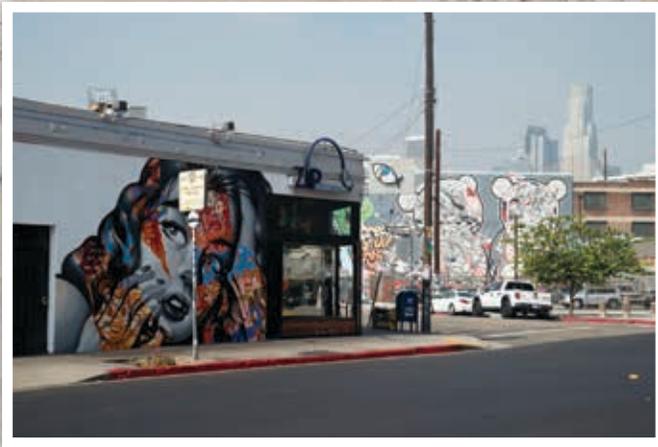




# The Arts District

HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE IN DOWNTOWN L.A.



LOS ANGELES  
CONSERVANCY

# Endings and Beginnings: A History of Change in Downtown L.A.'s Arts District

The history of the Arts District is one of constant change – many endings and beginnings. With the neighborhood about to start another chapter with the influx of new businesses, residents, and developments, it is a good time to reflect on the neighborhood's history and to think about how the historic architecture can continue to play an important role in its unique identity.

## From Grapevines to Railroads

Had you visited the area now known as the Arts District in the mid nineteenth-century, you would have seen acres of vineyards. In fact, Vignes Street, which runs through the northern edge of the district, was named after "the father of French immigration to Los Angeles," Jean-Louis Vignes. He arrived from France in 1831 and found in Southern California the perfect climate for planting grapes. In 1833 he planted grapes from France, and by 1847, Vignes' vineyard, El Aliso, was the largest producer of wine in California. Other winemakers and fruit growers followed Vignes, and by the late nineteenth century, oranges and grapefruit had outpaced grapes as the primary product of the area.

Railroads and manufacturing emerged to serve the citrus industry's shipping needs, and later to support the large number of people moving into California, and so began the transportation and industrial chapter in this neighborhood's history. Previously,

only local railroads ran through the city, but in 1876 the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad from San Francisco connected Los Angeles with the transcontinental railroad. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad came next to Los Angeles in 1885. In 1905, the Union Pacific arrived, making the city a western terminus of three major transcontinental railroads. All three railroads built depots, transportation buildings, warehouses, and rail yards in and around the Arts District.

In fact, many of the industrial buildings constructed in the Arts District during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century leave clear signs that they were built around the railroad. Buildings curve unexpectedly, following tracks long since covered over, and doors and loading docks are set three or four feet above ground level to the height of a boxcar.

While the railroads were eroding some of the agricultural land around the turn of the twentieth century, the area still had a rural feel in contrast to the residential and commercial development concentrated in downtown Los Angeles west of Main Street. Surprisingly, the Arts District was also home to several working-class residential neighborhoods due to the real estate boom of the late 1880s and the proliferation of job opportunities that came with industrial development.

## Industrial Boom

Despite the residential enclaves, this neighborhood was on a clear path toward industrialization during the early twentieth century. The city's population explosion contributed to the expansion of the regional economy. By the 1920s, Los Angeles had become the fifth-largest city in the United States and the seventh-wealthiest in the nation. Key manufacturers located in the Arts District at this time were producing bakery products, women's clothing, foundry and machinery goods, furniture, printing and publishing materials, automobile parts, and rubber.

In the early twentieth century, the



Aerial view of the expansive Barker Bros. factories and warehouses located along Palmetto Street, 1924. Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

City of Los Angeles was adding huge amounts of territory by incorporating already existing communities, such as Highland Park and Boyle Heights, and adding more than 100,000 acres in the San Fernando Valley. Because of all the available residential land, by 1922 the city had officially re-zoned downtown to eliminate all residential housing in order to make room for more offices, retail, and manufacturing. This move solidified the Arts District as an industrial center. Manufacturers continued to locate in the area throughout the 1910s and 1920s.

By the end of World War II, this neighborhood was clearly industrial in nature, but it began to face challenges as industrial needs evolved. As railroads gave way to the trucking industry, large trucks had difficulty accessing some of the smaller streets that were once railroad spurs. Manufacturing plants grew larger in size, yet land parcels in the neighborhood were small. Companies had to purchase several adjacent lots in order to build a large plant, making property acquisition difficult. Newer, outlying cities such as Vernon and the City of Commerce could better accommodate the needs of modern industries. As companies moved away to build larger, more modern factories, the warehouses of the Arts District stood vacant and the neighborhood began to decay.



