

SANTA MONICA CONSERVANCY

VOL. 1, NO. 1

ENSURING THAT THE PAST HAS A FUTURE

FEBRUARY 2003

Crucial Vote On The Future Of Preservation

In mid-February, ballots are being mailed to every voter in Santa Monica, and it's an election that preservationists cannot ignore. The "Homeowners Freedom of Choice Initiative" was introduced with the backing of developers and land use attorneys, and it is intended to block the designation of landmarks and historic districts. The Conservancy strongly opposes the initiative.

At issue is whether the owner of a residential or commercial property should be able to modify or raze structures at will or be required to follow City guidelines. Those guidelines, which have been in force under the City's landmarks preservation ordinances since 1976, ensure that architecturally, historically, or culturally significant buildings are not destroyed, aesthetically or literally.

CLAIMS VERSUS FACTS

The backers of the initiative claim that historic districting will depress property values, impose additional costs on homeowners, and give the City absolute authority over residents' homes. The facts, however, are different.

From Brooklyn Heights and Georgetown to Pasadena and our own Third St. Historic District, historic properties have appreciated faster than other residences. Like paintings or sculpture by renowned artists, aesthetics and rarity add to their worth.

The City of Santa Monica makes no claim on a home's interior. Owners can do whatever their tastes dictate. Exterior changes that can be seen from the street simply have to retain the original architectural style, but there is no prohibition on such work.

Very few houses actually qualify to become landmarks. Of 6500 homes in Santa Monica, only 16 have been designated (some in the single historic district) in the 27 years since the ordinance was enacted. The developer-backed initiative's provisions, however, would virtually eliminate the designation of any more.

CHARACTER COUNTS

The architecture of Santa Monica helps define its unique character. Destroy the architecture and you destroy the character, as well. The Conservancy urges you not to let that happen by voting "no" on the initiative and returning your ballot promptly.

NEWS



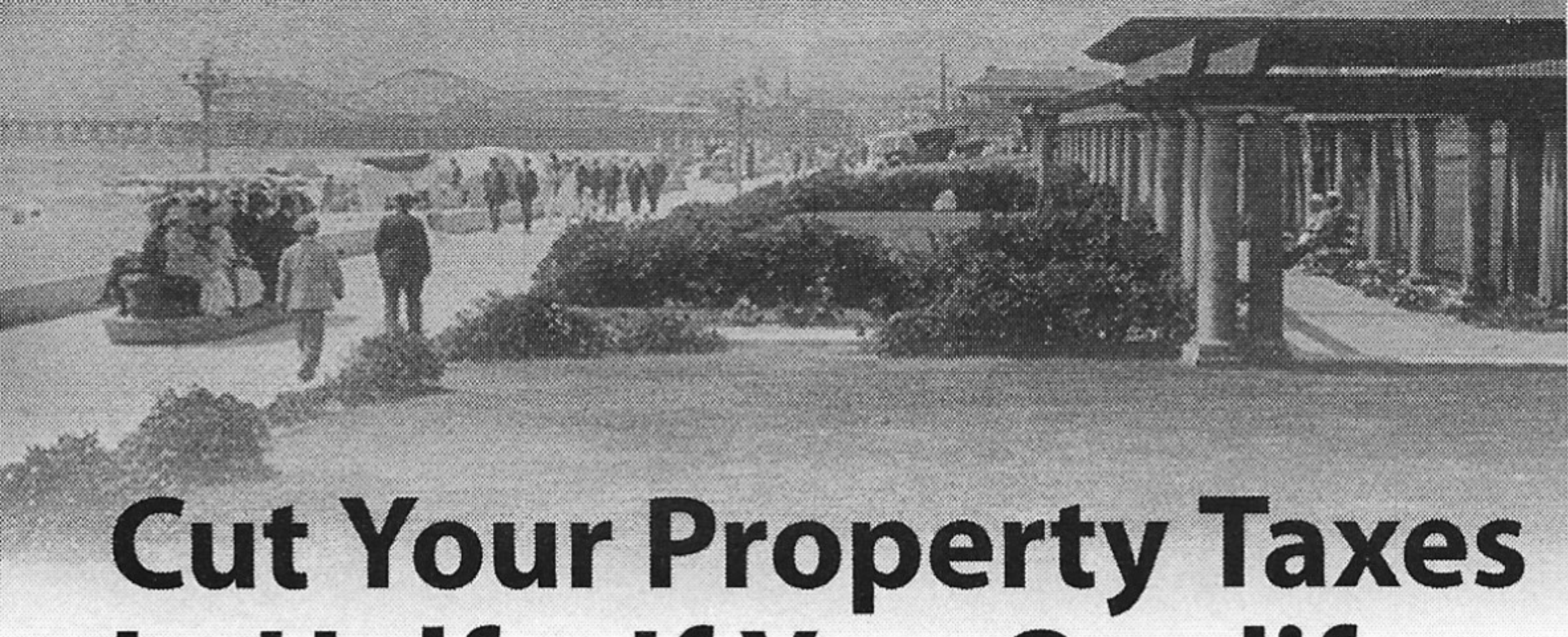
World-renowned architect Oscar Niemeyer had only one residential design built in America – the 1964 Strick House on La Mesa Drive.

