



LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY NEWS



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The low-rise “background buildings” of downtown’s Arts District contribute to the neighborhood’s overall character, yet they are increasingly at risk. Photo by Sarah Weber/L.A. Conservancy.

Special Spring Tour of L.A.’s Chinatown

by Sarah Lann

On **Sunday, April 17**, the Conservancy will host a special, one-day tour of L.A.’s Chinatown. Today’s Chinatown, with its many layers of history, is one of L.A.’s oldest neighborhoods. The streets and parcels forming the heart of the community were mapped in the city’s first official survey in 1849.

This vibrant neighborhood has a long history of historical and cultural significance. Before ‘New’ Chinatown’s grand opening in 1938 (the original Chinatown stood partially where Union Station does now), this less than one-square-mile area already stood as an architectural testament to Los Angeles’ diverse immigrant presence.

By the 1850s, the neighborhood was known as Sonoratown, the city’s first barrio. Little Italy was also located here: existing structures such as St. Peter’s Italian Catholic Church and Casa Italiana attest to the neighborhood’s Italian heritage. The Pacific Alliance Medical Center, dating to 1869 as the French Hospital, and the 1910 St. Anthony’s Croation Catholic Church speak to other prevalent populations. Their stories add to the richness of Chinatown’s streets, shops, and restaurants, which reflect the predominantly Chinese-American population that still lives there.

The heart of L.A.’s Chinatown is undoubtedly Central Plaza, the oldest plaza in the neighborhood. It features the iconic East Gate, Golden Pagoda, and the Seven Star

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Los Angeles: Growing Up with Character

by Adrian Scott Fine and Cindy Olnick

Los Angeles is entering a new phase of growth and physical transformation, as a postwar landscape defined largely by open space and low-rise buildings gives way to the demand for density. Few large cities can lay claim to L.A.’s recent investment in public transit infrastructure and expansion. Los Angeles is changing at a rapid pace, and this will inevitably affect historic places.

How do we plan for this change and manage it in a thoughtful way, so that the places we cherish are retained as an integral part of this new wave of development, rather than being needlessly thrown away?

The Conservancy has been managing change in Los Angeles since our founding in 1978. Yet the magnitude of change we now face poses new challenges that are complex and inter-related. The wheels are in motion now, from upcoming policy decisions to potential ballot measures, that will greatly affect the future of historic places. We must start to address these issues before it’s too late.

Community Character: The Common Denominator

Decisions about historic places don’t take place in a vacuum; they often relate to other issues such as housing. At the heart of these varying interests is a strong desire by residents to maintain the character and livability of their community.

Community character could be a tree-lined street of historic homes, a longstanding corner store and gathering place, or the neighborhood theatre. It could stem from a place’s architectural features, its social or cultural significance, or a combination. While hard to define, community

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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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Major funding for the Los Angeles Conservancy's programs is provided by the LaFetra Foundation.

Stay Informed: Connect with the Conservancy

Things happen between our bi-monthly newsletters – we hold events, buildings are threatened, buildings are saved – and we want to make sure you know about it! Connect with us online so you can stay informed about the programs and issues you care about.

Email

Subscribers to our Last Remaining Seats email list will be the first to know the lineup for this year's thirtieth season of classic films in historic theatres. We'll announce the lineup via email the week of March 7, and member tickets go on sale March 30. If you want to know this year's lineup before anyone else, and be alerted when member tickets go on sale, subscribe to our Last Remaining Seats emails today!

In addition to Last Remaining Seats, we offer emails on a variety of topics:

- **E-News:** general updates on our advocacy work, events, and more; sent monthly
- **Action Alerts:** appeals for your help with letter-writing, attendance at hearings, etc.; sent as needed
- **Events:** Conservancy event announcements (including fundraisers); sent as needed
- **Modern Committee (ModCom):** news from our volunteer Modern Committee; sent as needed
- **Garden Apartment Network:** updates specific to preserving historic garden apartments; sent as needed
- **Neighborhoods:** updates specific to preserving older and historic neighborhoods; sent as needed

To subscribe to any or all of these email lists, visit our website at laconservancy.org, click "Newsletter" in the top menu bar, and select the relevant list(s). If you have a user account on our website, you can also subscribe by clicking the "Edit" tab in your user profile and selecting the relevant checkbox(es).