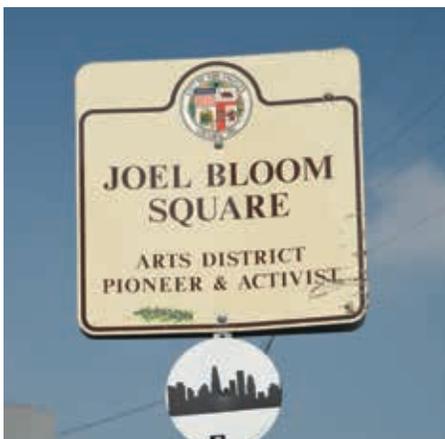
View looking east of Jean-Louis Vignes' orchards, circa 1865. Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

## Enter the Artists

In the 1970s, a group of artists, many of whom were being priced out of the increasingly expensive Venice and Hollywood art scenes, saw opportunity in the forgotten buildings in the Arts District. Vacant warehouses made for massive live/work studios at rock-bottom prices. Yet moving into an abandoned industrial neighborhood was not easy for these pioneering artists, who had to hide during building inspections by the fire department and live in inhospitable surroundings. Linda Frye Burnham, one of twelve early artists called the “Young Turks” living in the Arts District during this time, described it this way:

Living downtown was exhilarating after the perfect lawns and expensive lifestyle of Orange County, where everything smelled like Coppertone. But it wasn't easy. It was dangerous, especially in the '80s when the crack epidemic blew through L.A. It was filthy and uncomfortable, at the confluence of 11 freeways. The noise was shattering and it was so smoggy you couldn't see the city from the I-10. We had to drive 20 minutes to get groceries or do laundry or go to the movies. In winter it was really cold in those cement industrial spaces and in the summer the thermometer would rise over 100 degrees. (lindaburnham.com)

The artists opened up a number of avant-garde art galleries, such as the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) center on Industrial Street, and The Art Dock, a drive-by street gallery in an eight-foot loading dock located in Citizens Warehouse (now known as the



Pickle Works Building). Several artist hangouts opened, such as Al's Bar in the American Hotel, which was home to a groundbreaking punk-rock scene beginning in the mid-1970s until its closure in 2001.

This migration into the Arts District was done quietly and illegally, but became a growing issue. In 1981 the City acknowledged the situation and implemented the Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program, which legalized the residential use of formerly industrial buildings for artists. After the passage of the AIR, the earliest developers of the Arts District were often artists themselves. One of the most important legacies from these early artist/developers is that by rehabilitating the vacant warehouses, they saved an important part of L.A.'s industrial and transportation past. They became grassroots preservationists.

The Arts District had a thriving underground arts scene in the 1980s yet saw another downturn in the early 1990s due to a decline in downtown investment, rising homeless populations, and social unrest. This prompted a response from Arts District neighborhood activists, led by Joel Bloom, the area's unofficial mayor. In the mid-'90s, he successfully petitioned the City to designate the area the "Arts District." He also opened Bloom's General Store in the American Hotel on Traction Avenue and Hewitt Street. The store served as the heart of the Arts District until after Bloom's death in 2007. In his honor, the City designated the area around Third, Traction, and Rose as Joel Bloom Square.

## True to Its Roots amid Revival

In 1999, the City of Los Angeles passed its landmark Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO), which relaxed zoning codes for the conversion of pre-1974 commercial and industrial buildings into residential uses for non-artists. The ARO spurred another significant wave of development in the Arts District and shone a spotlight on the neighborhood as a creative and unique place to live.

Today, the Arts District remains the home of many artists as well as those

in other creative industries, including green technology, architecture, and entertainment, while still retaining some of its industrial use. Yet it is poised for another wave of development and change that comes with its own set of challenges. The area continues to attract new residential and commercial development, some of it now being built from the ground up and at a much larger scale than the existing structures. New development will bring an influx of new residents, perhaps doubling the population in the next few years.

From a preservation perspective, all this change could affect the historic industrial buildings and other defining elements, such as railroad tracks, that served as the focal point for early revitalization and that tell so much of the neighborhood's story. The Los Angeles Conservancy is already involved in a preservation issue at the James K. Hill Pickle Works Building, which was proposed for demolition in 2013. It is important to understand the story of the neighborhood in order to maintain its historic fabric and successfully plan for the change that is coming.

