You are invited to attend the August 30th American Institute of Architects membership meeting at the ELECTRICAL TRAINING TRUST.

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New ideas in affordable housing often go unheralded. That's too bad, because innovative projects can provide solutions that work in other places. Dan Solomon's scheme for South Central Los Angeles is a mixed use development that combines housing, historic preservation and office uses. John Mutlow's design for Rancho Sespe provides something entirely new for many migrant workers: housing itself.

RANCHO SESPE II, PIRU, CALIF.  
(VENTURA COUNTY)

The project provides cooperative townhomes for very low income farm workers families, many of whom were displaced from their previous labor camp, a group of dilapidated board-and-batten cottages owned by a growers' cooperative. The average household income is $17,731 for a family of five.

The idea of the new camp was to design a series of identifiable small neighborhoods. Each neighborhood grouping faces one another or a courtyard. A central pedestrian spine connects all the grouping and a major courtyard, which provides the focal point and acts as a central place. Anchoring the spine is a community building, with a multi-purpose room and child care center for 60 students. Aesthetically, the project is designed as a farmyard, organized around a central courtyard, with the community room serving as the "barn."

To avoid repetition and emphasize the individual identity of the units, the architects developed eight different buildings, varying the mix, arrangement and number of units in each building. Although the budget limited the unit types to three models, (for two , three and four bedrooms, respectively) Further economies were achieved through the use of only two prefabricated lengths two lengths of prefabricated roof trusses, forming a continuous roof line. All units share private rear gardens with sliding glass doors.

Team: John Mutlow, FAIA Architects. Owner: Rancho Sespe Workers Improvements Association Corporation. Landscape architect: William Morgan (phase I); Jordan and Gilbert (phase 2)

MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT AT  
VERMONT AVENUE AND 81ST STREET  
LOS ANGELES

"Isolated development initiatives and autonomous architectural works will not begin to redress the problems of South Central Los Angeles," says architect Dan Solomon. "South Central is confronted with the task of building whole streets and linking separated enclaves to a larger community. It is these notions of street making and linkages that mitigate this proposal and shape both its program and its architecture."

The design is the winner of a competition sponsored by First Interstate Bank, which plans to finance the $15 million project and others in the immediate area. The 75,000 square foot site is a narrow serviced street, paralleling a major commercial boulevard. Existing is the historic Pepperdine Building (also known as Hattem's Market), an Art Deco tower. The building will house the Business Expansion Network, which assists start up businesses and provides them with on-site "incubator" space. The proposal calls for 35 townhomes, with a secured private entry at the rear of the project. Each townhome has a private yard or large deck and a two car garage.

Team: Calea Development, Inc and The Related Companies of California (developers); Solomon, Inc. and John Didonato Architects (architects); S.J. Amoreno Construction (construction)
Blues for Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is a wearisome paradox: No other form of building is as critically needed by society. And, at the same time, no other form of construction has less political support or fewer financial resources. If there is one field in design, however, where the idealistic premises of our education in architecture—to improve people’s lives, enhance the environment—solve problems—holds true, it is housing for people in the low- and moderate-income range, both in the realm of public housing and privately owned non-profit housing. The need is almost unfathomable. The City of Los Angeles says 12,000 new dwelling units are needed annually. The city’s Housing Authority will provide fewer than 1,000. While independent non-profit builders and other public agencies will add to that number, the final total will remain a small fraction of the need. And judging from the high number of households in Los Angeles which are doubled up, and even tripled up, in apartments, that need may be understated.

In the current political Walpurgisnacht, both money and political support appear threatened, HUD, the poorly managed federal agency that is the largest source of public housing finance, is under attack by the current Congress. To help salvage the agency, the Clinton Administration has embraced the doctrine of vouchers—that is, direct subsidies to renters, rather than to landlords. The result could be a loss of the major source of affordable housing construction.

Charles Cofield, the development director of the city’s housing authority, has tried to identify new opportunities for affordable housing amid the federal disinvestment. “Through collaborative work, particularly with private sector businesses, the agency sees the opportunity to increase the viability of its role,” he said recently. In this scenario, the private sector, which includes local businesses, banks, non-profit home builders and local officials. What remains uncertain, however, is how to provide housing for people who pay below-market rents in a purely market-driven system.

