Revised Development Plan Preserves Century Plaza Hotel

by Mike Buhler

On February 11, the Los Angeles Conservancy, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Next Century Associates (owners of the Century Plaza Hotel) announced plans for a revised development project that would preserve the 1966 Century Plaza Hotel in Century City.

All three parties worked together at the urging of L.A. City Councilmember Paul Koretz, in whose district the hotel resides. The Conservancy is extremely grateful to Councilmember Koretz for his leadership in bringing us all to the table, and to his staff for their dedication to finding a preservation solution.

The revised project will preserve the existing hotel building as the centerpiece of a mixed-use development with hotel, residential, and office space; retail and restaurants; and public plazas and open space. The project will undergo the normal City review and approval process, including a full environmental impact report (EIR) estimated for release and public comment later this year. Next Century’s architectural team has begun a concept design that will be available for review in the coming months.

The project allows for the reuse of the hotel building and development of the property in a way that maintains the building’s eligibility both as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) and for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. The architecture and preservation firm Architectural Resources Group is preparing a historic evaluation of the project for the EIR, which will be presented to the city’s Cultural Heritage Commission in the months ahead.

The Conservancy and the National Trust will continue our involvement through a Preservation Advisory Group that will review the preservation project as it develops. Significant documentation has

Celebrate Sixties Homes!

by Trudi Sandmeier

As we reach the midpoint of our nine-month initiative, “The Sixties Turn 50,” the time has come to turn our attention to L.A.’s treasure trove of 1960s residential architecture. What comes to mind? The iconic Stahl House (Case Study House #22) by Pierre Koenig, immortalized in photographs by the late Julius Shulman? Or perhaps John Lautner’s Malin House (Chemosphere), the flying saucer-shaped home perched above the San Fernando Valley? How about John Woolf’s Bell Residence, a glamorous Hollywood Regency gem in Bel-Air? Or the Balboa Highlands Eichler Tract in Granada Hills, the city’s newest (and youngest) Historic Preservation Overlay Zone?

The Conservancy and our volunteer Modern Committee are here to be your guide. First, please be sure to whet your appetite by voting for your favorite homes on the “People’s Choice” Top 60 of the Sixties at laconservancy.org/sixties. Then mark your calendar for a series of events in mid-April highlighting sixties residential architecture.

On Tuesday, April 13, at 7 p.m. at the Getty Center, the Getty Research Institute will host the Los Angeles premiere of William Krisel, Architect. Directed by Jake Gorst, this 2010 documentary explores architect William Krisel’s life and work, which encompasses more than 40,000 individual housing units across the U.S. and is synonymous with mid-twentieth-century Southern California design. The screening will be followed by a conversation between Krisel and Wim de Wit, head of the Department of Architecture and Contemporary Art at the Getty Research Institute. This event is free, but parking is $15 and reservations are required. To sign up, call (310) 440-7300 or visit getty.edu/research/scholarly_activities/events/krisel/.

Please see CENTURY PLAZA on page 6
Upcoming Events: Something for Everyone!

The next few months are packed with great events! You’ll find details about each within this issue or online at lacconservancy.org. Here’s a snapshot of what’s coming up:

March 24: Sixties Cultural Landscapes Lecture
Learn about the fascinating history of mid-century landscape design in Southern California and its associated preservation challenges. See page 4 for details.

March 31: Last Remaining Seats (LRS) Tickets on Sale to Conservancy Members
Take advantage of early ticket sales and join us for another exciting year of LRS in Broadway’s beautiful historic theatres. Tickets will be available to the general public on April 14.

April 11: Third Annual L.A. Heritage Day—Free for Conservancy Members!
Sponsored by the L.A. Heritage Alliance, this festival-type event seeks to reconnect the public with greater L.A.’s cultural institutions and resources. Visit lacconservancy.org for details.

April 13: Screening of New Film, William Krisel, Architect
The Getty Research Institute hosts the L.A. premiere of this 2010 documentary exploring architect William Krisel’s life and work. See page 1 for details.

April 14: Sixties Residential Lecture
Join residential architecture expert Jan Horn on an armchair voyage through 1960s homes. See page 6 for details.

April 15: Blade Runner Panel Discussion to Benefit Conservancy
The 20th Century Decorative Arts Department at Bonhams & Butterfields presents Blade Runner: Designing the Future. Proceeds will benefit the Conservancy. See page 6 for details.

April 18: “Home Sixties Home” Tour
This one-time-only tour explores a range of ’60s residential architecture. Don’t miss this opportunity to get inside some of Los Angeles’ fab sixties pads. See page 6 for details.

