



MODELS

Built according to a new design, the Linda Vista shopping center provided the most coherent resolution to date of the mall as the central component of a commercial facility. Unlike the initial scheme, this one had no defined front or main entrance in any traditional sense (figure 209). The perimeter was occupied almost entirely by parking. Street elevations were treated in a matter-of-fact way to accommodate deliveries and other utilitarian functions. Perceptually, the dominant image was not a facade but a three-dimensional play of mass and void: a broad green defined by four buildings, each different in size and shape, and a canopied walk connecting them (figure 210). Wide separations between the buildings extended as walkways to the street, establishing clear ties from the approaches to the core. But the mall that occupied that core was the paramount feature, creating the sensation of a neighborhood park around which retail services were grouped. Grass, trees, and benches invited relaxation and play (figure 211). Here, wrote Whitney Smith, the Pasadena architect who designed the complex, “instead of garish store fronts and a raucous discord of signs there are the order and peace of an early village green.” Here, cooed the *Forum’s* editors, was “the full-dress presentation” of the idea they had advanced for planting grass on Main Street.⁴⁶

At the same time, the stores were unmistakably commercial in character, employing a minimalist vocabulary and curvilinear forms, dramatically lit at night (figure 212). The design also capitalized on wartime building materials restrictions to exude some of the studied casualness of the Farmers Market and its progeny.⁴⁷ Like the Farmers Market, too, and like Olvera Street and shopping courts in the region, the mall was a world in itself that seemed quite removed from the twentieth-century metropolis.

The configuration of Linda Vista was justified primarily on practical grounds. A full block could be utilized to advantage; no store had a better position than another; shoppers would see all parts equally well; perambulation would be encouraged; children were safe, completely removed from vehicular traffic. Such concerns were credited with leading to a solution where civic values predominated, a solution that could improve living patterns by retrieving the ostensibly better conditions that existed before the automobile filled the streets and indeed before speculation and the drive for profit shaped communities nationwide. Smith made clear his intention of designing Linda Vista as a model for postwar development, including the rehabilitation of existing districts. Good planning was requisite. The large, undivided block of land provided the matrix for turning conventional, street-oriented development “inside out.” Otherwise,

you [will] have . . . the evils of Main Street all over again. Streets too narrow. Trucks, buses, autos, and hopping pedestrians sharing the space. Stop lights choking the streets with thru traffic. No parking space for shoppers. Buildings fighting each other for light and air and attention. Business slowly mushrooming out into the residential area—shops here and there, filling stations, funeral parlors. The old story—blight, congestion, ugliness.⁴⁸

The tenants had mixed feelings about the Linda Vista center. Some still regretted not having a streetfront store; others found the layout

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Linda Vista Shopping Center, general view. Photo Maynard Parker, 1944. (Architectural Drawing Collection, University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara.)

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Linda Vista Shopping Center. Photo Maynard Parker, 1944. (Architectural Drawing Collection, University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara.)

