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MAGAZINE MAY/JUNE 99

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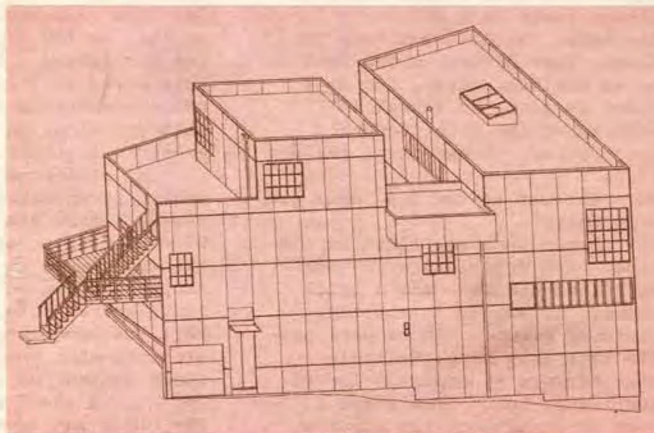


Frederick Fisher, see page 6.

If you want to know where architecture is headed, go to Los Angeles. Over the past twenty years, this city has been building up to a golden age of architecture that is now in full bloom. So when I was asked – on a late winter's day in New York – to head out to L.A. for a round of interviews with some of the most innovative architects and design teams there, I didn't have to think twice.

The trip brought back memories of my earliest visits to L.A. Every spring, I would fly from Minneapolis with my family to see my grandmother. I thought we had to fly because Los Angeles was on a cloud, not on Earth with the rest of us. L.A. remains that fantastic desert valley oasis I first encountered. And yet, whenever I go back, it's never the same. It's a city in a perpetual state of transformation.

As my recent visit made clear, L.A.'s ever-changing environment has fostered a design sensibility that is, for the first time in its history, truly its own.

JOE ADDO

With three interconnected public projects underway in Watts, Joe Addo's belief that architecture should be site specific and meet the needs of the people who will interact with it is becoming a reality. The Community Market, an indoor/outdoor marketplace built around a former warehouse on Central Avenue, will be linked to the Watts Cultural Crescent Park by the "Nile Walk," a continuous stretch of fountains and gardens. In the park, Addo's plan for a tensile structure to cover a 700-seat amphitheater is meant to create a dramatic dialogue with the historic Watts Towers which loom above the site, and which will still be visible through its tent-like transparent canopy.

Fritz Haeg: From what I've heard, you didn't take the most direct route to L.A.
Joe Addo: Well, I was born in Ghana, West Africa, which used to be an English colony, and so I ended up going to school in London, at the Architectural Association. I was there for six years.
FH: Who was at the A.A. when you were there?
JA: Peter Cook was there at the time. And Peter Salter. Zaha Hadid, of course – she's still there. It was an interesting training ground. There were people from Hong Kong, Malaysia, some African students, a lot of Americans, too. From there I went to Washington for about a year and then moved to L.A.
FH: What brought you here?
JA: Adventure. I arrived one winter weekend and it was warm. It had been freezing in the East, and I thought, "You know, I could hang out here." So I did.
FH: Was starting an office your ultimate goal when you moved here?
JA: The recession had just begun in '91, so the office I was working for folded. But I had all this work, so I hired one of the other architects who was with this practice, and we did these projects together.

My office is really like a makeshift endeavor. We have only one full-time staff, and then we hire people to come and help. Last month, we had six or seven people working for us on a project, and this week they're gone.
FH: You can focus more on the projects that you really care about instead of maintaining ...
JA: ... a staff and all that.
FH: What are some of the projects you're working on now?
JA: We're working on several park projects. The first one is the Watts Culture Crescent Park, which is a ten-acre park in the city of Watts. We came up with the idea of using tensile structures for the market stalls. So there will be six or seven of them built in this plaza. And another tensile structure will cover a 700-seat amphitheater. The nice thing about this structure is that it's demountable, because it abuts against the Watts House. And since it's a very important historic monument, we didn't want something which would impact this wonderful structure. So we can put it up for the events, leave it up for the season, and then take it down.
FH: Are there other public spaces like this in Watts? It's a part of L.A. that I'm not very familiar with.
JA: In the history of L.A., Watts is very important. It's where all the jazz used to be in the '30s and the '40s. People like Charlie Parker were coming to Watts. There's a street which runs north-south from downtown L.A. all the way to Compton which is called Central Avenue. This used to be the hub of all the cultural activity in L.A. from

Watts Culture Crescent Amphitheater

Sanders Residence

the turn of the century all the way through to the '50s and '60s. The demise of Watts began after the riots of '65. There was urban flight – basically most of the people who could afford to move. But it's going through major growth right now, and there are other spaces for public projects. I'm involved with three projects in a one-mile radius.

FH: Let's talk about those.

JA: We've already completed the marketplace building on Central Avenue for the Watts Labor Community Action Committee. This is a building which has a bank, retail stores and a restaurant, and it also has workshops where they train the young people of Watts to become entrepreneurs and go into business.

FH: How did you get involved in this project?

JA: I had never worked in Watts, hadn't done any public work. But the people behind the project, which at the time was being called an African marketplace, were referred to me by another architect, someone they wanted who was no longer practicing. So I went to the site, and it was this worn-out old box of a warehouse, packed full of junk. Their original idea was to just clean it up and put in stalls and turn it into a marketplace. But through sketches and talking to them and brainstorming, it became much more ambitious – we added two new buildings to it, which makes it a 20,000-square-foot building.

The third project we're doing is the Facade Program. We've been asked to re-do the facades of buildings along ten city blocks.

FH: The ultimate L.A. design problem, right?

JA: It is. And I'm very skeptical about that approach. But the idea is that this will act as an impetus to attract more investment and development in the community. Partial interventions like this, with a larger scale economic injection of capital, can really make a difference. But even if what we are doing alone doesn't solve the problem, the residents would rather have that than to just leave things as they are. So I agree, yes, it's a stopgap measure, but hopefully it's the first in a series of steps for a larger investment that will cover the area.

I'm involved with three projects which, hopefully, together will attract additional investment in the area. Crime is down in L.A., but people don't even perceive that. There's this perception of the area as violent and gang-infested, but it's not quite the case. So I think a little bit of sprucing up the image will go a long way to attract people who want to open up businesses.

FH: So these dilapidated facades make people feel unsafe, and the perception is more important than the reality.

JA: Absolutely. But Watts is going through a major PR campaign to let people know that this area is not as bad as people think. And the nice thing is that a lot of these projects are home-spun. They're local and begin from within the community, and then the government comes in and also assists. So a lot of local activists are involved. And we hired local builders to do all of these projects.

FH: Do you feel at all limited on public projects – as opposed to when you work with an individual client?

