

# 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.<sup>1</sup> Aerial views were the only ones from

which the complex was readily comprehensible as a whole. The mall space itself was, of course, the most important part of the ensemble experienced by customers. While this precinct was frequently characterized as a street without vehicles and numerous analogies continued to be made to the marketplaces of preindustrial settlements, the new complexes seemed different from any setting familiar to their clientele. Not only was the design vocabulary derived from a nonreferential modernism, but the ambience bespoke a degree of control uncommon to retail areas, suggesting more an institution than a magnet for commerce. Cars were absent, but so were things that once had jammed trading centers: animals, carts, wagons, street vendors, and many forms of unorganized activity. Like a college campus, the mall exuded neatness, order, and perhaps some of the trappings of a park.

The automobile figured more decisively in determining the size, configuration, and the placement of each store in the regional mall than with any other form of retail development. Easy access to the buildings from every part of the car lot became as important a concern as providing adequate space for cars themselves. Never before had the design of parking been so complicated or so significant a component of site planning. Public streets dividing the car lot were considered as detrimental as those dividing store groups; thus an internal system of vehicular routes was needed so that motorists could move through the huge area with ease. Determining the most effective connections between this private network and adjacent streets also posed problems in traffic management. The site plan carried all the challenges of a small city center, while being premised on conditions that had little precedent in realized work of any sort.

The level of attention paid to vehicles was matched by a concern for separating them from the shopping environment to a degree that was even more pronounced than in early malls. The objective was to divorce customers from their automobiles as quickly as possible by making the pedestrian retail precinct a world unto itself. Dominated by stores and displays, with no perceptual ties to the outside world, the setting was analogous to those created in the shopping courts or at the Farmers Market in Los Angeles. Victor Gruen became one of the most outspoken advocates of this dichotomy, arguing that while the demands imposed by the car were of great importance in planning retail developments, the needs of people remained paramount. It was a mistake to suppose that the two were synonymous. By 1960, he could draw from two decades of practice in southern California and a dozen years of experience in regional mall design to observe: "As the retailer-automobile honeymoon comes to an end, the retailer slowly realizes that his love has been misdirected. His true love belonged not to the automobile, but to the female customer in it. No automobile—not even the elegant Cadillac—ever bought a thing."<sup>2</sup> The car could pose significant problems in new retail precincts just as it could in older areas developed prior to widespread automobile use. The regional mall must embody a rethinking of the problem rather than be a refinement of existing models. Malls were appearing coast to coast by the time

Gruen's remarks were published; however, those who created them were still learning how profound a change their endeavors represented.

Just as with prototypical examples, the emergence of the regional mall was a national phenomenon. During the type's formative years, from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, key examples were designed for numerous metropolitan areas, including Boston, New York, Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, Seattle, and San Francisco as well as Los Angeles. While no one place became the clearly recognized pacesetter, assuming a central role comparable to that still maintained by New York and Chicago in the design of tall commercial buildings, southern California's contribution was among the most significant. Between 1948 and 1950 alone, at least a half-dozen regional mall schemes were proposed for the Los Angeles area. Collectively, they reveal the experimental nature of thinking at the outset. The gestation period was relatively short. In 1950, construction began on Lakewood Center, one of the earliest examples to be realized in the United States, which at once reflected tendencies elsewhere and helped define many of those found in the unusually large number of regional malls erected locally over the next decade. Los Angeles affords abundant evidence with which to analyze the type during the complicated period of its early development. At the same time, the region was no longer the uncontested leader in innovation, as it had been with many other forms of retail decentralization during the 1920s and 1930s or even with the creation of regional centers immediately after World War II. The metropolitan characteristics that had once made Los Angeles conspicuously different from other cities were rapidly becoming national ones. Furthermore, a basic conservatism, evident in some aspects of the city's development for decades, may have precluded any party from taking a more adventurous, higher-risk approach at this pivotal juncture.

## E M E R G E N C E

The first regional shopping center to employ a mall plan in the United States was designed in 1947; the first to be built was begun the following year and opened in 1950. Half a decade later, the type was viewed by the business world as well as by many planners and architects as the preeminent form of retail facility for major metropolitan areas. The transformation from a reformer's ideal to a major thrust in commercial development was remarkably swift. Compelling reasons had to exist for such a venture, with the risks it entailed, to be undertaken by numerous parties in so short a period.

The major impetus for the regional mall's ascendancy stemmed from shifts in the practices of department store companies. By the early 1950s, many department store executives believed that branches built independent of other outlets no longer constituted a sound strategy for expansion. Instead of alleviating the problems that plagued downtown locations, this type of facility could duplicate them. A large store attracted other mer-

chants, which, in turn, could thwart expansion and overburden parking facilities. Stores of lesser caliber could undermine the appeal of the precinct. Even when such problems did not arise, street congestion almost always did.<sup>3</sup> The department store was powerless to affect the course of events unless it controlled, directly or otherwise, all of the land in question. Chain and other specialty store competition could be held in check, perhaps even turned to advantage, by the department store company's selecting only those best suited to complement its emporium.

The incentive to develop a regional center was heightened by the market demand for big facilities. Stores of 200,000 square feet or more, containing a full set of product lines found in the downtown facility, became standard in the 1950s. Increased size not only raised the level of investment but intensified the complexities of site selection and planning. Both factors made the inclusion of additional outlets more feasible and appealing. The Broadway-Crenshaw Center provided an important lesson in this respect, underscoring the difficulties created by parasite stores no less than the advantages of having a large, integrated complex where the parent company exercised control over tenancy, parking, and vehicular movement on the premises.

By the mid-1950s, a number of department store companies had followed the Broadway's example by initiating regional shopping centers. In other cases, where a real estate developer took the lead, the department store still played a key role in shaping the form and character of the project.<sup>4</sup> The size and scope of shopping center development had a direct bearing on configuration. Layouts satisfactory for neighborhood and community centers were far less desirable at the regional scale. The Broadway-Crenshaw Center revealed the shortcomings of a linear form: irrespective of where the department store was situated, greater distance from it meant greater disadvantage for the establishment occupying that spot. One developer spoke on the subject with an animosity that suggested he knew from experience: "these 'miracle strips' seemed to have been planned with malice afterthought [sic], and the only miracle seems to be that some of them have made money."<sup>5</sup>

A single file of stores also posed problems in relation to the car lot, irrespective of whether parking lay at the rear or in front. Long walks from peripheral parking spaces to the stores, as at the Broadway-Crenshaw Center, could discourage customers at peak shopping periods. At the same time, a long range of buildings, as at Valley Plaza, was not conducive to perambulation. Customers tended to seek a parking place close to their primary destination and either park anew near other stores or leave. The desire for proximity between parking and store remained a fundamental one among shoppers, and was the most thwarted precisely at times of heavy patronage, upon which merchants depended for profitable returns.<sup>6</sup>

The mall proved its worth by resolving problems basic to shopping center design on a large scale. The inward-looking orientation encouraged movement throughout the premises. Once divorced from their cars and walking amid what seemed like an entirely different world, cus-

tomers tended to spend greater blocks of time meandering, meeting friends, having meals, and buying goods. Patrons also were inclined to think of the complex as a whole rather than just of the one or two stores frequented on a given trip. Perambulation was further stimulated by a seeming compactness. With stores on either side of the pedestrian way, the frontage of a single-file plan could be accommodated in half the linear distance. Additional frontage was available along the access paths between the car lot and the mall proper, which proved especially good for the small outlets earlier attracted to arcades and shopping courts. Perceptually, the ends of a mall were more like portals than marginal tails. The configuration enabled all locations to be more or less equally desirable for some kind of store, recapturing the balance devised by J. C. Nichols at the Country Club Plaza.<sup>7</sup>

The mall also addressed vehicular problems more effectively than other shopping center arrangements. With a generally even distribution of parking spaces around the complex, the distance from the extremities of the lot to the stores was kept to a minimum. Thousands of cars could be held in a circumferential lot while retaining a maximum walking distance of 300 feet—soon the industry standard. The mall further helped to resolve the long-troublesome matter of separating deliveries from customers. The delivery tunnel devised for the Broadway-Crenshaw Center was an ideal solution save in the cost to small stores. The mall plan allowed the tunnel to be employed more efficiently because at least twice as many outlets could be reached with the same length. The arrangement also enabled a number of stores to tie into a single subterranean connection. Only the largest emporia had their own link. With these adjustments, the delivery tunnel became a standard feature of the regional mall, bringing with it the added advantage of eliminating exterior service areas.

The mall's configuration helped the retailer's basic goal of broadening customer draw in outlying areas. The range of goods, easy access, and convenient parking all contributed to more families shopping together and also more males shopping alone than was typical in downtown shopping districts. This tendency both encouraged and was encouraged by the longer operating hours made possible by the comparatively low operating costs in outlying areas. As a result, evenings and weekends became important trading periods in a way they had never previously been. At the same time, during traditional shopping periods the mall seemed a more private, predominantly female world, absent the many components of the male workforce—from corporate executives to errand boys—found in the city center. The inward-looking orientation of the mall enhanced the reputation of these complexes as destinations. An editor of *Printer's Ink*, a leading organ for advertisers, described her experience at a pioneer mall as being “just as much fun” as visiting a world's fair: “The thing that impressed me the most was the carnival air that pervades the whole place—and opens pocket books! The shoppers are . . . relaxed, thoroughly enjoying themselves.” The mall truly seemed to represent “the future today.”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, proponents believed that malls would discourage, perhaps even prevent, competing retail development nearby because of the large tracts of land they required well beyond established business districts. Many early examples occupied between forty and eighty acres; in some cases, one hundred. The inward-looking focus of the mall would further this objective.<sup>9</sup> As the department store company could “control” its competitors from within, so it could “control” the impact of others through exclusion. Proponents believed the size of a regional mall could extend its power no less than its customer draw over a large geographic radius. Creating a location, pioneered by the lone-wolf department store during the 1920s, was thus merged with the reform concept of contained shopping nodes. But the mall stood in isolation for economic reasons, not out of aesthetic, social, or other planning concerns. Containment was now a strategic business tool, not a protection device for the nearby homeowner. The underlying reason why the mall gained favor in the retail world so quickly, then, was that it proved to be a more effective, predictable means of generating high revenues in retailing than other large-scale methods available at that time.

## S T E I N

Realizing the benefits of a mall plan and understanding how it might be best configured were not insights gained easily. After World War II, many questions remained, even among proponents of the mall, as to its optimal size and form. In 1946, no one thought of complexes that approached the dimensions of those developed only a few years later. Preferences varied widely as to the arrangement of open space and stores: should the mall space be narrow or wide, mostly paved or landscaped, evocative of a street, a plaza, or a village green; should movement be linear or circuitous; should retail units face one large open area or a sequence of smaller ones? Fewer possibilities were entertained in the layout of parking, which was almost always circumferential; however, different approaches were taken in trying to relate the pedestrian way to the car lot.

Designs advanced up through 1950 represent an assemblage of singular examples, encompassing a broad range of characteristics with no clear overall pattern. In advancing new ideas, architects and planners played a central role, serving as advocates as well as designers. Southern California was one of the most important staging grounds for this experimentation, harboring more schemes than other metropolitan areas owing to its great size, continued fast pace of growth, economic strength, and low-density patterns of development. None of these projects was realized, but they stand as key documents of the transition between the modest undertakings of previous years and the emergence of the type into the forefront of retail development nationwide.

