

## AN ARGUMENT FOR LOS ANGELES TIMES MIRROR HEADQUARTERS

BY ALAN HESS

The pair of Los Angeles Times landmarks facing City Hall tell a living story about the identity and vision of this city. Current proposals to sever them would erase that story from the heart of the civic center. The city deserves to keep them together to tell the whole story of who we were, and how we became who we are.

That's one of the essential roles that historic architecture plays in a city. The distinctive architectures of the two Times buildings trace how the city once saw itself, and how the passage of time transforms that.

The older building, opened in 1935 under Times publisher Harry Chandler, announced the provincial city's arrival on the national stage. Architect Gordon Kaufmann was known for grand traditional designs like Greystone, the Doheny mansion in Beverly Hills, but here he updated his style to reflect the modern West's raw, muscular physical power. It was an emblem of the rising California empire of movies and radio, aeronautics, technology, and oil that would challenge the centers of power in the east. It is no coincidence that Kaufmann was designing Hoover Dam, the ultimate symbol of Western power, at the same time.

The second building was the 1973 addition by architect William Pereira for Otis Chandler, Harry Chandler's grandson and publishing heir. Time had passed. Los Angeles had grown in power and prestige, its promise fulfilled. Los Angeles (and the Times) had achieved its destiny as a national and global metropolis. Pereira's building, christened the Times Mirror Headquarters, shows that. It is larger, lighter, more sophisticated in its use of modern technological might. It is the self confident expression of destiny fulfilled,

But while the 1935 Kaufmann building is now a beloved landmark that the current owners plan to keep, the 1973 Pereira building is at the moment less popular if no less important. Its Late Modern style is currently unfashionable and therefore vulnerable.

Los Angeles has seen this story before too often. We should have learned. Not too long ago the charming Art Deco design of Kaufmann's building was itself considered unfashionable and old fashioned. We lost a score of great Art Deco buildings, including the elegant black and gold terra cotta Richfield Building during those dark days. We almost lost the Central Library.

But fashion always changes. Pereira's Late Modern design will soon come back into fashion. It deserves its chance to return to popularity — especially because of its symbolic importance with the earlier Kaufmann building.

Pereira was the perfect choice to capture Los Angeles' sense of destiny fulfilled. He had already helped to shape modern California in its greatest period of expansion. From his office came the Theme Building at LAX (our Eiffel Tower), CBS Television City reconfirming our status as the nation's media capitol, the University of California Irvine campus, the Metropolitan Water District headquarters giving architectural form to our region's celebration of water, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, our modern cultural Acropolis on the Miracle Mile.

The controversy that greeted Pereira's Transamerica Pyramid in San Francisco warns us against making hasty judgments about what's worth preserving. In 1972 San Franciscans met it with the white-hot scorn they save for anything having to do with Los Angeles. Today, though, the Transamerica Pyramid is as revered as the sainted Golden Gate Bridge itself. Tastes do change. You just have to wait for it and not do anything stupid.

You cannot envision modern California without these Pereira icons. Yet we are already losing our heritage from him. Robinsons Beverly Hills is gone, LACMA's demolition is impending, and the Metropolitan Water District is threatened. We better take his design for the LA Times seriously before it's too late.

Pereira's addition has been criticized recently as if it were an escapee from a schlock business park in Orange County. But for one of the most politically and culturally influential clients in the city, and on a site across from City Hall, Pereira intended this building as a declaration of the city's future.

With its Late Modern design Pereira takes us beyond the minimalist boxes of the International Style, with a complex composition of stone verticals and steel and glass horizontals, with a mix of materials and solids and voids, lifting large volumes effortlessly into the air.

It is also a decidedly urban design. The First St. face sits back off the edge of the sidewalk, creating a small plaza, a gift of public space. Out of the path of the bustling sidewalk, it offers a quieter public space marked off by planters and columns (landscaped by noted landscape architect Robert Herrick Carter, a frequent Pereira collaborator) that lift the second-floor walkway above the sidewalk.

It is especially ahead of its time because it respects the physical and symbolic presence of the Kaufmann building, its historic neighbor, even at a time when Art Deco was out of fashion. In 1973 historic preservation was not yet a major concern in the architecture profession, but Pereira's design acknowledges the older building.

Even though it is several times larger than the Kaufmann building, Pereira's design intentionally does not overwhelm the older building. It is lower than its neighbor. The darker materials of the newer building's stone, steel and glass cause it to recede visually next to the lighter tone of the older building. Pereira's building steps back from the older building, both at ground level and on its upper stories. Its entry defers to the main Kaufmann building entry.

It is time to leave outdated opinions of this long-neglected style behind and recognize this building for its bold composition, its creation of public space, and its sensitive relation to its historic neighbor.

Clearly William Pereira's Times Mirror Headquarters is not an ordinary commercial office building of the period. It carefully considered its purpose as a symbol of an important corporation, and its site in the city's civic center. It gave that purpose a distinctive, well-crafted form. With the Kaufmann building (and the 1949 Mirror building by Roland Crawford) it tells a galvanizing story of Los Angeles' progress.

The building demonstrates not only Pereira's role as a master architect who helped to shape the city we know today, but a building which is symbolically, urbanistically, and creatively part of the life of the city.