkpoint is still at the rear.

The rotunda is a public resource in several ways. Most significantly, perhaps, it has been reinvented as one of the most stunning public art galleries in the Puget Sound region. Glass sculptor Dale Chihuly (a Tacoma native) and the Tacoma Art Museum teamed up to loan five projects that are installed in the rotunda. Chihuly also displays conceptual drawings of upcoming projects there, and his studio provides a full-time, on-site docent to answer questions and give tours.

GSA also makes the space available for cultural events. The rotunda is a key stop on Tacoma's ArtWalk, which allows the public to tour cultural facilities for free one evening each month. On those evenings GSA has helped organize activities like a performance by ballet students and an arts fair that provides teachers with a chance to learn about local youth arts programs.

The rotunda can also be rented for events like graduation ceremonies, weddings and banquets. About forty of these events take place each year, usually in the evening, following a protocol set GSA and the courts set up to ensure that events do not disturb

court proceedings, building manager Rick Gordon said.

"Courts have always been a center of community in this country, but I don't know of a court, except the U.S. Supreme Court, where there has been such an effort to make it a public building and invite people in for matters that are not court related," Bryan said. "This is still a social center and a historic center of Tacoma."

A Catalyst for Change

As the Union Station arrangements came together and design got underway, the city turned its attention to the worn-out warehouse district that surrounds it and the polluted waterfront on the other side of the freeway. "If we could get this courthouse squared away, we thought, it would turn that neighborhood around," said Sivley.

The first step was persuading the Washington State Historical Museum, which needed more space, to relocate from its facility on the north side of town. The city provided a site right next door to the station and the state underwrote the \$36 million construction cost of a new building designed by architects Moore-Andersson Associates very much in the spirit of Union Station. "What worked effectively is that we could show a symbiotic relationship between the projects," Sivley said.

With those projects in the pipeline, city leaders turned their attention to the dilapidated warehouse district across the street. They realized one missing link in the city was higher education, and organized a bid for an

expansion campus for the University of Washington. Tacoma won, and the university began a \$124 million project to retrofit several square blocks of old buildings and add new ones. The campus opened in 1997; currently 2,000 students are enrolled, with plans to expand and serve more than 9,000 students within a decade.

Meanwhile, the city was also beginning plans for the nearby waterfront, which had been designated a federal Superfund site. The city purchased the land for \$6.8 million, worked out an innovative agreement for cleaning it up on an incremental basis, and developed a master plan for housing and public uses. By summer, 2002, the first stretch of a 1.5-mile esplanade had been completed, along with a \$63 million museum devoted to glass and a \$35 million privately-developed building with retail space along the water and 215 apartments above.