April 30: Member Drive Deadline
Recruit new members, or purchase gift memberships, for a chance to win two VIP reserved seats at LRS—six chances to win! Visit http://lac.lacconservancy.org/drive for details.

May 1: La Laguna de San Gabriel (Monster Park) Picnic
Bring the whole family to the whimsical sixties playground in San Gabriel for a fun afternoon among sea creatures galore. See page 4 for details.

May 12 - 15: 2010 California Preservation Conference
The California Preservation Foundation journeys to Nevada City and Grass Valley for their annual conference. Visit californiapreservation.org for details.

May 13: 29th Annual Preservation Awards Luncheon
Tickets go on sale in April for the Conservancy’s luncheon celebrating the best of the best in historic preservation across Los Angeles County.

May 26: Last Remaining Seats Opening Night
This year’s series kicks off at the 1931 Los Angeles Theatre with How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (1967). The season runs through June 30. Visit our website for details.

May 30: “The Sixties Turn 50” Photo Contest Deadline
Last day to share your photos of 1960s buildings for a chance to win. See page 4 for details.
Preservation Issues in the News
by Mike Buhler, Flora Chou, Karina Muñiz, and Marcello Vavala

Maravilla Handball Court

The Conservancy is working with the Maravilla Historical Society (MHS), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, to preserve the oldest handball court in East Los Angeles. Built brick-by-brick by residents in 1923, the Maravilla Handball Court reflects the rich layers of history common in L.A. From 2023 to 2007, the court was home to the men’s-only Maravilla Handball Club. In the early 1940s, Michi and Tommy Nishiyama purchased the land following Michi’s internment at a Japanese relocation camp. The family opened a local El Centro grocery store next to the court; the store and court together became an important community landmark to East L.A. residents.

In 2006, Michi passed away; Tommy followed a year later, and the court and store were closed. The site was boarded up for a year, until the Maravilla Historical Society began efforts in 2008 to restore the court and store for community residents to appreciate, use, and learn about an important part of their neighborhood’s history. Residents and handball veterans who remembered the legacy of the court soon took up the cause to save the building.

In December 2009, the MHS organized the court’s first-ever co-ed youth handball tournament. Attended by over twenty-five boys and girls, the event helped introduce the sport and the historic court to a new generation of players. Veteran players attended to mentor participants, including young girls eager to learn the sport. Another event in February 13 kicked off the MHS’s capital fund-raising effort to convert the former store and court to a new generation of players. Veteran players attended to mentor participants, including young girls eager to learn the sport. Another event in February 13 kicked off the MHS’s capital fund-raising effort to convert the former store and court to a new generation of players. Veteran players attended to mentor participants, including young girls eager to learn the sport.

The effort to preserve the Maravilla Handball Court is part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “This Place Matters” campaign, spearheaded locally by the Conservancy, which identifies important community-based historic sites that merit national attention.

Golden Gate Theatre

On February 17, the L.A. County Regional Planning Commission certified the environmental impact report (EIR) for the Golden Gate Theatre adaptive reuse project, which will convert the theatre for use as a retail pharmacy. The Conservancy and members of the public spoke at the hearing. Although our testimony noted that the proposed conversion into a drugstore is not ideal, we emphasized that it is preferable to leaving the theatre vacant and deteriorating for the foreseeable future.

Built in 1927 at Whittier and Atlantic Boulevards in unincorporated East L.A., the Golden Gate Theatre is one of the few remaining neighborhood movie palaces in Southern California. The Spanish Churriguersque-style theatre was once surrounded by the historic Vega Building, which was demolished in the early 1990s after suffering damage from the 1987 Whittier Earthquake.

In March 2009, the County released the draft EIR for a proposal to convert the theatre into a retail pharmacy. The original plan would have left the interior virtually unrecognizable by removing or covering up architectural features. In response to concerns raised by the Conservancy, the State Office of Historic Preservation, the L.A. Historic Theatre Foundation, and community residents, the project has been substantially modified to leave more of the historic interior intact and visible, including the balcony.

Though the modified project is more sensitive, the Conservancy remains concerned about potential damage and has asked the commission to impose specific conditions to ensure maximum retention of historic fabric, including an explicit requirement to repair the auditorium ceiling and leave it visible to the public. The commission continued the public hearing until March 10, at which time it is expected to approve the project subject to a list of conditions proposed by staff.

