In fittingly dramatic fashion, on January 6 philanthropists Eli and Edythe Broad unveiled designs for their long-awaited, $130 million museum on Grand Avenue in downtown Los Angeles. The project, designed by New York architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS + R), is in parts both boisterous and restrained and has the capacity to help transform a street that has long attempted—and largely failed—to be a vibrant cultural hub for the city. It will be home to the Broads’ collection of over 2,000 contemporary

Keep it Local

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BROAD APPEAL

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Center Field

The LA Rams and the LA Raiders are long gone, and Los Angeles still has no NFL team. But that hasn’t stopped developer AEG from pushing ahead with an elaborate effort to lure one, unveiling three plans for a proposed $1 billion stadium in Downtown LA on December 15. The three schemes continued on page 10

Hilton Foundation Funds More LA Supportive Housing

Despite constant public and private efforts, homelessness remains one of the LA’s most intractable issues. According to the Los Angeles Homeless

Final 2010 Billings jog upward, so does optimism

In the second half of 2010, AIA’s Architecture Billings Index was more like a ride at Coney Island than anything currently running at the old amusement park in New York. But at least it’s going out on a high note: The November Billings Index, continued on page 2

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Scuptural DS+R Design welcomed as major downtown LA draw

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Emeryville Taps Local Talent for New Arts Center

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When Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) were solicited last June by Eli Broad to sketch an idea for his new archive and museum, the architects were forced to ask: “What do you build next to Disney Hall?” Answer: Something else. Where Frank Gehry’s work is handsome and impenetrable, the Broad Art Foundation, as DS+R have envisioned it, is porous and accessible. The stainless steel concert hall reflects the city’s skyline; blinding sunlight bounce off its capping shell. The Broad’s concrete veil, by contrast, is a less aggressive spectacle. At three-feet thick, and punched through with large angular openings, the new museum looks as if it is cloaked in an ice cube tray twisted by a powerful algorithm. As certainly, it has been, to pleasing effect.

Over time the animated, if a bit too-tidy white box, with its dramatic, carved out entryway—a nod to DS+R’s earlier Alice Tully Hall—will settle onto Grand Avenue, a signature building poised not so much to duke it out with Disney as to hold its own ground firmly. The trouble here is that everyone—architects, planners, civic officials, and developers—is convinced that if you plant the right number of monuments on Grand Avenue, the street will become, as Eli Broad has said, “the Champs Elysees of Los Angeles.”

No amount of architecture will transform Bunker Hill—the nation’s longest-running redevelopment project or, some would say, longest running scam. Broad’s obsession with having architects strut their stuff has obscured the need for a considered response to the city itself—including varied program and a welcoming streetscape. What we’re looking at now is just a sidewalk lined with masterpieces. This is not to argue for provincial architecture. But it might be helpful if what goes up on Grand Avenue were considered in its rightful place and not as some moon-shot projectile intended to rescue or resuscitate a barren landscape. For starters, the hill itself has been trampled and converted into a three-story garage, as if the slope were actually flat. Why have the architects decided to essentially level a site that drops 200 feet from front to back?

An inner truth—not to mention a particular history of human occupancy—resides in this steep hillside, yet the topography is buried. Does this geography communicate no ideas that might be captured in a building and, ultimately, speak to the city at large? And if Los Angeles is truly the center of contemporary art—as Broad and others argued at the unveiling of the museum’s design—why doesn’t the new building reach for a language that breathes the gritty, somewhat toxic perfume that spurs art here?

As it is conceived, the Broad is a pleasant museum with an admirable lobby, an exciting gallery space, and an eye-catching skin, suited to any philanthropist with a cool $300 million to spare. As usual, Los Angeles gets the architecture of anywhere, leaving us to wonder where our city really is, and who has the guts to confront it.

GREG GOLDMAN
chairs as part of a popular festooned with sofas and brick building that has been in 2009 the organization rare use of eminent domain, of Market area. Making a time eyesore in the South Planning to replace a long-firm Kennerly Architecture & Planning last month tapping small invest in modern architecture, ment agency continues to San Francisco's redevelop-

200 SIXTH STREET

1/18/11  5:46 PM  Page 3

magazine didn't pose the same security threat that our little engine that could join ing forces? Somebody call Michael Ovitz!

THE PARTY IS OVER, OR JUST BEGUN

Figueroa Street in Los Angeles? You know, the one that was abandoned leftovers from an aborted scheme in New Jersey? Well, the bespectacled, cowboy-boot wearing artiste is still trying to pass off those leftovers as a site-

THE PARTIES OVER OR JUST BEGUN

BROKEN RECORD

send screenplays, sugar cane, and sacher tortes to eavesdrop@archpaper.com

the Schindler House in West Hollywood. According to The Art Newspaper, the Arts). Among many other achievements, Noever opened the MAK Center at

we respond: Architects say the darnedest things. Remember humanity.” Isn’t that what he says about every city he works in? From Brazil’s natural and urban beauty and from its people who exhibit shared

Ovitz warned him: “This will either be the biggest thing for your career or it

BENNY CHAN

chester's Robocop-meets-Hepa-Air-Filter design for

from Brazil’s natural and urban beauty and from its people who exhibit shared

THE PARTIES OVER OR JUST BEGUN

Ovitz is going to get rich and famous, no doubt. It’s a good way to end your career as a museum director. For Noever, it’s a "juicy richness in terms

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We've just learned that after 25 years at its helm, the never-shy

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MAJOR SKYSCRAPER PROJECT INCHES FORWARD ON SITE OF WILSHIRE GRAND HOTEL

Despite grand ambitions, Downtown LA has built precious few skyscrapers in recent years. The major culprits are the economic downturn, a bloated bureaucracy, and a short-staffed planning department, all of which help explain why the Wilshire Grand Redevelopment, first proposed in April 2009, took until December 17 to receive approval from the LA Planning Commission. Nonetheless, the green light paves the way for one of the largest projects in LA in years. The $1 billion, 2.5 million-square-foot, mixed-used complex consists of two large towers on the corner of Wilshire and Figueroa that—if approved by the LA City Council—would be built on the site of the current Wilshire Grand Hotel (to be demolished). This includes a 46-story high rise that houses a luxury hotel and residential units, as well as a 66-story office tower. The two buildings, designed by the firm AC Martin—designer of several notable downtown skyscrapers—will be connected with a large plaza, while their 275,000 square feet of public space will include shops, a spa, and meeting spaces.

The project’s final sticking point—when discussed by the planning commission at a seven-hour meeting—is another clue as to why projects drag on in the city. After a protracted push and pull, the commission finally called for the building’s LED signage to be reduced to 150 feet or 13 stories, a much smaller area than the developer had requested. The department also nixed the idea of upper floor exterior lighting.

