

LOS ANGELES

# CONSERVANCY

# news

AWARENESS  
ASSISTANCE  
ACTION

VOLUME 33  
NUMBER 6

NOV | DEC 2011



The 1929 North Spring Street Viaduct (Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #900). Photo © Douglas Hill.

## Kronish House Saved from Demolition

by *Cindy Olnick*

The Kronish House has dodged the wrecking ball! Facing imminent demolition mere months ago (see cover story, September/October 2011), the highly intact home in Beverly Hills has been purchased by a buyer who intends to restore it.

This outcome is a testament to the very hard work of many people, the willingness of the City of Beverly Hills and the owner to give preservation a chance, and the power of public support. To everyone who wrote a letter, attended a hearing, made a phone call, or spread the word about the plight of the Kronish House, THANK YOU! Your efforts made a crucial difference.

Designed by modernist master Richard Neutra and completed in 1955, the Kronish House is one of only three Neutra designs ever built in Beverly Hills, and it's the only one that remains intact (one was demolished, the other completely altered). It spans almost 7,000 square feet on a nearly two-acre lot at 9439 Sunset Boulevard (it is not visible from the street).

The home was sold in a foreclosure auction in January 2011 for \$5.8 million and placed on the market in April for nearly \$14 million. Over the summer, the owner began the demolition process by applying for a permit to cap the sewer line.

The Conservancy, its volunteer Modern Committee, Dion Neutra, and others launched a range of intense advocacy efforts. Nearly

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## Innovative Solution Proposed for North Spring Street Viaduct

by *Adrian Scott Fine*

If a historic bridge is widened and substantially altered, and it no longer looks like it did when it was built, is it still a historic bridge? That is the fundamental quandary the Conservancy has been grappling with regarding Los Angeles' extraordinary collection of historic bridges. An innovative approach has come together for one bridge that could serve as a test case and ultimately have broader implications for preservation down the road.

The 1929 North Spring Street Viaduct has been a major advocacy issue for the Conservancy for years (see cover story, July/August 2010). Its proposed widening has garnered much public attention in terms of how to balance historic preservation principles with engineering and traffic standards. In this case, a compromise has emerged that just might satisfy both.

Fourteen bridges within the City of Los Angeles, built between 1909 and 1938, are designated as Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCMs). Like many of the city's bridges, the Beaux Arts-style North Spring Street Viaduct (HCM #900) was built during the era of the City Beautiful Movement. Its design sought to complement the classical motif of the adjacent 1910 North Main Street (HCM #901) and 1911 North Broadway (HCM #907) bridges.

Though they form a significant collection, each of the Los Angeles River bridges is unique, with a distinct character and specific preservation challenges. With the North Spring Street Viaduct, the City's Bureau of Engineering (BOE) seeks to make seismic retrofits while

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enhancing traffic separation and access for pedestrians and bicycles. The solution most often suggested for addressing these issues—with the North Spring Street Viaduct and elsewhere—is to widen the existing bridge substantially. Yet can this happen while retaining the bridge’s authentic character?

Well, it depends. Opinions vary across the country, and no one seems to agree on a single approach. Unlike historic buildings, which can be successfully adapted, retrofitted, and even added onto—all while maintaining their eligibility as historic resources—preserving historic bridges requires more creative thinking.

**The Issue in Brief**

The BOE first proposed to retrofit and widen the North Spring Street Viaduct in 2006; the plan lingered without any action until March 2010. Since then it has undergone an accelerated environmental review process on an extraordinarily fast timeline, due in part to secure federal Highway Bridge Program funding that would otherwise be lost.

The BOE proposed to widen the bridge by approximately forty feet (twenty on each side) to accommodate new eight-foot-wide sidewalks, five-foot-wide shoulders, and a center median with left-turn lanes at each end. As originally conceived in design and scope, this plan would likely have destroyed the North Spring Street Viaduct’s eligibility as a historic resource.

