



LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY NEWS



Jul/Aug 2013 • Volume 35 Number 4



The recently rehabilitated Casa de Cadillac on Ventura Boulevard. Photo by Jessica Hodgdon/L.A. Conservancy.

Casa de Cadillac's Road to Preservation

by Adrian Scott Fine

In the highly competitive car selling business, the latest model is essential to increased sales. The same idea applies to the dealership building itself, especially in recent years with auto manufacturers rolling out very specific architectural standards to ensure that buildings convey their brand and desired corporate image. That is what makes the recent rehabilitation of Casa de Cadillac along Ventura Boulevard in Sherman Oaks, and the return of its jewel-box showroom, all the more remarkable. "You have to really, really like your building to want to fight with Corporate," says Casa's owner, Howard Drake. "It was worth saving. Not saving it would have put a dark cloud over our business."

When Casa opened in 1949 as Don Lee Cadillac, there was much fanfare for its Modernist design. The *Los Angeles Times* called its outdoor lanai and patio feature a "bold and typically Southern California innovation destined to become a model in automobile sales and service buildings of the future." A combination of outdoor seating and vehicle display made the patio, with its flagstone walls and planters, a centerpiece of the building.

Architects Randall A. Duell and Phillip A. Conklin designed Casa to respond to the then-booming car-mobile culture, with a large glass window wall filled with new cars on full display to entice passing motorists. Also drawing attention was the neon "Casa de Cadillac" rooftop signage ("Casa de" was added in the late 1950s), designed to match the chrome script nameplate featured on the 1949 Cadillac model. It is a beloved signature element of the overall design.

As one of the first auto dealerships established in the San Fernando Valley, Casa helped shape and define the emerging 1950s suburban landscape. Like the range of models it offered to the discerning customer, Casa was Cadillac's finest showroom. It now represents a dwindling

Please see *CASA DE CADILLAC* on page 6

Curating the City Closes July 27 with Preserving Sprawl Panel, Followed by "Landmark THIS!" Workshop

by Flora Chou and Sarah Weber

On **Saturday, July 27** from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m., the Conservancy caps off our Curating the City: Modern Architecture in L.A. initiative with "Preserving Sprawl: The Suburbs Become Historic." This panel presentation will re-examine suburbanization and sprawl as a key chapter in the story of post-World War II Los Angeles.

Many of the neighborhoods and communities that once defined the new growth of L.A. now face threats of redevelopment, renovation, and sometimes complete demolition.

Looking at two centers of suburbanization, the San Fernando Valley and Lakewood, our panelists will offer insight into the history of their development and what they mean to the people who live there.

Panelists include **Robert Bruegmann**, Professor Emeritus of Art History, Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Illinois at Chicago and author of *Sprawl: A Compact History*; **Kevin Roderick**, author of *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*; and **D. J. Waldie**, author of *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* about the development of Lakewood. The panel will be moderated by author and architecture critic **Alan Hess**.

We're excited to hold this special event at a little-known Modern gem in the Valley

Please see *PANEL & WORKSHOP* on page 6

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Los Angeles Conservancy

523 W. Sixth Street, Suite 826
Los Angeles, California 90014
(213) 623-2489 Fax: (213) 623-3909
laconservancy.org

The Los Angeles Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization that works through education and advocacy to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County.

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William T. Cartwright (1920 - 2013)

William Cartwright, who was instrumental in preventing demolition of the iconic Watts Towers, passed away in June. In the late 1950s, Cartwright got lost on his way to visit his aunt. He came upon the towers in a state of neglect, with the gates open and the property littered with debris. Simon Rodia, the Italian immigrant who built the towers, had moved away in 1954, and his house had burned down.

Cartwright purchased the towers with a friend in 1959 and helped start the Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts, a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving the towers from demolition. "Without Bill Cartwright's aesthetic morality and daring, Rodia's Towers would have been smashed and destroyed years ago," says Jeanne Morgan, a charter member of the committee.

Last year, Cartwright told the *Los Angeles Times*, "we knew we had to do something that we believed should have been done before us: preserving something that needed it and not abandoning it."



Watts Towers. Photo by The City Project, Flickr Creative Commons.

James E. De Long (1921 - 2013)

Noted Modern architect James De Long passed away in April, as our previous issue went to press. In 1946, the Southern Californian was traveling to Columbia University to study architecture when he made a stop at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona. Wright was impressed with De Long and offered him an apprenticeship at Taliesin. After a year of studying with Wright, he returned to California and began his career as an architect, designing residential structures throughout Southern California. Some of his best-known projects are in the Mt. Washington area of Los Angeles, including the Wolford House and the Scholfield House.

In addition to his renowned career as an architect, De Long spent eight years as the architectural editor at *House Beautiful* magazine and served on the Board of Directors of the Taliesin Fellows. Our Modern Committee honored him with its Modern Master Award in 2011. He will be remembered for his great contributions to Modern architecture.

Lauren Everett Leaves Conservancy Staff

In June, Administrative Assistant Lauren Everett left the Conservancy to go on a great adventure! She is volunteering on an archeological survey of the Greek island of Keros, organized by Cambridge University. She will help with the survey and manage photography for the dig. Afteward, she will remain in Greece to work on a farm during the grape harvest.

We will miss Lauren's dedication to the cause of historic preservation but are glad that she continues to follow her passion for the built environment.

Preservation Issues

by Flora Chou, Adrian Scott Fine, Manuel Huerta, and Marcello Vavala

For more information about these and other preservation issues, please visit laconservancy.org/important-issues.

Landmarking Johnie's

Since the 1950s, the Googie-styled coffee shop has become synonymous with Southern California popular culture, intentionally designed to stand out and attract customers. At the northwest corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue is one of the best: Johnie's Coffee Shop. Opened in 1956 and designed by architects Louis Armet and Eldon Davis of the prolific firm, Armet and Davis, space-age decorative elements attract passing motorists, including a dramatic "butterfly" roofline, glass walls, and bright signage. Initially opened as Romeo's Times Square, the restaurant later became Ram's, and then Johnie's in 1966. It continued to serve coffee until its closing in 2000. In recent years, Johnie's has been used primarily as a filming location.

There are a dwindling number of Googie coffee shops still standing in Los Angeles. The Conservancy and its Modern Committee recently nominated Johnie's for listing as a Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM).

The Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro) intends to purchase Johnie's to facilitate staging for the construction of a new Wilshire/Fairfax station as part of the Westside Subway Extension project. While Metro acknowledges the significance of Johnie's and doesn't plan any modifications for the building, landmark designation will ensure that it receives strong protection from demolition and inappropriate alterations in the future.

Wyvernwood at a Crossroads

As many of our members and supporters know, the Conservancy has long been active in the effort to save Wyvernwood, opened in 1939 as L.A.'s first large-scale garden apartment community. Wyvernwood's Miami-based owner intends to wipe out the community and this historic district, which spans nearly seventy acres and is home to 6,000 residents. Wyvernwood's historic buildings



The Conservancy and its Modern Committee recently nominated Johnie's for listing as a Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM). Photo by Stephen Russo.

and green open spaces would be replaced by a mixed-use development that would quadruple the site's existing density. If built, this would be one of the largest projects ever developed in the city.

We are at a critical point in the nearly seven-year preservation effort, as the City of Los Angeles will soon decide whether to approve the proposed project. The Conservancy, along with a coalition of community organizations and residents, strongly believes that there is a viable preservation alternative that is being ignored. Other garden apartments in L.A. have been successfully preserved, such as Lincoln Place in Venice, Chase Knolls in Sherman Oaks, and the Village Green in Baldwin Hills. The same can and should be done at Wyvernwood.

The Conservancy recently worked with the collaborative media studio, Form Follows Function, to complete a short four-minute film about Wyvernwood. It clearly shows what is at stake: an entire community and a place where people have built their lives. This effort is so much more than just about saving buildings. It is why we are asking Councilmember José Huizar to continue to support preservation, to reject any proposal that does not include meaningful preservation, and to honor his commitment to save Wyvernwood. To see the film and to follow the latest details about upcoming meeting dates, please visit laconservancy.org/important-issues.

Progress at the Port

On July 25, the Board of Harbor Commissioners is set to decide whether to adopt a Port Master Plan Update (PMPU) that does not provide a clear path forward for preservation. While we have made progress and are working closely with Port staff, there continues to be a divide in terms of creating a level playing field for the historic resources in the land use section of the PMPU. Currently there are a lot of hurdles to overcome before a historic building at the Port can be adaptively reused. This leaves a number of historic buildings at risk, especially those at Terminal Island. The Conservancy is pressing for flexibility in the PMPU so that there is a greater likelihood of a preservation outcome.

There is some good news! In May, the Port adopted a new policy on historic and cultural resources, in terms of their identification, evaluation, and treatment. While this does not address or resolve our current issues with the PMPU, both the Conservancy and the National Trust for Historic Preservation are very pleased with the Port's initiative to develop such a policy.

Plan to attend the hearing and speak out in support of preservation of the Port's historic resources.

New Website Features Hundreds of Historic Places to Explore

By Cindy Olnick

As previously reported, the Conservancy has been working for more than a year to develop a new website and refresh our graphic identity as part of our thirty-fifth anniversary.

The new website is now live at laconservancy.org, and it includes our updated logo, as well as hundreds of historic places to explore.

In its first major overhaul since it first launched in 2000, the new website features information about historic places throughout L.A. County, updates on Conservancy preservation issues, and a dedicated section about Modern architecture.

The new site launched in June as a key element of our spring-summer program, Curating the City: Modern Architecture in L.A., part of the Getty initiative, Pacific Standard Time Presents: Modern Architecture in L.A. The section of the new website (microsite) dedicated to Modern architecture features:

- A searchable, filterable map of more than 300 Modern places throughout L.A. County
- Three virtual tours of the San Fernando Valley
- Curated guides to historic places by themes, from car culture to homegrown architects
- An essay by renowned author Alan Hess on Modernism's development in Greater L.A.
- A spotlight on the Conservancy's Modern preservation issues
- An overview of 13 challenges in preserving Modernism
- Information about upcoming events related to Curating the City
- Background on the Conservancy and its Modern Committee's work to preserve Modern places

The overall Conservancy website uses the same tools on a broader scale, with:

- Another 100+ historic places (non-Modern)
- A map of Conservancy preservation issues, segmented by urgency and linked to location pages for background information
- Information about the range of work the Conservancy does and how people can get involved
- Key resources from the original website, such as our directory of preservation professionals and list of historic sites for special events

We will continue to add new content, such as non-Modern landmarks and more resources, over the summer. The flexibility of the system offers great potential, so the website will only get better over time.

The Conservancy planned the website based on feedback from more than 1,300 people who completed a website user survey in summer 2012. An open-source platform, mobile-optimized design, and integration with a new constituent management system bring the website up to current technology standards and poise it for future growth.

Major support for the new Curating the City: Modern Architecture in L.A. microsite was provided by the Getty Foundation, and funding for the general website redevelopment project was provided through grants from the Ahmanson Foundation and the Donaldson Charitable Trust. These grants enabled the Conservancy to undertake a truly transformative project that will advance our mission for years to come.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the new website to date, from completing last summer's user survey, to compiling and entering content, to donating photos. Your feedback has directly informed the planning for the website and will continue to help guide our efforts as we move forward. We need and welcome your comments on the new site—just contact us at info@laconservancy.org or (213) 623-2489. Thank you, and enjoy!



Introducing Our Updated Logo

By *Cindy Olnick*

The new Conservancy website introduces our updated logo, another major initiative over the past year. Since 1982, the Conservancy logo has featured the stylized capital of an architectural column. The capital conveys the organization's strength, stability, and devotion to historic architecture. The original logo also included a stylized palm tree, an unofficial yet iconic symbol of Los Angeles.

The new logo features an updated, abstracted version of the capital and palm tree, the cleaner design emphasizing the style- and period-neutral nature of our work. The logo uses a geometric, sans serif font designed in 1927 by typographer Paul Renner. Renner's work is often seen as a bridge between traditional and modern typefaces—fitting for the Conservancy, given our work to bridge the past and future of Greater L.A.'s built environment.

The new logo is one of a series of icons depicting various architectural details, which we will be able to mix and match as needed to better convey the breadth of the Conservancy's work. A new graphic identity system using these icons will make our communications visually cohesive while expressing the distinct flavor of our diverse efforts (see the Last Remaining Seats example below). You'll see the new identity emerge over the next year.

Many thanks to everyone who participated in, and supported, the development of our new logo and identity system. We look forward to visually honoring our own rich history while embracing the future of preservation in Los Angeles.



LOS ANGELES
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LOS ANGELES
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LAST REMAINING SEATS

Explore Downtown at Sunset in August

by *Annie Laskey*

Summer has arrived, and with it the Conservancy's popular Downtown at Sunset walking tours. We will again offer our tour of City Hall (the only time of the year the Conservancy tours this iconic building), as well as slightly shorter versions of two of our popular Saturday tours: Art Deco and Union Station.

These special tours will take place on Wednesday evenings in August. Tours start at 5:30 p.m. and last approximately 1-3/4 hours.

The **Art Deco** tour highlights the architecture and ornamentation of buildings from the 1920s and '30s, featuring rich materials and classic geometric design. **August 7, 14, and 21.**

The **City Hall** tour explores the fascinating history and magnificent architecture of Los Angeles' great 1928 civic building. **August 14, 21, and 28.**

The **Union Station** tour offers an in-depth look at this iconic L.A. landmark, the last great railway station built in America. **August 7 and 28.**

Tours are \$5 for Conservancy members and children 12 and under; \$10 for the general public; reservations are required. Space is limited, so reserve now! Visit laconservancy.org or call (213) 623-2489.



City Hall tour. Photo by Annie Laskey/L.A. Conservancy.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE: SUSANA MILLER

by *Bruce Scottow*

Susana Miller, a Conservancy volunteer since 2006, finds Los Angeles unmatched for its eclectic mix of people, places, buildings, topography, and experiences. Susana is a Van Nuys native who has lived in San Jose, California and the Virgin Islands—where she picked up scuba diving. She now lives in West Hollywood and works as a residential realtor, but her employment resume includes work as a wine representative at notable eateries such as Spago and Trumps.



Modern Committee volunteer Steven Kyle invited Susana to attend one of their meetings and from that day on, Susana has maintained her interest in ModCom, as well as broadened her Conservancy interests to include virtually every type of program and event. Attend a Conservancy panel discussion, one of our spring or fall tours, or one of our Last Remaining Seats film screenings, and it's likely you'll see Susana's smiling face!

Susana's knowledge and appreciation of the city brought her to remark, "L.A.'s such a crazy city so full of all sorts of events!" One of her favorite events was a 2012 bus tour organized by fellow ModCom volunteer Chris Nichols—dressed as a bus driver—to some of the San Gabriel Valley's architectural treasures. That tour included driving through The Donut Hole, a La Puente drive-thru donut shop.

Donuts, scuba diving, real estate, restaurants, architectural preservation—Susana Miller's interests are as eclectic as the city she loves!

PANEL & WORKSHOP continued from page 1

designed by John Lautner. Originally known as the Crippled Children's Society of Southern California, the 1979 complex in Woodland Hills now serves as Ability-First's Paul Weston Work Center.

The event includes a breakfast reception before the program and a booksigning with the panelists afterward. **Space is limited, so registration is required.** Admission is \$10 for Conservancy members and \$15 for non-members.

Curating the City: Modern Architecture in L.A. is part of Pacific Standard Time Presents: Modern Architecture in L.A. Major support for the panel presentation has been provided by the Getty Foundation.

Landmark THIS! Workshop

Following the panel, and in partnership with the City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, the Conservancy will offer a **Landmark THIS! workshop** on how to nominate a building or site for local landmark designation.

This hands-on, interactive session will walk participants through writing an effective nomination, finding the necessary information, and navigating the political process. We'll focus on Modern resources and use local sites as practice examples.

Space is limited to **thirty-five people**, so we're looking for participants with an active interest in completing a local landmark nomination.

The workshop takes place from 1:30 – 4:30 p.m. at the former Canoga Park Branch Library, built in 1959 and recently adaptively reused as the Child Development Institute Early Learning Center.

Admission is \$15, including materials and refreshments. If you know of a specific historic place you'd like to see protected with landmark status, we hope to see you at the workshop!

To register for either or both events, please visit laconservancy.org.

CASA DE CADILLAC continued from page 1

1959 Cadillacs on display in this historic view of Casa de Cadillac. Photo from Conservancy archives.

number of postwar Modern auto showrooms still in near-original condition. Recent losses include Lou Ehlers Cadillac (1955, demolished in 2008) and Crenshaw Ford (1946, demolished in 2009) in Los Angeles, and Crestview Cadillac (1962, altered in 2012) in West Covina.