Besides the LED signs, the new buildings will have folded glass facades, tapering inward as their height increases (largely a function of their cores shrinking as fewer elevators travel to the top). While details haven’t been finalized, AC Martin principal David Martin said that the hotel would also be clad in a combination of stainless steel and terra cotta, and the office tower would be clad in stainless steel with photovoltaic-covered sun shades along its south elevation. The building’s glass configurations would change according to their orientation, creating what Martin alternately referred to as “textured” and a “fuzzy character.” “Different patterns will be created by various angles of the sun,” said Martin, noting that the buildings will have operable windows. The podium, meanwhile, will be “open and glassy,” welcoming pedestrians instead of presenting monolithic walls.

AC Martin has designed the 52-story Two California Plaza and the 53-story Bank of America Plaza, among many others. Meanwhile, the building’s developer, Thomas Properties, has worked on Two California Plaza, the Wells Fargo Tower, Library Tower, and Gas Company Tower. Their partner, Korean Air, owns three hotels in Korea and another in Hawaii. Korean Air acquired the Wilshire Grand Hotel in 1989. That 1950s building was designed by architect Welton Beckett, but LA Conservancy spokesperson Cindy Olnick told AN that the building is not a landmark property “because it’s been so completely altered over the years, even on the exterior. It was very important when it opened as the Statler Center in 1952, but unfortunately, it has virtually no historical integrity left,” she said.

The development team is exploring several funding options, although Martin admits that right now there is more demand for hotel construction than office construction. In early January, the developers helped clear their path by announcing a union agreement to give hotel employees of the Wilshire Grand severance and the option to work at the new hotel. The final step in the process comes early this year when the LA City Council casts its vote.
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Musical Chairs

LA’s SCI-Arc, which has shuffled faculty and locations throughout its history, prides itself on its commitment to “a permanent state of change.” The school is definitely living up to that promise. As of January, the school officially has a new Undergraduate Chair, John Enright, a new Graduate Chair, Hernan Diaz Alonso, and a completely new post: Academic Affairs Director, which is being filled by Ming Fung, who formerly served as the school’s Graduate Chair. Aside from new academic leadership, the school is undergoing several other changes: it recently announced a new technology-focused graduate program; it has a new COO, Jamie Bennett; and, in addition to other new facilities and projects, it’s working on a ground-breaking new robotics lab.

“We’re not self-satisfied; we know the discussion moves, and that new voices are needed to move it,” said Eric Owen Moss, the school’s director since 2002. The administrative changes, which were announced in the fall and became effective this month, were precipitated by last summer’s departure of former undergraduate program chair Chris Genik, who left to become dean of the NewSchool of Architecture + Design in San Diego. While searching for a replacement, the school’s directors decided it was time to add the academic affairs position, a combination of dean and provost that Fung said would help lighten the administrative load for everybody, crucial at a school where administrators also teach.

“It just seemed to make sense to start our programs fresh,” said Fung. In essence the school, which espouses a balanced leadership, will now have four people leading it instead of three, said Fung.

“We’re using this opportunity to brainstorm ideas for the future,” said Diaz Alonso, who, like his colleagues, seems pleased with the direction in which SCI-Arc is headed (The school recently ranked second in the Design and Computer Applications categories in Design Intelligence’s annual ratings). For Diaz Alonso, a principal at LA’s Xefirotarch as well as a professor at SCI-Arc, a major goal is to improve the school’s research and critical discourse.

“We need to try to understand the nature of architecture when the discipline is exposed to a high-speed level of change,” he said. Diaz Alonso also wants to push the crossover between practice and the school. “It’s vital that the school not operate in a vacuum,” he said.

“We don’t want to be an academic institution in a traditional sense.” For Enright, a principal at Griffin Enright Architects and a professor at SCI-Arc since the 1980s (with a short hiatus for a turn as assistant professor at USC), change means pushing the school’s focus on digital fabrication further, so that it better integrates with structural and environmental systems. He also hopes to better bridge the separation between fields of study.

“That’s the next challenge with education: How do we apply that three-dimensional thinking, which our students are so good at, across disciplines for a more integrated and robust architecture?” said Enright.

As these changes move ahead, the school is also settling into the second semester of its new Emerging Systems and Technology program (EST), a post-graduate program that emphasizes technologies like digital design, new fabrication methods (including robotic fabrication), and new material and building systems.

“We’re trying to figure out what it’s about. If it takes starting new programs, then we want to do that,” explained Moss.

As part of that program, the school plans to open a new robotics lab—which Moss refers to as the “robot house”—and a robotics simulation room in the coming months. The school has already poured six of the robots that will help automate fabrication, model-making, and other processes. Thanks to a $300,000 in-kind gift from Staubli Robotics, SCI-Arc will become one of the first architecture programs in the country with such capabilities. The EST program is headed by technology-savvy faculty like Diaz Alonso, Tom Wiscombe, Peter Testa, and others.

The school’s tech prowess is also evident in its entry in the U.S. Solar Decathlon competition, which the U.S. Department of Energy has sponsored to find a solar-powered house of the future. That design, called CL/IF, features a giant cantilevered, imbedded solar panels, and several sustainable insulation techniques. It will be on display at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in October.

“It’s a really exciting time to be here,” said Fung. And, definitely, never complacent. sl

THE BUCK STOPS ANYWHERE

Architects and preservationists often adhere to dogmatic notions of purity, attempting to restore not just the physical framework of significant buildings but also the soul. In his book The Secret Lives of Buildings, historian Edward Hollis bemoaned how “architecture is all too often imagined as if buildings do not—and should not—change.” Since arriving this fall, the new residents of Rudolph Schindler’s Buck House in LA’s Miracle Mile, Cincinnati-based Country Club Projects, has already subverted these expectations, challenging both the sanctity of modernist landmarks and the limits of traditional gallery spaces. Eschewing the “white box” model for art space, the gallery is programming its LA outpost with work that creates a dialogue with the building in which it is housed.

Built in 1934, the wood-frame-and-stucco Buck House represents the application of Schindler’s theory of “Space Architecture.” While most of the architect’s projects in LA are sited on steeply angled lots, the Buck House (like his own residence on Kings Road in West Hollywood) is built on a flat lot near the Miracle Mile. The house’s horizontal layout consists of two L-shapes that interlock, with flat roofs of varying height. Clerestory windows wrap around the upper floor, creating the sense that the roof is floating. The overall effect is a building that seems much more expansive than its modest square footage would suggest.

