

of the City of Angels should wear upon her head instead of the mural crowns sported by civic goddesses of old.

But while we drive along the freeways that are its crowning glory or prime headache, and con the rear-view mirror for historical illumination, what shall be our route? Simply to go from the oldest monument to the newest could well prove a short, boring and uninformative journey, because the point about this giant city, which has grown almost simultaneously all over, is that all its parts are equal and equally accessible from all other parts at once. Everyday commuting tends less and less to move by the classic systole and diastole in and out of downtown, more and more to move by an almost random or Brownian motion over the whole area. The chapters that follow are intended to invite the reader to do the same; only the history of modern architecture is treated in anything like chronological order, and can be read in historical sequence. The rest is to be visited at the reader's choice or fancy, with that freedom of movement that is the prime symbolic attribute of the Angel City.

2 Ecology I: Surfurbia

The Beaches are what other metropolises should envy in Los Angeles, more than any other aspect of the city. From Malibu to Balboa almost continuous white sand beach runs for seventy-odd miles, nearly all of it open to public access, much less of it encroached upon by industry than alarmist literature might lead one to suppose, though at one or two points considerable vigilance will be required for years to come – the sea is too handy a dumping ground for cost-cutting industries and public 'services'. But such worries notwithstanding, Los Angeles is the greatest City-on-the-Shore in the world; its only notable rival, in fact, is Rio de Janeiro (though the open ocean-beaches of Los Angeles are preferable in many ways) and its only rival in potential is, probably, Perth, Western Australia.

Historically this situation is entirely apt. In the long view of geological time, Los Angeles has only recently emerged from the ocean; most of what is now the Greater Los Angeles basin was below sea-level in Jurassic times, and has been hoisted into the sunshine by a prolonged geological lifting process, that has marked the flanks of Palos Verdes mountain [6] with as many as thirteen superimposed



6. The Beach Cities from Palos Verdes mountain

benches or terraces marking ancient beach levels. Palos Verdes is indeed believed to be the fastest-rising piece of land on the earth's surface, and the proneness of the whole area to earthquakes and minor tremors is proverbial.

But Los Angeles is not a seaside city in the classical mould. It was not entered or conquered from the sea, nor was it for a long time a port of consequence. It was an inland foundation that suddenly began to leap-frog to the sea in the railway age, establishing on the shoreline sub-cities that initiated its peculiar pattern of many-centred growth. Angelenos (and others) hurried down to the beaches for health and recreation, then decided to stay when they discovered the railways had made it possible to commute to work-places inland. The date of change-over from resort status to that of residential suburb can be identified by a variety of techniques:

'My brother, who is in the piano-business, tells me that Santa Monica uses more pianos than any other city of its size in the County. That means that Santa Monica has indeed become a home city, and is no longer simply a summer or winter pleasure resort,' wrote Marshall Breeden in 1925 of the prototype of all Angeleno beach cities, and this has been the pattern all along the shore.

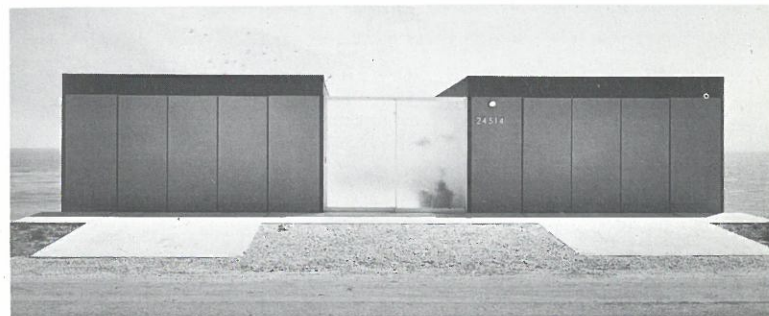
But an air of health and pleasure still attaches to the beaches, partly for good physiological reasons, and partly because the cultivation and cult of the physical man (and woman) is obviously a deeply ingrained trait in the psychology of Southern California. Sun, sand, and surf are held to be ultimate and transcendental values, beyond mere physical goods:

'Give me a beach, something to eat, and a couple of broads, and I can get along without material things,' said a Santa Monica bus-driver to me, summing up a very widespread attitude in which the pleasures of physical well-being are not 'material' in the sense of the pleasures of possessing goods and chattels. The culture of the beach is in many ways a symbolic rejection of the values of the consumer society, a place

where a man needs to own only what he stands up in – usually a pair of frayed shorts and sun-glasses.