Over nearly two centuries, the Arts District has evolved from vineyards, to working-class neighborhoods, to bustling industry, to abandoned factories, to artists' mecca, to urban oasis. Going forward, we can continue to turn to its architecture to better understand and appreciate the Art District's many endings and beginnings.



**Construction of the 510,000-square-foot One Santa Fe mixed-use development project adjacent to SCI-Arc, scheduled to open in 2014.** Photo by Anne Laskey/L. A. Conservancy.

## Many Thanks

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### About the Los Angeles Conservancy

The Los Angeles Conservancy is a membership-based nonprofit organization that works through advocacy and education to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County. The Conservancy was formed in 1978 as part of the community-based effort to prevent demolition of the Los Angeles Central Library. It is now the largest local historic preservation organization in the U.S., with over 6,000 members and hundreds of volunteers. For more information, visit [laconservancy.org](http://laconservancy.org).



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## A. Pickle Works/ Citizens Warehouse



Photo by Anne Laskey/L. A. Conservancy

*Orig. California Vinegar & Pickle Company, later James K. Hill & Sons Company Pickle Works*  
**1001 East First Street**  
Architect unknown, 1888-1909

One of the last surviving Victorian-era warehouses in Los Angeles, the building now commonly known as Pickle Works dates back to 1888, when the California Vinegar and Pickle Company erected a structure by the west bank of the Los Angeles River. James K. Hill & Sons Company Pickle Works succeeded the first owner.

As with many early buildings, the name of the architect is lost to time, as is the exact evolution of the building, which appears to have had several additions before 1909. A vernacular, two-story, brick-clad, wood-framed building, it is long and narrow with loading bays on two sides.

By the 1970s, the building was

known as Citizens Warehouse and was a haven for artists. Paying almost no rent, and often living on the premises illegally, artists created an under-the-radar arts community here that flourished.

One of these artists was Carlton Davis, who created the rogue gallery known as Art Dock in his studio space. From 1981 to 1985, different artists displayed their work within the frame of his eight-foot former loading dock. Open to viewing as long as the metal roll-down door was open, the gallery was a touchstone for the community.

The warehouse was converted to legal live/work spaces in the mid-1980s, and it continued to house artists' lofts until 2007. The building was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 2005.

When the widening of the First Street Bridge threatened the building, an agreement was reached in 2005 that allowed the City's Bureau of Engineering (BOE) to remove up to fifty feet from its south end to accommodate the bridge project (ultimately, seventy-five feet were removed) and to reconstruct a new end wall. In the spring of 2013, the BOE announced plans to instead demolish the building. Based on opposition from the community and the Conservancy, negotiations are currently underway for how best to preserve the Pickle Works Building.

**The eastern wall of the building along the railroad tracks reveals old ghost signs.**

Photo by Anne Laskey/L. A. Conservancy.



## B. Challenge Dairy Building



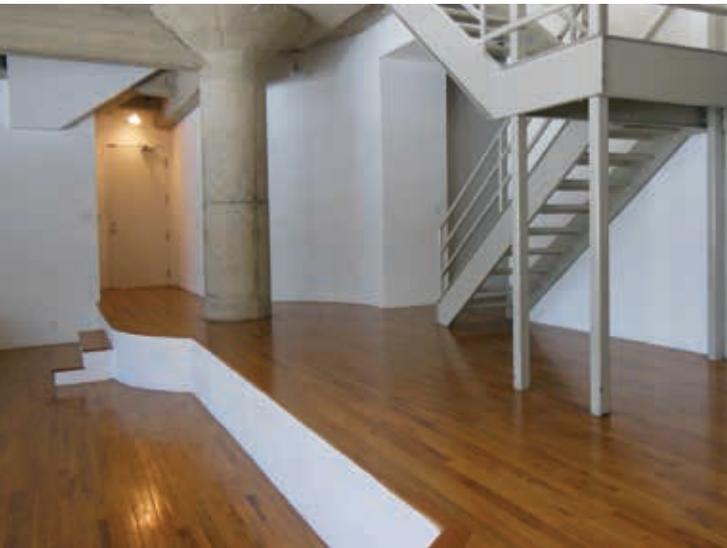
Photo by Bruce Scotlow/L. A. Conservancy.



*Orig. Challenge Cream & Butter Association*  
**929 East Second Street**  
Charles F. Plummer, 1926

This grey structure is a plain, rectangular building constructed of poured-in-place concrete. Typical of warehouses of the period, a series of loading docks line street level, and multi-pane industrial windows define the second story. There is little decorative detail and no attempt to conceal the building's use. However, a few things set the former Challenge

**Interior of a loft after the building was converted to artist-in-residence space in the early 1980s.** Photo by Anne Laskey/L. A. Conservancy.



