Why Cultural Significance Matters

by Adrian Scott Fine and Cindy Olnick

A modest industrial building on the outskirts of downtown Los Angeles recently raised some important issues about preserving the city’s cultural heritage.

The Bob Baker Marionette Theater at 1345 West First Street has been in the news recently for two reasons. Its founder, the legendary puppeteer Bob Baker, passed away in late November. Earlier in the fall, the new owner of the theatre property had issued a proposal to redevelop the site as housing, incorporating portions of the theatre building into the design. The notion of reusing the nondescript building in the new development led some in the media and the public eye to question the value of the building and whether it—or rather, its historic use—should be preserved.

In 2009, the theatre was designated as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM). Likely the longest-running puppet theatre in the nation and the only one of its kind in Los Angeles, the theatre was officially recognized for its association with Baker and its key role in the history of the art form. Baker was a beloved figure in Los Angeles, and countless Angelenos have fond memories of his shows.

In 2009, the theatre was designated as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM). Likely the longest-running puppet theatre in the nation and the only one of its kind in Los Angeles, the theatre was officially recognized for its association with Baker and its key role in the history of the art form. Baker was a beloved figure in Los Angeles, and countless Angelenos have fond memories of his shows.

The Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Ordinance defines a Historic-Cultural Monument as having “particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles.” The ordinance applies to buildings, structures, and even trees and landscapes. It does not, however, apply to the use of a property. Many historic landmarks survive only because they find vital new uses, as they should. It’s important to understand that when the Bob Baker Marionette Theater was designated as an HCM, it was the building itself that was landmarked, not its use.

What is key to the redevelopment of the theatre building, as with any other designated landmark, is how to design the new development so as not to overwhelm or marginalize the historic building, even one that is modest architecturally yet rich in cultural significance.

 Preservation Award
 Applications Due
 January 30

Each year, the Conservancy honors outstanding achievement in historic preservation in Los Angeles County with our Preservation Awards. If you know of a preservation project that deserves special recognition, we encourage you to apply for our 2015 awards.

Ace Hotel Downtown Los Angeles, formerly the United Artists Theatre and office tower, a 2014 Preservation Award recipient. Photo by Spencer Lowell.

An independent jury of experts in architecture, historic preservation, and community development will select the award recipients. We encourage submissions from across Los Angeles County that illustrate the value and power of preservation.

Conservancy News  2  
Issue Spotlight  3  
Year in Review  4  
Membership  7
Welcome Katie Sanborn, Office Manager

We are excited to welcome Katie Sanborn as the Conservancy’s new office manager. Katie will keep our day-to-day operations running smoothly in many areas, including finance, human resources, operations, information technology, and risk management. A native Angeleno, Katie holds a bachelor’s degree in dance from UC Santa Barbara. She worked most recently as data operations manager at tech startup Spokeo. She also worked previously at Girls, Inc., and is excited to return to the nonprofit sector.

Welcome Tiffany Narváez, Public Relations and Marketing Coordinator

Please join us in welcoming Tiffany Narváez as the Conservancy’s new public relations and marketing coordinator. Tiffany will help raise the Conservancy’s visibility by fielding press inquiries, promoting events, publicizing important advocacy issues, and enhancing awareness of other initiatives.

A Southern California native, Tiffany is passionate about local history and culture. She holds a bachelor’s degree in art history from UC Riverside and came to us from Rogers & Cowan, one of the nation’s top entertainment PR firms.

Welcome Lizette S. Aguilar, Salesforce Administrator

We’re also excited to welcome Lizette Aguilar in the new and critical role of Salesforce administrator. After implementing the new constituent relationship management system in 2013, we realized the vast potential and importance of using Salesforce to its full advantage in advancing our mission. Lizette will manage our ongoing transition to, and transformation by, Salesforce, from training staff to customizing the system to best suit our diverse needs. Lizette has twenty years of information technology systems and project management experience in retail, corporate, and nonprofit organizations. Most recently, she both worked and volunteered at Dolores Mission in Boyle Heights, where she implemented Salesforce.

Willow Pappageorge Leaves Conservancy Staff

After eight years as a key member of the Conservancy team, Willow Pappageorge left the staff in October to move to Portland, Oregon. Willow rose from administrative assistant to director of administration during her tenure, playing an essential and leading role in the Conservancy’s operations.

