



ALTADENA HERITAGE NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2008



JULIUS SHULMAN/GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT ALTADENA LIBRARY

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I am pleased to report that Altadena Heritage is being ably represented on the Library Building Committee by Board Member Michel Chabon. This group of library board members, librarians, consultants, architects, and designers is charged with developing a program for the renovation of our beloved Altadena Library; they welcomed us to present at their public meeting June 23rd. We'd heard that in earlier meetings the building's (real) problems were getting so much attention that its many wonderful attributes were not being sufficiently considered. Following is a condensed recap of the talk I gave on behalf of our organization.

Designed by Boyd Georgi, a modernist architect at the USC School of Architecture (and an Altadenan)

our library is a superb example of mid-century modernist architecture — when designers were experimenting with new materials and forms, and turning away from heavy walls, traditional facades, and historical references to create an architecture of space and light.

At Heritage we believe architecture is important, and no edifice in our town better illustrates why. Going to the library becomes much more than checking out books, surfing the web, doing homework, or reading a magazine. Generations of Altadenans have come to know our library as a special place, the library in a garden, across the bridge through the trees, into an exhilarating space, with light streaming in from above. Yes, they come for the books, but the feeling goes way beyond — and adds so much.

Yes, our library is in need of renovation; 47 years of wear and tear has taken its toll, new services are needed requiring new facilities, and the building has access, structural, and environmental systems issues that must be addressed. But whatever changes are made, they must not damage the elements that create its magical, enlivening, and expansive environment.

We believe certain elements must remain inviolate:



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1) The bridges — especially the bridge from Mariposa — which brings visitors in among the trees (it was intended, incidentally, to respond to the needs of the mobility impaired way before the Americans with Disabilities Act), and represents the transition to "Library Land." The spirited whimsical detailing — those joyful spherical lights, and the way the bridge hangs by rods from its railings, for example — boosts the magic.

2) The Central Reading Area with its sunken floor and vaulted skylight: the lowered floor is an essential part of a very carefully composed composition. Change the proportions and the feeling will be destroyed.

3) The Mariposa Street façade: a beautiful composition of voids and solids, the expanses of glass with walls reaching through into the garden, work to break down the distinction between outside and inside. This is a major organizing idea of the architecture.

4) The Santa Rosa façade — so recessive the building almost disappears, it seems the architect suppressed the building to emphasize the garden.

5) The stacking planes of the ceilings and the clerestory windows that encircle the building, bringing light in from on high, critical in creating the wonderful open feeling of the central space. Those clerestories are in need of repair, but we must not lose this feature.

6) The original furniture: nothing should be disposed of until improvements are finished. The children's room furniture that was recently discarded

could have been reused in the coffee shop everyone seems to want. To replace it now would cost thousands of dollars. Many original tables and the beautiful chairs that go with them may have accessibility issues, but to throw them out would be a mistake. And new furniture should be appropriate to the mid-Century architecture — let's avoid other historical references.

Beyond these caveats, we see many opportunities. If the building is to be expanded, the south and

west façades offer good places for additions. The library is the only real public garden in Altadena, and could be improved if tired plantings of nandina, agapanthus and azaleas were replaced with more appropriate native and drought tolerant species — while of course retaining the magnificent trees, many planted when the site was the estate of Colonel Green. More benches, outdoor rooms, places to sit and read or sip a latte would add a wonderful dimension.

We at Altadena Heritage will do all we can to support the design team in meeting the challenges posed by this very special building — a focal point of unity and pride for Altadena that was born amid controversy in a community process not so different from the current one almost 50 years ago. Whatever is built or changed must, of course, be of THIS era, and no way do we want to see changes and additions in some ersatz imitation of the old. We just want the designers to honor the building. The theme is set: the library in the garden, the beautiful proportions, the carefully choreographed rhythmic repetition of forms, the way the building reaches into its garden allowing our minds to soar, the ingenious ways that daylight is gathered into the space, and the sense of joy expressed in so many details. This is what must be... preserved, yes, but more... nurtured, kept lively and alive for us and for future Altadenans.

Mark Goldschmidt
Chairman

RECENT EVENTS

Although we've been tardy in getting out a newsletter, Altadena Heritage put on a couple of wonderful events the first half of the year. We started with the memorable **“Breakfast at Nuccio’s.”** This celebration of an Altadena institution — Nuccio’s Nursery — was attended by more than 80 people who enjoyed breakfast *al fresco* at the Chaney Trail site of Altadena’s “world famous” Camellia outlet. Not bad attendance, considering we were rained out on our original date of February 24, and had to reschedule for the following Sunday, March 4.

Events chair Anita David kept the “camellia beverage” warm under what seemed like dozens of tea cozies, with help from Lili Etezady and Brownie Allen. More board members, Sandra Miller and husband Jim, collected money and rounded up chairs, and Thomas Stahl created his normal beautiful graphics. We heard the intriguing family business story of Nuccios as told by one of its founders, Julius Nuccio. Local

historian Michele Zack gave a talk on *Altadena’s Nurseries Past*, providing lots of evidence of how important commercial and private nurseries and gardens have been to Altadena from the very beginning.



ANITA DAVID AND LILI ETZADY SERVING TEA TO GUESTS



46 WEST MANOR STREET
A GOLDEN POPPY WINNER

The Golden Poppy Awards were celebrated with an evening **Garden Party** on June 7th in the lovely garden of Anita and Chris David. Delighted and surprised winners (only two were AH members) were recognized for their creative gardening efforts that add so much to our neighborhoods. This year’s Golden Poppy recipients: Steve Labrecque, Melinda Goddard, William Peer and Gerald Cichlar, Nicklas and Suzanne Hallberg, Phil Skonieczki, Daniel Bradford, Mark and Chloe Gitleson, and Eric and G.E. Bauer. Besides the beautiful plaque in their gardens for a year, our winners all received a year’s membership in Altadena Heritage, and we hope to see them again.

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**YOU'RE INVITED
TO THE ALTADENA
HERITAGE
HOLIDAY PARTY**

**SATURDAY,
DECEMBER 13**

SAVE THE DATE!

**MEMBERS ONLY
A GOOD TIME TO RENEW
OR BRING OTHERS TO JOIN**

PLEASE BECOME A MEMBER

**JOIN OR RENEW TODAY...
BE PART OF SOMETHING SPECIAL!**

PLEASE EXPRESS YOUR SUPPORT
FOR THE PRESERVATION AND
APPRECIATION OF OUR COMMUNITY'S
UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT.

NAME _____

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