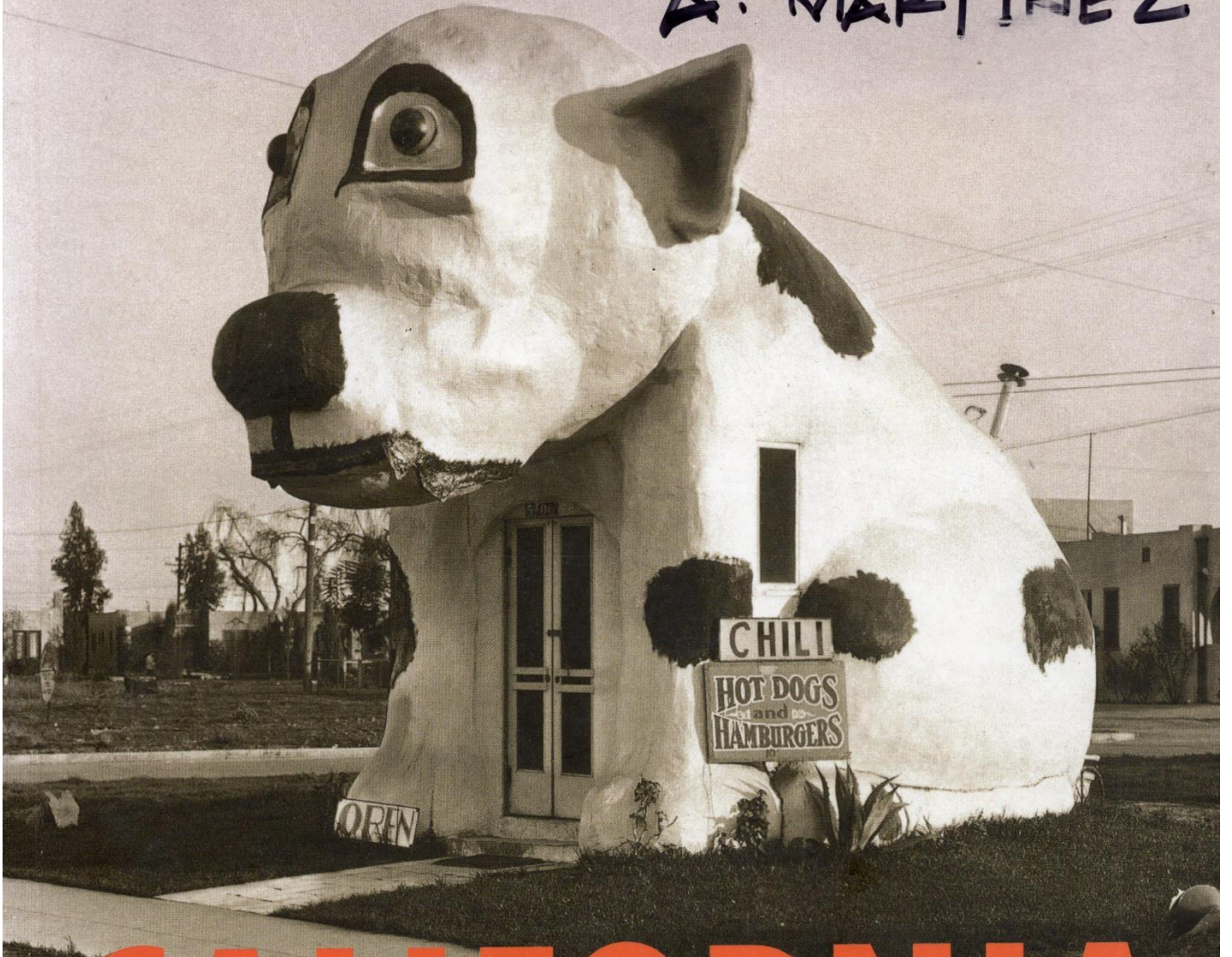


A. MARTINEZ



CALIFORNIA CRAZY & BEYOND

ROADSIDE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

JIM HELMANN



Copyright © 2001 by Jim Heimann.
All rights reserved. No part of this book
may be reproduced in any form without
written permission from the publisher.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Heimann, Jim, 1948 —
California crazy and beyond : road-
side vernacular architecture / by Jim
Heimann; introduction by David
Gebhard.
p. cm.

ISBN 0-8118-3018-7
1. Architecture—California.
2. Architecture, Modern—20th
century—California.
3. Vernacular architecture—California.
4. Roadside architecture—California.
I. Title.

NA730.C2 H39 2001
720'.9794—dc 21 00-057085
Printed in Hong Kong.

Distributed in Canada by
Raincoast Books
9050 Shaughnessy Street
Vancouver, BC V6P 6E5

Chronicle Books LLC
85 Second Street
San Francisco, California
94105
www.chroniclebooks.com

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Book Design by Jim Heimann
Digital Composition by Cindy Vance

Frontispiece: A rare view of a pro-
grammatic building under construc-
tion, the fourth Chili Bowl, 5061
Whittier Boulevard, ca 1932. Above:
Purity of form meets the realities of
the marketplace. The Pup,
12728 Washington Boulevard, ca
1940. Photograph by Ansel Adams.

Introduction by David Gebhard



David Gebhard, who died in 1996, was a pivotal player in the understanding and replacement of programmatic architecture into its rightful place in architectural history. In his essay in the first edition of California Crazy, Gebhard coined the descriptive word Programmatic (Gebhard used this spelling in his essay, but the current usage is “programmatic”) to define this type of unconventional architecture and provided a template for the study of the subject, which was once considered unnecessary and ephemeral by many. It is included in this current edition because of its timelessness and as a tribute to a historian who clearly defined many architectural subjects others were unwilling to consider.