Social Media

Did you know the Conservancy is on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram? Like us on Facebook at facebook.com/losangelesconservancy and follow us on Twitter @LAConservancy for daily Conservancy updates. It's your chance to connect with us and fellow Conservancy supporters about the places and events you care about by sharing posts and leaving comments.

If you're a photo person, be sure to follow us on Instagram @LAConservancy, and share your photos by using the following hashtags:

- **#walkDTLA:** official hashtag of the Conservancy's Walking Tour Program (learn more at laconservancy.org/tours)
- **#LASToryhood:** celebrate L.A.'s unique neighborhoods by sharing photos of the places and qualities that make each neighborhood special (learn more at laconservancy.org/lastoryhood)
- **#LastRemainingSeats:** official hashtag of our annual series of classic films in historic theatres (learn more at laconservancy.org/last-remaining-seats)

Preservation Issues

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

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

Conservancy Files Appeal

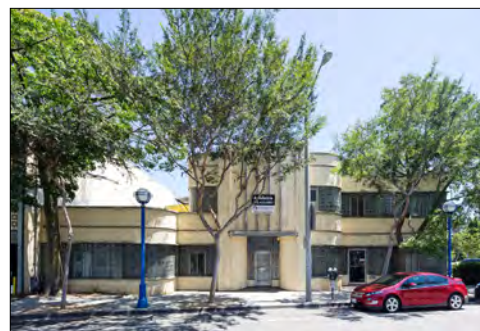
On February 3, the Conservancy filed an appeal on the Los Angeles Superior Court's January 5 decision by Judge Richard L. Fruin, Jr. that rejected our lawsuit against the City of West Hollywood.

The Conservancy filed litigation in September 2014 to force the City's compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) regarding the proposed demolition of the 1938 Jones Dog & Cat Hospital building. This suit is the first litigation filed by the Conservancy since 2007, regarding the now demolished Ambassador Hotel.

The litigation stemmed from the City of West Hollywood's failure to adequately evaluate preservation alternatives for the Wurdeman and Becket-designed building as part of the Melrose Triangle Project. The Melrose Triangle Project is a mixed-use project proposed for the block bordered by Melrose Avenue, Santa Monica Boulevard, and Almont Drive.

The Conservancy has urged the City to look more deeply into preservation alternatives, but the judge in this case ruled that the City had already properly assessed a preservation alternative. We are deeply disappointed with the decision and disagree with the findings.

The Conservancy is not opposed to the development of a mixed-use, gateway project at this location. Yet it does not need to happen at the expense of a historic building that



West Hollywood's former Jones Dog & Cat Hospital in 2014. Photo by Hunter Kerhart.

could be integrated and reused as part of the overall design.

The Conservancy's litigation is the only barrier to the building's demolition; the City Council approved the project in October 2014.

Singleton Estate

The Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC) voted unanimously in January to recommend landmark designation of the Wallace Neff-designed Singleton Estate in Holmby Hills. This action reversed a previous decision by the CHC in July 2015.

In spring 2014, the 1970 French Revival-style residence was listed on the market without any safeguards to ensure its protection or preservation. A year later, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the property had been sold. When large, multi-acre properties change longtime owners, they are often threatened with demolition, land subdivision, and unsympathetic alterations.

Believing that the residence could be at risk, the Conservancy originally nominated the Singleton Estate for Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) designation in April 2015. The CHC voted in July not to recommend designation to City Council, citing a lack of information due to their inability to tour the property before considering the Conservancy's nomination. The Commission voted in November 2015 to take the property under resubmission.

The City Council's Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee will vote in the coming weeks whether to recommend designation, followed by a final vote by the full City Council. While the nomination moves through the final process, the property has interim protection from demolition or alteration.