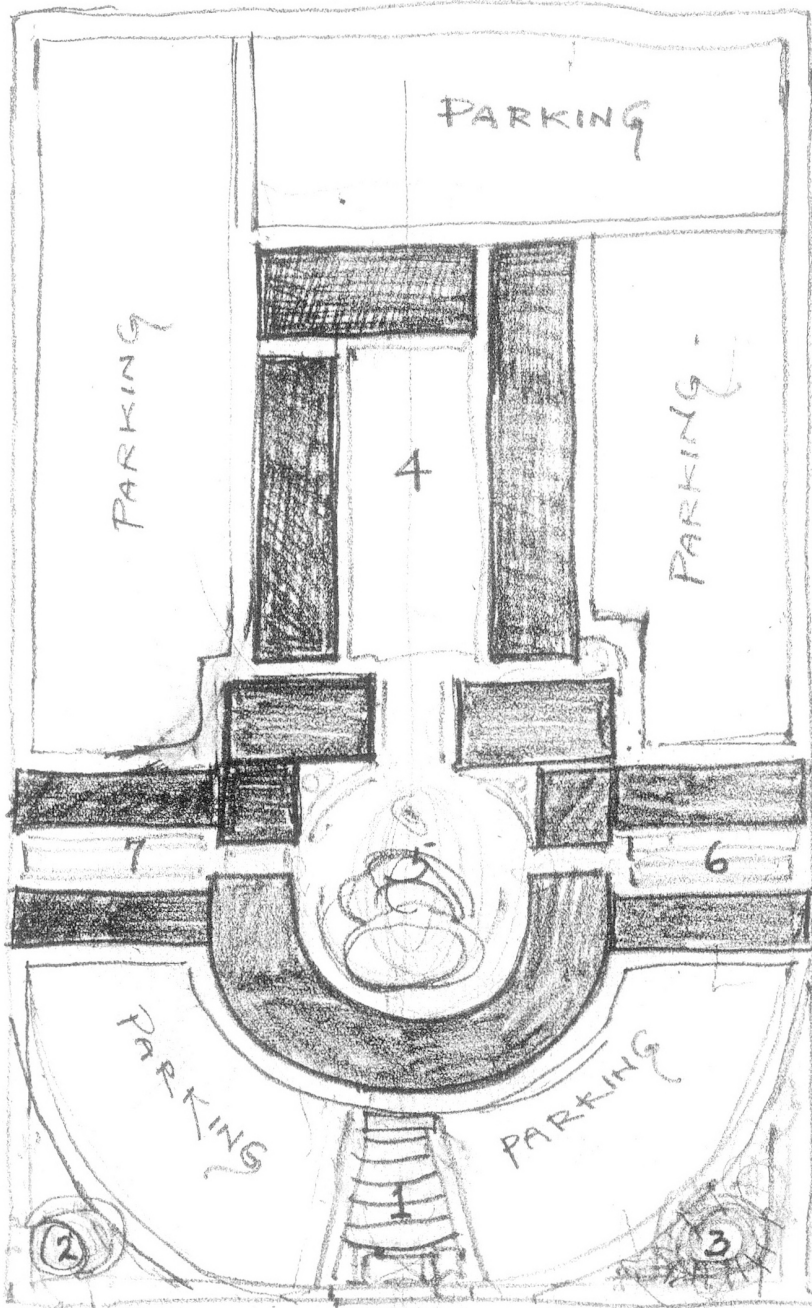
Few architects tried harder than Clarence Stein to give form and direction to the shopping mall during the late 1940s. Stein’s experience

convinced him that the type would become preeminent. Three opportunities arose in southern California to put his ideas into practice. For each, he served as a consultant, recommending the size, general configuration, and tenant mix.<sup>10</sup> Having studied the shopping center since the early 1930s, he was among the most knowledgeable persons on the subject. Yet Stein's hopes were stillborn; two of the projects never progressed beyond diagrammatic sketches, and the third, advanced no further than detailed design development. None of this work appears to have influenced subsequent endeavors. The episodes suggest the problem of translating an idea devised for neighborhood centers to much larger complexes and of adapting a concept based on social objectives to the demands of the marketplace.

The first of Stein's California projects was for a mammoth center on Whittier Boulevard designed to serve East Los Angeles and numerous other prosperous blue-collar communities that up to then possessed only small-scale arterial development. Occupying a seventy-acre site and with some 300,000 square feet of store space, the complex would have surpassed the Broadway-Crenshaw Center in size. The sheer number of people living close at hand may have been the decisive factor in convincing the developer, Leo Harvey, that a huge shopping center oriented to volume sales would be profitable. It was estimated that 345,000 people lived within a fifteen-minute driving radius, one million within a thirty-minute radius.<sup>11</sup> The center would challenge downtown as a retail magnet for as many as one quarter of the metropolitan area's residents.

Stein was asked to collaborate on the project by Los Angeles architect Lewis Wilson, with whom he had worked on the celebrated design of Baldwin Hills Village (1939–1942). More than a half-dozen layouts were studied, all of which had an inward focus, with stores grouped around one or more “parks” and walkways.<sup>12</sup> The organization was hierarchical. A space framed by a department store and entertainment facilities lay at the core (figure 219). To either side were comparatively narrow malls, one lined by specialty shops, the other by nonretail services. A third extension, the “court of daily needs,” was much larger and presumably would hold a spectrum of chain outlets similar to that at the Broadway-Crenshaw Center. Drive-in facilities—restaurant, theater, and service station—defined the boundary on one side. As at Willow Run, parking was circumferential and bracketed by the main buildings; here the distance between the two was never much more than 250 feet. Yet in contrast to Saarinen's design the spatial order was static; each area was defined as a more or less discrete zone.

The formality of Stein's plan reflected an academic approach to design learned at the outset of his career, over three decades previous, in the office of Bertram Goodhue. Much as with Carleton Winslow's design for Carthay Center, the arrangement was in a general way reminiscent of Goodhue's plans for the California Institute of Technology campus at Pasadena.<sup>13</sup> Stein's layout appears to have been predicated on the belief that people would require no encouragement from the configuration itself to



- ① OUTDOOR MOVIE
- ② GAS STATION
- ③ DRIVE IN
- ④ COURT OF DAILY NEEDS
- ⑤ ENTERTAINMENT DEPT STORE
- ⑥ PROMENADE OF SPECIALTIES
- ⑦ OFFICE  
HEALTH CENTER  
POST OFFICE  
BANK  
TRAVEL



circulate from end to end. But retail centers were hardly analogous to a campus in this respect. It would be easy for customers to patronize stores in one segment of Stein's compound and not venture into others. There was no clearly defined main circulation path, and almost every component had the potential to suffer from the consumer neglect that plagued side streets.

An awareness of such drawbacks may have led to the revisions Stein made several weeks later. While no less formal, the new scheme introduced a single open space of differentiated parts (figure 220). This large, cruciform "garden" was more accessible from the car lot, which, in turn, was more integrally related to the buildings. That Stein was beginning to address the issue of perception—how this behemoth would be experienced in the progression from street to car lot to mall—is further suggested by his ingenious varying of levels. A small cross section on the same sheet indicates that the main shopping floor and the "garden" were to rest a fully story above grade. Delivery access and storage thus could be underground without the cost of excavation. The parking lot sloped away from the center, and much of it was screened from the street by a raised perimeter service road. As a result, the buildings would be conspicuous from some distance away and the approach to the mall proper would seem more purposeful. The scheme may have proven too ambitious, however, for it did not advance beyond this exploratory stage.<sup>14</sup>

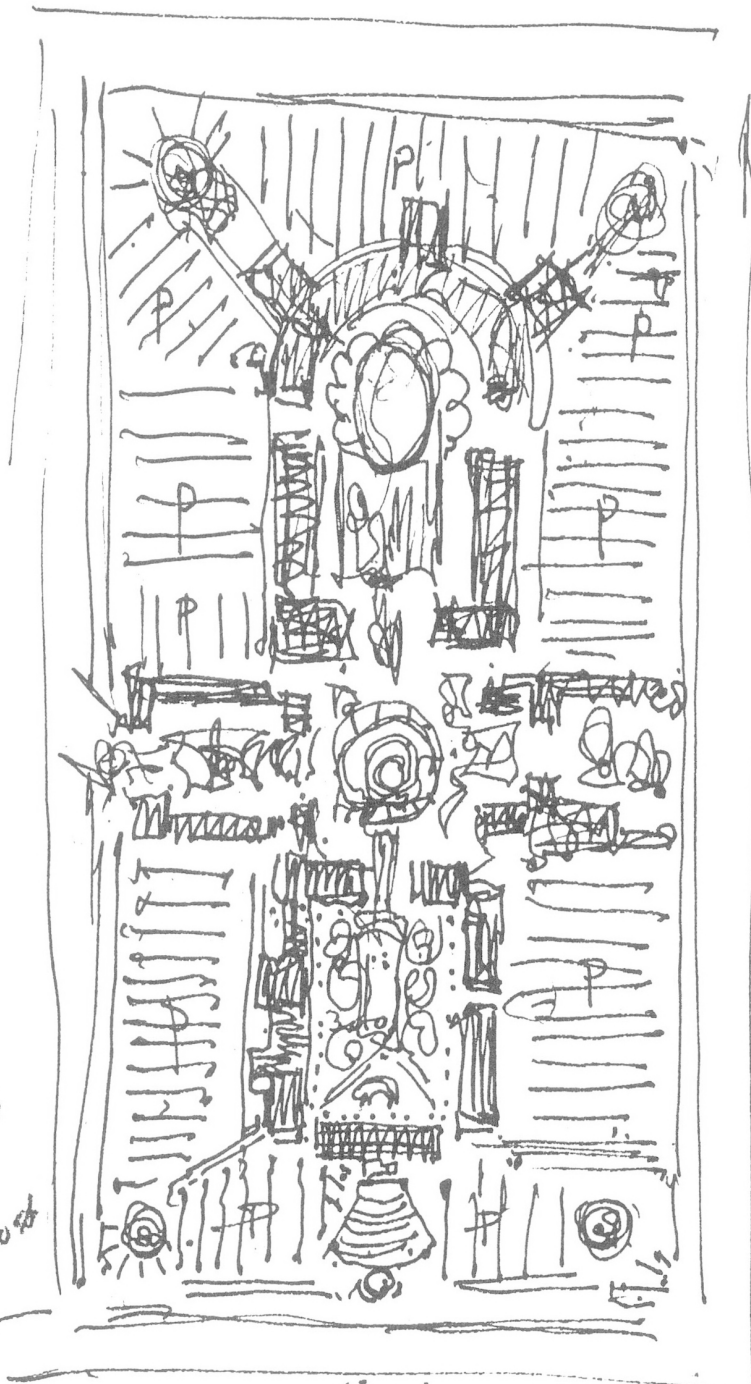
Less than two months later, in October 1948, Wilson again asked Stein to collaborate, this time on a more modest retail complex to be situated near Baldwin Hills Village. After inspecting the site, Stein argued that it was too small and should be combined with an adjacent parcel to form a thirty-acre tract for a regional shopping center. The architects convinced their client, Paul Trousdale, to fund a schematic plan that could be presented to the owners of the adjoining land to persuade them to cooperate. Size was crucial to the equation, Stein maintained, if the results were to be satisfactory. A complex that did not rival the Broadway-Crenshaw Center would be unable to secure tenants of high caliber. The East Los Angeles project also may have led him to believe that working at a large scale was necessary if the mall was to be developed to optimal advantage. Clearly the earlier scheme had a formative influence on the new plan (figure 221).

The importance Stein gave to the mall is evident in the argument made to his client. In expanded form, the facility would set a new standard: no "really modern shopping center . . . exists at present in . . . the Los Angeles region."<sup>15</sup> Beside ample parking close to all stores, the characteristics must include "complete separation of pedestrians and automobiles" and "shops and amusements facing on a pleasant park." Here the "park" was an axial extension of the "village green" in Baldwin Hills Village, and while the retail center was to serve a far broader clientele, the layout was a poignant reflection of Stein's commitment to providing communal open space secluded from its urban matrix.