Among many achievements, Willow was instrumental in transforming our technology more than once—from paper-based to online transactions, sending our first mass email communications, and most recently, launching Salesforce to integrate a vast range of information about our diverse constituents.

We miss Willow very much, but we wish her all the best and look forward to following her adventures in Portland.
City Makes New Strides in Protecting Older and Historic Neighborhoods

by Laura Dominguez, Adrian Scott Fine, Manuel Huerta, and Marcello Vavala

Preservationists and neighborhood activists have reason to celebrate the start of the new year, as there is some relief from over-development in sight. In November, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously passed two measures designed to curtail the city’s burgeoning teardown trend and bolster neighborhood conservation efforts, following public testimony from residents, neighborhood groups, and the Conservancy.

Stabilizing Development in Older Neighborhoods

Beginning in early 2015, fourteen older and historic neighborhoods will experience much-needed relief from demolition activity and out-of-scale new construction for up to two years, the result of a new Interim Control Ordinance (ICO). The ICO will limit single-family home demolitions in five neighborhoods awaiting Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) designation: Carthay Square, El Sereno-Berkshire Craftsman District, Holmby-Westwood, Oxford Square, and Sunset Square.

In nine proposed Residential Floor Area (RFA) Districts, including in part La Brea Hancock, Larchmont Village, Miracle Mile, North Beverly Grove, and Old Granada Hills, demolition may still occur yet the ICO will control the size of new replacement houses. RFA Districts are a relatively new zoning tool in single-family home neighborhoods that regulate the scale of new development.

In addition to these targeted restrictions, the ICO establishes a process for amending the City’s 2008 Baseline Mansionization Ordinance (BMO) over a period of eighteen months. The revised ordinance will close a number of controversial loopholes, including so-called “bonuses” that enable builders to exceed original space allotments by twenty to thirty percent.

In May 2014, Councilmember Paul Koretz introduced the motion directing the Department of City Planning to make recommendations for stabilizing construction activity in older and historic neighborhoods. The City has witnessed a surge in requests for HPOZs and RFA Districts, the result of escalating development pressure in residential neighborhoods and the compounding loss of community character and overall livability.

Public Notification of Demolition

Prior to the Thanksgiving holiday, the Council also approved Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell’s August 2013 motion to modify the City’s demolition process with legislation designed to empower community members to prevent surprise demolitions of unprotected historic buildings.

Before demolition permits can be issued for buildings older than forty-five years, the new Demolition Notification Ordinance requires property owners to inform abutting neighbors and their Councilmember’s office of any planned demolition activity, and to post a public notice on the property. The ordinance creates a thirty-day window for stakeholders to potentially negotiate preservation alternatives if a significant historic property is affected. This might include nominating it for Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) status. The ordinance also introduces a sixty-dollar fee to cover administrative costs.

The ordinance comes on the heels of several high-profile demolitions. In June 2014, the Mole-Richardson Studio Depot, a 1930 Art Deco building in Hollywood at La Brea and Wiloughby, was torn down without any prior notification.

Because the building was not landmarked and a replacement project was not yet known, the property owner was able to obtain the proper permits without public notice or review by the Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources.

Additionally, two designated structures were illegally demolished within seven months of the Mole-Richardson. In April, the owner of the San Marino Villas (HCM #870) demolished the Mediterranean Revival apartment building without any permits. In November 2013, the owner of an early 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival house in the Whitley Heights HPOZ tore down the property in its entirety, despite having been issued a permit only for interior remodel work.

The Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety has thoroughly reviewed the cases to date and is imposing the maximum penalty under the City’s scorched earth policy, which would prohibit any development on the sites for five years.

Neighborhood Character Counts

These complementary ordinances reflect growing public mobilization in response to recurring teardowns and other threats to neighborhood livability. Over the past year, the Conservancy has worked closely with residents and activists to shape these vital policies, reframing the complex topic of neighborhood conservation as an essential conversation about community identity and sustainability.

Co-presented by the Conservancy and the Department of City Planning, the L.A. Historic Neighborhoods Conference in October 2014 brought further momentum to these citywide efforts, convening more than two hundred residents for a lively exchange of ideas. The erosion of historic neighborhood fabric—or, as one attendee put it, “reckless development ruining the character and culture of the neighborhood and driving out long-term residents”—was a central and broadly experienced theme.

While a long-term, citywide solution to the teardown trend is still needed, the City Council’s latest actions represent significant progress. Now we need to speed up the process to bring new tools online to help more neighborhoods. Thank you to everyone who spoke out on behalf of these ordinances and, especially, to Councilmembers Koretz and O’Farrell for their strong leadership.
Thank You for Your Support in 2014!