Despite some minor remodeling, the house has remained mostly unchanged over the past seven decades. So Country Club Projects exhibition last September in the Buck House seemed especially transgressive. Designed by Jonah Freeman and Justin Love, the site-specific installation Bright White Underground transformed the spartan interiors into a decaying labyrinth inspired by a fictional character housing an experimental drug safe house. The end result was crumbling walls, festering mold, and peeling wallpaper. According to gallery principal Christian Wiscombe, the mold textures and treatments were a combination of paint, foam, layers of saturated paper and other materials. “It was a violent intervention,” he said. The house was returned to its pristine state for its most recent exhibit, featuring the

The gallery’s recent show Bright White Underground simulated the destruction of the famous home’s interior.
In addition to Jensen, rather than established firms, ECA meant attracting emerging artists and a vibrant arts sensibility, so the architecture competition was developed in order to reflect that, instead of doing a traditional RFP, said Sheila Bergman, ECA’s executive director, who previously held that role at UCLA Arts, a professional school for arts and architecture. The ECA board was advised by David Meckel, California College of the Arts director of research and planning, who came up with the idea of inviting local talent that didn’t include FAIAs (Fellows of the American Institute of Architects). This meant attracting emerging rather than established firms. In addition to Jensen Architects, the five other architects on the shortlist (narrowed from an initial list of 20) were Aidlin Darling Architects, Envelope A+D, Ogydziak/Prillinger Architects, and Schwartz and Architecture. Concepts were presented in a public forum on December 6. Jensen Architects, led by Mark Jensen, is best known for designing the new sculpture garden on the roof of SFMOMA. In the team’s concept drawings, the centerpiece is a steel-framed glass cube that houses the performance space, inserted into the shell of the existing 30,000-square-foot brick warehouse on the site. “The theater is very transparent—you’ll be able to see the catwalks above the stage, the rigging, the lights changing—you’ll see the inner workings of this art center from the outside,” said Jensen.

One of the strengths of the team’s presentation, according to ECA’s Bergman, was the possibility of multiple theater configurations. Thanks to retractable seating, the space can morph from a conventional stage with about 230 seats to a completely open floor. In the design for a “theater with no walls,” as Jensen describes it, the indoor space opens through big hangar doors directly onto a 2,700-square-foot open-air courtyard carved into the center of the warehouse. Gallery spaces will be located on the other side of the courtyard.

“In general, given that (the center has) such ambitious ideas for programming, we took a swing-shift approach to the spaces, without strict boundaries between them,” said Jensen. The team also presented thoughts for a new civic plaza that would connect the museum with City Hall. “It’s part of the revitalization of Emeryville, which has done a great job creating spaces for innovative companies and good housing opportunities. But now there needs to be some effort and investment in building the heart of the community,” said Bergman.

The $12 million project is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2012. The city, which purchased the building in 2006, is currently signed up to provide $3.5 million; the animation company Pixar, which is in a neighboring building, is contributing another $2 million; and the center is planning to launch a funding campaign for the remainder.

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BROAD APPEAL continued from front page artworks, as well as to the offices of the Broad Foundation.

“We’re convinced that Grand Avenue is where it’s at,” said Eli Broad, who has played a significant role in much of the street’s distinctive architecture, including Coop Himmelb(l)au’s Performing Arts High School, Arata Isozaki’s MOCA, and, of course, Disney Hall.

DS + R, well known for its work on Boston’s Institute for Contemporary Art and New York’s High Line and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, among other influential projects, has created a design that in many—although not all—ways embraces downtown LA, adding visual energy and welcoming people inside.

The three-story, 120,000-square-foot building is essentially a traditional steel-framed box wrapped in what the firm calls “the veil,” an intriguing honeycomb of interconnected structural concrete trapezoids. At the press conference, DS + R’s Elizabeth Diller pointed out that the veil will allow passersby to peek inside the building, while allowing art viewers to peer outside. Diller added that the veil’s design originated as a response to the highly expressive Disney Hall, which sits next to the new building. While Disney is shiny and solid, The Broad, as the new museum will be called, will be porous and cellular. She said

sponges and lava stones provided inspiration.

One enters the building through a “lift” of the veil, a large glass-clad cantilever on the corner of Grand Avenue and 2nd Street that’s evocative of the entry to DS + R’s Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center. The opening will “blow a kiss to Disney,” joked Diller, and invite people to come into the lobby, a sculptural space that will be activated with a cafe, bookstore, and multimedia space. On the escalator ride up to the main galleries, one will process through a dramatic tunnel that pierces the “vault,” an interior space containing the museum’s storage and archives. The foundation’s offices and a lecture hall will also be contained on these intermediate floors. On the way down, a separate passageway will offer glimpses into the vault and the inner workings of the museum.

The top-floor galleries will contain 40,000 square feet of open, column-free exhibition space that takes advantage of the veil’s construction to filter natural light in mesmerizing patterns. DS + R associate Kevin Rice noted that the firm is working with ARUP lighting designer Andy Sedgwick, the same consultant who has worked with Renzo Piano on many of his memorable skylights.

Other partners in the project include executive architect Gensler. Diller believes the building will add excitement to Grand Avenue and downtown LA, but also tamps down expectations for its impact on the neighborhood. “It’s only a step. It will not solve LA’s problems,” she said. While the building’s Grand Avenue and 2nd Avenue facades appear fairly active with their glassy fronts and widened sidewalks, its south and west elevations are still question marks. Those sides will have no public entrance and meet the street via the building’s three-story parking garage.

Much depends on whether the city’s huge Grand Avenue Project moves forward. That plan calls for plazas around the space, which could better connect the museum to the urban grid as well as to a new transit station. While many seem unsure if the new public space will come to pass, city planner Simon Pastucha said that “it’s a requirement, it’s just a question of when.”

When asked about the retail, restaurant, park, and hotel-rich Grand Avenue Project—hyped as the people-drawing complement to the street’s institutional heft—Broad told AN, “It’s delayed, but it’s still going.”

But until that project is underway, the Broad—with its flashy architecture and $2 billion collection—remains Grand Avenue’s best hope for regeneration.

SL

STEEL AND SHADE
THE ARCHITECTURE OF DONALD WEXLER

January 29 - May 29, 2011

Donald Wexler, Steel House, 1962, photography © Juergen Nagai, 2010

Organized by the Palm Springs Art Museum and California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, this exhibition is funded in part by the museum’s Architecture & Design Council, CALCRAFT Construction, Mitré & Bevel, Escalante Architects, Helene Galen, Daniel Patrick Giles, Hamptons Modern, Thomas Jekowy and Stephen Tripp, Harold Matzner, Brian McGuire, Ph.D., the City of Palm Springs, Modernism Week, Weldon Color Lab, American Institute of Architects/California Desert Chapter, and Friends of Donald Wexler.

Palm Springs Art Museum
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CAL STATE NORTH RIDGE WELCOMES ALL TO NEW PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

VALLEY OF THE ARTS

This month, arts and culture patrons in LA’s San Fernando Valley will finally get an alternative to schlepping downtown to see world-class performance. After more than three decades of deter-
minded effort, the new Valley Performing Arts Center (VPAC) at California State University Northridge (CSUN) officially opens on January 29.