There is a sense in which the beach is the only place in Los Angeles where all men are equal and on common ground. There appears to be (and to a varying degree there really is) a real alternative to the tendency of life to compartmentalize in this freemasonry of the beaches, and although certain high schools allegedly maintain a 'turf' system that recognizes certain beaches as the private territories of particular schools, it is roughly speaking possible for a man in beach trunks and a girl in a bikini to go to almost any beach unmolested – even private ones if they can muster the nerve to walk in. One way and another, the beach is what life is all about in Los Angeles.

For the purpose of the present study, that beach runs from the Malibu strip at the western extremity to the Balboa peninsula in the south, and is marked by a distinguished modern building at either end: Craig Ellwood's Hunt house of 1955 [7] at Malibu, and Rudolph

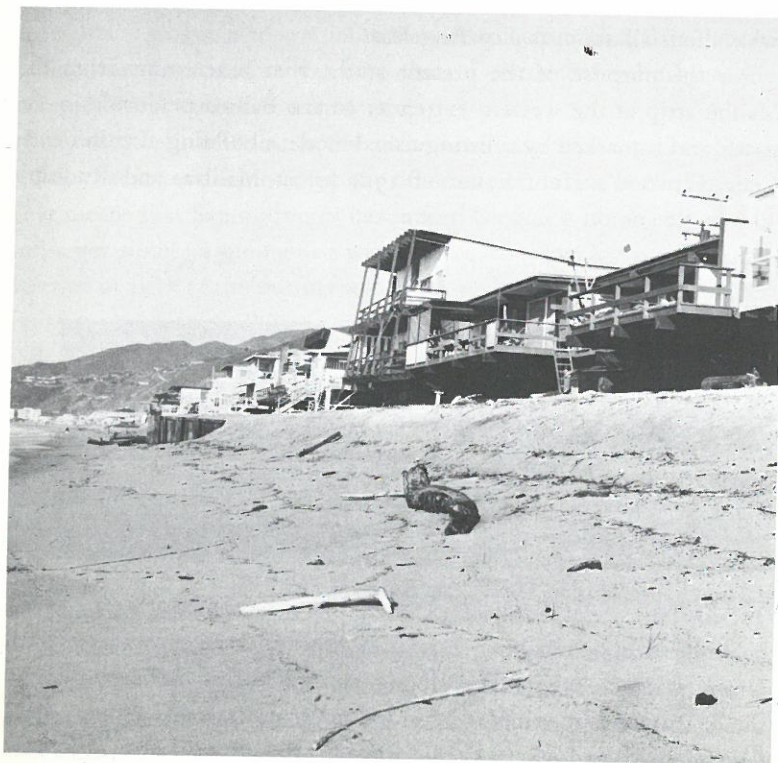


7. Hunt house, Malibu, 1955, Craig Ellwood, architect

Schindler's epoch-making Lovell house of thirty years earlier at Newport Beach, where the Balboa peninsula begins. Between the two the beach varies in structure, format, orientation, social status, age of development, and whatnot, but remains continuously The Beach.