JA: We push the design side of it, which doesn't happen very often in public projects. We really try and push the envelope. For example, when we were asked to do the amphitheater in Watts, I brought in the idea of using tensile structures, and the bureaucrats kind of panicked because of the cost, but they finally had the money to actually build them. I believe in coming at a project like this with a high design concept. I don't say, "Oh, it's just a public project, so we have to be modest about it." I really go for broke. That's my approach.

FH: I know you've done some private residences, and I'm wondering, what's the continuity in design sensibility between doing houses for wealthy clients and public projects in neglected neighborhoods?

JA: The private work funds our public work. No question that you don't make money doing this kind of work. But we love it. It's become the mainstay of our office. And it's important to come down in scale, which you do with a private house. So I use the houses as a laboratory to experiment with form and detail and finishes, and then bring that back into our public work.

FH: Let's talk about one of your houses, because I've seen the model for the one you're working on in Louisiana.

JA: In Baton Rouge.

FH: It's enormous, and it actually looks like it could be in Los Angeles.

JA: It's very un-Louisiana. Although we've had to modify the roof forms in the original plan just because the climate is so unforgiving in terms of its rain. And there was so much glass on the skylights that it wasn't going to work.

People think L.A. is casual, but the building practices in Louisiana are *very casual*. Everything is so verbal. It's difficult to get a cost estimate from a builder. They don't write anything down. And there are very few builders who are willing to do anything out of the ordinary. But it's been a fascinating experience trying to learn how things are done there.

Sanders Residence, Los Angeles

FH: Who have some of your influences been?
JA: Peter and Allison Smithson were great influences. They did the Economist building in London. Everything was concrete and very simple, but it was all in the detailing. So I love concrete. Maybe it's because in Ghana we have these adobe structures. Everything is thick, has depth to it. I often think our work is a bit overexuberant, but I don't think it's over the top. We try to tame it down. I think that as I get older, I'm learning to calm down and get the essence of the work.
FH: Los Angeles is a place that seems to encourage and endorse an over the top energy.
JA: A lot of people are doing rather exaggerated – albeit wonderful – work, but I'm forcing myself to think of the big idea and to be more restrained. When we first started building, we were very young – you tend to treat every product as your last product, so you put everything in it. But as you get older, you realize that there are going to be more opportunities to experiment. So you have one concept for each project, rather than throwing ten things at each one.

For example, we have a very simple concept for the roof in our park project. These are our Christmas cards, and you can see the idea of having one element that folds, a continuous fold. It's flat, and then it folds, and then it becomes the lower part of the building. That's the main element in this thing, and I'm very glad to just have this one move.
FH: Allowing one kind of physical object ...
JA: ... to speak.
FH: How do you see the design environment in Los Angeles evolving?
JA: Oh, I think it's changing. I think Modernism is truly back. There's a surge towards simplicity.
FH: Why do you think that is?
JA: That has always been here. The simple Modernist architects like Ray Cappe have always been here. But in the '80s and the '90s, publications focused on the more exuberant and adventurous architecture. And in my mind, not all the work in this town was like that. I guess for these publications it just wasn't sexy to have a refined, sculpted box. But now we're back to Charles and Ray Eames, and Schindler and Neutra ...
FH: A lot of the work I've been looking at here, including these projects of yours, is like an exuberant, human Modernism.
JA: Yes.
FH: With the late '50s as the point of departure ... where Modernism started to get a little goofy.
JA: You must remember that we are products of our environment. We have the climate where we can experiment with form, where we can expose more in terms of the material and the structure. So I think you're right. At the core, most of these projects are Modernist pieces with a twist. Although I don't think we can imitate or replicate work from the '50s. It's important to study those pieces and understand where they're coming from, and give them our own spin. There are a lot of young people who are actually doing that very well, but there are older practitioners who are doing it even better – and no one knows about them.
FH: Like who?
JA: I go back to Ray Cappe. I think he is the most underrated architect in the world!
FH: Tell me about him.
JA: Frank Gehry may be much more famous, but Ray Cappe is considered the father of young architects in L.A. He was a professor at Cal-Poly, and founded SCI-Arc around '71. I've invited Ray to be on my team for the Central Avenue marketplace. I thought, what a great way to learn about urban planning – through the master himself. Ray sees the importance of this project because he has a history in urban planning from the '60s. So this is basically a continuum of his teachings and his ideas. I have the big contract, but here I am, a student of Ray Cappe. So it's going to be an interesting experiment.
FH: A lot of people have mentioned him.
JA: There was an AIA convention a few years ago, and Norman Foster spoke, he was going on about L.A., how much he loves L.A. – and the only local architect that he mentioned he liked was Ray Cappe.
FH: It seems that the architecture community outside of Los Angeles likes to be able to step back and say, "This is L.A." And it can end up being a caricature.
JA: In a funny way, I think that although architects find the work here fascinating, I don't think they take it seriously. There's a lot of good work which no one ever talks about – either it isn't published or it's treated like it's Disneyland.

I know that you're going to be talking to the people at Hedge, and I think it's very impressive. I've seen some of their stuff and they're going to do very, very well. The whole idea of these young people grouping together, having a philosophy, a manifesto, and actually building stuff ... I've seen the restaurant they've done on Sunset. I went there for dinner the other night and I think it's fabulous. It's very simple, but it's the beginnings of great things for them.
FH: Where do you see yourself in the next few years – continuing with more public projects and parks, doing bigger private houses, or going somewhere else entirely?
JA: Some of the better work in this city is not in the public realm, but in the private, and, sadly, most people don't get to see it.
FH: It's houses.
JA: Yes, it's houses.
FH: I guess this is ultimately a city where public space is ceded to private, personal environments.

JA: Well, I really hope that we can continue doing public projects. But we also want to diversify and do other things, too. One of my fantasies is to do sets for theater or the movies or TV. I'm very fascinated by them. I watch television sometimes, and the sets are so bad. Every show has a terrible apartment. *Seinfeld* is obviously one of them, and so is *Frasier*. And these networks have so much money. Why not create a nice apartment for one of these shows?
FH: With the amount of energy you put into your houses, you've directly affected the lives of the people who live in them, and their guests. But to do a set for TV, you affect millions of people in their own living rooms ...
JA: It's the ultimate cyberhouse.

Aird House, Hollywood

L.A. Louver Gallery, Venice

FREDERICK FISHER

Fred Fisher is widely admired for the art spaces he has designed over the years in L.A. In his studios, galleries, and museums, the architecture never upstages the art: the art is always the most important thing in the room. Fisher's affinities for the work of California light and space artists such as James Turrell and Robert Irwin, and for the natural landscape around him, are evident in his architecture. He is known for the placement of windows and other openings to frame outdoor vistas – the sky, the ocean, hills and trees – as if they were pictures. And despite living and working in a place as young as L.A., he's also interested in ideas of ruins and how the layers of a building can reveal its history.

