Irving Gill: California Impressions
SAH/SCC Lecture with Architect John Reed
Sunday, July 24th

Reed will present rare Kodachrome slides on the work of Irving Gill from his personal collection, compiled throughout the past 50 years. This event offers an opportunity to see rare images of buildings as they once were and buildings that have been lost, accompanied by the reflections of one of Southern California's most authoritative voices on modern architecture.

John Reed grew up in San Diego and attended the School of Architecture at USC. After college, he worked for three years in the office of Lloyd Wright, where he often visited Lloyd Wright's famous father, Frank Lloyd Wright.

A pioneer in the preservation of modern architecture in Los Angeles, as well as an accomplished architect in his own right, John Reed was the preservation officer for the Southern California chapter of the AIA. He was also president of the "Save The Dodge House" foundation. This attempt to save the universally lauded Irving Gill masterpiece was the first effort to preserve a contemporary building—one fewer than 50 years old. Reed also helped Esther McCoy with her book, 'Five California Architects' (Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1960), acting on his interest in Gill and R.M. Schindler.

The Clarke Estate in Santa Fe Springs is located just 35 minutes from the Westside, near the intersection of the 5 and 605 Freeways. Commissioned by Chaucey and Marie Ranking Clarke, Gill organized the house around a central courtyard or "outdoor room." The lush garden and reflecting pool add to this enchanting site's allure. See for yourself on July 24th.

Bishop's School, La Jolla, Irving Gill (1909).
Photo: Marvin Rand

Dodge House, Irving Gill (1916, destroyed).
Photo: Marvin Rand

Horatio West Court, Santa Monica, Irving Gill (1919).
Photo: Marvin Rand
Preservation is in the eye of the beholder. So says Steve Scauzillo, the editorial page editor of the San Gabriel Valley Tribune, who recently argued that the abandoned Azusa Drive-In does not deserve to be saved. It was an excellent article that highlighted some of the larger issues facing the architectural history and preservation communities today. This is a classic case of competing interests between a property owner and a small but powerful band of enthusiasts. And it raises compelling questions about what kinds of places are significant and worth saving.

The Azusa Drive-In is on the California Register of Historic Places because it is one of the few remaining drive-ins off Route 66, recalling the romance of 1950s car culture. When the site was first listed as historic, Ken Bemstein of the LA Conservancy asked, “What if we had never preserved the ornate theaters of the 1920s? All kids today would know were the giant 10-screen theater complexes.”

The problem is that the structure’s original purpose is essentially obsolete, and difficult to adapt to a viable new use. As Scauzillo writes, our movie-watching habits have changed dramatically since the heyday of the drive-in. Other types of structures are more adaptable: a homestead can become the office of a non-profit, a club can become a community center, and a church can become the office of a non-profit group, or a historic church can be preserved as a small museum. Or sometimes, as in the case of churches, it can become the most architecturally beautiful university in the area.

A significant example of this is that the drive-in has become too small for the audience, and the structure’s original purpose is essentially obsolete. And it is difficult to adapt to a viable new use. As Scauzillo writes, our movie-watching habits have changed dramatically since the heyday of the drive-in. Other types of structures are more adaptable: a homestead can become the office of a non-profit group, or a historic church can be preserved as a small museum. Or sometimes, as in the case of churches, it can become the most architecturally beautiful university in the area.

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After more than three years, this is my final President’s Letter. I am opening a new chapter in my own life, and I am happy to pass the torch to Merry Ovnick, who is currently our membership coordinator. Merry’s credentials are impeccable. She has a Ph.D. in architectural history from UCLA, she is a professor at CSU Northridge, and she is the author of the excellent Los Angeles: The End of the Rainbow (Balcony Press, 1984). We have done some good work in the past few years, and I expect that it will only get better under Merry’s leadership.

Note: The duties of SAH/SCC Treasurer will now be assumed by former treasurer and past president of SAH/SCC John Berley.

Saturday

9. Saturday


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University of Southern California. Walking tour of historically significant buildings on USCD's University Park campus. Los Angeles Conservancy; LA; 10AM; $5-10, res. req. 213.623.2489. lascorvancy.org.

9-10. Saturday-Sunday

Lotus Festival. Celebration of Asian and Pacific island culture with dragon boats, flowers, Asian foods, and Oriental arts and crafts. LA Department of Recreation and Parks; Park Ave. between Glendale Ave. and Echo Park Blvd. 12PM-9PM. LAParks.org.

13. Wednesday


14. Thursday


14. Thursday


14. Thursday


16. Saturday

Historic Spring Street. Tour of the architecture of the old Spring Street financial district, once known as "Wall Street of the West" and now a hub of downtown revitalization. Los Angeles Conservancy, LA; 10AM; $5-10, res. req. 310.623.2469. lascorvancy.org.