At Malibu the beach is private; not because antisocial upper-class elements covered it with restrictive legislation, but because the pattern of development makes it physically inaccessible. From Malibu pier east to Santa Monica pier, the great arterial highway of the Beach Cities, the Pacific Coast Highway, is squeezed between sand cliffs to the landward, and the beach itself. Between the highway and the beach, what were once sold as small plots of land for beach-huts are now continuously covered by sizeable middle-class houses [8a, b] in such

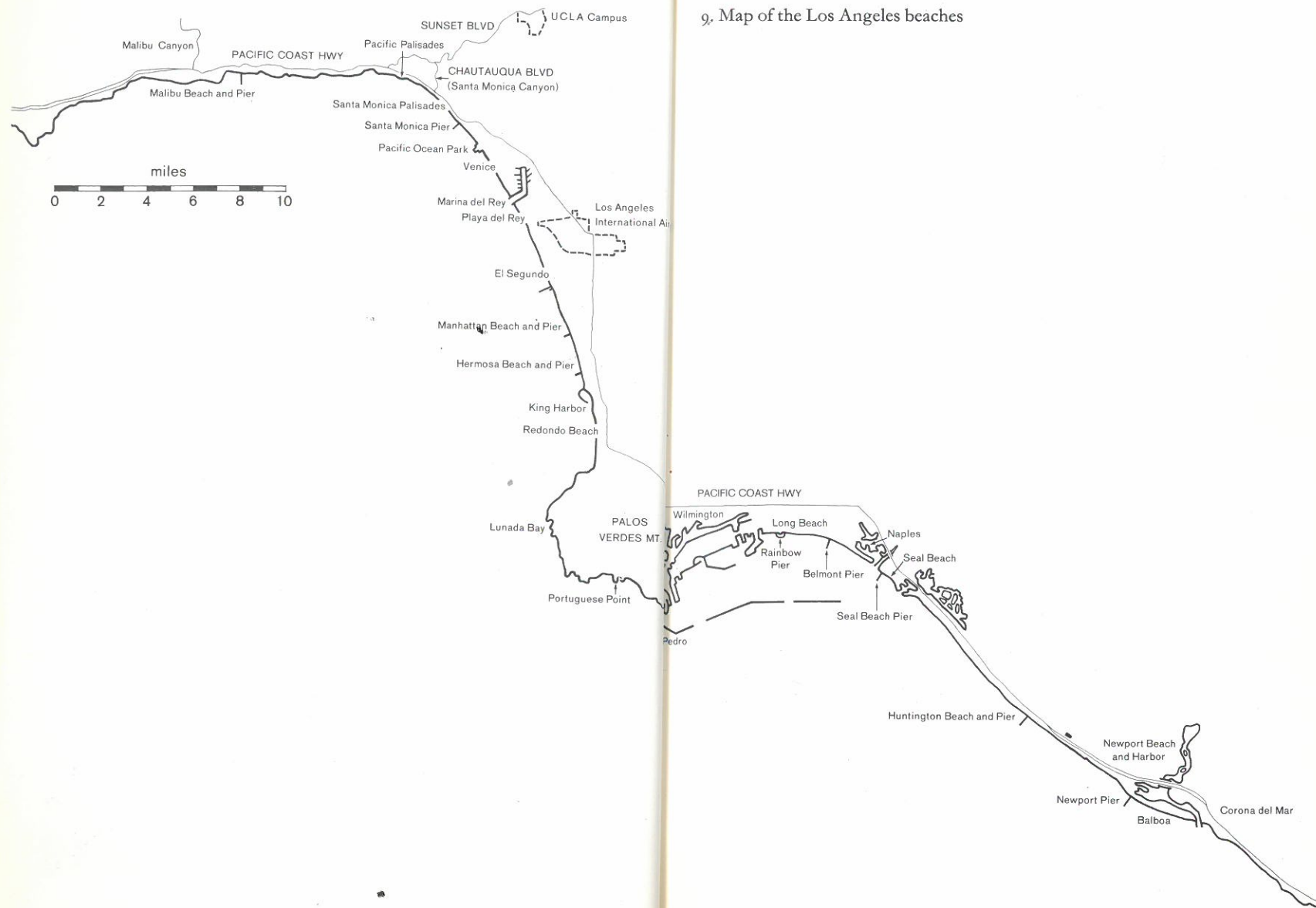
8a, b. Beach, houses and highway, Malibu



close contiguity that for miles there is no way to squeeze between them and get to the beach, which thus becomes a secluded communal backyard for the inhabitants. This situation is not absolute; there are sizeable inserts of public beach towards Santa Monica, but for miles through Malibu the houses make a continuous street-front behind which the sea is their private preserve [9].