Cost is perhaps the most persistent issue bedeviling the production of affordable housing. Recently, the fine housing scheme for the Franklin-La Brea Apartments, designed by Adel and Naude Santos, were criticized for costing $500,000 a unit, when $75,000 or so is the industry standard. But the assumption that affordable housing must always be the lowest in cost to produce often results in housing that is lacking in design interest and will be harder to maintain over time.

Policy is another problem. To date, the public policy for supporting affordable housing currently includes a density bonus for developers who include at least 20 percent of their units as “affordable.” Often, these units are studio apartments, not the two- and three- and four-bedroom units needed by households with children. The city’s new General Plan Framework proposes to introduce higher densities into certain neighborhoods, while sparing others. That means gerrymandering older neighborhoods with ugly, high-density buildings, while sparing affluent, single-family neighborhoods. A better solution would be a slight increase in density across the board, and to liberalize the parking requirements for accessory apartments, such as “granny flats” in converted garages. Neighborhood groups strongly oppose such notions, as reactionary politics may again destroy a housing opportunity.

An internal problem in the culture of the affordable-housing community is a preference for new construction over rehab. If cost is the issue, rehab should be the priority. Housing rehab is a good urban strategy and gives new life to buildings and neighborhoods alike. In a time of diminished resources, housing and city design can reinforce one another, rather than destroy one another.

— Morris Newman

A CD-ROM For FLW

The Frank Lloyd Wright Companion. William Allin Storrer. The book is an exhaustive reference source (or data base, if you will) of FLW’s built work with plans and photographs. The CD-ROM and the book each cost $75, so price cannot be a factor in the choice. Whether one buys the database in book or CD-ROM format will depend on other criteria, such as which medium makes Wright’s work more accessible and/or more useful.

The book arrays the buildings in chronological order, with black-and-white photographs, floor plans and text. In that regard, the book is linear and horizontal in form. Its index is conventional, listing projects in alphabetical order. As one thumb through the pages, one can see an accelerating clarity in Wright’s ideas, an emerging grammar, intentions manifested. For example, readers who are intrigued by the impact of Wright’s 1910 Wasmuth Portfolio on early European Modernists can quickly look at his work leading up to that seminal publication on preceding pages.

In contrast, to burst through the colorful CD-ROM is to fall into a soft waterfall with no bottom. The CD-ROM is quite the opposite of a book which is linear in conception. Instead, the configuration of the CD-ROM is lateral, with neither perceptible beginning nor end. The CD-ROM presents itself as a tree with branches, each branch of one’s own making. Therefore, one never really grasps an entire body of work. Instead, there are opportunities for searches that can be highly personal and idiosyncratic. It is that idiosyncrasy, after all, that is part of the fun of a CD-ROM: It was only by clicking on parts of a world-wide map that I discovered Wright experimented with low-cost, pre-fabricated elements in the construction of demountable beach cottages in Egypt. The cross-reference index, another great feature, is fast with fascinating explanations of devices such as the gable and cat-tail, textile blocks, and the like.

The CD-ROM appears to hold more information than the book, and that’s a strong mark in its favor. But it also has at least one drawback: a frustrating “informercial” for “Canvas for Windows,” a cumbersome graphics program which must be run every time the reader wants to view or “access” a large drawing. (Technically, the drawings could be accommodated without Canvas, a program which allows viewers to manipulate everything except the drawing, so where’s the fun?) A 33-second wait, timed on a first-floor plan for the 1905 Mary M.W. Adams Residence on a 486/66MHz, seemed interminable.

The graphic wizardry also seems beside the point when one wants to compare different projects at the same time. The comparison can be done, of course, by opening separate windows containing separate images, but that can’t be done either quickly or easily.

Books still have advantages, even as databases. With the book, it is easy to compare plans by flipping through the pages. And books, unlike computers, respond to the environment. Light falls on the pages, instead of emanating from them. Given decent care, the book will be around for at least a century or two. CDs and the accompanying hardware have yet to prove their longevity. But it is also true that the CD format excels in versatility when it comes to search- ing, and his CD provides plenty of ancillary material to enrich the pursuit. And readers who miss hand-written margin notes could scan them into the CD-ROM, even though that would seem slightly disingenuous.

BARBARA LAMBERT

ARCHITECT. Specialized architectural consulting firm seeks architect with justice facilities experience. Project, design, writing, and AutoCAD skills. Resume to: Roberta Simmons, S.T., 132 105th Ave. S.E., Bellevue, Wa. 98004.