**Trucks poised to load up and deliver dairy products, date unknown.**  
Historic photo courtesy of Norman Solomon.

Butter & Cream Association building apart from others in the neighborhood. The building was designed by the firm of noted architect Charles F. Plummer. Known for Spanish Colonial Revival-style buildings such as the Casa Del Mar (1926) in Santa Monica and the Petitfils-Boos Mansion (1922) in Hancock Park, Plummer would later partner with young Welton Becket and Walter Wurdeman to form Plummer, Wurdeman, and Becket, the firm that designed the Pan-Pacific Auditorium (1935, demolished 1989).

Fast forward to 1982, when the then-derelict building was purchased for conversion to lofts by developer

Norm Solomon. One of the first conversions following the approval of the Artist-in-Residence (AIR) ordinance, it was developed with artists in mind. The units are all large, ranging in size from 1,600 to 5,000 square feet, and each with a unique configuration. High ceilings on the ground floor were left intact, and the concrete walls and load-bearing columns were left in their raw concrete state.

The lofts still house members of the arts and creative arts communities.

**Employees prepare dairy products for distribution, date unknown.**  
Historic photo courtesy of Norman Solomon.



## C. 810 East Third Street



Orig. Southern California Supply Co.  
**810 East Third Street**  
Richards-Neustadt Construction Co.,  
1910

This four-story reinforced concrete building was built by the Richards-Neustadt Construction Company, a prominent construction and design firm. Its first tenant was the Southern California Supply Company, specializing in baking and confectioners' supplies.

The building has two distinct personalities: viewed from Third Street, it is a simple commercial building, with understated Beaux-Arts detailing. The

street level is distinct from the upper floors, which are separated by piers into five vertical bays. Modest decoration above and below the windows lends a touch of elegance.

The rear of the building conveys its industrial heritage. Running close to the building are the remains of the railroad spur that serviced it. Also apparent is the former loading dock, as well as a crane, still attached to the building, once used for loading and unloading.

The building has served as artists' lofts and studios for many years. The building also provides retail space on the ground floor.

Two artists currently in the building are A. S. Ashley and David Hollen. A. S. Ashley's home and studio are accessible only by climbing three flights of stairs. His artwork includes painting, assemblage, ready-mades, sculpture, performance, installations, and graphic arts. The large, north-facing windows of his unit flood the space with light, perfect for a painter's studio. Although he has occupied this particular space for only a few years, Ashley's involvement with art communities in the region, including the Arts District, has spanned five decades.

David Hollen's studio stands in stark contrast to Ashley's. In the basement of the building, it has no windows to let in natural light. The low ceiling limits the scale of artworks to a certain height, a constraint to which the artist has adjusted since moving



**Artist David Hollen in his studio.**

For more information about his work, visit [hollenart.com](http://hollenart.com).

into the space in 2005. Hollen works in durable ubiquitous material, such as porcelain, steel, cable, and rope, and his studio is a workshop full of tools and equipment. Industrial blowers dispel fumes, and a former furnace closet – complete with fire door – acts as storage space for flammable materials. A room at the rear serves as a gallery space.

**Artist A. S. Ashley in his live/work studio.**

For more information about his work, visit [asashley.com](http://asashley.com).



## History of the SCI-Arc building and Santa Fe Rail Yards

by Mike Henderson,  
Conservancy volunteer

The Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) building in the Arts District is the last remaining structure of the Santa Fe Rail Yards that operated in the area for 100 years.

The 1885 arrival of the Santa Fe in Los Angeles was a major milestone in the development of the city. The *Los Angeles Times* stated in 1887:

No one thing – or combination of things – has done more to give Los Angeles city and county

a lift in their recent sudden and marvelous growth than the influence of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, popularly known as the Santa Fe. For years ground down by an oppressive railroad monopoly [Southern Pacific Railroad], this section felt the pulse of new life as soon as the Santa Fe . . . . stepped into Southern California, a giant rival to the long-time monopoly giant.

The proposed location for the

Santa Fe rail yard was city-owned property along the Los Angeles River at the First Street Bridge. At the time, this land was of little value because the river ran free and was not contained in periods of heavy rain.

In 1886, the Santa Fe proposed to construct a permanent levee along portions of the river if the city would grant the company the adjacent land. The deal was unanimously approved by the City Council and, once the levee was in place, tracks were laid along the west side of the river. The Santa Fe also spent an estimated \$150,000 for additional land along the river that was privately owned.