Not only is this pattern opened up by public beaches towards Santa Monica, but human occupation in the landward side changes too, and





9. Map of the Los Angeles beaches



10. Santa Monica Canyon, c. 1870

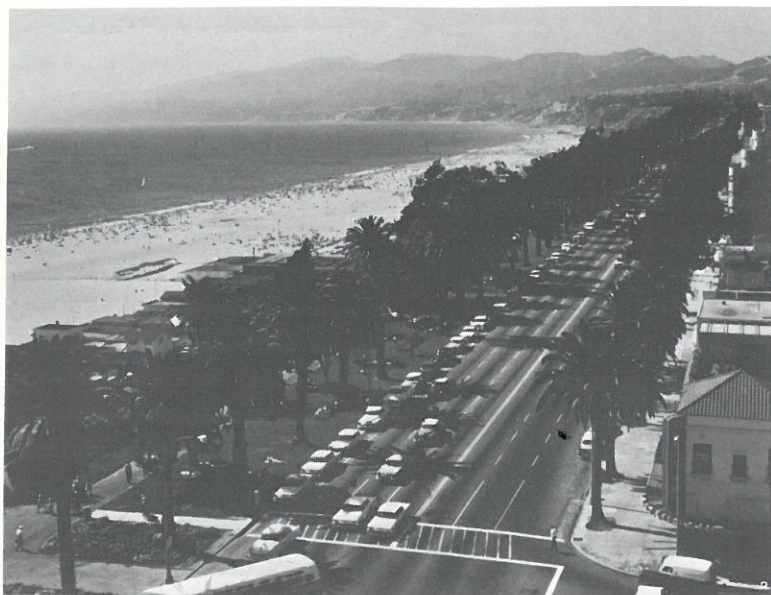
some major canyon roads come down to the coast highway. Geographically the most important of these is Chautauqua Boulevard, which not only provides a short-cut between Sunset Boulevard and the sea, but actually reaches the coast at the mouth of Santa Monica Canyon. Though it now has the relatively new and planned community of Pacific Palisades on the slopes behind it, the importance of Santa Monica Canyon [10] is that it is the point where Los Angeles first came to the Beaches. From the garden of Charles Eames's house in Pacific Palisades, one can look down on a collection of roofs and roads [11] that cover the old camp-site to which Angelenos started to come for long weekend picnics under canvas from the beginning of the 1870s. The journey from downtown could take two days, so it was not an excursion to be lightly undertaken, but there was soon enough traffic



11. Santa Monica Canyon from the garden of the Eames house

to justify a regular stage-run, and a semi-permanent big tent that served as a dance-hall and could sleep thirty people overnight. In the 1890s the long jetty of 'Port Los Angeles' took the railroad out to deep water hereabouts to unload coal, but the final establishment of Los Angeles' 'official' harbour at San Pedro, plus the discovery that steam locomotives could burn locally drilled oil, wiped out Santa Monica's last attempt to become a major port.

It was an earlier attempt to create such a port that really put Santa Monica in communication with inland Los Angeles. Within a few years of the discovery of the canyon mouth as a picnic beach, the railway had hit the shore at Santa Monica, but on the southern side of the flat-topped mesa on which most of the present Santa Monica stands. Along the top of the bluff where the mesa meets the sea is the



12. Santa Monica Palisades

splendid cliff-top park [12] of Santa Monica Palisades, and behind it there have always been high-class hotels as long as there has been a Santa Monica.