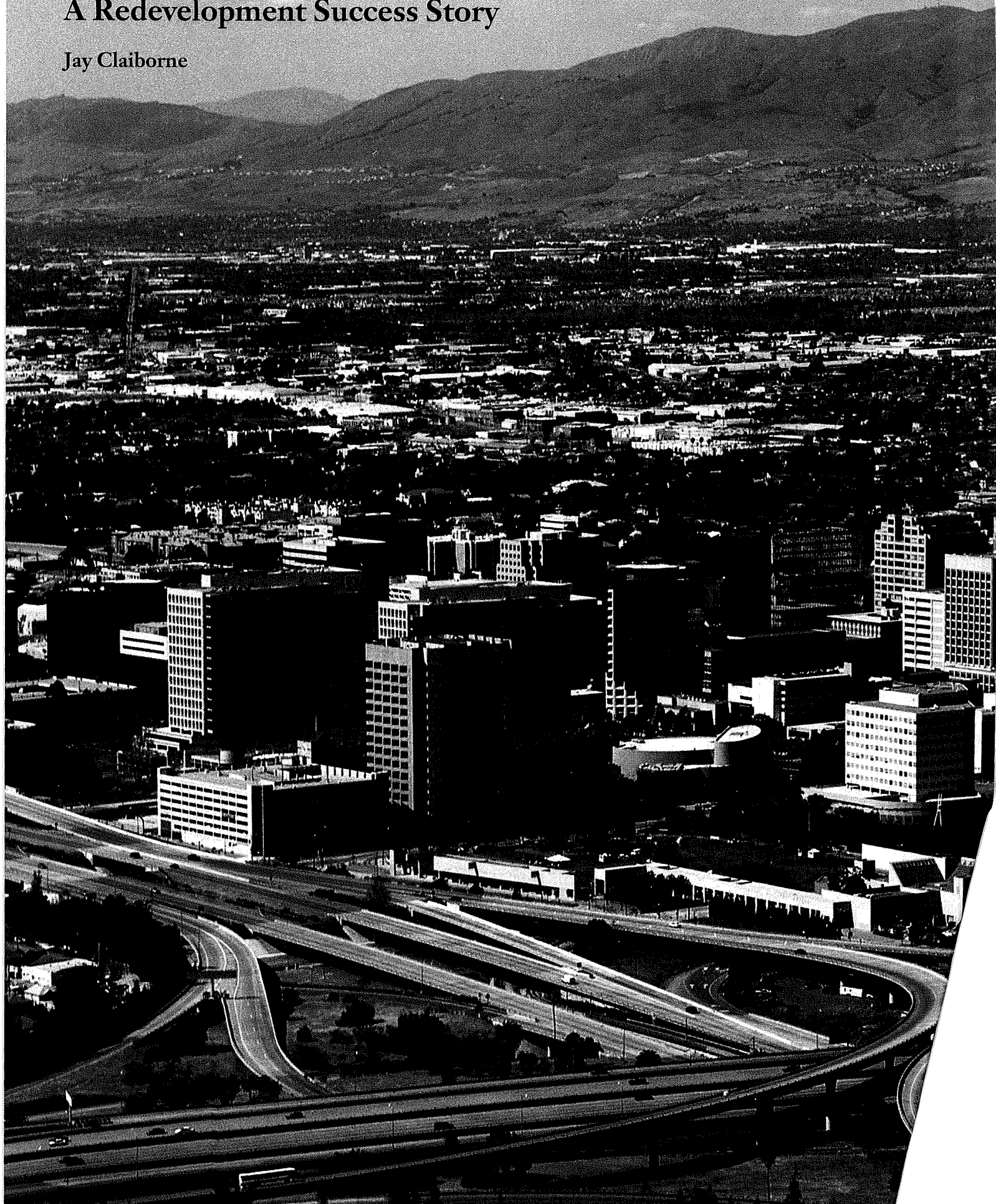
Linking it together is a pedestrian walkway that leads from the waterfront esplanade, up the side of the glass museum onto a public terrace, and across the freeway on a \$6 million "bridge of glass" with dramatic installations also designed by Chihuly. The bridge lands at the courthouse and state history museum and connects, across the street, to the main pedestrian spine of the University of Washington campus.

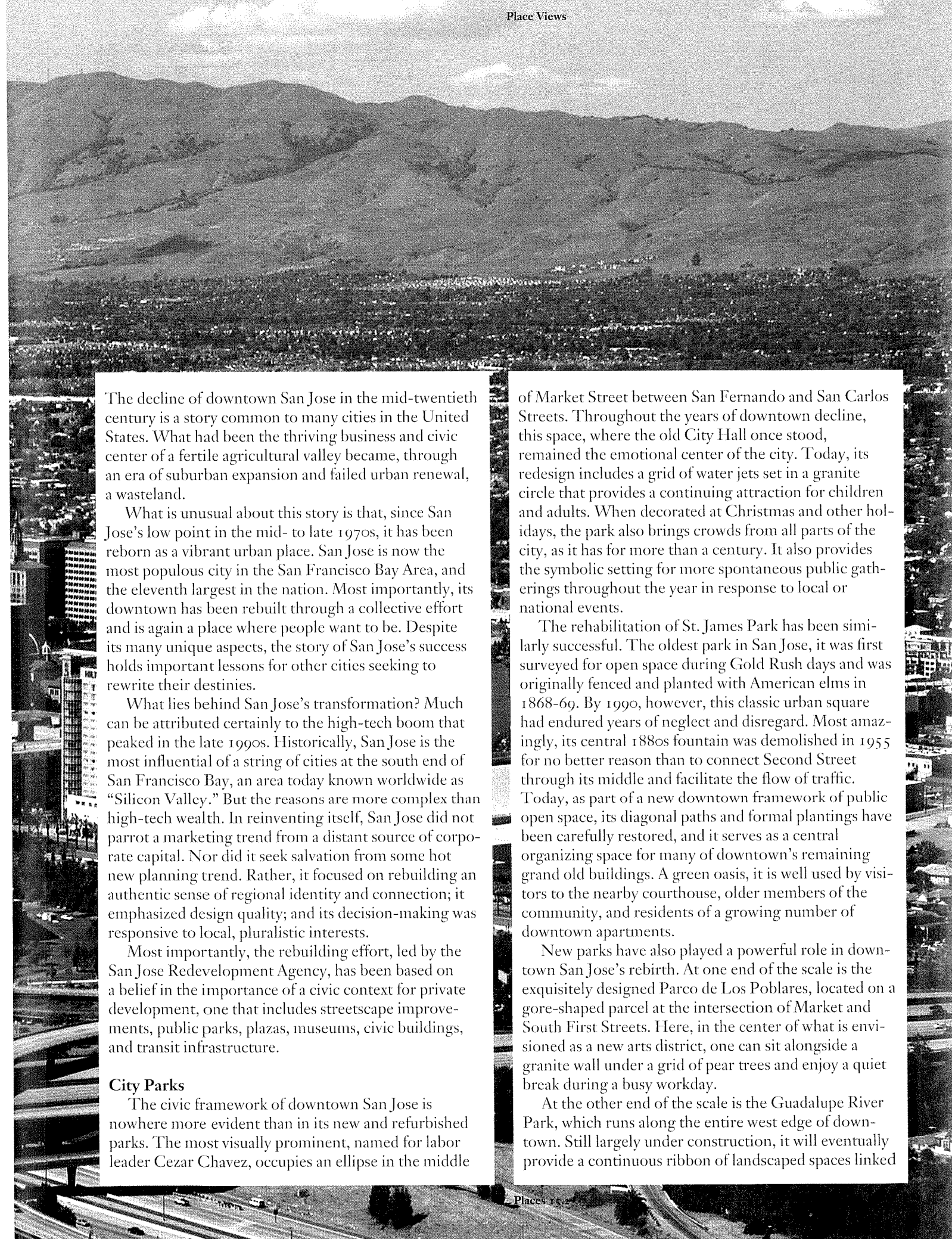
Finally, the Union Station-Waterfront district has a rail connection once again. A new light-rail line, open this year, connects in one direction to Tacoma's historic downtown and, in the other, to Puget Sound's regional commuter rail network. Union Station has become, perhaps for the first time, the symbolic gateway and catalyst for a re-energized city that it was always intended to be.