Last year was a successful one for the Conservancy, and we want to thank each and every one of our members for your support. Here are some highlights of what you helped us achieve. The statistics are from calendar year 2014 as of press time. Just as every membership makes a difference, every action taken on behalf of a specific issue—from writing a letter or attending a hearing to spreading the word to your friends—makes a difference. Thank you!

Impact

- Benefitted from the hard work of 340 volunteers
- Took direct action to help preserve 64 threatened historic places
- Analyzed and commented on 20 environmental impact reports
- Provided technical assistance to 250 callers
- Interviewed candidates for Los Angeles County Supervisorial District 1 and posted transcripts online
- Provided support to 6 neighborhoods seeking historic district designation
- Released the 2014 Preservation Report Card, assessing the state of preservation policy in 89 jurisdictions in Los Angeles County, and worked with 8 communities to improve their scores
- Raised over $42,000 for our Preservation Advocacy Fund, which goes beyond membership dues to support our preservation efforts

Top Preservation “Wins”

- Funding for Neighborhood Conservation/HPOZ staffing included in City of L.A.’s budget
- Interim Control Ordinance (ICO) will provide relief from teardowns and mansionization in 14 neighborhoods (see page 3)
- Demolition Notification Ordinance will prevent surprise demolitions of unprotected historic buildings (see page 3)
- Paul R. Williams-designed Hunt Residence spared from demolition
- Angel Food Donuts sign in Long Beach saved and repurposed as part of new Dunkin’ Donuts

Engagement

- As of press time, had 6,208 active member households, representing more than $566,000 in general support for our advocacy and education programs
- Convened 213 people for the L.A. Historic Neighborhoods Conference, co-sponsored by the City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, to help people learn how to protect the character of their communities
- Welcomed 12,456 moviegoers to the 28th season of Last Remaining Seats
- Took a record 11,000 guests on our downtown walking tours, including 906 school and college students
- Led 12 young preservationists (ages 11-13) on our Adventures in Architecture summer program for inner-city youth in partnership with the Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA)
- Introduced 30 future city builders (ages 15-17) to preservation and the great work of preservation architects in partnership with ACE Mentor Program
- Hosted over 50 attendees at two Regeneración workshops focused on the preservation of sites related to Latino/a heritage
- Shared some of L.A.’s amazing Modern buildings with 350 aficionados through four events hosted by our Modern Committee
- Hosted 2,074 people at additional public tours and programs, spanning from Sherman Oaks to Venice
- Partnered on events with Bringing Back Broadway, Los Angeles Heritage Alliance, CicLAvia, and Casa Libre

Visibility

- Had more than 413,000 website visits by over 300,000 individuals
- Appeared in the media 180 times
- Spoke at 29 conferences, classes, and community meetings
- Neared 19,000 “likes” on Facebook
- Reached over 9,000 followers on Twitter
- Passed the 2,000 follower mark on Instagram and introduced the #LAStoryhood hashtag, with more than 600 photos tagged to date

Your Membership Has a Direct Impact

71% Events and General Donations
29% Membership

Revenue from membership represents nearly one-third of the Conservancy’s annual income. The majority of this revenue directly supports our dual mission of advocacy and education. By maintaining your Conservancy membership, you play an important role in helping to preserve, revitalize, and promote Greater Los Angeles’ architectural and cultural heritage.
Thank You, 2014 Walking Tour Docents!

by Bruce Scottow

“As a Conservancy volunteer, I’ve gotten through the doors of places I’d never see otherwise!”

-Michelle Gerdes

Michelle’s comment resonates with so many of our volunteers, who often cite the significant benefits of helping out with events at sites rarely open to the public. Michelle was quick to add that getting through those doors for free is a definite plus!

As a third-generation Angeleno (her grandfather was a conductor on the Red Cars), Michelle has long been familiar with the region’s history, culture, and architecture. She began volunteering for the Conservancy in 2003 and was soon serving on the Last Remaining Seats committee, as well as helping at the film series’ screenings.

Theatre preservation and history are of special interest to Michelle. As a volunteer, she created the theatre “history boards” displayed at Last Remaining Seats screenings. She chips in for other Conservancy events as well, recalling with particular fondness (?) her exterior docent role at the Hughes Aircraft Company campus tour a few years back. Tour attendees might remember—as Michelle certainly does—that the city was drenched with over five inches of rain that day!