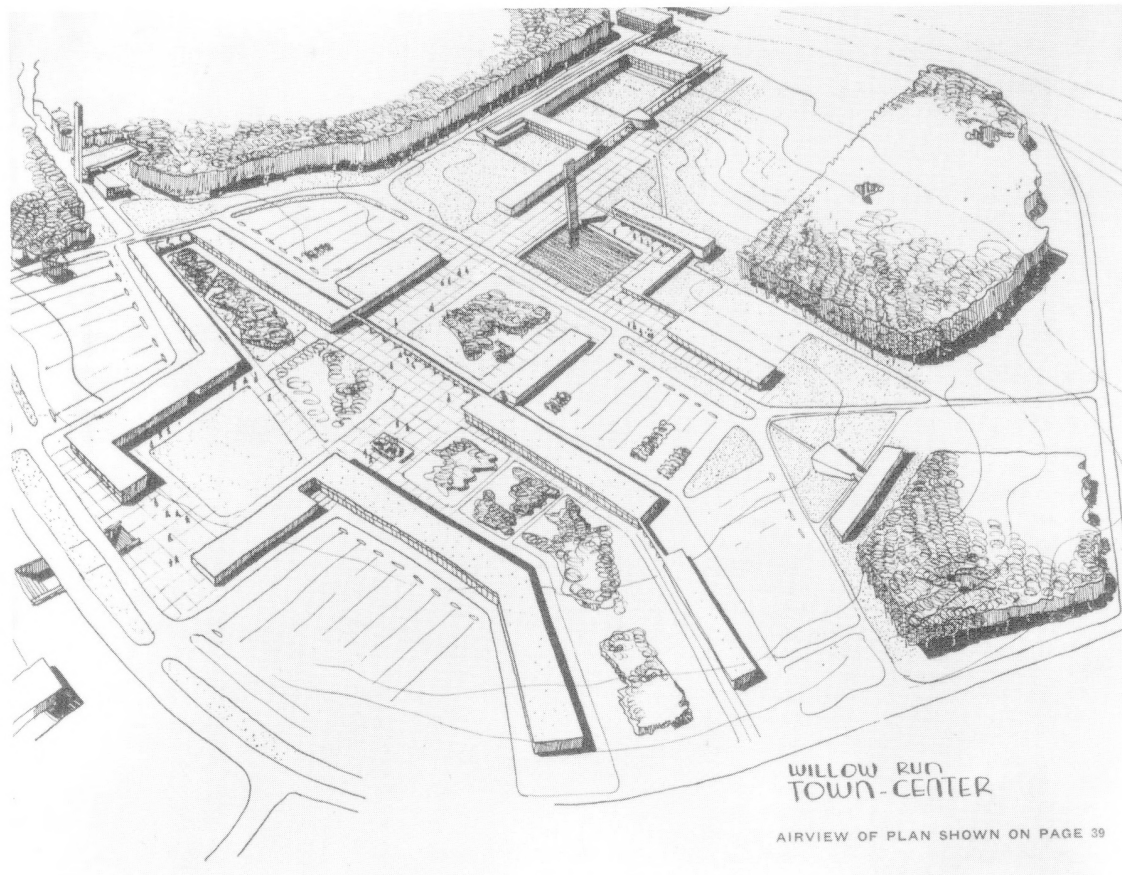


advantageous. Customers were pleased. Within a few years, however, parking needs began to change the situation. The center had only 216 spaces, far fewer than the standard for a complex of its size (82,000 square feet of store area) during the postwar era. Vacant lots set aside for expansion became supplementary parking areas, but they were not as convenient. Merchants began to clamor for converting the mall into space for cars. Among these priorities, the garden was no match for the machine.⁴⁹

Most of the wartime shopping centers were modest in scale, designed to address the immediate needs of families in defense housing projects that lay beyond the easy reach of existing retail outlets. The complex proposed for Willow Run was a notable exception. Although it never advanced beyond the schematic stage, the design was among the most important examples of its kind for the regional malls planned in Los Angeles and other U.S. cities during the immediate postwar years.

Lying some twenty-five miles west of downtown Detroit, next to the bomber plant bearing the same name, the Willow Run development was to have been twice as large (6,000 dwelling units) as Linda Vista and to stand in a rural area, much like Greenbelt. Like Greenbelt, too, Willow Run was conceived as “a model American community,” establishing “the level on which planners, builders, realtors and investors will have to compete in the postwar period.”⁵⁰ Five “neighborhood units,” each with a school and shopping facilities, were sited in an arc with the “town center” at the fulcrum. Designed by Eero Saarinen while in his father’s office, this core group was to include all the features expected in a fully developed community.⁵¹ Municipal agencies, a post office, fire and police station,





high school, and a utilities building rested at one end of the complex, a hotel at the other. In between lay a sizable shopping precinct, with a cruciform mall unifying the ensemble (figure 213).