Above: The Union Station-Courthouse complex, with new addition connected by a passage leading from the rear of the historic structure. Courtesy City of Tacoma.

Rebuilding Downtown San Jose: A Redevelopment Success Story

Jay Claiborne





The decline of downtown San Jose in the mid-twentieth century is a story common to many cities in the United States. What had been the thriving business and civic center of a fertile agricultural valley became, through an era of suburban expansion and failed urban renewal, a wasteland.

What is unusual about this story is that, since San Jose's low point in the mid- to late 1970s, it has been reborn as a vibrant urban place. San Jose is now the most populous city in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the eleventh largest in the nation. Most importantly, its downtown has been rebuilt through a collective effort and is again a place where people want to be. Despite its many unique aspects, the story of San Jose's success holds important lessons for other cities seeking to rewrite their destinies.

What lies behind San Jose's transformation? Much can be attributed certainly to the high-tech boom that peaked in the late 1990s. Historically, San Jose is the most influential of a string of cities at the south end of San Francisco Bay, an area today known worldwide as "Silicon Valley." But the reasons are more complex than high-tech wealth. In reinventing itself, San Jose did not parrot a marketing trend from a distant source of corporate capital. Nor did it seek salvation from some hot new planning trend. Rather, it focused on rebuilding an authentic sense of regional identity and connection; it emphasized design quality; and its decision-making was responsive to local, pluralistic interests.

Most importantly, the rebuilding effort, led by the San Jose Redevelopment Agency, has been based on a belief in the importance of a civic context for private development, one that includes streetscape improvements, public parks, plazas, museums, civic buildings, and transit infrastructure.

City Parks

The civic framework of downtown San Jose is nowhere more evident than in its new and refurbished parks. The most visually prominent, named for labor leader Cezar Chavez, occupies an ellipse in the middle

of Market Street between San Fernando and San Carlos Streets. Throughout the years of downtown decline, this space, where the old City Hall once stood, remained the emotional center of the city. Today, its redesign includes a grid of water jets set in a granite circle that provides a continuing attraction for children and adults. When decorated at Christmas and other holidays, the park also brings crowds from all parts of the city, as it has for more than a century. It also provides the symbolic setting for more spontaneous public gatherings throughout the year in response to local or national events.

The rehabilitation of St. James Park has been similarly successful. The oldest park in San Jose, it was first surveyed for open space during Gold Rush days and was originally fenced and planted with American elms in 1868-69. By 1990, however, this classic urban square had endured years of neglect and disregard. Most amazingly, its central 1880s fountain was demolished in 1955 for no better reason than to connect Second Street through its middle and facilitate the flow of traffic. Today, as part of a new downtown framework of public open space, its diagonal paths and formal plantings have been carefully restored, and it serves as a central organizing space for many of downtown's remaining grand old buildings. A green oasis, it is well used by visitors to the nearby courthouse, older members of the community, and residents of a growing number of downtown apartments.

