May 12 Doubleheader: Arata Isozaki and Conrad Wachsmann’s 80th Birthday Party

Distinguished Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, designated architect for the Museum of Contemporary Art to be built on Bunker Hill in downtown Los Angeles and featured in the April issue of LA ARCHITECT, will be the speaker at the May Chapter meeting at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, May 12 at the Biltmore Bowl. Co-sponsor with the Chapter is the Isozaki program is the Architecture and Design Support Group chaired by David Martin. Prior to his presentation, Isozaki will join Chapter members and guests in a festive party celebrating the 80th birthday of the late Konrad Wachsmann, a man who devoted his life to the architecture of the last century. “With Love,” the party will feature cake and a no-host bar for all celebrants from 6 to 8 p.m. in honor and memory of the highly respected architect, educator, author and innovator.

California 101: Design Communication is Theme of Monterey Conference

California 101, the CCAIA’s Monterey Design Conference, will take place on the weekend of May 29–31. This year’s theme is Design Communication, and all of the events are aimed at promoting a better understanding of architecture and design in California. The conference offers people a chance to get together in a beautiful setting, hear about local design developments, and enjoy audio-visual presentations about architecture and design, past, present and future.

Architectural Information

Each day of the conference includes an exploration of a particular theme; and on Friday it’s the “Architecture of Information.” Presentations will include an examination of the work of nationally recognized and architectural illustrators Carlos Diniz; a demonstration of Peter Ruesmeier’s two-dimensional architectural simulations including the film, Laika: Streets; and Combs Taylor’s popular slide presentations on the Crystal Palace. In the afternoon, there will be an Eames festival, featuring such films as The Exploding Airport, The National Fisheries Center and Aquarium, Phosphate and the City, and The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire, in Two Minutes. Saturday’s program will be in the tradition of last year’s “block presentations,” but it will be more flexible and will include new material and presentation techniques. Everyone will have the opportunity to see almost everything. Some of the presentations will be continuous, others will take the form of discussions, others will be short and sensory, and the presentations themselves are roving: Robin Wellington Quigley who will lecture on the history of the Eames, will take us through the eyes of two California architects, and MacKinlay, Win­ kneer and McNair’s multi-media slide show on the People’s Republic of China. Other presentations will focus on the architect at work. Roger Kennedy Leib will show his work as a product designer and manufacturer/entrepreneur.

A Message from Your Board

At the beginning of this year, your Board sent out a questionnaire to elicit opinions on a variety of LA Chapter issues and activities. Several issues were subject to some of those you might have a few comments. What were received, however, was an unexpected outpouring of information and responses. And that, so it seems, was the good news. The Board was surprised that you did not even care enough to return the questionnaire. Your Board is aware of the recent problems with our Chapter opera­tion, and we are strongly committed to correcting these deficiencies will be our highest priority. Fundamentally in this remedial operation is the recent employment of Mrs. Ann M. Johnstone, Executive Administrator. Janice is extraordinarily capable and will complement the Board of Directors. By the time you read this, we expect to have a shape to provide all necessary members.

We are planning a number of social events which began with our April chapter dinner meeting. These activities will come together occasion­ally to meet fellow-architects and discuss matters of mutual concern. Along similar lines, we are planning several neighborhood lunch meetings throughout the city. If you are interested in having a stimulating lunch discussion with six or eight of your colleagues, please call the chapter office. Several interesting professional programs are also in the planning stages, and soon we hope to announce a Producer’s Council educational seminar, as well as a fascinating program on “Fires, Floods, and Earthquakes”—natural disasters that concern all architects.

A high priority of this board is our effort to exempt from building de­ partment plan check all projects designed by architects. We are encouraged by support at the City Council and hope to report further progress soon. We are also particip­ating in the registration legislation of the AIA, which aim is to modify the California State Board of Architectural Education. We may yet achieve a majority of architect members on that important board.

Finally, we are continuing our involvement with historical preser­vation, energy awareness, membership development, design awards, etc., etc. Perhaps later this year we will be able to report to you directly at the LA/AIA first annual Chapter Convention. In the meantime, we will keep you informed—and we hope you’ll keep in touch, too.