Ennis House

In February, the Ennis House Foundation reduced the price of the Ennis House from $15 million to $10,495,000. While the price reduction reflects the current state of the housing market, it also opens the door for new potential buyers to purchase and restore the 1924 Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece. The lower asking price will allow a buyer to invest more funds directly into the home’s restoration rather than the purchase itself.

Columbia Savings Building

The 1965 Columbia Savings Building at Wilshire Boulevard and La Brea Avenue is now only a memory. Its demolition began on December 4, hours after the Los Angeles City Council certified the final environmental impact report for the replacement project. Two art pieces integral to the building’s design, a brass screen-waterfall sculpture and a 1,300-square-foot dalle de verre skylight, were salvaged by an art dealer who purchased them for resale. Wholesale demolition of the building with a wrecking ball was completed in January. Conservancy staff and longtime volunteer Larry Underhill documented the demolition through photos and video. To see selected images and video, and for background on the issue, please visit laconservancy.org.

HPOZ Board Appointments

In late summer 2009, members of the Los Angeles Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) Alliance protested the mayor’s widespread failure to appoint HPOZ board members as required under the city’s HPOZ ordinance.

Although the mayor’s office is responsible for appointing one board member with real estate or construction experience to each five-member HPOZ board, the Conservancy found that at least half of the existing twenty-four HPOZs lacked a current mayoral appointment. After compiling a list of vacancies, the Conservancy met with the mayor’s staff last fall to discuss how to expedite appointments. As of early March, only three vacancies remain.

For more information about HPOZs and historic districts throughout Los Angeles County, visit laconservancy.org/neighborhoods. You’ll find a Google map of nearly 100 historic neighborhoods throughout L.A. County, as well as a wide range of information about historic districts.
Cultural Landscapes Lecture March 24

Join the Conservancy and partner, The Cultural Landscape Foundation, at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 24 for a discussion about the preservation of 1960s-era cultural landscapes.

Los Angeles boasts a wealth of exceptional landscape architecture from the 1960s, including master works by such famed designers as Thomas Church and Garrett Eckbo. As with historic buildings, cultural landscapes reveal aspects of our region’s history and development, and reflect our evolving relationships with the natural world. These works of art express our regional identity, particularly in sunny Southern California. Ultimately, these landscapes are an important part of our built environment and a vital facet of the historic preservation movement.

As part of the Conservancy’s “The Sixties Turn 50” programming, presenters Charles Birnbaum and Alan Hess will lead us through the fascinating history of mid-century landscape design in Southern California and the challenges associated with preserving modern landscapes.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR, is the Founder and President of The Cultural Landscape Foundation, a nonprofit that seeks to increase the public’s awareness of U.S. landscapes. Mr. Birnbaum has authored and edited numerous works including Preserving Modern Landscape Architecture.

Alan Hess is a preeminent authority on the mid-twentieth-century architectural history of Southern California. As a practicing architect and historian, Mr. Hess documents the emerging suburban metropolises of the West. His many books include Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture.

The event will be held at the 1967 Proud Bird Restaurant in Westchester, a site on the 2009 “It’s a Mod, Mod, Mod, Mod City” tour. Admission is $15 for Conservancy members ($20 for the general public) and $5 for students. Reservations are required and available at laconservancy.org/sixties.

May Day Monster Mash – A “Sixties Turn 50” Picnic and Field Day!

by Adam Rubin

Fold up your “pic-a-nic” blanket, mold your ambrosia salad, and join the Conservancy and Friends of La Laguna for a picnic at Vincent Lugo Park in San Gabriel! On Saturday, May 1 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., this May Day afternoon will feature sixties (and sixties-inspired) food, games, and activities for kids of all ages.

La Laguna de San Gabriel, affectionately known as “Monster Park,” is nestled in the corner of San Gabriel’s Vincent Lugo Park. Handcrafted in the mid-1960s by master concrete artist Benjamin Dominguez, this sand-filled “lagoon” is home to over a dozen whimsical sea monsters that have brought children and families together for decades. When La Laguna was threatened with demolition in 2006 as part of a park expansion plan, park preservation advocates Friends of La Laguna successfully rallied community support to save this beloved landmark. They went on to create a groundbreaking study and preservation plan for this unique cultural landscape, which garnered a 2009 Los Angeles Conservancy Preservation Award.

But wait, there’s more! Ever tasted the “Orange Julius Shulman” or the “I. M. Pei-nut Butter” sandwich? In addition to preservation, picnic lunches, and games, the Coolhaus Ice Cream Sandwich truck will stop by with architecturally inspired ice cream sandwiches. Come see what delectable “Sixties Turn 50” ice cream treats await!