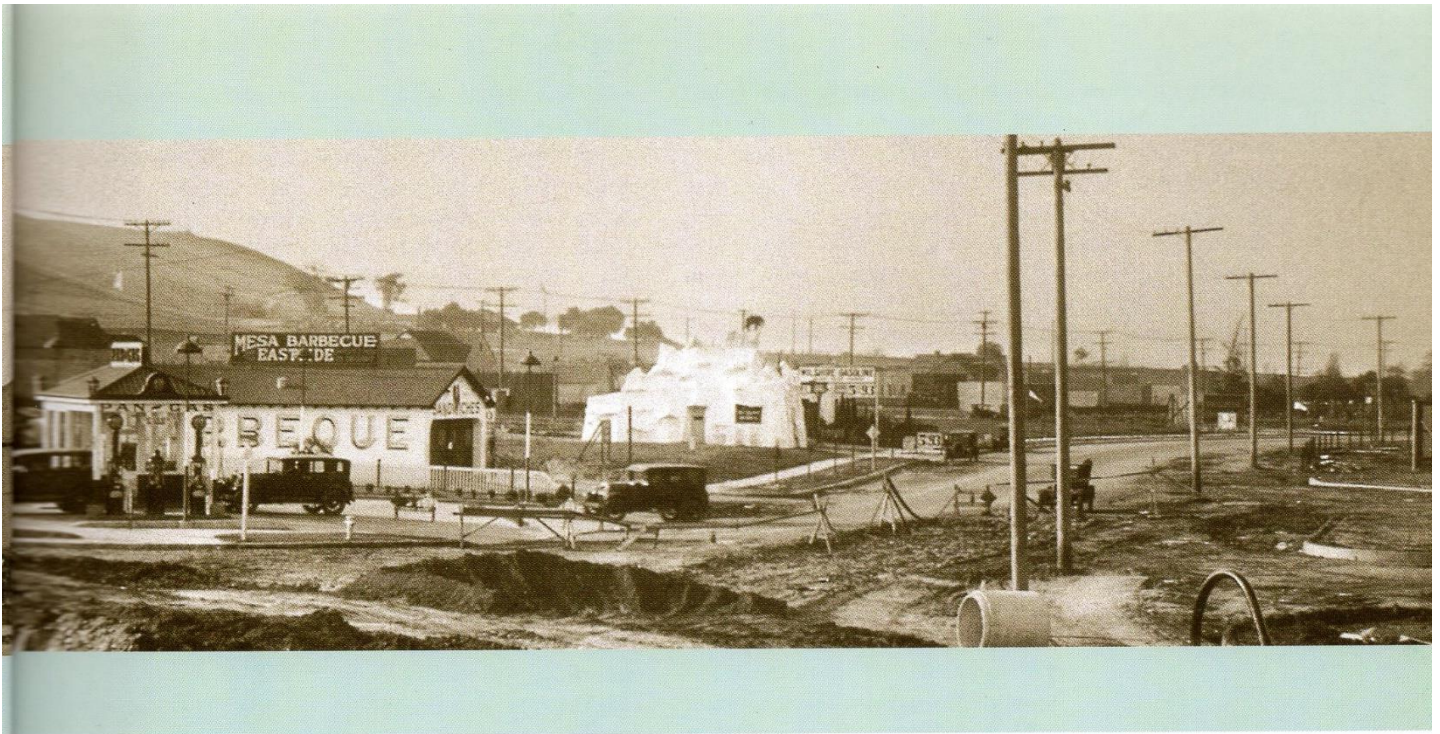
“If, when you went shopping, you found you could buy cakes in a windmill, ices in a gigantic cream-can, flowers in a huge flowerpot, you might begin to wonder whether you had not stepped through a looking glass or taken a toss down a rabbit burrow and could expect Mad Hatter or White Queen to appear round the next corner. But there would be nothing unreal about it if you were in Hollywood, South California, for shops of that kind are to be seen in all the shopping districts there.”¹ This reaction in the late 1930s by a Briton to Southern California is just one of the times the Southland has been viewed as the land of exotica. From the 1870s on, that which has seemed startling and unique in Southern California has been cultivated by both natives and visitors so that myth has slowly become fact.

In the late nineteenth century the exotica of Southern California almost always cited were its tropical and semi-tropical vegetation which had been introduced to the land, and what seemed to be a looser, more carefree, mode of daily life. By the mid-1880s the exuberance (or, as some felt, madness) of architecture was added as another California oddity. In the

early 1900s California as a place distinct from the rest of the U.S. became a major theme in its literature, arts, and architecture. California’s drippingly sentimental cultivation of the Mission Revival in architecture, followed by its passionate, indeed almost religious, conversion to the Spanish Colonial Revival in the 1920s, were broad-scale efforts to make the contrast between the American East and Midwest as sharp and as startling as possible.

It could well be argued that the high point of California’s stance as the land of the unique was directly tied to the emergence of California as Automobile-Land. In addition to providing the means of realizing suburbia, that greatest of American ideals, the automobile encouraged an entirely new response to how, on a day-to-day basis, we could experience our built or planted environment. California’s mildness of climate, with the resulting ability to cheaply and quickly erect structures, encouraged a nonserious view of not only architecture, but symbolism and salesmanship as well. Why not make the process of selling and buying as lighthearted and enjoyable as aspects of the free living which California had made possible?

And if Californians were going to be fully committed to this “auto-mania” (as it was called in the teens), then why not cultivate a set of architectural images which would instantly catch the eye, and which we would continue to remember? Driving by or attending a motion picture showing in Los Angeles at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre (Meyer and Holler, 1927) or at the Egyptian Theater (Meyer and Holler, 1922) or at the Mayan Theater (Morgan, Wells, and Clements, 1928) was not an experience easily forgotten. Equally, a run by a tire manufacturing company



posing as an Assyrian palace (Samson Tire and Rubber Co., Morgan, Walls, and Clements, 1929) was a far more effective way of pressing us to remember the product than a series of roadside billboards.

The introduction of the automobile made possible the linear, horizontal spread of Los Angeles with its resulting low density and low land values, and in the process it brought about the development of a wide range of auto-oriented, drive-in architecture. California, and Los Angeles in particular, did not originate auto-oriented signage and architecture, but its physical environment, its lifestyle, and its degree of commitment to the automobile made its fulfillment possible in the Southern California scene. As the New York-based editors of the *Architectural Forum* noted in an article, "Palaces of the Hot Doges," published in 1935, "... anything haywire is always most haywire in California."²

The quantity of spoken and written verbiage devoted to high art painting and sculpture published in our century has often led us to respond to their symbolic intent rather than their purely visual image. The truth is that the museum label, scholarly art historical slide presentation, or coffee table monograph on a major artist often seems greater than the object itself.

Except for a high art small elite, architecture has not yet experienced a similar wholesale transference of values from the world of symbolism. So far the middle-class audience has not been pressed first to read an explanation of a building and then go out and experience it. This is not to imply that direct and indirect symbolism does not exist in buildings, but rather that the visual language generally employed within our Western European architectural tradition has been a

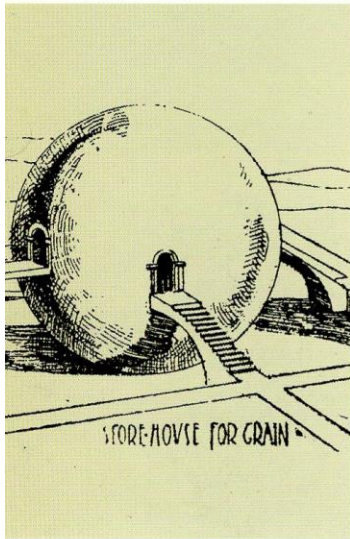
popular coinage generally understood by most members of society. In the twentieth century, the architectural language of the Colonial Revival, English Tudor, French Norman, or Classical Beaux Arts has been, through its historical allusions, direct and understandable. Equally, buildings which were clothed in the garb of the new, ranging from the Art Nouveau, to the Zig Zag (Art Deco) and Streamline Moderne, to the International Style (Modern) were addressed to a wide audience, ranging from the architectural elite to the middle class. In most instances these Period Revival or Modern buildings might well reveal layers of symbolic subtleties understood by only a few, but a knowledge of these subtleties was not necessary for a middle-class American to respond to the essential symbolism of each of these different images.