Lester Wathenbeer
President LAIA

LA Architect

May, 1981

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Inside:

A. Jeffrey Skoncheck reviews LA by and Michael Graves lecture at USC California 101, the CCAIA Mon­ terey Design Conference takes place from May 29–31. This year’s theme is “Design Communication.” The CAAIA National AIA Convention takes place in Minneapolis from May 17–21. This year’s theme is “A Line on Design and Energy.” Bernard Maybeck conducted experiments with many materials—Bubl­ estone concrete was one of them. Richard Rice, son of the engi­ neer/contractor who invented Bub­ lestone, describes Maybeck’s work in that material.

Ongoing Events:

Tours of the Schindler House, Saturday, 11:00–12:00 p.m. 835 No. Kings Rd., Los Angeles, CA 90069 (213) 651-1510, admission $3.00

200 Years/Images of Los Angeles, a Bicentennial Tour is taken at the Dorothy V. Dor­ pemeh Square, through September 1981.

Lectures:

May 7: Patrick Morreau, lectures on the Royal Exchange Theatre, UCLA Architecture Building, Room 1102, 8:00 p.m.

May 11: Helmut Schulitz, archi­ tect, Department of Architecture, Cal Poly Pomona, 8:00 p.m.

May 12: Arata Isozaki lectures on his recent work, 8:00 p.m., Grand Ballroom, Biltmore Hotel.

May 15: Howard Backen and Robert Arrigoni, San Francisco architects, discuss their award win­ ning work, USC Henry Hall 101, 1:00 p.m.


The City of Los Angeles presented the LA/AIA with the certificate pictured above in honor of the LA by LA Bicentennial exhibition.

Events:

May 12: Konrad Wachsmann Memorial Birthday Reception, 6:30 p.m., Grand Ballroom, Biltmore Hotel.

June 17: John Lloyd Wright Tour, Society of Architectural Historians. For further information: Leslie Heumann (213) 271-9581 evening.


June 4–5: Systems ’81, second annual international conference on production and management in A/E firms. Hotel information contact at LAX, registration $99. For further infor­ mation, call: Carol Gosselin (203) 666-9487, or write P.O. Box 13116, Newington, CT 06111.

Courses:

May 24: Architectural License Seminar (ALS), design seminar for June exam, Travelodge International Hotel, 9750 Airport Blvd. For further information, call (213) 208-7112.
Chapter News and Notes

The 219th meeting of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, March 3, 1981

Board of Directors will be considering the resolution to provide for national elections based on majority membership vote. Treasurer's Report: As of 2/21/81 there is a balance of $16,700.00 in the two bank accounts (Bank of America and Pacific Bank); accounts are payable are current. Outstanding loan has been paid. Due to the increase in anticipated dues income.

H. Newman's committee will continue discussion as to whether a bookstore and Associates will provide for membership and the community. He has been instructed to continue discussion as to provision of Associates' bookstore and Associates' library. He received a proposal for the library. He informed members of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and Associates, and will provide information on how to support same.
Futures Conference
"Los Angeles 2000" is the theme of a conference on the future to be held Saturday, May 9 at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

Looking ahead two decades, speakers and participants in the meeting will try to define the critical challenges that will confront Los Angeles in terms of its natural resources and their availability and people and their needs. Harvey Perloff, Dean of UCLA School of Architecture and Urban Planning, is Conference Chairman. Energy, water and air quality will be the subjects of the morning panel. Panelists will be Glenn Rocklund, Vice President of the Southern California Edison Company; James Walker, a member of the California Energy Commission; Duane Georgeson, engineer-in-charge of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power; Charles Phelps of the Rand Corporation, Gladys Meade, director of air conservation for the California Lung Association, and Carleton Scott, director of environmental sciences for the Union Oil Company. Moderator will be Richardillard, author of "Eden in Jeruslcy.