Designed by Minneapolis-based HGA Architects & Engineers, the 166,000-square-foot center sits between Nordhoff Street, a major local thoroughfare, and the CSUN campus. The complex comprises two connected buildings wrapped around a central courtyard, which opens toward the school’s other art buildings along CSUN’s east-west axis.

From the street, the main building’s distinctive can-
tilevered roof and generous glass curtain walls afford clear views inside—a counter-
point to the generally opaque facades on the campus. A nom-
inalist George Rickey kinetic sculpture, once damaged in the Northridge earthquake, and a large reflecting pool cir-
cling the street add to the hum of activity. “We wanted an extro-
verted building,” explained lead designer Kara Hill.

The façade’s travertine tile and glass continue inside the lobby, where a sweeping staircase lifts one’s gaze toward an upper balcony and rooftop terrace. The main building contains the heart of the complex, a 1,700-seat multipurpose performance hall designed with acoustics flexible enough to support anything from a classical music performance to a movie premiere.

The attached building houses a 175-seat black box theater for experimental and student productions, a 230-
seat lecture hall, and rehearsal stages and studios for the campus radio station, KCNS (88.5 FM). This structure borrows much of the vocabu-
ulary of the main building, culling from the same neutral-
toned palette of materials—painted steel, aluminum, stone, and travertine.

To accommodate the vari-
able acoustical needs without changing the appearance of the hall, the building deploys multiple techniques. More than 34,000 feet of stainless steel mesh cover the south façade. An absorptive woody fabric on the rear and side walls. Acoustic banners can also be deployed above the hall’s catwalk. Sinuous wood ribbons wrapped around the three-tiered hall also act as acoustical baffles that hide light poles and speakers underneath. Rather than using forced air systems that can add to noise, the hall uses a displacement ventilation system with diffusers under patrons’ seats.

The $125-million-dollar complex was built using both public and private funds. “About $10 million has either been received or committed: some from the federal, state, and county sources, and $30 million from individu-
als, corporations, and foundations, according to an official statement. At the building’s press preview, an additional $18 million was still needed to cap off financing,” said LA County Supervisor Michael Antonovich. CSUN plans to close that gap by selling naming rights and holding invitation-only events.

CARREN JAD

LA NATURAL HISTORY ENLIVENS ITS ENTRANCE TO DRAW NEEDED CROWDS

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County unveiled its elaborate North Campus scheme, which will rework its surrounding grounds into a natural learning center based HGA Architects & Engineers, designed with acoustics. The museum, which was recently rehabiliated, has been in the museum’s possession since 1926.

“It will act like a beacon that you can see from a car or from the subway,” said CO Architects principal Fabian Kremkus, whose firm is thoroughly enmeshed with the museum’s press preview, an official statement. At the

North Campus plan, a renovation of the 1913 building, staggered renovations on the ground and second floors of the main building, a new parking garage, a new central plant, and a new service yard. “Piece by piece by piece,” is the approach as Kremkus describes it.

Outside of the Ortho Foundation gift, the museum has raised $84 million out of $135 million needed for its expansion and renovations, said Pitkin. The next piece will be the Dinosaur Hall, opening this July. All this should make a major impact when NHM Next, as the museum calls its building effort, finally comes together.

“We’re facing a major street, it’s a raised bridge, has been in place for more than 30 years,” said Pitkin, “the best way to help architects and other consultants to evaluate the feasibility of a potential housing site. “Often times, architects are asked to front these costs them-

LA is ground zero for long-term homelessness,” said Bill Pitkin, director of Domestic Programs for the Hilton Foundation, which was created in 1844 and has handed out close to a billion dollars for youth leaving foster care and veterans. CSH also provides services for the homeless, an area that has already yielded work in a time where there’s little to go around.

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HOME WORK continued from front page

Services Authority, there were over 42,000 homeless people in LA County last year. That was down from previous tallies, but the city still has one of the largest populations in the country. The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in December announced that it was significantly stepping up its efforts to change that, offering $13 million in grants to help house and aid the city’s homeless. Prior to this push, the foun-
dation had given about $20 million in grants and loans over the past six years. The new grants will mean more chances for architects to get involved in providing new and renovated lodg-
ings for the homeless, an area that has already yielded work in a time where there’s little to go around.

“LA is ground zero for long-term homelessness,” said Bill Pitkin, director of Domestic Programs for the Hilton Foundation, which was created in 1844 and has handed out close to a billion dollars for youth leaving foster care and veterans. CSH also provides services for the homeless, an area that has already yielded work in a time where there’s little to go around.

Other supportive housing nonprofits in the LA area receiving money include the national organization Common Ground, Mental Health America, the St. Joseph Center, Skid Row Housing Trust, Step Up on Second, and the Downtown Women’s Center. Several of California’s top architects have already designed housing or renovated build-
ings for these organizations: Brooks + Scarpa (formerly Pugh + Scarpa) for Step Up on Second; Michael Maltzan and Koning Eizenberg for Skid Row Housing Trust; and Pica + Sullivan for the Downtown Women’s Shelter. That renovation project includes a large rooftop garden, a library, fitness room, spa tubs, and quiet lounges. Interior spaces were crafted by a group of 40 volun-
teer designers.

The Hilton Foundation’s Pitkin noted that once residents achieve stable living situations, they can more effectively receive mental health, job preparation, and other services. “We really believe permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless is the key,” said Pitkin. “The best way to help people achieve a healthy and fruitful life is to get a home.”

CARREN JAD
Romani, president of Icon downtown,” said Tim Boulevard to the south. relocated to a site over Pico Center’s West Hall, which the site of the LA Convention next to the Staples Center on stadium would be located within the next month. The developer, will be chosen winner, according to the football is not in town. The convention events when a retractable roof, enabling square-foot stadium with all include a 1.7-million-designs of the three firms initial RFP list of nine. The narrowed down from an Gensler, HKS, and HNTP, front page belonged to SUPERNova, Inc. Dornbracht Americas Inc., 1700 Executive Drive South, Suite 600, Duluth GA 30096, Phone 1 866-818-1999, E-Mail literature@dornbracht.com, www.dornbracht.com.
Not everyone knows that architecture critic Joseph Giovannini is also a trained architect. Now he has applied those talents on a large scale, building his first major architectural project: a multi-family apartment building in LA’s Lincoln Heights.