C.S.S-  
28 VII '48

STEIN

316



parking  
200' = 20 Cars  
6000 #

300' = 30 Cars  
deep x 300' = 9000 #

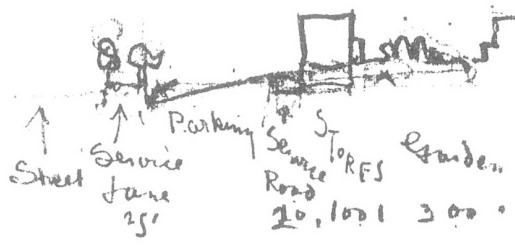
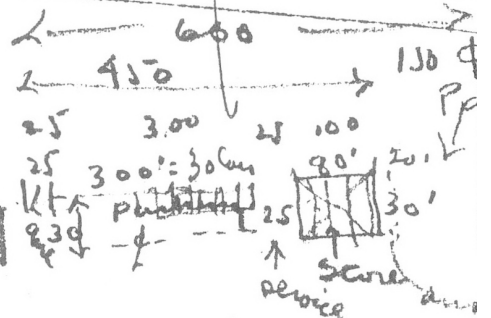
10  
1 20  
60 20  
20  
Bed 30

1 Parking average  
1 car 80' deep  
300 # 30' wide  
2400 #

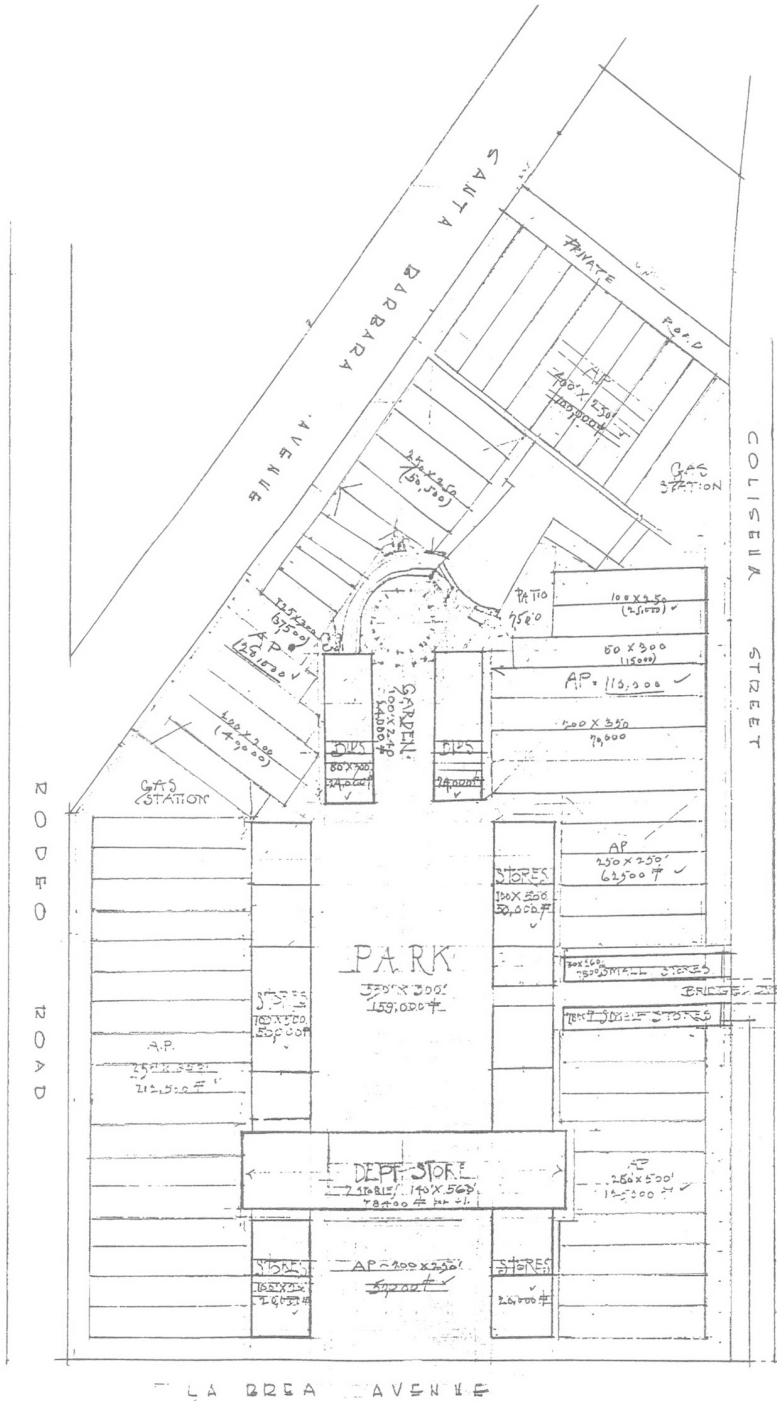
30 lanes  
40 Service  
200 Beds  
3000 Garden  
600

Have taken  
10' per car  
8 mgmt + loc  
8/300 = 3.7 cars  
930 - 500

1500'



1 car for 1 foot ft St  
parked

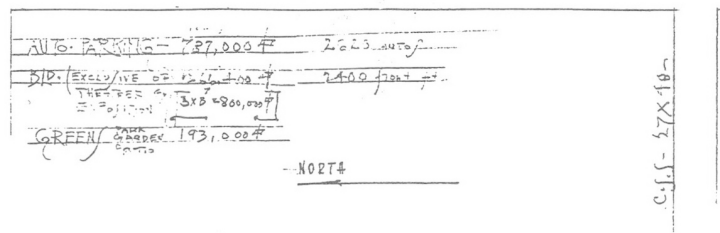


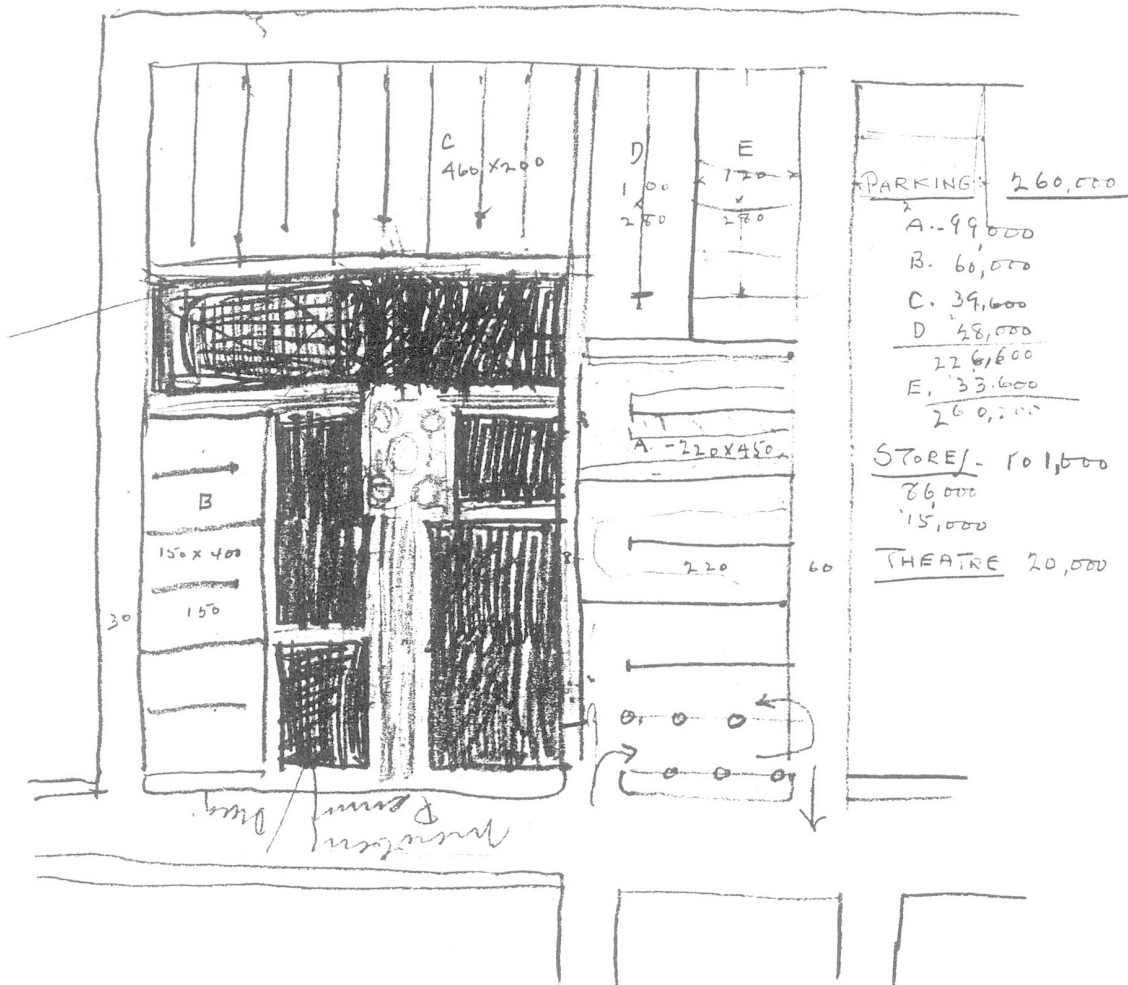
220

Schematic study for shopping center, probably on Whittier Boulevard, 1948, Stein and Wilson, associated architects. Site plan. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)

221

Preliminary design for shopping center, La Brea and Martin Luther King avenues, Rodeo Road, and Coliseum Street, Los Angeles, 1948, Clarence Stein and Lewis Wilson, associated architects. Site plan. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)





222

Study for shopping center, Thompson Boulevard and Borchard Drive, Ventura, ca. 1948–1949, Clarence Stein, architect. Site plan. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)

Remarkably, the site lay only about a dozen blocks from the Crenshaw Center. Wilson asserted that the two would not compete. The area's growth was such that "every large merchandiser in the United States will eventually be located in this area, and . . . with the proper . . . [design, the client] would be in the best position of offering them the first choice rather than Beverly Hills or Wilshire Boulevard."<sup>16</sup> The architects envisioned an updated Miracle Mile with branches of the region's finest stores; however, the Broadway–Coldwell Banker team had a more accurate reading of the market. Stein and Wilson's naiveté concerning both the target audience and the viability of siting a regional center so close to an existing one probably explain why their proposal advanced no further. For his part, Trousdale decided that developing land adjacent to the Crenshaw Center was the most advantageous course to take.<sup>17</sup>