The afternoon panel will deal with changing population characteristics, economic development, crime, community services, and public policy. Participants will be Lee Eyster, an architectural photographer at UCLA; William Huston, president of Watson Industries; and James Mcfall of the United Auto Workers Region 6; Edward Stronkob, MD., Emeritus Professor of human behavior at the University of Medicine, Tony Rios, Executive Director of the Community Services Organization in East Los Angeles, and Frank Henrikis, Director of Planning for the Southern California Association of Governments. Moderator, for the afternoon panel will be Ann Bosen member and Past Chairman of the Los Angeles County Fire Services Commission, and Past President of the Los Angeles Chapter of the AIA.

The Conference registration and luncheon fee is $10 per person. Reservations can be made by sending a check or money order payable to California AIA, 650 South Grand Avenue, Room 911, Los Angeles, CA 90017.

AIA Praised at Downtown Awards
The LA/AIA was among twelve award recipients at the first annual Real Estate Awards Luncheon held at the downtown Breakfast Club at the LA Chamber of Commerce on March 26. The Chapter was commended "for taking a leadership voice of responsibility in the safe-guarding of the Central Library as an important civic and architectural landmark." James Pulliam accepted the award on behalf of the Chapter. The awards were intended to highlight both the good and the bad in downtown urban development activity over the last five years. Judges were Edordi Contini, Urban Innovations Group, Harvey Perloff, Dean of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA; and John Pastier, architectural critic and culture writer. The following projects were commended:
- 800 Truck Street: The project was praised for combining artists’ studios with related businesses, "proving that buildings and even neighborhoods considered obsolete can be sensitively and practicaly recycled.
- The Varsity Theatre: It was commended as "imaginative adaptive use which has infused the downtown area with an attractive nighttime activity.
- The Broadmoore Hotel received an award as a "model of historic preservation which is contributing to the selective modernization, contributing to the revitalization activity of downtown and reestablishing its original high standard of service."
- 740 South Olive residence was commended as a "successful remodeling of a former commercial building to senior citizen housing, improving social consciousness and economic ingenuity to create an improvement in the area.
- The Children’s Museum was praised for "the establishment of a retail institution in a retail setting adding to the vitality of the downtown area and unex- pected dimension to downtown."
- The Watts Towers Arts Center was received for "successfully resisting the forces of change and whims of fashion, and retaining their traditional identity and local mark."

The Japanese Village Plaza was commended for "approaching perception and sensitivity to an existing environment, and rejuvenating economic environment of a deteriorated area.
- The Broadmoore Hotel was praised as a program designed to cope with a current social problem, resisting the temptation to find a narrow physical solution."

ARCO was commended as "an enlightened member of the business community," for its continuing and substantial support of civic and architectural endeavors downtown; and its concern for the future as well as the present.
- The Oviatt Building was praised "for selective historic preservation in conjunction with commercial revitalization; a vote of confidence for an overlapped downtown district."
- Broadway Street Scene was praised for "contributing to the health of Broadway as a commercial and social entity and as the city’s most active pedestrian street."
- In contract with the projects which were praised, the organization selected three projects for criticism.
- The base of the Bonaventure Hotel was singled out as "an ambitious architectural conception which..."
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"A house of natural materials repeats the color of the rocks... it absorbs the light and, with the help of trellises and vines, hides among the browns and greens of the hillside, and is finished for all time."

—Bernard Maybeck

By Richard B. Rice

Experiments with Cellular Concrete

Ornamental flames above the fireplace in Anderson Hall were cast in Bubblestone.

Bubblestone was used for the window tracery at the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Berkeley.