The Rarity of Niemeyer

If people are best known by the work they create, Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer deserves more recognition. The man called the "last great 20th Century architect" worked with Le Corbusier on Brazil's 1939 World's Fair pavilion and on the timeless U.N. building in New York. In the late '50s and early '60s, he singlehandedly designed every major government building, the cathedral, the university, and the National Theater in Brasilia, the new capital of Brazil. Yet, in the entire U.S., he designed only one private residence, and it is here... in Santa Monica.

Designed for film director/writer Joseph Strick, the house, at 1911 La Mesa Dr., is one of a kind. Its modern style is Niemeyer at his best, and it has the added distinction of being constructed *in absentia* – as a self-declared Communist, Niemeyer could not enter the United States to work on the house in person.

Mrs. Strick, who lived in the house since it was constructed in 1964, sold the home in 2002, and it was slated for demolition. The new owner was unaware of the home's significance. Thanks to the initiative of the Santa Monica Landmarks Commission and the support of the Los Angeles Conservancy, architects, and journalists, the new owner has agreed to rethink his plans or find a buyer. The home's future? Still uncertain but, because of the landmarks ordinance, the prospects are better than they were.



Cut Your Property Taxes In Half... If You Qualify

The State of California has a deal for you. It's the Mills Act, an economic incentive program to encourage the preservation of "qualified historical properties."

If your single (or multi) family property meets the criteria of Santa Monica's landmarks ordinance, it is eligible for benefits under the Mills Act. That means a reduction in property taxes of as much as 50%. While that shouldn't be anyone's primary reason for preserving a home, it is certainly enticing.

The ordinance's criteria, however, are very specific. The structure must be at least 40 years old and either

- represent some aspect of the City's past
- have particular aesthetic or artistic value
- be associated with historically important people or events
- possess distinctive architectural/design characteristics
- represent the work of a notable architect or builder or
- have features or a location that make it part of a neighborhood's identity.

If you think your home meets any of these requirements, contact the Santa Monica Landmarks Commission at 310.458.8341 or the California Preservation Foundation at 510.763.0972 (or online at www.californiapreservation.org).

Landmarks Update

After years of decline, Barnum Hall, the 1938 Streamline Moderne auditorium constructed by the Works Project Administration on the campus of Santa Monica High School, is undergoing renovation and was granted landmark status in December. For those of us who were sure that our children's appearance in Samohi productions was, as the theater decayed around them, a death-defying act, this is good news.

Four properties, all voluntarily submitted by their owners, are currently being evaluated for designation, including a Craftsman-style home on Raymond Ave. The property was purchased



by a developer but, rather than being replaced or "remuddled," it was completely restored. Judging by how quickly the home sold, it's a perfect example that preservation does pay.

Welcome, One and All

The support for preservation in Santa Monica is growing, and that's nowhere more apparent than in the membership rolls of the Conservancy. For an organization that held its first event just a few months ago, we already have an impressively long list.

We are, of course, a young organization. So there's more to look ahead to than look back on. Yet we have a full agenda of events and projects – everything from house tours and resource directories to first-person histories of Santa Monica's cultural, civic, and architectural past, educational materials, and assistance with the landmark process.

The present keeps the past alive, and your participation will ensure that the past has a future. Thanks to you all for leading the way.

CURRENT MEMBERS

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Judy Abdo | Nancy Greenstein |
| Marc Abraham | Brad & Ayn Grinstein-Donenfeld |
| Susan Adelman | Shannon Gaughan |
| John Adler | Sylvia Gentile |
| Peter & Cherie Altschuler | Frank Gruber |
| Kristina Andersen | Beverly Hardie |
| Abby Arnold | Holly Hein |
| John Baldessari | Patricia Hoffman |
| Russell Barnard | Sophie & James Newton Howard |
| Beverly & Bernie Bienstock | Dwayne Howard |
| Louise Bill | Kathryn Ireland |
| Judi Bloom | Jay Johnson |
| Lisa Bock | Thomas Kane |
| Barry & Sharla Boehm | David & Barbara Kaplan |
| John Bowman | Theresa Karanik |
| Caldecut Chubb | Durnford King |
| Darrell & Virginia Clarke | Rich Klubeck |
| Arthur Clement | David Lappen |
| Peggy Clifford | Mike & Joanne Leavitt |
| Richard & Catherine Corlin | Janet Levin |
| Nancy Corshen | Dee Pack & Beth Leder-Pack |
| Audrey Cowan | Linda & Jim Leonard |
| Ena Dubnoff | Joan Ling |
| Sue Edwards | Hal Light |
| Dorothy Ehrhart-Morrison | Claudio Llanos |
| Adam Finkel | John & Suzanne Loizeaux-Witte |
| Bruria & David Finkel | Susan Love Loughmiller |
| Sid Fleischman | Carla Malden |
| Steve Jones & Carol Flint | Alice & Aspen March |
| Mario Fonda-Bonardi | Roberta Maxwell |
| Susan Giesberg | Patricia & Scott McAuley |
| Karen Gray | Katherine McTaggart |
| Whitney Green | Ralph Mechur |