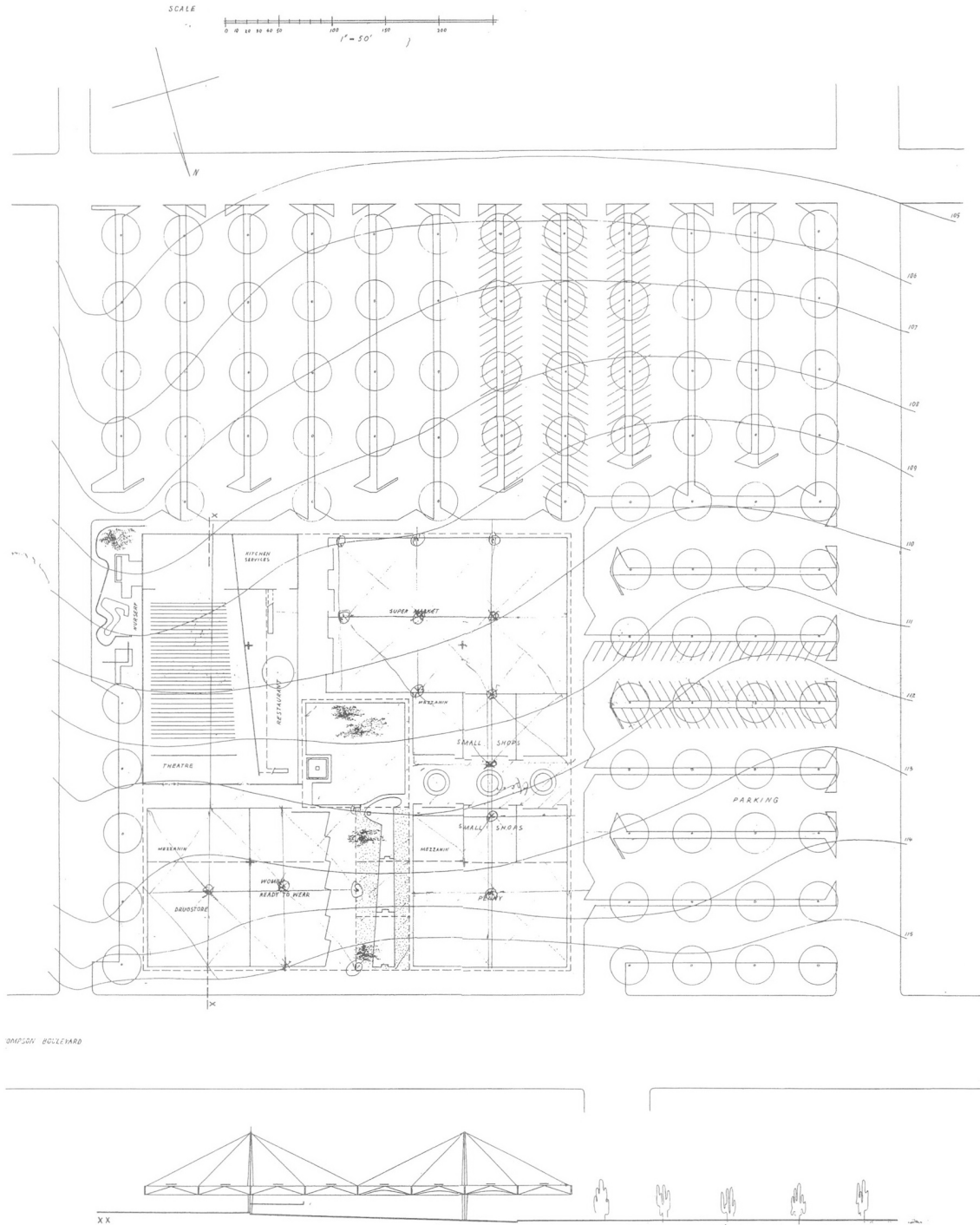
The scale needed to justify an expansive pedestrian area in economic terms was revealed in the third of Stein's projects. Commissioned by the Los Angeles real estate developer Samuel Marks, the center was to be built at Ventura, seventy miles up the coast. Its dimensions were not much larger (101,000 square feet of store area, 20,000 square feet for a theater) than Linda Vista; however, the effect was wholly different. At Linda

Vista, primacy was given to pedestrian space; at Ventura, the objective shifted to providing adequate space for automobiles.

Minimum requirements for parking at shopping centers rose dramatically during the postwar years because many earlier calculations proved inadequate and also because of the continued increase in automobile use. By the late 1940s, the needed ratio of parking area to store area was held to be 2½:1 or 3:1, far larger than most prewar practices.<sup>18</sup> Focusing on in this aspect, Stein found little room left for the mall, which was

223

Shopping center, Thompson Boulevard and Borchard Drive, Ventura, ca. 1949–1950, Matthew Nowicki and Clarence Stein, associated architects; project. Site plan and section. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)



reduced to along, narrow, and potentially claustrophobic zone. Oddly it was oriented to the street, suggesting that he may still have hoped many customers would walk to the premises (figure 222).

The problem of confined space could be overcome by making it appear more expansive than it actually was, or by making confinement an attribute, as was done at the Farmers Market. A fusion of both approaches was attained in the remarkable design for the Ventura project prepared some months after the initial studies by Stein's friend and now collaborator, Matthew Nowicki. The solution was deceptively simple, exemplifying what Lewis Mumford described as Nowicki's ability to unite "law and order with adventure and freedom."<sup>19</sup> Four pedestrian ways, each a different width and shape, led to a central plaza (figure 223). Only the latter space and one of its approaches were left fully open, and even these were visually part of a rigorous grid established by a roof frame of precast concrete panels suspended by cables from four masts (figure 224). The absence of any other structural components enabled Nowicki to manipulate space with considerable freedom, evoking a sense of a grand promenade on one hand and a crowded bazaar on the other (figures 225, 226). The roof frame was indeed analogous to a great tent, under which a parade of wares could be strewn for perusal. Had it been realized, the design might well have had a significant impact, for it prefigured some of the ingenious spatial effects pursued with the development of enclosed malls of later years. As it was, Nowicki died in a plane crash not long after his drawings were made, and the Korean War temporarily put a halt to new construction. But the underlying problem seems to have been that the retail area could not justify the project's cost, for it never advanced further and few subsequent attempts were made to incorporate a mall into a shopping center of comparable size.<sup>20</sup>

If the Ventura design demonstrated how the mall could enhance a compact arrangement of retail space, a more or less concurrent proposal explored how the mall could serve as an instrument of dispersal. The scheme was developed in 1949 by Robert Alexander as a master plan for the newly incorporated community of West Covina, which lay in a fast-

## 224

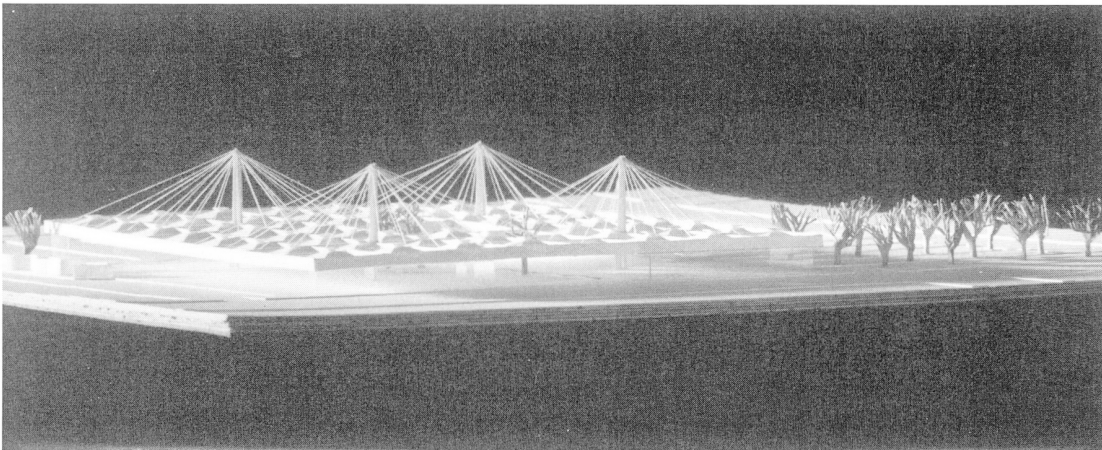
Shopping center, Ventura, Nowicki and Stein, model. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)

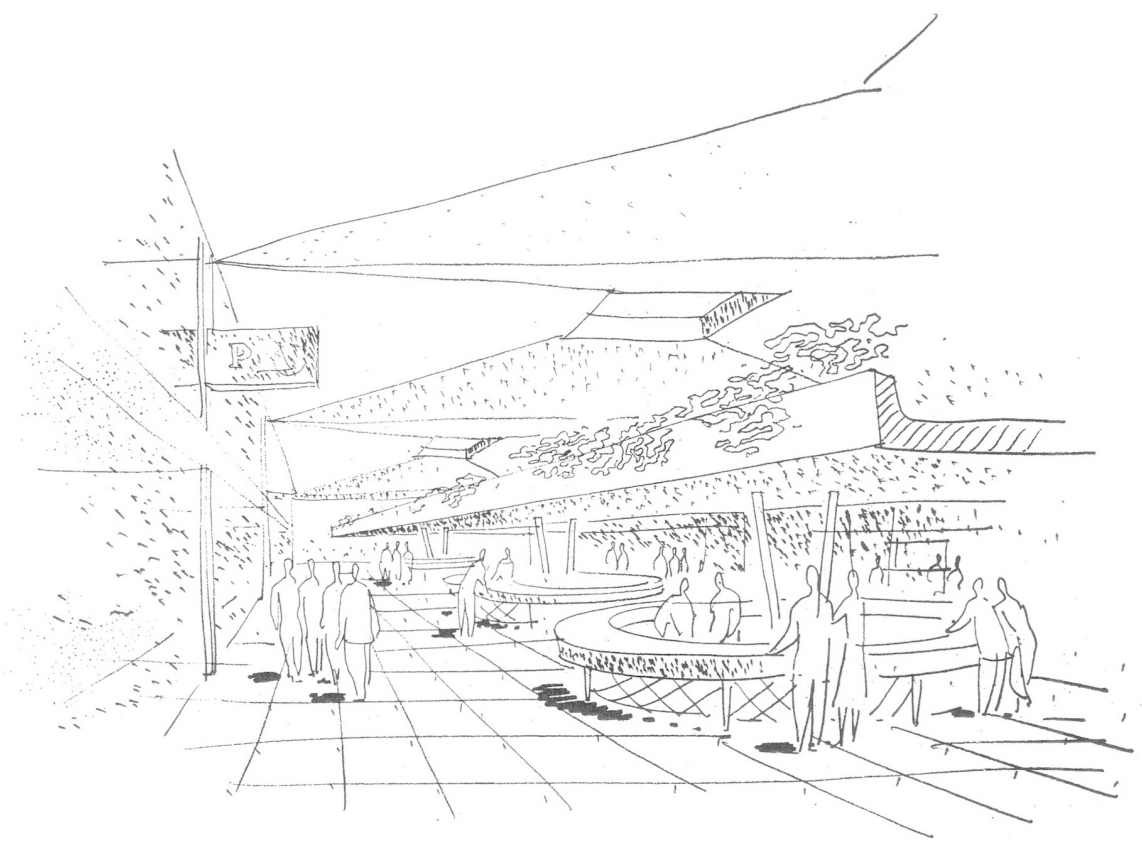
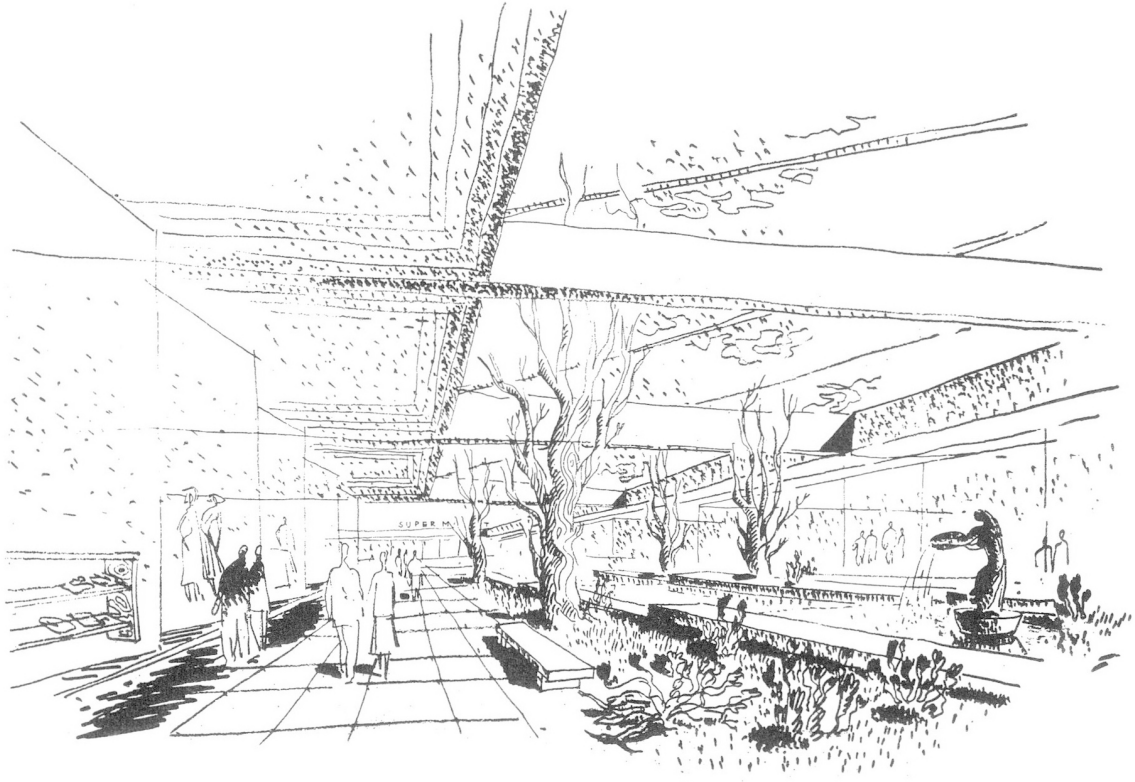
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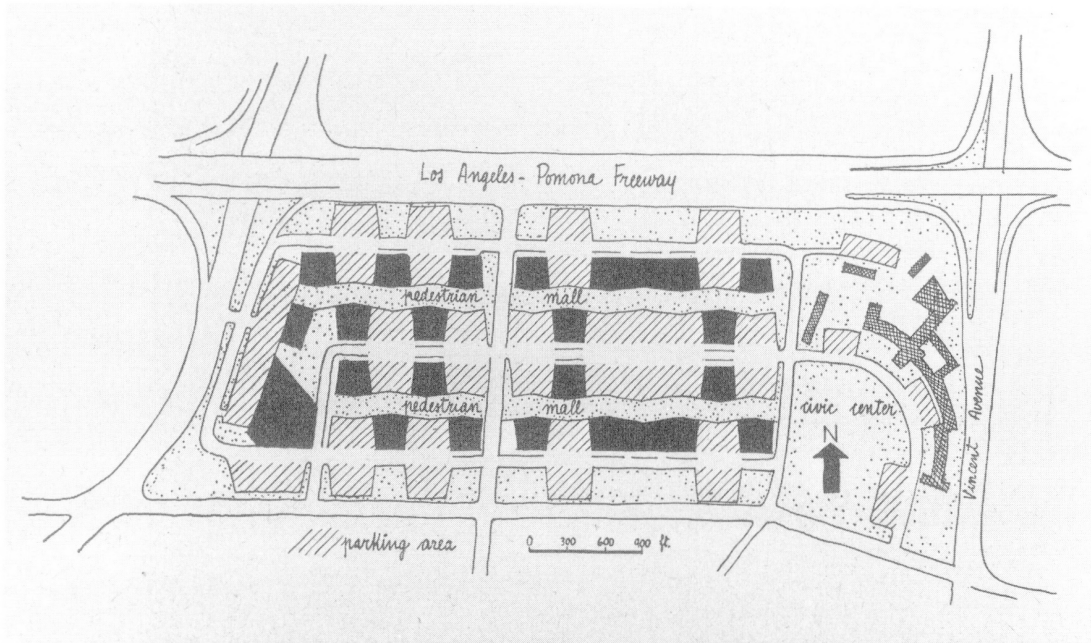
Shopping center, Ventura, sketch of mall by Matthew Nowicki. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)