Three aspects of the Willow Run plan made it an important precursor to the regional mall. First, the scheme demonstrated how a large retail complex with an inward focus could possess a clear, logical order that was not derived from a standard street plan or indeed any form of vehicular circulation system. Here it was the arrangement of the buildings and the open spaces serving them that dictated the layout of roads. A major route ran through the complex, separating the hotel from the retail area, but that path seemed of little consequence visually to the ensemble except as a means of vehicular access. Smaller roads extending around other parts of the perimeter were treated precisely for what they were: service routes, subordinate to, not determinants of, the building configuration. The most coherent aspects of the scheme lay within the core.

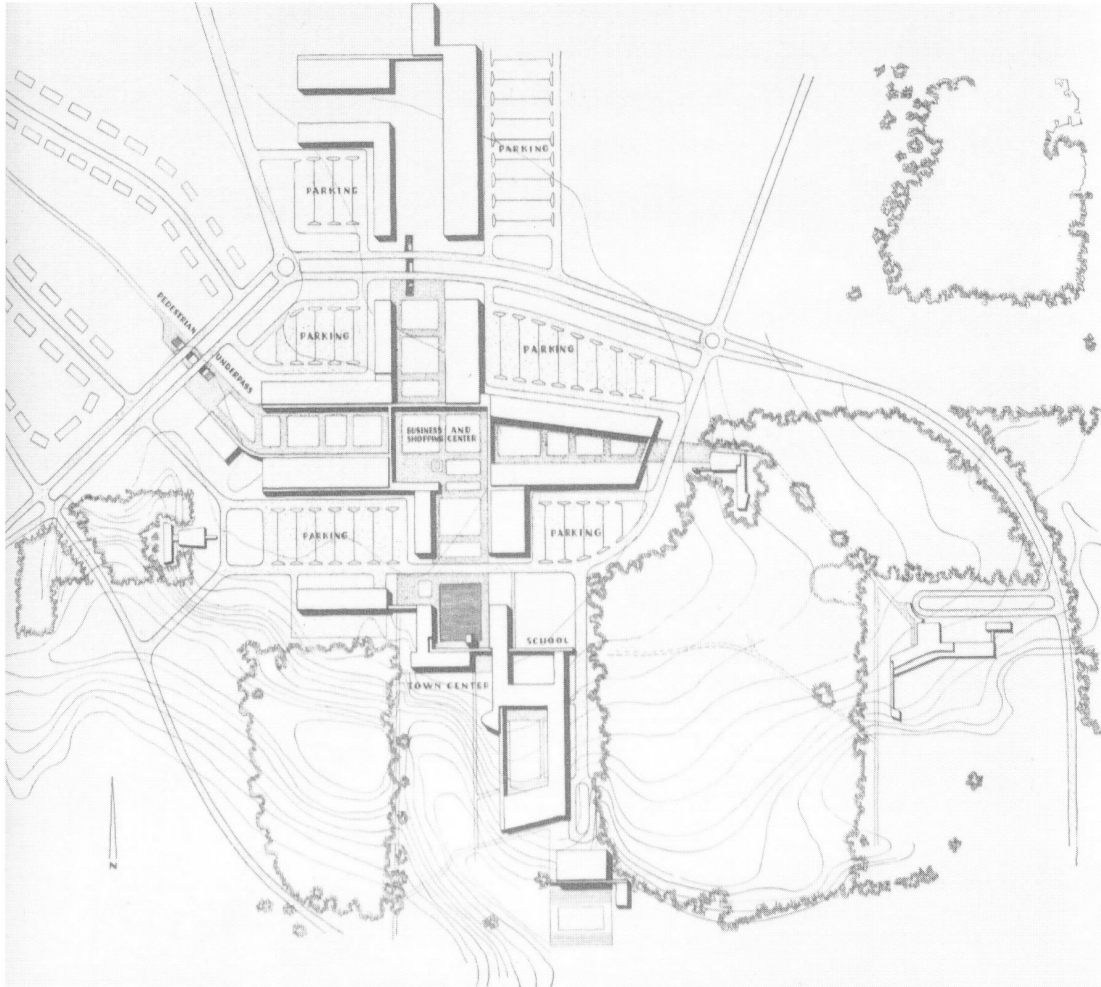
The second key feature was the mall's modified cruciform plan, which showed how open space could unify stores on a large scale, giving the complex a sense of centrality and avoiding a long, linear progression (figure 214). As a diagram, the scheme was multidirectional and open-ended rather than a hollow square as at Linda Vista. Finally, the design resolved the matter of peripheral parking for a complex of its size. With a car lot embraced by each L-shaped building, the distance between parked