FH: What was Los Angeles like for artists and creative people when you were starting out in the late '70s?

Fred Fisher: I think there was the feeling that Los Angeles didn't have a big Establishment, and that's one of the things that appealed to people and made it a fertile ground for art and architecture. We don't have a beautiful historic architectural framework to deal with – it's kind of an ugly, growing city. So somebody like myself could, out of school, build a house or find opportunities that would be rarer in other cities. L.A. had a diffuse pioneer kind of environment. Venice today is a huge cultural and tourist destination, but back then it was a ghost town. Turrell and Irwin had studios there, but you'd go out to the beach and there was nobody ...

FH: Even at the beach?

FF: Even at the beach. There was nude sunbathing on Venice Beach at that time because nobody was around to be upset about it. The place thrived on neglect. It was this alternative community, cheap housing right near the ocean. The artists moved in first, and then designers and architects who converted industrial spaces and funky little beach cottages. It was a place where young people could afford to live, develop their environments on their own terms, and be in a part of town not far from UCLA. You had that balance between culture and nature.

FH: Which you have in California – and which can't help but affect your work.

FF: Here on the West Coast, I think we look to Asia as much or more than we do to Europe, and I think that affects the art and architecture here. People have written about how the meditative quality of Asian religion and art relates closely to the perceptual, meditative quality of Turrell's work, and Irwin's and Doug Wheeler's work. That kind of balance between the Eastern mentality and the Western mentality has been one of the strengths of the cultural milieu here.

FH: I know that you started out in art, and I'm curious about how that evolved into architecture.

FF: Well, my father was an architect, so I didn't want to be an architect. I studied art at Oberlin College, and came to the conclusion that I wasn't cut out for that, and that I needed the limitations and the context that architecture provides. And yet I didn't want to entirely abandon my interest in art. When I first saw Frank Gehry's work, when I came out here to study at UCLA, I saw how that connection could work. His was the one firm that I was interested in working with, and I was lucky enough to work with him for a couple of years. That was a very fertile period in L.A.'s cultural history, when the Venice art community was really blossoming. Did you ever hear of *Wet Magazine*?

FH: What was it?

FF: That was a magazine that was published by one of my classmates at UCLA. It was about bringing

Herman Studio, Los Angeles

together design, architecture, art, fashion, food and bathing.

FH: When was this?

FF: From about 1975 until the early '80s. It wasn't just a magazine but a kind of a sub-cultural phenomenon. There were wonderful parties at the Burnside Baths that brought together a lot of people from my generation from these different fields.

That's where I got my first job on my own. The Caplin House was my first house. Loren Caplin was one of the publishers of the magazine, and his wife Laure was an artist and involved in *Wet* as well. I was also working with Jim Turrell – I was on the board of the Skystone Foundation for six years. I was doing studios for artists, trading art for architecture services. I did a studio for Roger Herman – a big plywood box in downtown L.A.

FH: Oh, I love that project.

FF: Eventually I moved from studios to galleries and then into institutional work, like the Broad Foundation – which led to getting involved with P.S.1. That was a long but great project. Alana Heiss liked to bring in artists for their opinions about the space. That kind of open-ended dialogue between artists, museum people, and myself has been the way I like to work. And the issue is always the same – to provide a framework where the art would be the most important thing in the environment.

FH: Which doesn't always happen in art spaces.

FF: I had an interesting comment from an art critic who came through the Broad Foundation. She asked if it had ever been published, and I said, "Actually not – it kind of surprises me because I think it's a significant project for a major collector." And she said, "I think I know why. Magazines like to have things in them which have punch, and here all you can see is the art." And I said, "Well, that's exactly the point."

I don't want to be completely self-effacing, but with the kinds of art spaces that I'm interested in doing, I try to balance my vision – the framework – with the artist's vision. That's my way of doing museums or art spaces. There are other ways of doing them. Frank's museums are extremely successful in a different way.

FH: That brings up the basic question of what one expects from the experience of going somewhere specifically to look at art.

FF: When you go to P.S.1, I think what you expect is to be brought into close proximity with the artists developing their own work. It's not so much a museum where work is just hung safely on the wall – although they do do that. The idea of P.S.1 started with a building that was a found arts space – a former public school building – where artists produced work in situ. Artists responded to the building as it was. I wanted to maintain that ethos of the museum as a working environment, almost an extension of a studio. It wasn't a matter of the architecture making an architectural statement, it was creating a framework where this mode of expression could continue to take place.

FH: To me, your personal hand is most visible in the entrance to the building. You start out with this sculpture garden. Though it's very subtle, it has the feeling of a very carefully designed place, with grand steps leading you to the entry. And then, you look straight up four or five stories in the vestibule.

FF: It was about discovering the building – its surprises. Yet, in Alana's inimitable way, she now calls that the Chimney Gallery, and she puts art in it. This is a very big, complex building. As the museum was being planned, part of the discussion was whether or not it would become an orderly, homogeneous, and rational environment. The notion that I eventually established for the project was that of a landscape. There are areas that are painted white and there are others where you see old peeling paint from a hundred years ago. The notion of *pentimento* – of seeing all the layers at one time, of simultaneously differentiated realities – is something that interested me. When I studied art, the kind of art that interested me most was Surrealism.

FH: Really?

FF: P.S.1 has gone through many states over the years, and I felt, why try to homogenize that? It's a much richer environment, not only revealing what's already there, but adding to it. The building expresses itself as you go through. It expresses all its history and all of the activities that have taken place there. You have to experience the whole landscape of the building; you have to have the sum of those experiences.

FH: I think most New York architects couldn't let go like that – there's this desire to contain and control and put a grid on it. But what you've done at P.S.1 has this relaxed Los Angeles feel.

FF: One of my favorite books is *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees*, by Lawrence Weschler, the one about Robert Irwin. It talks about a pure art

Entrance, P.S.1. Museum, Long Island City, NY

Emory House, Malibu

sensibility, of being aware of the process of putting names and structures on your perception – of being aware enough to let it go and separate out the layers of perception.

David Ireland is an artist in San Francisco I've worked with, and his work is very distinctly different from Irwin's, but similar in the sense of accepting and studying and subtly manipulating the existing character of an environment. Sometimes when you see a David Ireland piece, you don't even know you're looking at a work of art.

FH: Because it's so subtle.

FF: Those sensibilities have made as much of a difference as my architectural education on the way I want to deal with an existing environment. I don't necessarily feel a need to put new forms and new objects into the world. I think there's plenty in the world to deal with.