Manhattan Beach Ordinance

Following a year and a half of preparation, the City of Manhattan Beach passed a new historic preservation ordinance on February 16. The new ordinance replaces one that provided recognition of landmarks, not pro-

tection. The new ordinance, which goes into effect on March 17, marks a major milestone for preservation in this 3.9-square-mile city.

The protections afforded by the new ordinance come at a crucial time for the city, which previously earned the grade of "F" on the Conservancy's Preservation Report Card. According to Los Angeles County Assessor data, Manhattan Beach contains approximately 12,700 parcels, thirty-seven percent of which have been improved with new construction since 1980. This striking figure indicates that over one-third of the city has been rebuilt during the past thirty-six years.

City Council initiated preparation of the new ordinance with a unanimous motion on October 7, 2014. The Conservancy, in partnership with the Manhattan Beach Conservancy, met regularly with City planning staff to provide technical assistance on best practices during the drafting of the ordinance.

Key provisions of the ordinance include the ability to designate (with owner consent) and protect individual landmarks and the creation of a stand-alone Historic Preservation Commission. However, in response to the largely misinformed concerns of local residents and real estate professionals, City Council voted in early February to weaken some protections. This includes allowing property owners in pending historic districts to opt out and removing the City's ability to designate an individual landmark without owner consent in cases of exceptional significance.

Despite these concessions, the ordinance and the protections it affords to historic resources is a landmark event in Manhattan Beach history. We applaud the mayor and Manhattan Beach City Council for their leadership. The new ordinance will become the central fixture of the city's historic preservation program, which includes the Mills Act property tax abatement program. The City is also planning to initiate its first-ever survey of historic resources.

To reflect this major progress, the Conservancy will assign Manhattan Beach a new grade as part of our Preservation Report Card initiative.

Conservancy Volunteers: Mark Your Calendars!

by Bruce Scottow

Each year, the Conservancy welcomes more than 11,000 moviegoers to its Last Remaining Seats (LRS) film series, making it by far our single largest public outreach event. It's also our largest volunteer outreach event: in 2015, more than 135 people donated their time and talents to the series.

Volunteers support us in a range of ways: some help plan the series through our LRS Committee; others help with ticket mailings from the office. Many more help at each show managing the lines, assisting at Will Call, selling tickets, taking tickets, handing out programs, working at our membership or merchandise tables, assisting at book signings, helping at selfie stations and movie prop or artifact displays, docenting the theatre, ushering, assisting invited guests, and working backstage.

Simply put, LRS wouldn't happen without the support of our volunteers. So rest up, folks—we've got a busy schedule lined up for June with at least seven screenings.

We'll contact all registered Conservancy volunteers beginning in late April. If you're not currently a registered volunteer and are interested in helping out at Last Remaining Seats this June, please contact Bruce Scottow at bscottow@laconservancy.org or (213) 430-4218.

Thank you!



Volunteers Michelle Gerdes and Ann Tompkins managing the line at our 2015 Last Remaining Seats. Photo by Stephen Russo.

Celebrate the 30th Annual Last Remaining Seats with Us!



Movie fans filled the 1918 Million Dollar Theatre at our 2015 screening of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. The 2016 Last Remaining Seats series will return to the historic Broadway theatre. Photo by Larry Underhill.

by Bruce Scottow

The year was 1987. The place was the magnificent Orpheum Theatre. High up on stage, the theatre's massive curtains slowly parted, beginning a thirty-year tradition: classic films screened in the historic theatres of Los Angeles.

That night, the Orpheum's Mighty Wurlitzer organ accompanied two silent films, *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* featuring Buster Keaton, and *Billy Blazes, Esq.* starring Harold Lloyd. Since that evening, at historic theatres on Broadway and throughout Los Angeles County, the Conservancy's Last Remaining Seats film series has presented over 150 film classics and shorts, as well as scores of original production numbers, cartoons, newsreels, trailers, and travel logs.

