

And the Winner Is

Occasionally down, but never out, Los Angeles holds steady as the place to see and be seen. By Ron Bernthal



MODERN CURVES:

*The Walt Disney
Concert Hall*

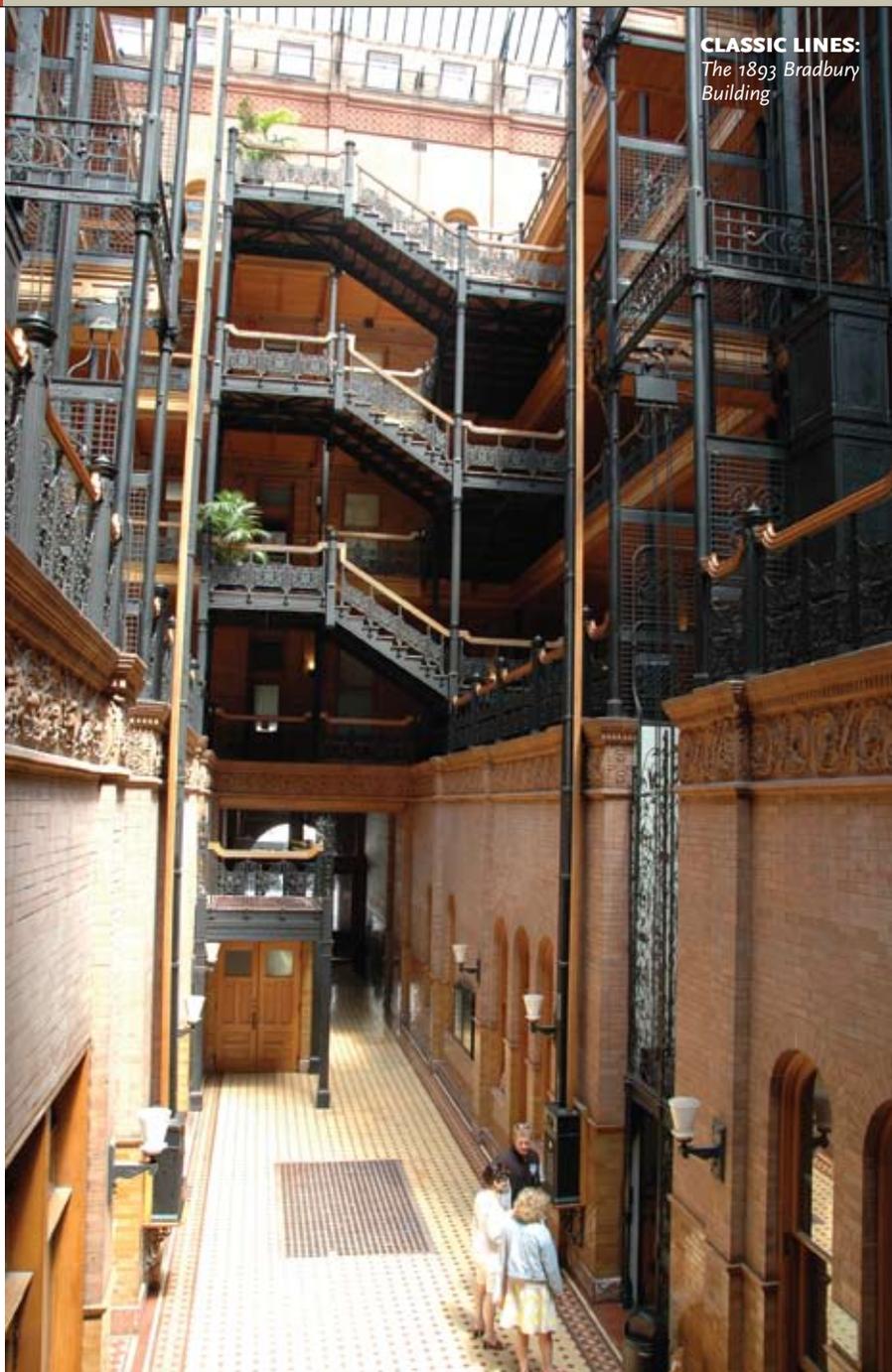
PHOTO: FEDERICO ZIGNANI

DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES, LIKE hundreds of other U.S. city centers, collapsed in the 1950s when residents and businesses fled the concrete Central Business District for new and greener suburbs. In Los Angeles, where there was still plenty of space to grow, this meant an escape to the beaches, the lush hills and the new shopping centers west of downtown.