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Linda Vista Shopping Center. Photo Maynard Parker, 1944. (Architectural Drawing Collection, University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara.)

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Community center, Willow Run, Michigan, 1942. Saarinen, Swanson & Saarinen, architects; project. Aerial view. (*Architectural Forum*, March 1943, 37.)



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Community Center, Willow Run. Site plan. (*Architectural Forum*, March 1943, 39.)

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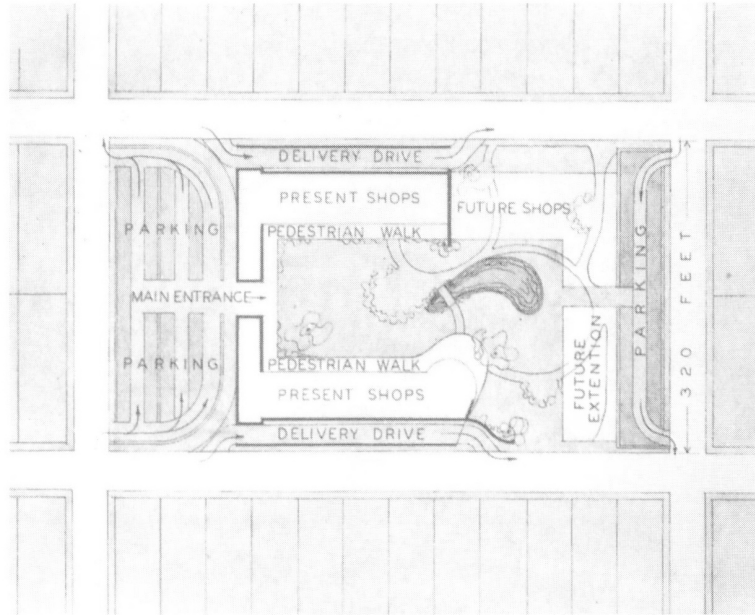
Urban redevelopment plan for South Central district, City Planning Department, City of Los Angeles, 1943 (*Accomplishments* 1943, n.p.)

automobiles and the mall entrance was kept relatively short. Though still modest by postwar standards, a far greater percentage of space was devoted to the automobile here than at Linda Vista. Parking was no longer treated like a regrettable necessity, but rather as a key component of the plan.

Willow Run remained a preliminary design, yet it had considerable impact and was cited in texts on shopping center design over the next decade. Morris Ketchum, who would soon emerge as a leader in the creation of the regional mall, considered Willow Run a benchmark and incorporated a number of its aspects into his own work. After the war, too, Victor Gruen used the scheme as a point of departure for his first regional mall proposal, situated in Los Angeles.⁵²

Willow Run was at once a catalyst and a symptom. The degree to which its characteristics embodied reform ideas that were becoming canon is evident in a plan prepared by the Los Angeles City Planning Department within months of the Michigan project's publication. Proposed to regenerate a deteriorated area just south of downtown, the design eliminated virtually all traces of the existing urban matrix to enable full presentation of contemporary planning practices (figure 215). Within each superblock, housing was clustered around parklike open spaces, two of





which contained community centers, comprised of elementary schools and stores. These neighborhood shopping facilities also served as a buffer between the expansive pedestrian areas and the off-street parking that served them. In a project designed less than three years after the Westchester model, both the arrangement and the thinking behind it could not have been less similar. Main Street had vanished.