If we glance back to history and examine our European inheritance in architecture, we will find that the symbolic intent displayed by buildings can (with just a little squeezing here and there) be placed in several different pigeonholes. The largest of these compartments would accommodate the time-honored tradition of architectural borrowings or plagiarism from architecture's own past. The use of past architectural languages to comment on both the past and present is an overriding quality of the classical tradition of Greece and Rome itself. Equally, the direct and indirect borrowings experienced during the medieval period, and thence the Renaissance to the present moment, illustrate how

Opposite. The Pup Cafe, 12728 Washington Boulevard, Culver City, California, 1929. *Above.* The Glacier, in the Angelus Mesa district of Los Angeles on Crenshaw Boulevard near Vernon Avenue, shown in context with its urban roadside environment, ca 1928.

the European tradition of architectural borrowing has been its dominant, most consistent theme.

A second, much smaller pigeonhole should be provided for symbolic borrowings which lie outside the realm of traditional architectural language. These exterior borrowings range from the zoological and botanical forms to those taken from the idealized realm of geometry such as spheres and squares. The entrance to a garden grotto through the mouth of a river monster, a multi-story dwelling built as an elephant, or a sphere as a house, and, in our century, an enlarged hot dog as fast-food restaurant are programmatic devices meant to convey a set array of meanings. As with traditional architectural borrowings, the nonarchitectural images may well be resplendent with architectural meaning; still they were meant to be readable by those who were to experience and use them.



Finally, there is another category of architectural borrowings that should be housed in its own tiny pigeonhole: these are those employing either elements of traditional architecture vocabulary or nontraditional forms to convey meaning by indirection. In the English Picturesque Garden Tradition of the eighteenth century, the miniature classical temple, the exotic Islamic kiosk, or the ruins of a medieval castle played a game of double transference. We were not being asked to respond to them in

a straightforward fashion as examples of conventional architectural imagery; rather, their intent was to comment on the present and its relation to the past.

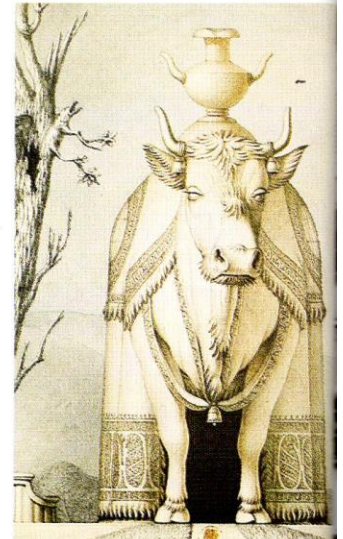
In the twentieth century a hotel built as an Aztec temple, or an enlarged ice cream cone used to sell ice cream employ similar elements of indirect symbolism. While the English Picturesque Garden was limited in its audience to the gentry who could read its meaning, such was not the case with most nontraditional architectural imagery in the twentieth century.

Before looking into the history of our nontraditional architectural borrowings it would be well to see if we could catalogue them in some fashion. The word “programmatic” could be suggested as a possible all-embracing term to describe this specified approach to architectural language. The vocabulary employed in these buildings hinged on a program organized to convey meaning not directly but by indirection. The program

Left. Claude-Nicolas Ledoux’s caretaker’s house (1780s) in the form of a free-standing sphere. *Right.* Jean-Jacques Lequeu’s schematic for a barn in the form of a cow (1700s).

of intent and the visual means employed were integral with one another. The audience, then, was being asked to respond not to the artifact, but to the programmatic utterance lying behind the form. In traditional architectural borrowings, by contrast, the means (style or fashion) employed had an existence in its own right, regardless of other meanings which might be ascribed to it.

Programmatic borrowings of the past divided themselves into two basic sources—those emanating from the world of high art and those derived from low art. Within our European tradition the principal low art examples have been signs to advertise and sell services and merchandise. For the literate as well as an illiterate audience a hanging sign in the form of a boot was a far more effective way of letting us know that this was a shoe shop than using the written word. A sign in the symbolic form of the product was a well-used device not only in the Middle Ages, but also in ancient Rome, and it has continued as a mode of communication right down to the present.

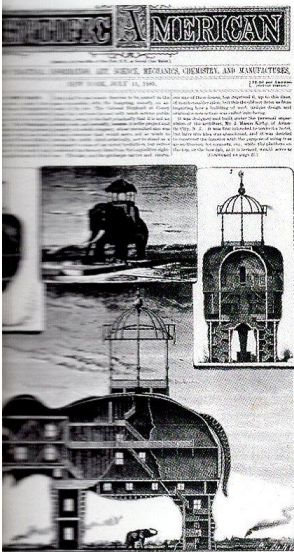


Alongside this programmatic, one-to-one symbolism has been another convention of employing signs which expressed the name of the establishment. An inn whose name was “The Head of the Horse” might well advertise its presence by a cutout, slightly sculptured sign in the form of a horse’s head. In the nineteenth century the scale of these programmatic signs was greatly increased. Large sculptured forms might surmount or be placed in front of a building, directly or indirectly indicating its usage. As a case in point in the 1890s the Eleventh Street Branch of the Grand Central market in Oakland, California, boasted a fully sculptured, brightly painted cow which was three times the size of a real cow.³

A second source from our European past came out of the high art world of architecture and landscape architecture. The villa gardens of Imperial Rome confronted their visitors with fountains and grottos often in the form of real and mythical animals, humans and plants. Topiary—the sculpting of vegetation in the forms of animals and other exotica—was another time-honored tradition. Pliny the Younger, writing of his own garden at Tusulan, speaks of trees “...cut into a variety of shapes.”⁴ The Roman tradition of topiary continued on through the Middle Ages, and it was utilized with

renewed enthusiasm during the Renaissance. In the sixteenth century and later, the specific symbolic Roman use of garden structures in the form of fantastic humans and animals came once more into play. It crept into the urban environment where in the 1593 Palazzo Zuccari in Rome, visitors entered the Palazzo through the mouth of an anxiously awaiting monster.

High art's principal contribution to Programatic architecture occurred in the eighteenth century in the English Picturesque Garden tradition and in the work at the end of the century of the classical Visionary architects.⁵ These architects pursued three versions of Programatic architecture. Their dominant commitment was to the world of geometry transformed—transformed in scale, and put to factual and symbolic usages. Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's often illustrated quarters for the rural caretakers of the 1780s, in the form of a free-standing sphere, disassociated from the landscape, is an example which immediately comes to mind. The single-geometric form of the sphere, symbolic of geometry, could also be enshrouded with an overlay of other meanings. Etienne-Louis Boullée's memorial to Isaac Newton (1784) used the sphere to symbolize the Newtonian view of the universe, while Ledoux



employed the sphere in his Plan for a Cemetery (1773–79) to evoke a sense of death and the underworld. These French, German, English, and American visionary architects employed a full package of programatic tricks to yank and pull us out of the world of everyday reality. Traditional architectural elements and parts of buildings were raised to a scale diverging from reality. Forms were borrowed from man's real or mythical past or from the faraway worlds of China, India, and the Near East. Buildings which borrowed entirely non-traditional architectural imagery included Ledoux's Woodcutter's House and Workshop (1773–79) in the form of a pyramidal stack of wood, Boullée's Cenotaph for a Warrior (undated), where we were confronted with a classical sarcophagus which has been blown up into a large building, and finally Jean-Jacques Lequeu's Barn in the Form of a Cow (undated).