The most senior of the beach cities, 'San Mo' has probably the most distinctive civic atmosphere – though I would be hard put to define it – which can be sensed back inland almost as far as the UCLA campus. Partly it is the generous planning of the street-widths, partly it is the provision of a very good municipal bus service, but chiefly it is having been on the ground long enough to develop an independent personality. The railway that failed to make it a great port nevertheless got it started as a resort city well before most of the others were even a twinkle in a realtor's eye.

South along the beaches, the immediately succeeding cities are much less stylish. Venice, intended to be the most stylish of the lot, was overrun by oil drilling and is now a long uncertain strip of frame houses of varying ages, vacant lots, oil-pumps, and sad gravel scrub. It has the charm of decay, but this will almost certainly disappear in the redevelopments that must follow the creation of the Yacht Harbor inland behind Venice. South of the harbour's mouth (corresponding roughly to the outfall of the old Ballena creek) a low cliff rises in contrast to the flatness of Venice – another mesa, this time topped by Los Angeles International Airport.

And under the flight-path of the jet-liners as they take off to seawards lie the Beach Cities that, unlike old San Mo, correspond most nearly to the surfside way of Angeleno life: Playa del Rey, El Segundo, Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach [13], Redondo Beach. These canonical 'surfurbs' are largely the creation of coastwise inter-urban electric railways, whose rusting remains could still be found behind Hermosa Beach, with a crumbling terminus depot at Redondo, when I first began

13. Hermosa Beach



to explore the area. The true beach strip, up to four or five streets deep, lay between the tracks and the sand. The ground is often steep, with little cross-streets plunging sharply between the cottagey houses and small stucco-box stores to the concrete 'board-walk' that characterizes mile after mile of the true surfurbian shore.

This beachside walk is the true artery of the beach life. Closed to wheeled traffic, except public service vehicles such as police cars, life-guard trucks, and the little rubber-tyred trams that run along the

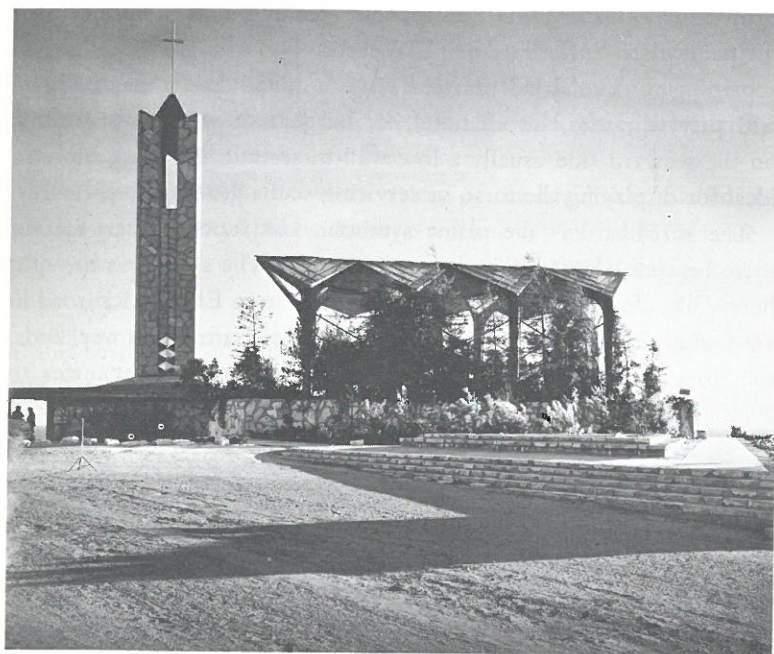
14. Surf-board art



equivalent walks in Santa Monica and Venice, this is the preserve of the pedestrian – including the pedal-cyclist who counts as a pedestrian according to normal US practice. On the inland side it may be lined with private houses, the odd hotel, hamburger bars or even restaurants; on the seaward side usually a low wall to restrain the sand, but also ideal for displaying the torso or servicing scuba gear and surf-boards.