The project is an adaptive reuse of a 1937 telephone truck warehouse, whose “heroic bay trusses” and loosely art deco exterior looked to the descriptive Giovannini like “a squashed Gothic Cathedral”: “I saw it and I got goose bumps,” he said. The building’s 15 double-height apartments, separated by a central aisle, both react to and preserve the building’s skeleton. Giovannini, who is an ardent fan of modern art, was especially interested in “curves, ribbons, shards, and floating spaces.” In essence, he said, the apartments aim to be three-dimensional art, and in many cases their formal elements are designed as “space paintings,” with various colors and shapes recreating two-dimensional techniques in three dimensions.

Inside a rather boxy confines, each unit’s curves and shards—further enhanced by strategic backlighting—are created out of sheet rock. “It’s very anti-box,” he said. Giovannini, who is also a trained engineer, was especially interested in “curves, ribbons, shards, and floating spaces.” In essence, he said, the apartments aim to be three-dimensional art, and in many cases their formal elements are designed as “space paintings.”

Texture and enlarging the overall spaces. It doesn’t hurt that his contractor was also trained as an engineer, able to negotiate the unusual dimensions of these spaces. Because the trusses are too large to accommodate full second floors, each unit has a mezzanine, generally containing the bedroom spaces, with living spaces below. The balconies and stairs are where Giovannini was able to really explore his space painting and love of swooping curves. Furthermore, each unit, explains Giovannini, reacts to the volume created before it, and no two units are the same. Not even close.

“What you see acts on your body and creates a thrill or dislocation,” said Giovannini, who used Vectorworks to visualize each unit before construction. Inspirations for color and shape came from painters like Malevich, Matisse, Ellsworth Kelly, and Yves Klein. Indeed, walking inside some units can be both thrilling and somewhat disorienting, but never boring. The units, which only cost about $90 per square foot to build, have rented so well that the author/architect is now looking for his next project.

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Budding Relationship

The merger of landscape and architecture is creating fertile new approaches to building.

By Sam Lubell
In case you didn’t notice, the architecture world is embracing all things green with an enthusiasm not seen since the 1970s. But this time around, the movement has expanded far beyond the grassroots level to a broader merging of architecture and landscape.

This soil-meets-steel trend, precipitated largely by our limited space resources, by the crossover in design fields, and by our desire to return to our roots, has forced architects and landscape architects to collaborate more closely, and occasionally, even to reverse roles.

“The boundary between landscape and architecture barely exists anymore,” said architect Michael Maltzan, who this summer opened the Playa Vista park on LA’s West Side, a composition broken up into a series of “urban rooms,” as the architect calls them, including floating recreation areas, large angular planted mounds, carved granite bridges, and a tensile fabric band shell. Combining valuable techniques learned from landscape architect James Burnett with his own architectural expertise, Maltzan used materials to reinforce the separation of space and employed shapes and textures to lead people through the park. In the end, the park is as much architecture as it is landscape.

“The concerns and investigations are the same,” said Maltzan. “If you remove the traditional distinctions between what disciplines are supposed to be doing and imagine what needs to be done, then you can create real innovation,” he added. Several of Maltzan’s upcoming projects merge architecture and the land, including the Cornfields Park in LA, the Piggyback Yard near the LA River, and the Art Park, next to the Geffen Contemporary in Downtown LA.

And Maltzan’s work is no aberration. Building green and stretching creative boundaries are just two reasons that “earth-itecture” is taking off. As we run out of buildable land, and as our sprawling lifestyle stretches our resources, it seems inevitable that we must learn how to better overlap architecture and green space in smart ways.

“It’s about adding public space in a tight environment,” said Curtis Fentress, whose firm is designing the San Diego convention center expansion, which will provide five acres of green park space on top of the convention center’s roof. Such projects are more than standard green roofs, which often overflow with plants but are not intended for people as with Renzo Piano’s instantly iconic green roof on top of the California Academy of Sciences. In more extreme examples, the difference between architecture and landscape is almost impossible to discern. One struggles to tell landscape and structure apart when looking at Hagy Belzberg’s Museum...
of the Holocaust in LA’s Pan Pacific Park. Here, sharp, undulating, planted forms are built into the park’s existing sloped hillside. In this case, building underground had the added ability to create a powerful architectural experience inside counterbalanced by a lighter experience outside.

Another project in which landscape and building are often indistinguishable is Morphosis’ and SWA’s new headquarters for Giant Interactive Group outside Shanghai, which is completely covered in green; a “prairie blend” of 15 plants that undulates and twists at extreme angles, and slopes down to the surrounding landscape. While all green roofs provide thermal protection, this project is an entire eco-system, filtering water for the nearby canal and feeding several life forms. The green space has become an attraction for workers and locals alike.

“We’re all interested in the same things these days,” said SWA principal Ying Yu Hung. “Energy efficiency, natural materials, the healing power of nature.” Of course, making landscapes fit into the schemes of an adventurous architecture firm was often challenging. In some places, the building slopes as much as 63 degrees, forcing the firm to come up with inventive measures to keep the soil clinging to the surface. “We were like, ‘Are you sure?’” said Hung.

Hung’s LA office has two architects to complement its 13 landscape architects, an increasingly common admixture. With “earth-itecture” becoming so common, it makes sense for an architecture firm to have landscape expertise on board. San Francisco firm Interstice Architects’ principles are Andrew Dunbar, an architect, and Zoe Astrakhan, a licensed landscape architect who studied landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. Several of their projects combine the disciplines, including the upcoming Center For Science and Innovation at the University of San Francisco. That project includes a new green plaza made of native plants built on top of an expansion to the school’s Harney Hall. In order to provide more light inside, the firm included benches that double as skylights and a side-facing “storefront window wall” that cuts into the earth. They worked to constantly communicate with the architects, NBBJ, and the project engineers to make sure that “all the players were in the room and decisions were not relegated to one discipline,” said Astrakhan. That meant that meetings addressed storm water, mechanical decisions, interfaces, ventilation ducts, and so on. “It was a constant give and take,” added Astrakhan. “When you begin documenting things, the lines are difficult to draw. There was definitely
a lot of time spent figuring out what made sense; figuring out what was architecture and what was landscape. It wasn’t always that clear to us.”

Small LA firm Freeland Buck includes an architect, David Freeland, and a landscape architect, Brennan Buck, who studied landscape architecture at Cornell. Their proposed Hunters Stand Cabin in Maine wedges itself into a hillside, lifting out of the ground plane, clad with shingled wood planks and cut with sharp windows. The earth has proven an inspiration for the firm in several ways: the bottom of the house is fitted with a soil medium so plants and trees can grow in the middle of the house; the coloring of the rooms change in response to the changing landscape; and triangulated spaces are carved out of the earth to maximize light and landscape interaction. Floors are partially above grade and partially below, emphasizing this divide, and giving the house an “embedded quality,” explained Freeland. A thin green roof on top gives the building a feeling of “immateriality,” adds Freeland. “Landscape gives you a variety of readings and experiences and feelings. That’s why it’s interesting to us,” he said.