New parks have also played a powerful role in downtown San Jose's rebirth. At one end of the scale is the exquisitely designed Parco de Los Poblares, located on a gore-shaped parcel at the intersection of Market and South First Streets. Here, in the center of what is envisioned as a new arts district, one can sit alongside a granite wall under a grid of pear trees and enjoy a quiet break during a busy workday.

At the other end of the scale is the Guadalupe River Park, which runs along the entire west edge of downtown. Still largely under construction, it will eventually provide a continuous ribbon of landscaped spaces linked



by trails. Completed sections already function as informal playing fields and locations for concerts and festivals, and the meadow and grounds surrounding the new Children's Discovery Museum are now directly connected to the downtown by an elegant pedestrian bridge.

The Redevelopment Agency took a typically proactive approach to this project. Seeing an opportunity to create a major regional park, it successfully lobbied the Army Corps of Engineers to shelve its original plan to contain the small Guadalupe River within a concrete flood channel. The new master plan incorporates a system of naturalized flood plains, acceptable to federal engineers, which can provide recreational spaces when the river is at normal flow.

The Redevelopment Agency's approach to streetscape projects has been equally creative. Following its reorganization in 1979 under Frank Taylor, the agency identified streetscape improvements as the most cost-effective way to build civic character and create an environment that would attract new development. Downtown streets today are lined with rows of large-stature trees that provide shade, color and texture. Special attention has been paid to lighting, consistency of materials between streets and buildings, and to the use of soothing colors. Drainage structures are hidden, and manhole covers are embossed with the city seal. Enameled sunburst signs identify historic landmarks. Along First and Second Streets, the multi-segmented trolleys of the county transit agency roll into downtown under a leafy canopy of sycamore trees. And since the tracks are located in a sidewalk area without

barriers, pedestrians can reclaim full use of the space when the trolleys roll away.

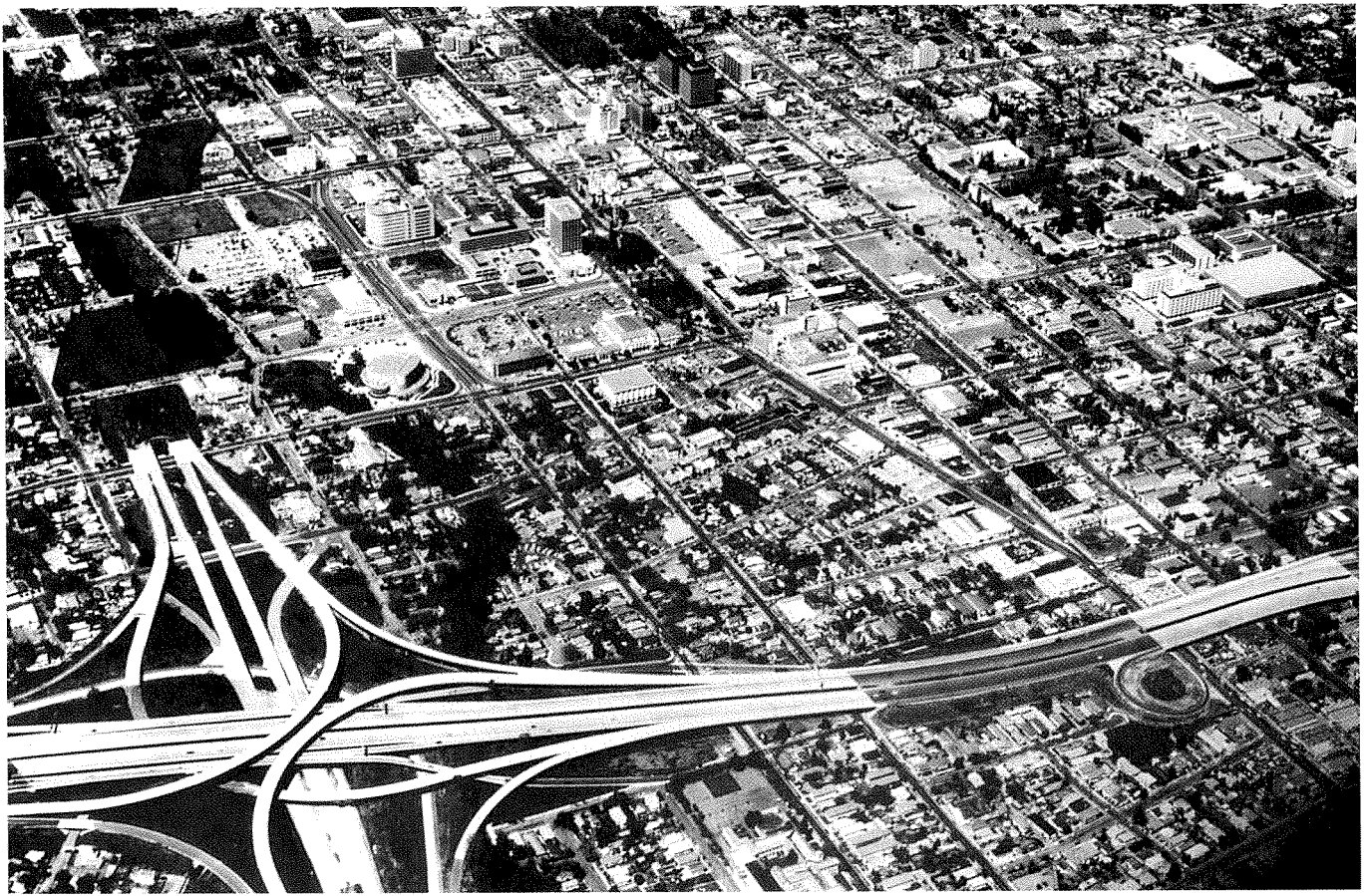
Such an abundance of high-quality, human-scale materials and good design enriches the experience of strolling through the downtown in a climate that is usually sunny and mild. Unlike in many other Bay Area cities, evenings in San Jose remain pleasantly warm much of the year, a reminder of why the Santa Clara Valley, where the city is located, was once called "the valley of the heart's delight."