The Santa Fe La Grande passenger

## D. Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc)



*Orig. Santa Fe Freight House*  
**960 East Third Street**  
Harrison Albright, 1906  
Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #795

From major train freight house to internationally renowned architecture school, the quarter-mile-long concrete structure at Third Street and Santa Fe Avenue clearly shows its layers of history.

Constructed in 1906 as the freight house for the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad (known as the Santa Fe), the building originally served both inbound and outbound freight. Train tracks on the west side and wagon/truck loading bays on the east facilitated the transfer of goods.

Touted at the time for its concrete construction, the building was designed by architect Harrison Albright, with construction overseen by Carl Leonardt. Both men were nationally recognized

**Left: The Santa Fe Freight House in 1999, just prior to ownership by SCI-Arc. Right: The building as the home of SCI-Arc today.** Photos courtesy of the Southern California Institute of Architecture.

as experts in reinforced concrete, a building material then gaining importance for its fireproof qualities.

Built at a reported cost of \$300,000, the Freight House was part of a concerted effort by the Santa Fe to establish itself in the Los Angeles market and gain momentum over the rival Southern Pacific Railroad. In 1922, the Santa Fe ceased the building's operation as the primary inbound freight house and began moving most of its freight operations outside the central city. The building eventually became a warehouse and by the 1990s it was derelict.

In 2001, the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) rehabilitated the long-vacant structure into the school's permanent home. Faculty member and SCI-Arc graduate Gary Paige designed the conversion, making the most of the building's character. Cement ceilings and walls were left

uncovered. Graffiti and street art from the site's abandoned days were left in place, as were loading bays and other remnants of the site's past as a freight depot and warehouse. Open design studios are accessed via a wide hall that runs nearly the length of the structure, emphasizing both the length and breadth of this unique building.

**SCI-Arc is home to approximately 500 architecture students and 80 faculty members.** Photo courtesy of the Southern California Institute of Architecture.



terminal, with its distinctive Moorish dome, occupied the north end of the yard opposite Second Street. It opened in 1893 at an estimated cost of \$100,000 and replaced a "dilapidated, weather stained shed" used until then by passengers. A turn table and round house were situated at the south end of the yard, with a freight house in the middle.

In 1906, the Santa Fe spent \$300,000 for an immense new freight house (now SCI-Arc) and additional trackage west of Santa Fe Avenue. With easy access to rail facilities, the area drew manufacturing, wholesalers, and warehousing businesses, creating a hub that flourished for years.



**Historic postcard of the Santa Fe La Grande Station, built in 1893. The distinctive domes were made of copper.** Postcard courtesy of the Marlene Laskey collection.

## E. Angel City Brewery



*Orig. John A. Roebling's Sons Company of California*  
**216 South Alameda Street**  
Hudson & Munsell, 1913



Angel City Brewery gives regular public tours of the brewing process and the building and is committed to the growth and revitalization of the Arts Districts.

Spanning 69,000 square feet, this warehouse was one of several regional wholesale warehouses for the John A. Roebling's Sons Company. The Trenton, New Jersey-based company specialized in manufacturing "wire rope" and other steel products. Roebling products ranged from suspension cables on the Brooklyn Bridge to steel for the Slinky toy.

The 1913 structure on Alameda was built when the company outgrew a smaller site nearby. It was designed by noted architects Hudson & Munsell, who also designed the 1913 Natural History Museum in Exposition Park, as well as elaborate private homes.

Built where Alameda and Traction (then called Stephenson) come together at a sharp angle, the building is trapezoid-shaped. This shape created a triangular area at its north end that was used for Roebling's offices. The small office lobby, still mostly intact, features tiles illustrating uses for the company's products, such as bridges, ships, and spools of cable. These tiles are by Ernest Batchelder, one of the foremost

tile artists of the Craftsman period in Los Angeles. Roebling's signature cable forms the banister of a small staircase leading to mezzanine offices.

The 230-foot Alameda Street frontage is lined with loading docks, once serviced by the railroad tracks still evident beside them. Additional loading docks on the east side of the building would have enabled wagon and truck access. Decorative brickwork at the roof line is highlighted by terracotta tiles with the initials J.A.R., for John A. Roebling.

In 2010, the building was purchased by Angel City Brewery and underwent a two-year renovation into a brewery. Angel City added a public component when it opened the Brewery and Public House in 2013. Now, the former warehouse space houses an artisan brewery and serves as a community gathering space. Wall space is dedicated to rotating displays of the work of local artists, and the bar is dedicated to an ever-rotating selection of Angel City beer.