The nineteenth century continued this high art tradition of Programatic architecture in only a marginal way. Certain pure geometric forms, such as the octagon, enjoyed great popularity, but the programatic exoticism of this form became so watered down in fact and

symbolic content that most people of the time responded to it within its own advertised realm of supposed rationalism and utility. By the 1880s the exoticism of non-European architectural languages—Islamic, Chinese, and Japanese—had become so commonplace in the way they were used that they could only be marginally thought of as Programatic.

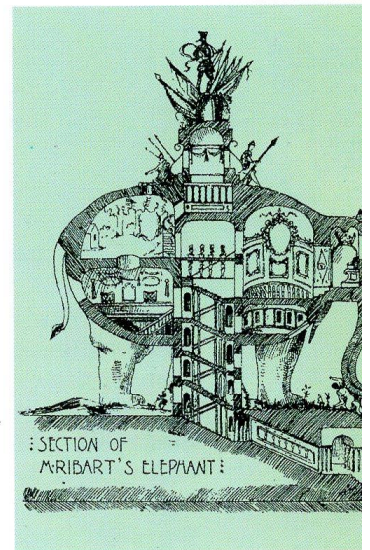
In contrast, the popular nineteenth-century scene provided a much stronger continuity between the distant past and our century. Signage—in scale, lavishness, and in sheer quantity—put the pre-1800 world to shame. Nowhere was this more true than in the United States, where by the end of the century immense thirty- to forty-foot billboards were erected in towns and cities. Anticipating the billboards was the convention of painting signs directly on the walls of buildings; it was in the latter half of the nineteenth century that this practice was expanded so that entire walls of commercial buildings and rural barns were transformed into giant advertising signs.

An important link in the upward and inward progress of Programatic buildings was a few structures in the form of elephants and other creatures, the most widely known being James F. Lafferty's come-on elephant "Lucy" built at South Atlantic City (Margate City) in 1881.⁶ Lafferty's sixty-five-foot creation was modeled on the designs

of the French architect Charles-François Ribart for a garden kiosk in the form of an elephant which were published in 1758. Ribart's creatures served as a symbol of the triumphs of the French crown; Lafferty's nineteenth-century elephant sold real estate.

Around the turn of the century there was an increase of Programatic buildings in amusement promenades of national and international expositions and in a growing number of amusement parks. The impact of these buildings tended to be somewhat different, for they existed in a noneveryday environment: their visual amusement or shock was minimal compared to what happens when these unfamiliar forms pop up in our everyday world.

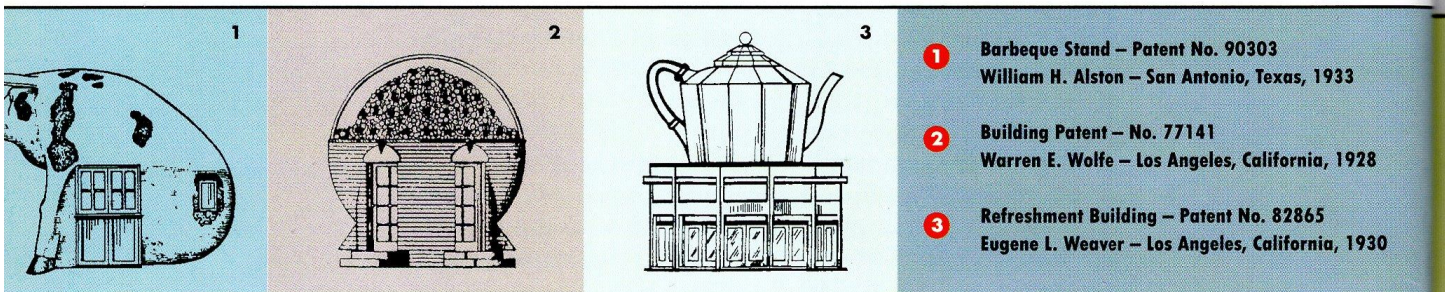
During the twentieth century it was the introduction of the automobile which promoted a new wave of direct Programatic architecture. Not only did the coming of



Left. The July 11, 1885 edition of *Scientific American* featured James F. Lafferty's schematics for the Colossal Elephant of Coney Island (1884). Right. Charles-François Ribart's garden kiosk in the form of an elephant (1758).

the automobile encourage the Programatic, it could even participate in its spirit as in 1911 when the California Corrugated Culvert Company of San Francisco had its company car built in the form of a corrugated culvert, which by chance happened to have an engine and four wheels.⁷ The usage of enlarged sculptured products to sell, which had begun in the nineteenth century, was raised both physically and symbolically to new heights in the first two decades of this century. In Indianapolis, a milk company constructed two fifty-two-foot-high milk bottles of glazed bricks, and other smaller-scale milk bottles, beer jugs, and wine bottles began to appear along America's developing systems of highways.⁸ It was during the

elaborate sculptural program worked for the Nebraska State Capitol Building in Lincoln by Bertram Goodhue, the philosopher Hartley Burr Alexander, and the sculptor Lee Lawrie added the remote highfalutin reference to the past expected of a public building, but, because of its limited audience this approach could certainly not be used to sell an everyday product of American industry.¹¹ As a rule, the popular architectural sculpture of American Moderne generally assumed a more programatic approach. The four tympanum figures over the entrance to Los Angeles' black and gold Richfield building (Morgan, Walls, and Clements, 1928) symbolized Aviation, Postal Service, Industry, and Navigation—all of course powered by oil.¹² These classically inspired fig-



next two decades, the 1920s and 1930s, that the many forms of Programatic architecture were firmly ensconced on the scene. Though there were examples built on the Continent and in England, it was the U.S., and especially the West Coast, which brought forth most of the examples.

The popular version of the modern, the Zigzag Moderne (Art Deco) of the twenties and of the early thirties, introduced Programatic elements into its buildings. In the gem of the Moderne—the Chrysler building in New York (1930)—the architect William Van Alen established a Programatic decorative program of “...glorifying American mechanical genius and incidentally Mr. Chrysler’s output of cars, trucks, and boats.”⁹ Radiator caps and emblems were used for flagpole sockets and “...on the thirteenth story, the brick-work wheels revolved under horizontal mudguards...”¹⁰ In Los Angeles, the Sunset Towers, one of the city’s major contributions to the Moderne (Leland A. Bryant, 1929–31), helps us to locate the enclosed parking garage by placing terra cotta automobile fronts below and above the windows.