For decades the core systematically lost its status as a meaningful part of the city, overshadowed by the rapid growth of Beverly Hills, Hollywood, Santa Monica and other palm tree-filled neighborhoods that seemed a world away from the shuttered storefronts of lower Wilshire Boulevard and Broadway. No one mourned the beautiful — but empty — Art Deco office buildings or the ornate movie theaters where the silent films of the 1920s ushered in the growth of the city's most famous industry. Even local film directors portrayed downtown as an expendable commodity, showing a fictional Los Angeles being destroyed in films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Independence Day*.

By the late 1990s, when other American cities were rebuilding their downtowns to resemble mini-Disneylands, the center of Los Angeles, not far from the original Disneyland, still looked and felt like a deserted rust-belt town. In 1999, recognizing the need to revitalize, the Los Angeles City Council passed the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance to spur downtown commercial development. Additional rezoning regulations, tax incentives and design innovations followed, allowing more high-density residential buildings. Almost immediately, private and public funding poured into new projects, and the world's top designers, many of whom live in Southern California, competed for downtown commissions.

The result is an architecturally savvy and visually exciting downtown where structures including the 2003 Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall and the award-winning 2005 Caltrans Building share the CBD with iconic landmarks, including the 27-story City Hall (1928), the



CLASSIC LINES:
The 1893 Bradbury Building

INFO TO GO

Located 15 miles southwest of the city, the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) is a major gateway connecting North American and Asia. A \$250-million runway on the south side of the airport was opened in April 2007 as part of an overall \$333-million project to improve airfield safety. A \$723.5-million renovation project at the Tom Bradley International Terminal started in February 2007 and is scheduled for completion in March 2010. Free shuttle service from the airport connects to the Aviation Station on the L.A. Green Line on the metro light rail network, but in Los Angeles driving is a way of life. All of the major car rental companies operate outlets at or near the airport.

restored 1893 Italian Renaissance-style Bradbury Building, the massive 1939 Union Station, and the 1925 orange brick Nabisco bakery, now a live/work conversion residence known as the Biscuit Company Lofts.

Since 1999 more than 7,000 residential units and 35 commercial structures and public facilities have been built or rehabilitated in downtown Los Angeles; estimated construction costs of all projects built or planned is more than \$12 billion. New hotels, restaurants, museums and an expanded Los Angeles Convention Center attract more than 13 million visitors annually to downtown.

Despite an economic downturn that has affected real estate sales (down 9 percent in the past year) and commercial development, the movers and shakers are not pulling out of ongoing commitments. The Grand Avenue project (\$2.1 billion) will include 3.6 million square feet of mixed-use development with a Mandarin Oriental hotel as part of a 48-story office tower. LA Live (\$2.5 billion), rising next to the Staples Center, will include the Nokia Theatre (already open), restaurants, shops, two new hotels (JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton) and Ritz-Carlton Residences. The Colburn School for Performing Arts is undergoing a \$120-million expansion; an extension of the mass transit Gold Line will be completed in 2009; and private condominium housing, either in new towers or as loft conversions, continues at a fast pace.

In 1873 George Ralphs opened a small neighborhood grocery store downtown and launched what eventually would become a California institution: Ralphs supermarkets. Ralphs abandoned the city core in 1950 but, in prodigal fashion, returned to the area in July 2007 to open downtown L.A.'s first modern supermarket. More than any gourmet restaurants, trendy wine bars or museums with eye-popping designs, the store, on West 9th Street not far from Ralphs' original 19th-century location, symbolizes the return of vibrancy to this area of Los Angeles, where views of the snowcapped San Gabriel Mountains



STAR SIGHTINGS:
The Griffith Observatory overlooks downtown Los Angeles.

and the wide expanse of the blue-gray Pacific can be glimpsed from many of the downtown buildings.