Michelle also volunteers at the Los Angeles Historic Theatre Foundation (LAHTF), where she has worn nearly every hat imaginable. Besides minding the manners of her two rescue cats, Michelle finds time to craft jewelry and art lamps from vintage items.
Telling the Full Story

While architectural icons are vital to our history and will always be integral to the Conservancy’s work, they don’t tell the full story. Architecturally unspectacular buildings also deserve recognition for the important roles they’ve played in defining our communities. They require us to dig deeper and look beyond just the façade of a building to fully understand what stories can be told. These stories come alive and are much more meaningful when the physical building in which they occurred still exists.

In addition to the Bob Baker Marionette Theater, buildings designated for their cultural significance include Bukowski Court, a 1920s bungalow court at 5124 West De-Longpre Avenue in Hollywood. Its modest Spanish Colonial Revival design is ubiquitous throughout Los Angeles. Yet this landmark served as home to a budding poet and novelist named Charles Bukowski from 1963 to 1972, as he transitioned from his job at the post office to the writing career that brought him international renown.

Once threatened with demolition, Bukowski Court was designated as an HCM in 2008. It has since been renovated by its owners and is a popular destination for literary and cultural tourists.

Designated the same year as Bukowski Court, the former Black Cat bar at 3909 West Sunset Boulevard became an HCM for the key role it played in Los Angeles’ gay rights movement. On New Year’s Eve 1966, Los Angeles police officers raided the Silver Lake bar, beating and arresting patrons for lewd conduct. Hundreds of protesters held a peaceful demonstration in front of the Black Cat the following February—more than two years before the famed Stonewall Riots in New York City.

The City of Los Angeles has designated other cultural landmarks, including the former Venice West Café at 321 South Ocean Front Walk (designated in 2010), which epitomized the postwar Bohemian counterculture in Los Angeles. In East L.A., the Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery, built by—and integral to—the surrounding multicultural community, was listed in the California Register of Historical Resources in 2012.

Recognizing cultural significance does not mean preserving every old building in Los Angeles. All landmarks must meet a threshold of significance based on nationally accepted standards and criteria. Yet, rightly, these criteria include not only architectural merit or pedigree, but the people and events that, together, convey our rich cultural heritage.

Jurisdictions near and far have made great strides in recognizing and protecting places of cultural significance. The City of Los Angeles and other cities in the county have started down the important path of embracing the full breadth of our heritage. While we have only scratched the surface, this is a journey that the Conservancy fully supports.

Plan to join the Conservancy and the Department of City Planning Office of Historic Resources in the spring for a Landmark This! workshop where we will focus on designating sites of cultural significance.
MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The Los Angeles Conservancy would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of our new Supporting members, and the new and renewing members of our Sustaining, Benefactor, and Cornerstone groups.

CORPORATE MARBLE
($5,000 - $9,999)
AIMCO

MARBLE CORNERSTONE
($5,000 - $9,999)
Linda Brettler and Matthew Weiner
Linda and Jerry Bruckheimer

CORPORATE GRANITE
CORNERSTONE
($2,500 - $4,999)
AGA Gensler
Martin Architecture and Design Workshop
Rising Realty Partners

GRANITE CORNERSTONE
($2,500 - $4,999)
Richard and Eileen Garson
Ann and Robert Ronus
Watling Foundation

CORPORATE LIMESTONE
CORNERSTONE
($1,000 - $2,499)
The Hearst Corporation
Interscape Construction, Inc.
Kilroy Realty Corporation
Marmol Radziner
Page & Turnbull
Steinberg Architects
Tim Barber Ltd.

LIMESTONE CORNERSTONE
($1,000 - $2,499)
David Caruso
Aileen Comora
Doug and Susan Gardner
Katherine and David Hensley
John Mark Horton
Alan Katz and Jerry Simmons
Kennon Korman
Alan Merson
Thomas R. Miller
Rita Morales Patton
Howard Sherman and J. Gregg Houston
Akio Tagawa and Yui Suzuki
Peg Yarkin

BENEFACCTOR
($500 - $999)
William and Miriam Blad
Gary Cohn
Perla Eaton – Olimpia Foundation
Barbara and Douglas Hadsell
David Jacot and Francis Diaz
M. Alfred and Marilee Katsen
Tracy King and Michael Davis
Judy McKee
Susan Nickerson and Alex Olivares
Patricia and Paul Sinclair
George Takei