There was no looking back—until now. For 2016, to salute the series' thirty-year history, Last Remaining Seats will take place entirely in the historic theatres of downtown L.A.'s Broadway. We'll celebrate the birthplace of the series as well as the Conservancy's longstanding work to revitalize the area.

The Last Remaining Seats volunteer committee has chosen its favorite titles from previous seasons, and we'll also screen a recent classic that turns thirty this year. We have partnered with the Latin American Cinemateca of Los Angeles (LACLA) since 1997, and this year they will offer their favorite film from past seasons.

The 2016 series will take place on Wednesdays and Saturdays, **June 4–25**.

Tickets go on sale to Conservancy members on **March 30** and to the general public on **April 13**.

You'll receive a postcard in mid-March with the lineup. You can also check our website at laconservancy.org the week of **March 7**. For the latest news and announcements, subscribe to the Last Remaining Seats email list (click Newsletter at the top of any page on our website, or update your subscriptions in your website user account).

As of press time, we're delighted to announce the following sponsors: Series Star Sponsors: Hollywood Foreign Press Association; Walter J. and Holly O. Thomson Foundation. Series Supporting Sponsor: Shangri-la Construction/Webcor Builders. Series Sponsors: NBCUniversal; Paramount; Roy Allen White Charitable Trust; Trina Turk / Mr. Turk; The Theatre at Ace Hotel. Screening Sponsors: Linda and Jerry Bruckheimer; Cole's, Originators of the French Dip; Consulado General de México en Los Ángeles; Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles; The Edison/Clifton's Brookdale; Hollywood Foreign Press Association; Hugh Hefner; Los Angeles County Arts Commission; Steve and Cathy Needleman; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Media Sponsors: Laemmle Theatres; *Los Angeles Downtown News*. Community Partners: Downtown Center Business Improvement District; Historic Core Business Improvement District.

Last Remaining Seats, Then and Now



LEFT: A committee of volunteers planned the original Last Remaining Seats season. New volunteers continue to join the Last Remaining Seats Committee to help plan the event each year. Photo by Randall Michelson, 1987. RIGHT: Crowds have streamed into L.A.'s historic theatres since the series' beginning. Photo by Tom Zimmerman Photography, 1987.



LEFT: The first season of Last Remaining Seats drew attention to Broadway's historic theatres, many of which were neglected and underused. Since then, both the Orpheum Theatre and the former United Artists Theatre (now The Theatre at Ace Hotel, pictured above) have been fully restored and are in regular use. Photo by Stephen Russo, 2015. RIGHT: People love taking photos of L.A.'s historic theatres. In recent years, we've set up a selfie spot with props at each screening. Photo by Larry Underhill, 2015.



VOLUNTEER PROFILE: ROBIN BOWERS

by Bruce Scottow

"I fell in love with those big old movie theatres."

-Robin Bowers

It was the 1950s. Television and burgeoning suburbs were just beginning to suck the life from many downtown movie palaces across the nation,



and the Ohio Theatre in Columbus was no exception. The theatre survived, however, and it was there that a young Robin Bowers, whose father worked at the theatre, took on one of his first high school jobs: theatre usher.

Fast forward fifty-some years, and Robin is once again working at movie theatres—but now as one of the Conservancy's most active Last Remaining Seats (LRS) volunteers. His roles with LRS have been varied, but his favorite is assisting backstage. One of his most memorable moments was listening to the lively backstage chatter between surprise guests Cloris Leachman and Mel Brooks before our 2008 screening of *Young Frankenstein*.

Robin has lived in the L.A. area since the early 1960s, following a career in computer data processing that began during his stint with the U.S. Air Force. He retired about ten years ago. We're happy he found the Conservancy, as he's willing to take on any role, from stuffing envelopes in the office to folding theatre curtains after an LRS screening. The Los Angeles Historic Theatre Foundation (LAHTF) also keeps him busy, as does his passion for rail travel. Robin's most recent rail trip took him through twenty-two states, from New England back to us in Los Angeles.