FH: There was a point in the late '60s/early '70s when some artists felt that there was enough stuff in the world, that ideas were more important than the object.

FF: Well, you had the earthworks of Michael Heizer, making a gesture in the landscape and seeing the landscape anew with that one simple gesture. And of course Minimalism helped people to re-see things – by reducing composed forms and allowing a dialogue with a box and the reflections around it.

FH: I was just going to ask about your cinder block house.

FF: One of my other favorite art historical periods was the English Romantic period, with its notion of the picturesque. We don't have any ruins here in California – it's too young – but we have these earthquakes and fires. What if we expressed that strength of nature versus the marginality of our life here in California, where we could be swept away by any number of natural disasters? So when I had some time on my hands, I did drawings to depict this idea of ruins from natural disasters, and the house around the ruins. In one, the block ruins look like they came from one kind of building, and then the simple Japanese pavilion-like house is on top of that. So there's also a kind of surrealistic disjuncture.

FH: It seems like there's a questioning of visual pleasure – the love of materials that by themselves are ugly, but are transformed by the hand of the designer.

FF: Well, that's part of the process of unnaming things. Frank Gehry was doing that, using chain-link fencing and corrugated metal and these traditionally ugly materials. He took them for their visual quality and forced people to see them in a different way. •

FH: You know, when I was going to school in Pittsburgh, I saw the construction of the house you did there from beginning to end. I walked by it every day on my way to school.

FF: The foundation was from the original house, and the client wanted to incorporate the ruins of that house into her new house. So we reused the stone from the old house to build one wall. Some of the carved stone pieces were used as lintels, and I tried to maintain some of the vernacular of Pittsburgh.

FH: I would imagine that being a huge challenge in that neighborhood, especially for the people who lived directly across the street ...

FF: Well, her parents lived across the street. [laughs] We didn't want it to feel like there was just one house on top of another, but that there were two or three or four layers. It wouldn't have been appropriate to do a California house there, but I wanted to bring notions of layering and superimposition and collage into this house.

FH: You've been working more and more internationally, and I'm wondering how your vision and intentions are affected?

FF: Well, I think people are interested in working with architects from the United States, and maybe from Los Angeles in particular because of their associations with the life style here and with the tradition of innovation. They're interested in the loft living in New York and the continuity with nature in Los Angeles. The collaborations between artists and designers have a cachet outside of the U.S. We've done projects in Japan and in Europe, and in most cases people are interested in how all that can somehow be translated into their environments.

FH: You're also in the midst of a big project in Berlin now.

FF: The developer for this project explicitly had those intentions, in that they're trying to introduce a new kind of inventory of housing into Berlin – of living and working environments with so-called creative spaces. I actually feel an affinity between Berlin and Los Angeles ...

FH: How so?

FF: On one hand, Berlin is trying to forget a certain amount of its history, and then it's also trying to invent a new one. Some of the projects are attempting to make Berlin a completely modern, ahistorical city, but there is also a desire to not forget. It really isn't one of the older European capitals, so it doesn't have as much of the physical establishment as London or Rome or Paris. Then the war destroyed so much. A large part of it was frozen in time during the Cold War. It's an amazing collage of different eras and ideologies, so doing architecture there is a very charged activity.

FH: It is one of those rare moments in the story of a city where there is an urgency for architecture to communicate.

FF: There is a recognition that the Nazi Era was a fact, that it can't be completely forgotten. There's physical evidence of it which isn't going to go away. And then there's the deeper history of marvelous buildings by Schinkel, and later Le Corbusier and Niemeyer. And now the city is supporting some of the most innovative architecture being done anywhere. You have everyone from Leon Krier and Aldo Rossi to Zaha Hadid doing things. It's absolutely incredible.

pool, Gernstein House, Los Feliz

SARAH GRAHAM
ANGÉLIL/GRAHAM

Dividing their time between offices in Los Angeles and Zurich, Sarah Graham and her husband and partner Mark Angélil have merged American efficiency and an openness to improvisation with European craftsmanship and attention to detail. In their work together, from houses in Topanga Canyon to an airport terminal and a town center in Switzerland, they're developing a hybrid sensibility – architecture that is adventurous, rigorous, and attuned to its environment.

FH: I know that Mark is Swiss, and that you started out in Boston, so how did you end up here in L.A.?

Sarah Graham: I was at Harvard, at the Graduate School of Design, and after I left, Mark started teaching there. We began our practice in '82 and were in Boston for about five years. But I'm from the West Coast and I wanted to come West again.

FH: What was Boston like?

SG: It was fine. But it was the postmodernist era in a conservative city and we never really fit in. It was a battle just to get people to a neutral place, not wanting pitched roofs and so forth. We thought that L.A. was probably a great place to do the kinds of things we were interested in.

FH: What was happening at that time?

SG: What I call "the Santa Monica Boys' Club" was in full swing.

FH: Like who?

SG: Everyone from Thom Mayne and Rotondi and Fred Fisher to the whole SCI-Arc club. There were a lot of good people doing a lot of good work. We never thought that our work was like theirs, but we very much liked their energy and we liked them. Los Angeles was definitely a place on the map at that point.

We moved here in '87. In '89 we won a competition for a town-center project near Zurich, where Mark is from. We opened an office there which is now our big office. We're only three or four people here in L.A., and we have twenty in Zurich. That's where our energies are focused now. And the work is quite interesting – everything from house additions to an airport terminal.

FH: The terminal is what you're working on now?

SG: The big work is all in Zurich at the moment – the airport terminal, remaking a factory into housing, office buildings, several big urban design competitions. That's plenty. In Europe, one gets work largely by competition. You have some word of mouth, but architects just don't market themselves there.

FH: How else would you say it's different from working here?

SG: The airport terminal is a good example. We've never done an airport terminal. And here, there's not a chance in hell that we could ever be considered for a $250 million project, when we haven't done that type of project before. But there, with a competition, they award the contract based on the quality of the work. And we were competing against big guys like Richard Rogers, all of whom had done airport terminals.

Esslingen Town Center Project, Switzerland

We can also build better in Europe. Everybody can. There's just more of a respect for the work, a higher level of trades, and an attitude about design and art that's not based on short-term economics.

FH: It seems opposite to the attitude towards construction in Los Angeles ...

SG: It is.

FH: ... where you get disposable buildings, things that might just as well tumble off the side of a hill.

SG: That's right. But by going back and forth we can learn from both sides and they inform each other. The fact that one can build cheaply here, really fast and light, is something that's new there. It's not always accepted, but you can have an influence. In Europe, we can work with newer materials in relation to energy efficiency. There's literally nothing in Los Angeles that I would call sophisticated from an environmental point of view. Right now we're working on a house where we're trying to use as much paper as we can – and it's great fun.