In early 1923 Bernard Maybeck heard of a new building material, the cellular concrete called Bubblestone, invented by my father, John A. Rice. On investigating the material, Maybeck noted the novel properties of heat insulation, fluidity, and a density of only one-fourth to one-half that of concrete. To determine how these values might be used, he conducted experiments, at intervals, over the next eleven years. I was involved in nearly all of them, and the memories linger. My father had moved to Berkeley from Arizona after retiring from a successful career as a mining engineer and geologist. Becoming interested in cellular concrete, he invented and patented practical methods of making it. Although I was only fourteen in 1923, I helped him in his laboratory with all aspects of the work. Maybeck enjoyed visiting us to discuss possible new uses for Bubblestone. The two men were good friends. Shortly after becoming acquainted with the product, Maybeck planned his first experiment. Two years earlier he had erected a dining hall and a kitchen at Glen Alpine Springs, a secluded resort community near the south end of Lake Tahoe where he often vacationed with his family. A permanent site being available there, he decided to build an experimental cabin to test the practicality of small Bubblestone buildings, provide experience in construction techniques, and evaluate the product for other uses. He designed an all-Bubblestone structure, 12 by 12 and 10 feet high, that could be built at minimum cost and effort. In spite of its simplicity, it did not lack character, and it harmonized with his other buildings and nearby granite boulders. Its five arched ribs and its interior and exterior sheathing slabs were made at the laboratory. When cured they were sent to Glen Alpine, assembled, and the voids filled with light Bubblestone. The cabin turned out as planned, and Maybeck was convinced Bubblestone could be used wherever appropriate. After 58 Sierra Nevada winters, it is still
structurally sound. Ironically, while he was erecting the fireproof cabin, his home in Berkeley was destroyed by a disastrous fire which swept the hillside.

Seeking a low-cost method of making wood frame houses fire-resistant, Maybeck invented a simple technique of dipping burlap sacks in Bubblestone, and applying them, shingle fashion, as roof finish and exterior wall sheathing. No skilled labor was required, and the freshly dipped sacks could easily be trimmed and molded to fit.

He experimented with his Bubblestone sacks on two small neighboring buildings intended to replace his home destroyed by fire. The one at 2 Maybeck Twin Drive was named "The Cottage," and the other, at 2711 Buena Vista Way, was his studio, often referred to as his "sack house." To him, the honestly random texture and the controlled shadings of the sacks were important features of the invention.

One Saturday he hired me to make the Bubblestone and apply the sacks to the Cottage, asking me to bring a neighbor boy to help. We soon learned how to dip a sack to obtain a smooth coating, and how to hang it neatly, with overlaps, onto the slats nailed to the studs. Maybeck supervised happily, often dipping and hanging a sack or two himself. He let them dry randomly, for he wanted the texture to suggest freedom from artificiality and restraint. This naturalness was enhanced by mixing into the Bubblestone two or three mineral earth colors he selected from the variety provided.

I recall him studying the building and the hillside, saying, "Put more brown in the next batch, and just a touch of red, the hillside," saying. "Put more brown in the studio, which were industrial sacks, brought the outdoors in.

Equipment borrowed from the Bubblestone laboratory, and used at the studio, consisted of a mixer, the foam-maker used at Glen Alpine, and a gasoline engine. The mixer was a commercial dough maker, its paddles replaced by a cylinder of course wire screen. It mixed cement with water and a little sand, then stirred in the foam. Bubblestone was first made by a two-step process: first, foam was made of water and a small amount of a liquid stabilizing agent called Bubblestone compound; second, the foam was mixed into a cement slurry. When efficient aterating screens and stronger compounds had been developed, Bubblestone was made in a single step, often in two-cubic-yard batches.

Maybeck’s sack dipped container Bubblestone. A sack was dampened, then laid on the curved screen to become saturated as the cr ank was turned one revolution.

In 1927 Maybeck used Bubblestone sacks on the roof of a house in Kensington, north of Berkeley. The large turned-down eaves and the rough Bubblestone were intended to suggest English thatch, a vision he was using in preliminary designs for Principia College buildings. When a new owner of the Kensington house was dissatisfied with his sacks, Maybeck had a simple solution. He asked me to pour Bubblestone along the ridge and let it flow in uneven streams to cover the roof. The resulting Bubblestone slabs, had developed the most widely used lightweight structural roofing system, and also used Bubblestone for poured-in-place floor and roof fill. They submitted a bid, but new specifications required heavy steel and concrete roofs.

