

Building DTLA

An Architectural Tour with **WAYNE THOM**

Sunday, September 23, 2018
Downtown Los Angeles

ABOUT WAYNE THOM

- Wayne Thom is an internationally renowned architectural photographer famous for his shots of downtown L.A. skyscrapers.
- He has worked with preeminent architects including I. M. Pei, A. Quincy Jones, and William Pereira on thousands of projects over his five-decade career.
- He was born in Shanghai, grew up in Hong Kong, lived in Vancouver, and was educated in Southern California at Art Center and Brooks Institute.
- Thom is a fellow of the American Society of Photographers and was given a Modern Masters Award by L.A. Conservancy.

BUNKER HILL

Bunker Hill was undeveloped until 1867, when a French Canadian immigrant named Prudent Beaudry bought the land, created a system of pipes and pumps to get water to the summit, and built roads to connect the hill to the developed areas below. He then developed modest structures, followed by Queen Anne mansions, and by the 1890s, Bunker Hill was one of the most luxurious neighborhoods in L.A. (named after a Revolutionary War battle fought in Boston, and won by the British, 100 years before Beaudry named one of his new hilltop streets for it).

The Angels Flight funicular was built in 1901, and the early years of the twentieth century saw the construction of apartments and commercial buildings on Bunker Hill. Over the next few decades, as the growth of the streetcar system, the building of the 110 freeway, and the creation of new luxury neighborhoods in Pasadena and to the west inspired the original residents to leave the area, their large homes were divided up into multi-family dwellings. It was not long before Bunker Hill started to be denigrated as a “slum” and an impediment to the smooth flow of traffic to the new suburbs. Among Bunker Hill’s notable residents in this period was John Fante, author of the classic downtown L.A. novel *Ask the Dusk* (1939).

In 1948, the city of Los Angeles created the Community Redevelopment Agency and amassed data about crime and the structural safety of Bunker Hill buildings that would ultimately be used to justify the demolition of many residences and ultimately the destruction

BUNKER HILL IN THE MOVIES

Bunker Hill was a popular location for noir films of the 1940s and '50s, including *Kiss Me Deadly* and *M*. It was re-created in entirely different locations for the 1997 Oscar winner *L.A. Confidential* and the 2006 adaptation of John Fante's *Ask the Dust*.



The Bonaventure | Photo by Wayne Thom



Bank of America Plaza | Photo by Wayne Thom

of the neighborhood by the 1950s. Photos discovered later called into question the painting of the neighborhood as a “slum” by pro-development interests that stood to profit from the redevelopment of Bunker Hill.

New Bunker Hills were created in successive waves, focusing on modern, commercial buildings, which got higher as zoning laws changed to allow the construction of skyscrapers. In the last decade, downtown L.A. has had its latest transformation as the site of mixed-use development, where luxury residences and new commercial buildings are densely intertwined.

THE BONAVENTURE

Built: 1974–76

Architect: John C. Portman, Jr.

Points of interest:

- ⦿ The largest hotel in L.A.
- ⦿ The top floor has a revolving restaurant and bar
- ⦿ Considered an iconic example of postmodern architecture
- ⦿ You’ve probably seen it in a lot of films, including famous elevator scenes in *In the Line of Fire*, *True Lies*, and *Forget Paris*

BANK OF AMERICA PLAZA

Built: 1974

Architect: A. C. Martin and Associates

Points of interest:

- ⦿ One of the first high-rises on Bunker Hill
- ⦿ From 1974 until 1992, it bore the logo of Security Pacific Bank, one of its original tenants; Bank of America acquired Security Pacific in 1992, and its name has been on the building ever since
- ⦿ A sculpture by Alexander Calder stands in front of the main entrance
- ⦿ The landscaped plaza has more than 200 trees and three waterfalls

CITY NATIONAL PLAZA

Built: 1972

Architect: A. C. Martin and Associates

Points of interest:

- ⦿ Considered a textbook example of the Corporate International “glass box” style of architecture that emerged in the 1970s
- ⦿ On this site formerly stood the art deco Richfield Tower, headquarters of the Atlantic Richfield oil company (later ARCO), which was completed in 1929 and demolished in 1969
- ⦿ The current complex was built as the ARCO Plaza, and its two towers were the tallest twin towers in the world until the building of the World Trade Center in 1973
- ⦿ The buildings have gone through a series of ownership changes since 1986; the complex has been named City National Plaza since 2005
- ⦿ The plaza includes Herbert Bayer’s sculpture-fountain *Double Ascension*
- ⦿ The complex also includes an underground mall