## Arts District Murals by Ed Fuentes

The Arts District is in the middle of mural enclaves. To the north, David Alfaro Siqueiros' 1932 "América Tropical" sits in preserved majesty on Olvera Street, and 1984 Olympic-era works line the 101 Freeway. To the west are the masterworks of Broadway. East is home to Chicano murals, the storytellers of their neighborhood.

In the late 1970s, working artists regenerated the abandoned warehouse district. A creative energy seeped in



*Pinned Butterfly, 1982, by Dustin Shuler.*  
Cessna 150 Aircraft and 20-foot-long steel nail.  
Courtesy Dustin Shuler Estate.

## F. American Hotel



*Orig. Canadian Hotel*  
**303 South Hewitt Street**  
Morgan and Walls, 1905

This four-story brick building was built as a first-class hotel for African Americans, many of whom worked as Pullman car porters. It was owned by W. H. Avery and managed for its first five years by Canadian J. W. Gordon.

The architects were Morgan and Walls, part of the lineage of one of the oldest and most prolific architectural firms in Los Angeles. Other local projects by the firm include the Farmers and Merchant Bank (1905) at Fourth and Main Streets, I. N. Van Nuys Building (1911) at Seventh and Spring Streets, and the Bank of Italy (1922) at Seventh and Olive Streets.

When it opened, its ground floor contained the reception area, kitchen, and dining room. Ten sleeping rooms

and out, as seen in projects like Dustin Shuler's 1982 installation, "Pinned Butterfly," a Cessna 150 nailed to the wall of the American Hotel that sits at the streets of Hewitt and Traction. In the tradition of the mural movement, Earth Crew painted "Undiscovered America" on East Fourth Street in 1992. By the late 1990s, the neighborhood was officially recognized as the Arts District. In 2000, the former freight depot along Santa Fe Avenue became home to the Southern California Institute of Architecture. Graffiti artists churned out images along the streets of



**An Al's Bar patron shooting pool, date unknown.**

Photo by Gary Leonard and courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

with shared bathrooms occupied each of the upper floors. The building originally spanned only 50 by 50 feet, much smaller than what we see today. By 1909, maps referred to it as the Palace Hotel, and it appears that a large addition had been made to the south side of the building, bringing it to its current size.

Later called the American Hotel, the building is best known in recent history as the epicenter of underground artists and musicians from the 1970s through the 1990s. In 1979, Marc Kreisel, one of the early artists living in the Arts District, opened Al's Bar in part of the hotel's ground-floor retail space. He bought the business from the eponymous Al, who had previously operated it as a truck stop café. It was described as a "town hall or town square" for artists living in the neighborhood when few community

South Garey and East Second. Where "Pinned Butterfly" once hovered, below is the evolving collage of sticker and wheat-paste art. Shepard Fairey was an early artist who used the streets as a canvas, which included the poster that became the icon of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign.

Two years before MOCA would even open "Art in the Streets," the 2011 survey of graffiti and street art, Daniel Lahoda curated the streets working with local and international artists. That defied the city's injunction on murals, and demanded street art to be

gathering places were available. It reached legendary status as the home of L.A.'s punk-rock and grunge scenes; several of the bands that played there, including Beck, Sonic Youth, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Nirvana, and the Misfits, went on to international success. Al's Bar retained its gritty, counter-culture atmosphere for over twenty years, closing in 2001.

The American Hotel was also home to another influential business, Bloom's General Store.

Opened in 1994 by Joel Bloom, it was the first grocery store to serve the neighborhood's growing artist population. Bloom was an actor and community activist who came to the Arts District in 1986 and felt an immediate kinship to the area. He campaigned to have the neighborhood officially designated as the Arts District in the mid-1990s, and he worked to retain the neighborhood's authenticity while improving its services and amenities. After Bloom died in 2007, his son Randy continued to operate the store until 2009, when rising rent prices forced its closure.

The building still houses several businesses and many artists. In 2013, it was purchased by a new owner who has long-range plans to upgrade the apartment units.

considered public art.

Now the Arts District is also a mural enclave. It becomes another way the neighborhood fosters creativity that forces gentrification to negotiate with a gritty aesthetic.