In Retrospect

Such a climate had once made the San Jose area a favored location for Native American settlement. However, after the Spanish discovered San Francisco Bay in the mid-eighteenth century, they overwhelmed local Ohlone culture, and, in 1777, the city was established as one of the new mission towns along El Camino Real. Later, as part of an independent Mexico, the area came to be dominated by the wealthy owners of vast *ranchos*.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Gold Rush brought a large, diverse, and unruly new population to California. Many of these people were migrants from the eastern United States, who looked upon the rich agricultural lands of the South Bay as their "manifest destiny." Not surprisingly, following California statehood, the *ranchos* lands were seized, and a new Anglo-dominated culture took hold.

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, San Jose promoted itself as an alternative to the "sinful" and "lawless" city to the north — San Francisco. Its leaders



came from a prosperous new middle class of farmers, merchants, religious figures, and educators. For a short time in the 1850s, the city served as the capital of the new state of California. San Jose State University became a leading educational institution, and its downtown cathedral became a center of Catholic worship.

By the late nineteenth century, much of the Santa Clara Valley had been planted with plums, apricots, cherries, and other fruits — all of which thrived in the benign climate. For nearly a century, fruit growing and canning were staples of the local economy. Early-twentieth-century accounts describe the beauty of San Jose's cathedral and Bank of America tower, the tallest building downtown, rising above a springtime sea of pink and white blossoms.

As in major cities of the West Coast, World War II brought profound changes. Military spending, including shipbuilding and the development of nearby Moffett Field Naval Air Station, created thousands of new jobs in the Bay Area. Following the war, returning servicemen and their families further swelled the local population. Meanwhile, Cold War military research and development continued to provide an engine for economic growth. During this time, large farm-machinery and cannery buildings served as readymade facilities for defense-industry suppliers — leading, for example, to the transition of the Farm Machinery Corporation into a major defense contractor, FMC. (Later, some of these same buildings would provide start-up space for a new generation of high-tech ventures.)

Being less constrained by geography than other Bay Area cities, San Jose grew rapidly. In 1960, its population

was only slightly more than 204,000. But between 1960 and 2000, it grew significantly every decade, adding approximately 691,000 new residents, finally surpassing San Francisco in population in 1990.

By the mid-1960s the orchards surrounding the city had all but disappeared, replaced by suburban residential subdivisions, shopping centers, office parks, and freeways. Sprawling, automobile-convenient development drained much of the vitality from the once-thriving downtown. With the opening of the Valley Fair Shopping Mall in the mid-1950s, Hart's, the last downtown department store, closed. The city's major newspaper, the *Mercury-News*, moved to an office-park location on the northeast fringe of the city. Most symbolically, perhaps, San Jose's City Hall was moved from downtown to North First Street in 1958. Following the architectural fashion of the times, it took the form of a lushly landscaped superblock of modern, low-rise buildings with a signature mid-rise tower. The old City Hall, a fanciful turn-of-the-century structure (1887-88) with great civic presence and urban character, was demolished.

Throughout this period, reaction to the decline of downtown was typical in its concern for the removal of

Previous overleaf: Downtown San Jose looking northeast. Photo courtesy of SJRA.

Opposite: Downtown San Jose was a thriving local business center at the turn of the twentieth century. Photo courtesy of SJRA.