WEEKEND TOUR OF CONTEMPORARY PHOENIX ARCHITECTURE. The Society of Architectural Historians, Southern California Chapter, is hosting a weekend tour of contemporary architecture and landscape in the Phoenix area, August 25-27, 1995, featuring several much talked about public and private projects, as well as some surprises. Tour cost is $500pp, and includes round-trip airfare from LAX, hotel accommodations at the Arizona Biltmore, and more! The tour is being arranged by Architours. For information and reservations: (818) 792-6758 or (213) 294-5825. Ask about family and group packages.
Left: Fields & Devereaux is in charge of the second phase of historic restoration on the El Capitan Building, home of the Walt Disney theater of the same name. The work is sponsored by the building’s new owner, Century Life of America, and is being aided by a $125,000 grant from the President’s Discretionary Fund.

Right: Environmental design by Venice-based Olio for the Sam Goody store in Horton Plaza, San Diego.

Get It Right, L.A. Architect! In regard to the article, "Specifically Green," in the April issue of L.A. Architect:

As a member of the architectural community of Los Angeles, I would appreciate a more accurate use of the title architect in L.A. Architect.

Specifically, you referred to the principal of Environmental Enterprises Inc., John Picard, as an architect. To my knowledge, he is not an architect, nor does he likely have any desire to become one. It is difficult enough trying to get the public to understand what an architect is, without the organization which supposedly represents architects confusing the issue. I accept these simple-minded mistakes from other newspapers and magazines, but the editors of L.A. Architect should know better.

Kevin Southland

Letters: Bob Kennard

Publisher John Wiley & Sons is preparing for publication a photo book based on Home Office Design, set for release in September 1996. Members are invited to submit client projects for possible inclusion, such as workstations, tightly organized apartment workspaces, or elaborate additions.

Submit inquiries or non-returnable review material as soon as possible to: Neal Zimmerman, AIA, Home Office Design Book, 744 Trent Brook Drive West Hartford, CT 06119.

People and Projects

Gensler is designing the executive offices for First Hawaiian Bank’s new headquarters in Honolulu. Interiors will incorporate store front floors with contemporary shoji walls of wood and glass, finished with white plaster walls. The color palette is neutral to complement and frame the bank’s maiko and makai (mountain and ocean) views, according to project designer Robert Green.

Construction has started on three buildings of the Brandeis Bardin Institute in Simi Valley. The new buildings replace three structures destroyed in the Northridge earthquake.

Designed by Wisdom Wein Collins, the one-story buildings are to be used for multi-purpose meetings, dining, and administration. "The underlying design concept calls for reflecting the human values of the institute and integrating the architecture with the area’s rustic environment," said Chester A. Wisdom, FAIA.

EDC, a design consulting firm headquartered in Manila, the Philippines, has opened a Los Angeles branch and appointed Craig Kronenberg, AIA, as partner. EDC and its affiliated firm, PRSP are responsible for such projects as the 35-story Citibank building.

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Publishers, Or...

Bob Kennard describes his approach to architecture.

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President's Message

Last month's 1995 AIA Convention in Atlanta had the theme of "ReVISIONing: Seeing Ourselves as Collaborative Leaders." Apparently throughout the conference was the importance of continuing education. This year's most controversial resolution was Resolution 95.2, which was a motion to abolish the current mandatory continuing education system, replacing it with a voluntary program.

I support the requirement for continuing education as a condition of membership! The results of a recent Chapter survey, as well as a long debate at our April retreat, however, suggests that one-third of our members have serious reservations about this issue. This disagreement reflects our nature: architects are independent-minded people. They don't like to be told what to do. We believe in continuing education, of course, but why should it be mandatory?

Rapid changes in our society, our economy, our demographics, our technology, are forcing us to change. As our friends at the AIA Pasadena and Football Chapters say, "Evolve or Die." Our fellow architects, as well as those in allied professions, are on the cutting edge of new ideas. From strategic planning and program management, on one side, to design/build and construction management, on the other, we're losing work at both ends. We are falling behind by failing to adapt to the changing needs of clients. Architects who haven't stayed current and those few who have been irresponsible, have hurt us all. Those architects who "blow" budgets and schedules and neglect the client's needs have made us vulnerable. Other professionals who definitely assume responsibility for meeting clients' needs for a well-functioning project, built within a budget and schedule, are getting our work. The result is construction management and design/build.