The surf-board is the prime symbolic and functional artefact of these beaches where California surfing began. The sport was brought here – like almost everything else – by the Pacific Electric Railroad in 1907 when, in order to stimulate flagging passenger traffic at weekends, they brought George Freeth, the Hiberno-Hawaiian pioneer surfer, to Redondo Beach to give demonstrations of surf-riding. It remained a tough and restricted sport – largely because of the unwieldy massive wooden boards – until the middle 1950s, when the modern type of board made of plastic foam jacketed in fibreglass hit the surf, handier and effectively cheaper (because mass-produced) than the traditional board. What has happened since is – as they say – history, but few episodes of seaside history since the Viking invasions can have been so colourful. Leaning on the sea-wall or stuck in the sand like plastic megaliths, they concentrate practically the whole capacity of Los Angeles to create stylish decorative imagery [14], and to fix those images with all the panoply of modern visual and material techniques – and all, remember, in the service of the preferred local form of noble savage, pitting his nearly naked muscles and skilled reactions against the full force of the 'mighty hulking Pacific Ocean'.

Southward the run of surfing cities breaks with the irruption of the Palos Verdes mountain, a massive promontory crowned by exclusive residential suburbs and in parts thickly wooded with deliberately planted trees. Its coastline is spectacularly craggy, boasts a few famous beaches like Lunada, and a few very odd monuments, like Marineland of the Pacific, and Lloyd Wright's expressionistic, but very effective glass Wayfarer's Chapel [15], now so overgrown both without and

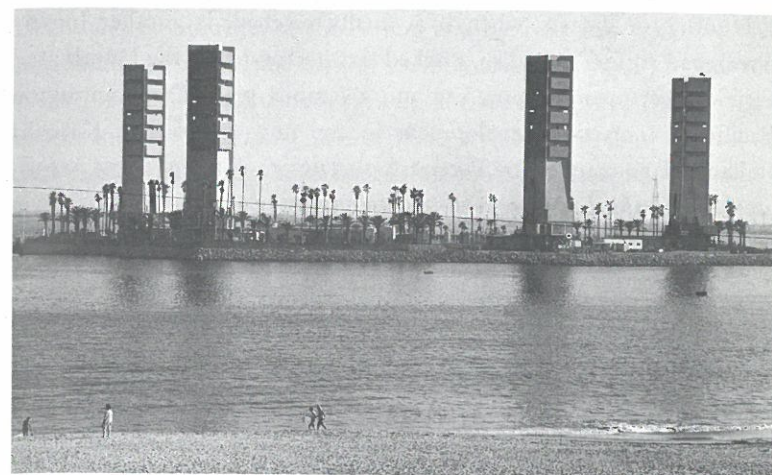


15. Wayfarer's Chapel, 1949, Lloyd Wright, architect

within that it is becoming more of a shrine to fecund nature than to the Swedenborgian rite. From the eastern face of Palos Verdes mountain one can look far across San Pedro and the wharves and basins of the harbour. Largely the invention of Phineas Banning in the early 1860s, the harbour twice nearly went to Santa Monica, but after some vicious infighting between railroad interests, the primacy of San Pedro/Wilmington was confirmed by a Federal Bill appropriating almost three million dollars for the construction of a major deep-water port there, and work began on the two-mile sea wall to protect it in 1899.

The other harbour city, on the other bank of the re-routed, tamed and channelled Los Angeles River, is Long Beach – again mostly a

creation of the Pacific Electric. For a mile or so east from the river mouth it has a rather solid, almost European-style sea front, though the off-shore oil-rigs, beautified with palm-trees and architectural camouflage [16], soon disabuse the visitor of any notion that he is not



16. Beautified oil-rigs off Long Beach

in Southern California. But further east, the normal kind of beachside development reappears and runs on to the end of the sand-spit that encloses Alamitos bay at the mouth of the San Gabriel River. Eastward and southward still lies the tidy municipality of Seal Beach, where they have recently torn up the rail tracks in the central reservation of Electric Avenue – a street name that reveals a common ancestry with most of the other beach cities.