FH: How would you use paper?

SG: Insulation, wallboards, cabinetry. You know, Frank Gehry did a chair with paper. It's a pretty great chair, and it's a pretty strong chair. We're trying to figure out how we can push that as far as we can. We thought, well, the typical building material here for small construction is wood, and while I like wood a great deal, the quality of wood is getting worse. The lumber industry is not really taking care of it, and things are kind of wet and soggy and not straight. So we thought, can we build a whole house out of steel, glass and paper? Let's say that if ninety percent of the house can be that, then it's pretty successful. We'll find out.

FH: Do you feel like your work is a hybrid of Southern Californian and European attitudes?

SG: Yes and no. I am definitely of this culture, and Mark has lived here enough – and loves it – that he's part of this culture as well. But we also have two partners in Zurich. They're not at all typically Swiss, but they don't pretend to be from Los Angeles either.

FH: Who would you say your influences have been?

SG: Other conditions beyond architecture are very important to us. I probably spend more time reading about art than I do about architecture. Partly because people write better about art than they do about architecture. I never could figure that out when I went from a thrilling art history class to an architec-

Environmental House, Topanga Canyon

ture history class ... Actually, I would say that it delayed my entering architecture for a few years.

FH: I can understand why.

SG: For example, Land Art, which transforms the context rather than just placing an object in a context. That's a powerful act, and I think it's fundamentally more interesting than seeing architecture as the pure, pristine object. The relationship of Land Art to architecture is very much a part of our thinking at the moment. We are much more interested in a weave of influences. In fact, one thing that's consistent in our work is that we try to interpret what we're doing from every possible point of view that isn't necessarily architectural or formal. Good work usually starts with other influences besides form – whether it's light or color or a poem, whatever it might be. Theoretically, you should be able to start anywhere.

FH: I suppose it's those external sources that make the end result architecture, as opposed to something just built – even if you're not conscious of them at the time.

SG: It comes together. In fact, we're much more interested in blurring disciplines than keeping them separate. What we care about is trying things and then asking ourselves, "How does that work?"

FH: Let's look at some things you've done.

SG: Well, there's a house we did here in Topanga Canyon for some friends. It's an environmentally influenced house, but done very simply. Topanga Canyon is hot and dry, so we put a giant umbrella roof on it with clerestory windows all around that are operable. And the roof is canted so that it follows the topography.

FH: So it's kind of torqued?

SG: Yeah, it's not a double curve, but it's sloping in both directions. That was before it was landscaped. Now the house has merged into the land more. The landscaping is kind of eating up the house, which I like very much. There is one zone where there are double height spaces. That was also why we picked up the roof at one point and then let it slope down.

FH: Oh, I see what you mean.

SG: What's funny is that we've since done an addition to the house. The clients thought it would be a weekend house, and then they decided to live there all the time, so they wanted to separate their bedroom a bit from the rest of the house. We thought, "Well, we might as well take it this way." So the addition starts moving down the hill.

FH: From the entry side, it seems very stable, but from the back it almost looks like it's in motion, kind of chugging up the hill.

SG: It is.

FH: It's very funny. It's a little train car.

SG: There's another house that we just finished outside of Zurich that, again, is a long, skinny house ...

FH: Oh, I've seen pictures of it. It's spectacular.

SG: That house is also on a hill, not nearly as steep, but it's similar in that there's a great deal of open space.

FH: It seems so refined and solemn.

SG: It's full of light. But one of my favorite things is that these wooden louvers that the house is sheathed in are shutters. The whole house is a black plywood box, and there are these wooden louvers in front of it, some of which are operable. So when you want either the sun or some privacy, you're revealing that under-layer of the black.

FH: And there's a retaining wall of grass. So it's like the house is sitting on a grass plinth.

SG: Well, the client is a landscape contractor, and that was his idea. We would have had a large concrete wall there. He was the one who said, "Let me try a grass wall." We were absolutely thrilled to have a client who comes up with a move like that.

FH: Can we look at one of your public projects?

SG: We have a model of the Town Center project that's outside of Zurich. But this has become a whole compilation of projects.

FH: You were hired to do a master plan, and now, one by one, you're doing these buildings.

SG: Exactly. We have a light rail train station, the station restaurant, a post office, lower-level parking, a village green. There is a row of buildings that will be office and light industrial, and there are fifty housing units behind it. We're working with Ove Arup ...

FH: They're the most amazing structural engineers.

SG: Right. But even though we want to have a certain precision, we will also allow the roughness of American house construction to occur – the wood stuff.

FH: If I think of the architects I know from Switzerland, they tend to be quite rational.

SG: Rational is a good way to describe it. In Europe, I'm always pushing for rougher. We're working on a small cooperative market in the town center. It's supposed to be a provisional building, so we really got to go cheap and light. The exterior facade is literally a lath that, here in L.A., we would only use as a plaster lath. It's so cheap that I don't even know if I'd want to use it here! [laughs] But when I looked at the craft and precision with which it was constructed, I said, "My god, you guys can make a chain link fence look like titanium." [laughs]

FH: And that wouldn't happen here in L.A.

SG: Here, when I tried to put a commercial garage door on a residential house, they were just banging it into place! I said, "Could you be a little careful? This is their dining room." This guy with a big tattoo goes, "Come on, lady, this is a Chevron service station door." So I said, "Could you still be a little bit careful?" And then he went back to slamming it into place.

HEDGE design collective

Hedge is a collective of eighteen young designers based in Culver City. With their pooled talents, Hedge not only offers architectural services, but industrial, landscape and graphic design, and have even started a line of clothes. The members bring in their own projects and work on them in loose collaboration, so there's a more flexible, informal approach to design than in an architectural office with two or three partners. But then Hedge isn't that interested in traditional architectural practice; they'd rather challenge and surprise each other from one day to the next.

FH: Where did the name Hedge come from?
Emily Jagoda: I think the only reason we could agree on Hedge was that it was sufficiently meaningless.
Joe Day: There was a kind of hedge against the realities of the market when we first got together four years ago ... and then there were people who really liked hedges.
Mike Ferguson: One of the definitions for "hedge" that we liked best was the hedgerow, which is an outdoor school. We were thinking that knowledge could take place outside, in a created space. The outdoor reference also suggested something that was slightly outside of the traditional approach to the profession.
FH: How old were you all when you started out?
MF: When we started, we were in our mid-twenties to early thirties. We wanted to continue the momentum and the energy that we'd created in school.
JD: It also didn't look like there was going to be a lot of work out there for us. So the idea of pooling our resources and trying to figure out how to get our careers started collectively made sense.
MF: Several of us had been working for some of the Hollywood superstar architects in Los Angeles, and in lieu of taking that route ...
JD: ... and being exploited, we thought: "Hey, we can exploit ourselves." You know, how much basswood can you sand for other people? [laughs]
MF: When we were considering names, we all sat around a computer and typed them in to see how they actually looked.
EJ: Right. Not just how does it sound, what does it mean? But how does it look?
JD: So the name Hedge is directly related to our interest in signage and street graphics, and that's come up in a lot of our projects since.
MF: The intersection of architecture and graphic design is a critical component for us. But it comes from the fact that we were forced – because of the economy at the time – to look at these other disciplines as ways to pay the rent and bring in income.
EJ: I definitely survived off of doing graphic design for quite a while.
MF: The stuff actually came back and influenced the work in a really significant way. That took me by surprise because I was probably the one who was more traditionally trained as an architect. But then to see that the integration of these disciplines can enrich the overall design ...