Larry Merchant
 Angela Mickelson
 Ted & Jacqueline Miller
 Suzi & Nels Mitchell
 Alessandra Montagna
 Ann & Monroe Morgan
 Betty Mueller
 Gerda Newbold
 Jack Nides
 Kathryn Norstrom
 Eileen Norton
 Pamela O'Connor
 Ken Olin & Patricia Wettig
 Gene Oppenheim
 Nancy O'Neill
 Fran Pavley
 Eleanor Phillips
 Robert Posek
 Michael Quick
 Robert & Laurie Ramirez
 Sandie Richards
 Marla Rochlin

Daniel Rogers
 James Rosenfield
 Trudi Sandmeier
 Laurel Schmidt
 William A. Selby
 Rachel Sene
 Phoebe Sharaf
 Dee Shutt
 Laurence Stakman
 Anthony & Mary Jo Stenger
 Loraine Stern
 Patricia Stich
 Dawn Swiderski
 John & Lori Tinker
 Alan Toy
 Heather Trim
 Dee Ulrich
 Chris Wallace
 Jocelyn Watkins
 Jeffrey Wasserman
 Winnie Wechsler
 Irving & Esther Zabin

Moving To A New Future

Preservation isn't usually such a moving experience, but it was for Cheryl Clark and Vincent Landay. Their 1907 American Four-square began life on 7th St. but, when St. Monica's Church needed more parking for parishoners, the house was going to be razed. The Landmarks Commission saved it from destruction, but the house still had to find a new home... at somebody else's expense.

Moving a house isn't easy or cheap, but the selling price provided an incentive. It was only a dollar. That was very tempting to Cheryl and Vincent who, with their two young daughters, wanted more room, a house with character, and a Santa Monica location. They got it all... with a lot of work, dedication, and reconstruction.

The house had been used as a boarding house, and much of the details inside were destroyed, yet enough was left to give them direction. With a new lot on 25th St. in Sunset Park, an understanding contractor, help from an architectural salvage firm, Vincent's mastery of Google to find fixtures and fittings, and Cheryl's determination, they labored for two years.

With new heat-



The house had to be split to be moved.



Places (and Events) Worth Remembering

EVENTS IN HISTORIC HOMES KICK OFF MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

By Sherrill Kushner

To introduce prospective members to our new organization, the Conservancy hosted open houses in historic homes. The first event was held at Pier House on Pier Street in Ocean Park, the home of former Santa Monica Mayor Judy Abdo. The 120-year-old structure belonged to the Vawter family who opened Santa Monica's first general store, first bank, and established the Presbyterian Church and the water company. Stylistically, the house's two-story massing and hipped roof suggest that it is an example of the American Foursquare idiom.

The stately Bundy House on 25th Street north of Montana, was the site of the second party. This intact Colonial Revival residence was built and owned by Thomas C. Bundy, a member of the prominent Los Angeles family. The home, which is on two lots, cost \$9,000 to build in 1913. Now owned by Patricia Wettig and Ken Olin, the home features spacious living and dining rooms that retain their Craftsman origins, though much of the interior had to be recreated and not just restored. Photographs of historic Santa Monica, which the Conservancy borrowed from the Santa Monica Public Library's Image Archives, graced the rooms, providing additional insights into the City's architectural heritage.

Thanks go out to the hosts, as well as to party coordinators Barbara Schnitzler and Doris Sosin and to the many volunteers who helped, including Peter Altschuler, Nina Fresco, Sherrill Kushner, Lori Nafshun, Pam Vavra, and Rolf Wyr.

Look for many more events in the months to come.

ing systems, vintage fixtures (from back East and eBay), and new period-style cabinetry, the house balances contemporary amenities and century old style and workmanship. Cheryl and



Eighteen blocks and two years later.

Vincent insist it was worth the effort. "We have a great house," she says succinctly – one that couldn't be replicated for anywhere near the same price.

Homeless House

The Shotgun House – the last remaining example of what is, essentially, an 1890s mobile home – is still on girders at the Santa Monica Airport. The 12' by 36' structure, which cost \$100 a century ago and was shipped to the city by rail, has been cared for by the Ocean Park Community Organization (OPCO) since, with Conservancy help, it was rescued from the wrecker's ball.