Reservations are required and are available online. Admission is $10 for Conservancy members, $15 for the general public, and $5 for children 12 and under. The fee includes lunch, one Coolhaus ice cream sandwich, and all the fun and games you can stand. For reservations, visit laconservancy.org/sixties.

Do You Have Vision? “Sixties Turn 50” Photo Contest

As part of “The Sixties Turn 50,” the Conservancy and our Modern Committee are hosting a 1960s architectural photography contest. Show us your vision of sixties Los Angeles for a chance to win a fabulous prize!

Images of icons such as the LAX Theme Building are welcome, but we encourage you to think outside the “space-age spiderleg box,” explore the city’s amazing sixties architecture, and be creative! Any ’60s structure in Los Angeles County is fair game.

Entries will be accepted by e-mail until May 30, 2010. Judges will pick winners in three categories: professional, amateur, and high school.

For details, visit laconservancy.org/sixties. We look forward to seeing the city through your lens!
Volunteers Make Everything Happen!

The Conservancy’s annual volunteer appreciation party took place on January 31 at La Villa Basque Restaurant in Vernon, a 1960s landmark and contestant in our “People’s Choice” Top 60 of the Sixties commercial buildings category. More than ninety volunteers enjoyed a tour of the completely intact restaurant and a presentation on the history of Vernon. The Conservancy thanks all our volunteers for their hard work throughout the year. Photo by Mrs. Underhill.

Special Thanks to the Walking Tour Docents Who Gave Tours in 2009!

Many thanks to our seventy-seven walking tour docents, who last year gave a total of 636 tours to approximately 7,500 guests!

Tony Abraham
Alice Allen
Nancy Arnhim
Janis Ashley
Ron Barnett *
Reem Baroody
David Berman
Kenon Breazeale
Bob Brennan
Margaret Briggs
Chris Brown *
Roberta Brown
Michael Burr
Gail Burton
Norm Carter
Bud Coffey
Pamela Corante
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Julie Downey *
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Sarah Finer
John Ghini *
Michael Goldstein
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Dennis Ritchey
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Zed Saeed
Bruce Scottow *
Christina Siden
Nancy Silverman
Shannon Simonds
Steve Slacey
Don Sloper
Lorraine Stark *
Ashley Strake
Pam Taylor *
Jill Thomsen
Ed Trepper
Martin Turnbull
Tony Valdez *
Donald Weggeman**
Judy Weinstein
Arthur Wertheim
Jan Westman
Ted Wolfe

* Gave fifteen or more tours in 2009
** Gave over twenty tours in 2009

Volunteer Profile:
VICTORIA WILLIAMS

by Connie Humberger

VICTORIA WILLIAMS is an enthusiastic and dedicated young woman who is one of the Conservancy’s Student Advocates at the John F. Kennedy High School Architecture Magnet. Victoria, a senior, lives in Los Angeles and travels daily to Granada Hills because of her passion for architecture. The Student Advocates program enhances her architecture curriculum with opportunities to learn about, and experience firsthand, greater L.A.’s rich architectural heritage.

A native of Los Angeles, Victoria briefly attended Dorsey High School before transferring to Kennedy’s Architecture Magnet. She also enjoys writing, reading, bike riding, Bible study, and movies.

Victoria has participated in three Conservancy special tours and recently wrote a landmark nomination with a student team for the Squire Residence in the city of Huntington Park. Victoria said that while it was hard work, she enjoyed the landmark process, as well as the realization that a teenager could contribute to local history and help to protect a historic building.

Victoria plans to attend Santa Monica College to study accounting and drafting. We know you’ll be successful, Victoria!

Have a Story to Tell?

The Historic Theatres Committee’s (HTC) Oral History Project needs you! If you’ve ever worked at, or have been involved in, one of L.A.’s historic theatres, the HTC wants to talk to you.

The HTC is collecting stories documenting the history of these great theatres. If you’re interested in being interviewed or know someone who might be interested, please contact Jan Wilson Morris at JWM4SWC@aol.com. Production skills are also needed.

For information about our volunteer Historic Theatres Committee, visit laconservancy.org.
**CENTURY PLAZA**

*continued from page 1*

already been completed to identify the building’s historic features, with preparation of a detailed historic structure report currently underway.

Architecture firm Marmol Radziner and Associates has developed a series of detailed treatment protocols for conservation of the hotel’s character-defining features and materials. This groundbreaking research—particularly on the treatment of aluminum, which came into widespread use in the 1960s and was used extensively in the Century Plaza Hotel—will benefit not only the hotel building but many other historic resources from the sixties and beyond.