## 226

Shopping center, Ventura, sketch of mall by Matthew Nowicki. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)







227

Study for shopping and civic center, Walnut Creek Parkway, Sunset and Vincent avenues and San Bernardino Freeway, West Covina, ca. 1949, Robert Alexander, architect; project. Site plan. (*Architectural Record*, August 1949, 114.)

expanding area some thirty miles east of downtown Los Angeles. Alexander and Wilson were partners when Baldwin Hills Village was designed and both men now lived there. That compound's layout provided the major source of inspiration for the West Covina plan, which ranked among the most unconventional in the country proposed for a shopping center of the postwar period.<sup>21</sup>

Given no specifics for a program by his municipal client, Alexander felt free to experiment, seeking to correct what he saw as major shortcomings in shopping center design. The distance between parked cars and stores would be reduced, all the while avoiding great expanses of asphalt, by fragmenting the parts into a checkerboard (figure 227). Two parallel malls linked the pieces and enabled extensive landscaping. These pedestrian ways converged at a plaza and department store at one end and at a "common" with municipal buildings at the other. In contrast to most mall designs of the period, this one held the potential for visually integrating architecture, automobiles, and people. Yet the decompositional approach was not conducive to circulation throughout the premises, which stretched 4,200 feet end to end. Most customers either would have made frequent stops in their cars or not gone to some portions, causing the same dual problems of congestion and underuse that plagued many traditional retail districts. The design never had the chance for refinement. After the schematic drawings were completed, the project lost its foremost proponent when the mayor died unexpectedly. Thereafter, the city council terminated the contract.



However significant their designs, neither architects such as Nowicki nor planning reformers such as Stein finally secured the shopping center's acceptance in the business world. The architects who succeeded in this were of quite a different sort. Some produced commercial, industrial, and institutional projects on a large scale. Their work was not distinguished by artistic prowess so much as by efficient, no-nonsense resolution of complex programs in which budgetary constraints were paramount. The major firms of this kind that contributed to the regional mall's early development included John Graham & Company of Seattle, designers of the first realized example, and Welton Becket & Associates and Albert C. Martin & Associates, both of Los Angeles, whose approach was influenced by Graham's prototype. Other architects who came to the fore espoused fundamental change in retail design through the adaptation of avant-garde concepts. The two most prominent figures in this arena were Morris Ketchum of New York, who was probably the first to prepare plans for a regional mall, and Victor Gruen of Los Angeles, who undertook similar work soon thereafter and eventually was seen as the nation's foremost innovator in shopping center design.

Among Gruen's strengths was his ability to translate theory into practice—to adapt the radical notions of form and space nurtured by the avant-garde to the pragmatic needs of the merchant and the investor, while making the ideas seem as if they originated with retail concerns. The downtown specialty shop was the launching pad for his career; the regional mall was the means by which he secured international renown.<sup>22</sup> The shift came neither quickly nor easily. The exuberant schemes Gruen designed for west coast retailers during the 1940s earned him the reputation of an eccentric in some local business circles—one reason, perhaps, why he did not see a shopping center plan materialize in southern California until the mid-1950s.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the innovative proposals Gruen designed for malls in Los Angeles between these two phases of his career gave him the experience and perspective necessary to achieve the later work that brought him worldwide recognition.

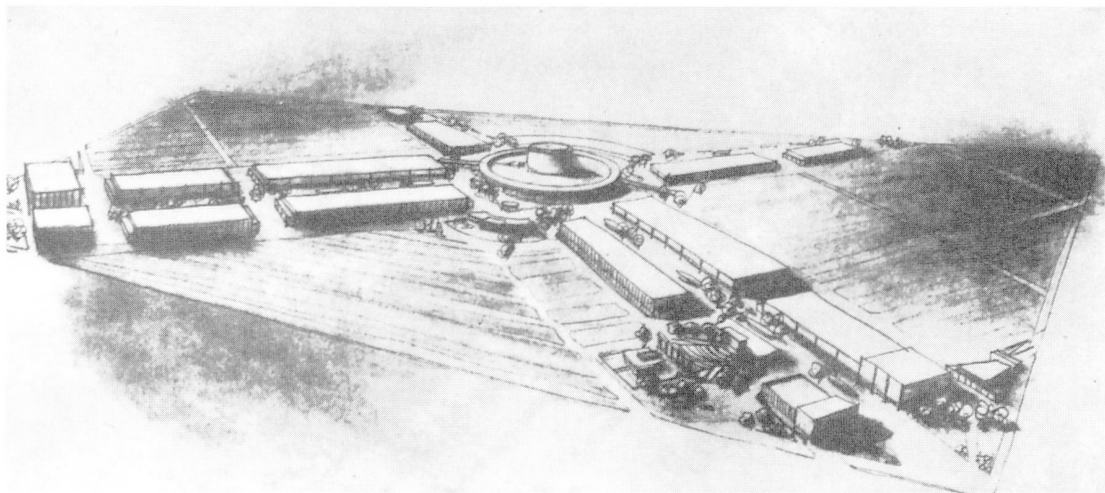
Gruen's first opportunity to develop his ideas on a large scale came with studies for an unidentified regional shopping center in Los Angeles. Presented in mid-1948, the scheme was as ambitious as the Whittier Boulevard complex for which Stein made studies soon thereafter.<sup>24</sup> In every other way, the two proposals underscored the differences in approach between these architects. Gruen's design imparted a sense of formality in its arrangement, while drawing from the avant-garde's penchant for dynamic interplays between form and space (figure 228). Gruen was at once assimilating what he could from previous endeavors and creating a solution that broke new ground.

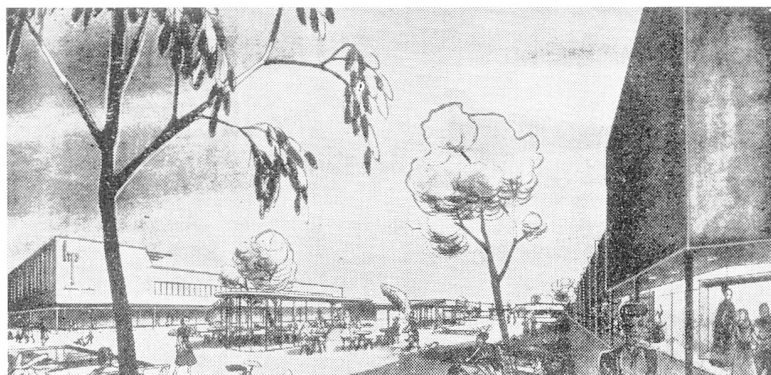
As at Willow Run, the ensemble was composed in a cruciform plan, dividing the car lot into quadrants. Yet rather than being open-ended, the complex was visually anchored to the corners of the site, its

axes arranged to tie pedestrian space to the street. A sense of order likewise pervaded those spaces as they extended toward the middle. Instead of being treated like a garden or park, the mall was a promenade neatly defined by buildings (figure 229). This configuration allowed customers to move easily between stores on both sides of the path. Equally important, space gave a strong sense of unity to the sprawling complex, a relationship enhanced by Gruen's unprecedented design for the core. In contrast to previous shopping mall plans, this central area was punctuated by an immense (250,000 square feet) department store, circular in plan, with a seven-story storage and utility tower at its heart. While treated as a freestanding sculptural object, the building's primary visual role was as a focal point for the ensemble. The mass was sufficiently great that it also would serve as a beacon, identifying the complex from some distance afield even though it was removed from the street. Gruen made the department store the linchpin, giving it a physical prominence commensurate with its function like the big Wilshire Boulevard stores.

Gruen's mall encompassed much the same broad scope of establishments as Stein's Whittier Boulevard project. Besides the department store and large chain outlets, the center included numerous small enterprises. Gruen was among the first figures to criticize the tendency in early postwar retail developments to neglect the one-of-a-kind merchant, arguing that a shopping center should include places specifically designed for such enterprises. Here, some of these stores were enclosed; others formed a market, offering unusual foods that could be carried home or consumed on the premises. The mall proper harbored kiosks, refreshment stands, and other vending booths. A variety of restaurants likewise would "invite people to spend many hours within the center." In its mix, the design thus combined the big stores as at the Broadway-Crenshaw, more diversified shopping as at Westwood Village, and the intimately scaled, bazaarlike qualities of the Farmers Market and Olvera Street.