CHINATOWN continued from page 1

Cavern Wishing Well. On the tour, you'll learn about the development of this current commercial center for Chinese and other Asian businesses. You'll also have the opportunity to explore decades-old shops selling traditional teas, medicines, and Chinese imports; see places of historic importance in the battle for Chinese-American civil rights; study the blended style of Chinese and American architecture readily on display; and experience firsthand the fresh energy of a neighborhood undergoing revitalization.

Of course, no tour of Chinatown would be complete without food. Decades-old institutions such as Hop Louie and Empress Pavilion are now complimented by the ever-growing, trendy restaurant scene, including places such as Chego, Ramen Champ, Pok Pok Phat Thai, and Little Jewel of New Orleans. The influx of popular culinary hotspots is rapidly making Chinatown one of L.A.'s most exciting food scenes, which underscores a younger generation's growing discovery of and newfound appreciation for the neighborhood. You'll learn more about the impact this generation is making and hear from stakeholders on relevant issues concerning the area's past and present. There may even be some dim sum to go with it.

Tickets are \$25 for Conservancy members, \$35 for the general public, \$15 for students, and \$10 for children twelve and under. Visit laconservancy.org/chinatown to reserve your spot on this very special tour.



Photo by Annie Laskey/L.A. Conservancy.

CHARACTER continued from page 1

character gives a neighborhood its context and meaning. It is particularly fragile in a fast-paced development environment like Los Angeles.

Balancing Density and Compatibility

As Los Angeles grows up—both figuratively and literally—it faces an ever-increasing demand for greater density. There are a lot of good reasons to embrace and support density, particularly along transit lines and near employment centers. Unlike other cities, L.A. can more easily build up, since plenty of surface parking lots and non-historic low-scaled commercial strip developments can accommodate larger and taller buildings. The key to preserving community character amid more density is to ensure compatibility between the old and the new.

High-Rise Development

Density is the name of the game in recent development, particularly in downtown and Hollywood. High-rise towers are being proposed or are under construction all over downtown. Hollywood has not seen its current level of development since it first came into existence.

The Conservancy typically does not weigh in on new construction projects. Yet we are increasingly stepping into this arena because of the cumulative effects these developments have on historic places. For instance, after more than a century as a remarkably cohesive neighborhood of mid-rise buildings, the Historic Core is being littered with high-rise towers of twenty to thirty stories that will dwarf their neighbors, introduce entirely new proportions, block iconic views, and create looming shadows. Even details that seem innocuous, such as projecting balconies on the main façade, change the feel of the street by making it seem more like Miami than the Historic Core.

The number of downtown high-rises that are proposed or already approved underscores the need for greater clarity and guidance. To better direct this development, the Conservancy strongly believes that there is an urgent need to revisit and update the City's Downtown Design Guide.



A proposed high-rise tower in downtown L.A.'s Historic Core would block views of the iconic Eastern Columbia building. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.

Background Buildings

If you've noticed a negative change in your local commercial area but can't put your finger on the source, it could be the rapid disappearance of what we call "background buildings." Background buildings are modest, small-scale, yet distinctive structures that create the overall feel of a street or neighborhood. They may not be individually significant, but collectively, they help define the character of a community.

One by one—or block by block—background buildings are being replaced with mid-rise developments that can seem sterile and disconnected from the existing community context. Where and how to place density is more art than science. Instead of the blunt instrument of massive razing and redevelopment, we need a more surgical approach that integrates new development into an existing context. The Conservancy is working to spotlight this issue through a historic preservation sub-committee of the Zoning Advisory Committee for re:code LA, the multi-year effort to rewrite the City's outdated zoning code.

Mansionization

Mansionization is nothing new, yet it is an incredibly important trend that shows no signs of slowing. Many proponents of teardowns and mansionization claim that building larger homes in older neighborhoods increases density. Yet not everything touted as "density" really is density. Countless older

homes have been demolished and replaced with massive, out-of-scale new houses—adding square footage, not density. Older neighborhoods rich in character are most vulnerable to this trend due to their location and land values.