WELLS FARGO CENTER

Built: 1980–83

Architect: Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill

Points of interest:

- ⦿ The two towers are joined by a three-story glass atrium designed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, who also designed the Bunker Hill steps
- ⦿ Known as the Crocker Tower until Crocker National Bank merged with Wells Fargo in 1986
- ⦿ Featured in the film *Blue Thunder* while still under construction: a helicopter flew through the unfinished top floor
- ⦿ The parallelogram-shaped bases are a twist on the Corporate International “glass box” design, and the color of the granite reflected a shift away from the black, gray, and silver that dominated early skyscraper design
- ⦿ Cultural critic Fredric Jameson offered it as an example of postmodern architecture’s “depthlessness”

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ⦿ What do you need to do differently when photographing a building versus a person? What techniques are useful for both?
- ⦿ What is the role of photography in documenting or understanding the history of a place?
- ⦿ What comes to your mind as you think about the layers of building on these sites and how the Bunker Hill area has changed and changed again over the decades?
- ⦿ How do you think decisions should be made about neighborhood changes? Who should be involved in decision-making?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT

- ⦿ On Bunker Hill
www.onbunkerhill.org
- ⦿ L.A. Conservancy Walking Tours
www.laconservancy.org
- ⦿ The Annenberg Space for Photography
www.annenbergphotospace.org

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

SUZANNE NORUSCHAT of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about today’s tour. They include materials on Wayne Thom, on architectural photography, and on the architectural and urban development of downtown L.A.’s Bunker Hill area.

BOOKS

- ⦿ Elwall, Robert. *Building with Light: The International History of Architectural Photography*. London: Merrell, 2004.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: TR659.E45 2004X
- ⦿ Hylen, Arnold. *Bunker Hill, a Los Angeles Landmark*. Los Angeles: Dawson’s Book Shop, 1976.
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: F869.L88 H9



Bank of America-Atlantic Richfield, Los Angeles | Photo by Wayne Thom



Well Fargo Bank, Los Angeles | Photo by Wayne Thom



Bank of America Data Center, Los Angeles | Photo by Wayne Thom

- Rice, Christina and Emma Roberts, eds. *Bunker Hill in the Rearview Mirror: The Rise, Fall, and Rise Again of an Urban Neighborhood*. Los Angeles: Photo Friends of the Los Angeles Public Library, 2015.
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: F869.L86 B863 2015
- Roseman, Curtis C., Ruth Wallach, Dace Taube, and Linda McCann. *The Historic Core of Los Angeles*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2004.
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: F869.L88 A27 2004
- Rattenbury, Kester, ed. *This is Not Architecture: Media Constructions*. London; New York: Routledge, 2002.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: NA2543.M37 T48 2002
- Schwarzer, Mitchell. *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: NA680 .S392 2004
- Shulman, Julius. *The Photography of Architecture and Design: Photographing Buildings, Interiors, and the Visual Arts*. New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: TR659 .S58 1977

ARTICLES

- Lubell, Sam. "Wayne Thom, the Master Photographer Who Teased Out Brutalism's Elegant Side." *Wired* (November 26, 2015).
- Mattens, Filip. "The Aesthetics of Space: Modern Architecture and Photography." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69, no. 1 (2011): 105-114.
- Stoller, Ezra. "Photography and the Language of Architecture." *Perspecta* 8 (1963): 43-45.

ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

View these materials online or in the Special Collections Reading Room on the second floor of Doheny Memorial Library. Advance notice is required for access to Special Collections materials; see the library's website for further information: libraries.usc.edu/locations/special-collections

- **Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project records**
Collection no. 0226, Regional History Collection
Special Collections, USC Libraries
archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/227
- **Wayne Thom Photographer Negatives, Photographs, and Other Material**
Collection no. 6105
Special Collections, USC Libraries
archives.usc.edu/repositories/3/resources/2387
- **Wayne Thom Photography Collection**
USC Digital Collections
digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15799coll41

OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

Mirrors and Mass: Wayne Thom's Southern California, online exhibition created by students in USC's School of Architecture course *The History of Modern Architecture in Southern California*, Spring 2018 (Professor: Emily Bills) scalar.usc.edu/works/wayne-thom/index

Wayne Thom Photographer: waynethom.com