23. Saturday

Cocktail Soiree at the Laemmle. Cocktail reception, silent auction, and tour of the private penthouse of the Laemmle Apartments (Mt. Wilson, 1934) to benefit Frank Lloyd Wright's Ennis-Brown House (1924). Art Deco Society of Los Angeles; Laemmle Apartments, 522 North Rossmore Ave., LA; 5-PM; $60-75; res. req. 310.669.3268. adsla.org.

24. Sunday

Paul Strand: Transforming the Ordinary. Lecture on the photography and vision of Paul Strand with photographic historian and author Naomi Rosenblum. The Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Dr., LA; 4-5PM; res. req. 310.440.7300. getty.edu.

25, Monday


28. Thursday


28-31. Thursday-Sunday

CA Boom 2. Seminars, tours, opening gala, and exhibits on contemporary design and architecture. CA Boom; Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, 1855 Main St.; $18-195; res. req. 310.306.6877. caboom2.com.

July continues.

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SAH/SCC EVENT

14. Saturday

Irvind Gill: California Impressions. Lecture and slide presentation with architect John Reed. See page 1 for details.
3. Wednesday
Art Deco Summer Evening Walking Tour. Condensed version of weekly Art Deco downtown walking tour. Los Angeles Conservancy; LA; 5:30PM; $5-10; res. req. 213.623.2489, laconservancy.org.

5, 13, 20, 27, Saturday

10, Thursday

10, Wednesday
Downtown Summer Evening Walking Tour. Condensed version of monthly Downtown's Evolving Skyline walking tour. Los Angeles Conservancy; LA; 5:30PM; $5-10; res. req. 213.623.2489, laconservancy.org.

12, Friday

13, Saturday
Little Tokyo. Walking tour of the historic heart of LA's Japanese community. Los Angeles Conservancy; LA; 10AM; $5-10; res. req. 213.623.2489, laconservancy.org.

13, Saturday
Walking Tour 25th Anniversary. Free half-hour tours and live music celebrating 25 years of Los Angeles Conservancy walking tours. Los Angeles Conservancy; Pershing Square, Olive Street between 5th and 6th Streets; 4-7PM. 213.623.2489, laconservancy.org.

16, Tuesday
DnA: Design & Architecture. Radio program for design and architecture in Los Angeles with Frances Anderton. 89.3 FM KCRW; 2:30-3PM. kcrw.com.

17, Wednesday
Union Station Summer Evening Walking Tour. Condensed version of monthly Union Station downtown walking tour. Los Angeles Conservancy; LA; 5:30PM; $5-10; res. req. 213.623.2489, laconservancy.org.

18, Thursday

19-20, Friday-Saturday
Residential Architecture in Los Angeles: An On-Site Study Tour. Illustrated course and on-site tour on the residential styles in Los Angeles, including Adobe, Victorian, Arts and Crafts, Art Deco, English Tudor, Spanish Colonial, Mid-Century Modern, and Post-Modern, with Santa Monica Conservancy walking tours, Los Angeles Conservancy; LA; 10AM; $5-10; res. req. 213.623.2489, laconservancy.org.

24, Wednesday
Little Tokyo Summer Evening Walking Tour. Condensed version of bi-monthly Little Tokyo downtown walking tour. Los Angeles Conservancy; LA; 5:30PM; $5-10; res. req. 213.623.2489, laconservancy.org.

27, Saturday
Historic Spring Street. Tour of the architecture of the old Spring Street financial district, once known as "Wall Street of the West" and now a hub of downtown revitalization. Los Angeles Conservancy, LA; 10AM; $5-10; res. req. 213.623.2489, laconservancy.org.
Harris Postcard:

The Work and the Words

The Harwell Harris X Two tour in Santa Monica Canyon didn’t start out as your typical SAH/SCC event. While the basic tour ingredients—interesting architecture, historical context, and tasty hors d’oeuvres—were all in tow, this event took on an added dramatic flare.

At 2PM on Saturday, May 14th, the stage was set. Forty-five tour goers took their seats. There was a hush in the back patio of the Pumphrey Residence, with all eyes toward Ted Wells, SAH/SCC Advisory Board Member and co-organizer of the day’s event. “Today,” Wells explained, “we are going to hear from Harwell Hamilton Harris, in his own words and in the words of his good friend, noted architectural writer Esther McCoy.” You could hear a pin drop.

Wells had created a Reader’s Theatre of sorts. The “dialogue” was culled from a variety of sources, such as Esther McCoy’s books and her archived papers at the Smithsonian, Lisa Germany’s exhaustive book on Harris, and the Harris Archives at University of Texas.