Some state registration boards are concerned about the viability of architects to stay up-to-date that they are implementing mandatory continuing education to renew registration. These requirements should not be mandatory, AIA, with our mandatory continuing education system, (AIA/CES) demonstrates leadership and the appropriate solution. Regulatory agencies need not mandatorily educate us, if our Institute can accomplish the same goals.

Delegates at the convention reaffirmed their support for mandatory continuing education by voting against Resolution 95.2. Mandatory continuing education is successful in other professions, such as medicine, law, and accounting. A successful program will improve our communication with clients and heighten our impact on the built environment. We may lose members through the requirement, but hopefully, the loss will come from those who have fallen behind, and those who have hurt the reputation of responsible architects.

Now is the time for our Institute to refine AIA/CES. The program must be accessible, not only to those in urban areas, but to members in remote areas. Through our journals, video tapes and yes, AIA Online, we should reach all members. The cost of programs must be affordable and charges for recording credits free. And through AIA Online, members could record earned credits on an Honor Basis.

Are you interested in earning continuing units? Call our Chapter office, or the chair of our Lifelong Learning Committee, Michael King, at (310) 578-6278. We offer several programs currently, and, with your support, they can multiply.

LANCE BIRD, AIA President

Los Angeles Invades Atlanta

To paraphrase a popular ad: I can't believe I did the whole thing! For whatever reason, I found the National AIA Convention in Atlanta even more exhausting than our own L.A. convention last year, and I spent two years involved in the planning and execution of that event. (And, of course, we all know that the AIA Convention was the best ever.)

In Atlanta, we were on the go from dawn until almost midnight for five days. Starting with regional caucuses breakfasts—at 7 a.m., no less!—we attended theme sessions, business sessions, professional development seminars, investiture of the New Fellows of the Institute, receptions and evening events.

Five AIA/LA members were elevated to Fellowship: Martin Gelber, Steve Johnson, Hendrik Koning, Takashi Shida and David Martin. The investiture ceremony was, as always, very moving. Congratulations to all.

Newly elected officers, effective 1996, include: First Vice President-President-Elect: Raj Burr Kumar, FAIA, of Washington, D.C. Vice President: Richard Bradfield, FAIA, of Georgia. Michael Stanton, FAIA, of California (Hooyay!), Joseph J. Wisniewski, AIA, of Virginia. Treasurer: L. Duane Griese, AIA, of Tennessee. Raymond "Skipper" Post Jr, FAIA, will be AIA President in 1996 and James H. Anstis, FAIA, will continue his two-year term as Secretary.

Among the resolutions passed at the convention:

95.1 Rescind the Interior Design Accord. Intent: to rescind the AIA, ASD, IBD and ISBD Title Certification Accord, entered into in 1988. Defeated.
95.2 Re-Direct the AIA Continuing Education System. Intent: to redirect the current system of mandatory education to one that recognizes continuing education as a learning experience, achievement and assures compatibility with requirements of regulatory agencies. Defeated. (Note: The AIA Continuing Education System will remain mandatory. The Board has directed management to waive fees for creation or maintenance of Continuing Education records.) Among the amendments to bylaws:
95.4 Governance Policies. Discussion postponed to 1996 Convention.
95.6 Transfer of Assigned Membership. Expunge the transfer process and stipulates that transferring members pay due only once a year. Approved.
95.7 Hardship Dues Reduction by the Component. Gives the component, in consultation with the Institute Secretary, the responsibility of deciding whether a member is eligible for a hardship waiver of dues or fees at any level of AIA membership. Approved as amended.

Spaces does not permit full information on other several other Board actions, including: 1) Revised and proposed AIA Public Policies. For copies, contact Nancy Sommersville, Hon. AIA, at (202) 624-7386; 2) Raising Awareness of about Intern Compensation Laws; 3) Standard for Licensure; and 4) Single-Point Dues Collections. Further information can be obtained by calling AIA/California Council at (916) 458-9082.

You would have really enjoyed the Theme and General Session, particularly the one anchored by Arthur Gensler, FAIA, and the 1995 AIA Gold Medalist Cesar Pelli, FAIA, as well as the panel discussion on "Building New Relationships," moderated by Kim Taylor Thompson.

It's difficult to convey the excitement—and fun—of an AIA Convention to those who have not attended: the stimulation of "working" with colleagues from all over the country; the opportunities to enhance your professional practices and competencies; and, not least, the chance to learn about, and influence, the direction of the profession. Christopher, you had to have been there! Maybe in Minneapolis, next May?