The project also addressed some of the social concerns of Stein and other reformers. Besides a movie theater, there was an outdoor audito-





rium where plays, concerts, fashion shows, and other performances could be staged. These activities were complemented by others held at an exhibit hall. Meeting rooms were provided for civic groups. Municipal authorities had branch offices; parents could leave their children at a nursery. In these ways, the concept joined aspects of the downtown department store, Main Street, and the open-air market—a scope then unparalleled in any retail development, existing or proposed. The mall itself not only tied these attributes together, it created a new kind of setting, at once metropolitan and private—a place where one could partake of an array of things possible only in a great city and at the same time gain refuge from the street and all other messy aspects of urban life. Each of the four ranges would be tangent to a street, facilitating arrival by bus, but otherwise the place was divorced from its environs. Deliveries to the large stores were underground; the remaining outlets had segregated service areas. Gruen sought to create a total environment made feasible only by widespread automobile use while excluding the negative effects of traffic: “The automobile age,” he concluded, “has destroyed the pleasant market place character of shopping areas as they are found in Europe and in New England. Yet this need not be so.” The scale of the center and its orientation entirely to the mall enabled the experience to be both highly varied and wholly desirable. It was “more than just a place where one may shop—it shall be related . . . [to] all the activities of cultural enrichment and relaxation.”<sup>25</sup>

When Gruen proposed his plan, few designs for shopping malls had been advanced since World War II. Among them, two unexecuted proposals by his one-time Manhattan colleague and occasional associate, Morris Ketchum, appear to have had a measurable influence.<sup>26</sup> Both of Ketchum’s projects were widely publicized and heralded as significant steps in recasting the nature of retail development. The first was prepared in 1946 for the town center of Rye, New York, an area experiencing decline purportedly due to competition from newer, outlying retail districts. The solution drew heavily from the *Architectural Forum*’s Syracuse plan of three years previous, with the existing matrix modified to accommodate off-street parking, arterial routes beyond, and a pedestrian mall along the business coordinator (figure 230).<sup>27</sup> Here Ketchum developed the concept in greater detail, giving persuasive exposition of the mall as a street with-

228

Shopping center, Los Angeles area, ca. 1947–1948, Gruen & Krummyeck, architects; project. Aerial perspective. (*Chain Store Age*, Administrative Edition, July 1948, 22.)

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Shopping center, Los Angeles area, view of mall. (*Women’s Wear Daily*, 18 October 1949, 62.)

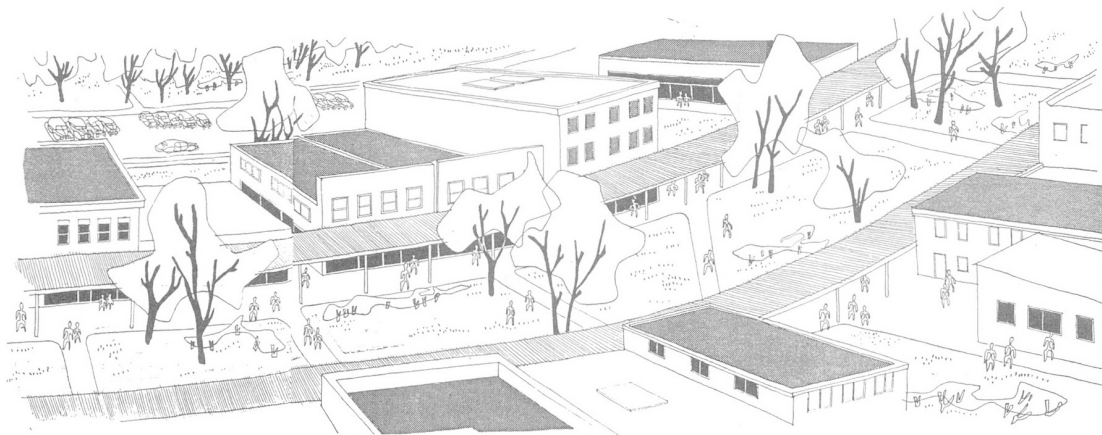
out cars, narrow enough to retain definition as a linear path, yet wide enough to have landscaping as a major element. It was precisely this balance that Gruen employed in his Los Angeles project.<sup>28</sup>

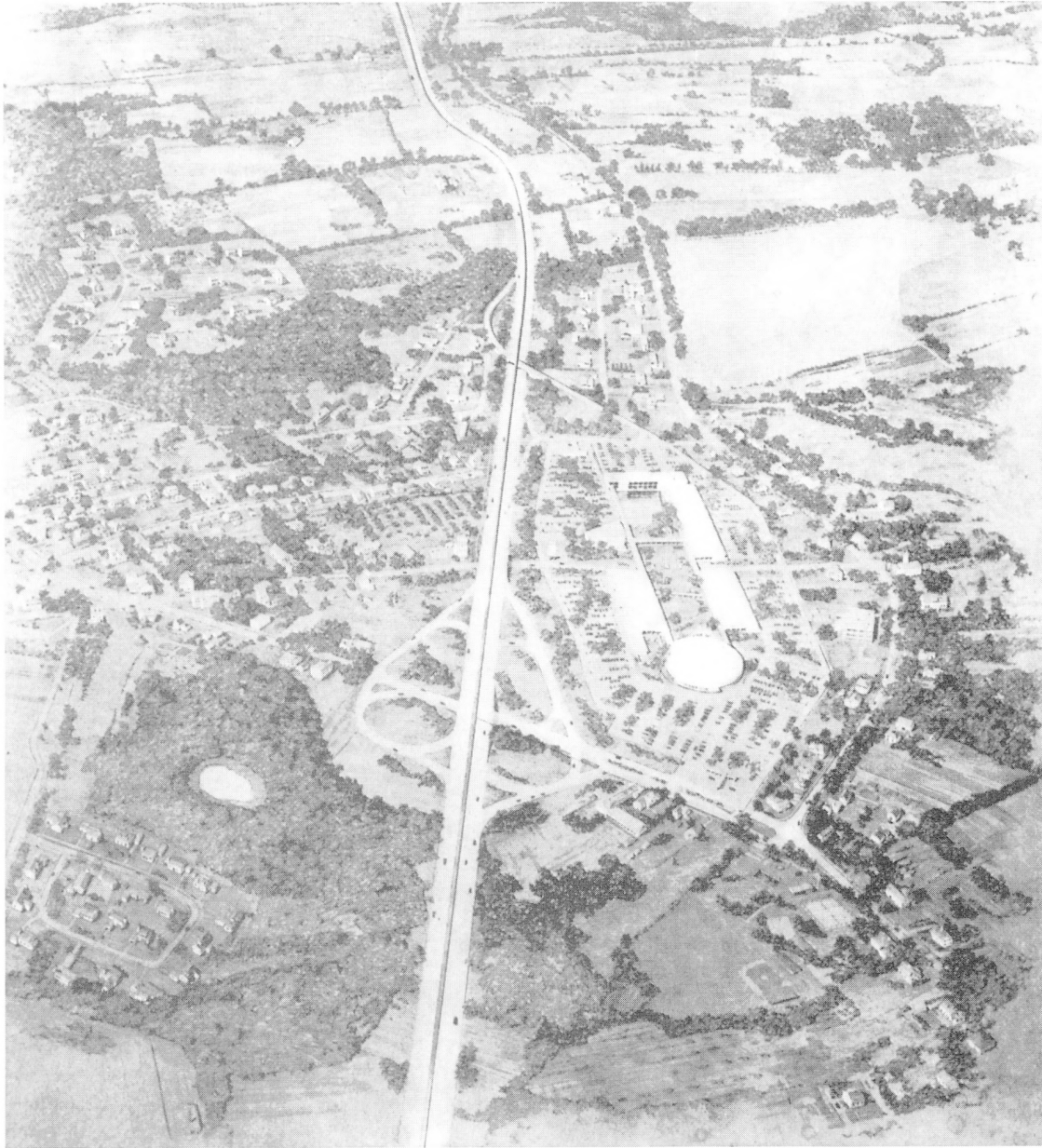
Soon after the Rye plan, Ketchum was at work on the North Shore Center, sited near Beverly, Massachusetts, some eighteen miles from Boston. Unveiled in schematic form in 1946 and in a more refined vein a year later, this project was the first design for a regional mall to advance beyond the preliminary stage and presented a number of features that became hallmarks of the type. Plans called for thirty outlets and space to accommodate 3,000 cars on a sixty-two acre site, making it one of the most ambitious integrated retail facilities proposed to date (figure 231).<sup>29</sup> Parking formed a virtually unbroken ring around the stores, rendering the complex more a self-contained island than earlier examples and establishing what became a common pattern. The center also was completely removed from other establishments so that there would be no competition and no encroachment. The site was finalized on the basis of accessibility to households; distance from, rather than proximity to, existing businesses was the determining factor. The scheme further set a precedent by being situated adjacent to a limited-access highway (Route 128)—a relationship as rare in the East as it was in Los Angeles until the mid-1950s. The locational choice was based on an extensive study, which perhaps more than any other of the period revealed the need for detailed analysis of the market area, transportation routes, and potential locations prior to embarking on the development of a large-scale complex.

The North Shore Center also codified the role of a sizable branch of a downtown department store as the retail anchor. As initially envisioned by real estate entrepreneur Huston Rawls, the complex was to have been smaller. Harold Hodgkinson, president of Filene's in Boston, reportedly advised Rawls on expanding the project's scope and introduced him to architect Kenneth Welch. Welch, in turn, advocated a regional center and conducted the exhaustive market study to justify risking the \$6,000,000 financial commitment required.<sup>30</sup> His writings on this project indicate a far more sophisticated approach than Stein's. At the time, there was no comparably thorough analysis in print of market potential and strat-

## 230

Redevelopment plan for central business district, Rye, New York, 1946, Ketchum, Gina & Sharp, architects; project. Perspective of mall. (*Architectural Forum*, August 1946, 78–79.)





egies for its capture in outlying areas. Welch contributed significantly to the advancement of the regional mall concept by delineating a clear, step-by-step method that made the investigative process comprehensible and convincing.<sup>31</sup> He also became the foremost advocate of siting these complexes far from established business centers and residential areas alike, determining location as much from projected growth as from existing use patterns.

Finally, the North Shore Center pioneered in uniting the hard-boiled concerns of retail development with the reformer's ideal of a center planned for social betterment. Extensive recreational facilities were included as a complementary focal unit to the department store. Surrounding acreage would be zoned to protect the residential environs as