The exponents of the Moderne maneuvered themselves even closer to the pretenses of high art in their frequent use of programatic sculpture. Sculpture depicting specific historic individuals from classical and nonclassical sources was a favored device of the European and American Beaux Arts tradition from the 1890s through the 1930s. But such figures demanded some degree of humanistic erudition so that the audience could fully comprehend what was supposedly symbolized. The

ures were made understandable (it was hoped) by adding wings and a propeller to the figure of Aviation, and by attaching similar easily recognizable appendages to the other three figures.

The play between innuendoes of high art and direct programatic art was a theme which occurred with moderate frequency in roadside advertising of the 1920s. The serious-minded lamented what they saw happening to the roadside. With the completion of an extensive portion of the national highway system by the early 1930s the advantages of regional and national repetitive highway signage came into the picture. The most extravagant of these were the sequential Burma Shave signs with their quizzical utterances luring the driver to the final Burma Shave sign, and sign notices throughout the upper Midwest leading up to Wall’s Drug Store in Wall, South Dakota. The image of the Burma Shave signage was fitting for a national product while the Wall’s Drug Store signs had an appropriate fallen-down Western look.

The California architect Robert H. Orr noted that the way things were going, “...our highways, byways, and street corners will be lined with sculptural monuments revealing those strewn along the ‘Holy Way’ to the ancient Tombs of the Mings.”¹³ What Orr was referring to were three-dimensional sculptural advertising signs usually consisting of a high base which bore the written message, and sculptural horses and riders, bulls, or racing cars placed on top. In some instances there was an understandable relationship between the sculpture above and whatever it advertised, as the figure of the bull helped name Ye Bull Pen Inn in Los

Angeles, or a depiction of Barney Oldfield and his racing car helped sell Richfield gasoline. In other instances, “famous” statuary was taken from the world of high art with seemingly no direct connection (other than the prestige of “Art”) between the sculpted figure and the advertising product. The inventiveness of Programatic signage was especially evident in the 1930s. In 1931, the Coca-Cola Company used real-life female models to sit under make-believe palm trees to enjoy the “pause that refreshes.”¹⁴ The play between that which is and that which is not was frequently employed in large billboard signage when real objects occurred within an illusionary painted sign. The General Sign Company of Oakland placed a coupe

magazines (especially *The National Geographic* for the American middle-class audience) the world architectural scene was just waiting to be grabbed up. The rash of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century non-European borrowings was continued, although the context was meant to be more jarring, so that their indirect message could be more favorably conveyed. Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Japan, China, and Hindu and Islamic India provided vocabularies for anything ranging from the interior of restaurants to motion picture theaters. Added to these older borrowings was a new group of “primitive images” derived from the Pacific world of Melanesia and Polynesia, the pre-European pueblos of the American Southwest, the teepees of

Refreshment Stand – Patent No. 93665
Warren Lee – Los Angeles, California, 1934

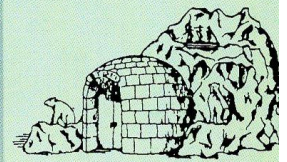
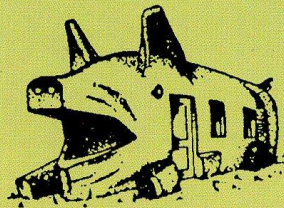
4

Booth Patent – No. 107561
Daniel G. Terrie – Rockville Centre, New York

5

Igloo Patent – No. 81860
John Henry Whittington – Los Angeles, California, 1928

6



from the Howard Motor Company within a tropical island setting complete with a sunset, and on the roadside outside of Milwaukee, there was a real yellow-and-silver airplane, apparently crashing into the ground. This eye-catcher let the passing motorist know it was only a twenty-minute drive to a Schuster’s Department Store.¹⁵ A subtle, complex interchange between the real and the illusionary occurred in a large sign in Indianapolis, where a gigantic make-believe mirror enlarged a moving sequence of views of the individual shops located in the Circle Tower Shopping Center. In this instance the signage with its movement accentuated by changing colored lights existed as an intermediary between the potential customer and the actual passage into the individual shops.¹⁶

Another twentieth-century link with the Programatic architecture of the past is to be found in the use of architectural imagery which was either exotic (the far-away or distant past), or was a perversion of some past European architectural mode. Forms which we would loosely label as “medieval” were a favorite imagery of the 1920s. But this medieval imagery was meant to be read through our remembrances of the fairy-tale world of Hansel and Gretel.¹⁷ These little witches’ cottages—which might serve as real estate offices, service stations, or fast food restaurants—play an intriguing game with scale and other make-believe elements. They are, in fact, dollhouses enlarged, but kept at distances from the world of traditional imagery.

The range of non-European traditional imagery utilized during the twenties reveals that through popular

the Plains Indians, and the Pre-Columbian architecture of the Maya, the Zapotec, and the Aztec of Mexico and Central America.

During the thirties these exotic borrowings were joined and almost overwhelmed by the imagery of the Streamline Moderne. The Streamline Moderne, as a popular architectural system of imagery, seized the element of speed—epitomized in the aerodynamic design of the airplane—and applied it to the full range of designed products, including signage and large and small buildings. Even signs were caught up in the Streamline urge: “...if outdoor advertising is to keep its foremost place among advertising mediums it must keep its foremost place in design, too, along with motor cars and airplanes and railroad trains.”¹⁸ That which distinguishes the Streamline Moderne has to do with how the audience was asked to respond to the building. In the case of a Streamline Moderne building the audience was expected to see it as architecture which had been clothed in a modern garb. Programatic Streamline Moderne buildings exist in the form, for example, of a streamlined train as a diner, a streamlined boat as a restaurant, or a streamlined automobile as a service station.¹⁹ By the end of the 1930s the Streamline Moderne image, with its hint at what glories lay in store for us in the future, had almost entirely supplanted the older languages of Programatic architecture.

An illustration of how the twenties could be tied to the thirties and how the past could be linked to the future can be seen in the many fast-food hamburger shops in the form of streamlined castles. The single corner



tower used for the chain of White Tower hamburger shops was all that was needed to suggest that it was medieval.²⁰ The Wichita-based White Castle buildings played off the hygienic quality of white porcelain panels against crenelated parapet and tower, while the Tulsa-based Silver Castle chain ended up with a totally streamlined box which retained its allegiance to the medieval past solely through its name and logo.²¹

Turning our attention specifically to California's Programatic architecture of the twenties and thirties, it is of interest to note that these Programatic forms came onto the scene late in the 1920s and more of them were built during the opening years of the Great Depression than before. Though there were examples before 1928, their high point was between 1928 and 1934. This is borne out not only by examples which were constructed but by the numerous unbuilt examples for which patents were issued.²² The ingenuity of American designers is pointedly and delightfully revealed in the array of "impossible" visual images which they patented. What was built in California and elsewhere in the country reveals only the tip of the iceberg in terms of America's faith in the Programatic to sell services and products. Lunch pails, jugs, teapots and cups, locks and keys, corncobs, milk bottles, ice cream cones and freezers, birthday cakes, icebergs, soup bowls, oranges, hot dogs, and tamales were joined by dogs, pigs, and dancing girls as constructions. There also were the machine themes applied to the buildings: airplanes, ships, automobiles, and even spark plugs and light bulbs.