Of course, the ways that landscape is being incorporated into architecture are not all new. San Diego architect Kevin Defreitas recently completed the St. Bartholomew Chapel, a Catholic church on the Rincon Indian reservation outside of San Diego. The rammed earth project incorporated 120 tons of local soil to form the building’s walls, and also used natural elements like a Live Oak Tree, which was harvested for the altar, and a three-ton boulder which was turned into the building’s baptismal font. In this case, the use of natural materials—the rammed earth walls are several feet thick—help prevent the building from burning down in a wildfire, as its predecessor did a few years ago. And its incorporation of local materials was vital for the Indian tribe, which considers land on its reservation sacrosanct. Defreitas found working with the local soil a transformative experience, and hopes to continue, despite San Diego’s insistence on not classifying rammed earth as a usable building material. “It’s just dirt, but it’s an incredible material,” said Defreitas. “It’s hard to go wrong with natural materials. They seem to age in a way that others don’t. And there’s an honesty to the material; you immediately understand what it is. It’s as renewable as you can get, and when the building is done, it can go back to where it came from. It’s like they say: when God created Adam, he made him out of mud.”

SAM LUBELL IS THE WEST COAST EDITOR OF THE ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER.
WEDNESDAY 26

Lectures

Christian Meister: Tangible Cartoons
7:00 p.m.
Southern California Institute of Architecture
W. M. Keck Lecture Hall
960 East 3rd St.
Los Angeles
www.sciarc.edu

Decolonizing Architecture: Panel Discussion
7:30 p.m.
REDCAT @ Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater
631 West 2nd St.
Los Angeles
www.redcat.org

Michael Weinstock: Metabolism of the City
6:00 p.m.
USC School of Architecture
Gin D. Wong, FAIA
Conference Center, Harris Hall 101
Los Angeles
arch.usc.edu

THURSDAY 27

Lectures

Nip Tuck Diptych: a Lecture on Architecture by Sharon Johnston and Nader Tehrani
7:30 p.m.
MOCA LA
250 South Grand Avenue
Los Angeles
www.moca.org

MOCA Art Talk: Sharon Kwan
Discusses Iannis Xenakis
6:30 p.m.
MOCA Pacific Design Center
8687 Melrose Ave.
West Hollywood
www.moca.org

SYMPOSIUM

Hispanic Historic Designations in an Urban Environment
9:00 a.m.
The Hilbillion Club
2286 Cedar Street
Berkeley
cahistoricpreservation.org

SATURDAY 29

Lecture

Art, Architecture and California Culture: The Works of Kenton Nelson
1:00 p.m.
Art Institute College of Design, Alhambra Auditorium
1700 Lida St.
Pasadena
www.aias.org

EXHIBITION OPENING

Imagine That! Photographing an Invisible World
California Museum of Photography
3824 Main St.
Riverside, CA
wwwcmp.cr.edu

SYMPOSIUM

California 2020: A Vision for the Next Decade
9:00 a.m.
Heidtman Grand
120 3rd St.
Sacramento, CA
www.pci.org

MONDAY 5

SYMPOSIUM

HUD Environmental Review Training
10:00 a.m.
HUD
3rd Floor Conference Room
600 Harrison St.
San Francisco

TUESDAY 8

Lecture

Francois Roche, R&A
6:00 p.m.
UCLA, Perluff Hall
100 Stein Plaza
Los Angeles
www.aud.ucla.edu

TUESDAY 9

Lecture

Benedetta Tagliabue
7:00 p.m.
Southern California Institute of Architecture
W. M. Keck Lecture Hall
960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles
www.sciarc.edu

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

SOUPERgreen
6:00 p.m.
Architecture and Design
Museum
6032 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles
aplusd.org

GOING NOWHERE
Steve Turner Contemporary
6026 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles
www.steveturnercontemporary.com

SUNDAY 13

EXHIBITION OPENING

Larry Flis:
Hollywood, 2000-2009
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
5905 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles
www.lacma.org

SUNDAY 16

LECTURES

Paul T music
Geo Logic
Design-Towards High-Tech Design, Low-Tech Construction
7:00 p.m.
Southern California Institute of Architecture
W. M. Keck Lecture Hall
960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles
www.sciarc.edu

Dancing in the Streets:
Celebrating Community and Public Space
12:30 p.m.
San Francisco
www.sfp.org

TUESDAY 18

LECTURE

Gary Kauffman:
Museum Exhibition Discussion:
Patrick Tighe + Eric Owen Moss
7:00 p.m.
Southern California Institute of Architecture
W. M. Keck Lecture Hall
960 East 3rd St.
Los Angeles
www.sciarc.edu

LECTURE

Hub Bay Area:
Innovations in energy
6:00 p.m.
SPUR
654 Mission St.
San Francisco
www.sfp.org

MONDAY 21

LECTURE

CCA Architecture Lecture Series: Mark Fornes,
THEVERYMANY
7:00 p.m.
California College of the Arts,
Timken Lecture Hall
1111 8th St., San Francisco
www.cca.edu

SUNDAY 25

SYMPOSIUM

Polytops, The Architecture of Soundscapes:
A MediaSCAPES symposium
7:00 p.m.
Southern California Institute of Architecture
W. M. Keck Lecture Hall
960 East 3rd St.
Los Angeles
www.sciarc.edu

DEVELOPED AND UNDEVELOPED:
PHOTOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPES

De Young Fine Arts Museum
50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive
San Francisco
Through March 30

Landscape photography has long played an influential role in America’s collective memory. Whether promoting conservation, expansion, identity, or merely documenting the sublime, photographs have been consistently drawn to America’s varied vistas. Developed and Undeveloped: Photographic Landscapes, a new exhibition at San Francisco’s de Young Fine Arts Museum, on view through March 30, brings together over 35 photographs extending back to the 19th century. The collection “presents a variety of approaches to framing the landscape, with scenes of unspoiled wilderness contrasted with sites bearing evidence of human intervention.” Including Ansel Adams’s elegant vistas, Edward Burtynsky’s slashed quarries, and William A. Garnett’s unique scenary labors, Two Trees on Hill with Shadows, Paulo Roberto (1974), Developed and Undeveloped, draws from the collections of the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, the Paul Sack Trust, and Charles and Diane Frankel. Also included are photographs by Mathew Brady, Carleton Watkins, Robert Adams, Shi Guorui, and Michael Light.
Whatever your taste in wine, from Sutter's White Zinfandel to Opus One, you'll find plenty to savor in a provocative exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The show How Wine Became Modern explains, among other things, the frenzy of vintners to brand themselves in a fiercely competitive market, enlisting architects and other designers to help them upstage the competition. Henry Urbach, the museum's curator of architecture and design, has assembled an extraordinary mix of architectural models, art works, videos, glasses, flasks, and other items that bring the subject to life, and in some cases even allow you to sniff (but not taste) the wine.