Beyond this, the oil industry reasserts itself. Right down to Huntington Beach (named after the Pacific Electric's founder) new wells and abandoned wells, capped wells and wells straddled by nodding pumps, seem almost as numerous as human habitations and for one incredible

mile or so, the Pacific Coast Highway is lined with a double file of pumps standing shoulder to shoulder behind a token 'beautification' fence, their orange painted 'heads' nodding tirelessly and slowly, and always out of synchronization with one another, so that they seem like a herd of extra-terrestrial animals with inscrutable minds of their own.

Huntington Beach, when it is finally reached, is another loosely developed surfers' paradise, marked architecturally by the Huntington Pacific Apartment Community and a famous pier. The Huntington Pacific is a massive development in the now fashionable Kasbah/Italian-village manner (by Pereira Associates and Leland King Associates) with vaguely Mission-style detailing, perched on the shore over two decks of car-parking. It is a harmless enough piece of tame



17. Huntington Beach Pier

fantasy architecture, but it is literally perched *on the shore*, is surrounded by a wall and is guarded by a uniformed *cop*. If it heralds the subdivision of the shoreline (presumably as oil-leases fall in) into a series of fortified private segments, it is a sorry portent for surfurbia.

Huntington Beach Pier [17], on the other hand, is one of the constituent monuments of the surfing life, the best viewing point and outstanding hazard of the surfing championships, so well known that to ask for 'HBP' will usually find it. The reputations of the piers are understandably functional, rather than architectural, but the whole class of piers must be saluted here as the most characteristic structures in Surfurbia. The beaches are uncommonly well provided with public piers, whether commercially or municipally operated – Malibu, Santa

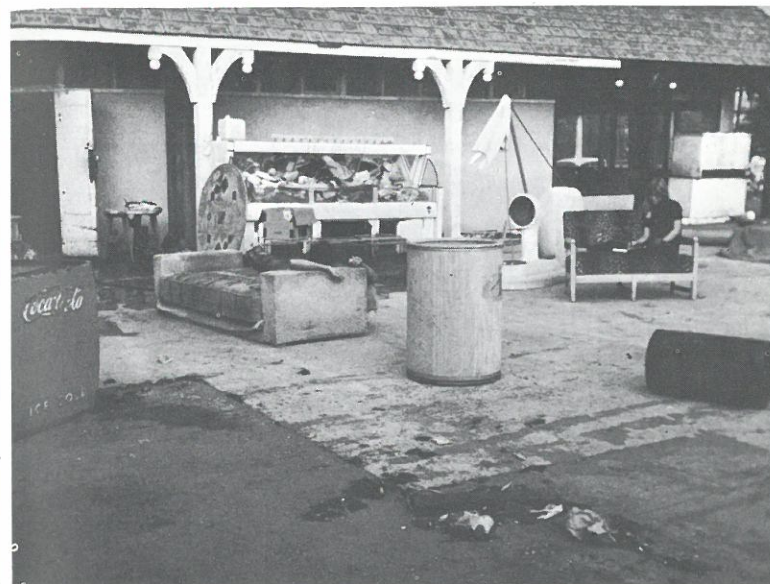


18. Santa Monica Pier

Monica, Pacific Ocean Park, Venice, Manhattan Beach, the elaborately loop-planned Redondo Pier, Long Beach municipal, Seal Beach, HBP itself, Newport, and Balboa. Some were built for commercial purposes and for fishing, most are simply resort facilities – Seal Beach pier was built by the Bayside Land Company when their piece of the Bolsa Chica rancho was subdivided, but by 1937 it was in such poor condition after the winter storms that it was rebuilt by the municipality, and the city engineer has his name on a bronze plate at the entrance.