The progress we’ve made to date is very encouraging and could serve as a model for collaboration between preservationists and developers going forward. It is particularly meaningful on the heels of the demolition of the 1965 Columbia Savings Building (see page 3), which underscores the fragility of Greater L.A.’s 1960s heritage. For more information, visit our “Sixties Turn 50” website [laconservancy.org/sixties](http://laconservancy.org/sixties).

Our success with the Century Plaza Hotel would not have been possible without the support of you, our members. Each and every Conservancy member makes a crucial difference in our ability to influence decision makers on important issues like this. Thank you. We’d also like to thank the hundreds of people who wrote letters of support and the nearly 1,500 people who pledged their support for the hotel’s preservation. We still have much to do, and we will keep you posted.

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**‘Blade Runner’ Panel Discussion Benefits Conservancy**

The 20th Century Decorative Arts Department at Bonhams & Butterfields will present *Blade Runner: Designing the Future*, on **Thursday, April 15**. The panel discussion will focus on the groundbreaking themes and visual design of director Ridley Scott’s 1982 science fiction classic, *Blade Runner*, including the use of L.A. landmarks such as the Bradbury Building and Ennis House in depicting a landscape of the future. The panel will include the film’s Oscar-winning producer, Michael Deeley, and legendary conceptual and industrial designer Syd Mead. Proceeds will benefit the Conservancy.

Details are available at [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org). Tickets are $25 - $50 and can be purchased through Bonhams by calling (323) 436-5445 or by e-mailing katie.nartonis@bonhams.com. You can also join our Events e-mail list for the latest updates (“Sign Up for E-News” on our website).

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**HOME TOUR**

*continued from page 1*

On **Wednesday evening, April 14**, join us on an armchair expedition through the world of 1960s residential architecture. Leading our voyage will be Jan Horn, founder and executive director of the Architectural Division of Coldwell Banker. Mr. Horn has specialized in the sale of architect-designed houses for the past thirty years. A frequent speaker on architectural topics at museums and universities nationwide, he is an affiliate member of the American Institute of Architects, Los Angeles Chapter, and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Architecture + Design Museum. Admission to this event is free with the purchase of a “Home Sixties Home” tour ticket (see below); otherwise, admission is $5 for Conservancy members ($10 for the general public). Reservations are available at [laconservancy.org/sixties](http://laconservancy.org/sixties).

Last but not least, join us for the “Home Sixties Home” tour on **Sunday, April 18**, when we’ll visit some great ‘60s homes in Brentwood. One of the tour sites, last opened to the public for a 1968 home tour, is a redwood treehouse bachelor pad complete with walk-in wine cellar, steam room, and Jacuzzi tub. Perched on the hillside overlooking a canyon with views to the ocean, the Franks House was a hub of social events, notorious with the neighbors for swinging parties. Although the finishes have been updated over the years, architect Raul Gardner’s daring 1966 design is intact.

Another featured home is the sprawling custom residence built in 1961 for Dr. and Mrs. Morris Frankel in Mandeville Canyon. Designed by Ephraim Baran, AIA, architect of the distinctive Directors Guild of America corporate headquarters in Hollywood, the house is a virtual time capsule of sixties architecture and interior design. A celebration of angles and glass, this unique home was built for entertaining. It retains its original finishes and features throughout, including a somewhat startling coffin-shaped swimming pool that must be seen to be believed.

The “Home Sixties Home” tour is generously sponsored by City National Bank and Coldwell Banker. Please visit our website for more information about the tour sites, all of which are in the hills north of Sunset Boulevard in Brentwood. Tickets, which include shuttle transportation to the homes, are $40 for members ($60 for the general public) and are available at [laconservancy.org/sixties](http://laconservancy.org/sixties).
NOVEMBER 11 / JANUARY 19
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UPCOMING “SIXTIES TURN 50” EVENTS

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES LECTURE
Wednesday, March 24

Join the Conservancy, The Cultural Landscape Foundation, and noted architect/historian Alan Hess for a discussion of 1960s-era cultural landscapes in Southern California. For details, see page 4.

LA LAGUNA MAY DAY MONSTER MASH
Saturday, May 1

Join us at the whimsical La Laguna playground in San Gabriel for an afternoon picnic with games, lunch, ice cream, and fun for the whole family. For details, see page 4.

HOME SIXTIES HOMES
1960s Residential Tour
Sunday, April 18

Mark your calendar for our upcoming tour highlighting a range of 1960s residential architecture in Brentwood, including the 1961 Frankel House (pictured above). For details, see page 1.