In designing the campus, Maybeck sought to capture the informality, permanence and sincerity of an old English village. On Howard House, for example, he rounded the tiled eaves to suggest thatch. When this was proposed, one patron wrote to the college he "viewed with alarm" a prospect of imitation thatched roofs, and offered to pay for a consultation with Frank Lloyd Wright to properly advise the Principia architect.

It was in 1934, in Anderson Hall, that Maybeck again used Bubblestone. The two large wings of the dormitory are connected by a baronial living room. The steel truss members are fireproofed with concrete, which also forms their Gothic ornament representing carved timbers. As the interior near completion, Maybeck noticed the plainness of the concrete hood over the large fireplace. Deciding to add sculpture to accentuate the area and balance the other shapes in the room, he envisioned four stylized flames rising in the opening and mounting the hood. Since the material of the flames had to be fluid, permanent, and lightweight to avoid loading the hood, the choice was obvious to him. In the same manner as the capstones, the flames were successfully cast of Bubblestone.

In 1938 Maybeck was ending his career, and I was starting mine in the aircraft industry. My father retired—a pioneer in his field. The development of cellular concrete continued, mostly abroad, its worldwide production in 1937 exceeded 7 million cubic yards. Maybeck saw the potential, and in his own way, with enthusiasm and imagination, shared in the pioneering. 


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Jeffrey Skorneck

LA Architect May 1981

LA Architect

The architectural community's tribute to the Los Angeles bicentennial was unveiled March 19th at Barnsdall Park with a championship and birthday-bake sale celebration. Co-hosts were LA Executive Director Deborah Feldman and founder and beneficiary of a creative and energetic team led by Richard Saul Wurman, who served as both the light-hearted spirit and the principal architect.

The original idea included the development of a large, easy-to-read guidebook that would capture the image of Los Angeles—its art, its history, its developments and the buildings that have marked the history of the city.

The exhibit was divided into four galleries, each concentrating on an aspect of Los Angeles architectural scene: fantasy, vision, the landscape, and public spaces and private domains. A grand portal for each gallery was selected from among two hundred entries, many submitted by University students.

The AlA steering committee, March 1981, featured the finalists in this competition. But a lot can be learned from the other contenders. Recurrent themes for doorways that would capture the image of Los Angeles according to architectural student participants were the art deco, palm trees and rainbows, free-ways and strip development, and parades of other places and times—transparent in their fakeness. There must be some significance in the fact that entries for the fantasy-visionary door greatly outnumbered those for the other doors. The public door generated the fewest entries. It is also worth noting that images pertaining to downtown Los Angeles were strikingly absent; instead, the doorway competition entries really represented a swath of the city from Hollywood to Santa Monica, the area architects may see most, but one that is miles west of the population centroid.

One doesn't know how to interpret the 1930's symbolism that pervaded so many door entries. Los Angeles couldn't have "peaked" then, except perhaps in the production of romantic movies; our first freeway wasn't dedicated until the early 1940s; and it seems pertinent to dismiss the entrance as homage to the deco revival, a trend already on the wane. Perhaps the explanation is that the Los Angeles "fantasy" has never been more pervasive than in that time period.

Many of the most interesting doorway competition entries could have been classified as Hockney and high-fake. The Hockney entries tended to portray brand landscapes, viewed through sunglasses, punctuated only by palm trees and faded patio furniture. The high-fake entries, on the other hand, were a hodgepodge of Beau-Arts stage sets that revealed in betrayal; behind every element of its facade was a steel truss—and the stone was really stucco. There was no way out. The conclusion must be that in Los Angeles one can pretend that one is anywhere or at any place at all.

The displays behind the doors had been well covered in the general press. What they accomplished primarily was to show how, behind the facade, Los Angeles accommodates a variety of incomes for its millions of people. For example, a two-family house was clearly conveyed and with elegance the enormity of the city's water supply system. The lush life is a reality only through hard and some times dirty work. And the Public gallery—which came in for some high praise—was nevertheless successful in presenting people in the larger size of the city, laid out photo-graphically before visitors at 1/24,000 of its actual size.