FH: The Hedge postcard says: "New construction, additions and renovations, industrial design, landscape and urban design, computer imaging, exhibitions and publications, graphic design." That's pretty ambitious. It might even make whoever's hiring you consider you for everything else as well, and start to question all these other aspects of their visual world.
JD: I think casting the net wide has had its advantages. It's brought in disparate projects. And for us, traditional architecture is one component, but probably not the most pervasive component in those projects.
MF: We've tried to figure out a way to elevate the graphic program of a project to the same level as the structural or mechanical engineering program.
EJ: And if you don't take control of that stuff, someone else who is a lot less thoughtful about it is going to do it for you.
FH: Your Speedway restaurant project, particularly the exterior, is a good example of graphic design meets architecture.
MF: With the Speedway project, we wanted to push this idea of a thematic billboard. You could actually lease out parts of the building as signage – in the same way that sponsors buy space for their decals on Indy race cars.

Speedway Cafe, Irvine

Formula 21

The thing was supposed to be plastered with signage. But there were all these environmental codes to deal with, so slowly those ideas got whittled away. We ended up asking, "Okay, what about the big 353 that's on the side of the building?"
FH: Is that the address?
MF: That's the address, and it's like thirteen feet high. They don't have any code restricting the height of the address, so that gets to stay. There is an opportunism in design in Los Angeles. You're inundated with signage. You're inundated with the automobile. You can't run away from it. There's no way to vilify these things with some new urbanist strategy: "You're only going to have one car and it's going to be parked in your Victorian garage ..."
JD: "You're going to walk." [laughs] In terms of public design in L.A., you can't but address the automobile.
FH: The ultimate example of that is the parking garage Frank Gehry did for Santa Monica Place. There's a scrim of chain link fence and it says: "Santa Monica Place," and that's it.
JD: It's actually a beautiful frame though. If you look at the substructure of that, it's great.
FH: Where do you see the architecture of Los Angeles going? We started with people like Frank Gehry and then Eric Owen Moss and Morphosis. That seems opposite to the architecture of the everyday.
EJ: Yeah, Moss, Morphosis — all that super-baroque stuff. We've already moved away from the everyday and into the architecture of every other day. [laughter] I think the role of the willful architect who makes these super expensive, very sculptural, highly baroque, ornate buildings, is not necessarily a durable role. And it doesn't involve the client much. The client is hiring you as an artist, so there's an elitism that removes you from a whole segment of the population.
FH: Because it can't serve as a model for anything else to happen?
EJ: Than itself.
FH: It doesn't lead to anything.
MF: To characterize the evolution in simple terms, I think that Los Angeles is somehow moving from an '80s egoist to a mid-'90s relativist to an optimistic approach towards architecture — an architecture that can actually serve a wider range of interests.
FH: Whereas with the '80s model there's a desperation for classic high impact architecture at all times.
EJ: It's very showy. It's very ostentatious.
JD: And very concerned with the primacy of architecture itself. But we're more involved with the idea of a generalized design, where, as a designer, one feels comfortable taking on a variety of different tasks and making sense of different problems, figuring out how to make things better.

above and top right: Minardos Residence

JOW Center, Torrance

EJ: Yeah, it's problem-solving rather than a specific discipline.
FH: You guys are in Culver City.
MF: It's a fairly vacant place, which makes it nice.
FH: And it's near the airport.
JD: Culver City, like Burbank, has been a company town for most of its history. There's a bit of a freeze frame to parts of Culver City because it was built very quickly around the needs of the employees of the studios here. Sony/Columbia is the most formidable one now. But Culver City has grown much more complex in the last ten years.
MF: We do end up with quite a few clients that have something to do with the film industry — it's almost a cliché in Los Angeles that the architects are lucky because there are younger people who want to do adventurous things. They're in a business that embraces the shock of the new. But more than anything, the trades that surround the film industry make our practice more interesting. Everything from photographic services to model-making or alternative media stuff.
EJ: People don't necessarily freak out when you call up and ask, "Can you fabricate this weird thing that you've never heard of?" They don't laugh you out the door.
MF: We were talking the other day about the difference between filming in Los Angeles and New York; that when things are filmed in Los Angeles, they're meant to be every place in the world.
FH: And New York is always New York.
EJ: Or if you drive by the Fox lot right here in L.A. you might end up on a street in Brooklyn. [laughs]
MF: I wonder if that's the ultimate difference between the two cities: L.A. tries to be nowhere, and everywhere else tries to be New York.
FH: In L.A. you can make up your own reality as you go along, whereas New York doesn't have any room for that. You can't impose your own vision on New York, especially as an architect.
JD: I think our generation is one of the first that thinks pretty comprehensively both about producing exterior architecture and making sense of an existing fabric.
FH: Having to work within existing buildings.
JD: Twenty years ago that wasn't an issue that a lot of L.A. architects confronted regularly.
FH: Well, in New York it's almost all you do. But do you see it getting more that way here?
EJ: We do a lot of renovations or remodels — probably because we're so young and that's the scale of commission we get. But I do think L.A. is changing. It's more about trying to save what you can.
JD: There's also been a pretty radical historicization of Los Angeles in the last ten or fifteen years. With books like Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* and Kevin Starr's *Histories of the City*, there's a real sense that we ought to recognize, make sense of, and salvage the fabric of historical structures in L.A.
MF: The kind of development that took place here in the '50s was as

new and radical as any approach towards design in architecture anywhere in the world. Because there were no precedents. At the same time, architecture began to reflect the invention of plastics and other available materials. I'm nostalgic for that type of optimism ...

FH: What do you think you want to be doing in five or ten years? Where do you see the group going?

JD: When we started, projects would come in through individual members and they'd be treated independently. Now, more and more, we have little businesses that are taking shape – whether we're producing architecture or clothing, doing landscape design – and we're trying to figure out how the umbrella of Hedge can factor into those schemes ...