But these southern municipal piers are rather simple in their functions. Santa Monica [18], by contrast, is rich and complex and blatantly commercial, a little Luna Park, complete with off-shore parking lots, shops, restaurants and a famous enclosed carousel with apartments for rent in its corner turrets, and Charlie Chaplin used to eat at a famous restaurant near the end of the pier in his early Hollywood days. My own preferred off-shore restaurant is on Redondo pier, which performs the unusual manoeuvre of going out to sea and looping back to the shore, and is currently being developed as a major beachside tourist shopping centre and a rather pleasant pedestrian precinct. And if anyone sought a major monument to the heartbreak that ends the Angeleno dream, there was always Pacific Ocean Park [19], a recent fantasy in stucco and every known style of architecture and human ecology (including a giant artificial rock at the seaward end), a magnificent set of rides and diversions, now demolished after years of bankruptcy . . .

But back to Huntington Beach and southward still; an unresolved area with a big motel, sparse development, then the finest of all the beachside electric generating stations, industrial architecture at its naked best – and for this there may be a good reason in the fact that the steel work was detailed for the Bechtel Corporation who built it, by ex-students of Mies van der Rohe's from Chicago. By day it is a monument in grey steel, by night a fantastic city of lights that can be seen for miles along the shore. Beyond this point, the ecology finally begins to resolve itself into the rich beachside suburbs of Newport Beach, Balboa,



19. Dereliction at Pacific Ocean Park

and Corona del Mar. Substantial houses and apartment blocks serving two-yacht families cluster tight around Newport Harbor; Schindler's Lovell house and other relatively modest residences look out across the Beach, and inland rise the low hills of the Irvine Ranch. This is the end of Surfurbia, marked by two basic facts: firstly that this was as far as the Pacific Electric Railway came along the shore, and if that were not final enough, the Irvine Ranch, undeveloped until less than a decade ago, and still not open to 'normal' subdivision, has always been the traditional barrier to the growth of Los Angeles in this direction. The topography changes as the Irvine lands rise above the flats of the Orange County shore, but more than this the style, the very atmosphere changes. As you cross the Pacific Coast Highway bridge between Newport and Corona del Mar, you know you are leaving Los Angeles.

3 Architecture I: Exotic Pioneers



20. The Lopez adobe, 1878

Modern architecture in Los Angeles started with the useful advantage that the difference between indoors and out was never as clearly defined there, nor as defensive, as it had been in Europe, or was forced to be in other parts of the USA. Traditions inherited from the Rancho period encouraged a tendency to 'speak in superlatives, to live out-of-doors, to tell tall tales, to deal in real estate, to believe what isn't true, to throw dignity out the window, to dress dramatically, and, last but not least, to tackle the impossible'. Lee Shippey's list of old California customs contains other items besides, but these seem to be curiously relevant to what has happened to architecture in Los Angeles, and the lack of distinction between indoors and out sums it up.

Early pictures of the pueblo, whether taken by hand or camera, agree in showing a settlement composed of flat-roofed single-storey adobe buildings with walled courtyards behind, and covered verandas (locally porches) in front, behind, or both, and surviving adobes of Southern California, though mostly equipped with an upper storey, continue this theme – the massive walls and small windows required for one sort of sun-protection are set off by open porches [20] to catch the breezes, as an alternative way of keeping down sun heat.

More recent developments have tended to play up the porches to the point where walls seem almost irrelevant, and concepts of front and back dissolve because there are no façades to attach them to; as Denise Scott-Brown is reputed to have said of the Architecture School at UCLA, 'It's a true Southern California building with five entrances, none of which is the main one'. This penetrability throws greater functional loading on the surrounding environment and its design – if any! In domestic work the planting and landscaping is apt to have to work hard in an environmental sense, whether it is screening the living areas from prying eyes or a tidal wave of freeway noise; in