The architectural product of vintners' quest for notoriety ranges from the sublime to the god-awful. In Napa Valley you can find Herzog & de Meuron's magisterial Dominus winery, the Disneyesque Castello di Amorosa, and Darlush, a meticulous reconstruction of Persepolis with steel-framed windows, where decent wine can be tasted in a room only an ancient Persian could love. And, of course, there is Michael Graves's Clos Pegase, a postmodern folly that won a misguided SFMOMA competition in 1984. It's a pity that Urbach should hail this as a pacesetter, and ignore the superior wineries of Mondavi and Chappellet that predate it.

Photos of recently built wineries are keyed to a wall map of the world to illustrate the global obsession with striking architecture. Spain tops the list for quality, and alongside the celebrated structures of Gehry, Hadid, and Calatrava is a little-known gem, Bodegas Baigorri, by the Basque firm of Inaki Asqiao Izuz. Visitors can admire the hilltop view from an austere glass pavilion, then take a subterranean ramp six levels down, following the gravity-impelled progression of the grape from fruit to bottle. At the bottom of the hill is a restaurant and tasting room. It's a brilliant fusion of architecture and nature, showmanship and productivity, and it demonstrates how architects have transformed the process as well as the public perception of winemaking.

The show takes a daring look at the artistic side of such endeavors, and even attempts to create its own artwork. Diller Scofidio + Renfro have made an installation for the show that leads with a photo mural of a wine tasting staged as The Last Supper, and continues with an eye-opening array of designer wine labels. In one vitrine you'll discover Wine Wars, "a trivia game for wine geeks and wannabes," and Froglets, a trio of sealed goblets of red, white, and rosé vin.

18

URBAN MYTHS VERSUS URBAN REALITIES

Makeshift Metropolis: Ideas About Cities
Witold Rybczynski
Scrivener, $24.00

Witold Rybczynski is an insider to the way many critics and historians are not. He was trained as an architect, worked with Moshe Safdie, and has designed buildings on his own. Before becoming a professor in urbanism he taught design, specializing in low-cost housing for third world countries. One common thread that runs through his writing is a deep concern for the human qualities of space and place at all scales. While he never lost the eye of an architect, he has broadened his perspective as a critic to become a disciplined, astute historian of the built environment.

This background makes his latest book, Makeshift Metropolis, uniquely exciting. Distillation and critique of some of the most relevant and significant thinking on urbanism in the United States. While acutely aware of the realities of cities—how they are designed, planned, and developed piece by piece—he can also insert his own understanding as a designer. Thus, he is uniquely positioned to present a balanced view of the "what is" with the "what should be." Makeshift Metropolis can be viewed as a companion and extension of A Clearing in the Distance, Rybczynski's examination of Manhattan and Frederic Law Olmsted. Both books address the complex aggregations of urban planning and productivity, and it demonstrates how architects have transformed the process as well as the public perception of winemaking.

The show takes a daring look at the artistic side of such endeavors, and even attempts to create its own artwork. Diller Scofidio + Renfro have made an installation for the show that leads with a photo mural of a wine tasting staged as The Last Supper, and continues with an eye-opening array of designer wine labels. In one vitrine you'll discover Wine Wars, "a trivia game for wine geeks and wannabes," and Froglets, a trio of sealed goblets of red, white, and rosé vin.

Santiago Calatrava's Ysios Winery, in Spain's Rioja region. ordinaire. This being a contemporary art museum, you can expect some pretentious absurdity, and the prize goes to a video of a man carrying a full glass of Claret through the streets of Bordeaux, spilling most of it over his white suit. Or you might prefer to inhale the breath of an artist who drank a high-rated bottle and encapsulated the odor into paint.

LA ARCHITECTURE CRITIC
MICHAEL WEBB WRITES FREQUENTLY FOR AN.
Site planning, zoning, and codes are vital parts of the practitioner’s art, but they often remain a series of prescriptions, not inspirations. Conversely, designers frequently cite context to justify a project’s form. Site planning and context rarely connote as meaningful design generators, but Los Angeles architect and professor Roger Sherman shows in L.A. Under the Influence that they are integrally intertwined and can produce interesting results and relations. Assuming the role of detective, Sherman explores architectural and urban anomalies in his hometown of LA to reveal how various factors and stakeholders shape built environments, sometimes antagonistically, sometimes symbiotically. The best of these result in mutual advantage, a term that Sherman illustrates with a property at 2743 Eighth Street in LA. The landlord provides an apartment and space for a billboard, which inadvertently provides the tenant with a balcony, shading, and a second means of egress.

Sherman argues that in reading sites not only as physical entities but also as properties with hidden relations, one can connect disparate properties and reveal political, economic, and cultural continuities at play. The most obvious are multiple tenants in a mixed-use building or multiple constituencies on a single property, such as an advertisement, parking lot, and building. However, Sherman’s case studies show these relations can produce much more interesting results as different uses accumulate and influence each other. In his investigations, Sherman criticizes the “purely compositional gamesmanship” and “purely formal reading[s] of urban context,” promoted by the likes of Robert Venturi and Colin Rowe, as shortsighted and lacking attention to interaction “enacted through the medium of property,” where multiple interests and conflicts are resolved. Sherman’s examples are often palimpsests, or have disjointed appearances resulting from subsequent interests and motives merging on a given property. These anomalies pique his curiosity, because these varying intentions form the urban realm and give it character. From studying this evidence, architects and planners can begin to “develop a theory and method of creating” rich urban landscapes and developments. Game theory provides a prime tool in navigating and negotiating the dynamic relations and legalities surrounding properties. More importantly, it involves negotiation, a process that more designers should heed in “bargaining...for a new method of producing urban form.” Sherman provides an entire chapter on the logic and forms of negotiation—from “landplay,” a kind of mutual haggling, to “even-up,” where stakeholders pursue a mutual balance, as opposed to the “tit-for-tat,” where parties cooperate until crossed and blatant self-interest, or even vengeance, rules. Almost all forms of negotiation are visible in the 2600 Cherry Avenue property, where a bank, shoeshine, café, and oil pump jack coinhabit.

Sherman hopes that these close readings of property, strategic negotiations, and collaboration will politicize architecture to reengage urbanism with an adaptive approach, rather than mere formal imposition, where architecture’s intentions are clearly communicated. By tracking behaviors of the city, developing new descriptive techniques, and employing new analytic tools that embrace the complexities of property and negotiations, he contends that designers and planners will “reclaim a more instrumental role in the making of cities.” His may not be the only method, but L.A. Under the Influence contains important, as we need designers to remind us of what could be, we also need the close reading of what is actually happening on the ground to inform these visions. With any luck, the continued exchange between the two can somehow materialize in real places people actually want... and should want.