The conversation between Harris (persuasively played by Jack Valero) and McCoy (righteously interpreted by SAH/SCC Vice President Sian Winship), was vibrant, illuminating, and sometimes downright funny. Valero and Winship took moments to breathe life into their characters, replete with dramatic gesture and convincing intention. The dialogue showcased a young and optimistic Harris in early career, up to the period of time when the Byron Pumphrey and John Entenza houses—the two houses we visited—were built. We learned about Harris’s search for form in wood and plaster, and about the influence of Richard Neutra and Frank Lloyd Wright on the aspiring architect. We also learned about some of Harris’s own architectural dictates, including “make one wall of a room glass facing a garden” and “by doing the most natural thing, you do the most revolutionary.”

Next on the Playbill, restoration architect Michael Folonis spoke eloquently about the challenges of restoring the houses that we visited. After a brief question-and-answer period with Folonis, tour goers split into groups.

One group started their touring with the Pumphrey House (1939), noticing the vertical surfaces of stucco and the outsloping planes of balconies lapped in redwood boards—a Harris trademark.

Another group jumped into a waiting van, winding their way just up the canyon to the International Styled Entenza Residence (1937) designed for John Entenza, best known as creator of the Case Study Program and publisher of Arts and Architecture Magazine. Tour goers marveled at the crisp elliptical lines, exterior metal stair, roof garden, and a huge glass slider that open the 18x24-foot living room to Pacific Ocean views. All this is in a house purporting to be just more than 600 square feet.

As tour goers returned to the Pumphrey House, they partook in the delicious goodies and formed informal conversational groups in the front patio. Here you noticed restoration architect Michael Folonis, who stayed the balance of the afternoon, chatting with a few tour goers. You could also hear groups comparing and contrasting the two distinct homes.

Set in the Santa Monica Canyon of the 1930s, this SAH/SCC tour gave a unique opportunity to experience the inspiring words and freshly modern works of Harwell Hamilton Harris. Definitely, an afternoon to remember!

John Ellis

Happy Birthday, Julius

AH/SCC Event, October 9th

Celebrating the 95th birthday of one of the most formidable contributors to 20th-century architecture, SAH/SCC is delighted to announce an evening honoring Julius Shulman, on Sunday, October 9, 2005. The celebration will include cocktails, dinner, and festivities, as well as an “architectural” birthday cake for Julius. The venue for this party and SAH/SCC fundraiser, although unconfirmed at press time, is guaranteed to be sensational. For more information, check www.sahscc.org for specific updates and look for ticket sales to be in September/October issue of SAH/SCC News.

John Ellis
For those of you who missed out on recent SAH/SCC tours, or would like more information for your reference, here’s an opportunity to get your hands on the publications printed especially for SAH/SCC events. Don’t let another chance pass you by.

Edward A. Killingsworth: Setting a Modern Standard: 20-page booklet on Killingsworth’s Long Beach work, featuring photos by Julius Shulman and Marvin Rand

at $9 each

Rodney Walker: The Ojai Years: tri-fold black-and-white brochure featuring Walker’s important residences in Ojai, with pictures and article by historian David Mason

at $6 each

Beyond the Bauhaus: 32-page illustrated booklet with plans, photos, and essays based on Boston tour

at $10 each

Soriano: Man of Steel: 12-page illustrated booklet with article by Neil Jackson

at $10 each

Palm Springs Postcards: seven postcards of homes visited on “Shelter Under the Sun” Tour, photographed by John Ellis

at $10 each

Avenel Homes: two-fold, two-color brochure from “Shelter Under the Sun” Tour

at $2 each

Modernism for the Masses: three-fold brochure with insert of detailed floor plans of Eichler homes visited on the tour to Orange County.

at $10 each

Cool Pools: Booklet and cassette tape from “Reflections on Water Cool Pools Along Sunset Boulevard.”

at $10 each members

at $15 each non-members


at $10 each

Reconsidering Lloyd Wright: 21-page, four-color booklet from “Reconsidering Lloyd Wright House Tour.”

at $10 each

Union Station and MTA Transit Center: A two-fold map for a self-guided walking tour including historical facts and photos.

at $2 each

SAH/SCC Events:

Irving Gill: California Impressions — July 24th

Ticket(s)

at $15 each = $____

SAH/SCC Membership Benefits:

Subscription to bi-monthly SAH/SCC News

Member prices for SAH/SCC events

Free Members Celebration

Membership Categories:

$35 
Member (individual - $15 additional name, same address as member)

$20 
Student (with copy of current I.D.)

$100 
Patron (up to 2 names at same address)

$500 
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$750 
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