JANICE AKIN, Hon. AIA

Committees:

The CBEA.AIACC Intern Development Program Implementation Task Force is coming to Los Angeles. Hear what task force members have to say about the new California IDP Mandate. Learn how it is going to affect both yourself as a professional and your firm when Mandate is enacted. Engage in the discussion.

All this will take place at IDP Mentor/Sponsor Workshop scheduled for Saturday, June 17, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., at the office of Gensler & Associates, 2500 Broadway, Suite 300, Santa Monica. More information can be obtained by calling Ethel Rubio at (213) 386-7070, ext. 355.

Environment

Join the Committee on the Environment for a tour on June 20 of the new Energy Resource Center, recently completed by Southern California Gas Company.

The building is one of a handful of structures in Southern California that has been designed for sustainability, and it is well worth the tour. Project architect is Wolff, Kenyon and Partners.

The address is 9240 E. Firestone Blvd., Downey, CA. The tour is at 10:30 a.m. Directions: Take the Santa Ana (5) Freeway south, exit to the Library.
Renovation Dispute at Schindler House

The City of West Hollywood issued a stop work order in late April, after officials discovered that the Friends of the Schindler House had started renovating the historic structure without a building permit.

Members of the Los Angeles AIA Historic Resources Committee alerted West Hollywood officials, when they learned that the Friends had allegedly removed historic fabric, as well as used materials that were allegedly out of keeping with the original structure.

The city’s Cultural Heritage Advisory Board subsequently held a hearing regarding the house, and approved the renovation work retroactively. Last year, the Austrian government provided funds to renovate the building.

“This particular house is an extremely important resource for Los Angeles and for the architectural community here. It was disturbing that work was going on without the proper review,” said Gordon Obschlagler, AIA, chair of the Chapter’s Historic Resources Committee, adding that the unauthorized work “sets a bad precedent for historic properties.”

Obschlagler also expressed concern about plans to build a bookstore behind the house, and its potential impact on the house’s carefully designed landscape plan.

Bob Sweeney, long-time president of the Friends of the Schindler House, in an interview asserted that all the renovations were historically correct but acknowledged that he had not consulted with any Schindler experts outside the Schindler House board before undertaking the work.

The Historic Resources Committee has asked West Hollywood to review all work to be done at the Schindler House, as well as require a historic structures report to be used as a guide for any future renovation work.

Built in 1921, the Schindler house was the architect’s first independent work in California and was his long-time residence. The design is noted for its building techniques and the use of industrial materials, as well as an unusual plan that integrates courtyards and landscaping.

Habitat Hits L.A.

Habitat for Humanity, the non-profit group that builds housing for low-income residents, plans a “ Blitz Week” starting June 18, when volunteers plan to build 21 houses in Willowbrook, an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County near Watts.

Habitat bought the property three years ago, but delayed construction until an understanding could be reached with residents about the nature of the housing. Some residents reportedly feared that the Habitat-built houses would be public housing and attract “undesirable residents.” Habitat subsequently hired Lawrence Williamson, a developer, as a community liaison. In response to the community, the houses will be multi-bedroom houses, which are larger than those typically built by Habitat.

The group plans to build houses in South Central Los Angeles and in Venice. Habitat relies on volunteer labor and design. Seraphina Lamb, AIA, is among the architects contributing a design to the Willowbrook project.

USC Fetes Morphosis’ Mayne

Thom Mayne, co-founder and principal of Morphosis, was honored in May as 1995 Distinguished Alumnus by the University of Southern California School of Architecture.

Dean Victor Rodriguez described Mayne, who earned his Bachelor of Architecture in 1969 and established Morphosis in 1975, as “one of the school’s most illustrious graduates,” adding, that his work “continues to be thought-provoking and to stimulate discussion about the nature of architecture as we enter the 21st century.”

Julia Thomas Honored

Julia Thomas, chairman and CEO of Bobrow/Thomas & Associates, was the honoree in May at the annual Tribute to Women luncheon, sponsored by the Westside Women’s Health Center in Santa Monica. Thomas, a non-architect who heads one of the city’s most active health-care design firms, was recognized “for her long history as a community and business leader and her special concern for health issues.” She sits on many boards and commissions, and is Chair of the Health Issues Committee of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce.