



# LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY NEWS



Mar/Apr 2015 • Volume 37 Number 2



Parker Center, currently threatened with demolition and the focus of a panel discussion on March 22. Photo by Hunter Kerhart.

## Preserving Places with Difficult Histories

by Adrian Scott Fine

As the preservation movement evolves and matures, we at the Conservancy increasingly find ourselves advocating for places that may not always engender strong positive feelings or associations from the public. Sometimes we face the complete opposite, when a site's history is so mired in controversial events or personalities that people can't imagine preserving it. Yet significance can encompass both positive and negative elements, and places with such significance can teach us valuable lessons and empower us to face, and own, the totality of our history.

Preserving places with difficult histories is not new to the Conservancy. For instance, our nearly twenty-year effort to preserve the iconic Ambassador Hotel became much more difficult with opposition from the family of Robert F. Kennedy, who was assassinated there in 1968.

We all know that history is not always pretty. It can be painful, and it includes some events, actions, and outcomes that we would like to forget. We need to ask ourselves: are we being honest and preserving the full, authentic story of a place, or only the bits and pieces that form our preferred image of history?

On **Sunday, March 22**, the Conservancy will tackle this issue in a free public event. An expert panel will explore the difficult history of Parker Center, the former Los Angeles Police Department headquarters that is currently threatened with demolition. (See page 2 for event details.)

Located at 150 North Los Angeles Street in downtown L.A., Parker Center is perhaps best known as the backdrop for television's long-running *Dragnet* television series and home to Sergeant Joe Friday. It currently stands vacant in a prime location. Some in the City's administration are calling for its demolition and replacement with a new, twenty-plus-story tower to house City staff.

The Conservancy, our Modern Committee, the Little Tokyo Historical Society, and others

*Please see PARKER CENTER on page 6*

## Walking Tour Program Turns 35

by Annie Laskey

This year, the Conservancy celebrates the thirty-fifth anniversary of our award-winning Walking Tour Program through year-long promotions and special events.

The celebration will kick off on **Sunday, March 22**, with a day of tours at City Hall, one of the most iconic buildings in Los Angeles. This special day will be the only tours of City Hall that the Conservancy will be offering in 2015. Tickets are \$5 for members and children 12 and under and \$10 for the general public. The 1.5-hour tours will take place between 11 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. The tour is presented in partnership with Project Restore. For details and reservations, visit [laconservancy.org/city-hall-tour](http://laconservancy.org/city-hall-tour).



Tours of City Hall will be offered Sunday, March 22. Photo by Annie Laskey/L.A. Conservancy.

*Please see WALKING TOURS on page 4*

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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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## Free Panel Discussion on Parker Center March 22

### The Stories You Are About to Hear Are True: Preserving Parker Center FREE Panel Discussion and Reception

**Sunday, March 22, 3:30 p.m.**

LAPD Police Administration Building, Ronald F. Deaton Civic Auditorium

100 West First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

For more information and to RSVP, visit [laconservancy.org/parkercenterpanel](http://laconservancy.org/parkercenterpanel)

Join the Conservancy and community stakeholders for a conversation about the many layers of history at Parker Center (originally the Police Facilities Building, Welton Becket & Associates and J. E. Stanton, 1955). While many know it from the hit 1950s television police drama *Dragnet*, this building has a deeper and sometimes controversial history.

The City of Los Angeles, through its Bureau of Engineering, is pressing for a redevelopment project that will demolish and replace Parker Center (see cover story). The Conservancy believes that Parker Center can and should be preserved and integrated into new construction. At this panel discussion, you will hear about the viable preservation alternatives, and through the conversation with the panelists, you will learn why it is important from a historic and cultural perspective to preserve this building.

Panelists will speak from a number of different points of view about Parker Center's significance:

- Innovative modern design by one of L.A.'s most prolific firms, Welton Becket & Associates, and its integration of public art and landscaping
- Importance as the most modern and state-of-the-art police facility of its day
- Construction as an early urban renewal project that demolished a major portion of Little Tokyo, as well as subsequently affecting the development of that neighborhood
- Association with Chief William H. Parker, whose time as police chief reduced corruption in the force, but also resulted in strained relations with the African-American and Latino communities
- Significance as a site of important historic events, such as the 1992 Los Angeles riots

A reception with light refreshments will follow the panel discussion. For more information, and to reserve your seat at this free event, visit [laconservancy.org/parkercenterpanel](http://laconservancy.org/parkercenterpanel).

Come early and spend the day enjoying the Civic Center. Also on March 22, we will kick off the thirty-fifth anniversary of our Walking Tour Program with a one-day-only special tour of City Hall. To register for a tour, visit [laconservancy.org/city-hall-tour](http://laconservancy.org/city-hall-tour).

## By-Law Updates Coming Soon – Please Vote

To keep pace with changes in nonprofit governance, the Conservancy is updating its by-laws. We last updated the by-laws in 1990, and most of the new changes simply bring them up to current standards and best practices for nonprofits.

**We'll need your help in this process**, since these amendments must be approved by the Conservancy membership in a vote.

We will include a summary of the changes in the May/June issue of this newsletter, along with a ballot for you to vote on the changes (in addition to new board members, as you've done in the past). **Please keep an eye out for this issue in late April and take a few minutes to cast and return your vote.**

If possible, we will also provide the opportunity for you to vote online.

Thank you in advance for your help!

## Preservation Issues

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

For more information about these and other preservation issues, please visit [laconservancy.org/important-issues](http://laconservancy.org/important-issues).

### Norms La Cienega Safe (for Now)

As you may have seen in the press and social media, Norms La Cienega Coffee Shop has seen a recent whirlwind of activity. The 1957 Googie icon, designed by the renowned firm of Armet & Davis, received temporary protection from demolition after its new property owner obtained a demolition permit. On January 15, the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC) voted unanimously to consider an application for Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) status.



Norms La Cienega. Photo by Hunter Kerhart.

For nearly sixty years, this hallmark of Mid-Century Modernism has been the flagship location of the Norms restaurant chain. In late 2014, the business' former owners announced the sale of the chain and the La Cienega property to separate entities.

With the building's future uncertain, in December the Conservancy nominated Norms La Cienega for designation as an HCM for its association with Armet & Davis, its pioneering Googie design, and its enduring significance in Los Angeles' postwar landscape. On January 5, the new owner of the Norms property (not the restaurant chain) applied for and received a demolition permit.

The Conservancy first learned of the demolition permit on January 13, two days before the CHC hearing. Public response to the news was swift and impassioned—our post on Facebook reached over 600,000 people, and the story received international media

coverage. Los Angeles City Councilmember Paul Koretz, whose district includes Norms La Cienega, pledged his strong support for the nomination, as did the new owners of the restaurant chain.

A representative for the new property owner told the CHC that the owner has no current plans to demolish the building. The Conservancy has launched a petition on *Change.org* urging the property owner to vacate the active demolition permit as a sign of good faith.

### Chase Bank/Lytton Savings

In November 2014, the City of Los Angeles released the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the 8150 Sunset Boulevard Mixed-Use Project, proposed for the southwest corner of Sunset and Crescent Heights Boulevards. While we are having good conversations with the owner and their team about preservation alternatives, the current project calls for the demolition of the former Lytton Savings (currently Chase) building, a 1960 Modern bank building distinguished by its zigzag folded-plate roof.

The Conservancy, along with our Modern Committee and Hollywood Heritage, strongly considers Lytton Savings to be significant both locally and regionally as an important expression of American bank design and postwar architecture. Designed by Kurt W. Meyer and featuring an integrated art program, the building is one of Los Angeles' earliest remaining examples of postwar savings and loans institutions, which were in high demand due to the housing boom of the 1950s and '60s.

In our response to the DEIR, the Conservancy urged the City to further evaluate and select one of two preservation alternatives that would retain and incorporate the Lytton Savings building into the proposed project. The preferred project would demolish the two-story building and replace it with a similarly sized commercial building. We believe that the existing historic structure can be successfully integrated into the new development while maintaining its eligibility for designation as a Los Angeles Historic-

Cultural Monument and for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources.

### Beverly Hills Cultural Heritage Ordinance

On January 15, a liaison committee led by Beverly Hills Mayor Lili Bosse and Councilmember John Mirisch rejected far-reaching revisions to the City's Cultural Heritage Ordinance that could have jeopardized the City's A+ grade on the Conservancy's 2014 Preservation Report Card. If passed, the proposed amendments to its ordinance would have had a chilling effect on local preservation.

Since late 2013, efforts have been underway to refine the Cultural Heritage Ordinance in order to streamline certain procedures for homeowners and to meet state and national standards for local preservation programs. Despite the success of the City's preservation program since the adoption of the ordinance in 2012, the Planning Commission's proposed amendments sought to restrict both the quantity and the types of historic resources eligible for protection. The Conservancy, along with Beverly Hills Heritage, has voiced strong concerns over the consequences of these extensive changes.

Proposed revisions included the insertion of restrictive landmark designation criteria, the prohibition of historic districts in areas zoned for single-family residences, and the requirement that all nominations without owner consent meet additional criteria. The Planning Commission also proposed changing the name of the Cultural Heritage Commission to the Historic Preservation Commission, which concerns stakeholders by removing the cultural association to the commission.

The Cultural Heritage and Planning Commissions are now working on an amended version of the ordinance. We anticipate the revised ordinance to go to the City Council in March or early April.



## WALKING TOURS

continued from page 1

Also scheduled on March 22 is a panel discussion about preserving Parker Center, another Civic Center landmark (see page 2 for details on the panel).

The Walking Tour Program began in 1980, when volunteer Lynn Taylor and a handful of other Conservancy volunteers organized regularly scheduled walking tours to augment the special events the Conservancy had offered since our founding in 1978.

The first two tours offered were Pershing Square Landmarks and Broadway Theatres, followed a year or two later by Palaces of Finance. Those three tours are still offered regularly, although the names are now Historic Downtown, Broadway Theatre and Commercial District, and Downtown Renaissance, respectively.

Over the years, many tours have been added and discontinued, with eight regularly scheduled tours currently offered. In 2014, the program reached an all-time high of 11,500 tourgoers.

The heart and soul of the program are the volunteer docents. Reflecting a wide range of ages, backgrounds, professions, and interests, each docent is completely engaged with the city and its history, bringing the architecture to life with their knowledge, enthusiasm, and insights.

Currently, eighty-six active docents give tours, nearly twenty of whom have been leading Conservancy tours for over ten years.

Side by side with the veteran docents are newcomers to the program. In 2014, sixteen new docents went through the four-month training class and are now bringing their energy and unique view of the city to the tours. The next docent training class is tentatively scheduled for early 2016.

We hope you'll join us in celebrating the thirty-fifth anniversary of this signature Conservancy program. For updates on special events, visit [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org) and/or subscribe to our E-News and/or Events emails (click the "Newsletter" link at the top of any page on our website, or edit your website user profile).

## Last Remaining Seats Member Tickets on Sale March 25

by Sarah Weber

The twenty-ninth year of the Conservancy's signature film series offers something for everyone, with classic films ranging from the 1930s to the 1980s screened in six beautiful and distinct historic theatres.

As always, Conservancy members enjoy advance purchase and discounts on tickets. Tickets go on sale to members at 10 a.m. on **Wednesday, March 25** and to the general public on **Wednesday, April 8**. Tickets are \$16 for Conservancy members (\$20 for general public). For details, visit [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org).

We offer special thanks to our 2015 Last Remaining Seats sponsors (as of press time): Series Star Sponsor: Hollywood Foreign Press Association. Series Supporting Sponsor: Shangri-la Construction/Webcor Builders. Series Sponsors: Clifton's and The Edison, NBC Universal, Trina Turk, Paramount. Screening Sponsors: Linda and Jerry Bruckheimer, Cole's, Hugh Hefner, The Music Center, Steve and Cathy Needleman. Media Sponsors: Laemmle Theatres, *Los Angeles Downtown News*, Yelp. Latin American Cinemateca of Los Angeles Sponsors: Hollywood Foreign Press Association, City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, CBS Television Studios.



The twenty-ninth season of Last Remaining Seats opens at the Million Dollar Theatre (1918) with a screening of the Alfred Hitchcock classic, *Psycho* (1960).



The silent film *City Lights* is considered one of Charlie Chaplin's best works. The film premiered at the Los Angeles Theatre in 1931; it will again appear at the Los Angeles Theatre on June 13. Image courtesy MK2 and the Chaplin office.

### 2015 LRS Lineup

(subject to change)

Wednesday, June 10  
Million Dollar Theatre  
*Psycho* (1960)

Saturday, June 13  
Los Angeles Theatre  
*City Lights* (1931)

Wednesday, June 17  
Palace Theatre  
*Dios se lo pague/God Bless You* (1948)  
co-presented with the Latin American Cinemateca of Los Angeles

Saturday, June 20  
The Music Center's  
Dorothy Chandler Pavilion  
*How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953)

Wednesday, June 24  
Orpheum Theatre  
*Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971)

Saturday, June 27  
The Theatre at Ace Hotel  
*Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)  
matinee and evening screenings

# Garden Apartment Microsite Debuts Online

**CURATING THE CITY**

*We Heart Garden Apts.*

Estrada Courts in Boyle Heights. Photo courtesy Housing Authority Collection/Los Angeles Public Library

Home > Explore L.A. > Curating the City: Garden Apts.

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## History of Garden Apartments

Garden apartments originated from urban planning and landscape concepts first adapted from the British in the nineteenth century.

Urban planners Clarence S. Stein and Henry Wright spearheaded the Garden City Movement in the United States in the early

Curating The City: Garden Apts.

Explore Garden Apartments  
Saving Garden Apartments

**Garden apartments epitomized Southern California's indoor/outdoor living ideal.**

Our new Curating the City: We Heart Garden Apartments microsite explores the legacy of L.A. County's historic garden apartment communities, which are increasingly vulnerable to demolition.

by *Laura Dominguez*

The Conservancy is pleased to share the newest installment in our Curating the City series. The We Heart Garden Apartments microsite at [laconservancy.org/gardenapartments](http://laconservancy.org/gardenapartments) is the latest addition to our ever-growing website at [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org).

Curating the City: We Heart Garden Apartments explores the legacy of Los Angeles' thriving collection of historic garden apartment communities. Featuring in-depth profiles of nine complexes, including Estrada Courts, Lincoln Place, Park La Brea, and The Village Green, the microsite describes the history of garden apartments, as well as the increasing threat facing many garden apartment communities today. You can explore these historic communities through a searchable map, with options to filter by architect, style, location, decade, and more.

Based on the twentieth-century Garden City Movement, garden apartment communities epitomize Southern California's indoor/outdoor lifestyle. They are generally known for "superblocks" of low-to-medium-rise buildings, shared open space, and park-like landscaping. They provided attractive and affordable alternatives to the substandard housing of the Great Depression, and they later served as quality housing for defense workers during World War II, as well as re-

turning veterans and their families.

Although garden apartments continue to be great places to live today, the Los Angeles-area communities are increasingly vulnerable resources. Their large sites, low density, and valuable real estate put them at risk for demolition and redevelopment. Our new microsite represents our latest efforts to raise awareness of this remarkable collection of historic places in the county.

In tandem with the Curating the City microsite, we have revamped a bilingual (English/Spanish) section of our website dedicated to Wyvernwood Garden Apartments in Boyle Heights ([laconservancy.org/wyvernwood](http://laconservancy.org/wyvernwood)). Visit these pages to learn more about the layers of history within the community and the ongoing campaign to save Wyvernwood, the first large-scale garden apartment community built in Los Angeles.

We hope you'll visit our website to explore these places and to share your own stories about Los Angeles historic garden apartments. And please be sure to sign up for our Garden Apartment Network mailing list to stay informed on all things garden apartment!

## 2015 VOLUNTEER AWARDS



### 30+ Years of Service

**Steve Partida, Mary Alice Wollam, Ed Trosper, Robert Manners, Gordon Johnson, Marcia Hanford, Richard Webber**



### 25 Years of Service

**Margaret Briggs, Martha Gruft, Gail Ostergren**  
(not pictured: Ruth Ann Wentsel)



### 15 Years of Service

**Nicole Thompson, Lee Fink, Howard Fink, Herb Silverman**  
(not pictured: Dennis Ritchey)



### Exemplary Service in 2014

**Holly Kane, Mary Alice Wollam, Tom Sutherland, Hunter Kerhart, Michelle Gerdes** (not pictured: Bud Coffey, Evan Daum)

Photos by Larry Underhill



## PARKER CENTER continued from page 1

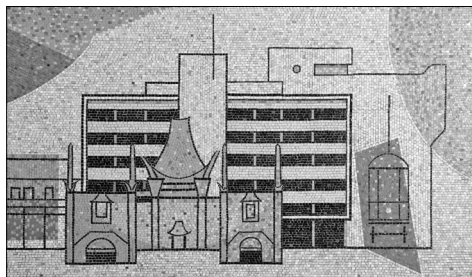
are advocating for Parker Center's preservation and adaptive reuse. In late January, the City's Cultural Heritage Commission voted unanimously to initiate a Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) nomination for the building. Sometime likely in March, the City Council will decide whether to designate Parker Center as an HCM.

### Just the Facts

When Parker Center was built in 1955, the eight-story, International Style building with integrated art and landscaping components was a significant postwar addition to the Los Angeles Civic Center. Designed by Welton Becket & Associates and J. E. Stanton with a landscape by Ralph E. Cornell, Parker Center was then known simply as the Police Facilities Building (renamed in 1966 for Police Chief William H. Parker).

Exemplifying Becket's "Total Design" philosophy, the building prominently features art installations, including a piece by sculptor Bernard J. Rosenthal and one of the largest mosaics ever built, the "Theme Mural of Los Angeles" by Joseph Louis Young. The building's innovative design, which integrated virtually all departments into a centralized facility, was critically acclaimed at the time as a model for modernizing the police force—as were the state-of-the-art crime labs and communications center. In 1956, *Popular Mechanics* called Parker Center "the most scientific building ever used by a law-enforcement group."

By these facts alone, Parker Center's significance is undeniable. The building has been identified as individually eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources and as a contributor to a National Register-eligible historic district of the Los Angeles Civic Center.



Detail of "Theme Mural of Los Angeles" by Joseph Louis Young, a large mosaic featured in the lobby of Parker Center. Photo by Larry Underhill.

Yet the stories of how Parker Center came to be and what it later symbolized make preserving it all the more challenging and compelling. Before Parker Center, the site contained two of the most vibrant blocks in Little Tokyo. It housed many small mom-and-pop businesses and cultural organizations serving the Japanese-American community. Starting in 1948, the City earmarked these blocks as part of a Civic Center expansion plan and an early form of urban renewal. The site was cleared of all existing buildings—many of which would be considered historic if still standing. The property was remade into a single superblock, with Parker Center's construction beginning in 1952.

Despite being a federally supported program that ended more than forty years ago, urban renewal remains a touchy subject today, especially for preservationists and for those personally affected. Thousands of historic buildings, as well as part or all of neighborhoods such as Little Tokyo and Bunker Hill, were lost during this era of massive urban redevelopment. Parker Center's construction was particularly hard felt: in addition to displacing hundreds of Japanese Americans, it spurred feelings that history was repeating itself, as some of these same people had been forcibly removed just a decade earlier and confined in World War II internment camps.

Parker Center's role in telling the story of Little Tokyo's history is not without controversy. Yet it is also meaningful and something many do not want to forget or wipe away through demolition. "Preserving the building is important, and it should not be destroyed and forgotten after a life of only sixty years," says Michael Okamura, president of the Little Tokyo Historical Society.

In September 2014, the Little Tokyo Historical Society joined the Conservancy in urging the City to support a preservation alternative that calls for preserving the main portion of Parker Center while allowing for an expansion at the rear of the site.

In addition to Parker Center's early urban renewal roots, its subsequent layers of history were not always perceived as positive. William H. Parker, who oversaw the building's construction, was one of the most distinguished—and controversial—police chiefs

in Los Angeles history. During his leadership (1950-1966), he professionalized the police force and developed crime-fighting concepts that are now standard practice. Yet his tenure was also marred with discrimination against the African-American and Latino communities, a deep-rooted problem brought into the national spotlight during the 1965 Watts riots. Even after Parker's death in 1966, for many the building continued to symbolize racial inequalities and police brutality in the city. The most visible example occurred in 1992, when protesters surrounded the building following the acquittal of four officers accused of brutally beating Rodney King.



People gathered outside Parker Center following the jury's decision in the Rodney King case in 1992. Photo by Gary Leonard, Gary Leonard Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.

Some argue that it is counter-intuitive, or at the very least ironic, to now want to preserve a place like Parker Center. Yet without the physical place in which these events happened, it is infinitely harder to tell the stories and demonstrate just how far we have come.

The fact that Parker Center brings out so many strong feelings only underscores its role in Los Angeles' history and how it helps us remember our past while also allowing us to move forward. In a recent piece about why older buildings matter, Tom Mayes at the National Trust for Historic Preservation wrote, "[t]he history of an old place may be viewed differently over time—and interpreted and reinterpreted as our conception of who we are as a people changes."

Learn more about the difficult history of Parker Center at our free panel discussion, "The Stories You Are About to Hear Are True: Preserving Parker Center," on **Sunday, March 22**, at the LAPD Police Administration Building in downtown Los Angeles. See page 2 for details.

# DECEMBER 5 / JANUARY 28

## 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

### MEMBER PROFILE: SUSANA HERNANDEZ-ARAICO

by Sara Roberts

Susana Hernandez-Araico has been a member of the Los Angeles Conservancy since 1998. She first joined the Conservancy because she wanted to get to know Los Angeles, her adopted city, better. As a lover of history, she has a firm belief that "one cannot understand a place's present without understanding its past."

Soon after joining, Susana became a walking tour docent. Her tour route started and ended at her two favorite historic places: the Millennium Biltmore Hotel and the Bradbury Building.

Susana's favorite Conservancy programs include Last Remaining Seats, walking tours, and special events that highlight a certain area of the city or a certain style of architecture—such as last year's tour, We Heart Garden Apartments!, for which she volunteered.

"The Conservancy fulfills a very significant function in both preserving L.A.'s architectural history and acquainting members of the Los Angeles community, new and old, with the heart of the city's architecture and history," says Susana. "I'm proud to be a member because I take great satisfaction in being active, in some small way, in the goals of the Conservancy."

Thank you, Susana, for your longstanding support, and thanks to all of our members for taking an active role in preserving Greater L.A.'s history.





## 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](http://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.



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For the latest information about issues and events, visit [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

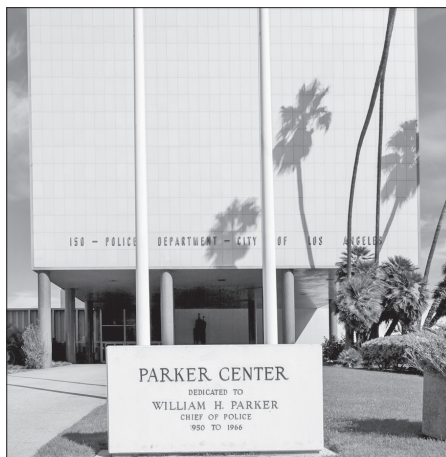


Photo by Hunter Kerhart.

### FREE PANEL DISCUSSION AND RECEPTION

Sunday, March 22

Join us for "The Stories You Are About to Hear Are True: Preserving Parker Center," a free panel discussion about the history of downtown's Parker Center. Details on page 2.



Photo by Douglas Hill.

### LAST REMAINING SEATS MEMBER PRESALES

Wednesday, March 25

Conservancy members enjoy exclusive presale tickets to our twenty-ninth annual Last Remaining Seats series. For the full film and theatre lineup, see page 4.



Photo by Larry Underhill.

### SAVE THE DATE: PRESERVATION AWARDS LUNCHEON

Thursday, May 7

Save the date for our 2015 Preservation Awards Luncheon and help us honor the best in preservation. Learn about award recipients in our upcoming May/June issue of *News*.





LOS ANGELES  
CONSERVANCY  
MODERN COMMITTEE

# MODCOM TURNS 30

SPECIAL EDITION | MARCH 2015



Photo: Conservancy archives

Demolition of Tiny Naylor's (Douglas Honnold, 1949) and Ship's Westwood in 1984 led to founding of Fifties Task Force.

## Fifties Task Force: The Beginning

by Tom Gardner, Chair 1984-87, 1991

In early 1984, at the urging of the Los Angeles Conservancy's then-president Martin Eli Weil, a small but passionate group of volunteers formed a subcommittee in response to the rapid destruction of post-World War II buildings in Los Angeles. The catalyst was the demolition of two classic Googie style coffee shops – Ship's Westwood and Tiny Naylor's at La Brea and Sunset. The group adopted the name "Fifties Task Force" and set out to raise awareness of, document, and advocate for our rich heritage of midcentury architecture, which was very much at risk.

The task force began by documenting buildings and sharing that information with the group, and wrote newsletter articles to help educate the Conservancy membership. In March 1986, the Task Force produced its first program "Fifties Architecture: Exploring the Issues" with presentations by famed modern architects Whitney R. Smith and John Lautner with author Alan Hess as moderator. Rounding out the event was a Task Force slide presentation of its inventory of mid-century buildings, a discussion of current issues, and a lecture on residential architecture.



Photo: Conservancy archives

Street Theater Advocacy. Downey McDonald's 1994.

In 1988, the Task Force produced the "John Lautner: Real Architecture" tour, and in 1989, two tours of Case Study Houses titled "Yesterday, Today, & Tomorrow." Together these tours stimulated new interest in Southern California mid-century architecture, paving the way for its broader rediscovery in the 1990s.

## ModCom and the Modern HPOZ

By Regina O'Brien-Wronske,  
ModCom Chair 2009-Present

When most people hear "Historic Preservation Overlay Zone" (HPOZ) – the City of Los Angeles' term for a historic district – they often think of neighborhoods of Craftsman Bungalows or Queen Anne-style houses. Few think of the mid-century modern tracts that proliferated throughout Southern California after World War II. There are, however, several modern HPOZs that owe their designation in great measure to

*Continued on page 3*



Photo: Dogwood Ink

Mar Vista Tract HPOZ.

## March 28 Celebration Includes Entertaining Slide Talk

Happy thirtieth birthday to the Los Angeles Conservancy's Modern Committee! Like the Conservancy itself, the Modern Committee began as a small group of concerned citizens that grew into a powerful force for preservation in Los Angeles. To celebrate its anniversary, the Committee will hold a fun event on **Saturday, March 28** from **4 to 7 p.m.** at Pasadena Presbyterian Church, a masterpiece of organic form rendered in concrete. The program includes an entertaining presentation about ModCom's three-decade history, fascinating speakers, and a reception. And it's free! For details, visit [laconservancy.org/modcom](http://laconservancy.org/modcom).



# Proactive Preservation

by Alan Leib, Chair 2001-2004, 2008-2009



Norms La Cienega (1957, Armet & Davis). Nominated as key L.A. landmark; threatened.



Touring Johnie's Coffee Shop, Wilshire (1956, Armet & Davis). Designated as local landmark.

Having been involved for more than half of the Modern Committee's thirty years, I have seen various preservation scenarios play out in Greater Los Angeles. Unfortunately, many preservation emergencies involve some sort of last-minute effort to designate an endangered building unprotected by landmark status. For modern resources, the Conservancy and its Modern Committee have always embraced proactive landmark designation as a key protective measure.

In particular, important residential architecture can be overlooked outside of identified historic districts. The Strick House in Santa Monica was Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer's only extant residential



National Register-Listed Case Study House #20.

© J. Paul Getty Trust. Used with permission, Julius Shulman Photography Archive, Research Library at the Getty Research Institute (2004.R.10)

design in North America, but it was unidentified and threatened with demolition until the Modern Committee submitted a successful local landmark nomination in 2003.

In 2004, the legendary *Arts and Architecture* magazine's Case Study House Program was widely celebrated, yet only a handful of the program's residences were designated, leaving the rest vulnerable. In a proactive effort, ModCom commissioned architectural historian and former ModCom chair Peter Moruzzi to prepare a National Register multiple property nomination for the entire Case Study House Program. Numerous volunteers, under the coordination of Steven Kyle, were tasked with documenting eleven dwellings in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Ventura counties as part of the overall nomination. Included were important works by Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, Rodney Walker, Craig Ellwood, and Pierre Koenig. In 2013, ten were officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places, with an eleventh deemed eligible for listing due to owner opposition. In November 2013, the Modern Committee received the Governor's Preservation Award for its work on this effort.

The Modern Committee is dedicated to additional proactive nominations. The visionary, futuristic work of Googie architects Armet and Davis is an obvious example. In 2013, the firm's classic Johnie's Coffee Shop at Wilshire and Fairfax was nominated and is now a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM). Hopefully, by the time you read this, another Conservancy/ModCom nomination, Armet and Davis' endangered Norms La Cienega, will also be an HCM. Many more properties deserve such attention, with proactive designation a proven means of providing a crucial measure of protection.



## ModCom and the Modern HPOZ *continued*

two ModCom members, Adriene Biondo and Amanda Seward.

Amanda participated in the community effort to designate the Gregory Ain Mar Vista Tract in 2003. This collection of 52 one-story homes was built in 1947 by modernist architect Gregory Ain in collaboration with Joseph Johnson and Alfred Day. Each modest house champions the indoor/outdoor lifestyle and features flat roofs, clerestory windows, V-shaped pipe supports, overhang cutouts, rear walls of glass, and open floor plans. Garrett Eckbo landscaped its three-block area. Eckbo is considered one of the masters of modern landscape design.



Photo: Adriene Biondo

Balboa Highlands Eichler Tract HPOZ.

In Granada Hills, the 1962-1964 Balboa Highlands Tract is a collection of 108 mid-century one-story post-and-beam houses

with glass walls and lovely courtyard atriums open to the sky. The seminal California developer Joseph Eichler constructed the tract from designs by noted modern architects A. Quincy Jones and Frederick Emmons. It was designated in 2010 after a seven-year effort led by past ModCom Chair and resident Adriene Biondo. She credits the Modern Committee's San Fernando Valley tour "How Modern Was My Valley" for sparking owner interest in designating the neighborhood.

These decidedly modern HPOZs helped change what we think of as a historic district and paved the way for the preservation of mid-century housing tracts in Southern California.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF MODCOM'S 30 YEARS OF EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

ModCom was instrumental in launching the Conservancy's work to preserve modern resources. Over the years, the Conservancy and its ModCom have worked together on these and many other efforts.

Space doesn't allow for the names of individuals who went far above and beyond the call of duty on specific projects; please know how much we appreciate your efforts.

### 1984-1995

#### CHAIRPERSONS:

**Tom Gardner** (1984-87), **Kathleen Leonard** (co-chair, 1987-88), **Gene Polk** (co-chair 1987-90), **Mike Ulander** (1990), **Tom Gardner** (1991), **Peter Moruzzi** (1992-1997)

Demolition of **Ship's Westwood Coffee Shop** (Martin Stern, 1958) and **Tiny Naylor's Drive-In Restaurant, Hollywood** (Douglas Honnold, 1949).

#### Founding of Fifties Task Force, 1984.

Early members include Annette Andreozzi, Frank Cooper, John English, Tom Gardner, Kathleen Leonard, Chris Nichols, Jamie Nichols, Katherine Rinne, and Dan Silver.

Group educates itself on mid-century architecture, identifying significant or potentially threatened examples, and raising awareness through Conservancy newsletters.

**"Fifties Architecture: Exploring the Issues,"** Lectures and panel discussion.

Oral histories of photographer Julius Shulman, landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, furniture designer Edward Frank, and architects Ray Kappe, John Lautner, and Whitney Smith. Hosted by Huell Howser.

**"John Lautner: Real Architecture"** Tour and lecture.

**"Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. Case Study Houses"** Tours. Coincided with MOCA exhibit.

Committee name changes: **Modern and Post-WWII Committee** (1991) to **Modern Committee/**

**ModCom** (1992)

**"Neutra in the 1930s"** 1992. Tour and lecture.

**Bob's Big Boy Toluca Lake** (Wayne McAllister, 1949). 1993. Designated California State Point of Historical Interest after difficult battle. Today it's the nation's top-grossing Bob's.

**"Postwar Modern Commercial Architecture in Los Angeles"** 1993. Lecture series and exhibition

on architectural firm Armet & Davis focusing on Google style.

**"Cruising Postwar Los Angeles"** 1994. Self-driven citywide tour of modern sites with over 1,000 tourgoers.

**Downey McDonald's.** 1994. Multiple rallies to save oldest remaining location built in 1953. Front page of *New York Times*. Company preserves and reopens it.

Other advocacy efforts: **CBS Television City** (saved), **Azusa McDonald's** (lost), **Wich Stand Coffee Shop**, Ladera Heights (designated).

### 1995-2005

CHAIRPERSONS: **Peter Moruzzi** (1992-1997),

**Chris Nichols** (1998-1999), **Michael Palumbo** (1999-2001), **Alan Leib** (2001-2004), **Adriene Biondo** (2004-2008)

**"Architects' Own Homes and the Modern Tradition in Los Angeles"** 1995. Tour of houses designed by and for some of the area's most important modern architects.

**"Cruising Industrial Los Angeles"** 1997. Pioneering tour highlighting 20th century industrial architecture throughout L.A. County.

Launch of ModCom website. 1998.

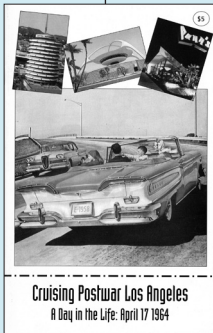
**"A Place in the Sun: Architecture of Wayne McAllister 1928-1961"** 1998. Exhibition honoring architect of 1930s streamline drive-in restaurants and 1950s Las Vegas hotels.

**Van de Kamp's, Route 66, Arcadia** (Bissner & Zook, 1967. Now Denny's). Rallies with windmill hats save this last windmill-topped Van de Kamp's.

**"How Modern Was My Valley: Touring the Postwar San Fernando Valley"** 2000. Showcased the

Valley's heritage as a mecca of mid-century suburbia.

*Continued on page 4*



Cruising Postwar Los Angeles  
A Day in the Life: April 17 1994



# HIGHLIGHTS OF MODCOM'S 30 YEARS OF EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

*Continued from page 3*

**Holiday Bowl** (Armet & Davis, 1958). 2000-2003. Long battle resulted in preservation of coffee shop, now a Starbucks. Bowling alley demolished.

**Lincoln Place Apartments** (Ralph A. Vaughn & Heth Wharton, 1949-1951). 2000-2010. Important modern garden apartment complex preserved after decade-long community effort.

**"3-D L.A.: Modernism in Three Dimensions. The Stereo Photography of Jack Laxer 1953-1965"** 2001. 3D slide show of mid-century commercial buildings.

**"Built by Becket Centennial Celebration"** 2003. Salute to Welton Becket & Associates at the firm's Cinerama Dome.

**"Your Government in Glendale"** 2000. Walking tour of mid-century civic center.

**"20-20-20: 20 Years-20 Sites-20 Bucks"** 2004. Tour of 20 locations celebrating ModCom's 20th anniversary.

**Case Study House Program:** National Register of Historic Places nomination. 2004-2013. Eleven houses designated.

**Johnnie's Broiler, Downey** formerly Harvey's, now Bob's Big Boy (Paul B. Clayton, 1958).

Determined eligible for California Register 2002. Illegally demolished 2007; rebuilt 2009 after community effort.

Other advocacy efforts: **Glendale Federal Savings HQ** (saved), **Bass House/Case Study House #20** (designated and saved), **Monterey Trailer Park** (designated and saved), **Cinerama Dome** (saved), **Stuart Pharmaceutical** (saved), **Hanna-Barbera Building** (saved), **Java Lanes** (lost)

## 2005-2015

CHAIRPERSONS: **Adriene Biondo** (2005-2008), **Alan Leib** (2008-2009), **Regina O'Brien-Wronski** (2009 to Present)

**"Curating the City: Wilshire Blvd."** 2005. **"Johnnie's Coffee Shop"** (formerly Romeo Times Square). Curated exhibit, reopened long-closed

restaurant, hosted original architect Eldon Davis.

**"Spectacular Vernacular: High Style Roots of Everyday Modernism"** 2006. Ranch House lecture, modern home tour including Corbin Palms (Palmer and Krisel, 1955).

**Capitol Records Building.** HCM nomination approved 2007.

**"City of the Seekers. L.A.'s Unique Spiritual Legacy"** 2009. Tour of distinctive birthplaces of L.A.-based spiritual movements.

**"It's a Mod, Mod, Mod City" Tour** 2009. Part of "The 60s Turn 50" initiative highlighting 1960s architecture eligible for National Register.

Establishment of the **Modern Masters Award Program** 2009. In-person tributes to architects, artists, and designers whose work significantly affected mid-century Los Angeles. Recipients include Julius Shulman, Marvin Rand, Jack Laxer, Eldon Davis, William Krisel, W.A. Sarmiento, Jerome and Evelyn Ackerman, Ray Kappe, and Malcolm Leland, among many others.

**"Home Sixties Home"** 2010, part of "The 60s Turn 50." Four residences highlighted.

**Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co.** (Paul R. Williams, 1949). 2011. Successful nomination. Historic lobby murals preserved in situ.

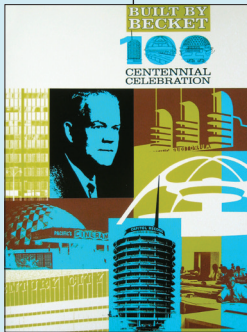
**"Millard Sheets-A Legacy of Art & Architecture"** 2012. Tour of significant Millard Sheets-designed sites in Pomona and Claremont.

**Johnnie's Wilshire** (Armet & Davis, 1955; formerly Romeo Times Square). 2013. Successful nomination.

**Landmark nominations:** **Strick House**, Santa Monica (Oscar Neimeyer, 1963); **Driftwood Dairy**, El Monte (1960-61); **Van Dekker House**, Woodland Hills (Rudolph Schindler, 1940); **Department of Water and Power HQ** (A.C. Martin & Assoc., 1965).

Other advocacy efforts: **Ambassador College, Fine Arts & Sciences Buildings**, Pasadena (lost), **Columbia Savings** (lost), **Shusett House** Beverly Hills (lost), **Moore House** (lost),

**Robinson's May**, Beverly Hills (lost), **Glendale Federal Savings** (saved), **CBS Columbia Square** (saved), **Century Plaza Hotel** (saved), **Kronish House**, Beverly Hills (saved).



Tour booklet images: Conservancy archives; DWP Building: Erich Koyama

## A Word from the Chair

It has been my pleasure to serve the Modern Committee these past fifteen years, the last six as chair. Since 1984, the volunteers of ModCom, hand-in-hand with dedicated Conservancy staff, have worked hard to identify and protect the important mid-century built environment of Los Angeles County, be it a vernacular coffee shop or an exceptional home. During this period there has been a remarkable evolution in the appreciation of modernism, and the Modern Committee is proud to have played a part in this.

Recently, in an effort to accomplish more direct, hands-on advocacy, ModCom has altered its format by adding a working group and instituting quarterly educational events. And we continue to work proactively on a range of advocacy issues. We would love to hear your ideas and concerns, and we welcome your participation.

I look forward to the bright future of our Modern Committee, and hope you will come and join us.

*Regina O'Brien-Wronski*

## 2015 ModCom Executive Council

Regina O'Brien-Wronski, Cheryl Dudley-Roberts, Chris Green, Charles Fisher, and Steven Kyle. Special thanks to Chris Nichols, the heart and soul of ModCom since 1987.



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