LODGING
FOUR SEASONS HOTEL
WESTLAKE VILLAGE

This tranquil, 270-room property, less than two years old, is about 25 miles from downtown L.A., but it satisfies a guest's every need with easy freeway access, a fitness center and 40,000-square-foot spa,

indoor and outdoor meeting space, five dining options, state-of-the-art technology throughout, and proximity to Topanga Canyon, Malibu beaches and the Santa Monica Mountains. The hotel is associated with the California Health & Longevity Institute, a facility that offers guests an opportunity to meet with physicians and wellness experts for nutritional education, diagnostic tests, medical screenings and personalized fitness training. Hampton's restaurant offers "Wellness" and "Indul-

PHOTO: CLINTON STEED

DIVERSIONS

The 500-square-mile Los Angeles metroplex encompasses sun-splashed beach towns, Spanish-style mansions, blocks of auto-body shops, shadowy rural canyons dotted with celebrity hideouts, sprawling cookie-cutter subdivisions and serpentine freeways. Visitors may find their options overwhelming.

Christopher Hawthorne, architecture critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, calls L.A. "the most interesting city in the country right now," and a visit should include the city's architectural and cultural highlights. You could start with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's new **Broad Contemporary Art Museum** (5905 Wilshire Blvd., tel 323 857 6000, www.lacma.org), designed by Renzo Piano. The **J. Paul Getty Museum** at the Getty Center (1200 Getty Center Drive, tel 310 440 7330, <http://getty.edu/museum>), in the Santa Monica hills, is a Richard Meier-designed

complex that offers excellent exhibitions of fine art, film, sculpture and photography.

The **Walt Disney Concert Hall** (111 South Grand Ave., tel 323 850 2000, www.laphil.com), designed by Frank Gehry, is home to the Los Angeles Philharmonic and is near Arata Isozaki's **Museum of Contemporary Art** (250 S. Grand Ave., tel 213 626 6222, www.moca.org). **Griffith Observatory** (Griffith Park, tel 213 473 0800, www.griffithobservatory.org), constructed in 1935, recently reopened after a five-year restoration and expansion. The observatory's monthly public "star" parties have nothing to do with actors.

For outdoor relaxation and recreation, watch the volleyball games at Manhattan Beach, rent a bike in Santa Monica and ride along the beach path to Venice, or jog through Palisades Park and view the Pacific.



PIANO'S MUSIC: *Broad Contemporary Art Museum*

PHOTO: WELDON BREWSTER

gence" menu options. *Two Dole Drive, Westlake Village, tel 818 575 3000, www.fourseasons.com \$\$\$\$*

HYATT REGENCY CENTURY PLAZA

A few miles west of downtown, the Hyatt Century Plaza is a convenient base when visiting L.A. attractions such as Universal Studios, the Santa Monica and Venice beaches, and the shopping areas of Beverly Hills, Melrose Avenue and West Hol-

lywood. The 726 guestrooms have private balconies, Hyatt "Grand Beds," granite desktops and LCD HDTVs. Two floors offer VIP Regency Club accommodations. The 25,000-square-foot Los Angeles Ballroom is one of the largest in the city, and the hotel's signature restaurant, Breeze, offers indoor or patio dining. A large pool and an Equinox Fitness Center are located in a park-like setting behind the hotel. *2025 Avenue of the Stars, tel 310 228 1234, www.centuryplaza.hyatt.com \$\$\$\$*

THE STANDARD DOWNTOWN

Eclectic and cool, this new hotel was built within the historic 1956 landmark Superior Oil headquarters building. Its rooftop bar/pool area is a choice spot for people-watching; the hotel's restaurant sports a retro design and is open 24/7. All 207 guestrooms are categorized as whimsical, pop, stylish or avant-garde. The Disney Concert Hall, the Museum of Contemporary Art and other downtown attractions are close by. *550 S. Flower St., tel 213*