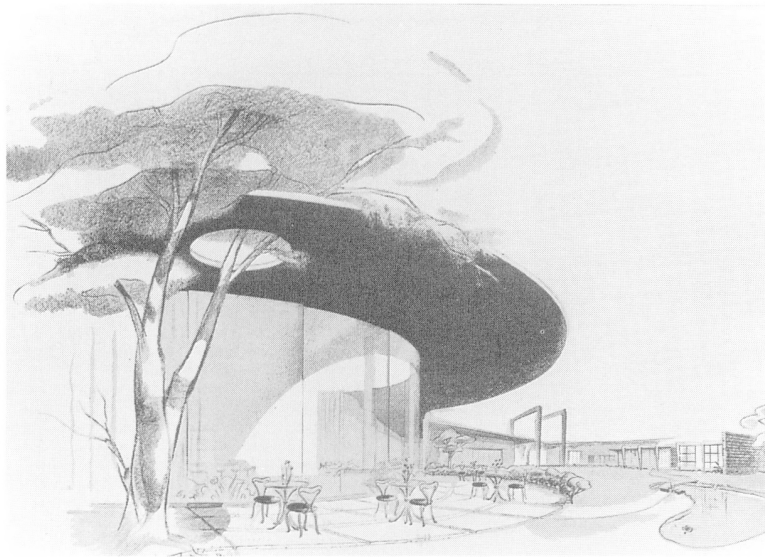
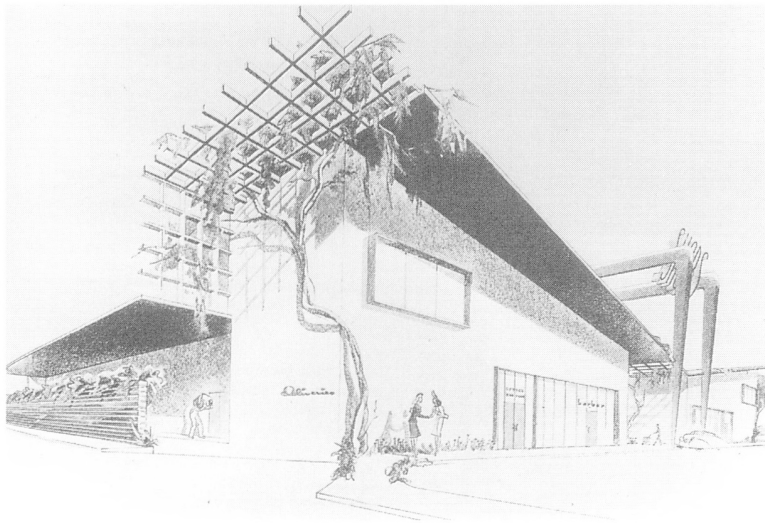
An approach more suggestive of reconciliation was advanced concurrently as a model neighborhood shopping center in the *Forum's* Syracuse plan. The editor's choice of Victor Gruen, now based in Los Angeles, to design this component was propitious. Gruen had a national reputation as a retailer's architect, whose work to date had been for specialty stores with a streetfront orientation. The fact that Gruen was now willing to embrace an "inside out" approach, positing the mall as a harbinger of future work, suggests a view predicated on commercial as well as aesthetic and social concerns. It was also an important initiation for Gruen into a new realm of retail planning, for which he would later become a prominent advocate.⁵³

Diagrammatically, the layout of Gruen's complex was similar to that of Linda Vista, with all stores turned away from the street and opening onto a landscaped mall (figure 216). Parking and deliveries were peripheral, here with the car lots placed at either end, the stores serviced along the sides. On the other hand, the normative urban context of the orthogonal grid was accepted, implying at least a concern for applicability to what still constituted the vast majority of potential sites. Gruen noted that "larger centers could be built on the same principle, covering several blocks," adding that "automobile traffic could be diverted around such centers or if necessary, under them."⁵⁴

Gruen also implied that such a center should be isolated, surrounded entirely by residences, since it would provide "all [the] necessities

of day-to-day living.” Thus, like Linda Vista, the scheme was treated as a self-contained island, but one oriented entirely to the motorist. No aspect was conducive to patrons walking to the premises. Furthermore, the design possessed a distinct front, separated from the street by the car lot yet asserting its presence through Gruen’s rambunctious use of large-scale forms (figure 217). Though both the mass and the vocabulary were different, the effect was much the same as at some of the exuberant drive-in restaurants erected in southern California during the previous few years. This motorist-oriented facade would have been the more prominent by virtue of its contrast with the unadorned sides where the deliveryways were screened by freestanding walls.