Initially, the Conservancy advocated an alternative that would leave the historic bridge intact and construct a stand-alone pedestrian crossing alongside it—a strategy that has succeeded elsewhere across the country. The BOE ultimately rejected this option, partly because this type of approach would not qualify for available funding. The BOE proceeded with the environmental impact report (EIR) at a rapid pace, much to the anger and frustration of people concerned about the bridge. Adding insult to injury, the EIR failed to consider a single alternative that would maintain the bridge’s historic status. Conservancy members and supporters came out in full force, responding to our action alerts with

more than seventy letters to the City and speaking against the proposal at public hearings.

A turning point came in December 2010, when the project was brought to the Mayor’s Design Advisory Panel for review. Panel members strongly supported the preservation of the North Spring Street Viaduct and criticized the widening proposal. The panel directed the BOE, bicycle advocates, and the preservation community

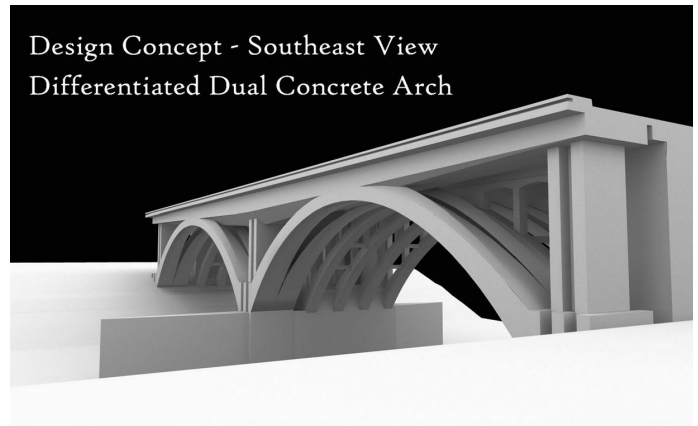
to work together to develop a more creative approach that would not irreparably harm the bridge or jeopardize its eligibility as a historic resource.

**What a Difference a Year Makes**

Since then, the project has evolved considerably. The new proposal would widen the bridge by around half of the original plan (twenty-one feet instead of forty), and it would widen it on only one side, to the south. This approach meets all minimum traffic and safety standards and still allows for dedicated pedestrian and bicycle access.

While the scale of the widening was reduced greatly, the design treatment for the bridge was still very much an issue. Initially, the BOE presented a design that would replicate (or otherwise imitate) all the design features on the south side of the bridge.

Whenever possible, the Conservancy aims to ensure that rehabilitation projects meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards. The Standards are national principles for preservation that are often used to help guide projects to make sure changes are done in a way that retains a structure’s eligibility as a historic resource. While the Standards are somewhat subjective and they set forth no definitive approach for bridges, any alterations or modifications should generally be differentiated from the original so that they



Under the Bureau of Engineering’s current proposal, the north side of the North Spring Street Viaduct would remain intact (see cover photo), while the south side would be expanded with a new, subtly differentiated design, such as the one in this preliminary rendering (courtesy of the BOE).

do not present a false sense of history. The design should also be implemented in a way that is reversible, so that it could be removed in the future without impairing the essential form and design of the original bridge.

The Conservancy opposed the initial “full replication” design based on our opinion that it would not meet the Standards. Fortunately, the BOE was very responsive to the concerns of the Conservancy and the broader community, as well as to guidance from the Mayor’s Design Advisory Panel and the office of City Councilmember Ed Reyes, whose district includes the bridge.

The plan now calls for a subtly differentiated design for the south side of the North Spring Street Viaduct. Instead of being replicated at a wider scale, the bridge would stay original on the north side and be widened on the south side with a new, yet compatible, design. The new design features a more modern, articulated double-arch span that complements the original north side.

Pending further refinement, this innovative design approach appears to meet the Standards. According to the BOE’s preservation consultant, the design would likely retain the bridge’s status as a Historic-Cultural Monument—which is the Conservancy’s primary goal. The result of much community input and participation is a design for the North Spring Street Viaduct that reflects out-of-the-box thinking, and perhaps a path for moving forward on other bridge projects currently in the works.