CORPORATE MARBLE
CORNERSTONE
($5,000 - $9,999)
David K. and Elizabeth S. Thompson
Joyce Zautilin

SUSTAINING
($250 - $499)
Kim and Michael Anton
Craig Bartelt and Nick Mercado
Hamid Behdad
Susan I. Bernatz
Ralph Bijou and Laurie Minc
Leo and Dorothy Brudy
Janet and Jay Cohen
Mr. and Mrs. Bud Cohn
Catherine Collinson
Sue Derickson
Thomas De Simone and Jason Wright
Snowdy Dodson
Thomas Ford
Kirk Funkhouser
Bruce Gainsley
Philip J. Gold
Mr. and Mrs. Greenberg
Lore Hilburg
Dana Hunter
Sue Abbe Kaplan
Linda and Michael Kesten
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Knobler
Jonathon Komack
David and Robin Kopple
Boyd and Helena Krout
Joseph Lumarda
Leslie S. Lyndon and Bill Carey
Elizabeth Mahoney
Blake McCormick
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon McWilliams
Lauren Nakasugi
Michael Olecki and Karen Bodner
Lannette Pabon and Ross Schwartz
Jason Pritchett
Mr. & Mrs. Bradley Roe
Gary and Christy Roebner
Ruth Ross
Maggie Roth
James and Sylvia Rothman
Jill Scheetz
Dennis Schroeder
Robert Shuell
Richard Stanley
Bob Stiefel
Judy Stuart
Alicia Syres
Willie Thomas
Jon and Ann Vitti
Michael A. Vorhaus
Suzanne Wallander
Mr. and Mrs. Alec Wisner

SUPPORTING
($100 - $249)
Lilia Aceses
Claudia Allen
Henning Andersen
Sharon Arnett
Gayle Baddin
Sharon Baranoff

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Your membership provides the Conservancy with crucial operating funds, as well as strength in numbers to maintain a powerful voice for preservation. Thank you!

YOUR MEMBERSHIP DOLLARS AT WORK

Did you know that a third of the Conservancy’s revenue comes from membership? That makes you a critical partner in our mission of using advocacy and education to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County.

As one of our more than 6,000 member households, you help give the Conservancy a significant voice for preservation in our community, enabling us to advocate for our historic neighborhoods and individual places that are too valuable to lose.

Because of you, we can:

• Meet with elected officials and other decision makers to voice concerns and find solutions
• Work with community members out in the field
• Advocate for stronger tools to protect places and incentivize preservation
• Provide technical assistance and training to residents, city staff, and others working to protect the historic places that make L.A. unique

As we begin the new year, we want you to thank you for your ongoing commitment to and support of the Los Angeles Conservancy!
Walking tours begin at 10 a.m. except where noted. Tours are $5 for Conservancy members and children twelve and under; $10 for the general public. Walk-ins are accepted on most tours. Pre-payment is required on Angelino Heights, Biltmore Hotel, and Broadway.

For details and reservations, visit laconservancy.org. Questions? Call the Conservancy office at (213) 623-2489.

WEEKLY TOURS
Art Deco
   Every Saturday
Biltmore Hotel
   Every Sunday, 2 p.m.
Broadway: Historic Theatre & Commercial District
   Every Saturday
Historic Downtown
   Every Saturday
Union Station
   Every Saturday

BI-WEEKLY AND MONTHLY TOURS
Angelino Heights
   First Saturday
Downtown Renaissance: Spring & Main
   Second and Fourth Saturdays
Modern Skyline
   First and Third Saturdays, 2 p.m.

Youth, family, and group tours by arrangement; call (213) 623-2489 for information.

For the latest information about issues and events, visit laconservancy.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

PRESERVATION AWARD APPLICATIONS DUE
Friday, January 30

Each year, the Conservancy honors outstanding preservation projects in Los Angeles County. Applications for the 2015 awards are due January 30. Details on page 1.

WALKING TOURS CELEBRATE 35TH ANNIVERSARY

2015 marks the 35th anniversary of the Conservancy’s walking tour program. Help us celebrate by attending one of our tours listed above, and look for special events throughout the year.

SUBSCRIBE TO E-NEWS

Stay up to date with the latest on Conservancy events and issues. To subscribe, click “Newsletter” on the top menu bar at laconservancy.org or edit your website user account.