If we apply our earlier categories to these examples, buildings and signs generally fall into two basic groups—those whose imagery directly conveys what

was being sold, and those which employed a wide variety of indirect messages to advertise. All of the Programatic structures, whether a tamale stand built in the form of a tamale, or an airplane built as a service station, were created to be eye-catchers: they were meant to startle, shock, and amuse. Humor was an essential element in the audience's response to these structures. Even the streamlined passenger car as a diner, with its allusions to the future, was meant to convey a sort of lighthearted Buck Rogers excursion.

Direct Programatic architecture—the structure as a sign of what it was selling—succeeded because of the simplicity of its symbolism, whereas indirect Programatic architecture entailed degrees of meaning which, one suspects, had the potential of holding the audience's attention for a longer period of time. An enlarged hot dog which sold hot dogs exemplifies a first step in the process of injecting indirect meaning into the architectural vocabulary. An iceberg to sell cold soft drinks and ice cream or a teapot or coffeepot built as a restaurant suggests that this is a place where food and drink may be obtained. A service station in the shape of an airplane asks that the audience symbolically connect two machines with the selling and consuming of energy-producing products.

All of these buildings somehow manage to maintain connections between the form of the structure and what is being advertised, but such is not the case for a wide variety of exotic languages which often occurs in Programatic architecture. An owl enlarged to a small building, which housed an ice cream stand, reveals no connection between the product and the form of the building. Perhaps, it might be suggested, there is linkage to be found in the childhood world of fairy tales,



reinforced in the twenties and thirties by the dream world of the Hollywood motion picture. The architectural garb provided in Los Angeles by Grauman's Chinese Theatre, the Egyptian Theater, and the Mayan Theater was openly employed to carry the theater-goer into an intermediary noneveryday world, and thence into the visual mythology of the film. The far distant lands of the Egyptians, of the Mayans, and the Chinese were, by the mid-twenties, a more effective device to carry the audience into the film than the earlier usage of the sumptuous Beaux Arts baroque.

The most prevalent building types associated with Programatic architecture were those associated with the automobile and drive-in architecture. Here the need for quick identification at a reasonable speed and distance meant that a building which could catch the eye could or should draw in customers. In writing about Pasadena's well-known Mother Goose Pantry (1929), which was built as a great shoe, a writer noted that "...[Foothill] Boulevard is lined with wayside places of various types and designs for miles. Every one of these is forgotten, however, save the famous Mother Goose Pantry."²³

A theme which enjoyed great popularity throughout the U.S. was that of the frontier log cabin. One of the earliest of these in California was the ca 1911 Old Log Cabin refreshment stand in San Diego. Numerous variations on this theme were carried out in California in the 1920s and 1930s, including buildings in the form of a single tree trunk. In 1930 the log cabin was seized upon as an architectural style for a chain of small fast-food restaurants, the White Log taverns. The first of these was built in Oakland, and by 1937 there were sixty-two of these fast-food restaurants located through-

out California.²⁴ The White Log Taverns, with their frames of steel sheathed in concrete logs, played off two sets of images—that of log cabin and that of the American Colonial Style. For a national image, this added up to the best of two worlds. Another California example of the virtues of the American home and the frontier was The Big Fireplace restaurant in Los Angeles (1927), which greeted its customers with two giant-scale exterior fireplaces augmented by a pattern of ever-changing red lights. The parking lot and the street had become one great big living room.²⁵

More indicative of the California scene, and especially of Southern California, was the occurrence of Hansel and Gretel architecture. The first of these buildings on the Los Angeles scene was designed by Harry Oliver, who was a set designer for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. In 1921 he designed the studio offices for Irvin C. Willat Productions in Culver City. "We have tried," noted Irvin C. Willat, "to reproduce a tumble-down structure of two centuries ago, but which will be equipped with the most modern office appurtenances."²⁶ The reason for this cultivated architectural exoticism was no different than that for a drive-in restaurant. A 1921 newspaper article of the time reported, "It is said that this structure has occasioned more comments from passing motorists than any building being erected in Los Angeles in recent months."²⁷

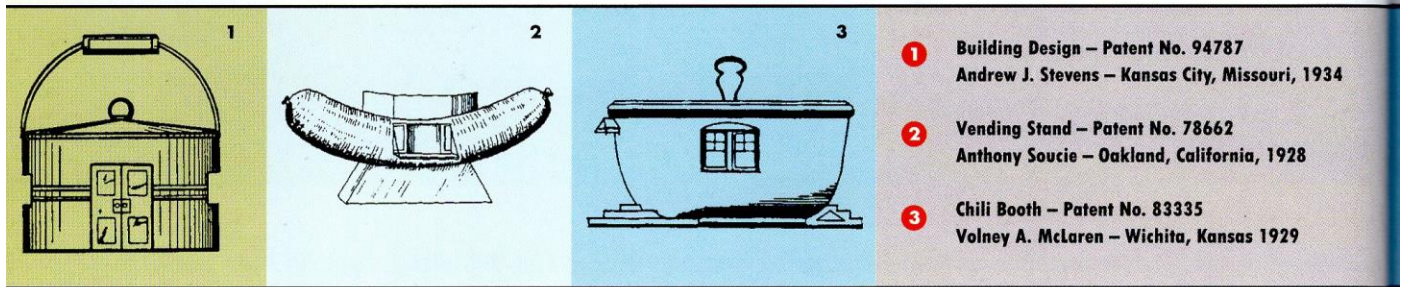
Within a year Oliver went on to design the first Van de Kamp's Bakery's famous shingle-covered windmills,

Opposite. The Old Log Cabin, University Avenue, San Diego, ca 1911. *Above.* The Freezer, painted its original brown color, Fourth Street and North Western Avenue, Los Angeles, 1927.

and the Tam o' Shanter Restaurant located on Los Feliz near Griffith Park.²⁸ The Tam o' Shanter restaurant was supposedly California's first drive-in restaurant, and it was the first of the Los Angeles drive-ins to consciously cultivate the world of Alice in Wonderland.²⁹ Its fairy-tale atmosphere was openly connected at the time to Hollywood: "...The Tam o' Shanter Restaurant is the product of movie town architecture efficiently applied."³⁰

In the late twenties and early thirties, movieland versions of Hansel and Gretel cottages were built throughout the West Los Angeles area, many of which were designed by the productive and professionally respected firm of Pier-

marginal establishments which employed the Pueblo Revival, the Moorish or Islamic Revival, and the Pre-Columbian of Mexico and Central America. Gay's Lion Farm (1926) in El Monte and, above all, the impossible Cliff Dwellers cafe on Beverly Boulevard (1927) illustrate how a non-European architectural image could be pulled into the realm of the Programatic. Equally strained in its relationship to the traditional were a wide array of Islamic-inspired designs: the Calmos #1 Service Station (1925) on Hollywood Boulevard with its domed mosque-like station which is accompanied by two minarets, and Roland E. Coate's Calpet Service Station (1928) on Wilshire Boulevard where the final touch was the female Moorish attendants who serviced



pont and Walter S. Davis. Robert H. Derrah, who is best remembered for his Coca-Cola Company building in the form of a streamlined ocean liner, employed the Alice in Wonderland theme for his Continental Villa, which formed a segment of his 1936 Cross Roads of the World on Sunset.³¹ Half-timbered medievalism continued on into the post-World War II years, but these later examples establish their relationship to the traditional world of architectural imagery, rather than to the storybook world of Alice or Hansel and Gretel.