Because it can only remain at the airport for 18 months, OPCO has been actively looking for a new location. After completing a preliminary survey of public sites in Ocean Park, the neighborhood which qualifies as the ancestral home of the shotgun style, the OPCO Shotgun House Committee on January 30th forwarded the list of sites to the City for review.

If you'd like a current update or want to help by donating time, money... land... call or fax 310.358.3350, send email to shotgun@opco.org, or go online at www.opco.org/shotgun.htm.



Getting Involved

A sense of community begins with people – people who share similar expectations, no matter how diverse they are as individuals. That's the essence of the Santa Monica Conservancy and of Santa Monica itself.

If the character of your neighborhood is what made you choose it or explains why you live there, we're here to help you retain it... without ignoring or resisting the natural changes that occur in any modern community. You can help in that effort. How? By contributing your talents, your input, and your energy.

For more information, contact the Conservancy by phone at 310.456.0399, by mail at P.O. Box 653, Santa Monica, CA 90406-0653, or online at www.smconservancy.org.

SANTA MONICA CONSERVANCY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ken Breisch	Lori Nafshun
Tom Cleys	Bea Nemlaha
Bruce Cameron	Doris Sosin
Arlene Hopkins	Pam Vavra
Sherrill Kushner	

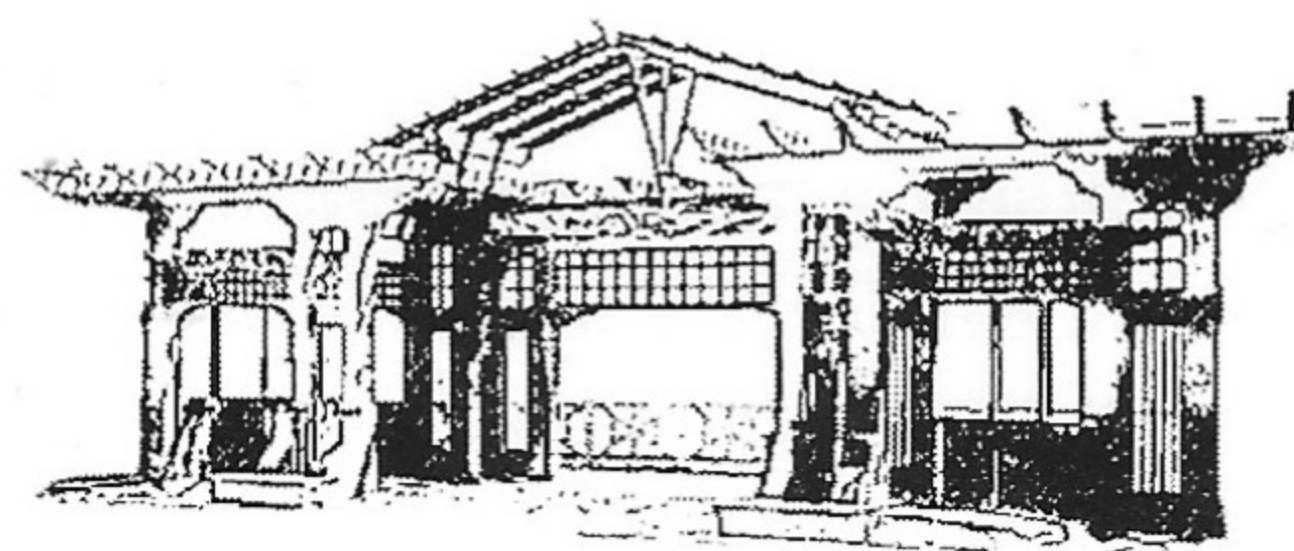
Save the Date: May 8th

PRESERVATION WEEK TOUR FEATURES SANTA MONICA'S HISTORIC RESIDENTIAL HOTELS

Since 1971, Preservation Week has called attention to local landmark efforts across the nation. In major cities and small towns, the events, begun by The National Trust for Historic Preservation, celebrate with tours, black-tie dinners, re-enactments, and competitions, and each Preservation Week emphasizes a different aspect of conservancy. This year's theme is "Cities, Suburbs, and Countryside," and activities will take place during the week of May 5 - 11.

On Thursday, May 8, 2003, from 5 to 7 p.m., the Santa Monica Conservancy and the City of Santa Monica are planning to sponsor a docent-led walking tour of four of the City's historic residential hotels. Currently being considered for the tour are The Charmont, The Embassy, The Georgian, and the Sovereign.

At the end of the tour, we plan to have refreshments and a speaker in the lobby of one of the hotels, so save the date, and watch the Conservancy News for more details in the coming issues.



SANTA MONICA CONSERVANCY
P O BOX 653 SANTA MONICA CA 90406-0653