*Ed Fuentes writes about public art for KCET. He began writing viewfromaloft, a blog he founded in 2006, when he lived in the Arts District.*

## G. Toy Factory Lofts



*Orig. Star Truck & Warehouse Company*  
**1855 Industrial Street**  
H. L. Gilman, 1924

This utilitarian, six-story, concrete warehouse was built for the Star Truck & Warehouse Company. Though the building is square and box-like in appearance from most angles, its northern side curves gracefully to follow what was once a railroad spur. The railroad curve continues around a two-story portion on the west side, and its continuation is seen in the shape of the buildings that face Toy Factory Lofts across Industrial Street.

The architect credited with the building is H. L. Gilman, who later became staff architect for the Santa Fe Railroad. The building's poured-in-place concrete construction was so sturdy that the structure was designated a civilian bomb shelter during World War II.

Used as a warehouse and for manufacturing over the course of its life, the building was purchased in 2002 by developer Linear City for residential conversion, working with architects Donald Alec Barany and Clive Wilkinson. At the time of its purchase, the site was used to assemble stuffed animals, hence the name Toy Factory Lofts.

The Toy Factory Loft's 119 condominiums were developed for

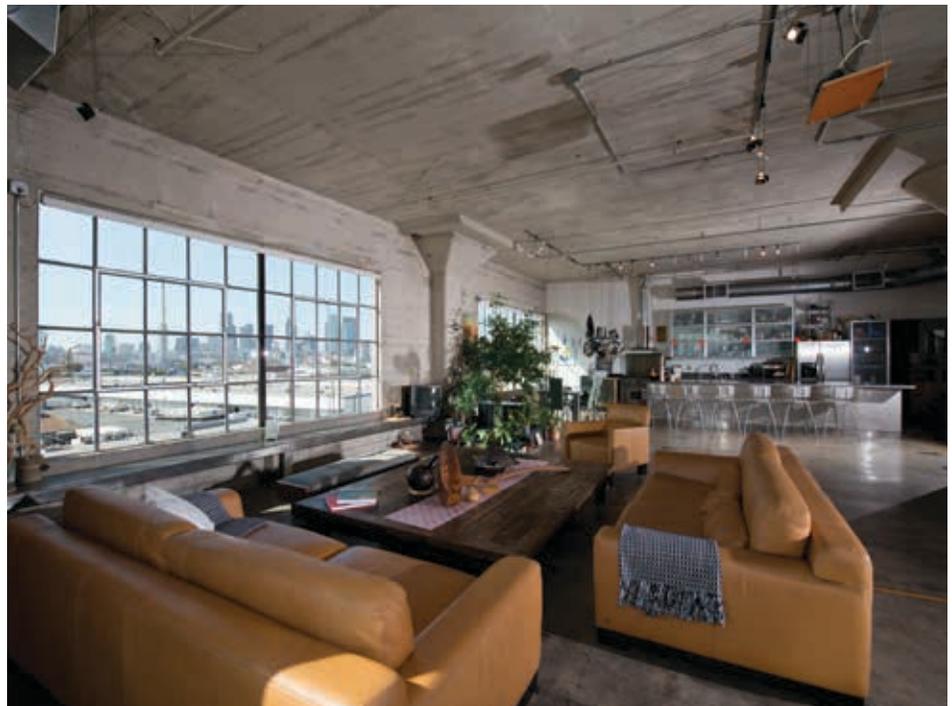


artists and people in creative industries looking for large units. The industrial nature of the building was treated as an asset, and original windows, floors, walls, and ceiling treatments were maintained whenever possible.

As with most warehouses in the area, the building contained loading docks facing a railroad track, as well as a separate set of docks for trucks. The former docks now serve as the building's entrance and as retail/commercial space. Set several feet

above street level, they are accessed by a raised path.

The Toy Factory Loft building faces Mateo Street. The street was named for Matthew "Don Mateo" Keller, an Irish immigrant who settled in Los Angeles in 1851. He established a large vineyard in the area and owned thousands of acres of land in the region, including Rancho Malibu. A good friend of pioneering banker Isaias Hellman, Keller served on the board of Hellman's Farmers and Merchants National Bank.



## H. Biscuit Company Lofts



*Orig. National Biscuit Company*  
**1850 Industrial Street**  
Eckel and Aldrich, 1925  
Los Angeles Historic-Cultural  
Monument #888

**B**uilt for the National Biscuit Company (later known as Nabisco), this seven-story Beaux-Arts building was reported to have cost \$2 million to construct. It was designed by Eckel and Aldrich, a prominent firm based in St.

Photos by William Anthony Photography and courtesy of Linear City Development LLC.

Joseph, Missouri. The principal of the firm was Frenchman Edmund Jacques Eckel, who had studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.