The commercial character of the design was further evident in its plan. Sizable areas were allocated for a market, drug store, and variety store, reflecting a concern for attracting chain companies as anchor tenants. Unlike at Linda Vista or many other planned centers, Gruen drew



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Shopping Center for 194X, Syracuse, New York, hypothetical design, 1943, Gruenbaum & Krummeck, architects. Site plan. (*Architectural Forum*, May 1943, 101.)

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Shopping Center for 194X, entrance front. (*Architectural Forum*, May 1943, 103.)

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Shopping Center for 194X, general view from mall. (*Architectural Forum*, May 1943, 101.)

from Los Angeles's commercial vernacular: storefronts here would be individualized and the market would have an open front facing the mall, just as others of its kind in southern California opened to the street. As a controlling device, however, a wide canopy and evenly placed structural piers were conceived to unify the ensemble. Such treatment, combined with the prominence given to open space, would create an effect quite different from the accretive one common to recent arterial development in Los Angeles (figure 218). Gruen struck a balance between the identity of each store and of the complex as a whole that would become the norm for regional malls after 1950. He also matched his interest in an architecture calculated to stimulate purchases with broader objectives. From its landscaped centerpiece, the scheme imparted the feeling of a tropical resort as much as a place for buying everyday goods. A "community center," which included an assembly room, lounge, library, and post office, was an integral part of the plan. A circular restaurant opening onto an outdoor terrace lay on the opposite side. Provision was also made for doctors' and dentists' offices. Although Gruen was yet to champion commercial architecture as an instrument of fundamental change in living patterns, he now shared the housing reformers' commitment to making the retail center a magnet of communal activities—a place where purchasing goods would be "a pleasure, recreation instead of a chore."

The essential groundwork was laid for the shopping mall before the end of World War II, with a new generation of architects advocating "inside out" retail facilities. "Grass on Main Street" became a reality, albeit a tentative one. Most of the advances remained on paper. Southern California had the premier realized example at Linda Vista, yet the complex's immediate impact on the urban landscape was virtually nil. In sharp contrast to a Westwood or a Farmers Market, few members of the general public were even aware of its existence. The business community remained unimpressed. Some years elapsed before the shopping mall gained acceptance among retail and real estate interests. The drawbacks to less radical programs such as those developed at the Crenshaw Center, Westchester, and Valley Plaza had to become clear before the shift became decisive.

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XI

NO AUTOMOBILE EVER BOUGHT A THING

The regional shopping mall was the most important means by which fully integrated management and merchandising techniques became institutionalized in retail development. The form of the mall alone rendered multiple ownership impractical. With stores oriented to one another as part of a contained, inward-looking landscape, the placement of each unit in relation to the others so as to encourage perambulation throughout became even more crucial than it was for shopping centers oriented to the street or car lot. Once cast in bricks and mortar, a mall left little room for correcting errors in judgment save through costly modifications. The layout also reinforced customer perceptions of the center as a single entity and therefore intensified the need for careful coordination among tenants.

Likewise, retailers had to be satisfied with the mix and be willing to work as a group. The fragmented merchandising and management structures as well as piecemeal planning that resulted from multiple ownership made little sense under the circumstances.

In its physical characteristics, the regional mall broke even more abruptly from normative practices. These huge centers were perceptually disconnected from the street, creating their own environments instead. Buildings were set back and generally lacked a strong distinguishing presence from the arteries that served them. Signs and enormous expanses of parking area were more prominent than architecture as identifying characteristics from the public realm.¹ Aerial views were the only ones from