JAMES WAY IS EDITOR OF THE FXFOWLE BLOG.
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Free of Freeways

Thanks to his far-reaching reassessment of California’s real estate industry, Michael Dieden is one of the state’s more progressive developers. Dieden started his career as an aide on Jerry Brown’s first successful gubernatorial campaign in 1974, and almost forty years later his work remains very much connected to the public realm. Dieden and his company, Creative Housing Associates (CHA), aim to improve neighborhoods through transit-oriented developments (TODs). The firm’s Mission Meridian Village in South Pasadena – designed by Moule & Polyzoides Architects and Urbanists – is considered a model for revitalizing communities and integrating mass transit with architecture, and Dieden is currently pursuing a TOD in Santa Rosa, California. This fall Dieden chaired a panel at the Railvolution conference in Portland called “From Freeways to Boulevards,” which focused on removing downtown freeways and replacing them with welcoming boulevards.

The Architect’s Newspaper: You describe Creative Housing Associates as a “town builder” and not a developer. Prior to World War II, most communities had a “town builder.” That person didn’t create the demand, he satisfied it, and building was financed by a local bank. Now with Wall Street financing, real estate is a commodity. You can see how that helped cause the economic collapse we’re all suffering. The key is to “reset,” as Richard Florida says in his recent book. The Millenial generation has no interest in the traditional notion of the single-family home. Their domicile is a shelter conceived in multi-family configurations, next to transit, not tied to autos, with social time spent in cafes rather than inside large homes. We can’t afford the Joel Kotkin model of living, as he describes the San Fernando Valley. Ironically, he lives in Studio City and The Valley has become Fernando Valley. Ironically, he lives in multi-family configurations, next to all suffering. The key is to “reset,” as helped cause the economic collapse we’re creating the demand, he satisfied it, and had a “town builder.” That person didn’t create transit-oriented districts. The train station is like the foyer to the community. It should offer a sense of excitement. How does this situation relate to the political and social environment? The population is very frightened; you see that in polling data. People have lost faith in their government’s ability to protect them. This comes up when you propose a TOD: People are very skeptical, in part because of all the problems the older generation foisted on them. At CHA, we establish trust first and then introduce what might be possible in terms of new buildings. For Mission Meridian Village, I spent the first two months walking door to door, asking neighbors what they wanted, and not telling them how great my ideas were. When it comes to issues of NIMBYism, there are good and bad approaches. The bad comes from developers who hire citizen-relationship teams to game the system to jam the development approvals through. The better approach is the charrette, inviting the community to have a seat at the table, so they are empowered. It’s a much more healthy process and outcome.

To what degree was the collapse of the sprawl housing market responsible for this recession? China, because it is such a large depositor in America’s banks, decided it needed to hedge its investments. It pushed Wall Street to invest instruments to invest hundreds of billions more dollars. Wall Street came up with the subprime mortgages and other risky financial instruments. In order to satisfy the demand for the huge increase in mortgages, Wall Street then had to fund sprawl developers. That’s largely why you saw such growth in places like Riverside, Vegas, and Phoenix. They had the money, sold the houses, packaged and sold the mortgages as securities. And this house of cards collapsed upon everyone including the homebuilding industry. Now look at the devastation to our culture and society. It’s a vicious cycle of the merchant builders, Wall Street and freeway construction: They are all complicit in perpetuating the 1950s suburban American dream. One can only hope that the BP oil fiasco in the Gulf will be the final nail in the coffin.

You’ve long proposed turning freeways into boulevards, as was done with the Embarcadero in San Francisco. Why exactly do you advocate tearing down the arteries in America’s downtowns? Look at the positive impact that could come from demolishing the 10 Freeway in Los Angeles. It’s important in a whole host of both symbolic and real socio/environmental ways. For one, the 10 has segregated LA for half a century, to the point where people say, “Oh, my God, you go south of the 10?” Two, this freeway saps street vitality from the major arterials – Venice, Washington, Pico and Olympic Boulevards. Let’s reverse that by removing cars and starting from scratch with pedestrian friendly principles, maybe even running a trolley down it. The arterials could become what Wilshire Boulevard was supposed to be: the grand boulevards of Los Angeles.

Architect Stefanos Polyzoides has described you as a “guerrilla developer.” I don’t necessarily endorse that term, but the idea is that the ideal developer, when engaging a new opportunity, blends in with the indigenous population like a guerrilla fighter. You take the time to understand them, to learn their neighborhood history, and to think about where you might take it in a modern application. Most real estate is product-driven, with one of handful of uses: condos, strip centers, or housing tracts. This is why almost all new development resembles pasteurized cheese. Instead, we need to return to the concept of building beauty. When you visit a historic community such as San Juan Capistrano, where I recently participated in an urban-design charrette, the setting can be absolutely magical. But usually, when you are in a mall today, there is discomfort. The difference that comes from building to the human scale is felt on a primal level. Buildings should be designed for the human, not the ego, and not simply for the use.

Describe your opposition to single-use, one-off projects, and your desire for transit-oriented districts.

When we’re invited into a city, we look at it through a broader vision, where it’s not just the site itself but what’s surrounding it and what makes it cohesive. In a well-designed transit-oriented district, all the components are integrated, from street lighting to building heights with varied density. In a transformative process, the district assumes a sense of arrival. The train station is like the foyer to the community. It should offer a sense of excitement. From there you can go out a half-mile radius into a neighborhood where people can give up a car, where schools and open space are nearby. People will see we really don’t need these freeways anymore, and they can live without having to own a car.

Sustainability has become a prime design consideration. Most architects now believe it’s not good design if it’s not sustainable design. But how real is the sustainability movement? If it’s really about protecting people and the planet, shouldn’t there be corollary for social justice? That is: It’s not good design if it’s not socially responsible design.

Much of the “green” fad really has nothing to do with significant sustainability. Sustainability has become a demand from the Millennials as well, but with a deeper dimension: To take the ego out of architecture and build practical, well-designed, human-scaled buildings. Their lifestyle is completely different from what sprawl product delivers. You will now see a socially responsible sustainability; one driven by real demand. People are living in smaller and more intimate spaces. My own family of three, plus dog, live in a 1,600-square-foot house. Many developers are answering the call – especially in this down market – with affordable housing, some of which is quite good. You’ll see more and more compact development, especially with new transit coming in. That’s happening all over: It is the marriage of builders recognizing the demands of the millennials with their own sense of social responsibility.

An Interviewer Jack Skelley Writs About Urban Design and Real Estate.

Left: Dieden’s transit-oriented Mission Meridian Village in South Pasadena.