Above: Following years of failed reclamation efforts, downtown San Jose was dominated in the late 1960s by abandoned buildings and parking lots. Photo courtesy of SJRA.



“blight.” But many of the sites cleared for redevelopment would remain vacant for years. And those projects that were built often created only dead street frontage.

San Jose in the 1960s and 70s seemed to typify the decentralized growth that many planners viewed as the inevitable future of the modern city. San Jose was seen as the ultimate suburbia. For San Franciscans, it was not even a place; it was a joke.

Local Pride of Place

Fifteen to twenty years ago, people who insisted that San Jose should be taken seriously were considered either hopelessly unsophisticated or blind. Yet in the mid-1970s an influential group of local leaders made the connection between civic pride, memories of the old downtown, and a new destiny for their city.

At the political helm was Tom McEnery, San Jose’s mayor from 1983 to 1990. A local businessman, history buff, and son of a former mayor, McEnery forged important coalitions that, for years to come, provided the base of support for downtown projects and programs. Through the 1990s, his successor, Susan Hammer, maintained this commitment, while supporting new programs of public investment for nearby neighborhoods.

Today, a new mayor, Ron Gonzales, has expanded the city’s focus on neighborhood reinvestment, while seeking to put his stamp on downtown projects that have been in the planning stages for years. In particular, he has strongly supported the design of a new downtown City Hall complex as the anchor for a seven-block civic district.

Plans here include a symphony hall, a school, and a new public library (whose strategic location will allow it to be shared by city residents and students and faculty at San Jose State University). Gonzalez has also made the extension of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART) to downtown a priority.

A Dedicated Staff

Over the years San Jose also has benefited from the vision of a core of influential and highly talented city officials, initially led by Redevelopment Director Frank Taylor (1979-99) and his Principal Architect Thomas Aidala (1982-1998). Both shared a belief in the importance of cities and of city design, and they instructed members of their staff to become actively involved in the design of major new development projects. Aidala, in particular, was adept at finding ways to promote creative design solutions that might otherwise have wilted within the city’s bureaucracy. He trained his staff to negotiate with public-works engineers to maintain the integrity of streetscape projects in the face of design standards written primarily for automobiles.

Such a culture of design excellence has continued through several staff transitions. When the number of downtown projects grew dramatically, Walter Rask

Above: Downtown San Jose today. View looking north along First Street transit mall. Photo courtesy of SJRA.

Opposite: Silicon Valley comprises San Jose and other smaller cities at the south end of San Francisco Bay. Map courtesy of SJRA.

(1987-1995) became the agency's Principal Architect, with Aidala continuing as a full-time consultant. Both worked closely with the agency's Principal Landscape Architect, Ken Talbot, on streetscape and open space projects. Subsequent Principal Architects have been Jeff Orberdorfer (1995-2000) and David Nieh (2000-present), in partnership with Principal Landscape Architect and Urban Designer Martin Flores. In 1999, following Frank Taylor's retirement, a new Redevelopment Agency Director, Susan Shick, was appointed by Mayor Gonzalez.

One of the hidden benefits of a talented staff has been an ongoing elevation of public taste. Based on readership for design articles in the *Mercury News*, some might argue that public interest in architecture and urban design is now more sophisticated in San Jose than in other large cities in the Bay Area. In part, this public awareness can be traced to Taylor's establishment of an Urban Design Review Board for major downtown projects. Under his leadership, the board became a public forum on city design, and its profile was raised by his insistence that well-known national and international architects be paid to serve on it.

The Source of Funding

Money, of course, also played a critical role in the rebirth of downtown San Jose. But even here the story has had an important local twist. San Jose was able to take advantage of a one-time exemption to California redevelopment law to combine three noncontiguous plan areas: downtown, Edenvale (an industrial area south of downtown), and Rincon de los Esteros (another industrial area to the north). Consolidation allowed tax-increment funds from one area to be used in the others — a move designed to benefit downtown, which had previously been unable to generate enough redevelopment money on its own.

The financial mechanism underlying redevelopment law in California is eloquently simple. When a new plan area is established, a review of assessed property taxes is made, and the year of its creation becomes the base year. Thereafter, increases in property tax assessments above the base amount constitute the tax increment and may be captured for use within the plan area, rather than being distributed to an entire city or county. The beauty of such a source of funding is that it does not increase taxes; nor is it a "new tax."