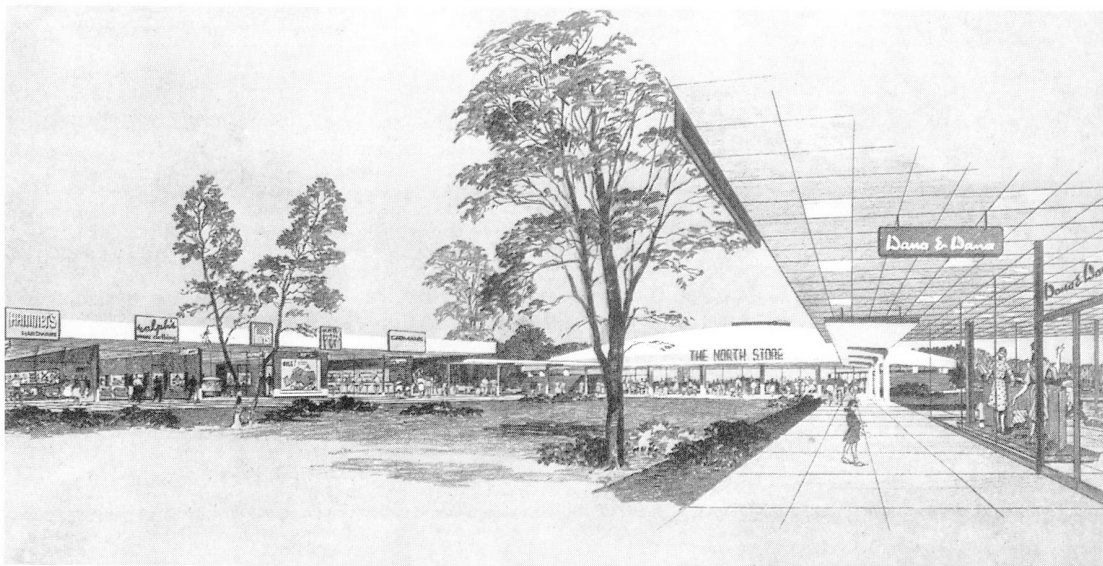
#### 231

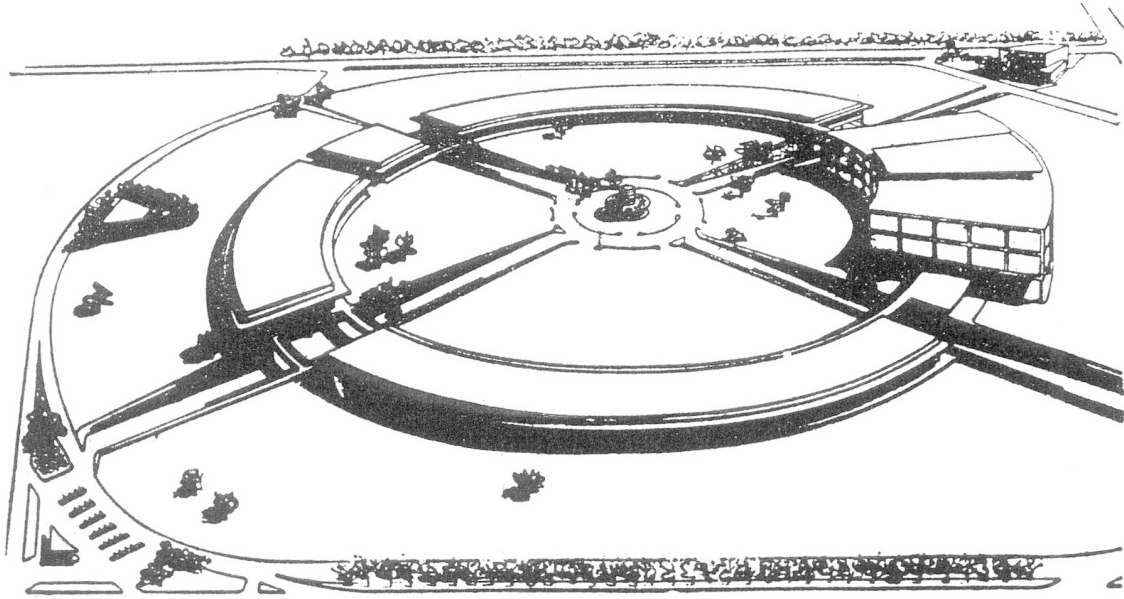
North Shore Center, Route 128 and Brimbel Avenue, Beverly, Massachusetts, 1947, Ketchum, Gina & Sharp, architects, Anderson & Beckwith, associated architects, Frederick J. Adams, planner, Arthur A. & Sidney N. Shurcliff, landscape architects; project. Aerial perspective, drawing by Vincent Funro. (*Architectural Forum*, June 1947, 84.)

well as to prevent competing interests from locating nearby. Expanding on the idea of Linda Vista, the mall was cast in the mold of a village green, 100 feet wide, around which the buildings formed a modest backdrop (figure 232). The treatment of the storefronts facing the car lot was more elaborate. All aspects of the setting were designed to appeal to consumers and thus induce perambulation.

In creating his Los Angeles project, Gruen relied on the basic conceptual framework established for the North Shore Center, while striking an independent chord in many significant ways. Besides its more complex program, Gruen's scheme possessed greater clarity, with buildings arranged as if in a procession. Centrally poised, the department store held a commanding presence much like that accorded to the church in ideal city plans of the Renaissance or to the courthouse in many U.S. county seats. Yet the mall did not evoke a town street, a market square, or a village green so much as a fabulous boulevard. Later Gruen cited Vienna and other European cities he had known since youth as the ultimate inspiration for his approach to mall design. Consciously or otherwise, however, he seems to have absorbed the metropolitan aspirations embodied in outlying business districts of Los Angeles since the 1920s. Diagrammatically, his scheme was as if the composite Crenshaw Center had spawned a twin across the street, both the main and intersecting arteries had been narrowed, vehicular traffic had been barred, and the adversarial department stores had consolidated to form a new symbol of coherence. In its character, Ketchum's work still harked back to the small town and an agrarian ideal; Gruen's proposal was thoroughly of the city.

No regional mall was in operation when the Los Angeles scheme was published, so the planning of such complexes remained to a large degree theoretical. The context to which experimentation continued to mark the architect's endeavors is revealed by a second project, announced in September 1950, of the same Whittier Boulevard site for which Stein





had made studies two years before. Now called the Olympic Shopping Circle, the design was the near opposite of Gruen's earlier plan (figure 233).<sup>32</sup> Instead of being the central focus, the department store rose toward the periphery without much architectural fanfare. The huge core was almost entirely open. Rather than developing the mall as a refuge from the parking area as well as from the street, Gruen maintained the close spatial relationship between automobiles, pedestrians, and storefronts that existed in front-lot centers. The main departure here was the circular plan, in which space existed for 2,000 cars outside the ring and an additional 1,000 within. Access routes divided the plan into quadrants and terminated at a drive-in restaurant positioned like a piece of civic sculpture. Suggestive of a traditional urban square updated for the motor age, the inner zone was clearly the most important. The pedestrian way that encircled this space was wide, tall, and sheltered—delineated by the architect to evoke an arcade bordering the marketplace of a Mediterranean city (figure 234).

Gruen advanced the hollow-core configuration as a means of minimizing the distance between parked cars and stores. Here, too, was an arrangement where the entire complex was readily comprehensible at ground level, not just from the air. Yet the plan had an insurmountable flaw: it channeled automobiles along limited paths from equally limited places of access and egress, intensifying the drawbacks of downtown street patterns. Since the inner parking area would be sought by most customers, peak shopping periods would be plagued by vehicular congestion. Neither Gruen nor his clients seemed aware of just how complicated traffic planning was at this scale. Three months before the Olympic center was announced, he unveiled a design for the even larger Eastland Plaza near Detroit, which was laid out much like the North Shore Center, but with the big interior car lot replacing the green and an even more limited vehicular circulation system (figure 235). The Korean War halted the execution

232

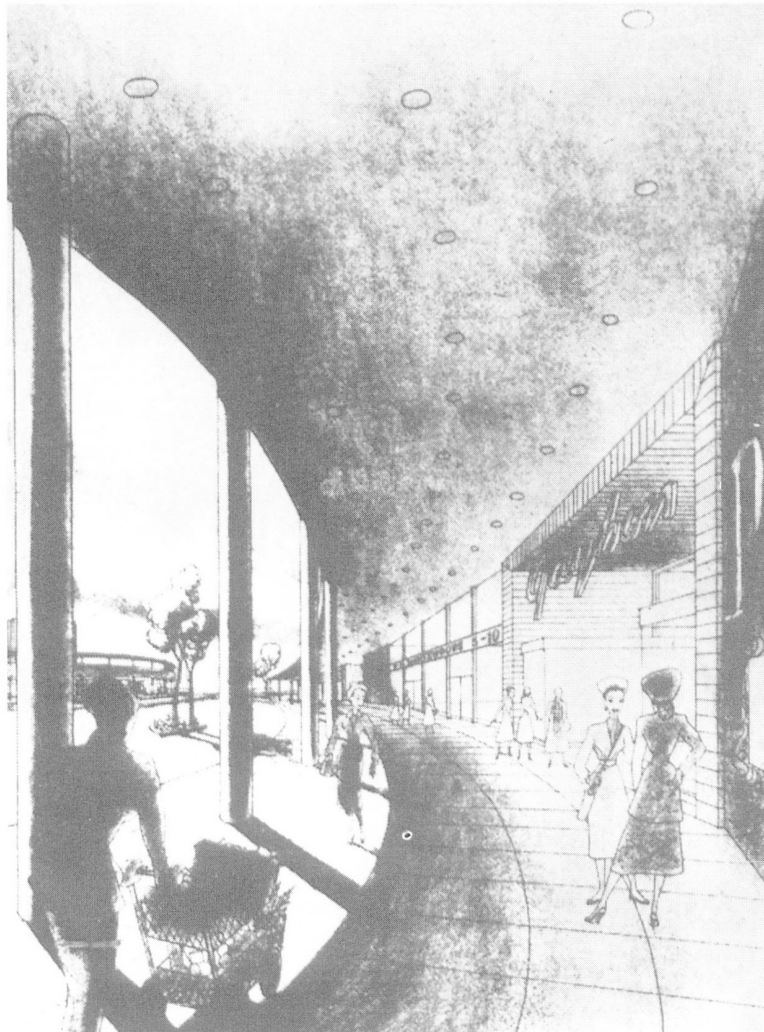
North Shore Center, view of mall, drawing by Vincent Funro. (*Architectural Forum*, June 1947, 91.)

233

Olympic Shopping Circle, Whittier and Olympic boulevards, Goodrich and Gerhart streets, Commerce, 1950, Gruen & Krummeck, architects; project. Aerial perspective. (*Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1950, 1-8.)

of both schemes—a fortunate circumstance for Gruen. Had either one been realized, his reputation might never have recovered.<sup>33</sup>

Over the next two years Gruen rethought the problem thoroughly, as if the Olympic and Eastland centers had been a necessary extreme before his approach could be cast in a fresh perspective. Thereafter he continued to experiment, producing solutions that were no less innovative but that acknowledged the need to plan in different ways for cars and people. By mid-1952 Gruen embarked on a new direction, with buildings grouped tightly around the department store. The most famous example of the so-called cluster plan of his invention was the huge (110 units, 1,192,000 square feet) Northland Center near Detroit (1952–1954), the second commission he received from J. L. Hudson.<sup>34</sup> But Northland was only one in a series that revealed the concept's flexibility in application.<sup>35</sup> The initial plan (1953) for Southdale Center near Minneapolis was similar, but with the mall set on two levels and fully enclosed.<sup>36</sup> With such schemes, Gruen earned his reputation as the nation's leading architect of shopping malls. However, none of this seminal work was for southern California, where patterns were developing along somewhat different lines.<sup>37</sup>







Had Gruen's first mall proposal been realized, Los Angeles might well have become a leading center of innovation in regional mall design. As it was, the metropolitan area was simply one of several places where the type got its initial foothold, and even though examples proliferated there to an unmatched degree by the late 1950s, none became a national model in the way Gruen's 1948 design could have been or his later work in other parts of the country actually was. The architect's questionable reputation among local retailers does not fully explain the outcome. The fact that, even when Gruen became a recognized national pacesetter in shopping center design, his Los Angeles work was relatively unadventurous reflects the persistence of the underlying conservative strain evident in the Los Angeles commercial sphere since the 1930s. The development of streetfront neighborhood centers instead of ones organized around a forecourt prior to the war, the adherence to this pattern even with postwar regional centers such as Westchester and Panorama City, the reluctance to depart from established patterns of multiple ownership—all were symptomatic of an outlook that was inclined toward the ordinary and the expected as much as to the novel. However pathbreaking other facets of its retail development were, and however strong the stereotype of Los Angeles as a harbor for unorthodoxy, local preferences often were guided by mainstream practices.

234

Olympic Shopping Circle, view of mall.  
(*Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1950,  
1-8.)

235

Eastland Plaza, Vernier, Eight Mile, and  
Kelly roads, Harper Woods, Michigan,  
1950, Gruen & Krummeck, architects;  
project. Model. (*Architectural Forum*,  
August 1950, 111.)