In the East, South, and Midwest, the Colonial was by far the favored image for a wide variety of small roadside commercial buildings, ranging from service stations to restaurants. In California the imagery of the Colonial was occasionally used, as in Fatty Arbuckle's Plantation Cafe of 1926 on Washington Boulevard. In this case, it was the signage on the roof and the signing on the long mound of turf which pull the structure and its setting out of the normal world of architecture. That this perversion of the past has not left us is readily apparent in the 1960 Pacific Savings (now California Federal Savings) designed by Rick Farver Associates, where the full-blown vestige of George Washington's Mount Vernon has been moved from the shores of the Potomac to a safe site overlooking the Hollywood Freeway.

More instances of California's Mission, Hispanic, and Mediterranean imagery used for small-scale commercial purposes tended to be rather straight-forward interpretations of one or another of these modes. Just off the path of traditional architecture were those

your Packard or Franklin. The Islamic theme was employed for King's Tropical Inn on Washington Boulevard (1926), which somehow sought to connect its specialty chicken dinners with the exotic world of Africa and the Near East. In the thirties the imagery of the Land of the Arabian Knights encouraged an Iranian mosque for the Beverly Theatre (1930–31) and for the extensive offices of the Girard Real Estate Development (1928) on Ventura Boulevard.

While the downtown Mayan Theater was locally the most widely known of Los Angeles' pre-Columbian exercises, the most extensively written about was Robert Stacy-Judd's Aztec Hotel (1926) in Monrovia.³² The delightful and at times humorously mad maneuvering of historic images can be seen if we compare the Oriental theme of the Mandarin Market (1929–30) on Vine and Grauman's Chinese Theatre, or the Egyptian assertions of Glendale's Egyptian Village Cafe (1924) and the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood.

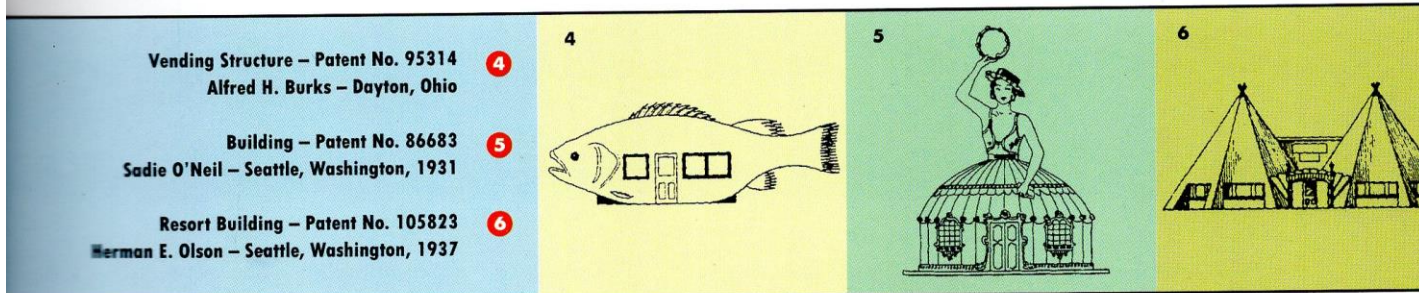
A recurring theme in the eighteenth-century architecture was the return of the primitive, symbolized by the wood and thatched hut. Primitive or indigenous architecture was also played upon as a theme in Programatic architecture of the twenties and later. These images ranged from colorful Arab tents used to sell tropical fruits and juices, to thatched restaurants offering South Seas cuisine. The theme with the widest popular appeal was the Plains Indian teepee. Here was a form which was closely tied to the romance of the West. To spend a night in a teepee motel or have one's car serviced at a teepee village was a marvelous way to imply a connec-

tion between the nomadic Plains Indians, the westward movement of covered wagons, and the automobile and the open highway.

Los Angeles' gift to America of buildings and signage represents a mixed-up world of myth and fact. Promotional trade, popular and professional publications obviously delighted in illustrating Los Angeles roadside buildings in the form of oranges, jugs, and flowerpots. Photographs of these Programatic buildings not only presented startling visual objects to their readers, but there was always the implication that the buildings illustrated were typical of the scene.³³ As artifacts of the roadside scene these Programatic buildings often lack

repeated theme was the building in the form of a milk bottle, but other exotica—oranges, artichokes, and pumpkins—entered the scene.

The heyday of California's Programatic buildings occurred during the ten-year period from 1925 through 1934. It was in these years that the most famous of the California examples were built: the Hoot Hoot I Scream building (1925); the Brown Derby restaurant (1926); the Sphinx Realty building (1927); the Igloo building (1928); the Tamale building (1928); the Mother Goose Pantry restaurant (1929); the Zep Diner building (1930); the Toed Inn stand (1931); and the Pig Cafe (1934). While there were a few buildings



the usual documentation associated with larger, more conventional, buildings. It is unlikely that we will ever know just how many of them were actually built. Altogether there were probably less than seventy-five Programatic buildings built in Southern California. What strikes one in looking through the published illustrations of these buildings is that only a small handful—less than a dozen—were illustrated over and over again. Generally the buildings which were repeatedly published were the most flamboyant, though one often has a sneaky suspicion that these were the Programatic buildings which by chance happened to have been photographed. While the Hoot Hoot I Scream stand in the form of an owl was located on Long Beach Boulevard, this was not a street which would normally be traveled by the casual visitor to Los Angeles. Thus the picture represented at the time and later that Los Angeles and Southern California highways and streets were lined by hundreds of Programatic buildings was simply not true.