FH: Maybe it's enough just to be working in the same space on different projects and have a name that covers all of it.

JD: That has been the informal virtue of the whole thing from the start. It'll be interesting to see what happens. The challenge we face now is making sense of how these different practices can coexist and reinforce one another. One of the advantages to having a group this big – eighteen people as opposed to a partnership of three or four – is that people have all sorts of things going on quietly and then you're wonderfully surprised when they surface within the larger group.

FH: I love that.

JD: And with a group this big, the issue of authorship is going to be subverted by necessity.

EJ: We've tossed out the idea that we have to continually be plugging our stuff.

JD: It's more fun to plug other people's stuff. [laughter]

EJ: Joe's got a whole line of clothes that he's actually produced and is selling. It's a real business.

FH: Where are you selling it?

JD: We're trying to get it up and rolling as a mail order business. In New York, Swell was carrying a few pieces. But manufacturing things is very different from designing them.

EJ: We're really into it. We went down to the pattern maker's studio to look at this yellow paper with black lines on it. It was like a Duchamp pattern, but with folded surfaces.

JD: In a funny way, some of what I'm discovering with clothes has gone into these houses I'm working on now.

EJ: A pattern turns into something that is not only three-dimensional and volumetric, but also has drape and these qualities that buildings usually don't.

FH: There's also the difference between architecture as a container for many, and clothing as a container for one person.

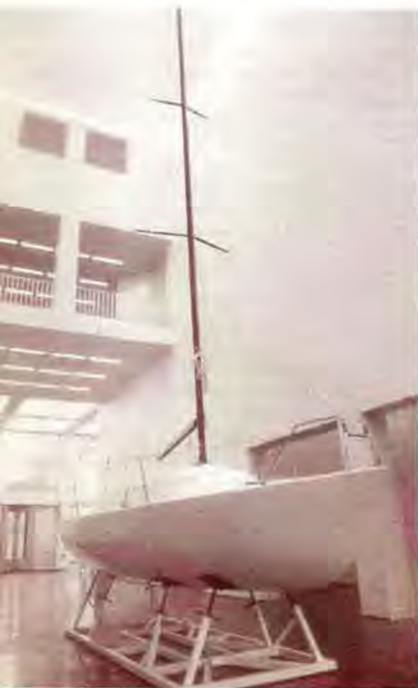
JD: I think what I like most about dealing with clothes is that everything ...

EJ: ... has to move.

JD: One of the pleasures of Hedge is feeling that when you do try something really out of step with a traditional architectural practice, there's a lot of support and enthusiasm ... for just taking a swing.

JORGE PARDO

Jorge Pardo is an artist who has shown extensively in galleries and museums. His work often consists of simple, functional objects of his own design – lamps, tables, and beds. He has also built and exhibited a full-size sailboat and, for the last Sculpture Project in Munster, Germany, a boat pier on a lake. Recently, when The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles invited him to have a show, he decided to design and build his own house. During the exhibition, the house, located in the Mount Washington area, was open to the public. Now that the show has ended, he still sees the house as a work of art, but he's also made it his home.



ntitled, 1997

FH: Since you've come to design as an artist, with a specific project for a house, you're not bound up by the issues of architecture as if it were your practice. Do you think you're better able to objectively investigate those issues?

Jorge Pardo: I don't feel comfortable as an architect and I don't feel comfortable as a designer, because I'm not. It's like being from another country or something. You just don't ever forget that you're not that.

FH: What if all of a sudden you became so exclusively taken by those issues that you just decided to become an architect or a designer?

JP: That would be amazing.

FH: Or would it just be another venue for your work?

JP: I'm doing more architectural projects than art exhibitions. I don't have any problem with that. I'm interested in understanding what the differences in the aesthetic of architecture and the aesthetics of painting or sculpture are as I'm involved in them. But I never want to have a practice where I'm forced to be working with models and things.

It was interesting to see, as a sculptor, what making an exhibition that entailed building a house would be about, and what type of subject it would become. This was something that took three or four years to do. In the process, I became like a builder, a designer, a pseudo-architect.

FH: Similar maybe to the process you went through to make the sailboat?

JP: Yeah, that came from taking sailing lessons with my friends, and then from looking at myself experiencing something pleasurable. You know, where does that take me? How do you experience more pleasure? How do you find out what you love about things, what you find yourself eternally drawn to?

FH: Do you ever think: Where does my work fit in the story of design? Does it make sense to even place it there?

JP: I never really go there. I became involved with this project about making a house, and it happened to be my house. I just like looking at houses. One of the important things for me is an interestingly made space, and the transition you go through with it. What are you forced to see? What happens to you and how do you remember that? One architect I like and was influenced by is Tadao Ando.
FH: That's an interesting example of someone who wasn't professionally trained as an architect. He started out as a boxer, and came into architecture from the side door, too.
JP: Well, I'm as involved in being able to make interesting spaces as I am in setting up a discussion about the difference between art and architecture. I could have made just about any house, as some sort of boring Duchampian gesture ...
FH: You could have hauled in a trailer or something.
JP: Or I could have made a tract house. But the issue that I took on was to really design something. That seemed a lot harder, and its ramifications much more difficult to understand.
FH: You wanted a fully designed house that's conscious of all the architectural issues of space ...
JP: The consciousness of the design comes from asking: What would I like to live in? What would be an interesting house for me? What are the things that I like about what I've seen? What's an interesting relationship to a site?
FH: Most of the issues you're talking about are abstract – relationships in space and things like that – pure architectural issues that transcend time. But then you go into issues of style that may be a little more slippery. For example, how do you feel about contemporary design culture?
JP: There's a very strange, but I guess predictable, elevation of mid-century furniture ...
FH: Something like *Wallpaper* magazine epitomizes that.
JP: Right. I guess I'm just somebody responding to something that is somehow pertinent. I can't even begin to tell you why this obsession with domestic space has become so prevalent in the last ten years. My interest in domesticity and architecture has come from living in L.A. We don't have all the art historical museums or the

4166 Sea View Lane, 1998

kind of painting tradition that you have in New York.
FH: So it's like post-war modernism becomes the foundation of the cultural history of Los Angeles.
JP: If you want to see examples of really interesting domestic architecture in L.A., there are many. There was a huge amount of physical space and an incredibly generative atmosphere for modernist houses. You had people in Los Angeles who were very interested in a kind of alien aesthetic. People went to L.A. to get away from whatever there was on the East Coast.
FH: Who were your influences?
JP: My art education, my formative time, was in L.A. I'm a big fan of John McLaughlin and Michael Asher and John Baldessari. I was very much influenced by Dan Graham. I'm not sure how to unravel what the set of influences were that made me do what I do – other than a general interest in the history of abstraction, particularly American abstraction from the '40s on.

