



Around 75 years ago, give or take a few years, something big happened in Sacramento. I know that because of the evidence left behind – all our first high rise buildings sprung up within a short span of years - which are now our most treasured buildings like the Elks building, the 926 J Building, and the California Fruit Exchange Building. With them came other icons like the Memorial Auditorium and the Public Market. Wow! Whatever took hold of our City in that era changed it forever, moving us from a small town to become a real City.

Fifty years from now, I predict that someone will be looking back on our own era as another transformational time in Sacramento. On the horizon are City shaping projects like the Railyards and Township 9, poised to boom when the next “up” economic cycle rolls around. Our descendants will look back and wonder at the dramatic changes that unfolded – and we, right now, are privileged to be right in the middle of this momentous era!

In my view, what happened some 75 years ago that changed our community so dramatically is beginning to happen today. I believe we are moving from a time of COMFORT, to a time that will be defined by PASSION. Our community has historically been reluctant to take risks –politically, in building design, and in thinking big or outside of the box. In times defined by PASSION, thinking boldly, thinking creatively, thinking that anything is possible and having the courage and drive to move toward dramatic visions will become *our way* of doing business.

Although the next year or three will be challenging as the economy goes through its normal cycle (we were, after all, overdue for a correction), this is a good time to look back on what we as a community and a profession have done in the boom we’ve just ridden. The last few years, in particular, have been a period when cities all over the country found their downtowns rediscovered as places to live and play – and the cores of many have come alive with housing booms. Here in Sacramento, we haven’t been stagnant by any means. Lofts are no longer something we have to drive hours to see, and along with dozens of hip new eateries and nightspots, there are parts of the downtown and midtown that have a real buzz. Most importantly, 1,600 new downtown residences are finally laying the foundation for a widespread walkable core.

Yet, when I take a few steps back and reflect on the past six years of housing growth in the downtown/midtown core, the facts are sobering – in this, our greatest downtown boom in nearly a century, we’ve produced housing equal to about 2 months of the production housing that has historically defined our region. While I’m thrilled that we now have options to the formerly unchallenged suburban living choices, I’m tempted to ask the question: why did we not get MORE done? From my cat bird seat on the DOC and its predecessor for the last decade, I think that as a community we spent much of this boom time doing housekeeping – cleaning up outdated ordinances, regulations, reforming

the City regulatory culture and infrastructure, and reshaping the way the business of building a city gets done. Of course, that housekeeping was all critically necessary. After all, when it began our City was ranked dead last as a place to develop, a “pit of hell as a place to work” was the phrase one prominent developer used.

Now, we’ve got tools such as the Matrix plan review process in place – a concept so innovative it is winning national attention and awards. However, many of the REALLY big projects, in the meantime, have been put on the shelf. There will be no SACAs towers in this cycle, no Liebeskind highrise. But the groundwork is being laid for even larger adventures, and this is the time to continue to prepare so we are ready for the next cycle. When it comes, we must be ready to really rock and roll. Passion will be the order of the day, and I predict that we will find the leadership and the visionaries whose passion will take this City to a whole new level.

So how can we as Architects and architectural advocates keep the fire going in the meantime? One of the key challenges, as I mentioned in my last column, is to redefine success. It has to mean more than “no complaints.” Revolution comes from either blowing up boxes, or a slower but more deliberate process of education and collaboration. The latter is the ticket. The AIACV can play a critical role in educating our City leaders, our commissions, and the public on why design matters and how contextual design can go beyond “mimic, replicate and emulate” to embrace the bolder and more inspirational concepts of *reinterpretation* and *contrast* (to cite just two specific examples). If you would like to be part of the revolution, you can assist us by contributing some measure of your time and energy and help with this education.

When our City adopted the goal of becoming “The most Livable City in America,” it seemed so ambitious as to feel a bit awkward, even silly as a slogan. That’s because in times defined by comfort, to push far out of the box does seem awkward and uncomfortable. In times defined by passion, we as a profession will be pushing the envelope daily. Join me in moving in that direction. At the recent retreat I hosted for our Board of Directors, we identified three core areas where we need membership leadership and participation. They are:

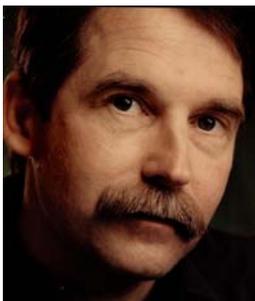
Connection (how we engage the membership and the community at large)

Growth/Sustain (how we sustain as an organization), and

Policy (how we lay a path toward a shared vision for our future)

Pick one, and let me or [Don Comstock, FAIA](#) know your preference via email or phone.

If you’re not in the room, you’re not in the deal!



Comments? Drop me an email: <mailto:mfm@appliedart.net>