The chronological history of Programatic buildings in California closely follows the pattern already mentioned in the discussion of traditional architectural imagery. One of the earliest examples was Albert Kenney's 1903–04 restaurant ship "Cabrillo" and Venetian Garden, which was situated on the Venice Pier.³⁴ This make-believe ship on piles pretended at one moment to be a Spanish galleon; at the next it was a fragment of a Venetian palace. By 1920, Kenney's ship "Cabrillo" was joined by a small scattering of buildings and three-dimensional signs situated in both Northern and Southern California. An often

constructed after 1935—such as Cobb's Chicken House at the 1939 San Francisco World Fair—which directly continued this earlier tradition, later Programatic transformations looked almost exclusively to the Streamlined Moderne image of the transportation machine for sources. In Los Angeles, Robert H. Derah's streamlined ocean liner for the Coca-Cola Building (1936) was the grandest example, while all that was needed was a set of tracks for the streamlined train engine of Alice Faye's Club Car Restaurant (1941) to streak off into the night.³⁵ The image of the airplane, as the most advanced transportation machine, was employed for service stations, and in 1939 Charlie Le Maire, the Los Angeles restaurateur, patented the Skyline Diner, which was in the form of a Norman Bel Geddes double-decked streamlined airplane.³⁶ The Dark Room (1938) on Wilshire moves us programatically into the objects sold by employing a streamlined image of a camera as its storefront.

When building activities resumed in California in 1945 after the war, there was almost a complete absence of Programatic buildings. The often illustrated Tail o' the Pup on La Cienega Boulevard was built or refurbished in 1946, the Wigwam Village in Rialto was built in 1955, along with a few others—just enough examples to indicate that, although low keyed, the tradition was not dead.³⁷ The image of the doughnut as a symbol for fast food entered the California scene in 1954 with The Big Do-Nut chain, and numerous variations were built like The Do-Nut Hole (1958) in the City of Industry. In more recent years the older Programatic buildings have been joined by the Shutterbug (1977) in



Westminster, and by the giant Caterpillar as a tractor salesroom in Turlock (1978).³⁸ There was, though, no break in California's usage of Programmatic signage between the pre- and post-World War II years. The early Programmatic signage of a wide-eyed puppy dog which looks down at us from atop Barkies Sandwich Shops (1930–31) was augmented in the Post-War period by the giant woman's leg which lets us know that this is indeed Sanderson's Stockings (1948), and by the red-and-white Santa Claus (1950) that announces this is the town of Santa Claus, California.

Variations on this form of architectural signage were large-scale billboards and entire building facades which formed sculptured signs. Clifton's Cafeteria on Olive Street in downtown Los Angeles (1931) with its waterfalls, geysers, and tropical foliage was matched, if not surpassed, by the scene of romping and frolicking pigs which in painted and sculpted forms crawl over the walls and buildings of Farmer John's Meat Packing Plant in Vernon.³⁹

The approach taken to language in these Programmatic buildings or in signage ran the gamut between direct commentary and the exotic. **The building in the form of the product sold—a tamale, orange, or lemon—is as obvious as one could ask.** The next step of symbolism plays on the theme of the container or mechanism used in the production of the product: the flowerpot as a nursery or flower store, a cream can to sell dairy products, or a hand-cranked freezer to dispense ice cream products. A third set of symbols goes one step further by hinting at some quality associated with the product: an igloo and iceberg to sell cold drinks and ice cream, or a coffeepot to advise the viewer that this is a restaurant.

Then there are those buildings that comment on their names—The Brown Derby, The Toed Inn, or The Pig Cafe. There is often an essential need for the Programmatic form of the building to be accompanied in this case by written signage so that the potential customer can tie the form and name together. Behind this play between the form and the written word is another element of attraction as to the whys and wherefores of the name itself. The shoe as a building for Pasadena's Mother Goose Pantry Restaurant is meant to pull us directly back into childhood.

But what levels of humorous meanings lie behind such themes as the Round House Cafe (1927), with its train engine plunging out toward us, or the World War I theme of a crashed airplane and sandbagged trenches of The Dugout (1927) in Montebello? The child's world of the fairy tale certainly lies behind The Mushrooms Restaurant (1928) in Burbank, and Pumpkin Palace restaurant (1927) in Burbank, but other themes like the walled and guarded Jail Cafe (1926) must somehow appeal to other parts of our sensibilities. The suggestion that there should be a give-and-take between the real, everyday world and some other world was the overriding theme of California's Programmatic excursion into the Streamline transportation machine. In the instances of streamlined ships, trains, and airplanes of the late thirties and early forties we are asked

Above. The impact of programmatic buildings along the emerging cityscape is apparent in this view of the Umbrella Gas Station, 830 South La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles, ca 1928. *Opposite.* In true roadside fashion, the Orange Inn (ca 1927), a refreshment stand and outdoor market on Foothill Boulevard in Arcadia, attracts tourists destined for Los Angeles with an attention-getting, giant orange.



to hop, skip, and jump back and forth between the then-existing works of technology, the world of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, and the machine-dominated futurism of the twenty-first century.

Programatic architecture and signage were almost universally condemned by America's upper middle class, professional planners, and the high art world. The first two groups felt (and quite rightly so) that Programatic structures, like billboards and roadside architecture in general, would destroy the City Beautiful sense of order in an urban environment, as well as the sylvan quality of suburbia. They were uncomfortable with the blatant commercialism these structures implied. The proponents of high art were afraid that the frequent use of sculpture in this fashion would debase the original, asking "Will they not eventually make sculpture ... so commonplace that the real object of art cannot, except by those especially trained, be disassociated from the commonplace and cause a decadency far-reaching in its effect and influence?"⁴⁰ In a way, of course, this is just what happened. Bit by bit the high art world of Cubism, Futurism, and, above all, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Pop has so mixed, transformed, and been transformed, that today a high art and a good bourgeois will respond with equal ardor to those few remaining vestiges of our Programatic near-past.

It was the foremost of America's architectural historians, Henry Russell Hitchcock, who as early as 1936 noted that, "The combination of strict functionalism and bold symbolism in the best roadside stands provides, perhaps, the most encouraging sign for the architecture of the mid-twentieth century."⁴¹

This affirmative response went basically unheeded and did not reappear until the 1950s in the pages of *Landscape*, which was founded and edited by J. Brickerhoff Jackson. Jackson, and the writers he assembled in the pages of *Landscape*, asked us to reassess the whole of our commercial vernacular including the highway and the commercial strip.⁴² The imperative which Hitchcock had in mind for Programatic architecture finally arrived in the mid-sixties though the publication of Robert Venturi's volume, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, and in the buildings which he and his associates design.⁴³ Venturi's Duck (Martin H. Maurer's Roadside Stand near Riverhead, Long Island, 1933), symbolizing buildings as signs, brought the whole of Programatic buildings back into high-art respectability.⁴⁴ Since the early seventies the Programatic tradition of borrowing from architectural imagery itself and from outside of it has returned with a fervor. In California it seems almost to be a repeat of what occurred in the relationship of the use of programatic forms within the eighteenth-century English Picturesque Garden tradition and the later occurrence of "real" Programatic buildings. In the 1950s, California began to experience a rash of miniature golf courses resplendent with a wonderful array of toy-sized buildings; by the mid-seventies they began to be supplemented by "real" buildings. Whether the rich treasure trove of California's Programatic buildings will provide a similar inspiration for the present remains to be seen. One hopes it will.

David Gebhard
 Director, University of California Art Museum
 Santa Barbara, California