FH: Do you see your work moving from more public things to more domestic, private situations?
JP: I don't know if it's moving that way. The house was incredibly public. We had about 4,000 visitors in six weeks. That's not a lot of people in terms of a museum, but it was in a funky neighborhood, and it was more than anyone expected.
FH: Have you moved in yet?
JP: I camped a few days there, but I'm not living there yet.
FH: Are you excited to move in?
JP: Yeah, I am actually. It's a very strange process – going from an exhibition to a home. It's closed now but people still call to come see it.
FH: And you have to take them around in your bathrobe?
JP: I have to say, "Well, it's not an exhibition anymore. It's my home now." There's a kind of awkwardness in the way that the piece has ended that's very different from the way other pieces end. It's not only the end of an exhibition, it's the beginning of my residency. It's an object that just keeps turning.
FH: The house has a classic courtyard scheme where the perimeter is windowless, right, with

redwood siding that wraps around?
JP: It's in the shape of a C, so there are three sides. The only thing that makes it atypical of a courtyard or a hacienda house is that it's on a double slope. It slopes to the east and it slopes to the south. There's a room at the top which looks over the rest of the house below. And at the bottom, you're in a courtyard without a view. The house does what the site does: where you had a view on the property, you still have a view in the house. I just took advantage of what was there. I tried to make a courtyard house that would look at itself, but would also look out. My house is not situated any differently than any of the others nearby, but mine doesn't have any fenestration on the street. You just see a big redwood mass that torques, that turns as the street turns.
FH: So it's like a piece of abstract sculpture?
JP: In a way. The roof is two slopes. One follows the slope of the street, and the other follows

the slope of the lot. Its strangeness comes from its limits, not because it's a particular shape.
FH: So will it get published in *Architectural Record* or *Artforum*?
JP: I don't know. But it's not a house on a pedestal. It's not a house that's designed to be photographed ... I was offered an exhibition at MoCA as part of the "Focus series," which are smaller exhibitions. I just thought it would be interesting to make a house because of all the problems it would propose – particularly in response to an invitation like that.
FH: It's kind of fascinating to see a house on a hill and know that it's a piece of art.
JP: What's interesting about the house is that it actually is a piece of art. As an artist, you involve yourself in the process very differently than if you were constructing a joke or constructing a model or a sociological vantage. I'm not interested in making a house to understand the history of L.A. or something like that. I'm interested in it like a Jackson Pollock or a Donald Judd – this is the work that it wants to talk to. This is the history that it wants to re-engage and reanimate.
FH: Judd is a great example of an artist whose design work always maintained its art.
JP: It was designed to be looked at, but only to be half-used or something. Donald Judd is an interesting artist; he's just not an interesting furniture designer. How usable is the furniture he made? You can't really sit in a Donald Judd chair.
FH: Well, not for very long.
JP: If you have a house full of Donald Judd furniture, it means something very different than if you have a house full of my furniture. It's a different attitude towards the problematic of functionalism. Generally, my things work. They either work well or they work okay. It's not easy to make something work really well. If you look at the interesting design fetishes today, less than half of it is comfortable.
FH: It's sacrificing the practical for a design vision.
JP: The style overruns it. Most modernist furniture is not stuff you run home to at the end of the day and jump into. Although Arne Jakobson chairs are some of the few things that actually work.
FH: Judd's work seems like it's sculpture that slowly became furniture, that became functional. Where maybe yours is more like furniture that became art.
JP: Think of Richard Artschwager. He's an artist who's interested in taking the eccentricity of his sculpture and applying it to something that's not supposed to be eccentric. When he makes furniture, it's almost like folk art or something.
FH: Do you sleep in one of your beds?
JP: I do actually. But generally speaking, I don't have a lot of my work around. Now, obviously, I'm completely surrounded. I'm inside of it.
FH: It seems like a big deal, right? To all of a sudden ...
JP: ... become a performance artist? [laughter] There's a strange sort of method to the way that the work forms itself. Look at the house in terms of other artists' houses, of which there are many, like Monet's house or Brancusi's studio. These places usually become meaningful at the end of the artist's career.
FH: For what's happened there?
JP: Right. And when I came up with this project, I was interested in somehow inverting that. I didn't want the house to have the structure of a relic. I wanted to make something that collects what is meaningful, with the potential for reorganizing that idea.
FH: It seems appropriate for Los Angeles – making a stage for something to happen.
JP: That's a good point actually.
FH: The whole idea of Los Angeles being a place where you make something to grow into differs from other cities where you inhabit existing structures and try to make them your own.
JP: How do you make a house or an object that doesn't allow for a kind of traditional unfolding into "this is me?" If historical houses are about who lived there, who made them, my house is significant for reasons that are much stranger or much more difficult to identify.
FH: So what do you think of contemporary architecture in Los Angeles?
JP: I don't know that much about it. I don't have architect friends.
FH: Not high architecture, just architecture in the mundane daily sense of living in L.A., in the built environment?
JP: I think L.A. has some fucked-up architecture. It has some very beautiful examples of domestic architecture, but mostly you have the kind of buildings that were made by people who had some money and wanted to develop an area. And then they tore things down and did it again.
FH: Disposable architecture?
JP: It's not even architecture. It's something else ... It's about developers. It's not useful to me.
FH: Maybe that kind of non-architecture has something to do with the placelessness of L.A.
JP: I don't think of L.A. as a place that's placeless.
FH: I mean the way that most of the city has been developed, there's a sense that a building could just as well have been put up here or there or almost anywhere.
JP: Maybe at one point. But I think L.A. has delineated itself. There are neighborhoods that have formed. Gentrification is happening for the very first time in places like Echo Park and Silver Lake and Los Feliz, where people are coming back to a neighborhood. L.A. is only fifty years old – the L.A. we're talking about.
FH: It's like a city in its adolescence.
JP: I think that "placelessness" comes from the fact that it's so formative. I live smack in the middle of the city, on a hill that was one of the first bohemian communities, and a lot of the houses are from the beginning of the century. There are many places in L.A. that are like that. They have the kind of houses that you would expect to find out in the country or in suburbia, not in the middle of a city. L.A. is one of those cities you don't really understand unless you live there for a while. People who aren't from L.A. have a very strange relationship to L.A.
FH: I love Los Angeles. To me, as a visitor, there's this element of fantasy – even in the most rundown areas. I always get a sense that there's something behind what I'm seeing ...
JP: An artifice?
FH: Yeah.
JP: I don't know about that. I think most of what's in L.A. addresses the place, and the artifices aren't really artificial. I don't think the artifice in L.A. is that lasting. It's desert, but not really, not any more. It's a city. There are many places that were deserts, and then people brought water to them, and they changed.

Pier, 1997.