Unusually elegant for a factory, the building has additional height rising above the roofline on three of its four corners, giving it a distinctive profile. The brick cladding and cream-colored terra-cotta trim add further refinement. Housing two bakeries, this was the

company's flagship plant for the western United States. The decision to locate the plant in Los Angeles was due in part to extensive lobbying by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.

The loading dock for the trucks was established on the north face of the building, fronting Industrial Street. Indicative of the care taken with the design of the building, the docks are deeply recessed so that the trucks would be protected from the elements while loading. Trains made their deliveries to/from the south side of the building.

The bakery thrived until after World War II, when Nabisco opened new plants elsewhere. The building then became a garment factory. In 2006, it was purchased by Linear City for conversion to 104 live/work condominiums.

The Biscuit Company Lofts conversion, by Aleks Istanbulu Architects, won a 2009 Los Angeles Conservancy Preservation Award. Existing wood and terrazzo floors have been preserved throughout, as well as all the exterior brick and terra-cotta details and nearly all the existing windows. The former loading dock has been transformed into the successful restaurant Church and State.

Photo by Tom Bonner Photography.



## Tour Stops

- A.** Pickle Works/Citizens Warehouse (p. 4)
- B.** Challenge Dairy Building (p. 5)
- C.** 810 East Third Street (p. 6)
- D.** Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) (p. 7)
- E.** Angel City Brewery (p. 8)
- F.** American Hotel (p. 9)
- G.** Toy Factory Lofts (p. 10)
- H.** Biscuit Company Lofts (p. 11)

## Tour Parking

## Self-Guided Bike Route and Points of Interest

**1. The Coca-Cola Building, 963 E. 4th St. (at Merrick Street):** This 1915 building replaced The Coca-Cola Company's former location on San Pedro St. and served as its West Coast headquarters until 1929 when it moved to 1334 S. Central Ave. Until recently, this building housed T.T. Toys.

**2. Mural, 966 E. 4th Place (near Merrick Street):** *Redemption of the Angels* created earlier this year by Angelina Christina and Fin Dac.

**3. Maxwell House Building, 405 Mateo St. (at Santa Fe Avenue):** Built in 1924, this building housed production facilities for Maxwell House Coffee.

**4. Nate Starkman & Son Building, 544 Mateo St. (at Palmetto Street):** Built in 1908, this 27,702-square-foot industrial space is a favorite filming location. The final episode of the TV show *House* was shot here.

**5. Film Location, Palmetto Street (between Mateo Street and Santa Fe Avenue):** Often transformed into San Francisco and other cities, this street mostly serves as a backdrop for filming.

**6. Morrell Meat Building and Murals, 1335 Willow Street (at Santa Fe Avenue):** This former meat packing facility is now Willow Studios, a popular filming venue, and houses LALA Art Gallery. The two monumental exterior murals are *Untitled* by the artist RETNA (Marquis Lewis) and *Split Identities* by identical twin brothers and artists How & Nosm (Raoul and Davide Perre).

**7. Stover Seed Company Building, 592 Mateo Street (1946), 1407 E. 6th Street (1957), 1415 E. 6th Street (1976):** Founded in 1922, this company owns three buildings in the immediate area and has been run by David Knutson and his family since 1972.

**8. Southwestern Bag Company Building, 1380 E. 6th Street (at Mateo Street):** This family-owned-and-operated wholesale distributor has been at this location since its founding in 1924.

**9. Murals, Imperial Street and Jesse Street:** These four large murals are by Belgian artist ROA: *Decaying Sea Lion*, *Squirrels*, *Warbling Vireo*, and *California Brown Bear*.

**10. Mural, 667 S. Santa Fe Avenue:** Painted two weeks ago, this large-scale work by artist Ron English is called *Urban Bigfoot*.

**11. Murals, 7th Street and Mateo Street:** Currently on view at this intersection are panel murals by Dabs Myla (Darren Mate and Emmelene Victoria), CRAOLA (Greg Simkins), and David Choe.

The self-guided bike tour was curated by Melissa Richardson Banks ([www.downtownmuse.com](http://www.downtownmuse.com)) to help tour attendees navigate north to south between 4th and 7th Streets. To learn more about the featured murals and other street art made possible by the community-endorsed L.A. Freewalls project, visit [www.lalaarts.com](http://www.lalaarts.com).

*Cyclists assume the responsibilities and risks for their own safety and property when bicycling through the Arts District. Be aware of construction areas, walk your bike when necessary, use the proper safety equipment, and lock up your bike.*