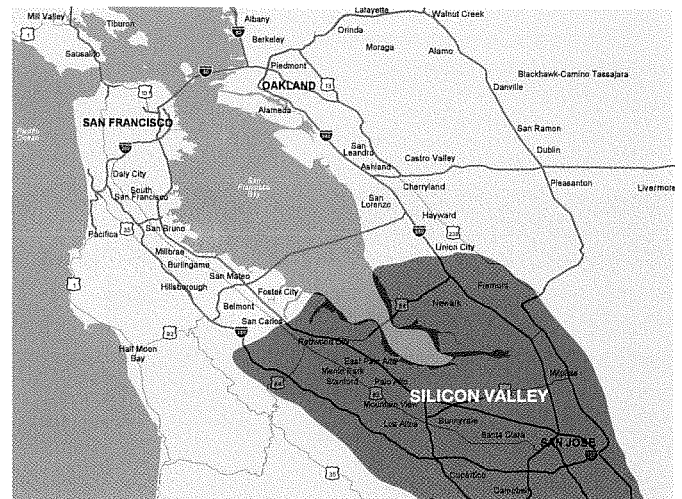
One measure of the success of such a public redevelopment effort is the extent to which it stimulates new private development. In turn, private-sector reinvestment translates into higher assessed property values — and, subsequently, a higher tax-increment. Thus, continuing success at attracting private development creates an

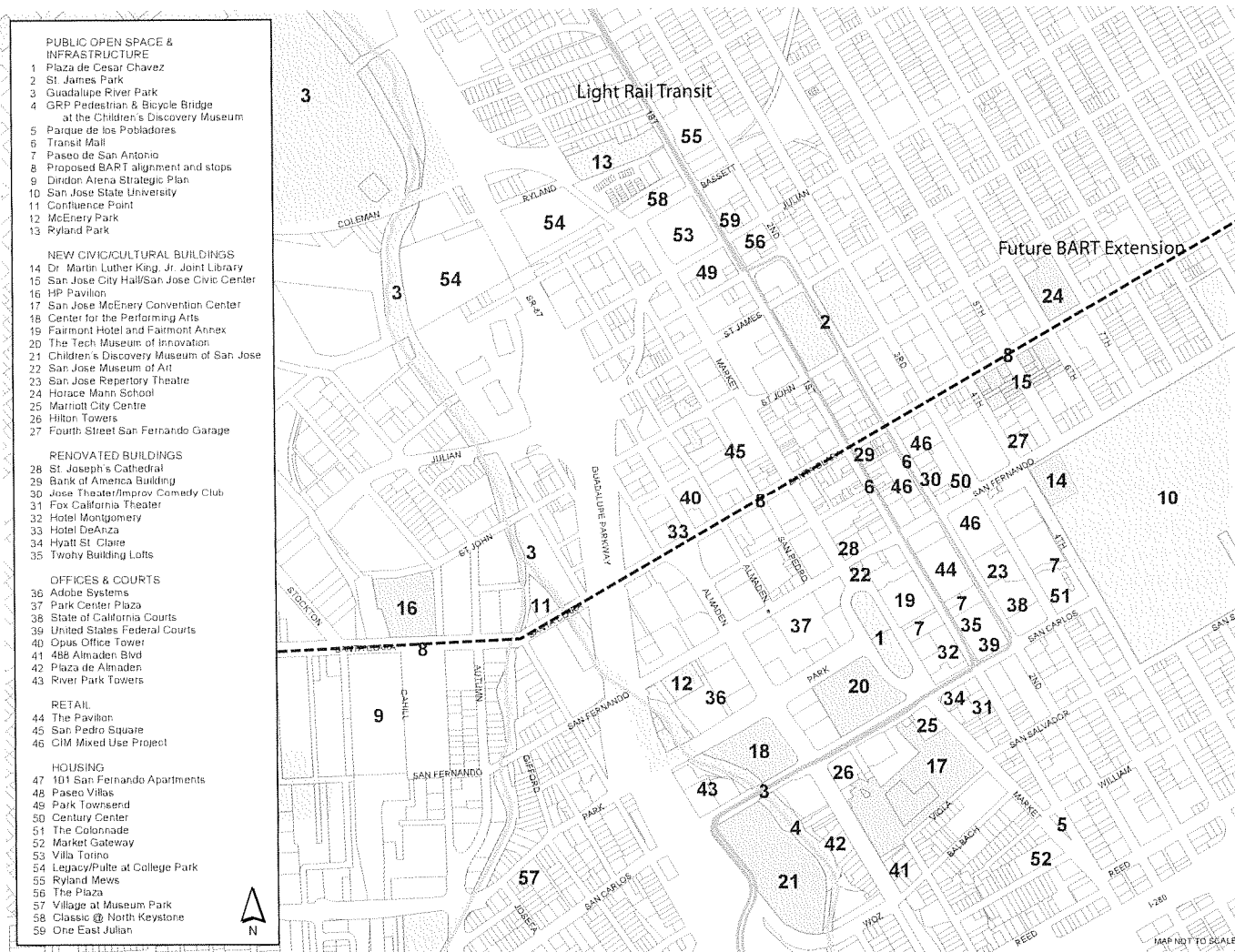
ever-expanding source of public redevelopment money.