Putting Casa on the road to preservation has not been an entirely smooth ride. Drake believes that “cars and buildings go through a similar period when they are not so cool, no longer the new thing, and luckily Casa made it through this lull.” Casa has had some changes over the years. The biggest followed the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, when the glass façade was replaced and its mullion pattern, color, and overall design were altered. “It was really important to me that we went back to the original window design,” says Drake, who spearheaded a nearly two-and-a-half year rehabilitation project. “We could have taken the easy road and ripped everything off the building, but that’s not what we or the community wanted.”

Instead, Drake and his team worked closely with General Motors to negotiate a plan that met corporate goals without compromising Casa’s original design. He credits the Conservancy with helping to convince General Motors to reconsider a plan that would have clad the building in limestone panels, added a cornice, and replaced its distinctive signage. Cadillac’s image program is intent on obtaining a consistent look for its dealerships across the country. “Without the Conservancy’s letter and help from the councilmember, I don’t think I would have been successful,” says Drake.

The Conservancy and its Modern Committee have long kept an eye on Casa, fearing it might go the way of so many other auto showrooms. We have reached out to Drake over the years and, to help build awareness, featured Casa in two past Conservancy tours: How Modern Was My Valley in 2000 and ModCom: 20-20-20 in 2004.

The worst was feared when the Conservancy first heard about extensive work underway at Casa last summer. Drake quickly alleviated any concerns, sharing his plans to restore many of Casa’s original elements. “Any time we could save something that was cool, that’s what we did,” he says. With interiors updated to offer modern customer amenities, a restored façade, and all new infrastructure in place, the Casa everyone knows and loves is back. Unlike the gas-guzzling original cars that it displayed, Casa is also now sustainable, with the sensitive addition of solar rooftop panels.

Although it was anything but easy, Drake would not have done anything differently and says General Motors is now thrilled with the end product. Like the luxury cars he sells, Drake says, “Casa is built to last and is not going anywhere for a long, long time.” We like the sound of that!

MARCH 13 / MAY 22 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.

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MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

THANK YOU TO OUR PRESERVATION AWARDS LUNCHEON SPONSORS

On May 16, we held our annual Preservation Awards Luncheon at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel. Congratulations to all of our award recipients, and thank you to our presenting sponsor, **City National Bank**, and our table sponsors!

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CONSERVANCY WALKING TOURS

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

Modern Skyline

Every Saturday, 2 p.m. (thru August)

BI-WEEKLY AND MONTHLY TOURS

Angelino Heights

First Saturday

Downtown Renaissance: Spring & Main

Second and Fourth Saturdays

Union Station

Third Saturday

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



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We recently launched our newly designed website! Check it out at laconservancy.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Photo by Annie Laskey/L.A. Conservancy

SUNSET TOURS

Summer Evening Downtown
Walking Tours
August 7 – 28

Explore downtown Los Angeles as the sun sets and the air cools. Join us for tours of City Hall, Union Station, and Art Deco architecture. See page 5 for details.



Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy

PRESERVING SPRAWL

Saturday, July 27
10 a.m. - 12 p.m.
Woodland Hills

Yes, suburbs are becoming historic! An expert panel will re-examine suburbanization and sprawl as a key chapter in the story of post-World War II Los Angeles. See page 1 for details.

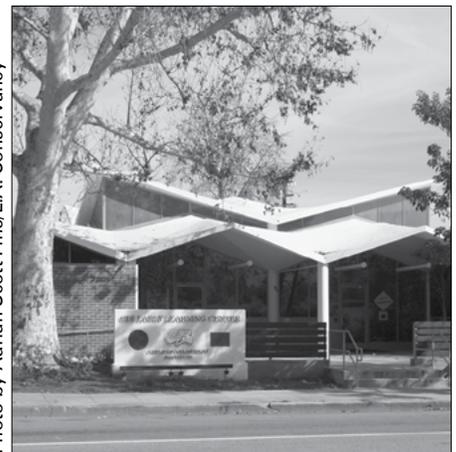


Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy

LANDMARK THIS! WORKSHOP

Saturday, July 27
1:30 - 4:30 p.m.
Canoga Park

Is there a building you'd like to see designated as a local landmark? Learn how to go through the nomination process at this interactive workshop. See page 6 for details.