The City is working on amendments to its Baseline Mansionization Ordinance (BMO) and a new Single Family Zone that hopefully will create more incentives to retain existing houses, rather than replacing them with new ones. The initial passage of the BMO in 2008 was an important first step, but now is the time to strengthen this tool and make sure it works as intended.

Where There's a Will...

To say the "growing up" of Los Angeles needs a big-picture perspective is an understatement. The issues introduced here (and others) are converging to change how our city looks, feels, and functions for generations to come.

The Conservancy will continue advocating for sound planning that allows neighborhoods to adapt for density without losing their character. As we continue this important conversation, we'll need everyone's help as we ultimately advance strategies and possible solutions. We believe that with enough vision, collaboration, and sheer will, Los Angeles can reach a new level of maturity that embraces its rich, irreplaceable heritage.

DECEMBER 8 / FEBRUARY 1 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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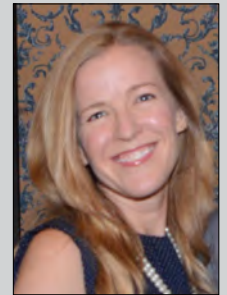


MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

MEMBER PROFILE: KATIE HORAK

by Liz Leshin

"I always had a love of historic buildings and an interest in what makes a place a place," says Katie Horak, an individual member as well as



a Principal with Corporate Cornerstone member Architectural Resources Group (ARG).

With a background in fine arts, Katie came to preservation on a circuitous and personal path. She saw the destruction of many places in her hometown of Upland, CA, part of the citrus industry hub of the early twentieth century. When the last remaining citrus packing house in nearby Claremont—where her mother had worked as a teen—was threatened with demolition, she helped advocate for its preservation. Now a vibrant mixed-use building, the Claremont Packing House received a Conservancy Preservation Award in 2009.

Katie earned a master's degree in heritage conservation from USC. She worked for the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission before joining ARG in 2008.

"Being a Corporate Cornerstone member of the Conservancy connects us to the larger preservation community," says Katie. "It makes me proud of my city that we can support the largest local preservation organization in the country."

"The Conservancy does important work," she adds. "From grand mansions to corner cafes, places tell the story of a city."

CONSERVANCY WALKING TOURS

Tours are \$5 for Conservancy members and children twelve and under; \$10 for the general public. Walk-ins accepted on Art Deco, Downtown Renaissance, Historic Downtown, and Modern Skyline. All others require reservations.

For details and reservations, visit laconservancy.org. Questions? Call the Conservancy office at (213) 623-2489.

CONSERVANCY WALKING TOURS

Angelino Heights

First Saturday of every month, 10 a.m.

Art Deco

Every Saturday, 10 a.m.

Biltmore Hotel

Every Sunday, 2 p.m.

Broadway Historic Theatre &

Commercial District

Every Saturday, 10 a.m.

Downtown Renaissance

Every Saturday, 10 a.m.

Historic Downtown

Every Saturday, 10 a.m.

Modern Skyline

Every Saturday, 2 p.m.

Union Station

Every Saturday, 10 a.m.

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



Los Angeles Conservancy

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UPCOMING EVENTS



Photo by Annie Laskey/L.A. Conservancy.

CHINATOWN TOUR

Downtown L.A.
Sunday, April 17

Explore the vibrant history of downtown L.A.'s Chinatown on our special one-day-only tour. Space is limited; reserve your spot today! Details on page 1.



Photo from 2015 luncheon by Gary Leonard.

PRESERVATION AWARDS LUNCHEON

Millennium Biltmore Hotel
Thursday, May 5

Help us honor the best in preservation at our annual Preservation Awards Luncheon! Winning projects will be featured in our next issue. Individual ticket and table reservations available at laconservancy.org.



Orpheum Theatre. Photo by Larry Underhill.

LAST REMAINING SEATS

Downtown L.A.
Wednesdays & Saturdays
June 4–25

Celebrate our 30th annual Last Remaining Seats series of classic films in historic theatres, where it all began in 1987: Broadway's historic theatres! Member tickets go on sale Wednesday, March 30.