Members of the public who attended the LA by LA exhibit came away with a good impression of the city and its architects. We may be dreamers and are not above having a little fun, especially when it comes to facades and grand entrances. But behind the facades, there is substance.

Many people are to be credited in the success of the LA by LA exhibit. The AlA steering committee, headed by Jerry Lomax, and students from three schools: SCI-ARC, USC, and Cal Poly Pomona. Without their thought and labor the exhibit, which was assembled on a very small budget, would never have occurred.

The Michael Graves Lecture

Although he is not yet well enough enunciated to be called an LA architect, Michael Graves is no slouch in the fun department. Both in the work he presented and in his playful digs at other architects, Graves kept the full-house crowd at USC's Bovard Auditorium chuckling. Unfortunately, his talk was structured around a ponderous historical analysis of doors and walls. In trying to make a scholarly case for his recent work, Graves left the door closed on the thought process behind his design philosophy.

Through history, walls and open­ings in them have created impres­sions that govern human response, thus architecture, and, ultimately, the way basic building components are designed thus can substantially affect the success of a building. So, Graves would have us believe, all the doors on the Los Angeles skyline—nonstructural colon­nades, domes, non-axial barrel vaults, Beaux-Arts symmetry, and more—were really just the openings dictated by the program. And he has even developed potential buyer insights inside, move them quickly through the display areas, and stare them in the "closing" room. The formula apparently works, the client is pleased.

However, while some of the spa­tial arrangements between the program, listeners were not con­vinced that the impression expressed in the design subtleties can be attributed solely to anything so objective as the program. In­stead, there is some other thought process that determines the con­tours of space, the shadings, and the details—all the factors that set Graves' architecture apart from other post-modernists (however much he may lament the label). He did not let on much about that process.

Graves was no more illuminating in his presentation of his new civic building commission in Portland. The interior work was let out on a separate contract to a local firm, preliminarily providing for what might have been some brilliant inside public spaces. So here Graves' ubiquitous column with its tapered capital becomes a surface element, virtually painted on the facade. If it is an arresting visual image and Graves' disclosure of its design origins would have been interesting. To hear that the build­ing is energy-efficient, hardly a sur­prise given the porphyrte windows, is not.

Graves pretty much confined his discussion of the Portland project neighborhood buildings, relationship with public spaces, and the en­trance. However, an office building is new territory for Graves. Surely his thoughts on the function of an office building go beyond its role as a monument on public land. Given the potshots Graves took at other architects in their attempts at projects of a similar scale, it will be interesting to hear his colleagues' comments on this project once it is completed and the designs have been executed.

Finally, one wonders how Graves might have astounding transition from white to pastel. Would that Graves had skipped the history of the Los Angeles skyline and development, rather than present­ing it as a "befuddled" one can only guess burst spontaneously from the mouth of one person, who has broken the ice with virtue. It's not a Lippizaner, and the facade of the building. On the contrary, the architectural community—or so it seemed from the crowd in attendance—Graves can come back and tell us what really motivates his recent designs. He probably would not be wise to invite his Sunar client to that lecture.

A. Jeffrey Skorneck

Jean Stoddard is an architect and urban planner with Green Associates.

French Decorative Arts Seminar

A one-day seminar exploring the rich resources of French furniture and decorative arts at the Getty Museum will be offered by UCLA Extension Monday, June 1, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the J. Paul Getty Museum, 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu. The program will be led by Gillian Wilson, curator of French decorative arts at the Getty.

The collection, housed in special interior spaces representing specific periods of French art, is considered the finest in America. Lectures and personally guided tours of the galleries provide rare insights into the most creative and extra­ordinary periods of French design. The fee is $33. For details, call The Arts, UCLA Extension at (213) 825-9601.

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The AlA emblem may be used by individual members and compo­nents on their stationery, business cards, publications and purchased advertisements. Only those firms whose majority ownership or control is vested in members may use the emblem in these ways. Adapta­tion of the emblem is permissible as long as the basic image and relative proportions of the eagle and column are preserved. The official seal of The American Institute of Archi­tects is reserved exclusively for the official Institute and component use.

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