892 8080, www.standardhotels.com/losangeles \$\$\$\$

DINING

KATSUYA HOLLYWOOD

Los Angeles is filled with expensive and trendy Japanese restaurants, but this one, open just one year at Hollywood and Vine, has impeccably fresh fish and entertaining service and is part of the rapidly expanding Katsuya brand (the first opened in nearby Brentwood) under the direction of Katsuya Uechi, one of only four master sushi chefs in Los Angeles, and designer Philippe Starck. Outside, there is no sign, and inside the space is dark and edgy, with stainless steel chairs, black Noren curtains and large photos of beautiful geisha. *Au courant* Angelenos come for salmon sashimi with caviar, seared albacore with garlic soy lemon butter or the \$90 *omakase* dinner. Take a peek at the S Bar before departing for the evening. 6300 Hollywood Blvd., tel 323 871 8777, www.sbeent.com/katsuya \$\$\$\$

BEACON

Located in Culver City's fashionable Design District, Beacon has been dazzling customers for the past three years under the direction of husband-and-wife team Chef Kazuto Matsusaka and Manager Vicki Fan. The Asian-influenced menu includes appetizers of sugar snap pea salad or kaki-fry oysters, and larger plates of Tasmanian salmon trout and miso-braised short ribs. The coconut rice and mango brûlée could be the best dessert in the city. 3280 Helms Ave., tel 310 838 7500, www.beacon-la.com \$\$\$

BAR PINXTO

Chef and restaurateur Joseph Miller was inspired to open this new eatery after a visit to Barcelona: The ambience here, as well as the wine list, is pure Spain. As in Europe, tapas — chorizo and fried quail eggs, *bacalao*, potato, manzanilla olives and other traditional Spanish appetizers — are presented under a glass display case on the bar. 109 Santa Monica Blvd., tel 310 458 2012, www.barpintxo.com \$\$ ■■



CULTURE COMPLEX:
The Getty Center

PHOTO: ALEX VERTIKOFF

At Home with Michael Palladino

Principal Designer, Richard Meier & Partners

Since 1979 Michael Palladino has worked closely with architect Richard Meier on many award-winning projects, including the Getty Center and the Broad Art Center at UCLA. He is a recipient of the prestigious Rome Prize for architecture and the Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects Los Angeles. He moved to Los Angeles in 1986 to open Richard Meier & Partners' West Coast office.

Global Traveler: *What were your first impressions of Los Angeles as a place to live and work?*

Michael Palladino: As I prepared to move West, my New York friends and colleagues warned that L.A. was laid back and that I would trade in my sketchbooks for a surfboard and sports car. My friends could not have been more wrong. I found the Los Angeles architectural culture to be inventive, cutting-edge, experimental yet very sophisticated. Instead of slowing down, I was energized by the architecture and the openness to architecture possibilities. I used the move from New York to L.A. as an opportunity to refocus my goals and to advance the modern architectural vocabulary that I had tested, manipulated and refined during my years in New York.

GT: *What surprised you most about living in Los Angeles?*

MP: Like many artists and architects before me, I am inspired by the quantity and quality of the daylight in Southern California. The expanding palette of materials and textures in my recent designs is a direct reaction to this extraordinary resource.

GT: *What neighborhoods of Los Angeles do you find especially compelling in terms*

of architecture, housing stock and scenic beauty?

MP: I was fortunate to find a small mid-century modern house in an area of Brentwood called Crestwood Hills. Many of the homes in this neighborhood were designed by the architect A. Quincy Jones to take advantage of the mountain setting with views to the city and ocean. Over the last 50 years the landscape has matured to make each property feel private [while retaining] the expansive views over Santa Monica Bay. Due to the extraordinary weather in Southern California, residences can be smaller because interior space can extend to the outside. Outdoor rooms, terraces, balconies and gardens are important opportunities that capture the essence of Southern California living.

GT: *Does your family frequent any specific destinations on weekends?*

MP: Over the last 20 years, my family and I have found living on the West Coast has a lot to offer. We have found crystal-clear water and great surf in San Clemente, just a 60-minute drive south. In the winter, Sierra skiing is five hours north and the best ski areas in Utah and Wyoming are short, direct flights from L.A.

GT: *For staying in the city on weekends, do you have any favorite restaurants, hotel bars, or other city entertainment venues?*

MP: Not to appear too biased, but the restaurant and bar we designed at the Beverly Wilshire hotel in Beverly Hills — Cut and the Sidebar lounge by Wolfgang Puck — have earned a well-deserved reputation for their extraordinary food, service and people-watching. And the Restaurant at the Getty Center offers a wonderful Sunday brunch with amazing views.