In San Jose, the Redevelopment Agency's initial strategy was to fund public improvements in the Rincon de los Esteros area. Projects here included light-rail transit access to downtown and landscape improvements that might enhance its image as a site for new, privately funded high-tech development. Eventually, this effort was so successful that the area became known as the Golden Triangle — now home to such industry giants as Cisco, Intel, Lucent, Netscape and IBM. As tax-increment funds grew, money also became available for strategic downtown projects. In all, slightly more than \$1.2 billion dollars has been generated since the mid-1980s, often as much as \$90 million a year.

The magnitude of this targeted funding may suggest that downtown San Jose's renaissance is only about the power of money. However, large-budget projects don't necessarily add to the civic character of a city. Specifically, in contrast to the privatized nature of the corporate business parks and "campuses" in the Golden Triangle, the agency's use of redevelopment subsidies for major downtown development has emphasized the creation of social, economic, cultural and recreational interconnections.

Most recently, under Mayors Hammer and Gonzales, the Redevelopment Agency's attention has shifted ever more toward housing. Under California redevelopment law, 20 percent of tax-increment monies must be set aside to provide low- and moderate-income housing units. As the surge in residential construction on the edges of downtown now indicates, the city's commitment in this area is strong, and today more and more of the new housing in the downtown area is market rate.





The Missing Component

Retail development has been the one missing element in the rebirth of San Jose's downtown. Frank Taylor never denied the importance of retail to a revived downtown. Yet he considered it secondary to developing a strong framework of street and park improvements, providing civic and cultural attractions, and building a significant quantity of high-density housing. Ultimately, he believed that if these civic objectives were achieved, viable retail — often the fickle Holy Grail of downtown redevelopment schemes — would follow.

Nevertheless, the relative absence of retail is telling. Even today, with an increasing number of housing units and office developments downtown, there are surprisingly few shops. There are a few household- and office-serving stores, and there is even a moderately sized, high-quality grocery. But most of the new retail activity consists of cafes, restaurants, brewpubs, performance clubs, and sports bars. As in most cities today, San Jose's serious retail is still located in outlying malls and older neighborhood districts.

Mayor Gonzales is the most recent to tackle this problem. As late as April 2002, he was touting the success of negotiations with a New York developer, Palladium Co. to build almost 3 million square feet of new offices, shops, restaurants, and housing in the vicinity of St. James Park — an estimated investment of more than \$1 billion. But by the end of the year Palladium had backed out, citing the downturn in the high-tech economy. And, although another developer, CIM Group of Los Angeles, has discussed taking over parts of the project, for the moment major new downtown retail would seem once again to have eluded San Jose.

Such an outcome clearly cannot be blamed entirely on the economy. A huge new mixed-use complex, Santana Row, recently opened in San Jose. But it is located several miles from downtown, near the popular Valley Fair Shopping Center. Quite the opposite of bringing retail back to an authentic city center, it offers a themed, private urban environment within a 40-acre suburban enclave.

In many ways Santana Row is the antithesis of Taylor's vision for downtown. Approximately 1,200 units of housing are located over outlets for mostly upper-end franchise retailers. Other buildings include a multiplex movie theater and a hotel, and everything is organized within a grid of narrow, private streets. In pursuit of an orchestrated pedestrian atmosphere, there are many clearly imported elements, including Parisian-style park benches, a fountain from Barcelona, and a church facade from the south of France.

A New Civic Culture

Despite setbacks such as the continued inability to create a major retail district, downtown San Jose is clearly back in business. Its scale and grandeur give it a serious claim to being the cultural and political center of the Silicon Valley.

San Jose has rewritten its destiny through planned reinvestment in public infrastructure and civic facilities and by rebuilding its downtown as an authentic, public place. While there have been many unique circumstances, including the amount of money available to fund redevelopment projects, the lessons of San Jose's new downtown are worth noting by all who would seek to revitalize their own cities: strong political leadership and the will to build strategic projects; long-range planning for project development and funding opportunities; and design talent responsive to local conditions and fresh solutions. It is an unfolding story of great significance.

Opposite top: Major recent projects in downtown San Jose. Map courtesy of SJRA.

Opposite bottom: San Jose's downtown redevelopment has concentrated on building a new infrastructure of public spaces. Guadalupe River Park looking north to Center for the Performing Arts and Adobe Systems office complex. Photo courtesy of SJRA.