## REALIZATION

REALIZATION

332

While Gruen was still at the early stages of the hollow-core plan, construction was nearing an end on the first two regional malls to see three-dimensional form: Shoppers' World and Northgate. Both were of great importance in validating the mall concept on a large scale, while their fundamental differences emphasized the still tentative nature of such undertakings. Located at Framingham, Massachusetts, nineteen miles west of Boston, Shoppers' World (1949–1951) was conceived as the second unit in Huston Rawls's projected network of regional centers.<sup>38</sup> The basic plan developed for the North Shore Center was retained, while several important modifications were introduced. Shoppers' World was larger (550,000 square feet, forty-four stores, parking for 6,000 cars) and designed to have a major department store branch at either end—a pairing perhaps inspired by the unplanned composite at the Crenshaw Center and one that became a key feature of regional malls by the late 1950s. At the same time, the arrangement was more compact, without wide spaces between building groups. The mall itself was still a broad, parklike space; however, the dual storefront treatment of the North Shore Center was abandoned for one where all the visual emphasis was given to the inner area. Among the most pronounced departures was the two-tier placement of stores, a configuration that may have been inspired by the commercial arcade, and that here doubled the frontage possible for each linear foot of the mall (figure 236). Although it is questionable how much this solution





actually reduced the distances patrons walked, the perceived effect was of a more convenient, cohesive place. The two-story plan failed to elicit much emulation at first, but it did become a favored one for enclosed malls, of which Gruen's Southdale (1953–1956) as the first.<sup>39</sup>

Northgate (1948–1950), located six miles from downtown Seattle, just outside the city limits, was the first regional mall to open and proved more influential than Shoppers' World on its immediate successors, especially those on the west coast.<sup>40</sup> Like the Broadway-Crenshaw Center, this complex was developed under the auspices of a major department store, Seattle's Bon Marche, which proved a key factor in both the layout and tenant structure. The complex was planned foremost to support the Bon Marche branch, which occupied one quarter of its total 800,000 square feet. Rising midway along the 1,500-foot-long "Miracle Mall," the department store was also the most conspicuous feature from the primary approach route (figure 237). A junior department store, Butler Brothers, occupied space at one end, but Bon Marche's major competitor, Frederick & Nelson, was excluded. At the same time, the overall tenant structure was planned for competitive merchandising so that patrons could have a greater choice of goods among the eighty stores. Northgate also had considerable variety in the size, type, and ownership of those stores, including both sizable chain outlets and small shops such as Gruen envisioned for his complex.

The size and scope of Northgate, plans for which were announced in February 1948, may have influenced Gruen in developing his first Los Angeles project, but there were significant differences between the two. The Seattle complex was linear instead of cross-axial in its ar-

236

Shoppers' World, Worcester Road, Framingham, Massachusetts, 1949–1951, Ketchum, Gina & Sharp, architects, Arthur A. & Sidney N. Shurcliff, landscape architects; demolished 1994. View of mall. (Photo author, 1988.)

237

Northgate, First Avenue, N.E., between N. 103rd Street and Northgate Way, Seattle, Washington, 1948–1950, John Graham & Company, architects; altered. Aerial view. Photo Pacific Aerial Surveys, 1950. (*Architectural Forum*, August 1950, 117.)



rangement, and the mall itself was a narrow (forty-eight feet), paved area, which seemed the more contained as a result of canopies over the stores to either side (figure 238). The inspiration for this funnel-like space came from the narrow retail spine in downtown Seattle where the parent store was located. The effect was very different from what Ketchum had designed for Rye or Gruen for Los Angeles.<sup>41</sup> Here the more intimate pedestrian spaces of shopping courts were elongated and homogenized. Customers were also close to the storefronts along either side, their view of window displays interrupted by only a few, unobtrusive planting boxes.

Where Gruen and Ketchum had employed architectural variety, Northgate's buildings, save for the Bon Marche, were minimally treated, signs affording the sole departure from the expanses of unadorned wall and canopy surfaces. Differentiation between storefronts at ground level was not marked either. Neither the buildings nor the ambience competed with the window displays for visual attention. Here the regional center was established as a serious alternative through mercantile attributes alone. Neither Gruen's idea of the mall as a colorful bazaar nor the reformers' ideal of a cultural center—a place of beauty that would revitalize a sense of community life—had much impact on the plan.

Northgate's biggest contribution was to demonstrate that the regional mall could be an attractive investment without an elaborate physical plant. Soon after the complex opened, James B. Douglas, president of the parent company, Allied Stores, was asked why the center resembled the aircraft factory nearby. His response was direct: "Some centers spend a lot more on frills, but they'll never get their money back. The main thing is that Northgate makes money."<sup>42</sup> Sales at the Bon Marche branch ran twice as high as anticipated during its first year of operation. Shoppers' World was also successful, but due to the failure to secure a second depart-

ment store, among other reasons, its operating company declared bankruptcy several years later, severely limiting its influence.<sup>43</sup>

Northgate emerged as the key prototype for work of the early 1950s, not just in general terms but in such particulars as the single department store anchor, competitive merchandising among other tenants, the long and narrow paved mall, and the decisively plain treatment of its buildings. Similar schemes began to appear almost at once, including ones by two Los Angeles architects. Welton Becket incorporated a number of Northgate's features at Stonestown in San Francisco (1950–1952) and in his revised plans for Hillsdale nearby in San Mateo (1952–1954).<sup>44</sup> Equally strong similarities can be seen in the plan Albert C. Martin, Jr., prepared in 1950 for Lakewood Center, the first regional mall to see realization in southern California.

#### LAKWOOD CENTER

Plans for Lakewood Center were announced in June 1950, when only Northgate and Shoppers' World were under construction and plans for about eight other regional malls were being prepared elsewhere in the country.<sup>45</sup> In this still infant state of the type's development, Lakewood

238

Northgate, view of mall. Photo Martin Mayer, 1950. (Courtesy Meredith Clausen.)

239

Lakewood Center, Lakewood Boulevard between Del Amo and Candlewood streets, Lakewood, begun 1950, Albert C. Martin & Associates, architects; altered. Aerial view, ca. 1952. (Courtesy Bill Symonds.)





ownership could render both the process of development and the operation more efficient, ultimately generating greater returns.

Lakewood Park was shaped by more than monetary concerns. The entire scheme incorporated a number of features that had been advocated by Los Angeles County planners for some twenty years but that seldom saw implementation.<sup>49</sup> Lakewood Park was conceived as a self-sufficient residential community with its own schools, recreation grounds, religious facilities, and civic center as well as shopping mall. The totality of this agenda exceeded those of Westchester, Panorama City, or most other postwar tracts in the metropolitan area not only in size but in scope, for Lakewood as intended to form a discrete municipal jurisdiction. The target audience, on the other hand, was typical: the many thousands of young, skilled working- and lower-middle-class families that were prospering in the region. Situated seven miles north of downtown Long Beach, Lakewood Park was in a rapidly growing area, near a Douglas Aircraft plant and within convenient driving distance of the region's primary industrial corridor as well as other centers of employment. Yet basic services were few and far between in the immediate area. Lakewood Park's developers did not have to worry about competition; any facilities provided would likely be used by most residents as well as by others less well served in surrounding tracts.

Lakewood's most striking physical departure stemmed from its comprehensive land use program. In sharp contrast to normative patterns of business development along thoroughfares, and even unlike the plans of Westchester and Panorama City where retail activity was confined to arterial nodes, Lakewood's boulevards were generously landscaped, with access roads as buffers between them and the dwellings. Trees and shrubs were planted in great number. Churches, schools, and other institutions was closely related to the housing fabric around them. Commercial activities not only were limited to a single precinct but were separated from other land uses. The guaranteed neighborhood became a product of mass consumption.

Control over land use, coupled with a huge target audience of 70,000 people soon to inhabit Lakewood Park and many thousands more soon to live in the surrounding area, justified Lakewood Center's size. At the same time, the experimental nature of this enterprise, as of the entire development, argued for careful control, with nothing left to chance. To develop Lakewood Center, a subsidiary corporation of the same name was established with Joseph Eichenbaum at its head. Eichenbaum was a veteran in the retail field, having begun his career at the family department store in Chicago and worked with a number of chain companies as a real estate broker once he moved to southern California after the war. However, Eichenbaum had never undertaken a project of his own, let alone one of this magnitude. At a very early stage in the new center's planning, he enlisted the May Company, which, in effect, became a partner in the process well before a contract was signed. The department store's president, Tom May, together with the May Company's design staff and Albert

C. Martin, Jr., whose firm had been the architect of May buildings in the region since the 1930s, were the key figures in determining the form Lakewood Center would take.

The May Company's decision to build at Lakewood entailed risks. Current and future growth in the target area was a decisive factor in selecting a branch department store site; however, the locations generally chosen up to that point were close to precincts already occupied by substantial numbers of people. The clientele for Lakewood Center, in contrast, largely consisted of projections. Building at Lakewood Park had just started and few developments around it were much further advanced. The chances that rapid growth would continue were high, so that Lakewood Center would soon stand in a pivotal location from which to draw hundreds of thousands of people from southern Los Angeles and eastern Orange counties; but the outcome was by no means assured. These circumstances may well have influenced the May Company's decision to build an enormous facility of its own and support the creation of a comparably expansive retail center as part of the package. Bigness furthered the risk but also enhanced the market appeal, as the Crenshaw Center had shown. With a number of well-known branches and chain units, a complex the size of Lakewood could draw from a great array of residential areas south of downtown Los Angeles, which had little beyond neighborhood-oriented arterial developments from previous years. The Crenshaw Center showed how strong the draw of a complex could be under those circumstances. Moreover, Lakewood could attract consumers from areas to the south at Long Beach. The latter community had its own department stores, but none matching the status of the May Company. Lakewood was close enough to be a serious competitor, and the complex had more parking space, Eichenbaum stressed, than in all of downtown Long Beach.<sup>50</sup>

To guide the design, "careful surveys" were reportedly made of "every major shopping center in the United States." Yet according to Martin, few of the complexes visited possessed attributes that became models for the scheme. The Crenshaw Center was among the first examined. Tom May was adamant about excluding direct competition with his store; no company would be allowed to do what his had done there. The experience at Crenshaw also made May and Martin reject a plan with rear parking and decide that the department store should have a central place surrounded by car lots. May and Martin inspected the Country Club Plaza, which, for them, affirmed the validity of creating a large, integrated center but provided no model for layout. Shopper's World failed to impress them due to the great width of the mall and the fact that the entire scheme was devised to accommodate two department stores rather than one. Both client and architect felt Northgate looked cheap and unappealing; nevertheless, it appears to have influenced Lakewood's arrangement, hierarchy of stores, and tenant mix.<sup>51</sup>

While similarities existed between Lakewood and Northgate, the two differed in conceptual origin. According to Martin, the decisive party





in choosing a mall plan and in determining the nature of its configuration was the May Company's store planning staff. The premise for their solution lay with the aisles of a department store along which various types of merchandise were carefully positioned so as to foster perambulation and impulse buying. Martin had worked closely with these designers on the interiors of the Wilshire and Crenshaw stores. He regarded them as masters at understanding the psychological aspects of shopping and how to induce movement of customers throughout large areas of space. Lakewood's mall was thus developed as an extension of interior planning, an externalized adaptation of the department store aisle. The notion of a downtown shopping street closed to vehicles, the inspiration for Northgate, was a less controlled setting from the retailer's perspective and does not seem to have affected the concept for Lakewood at all.<sup>52</sup>

In reaction to Northgate, considerable effort was made at Lakewood not to have the experience boring. The mall was slightly wider (sixty feet) than Northgate's; yet it remained a tight, linear zone, paved and with minimal landscaping so that pedestrians could get a clear view of displays on both sides (figure 241). The main difference was that each store could have its own identity—indeed, each was designed by a party of the tenant's choosing—echoing Gruen's 1943 *Forum* proposal. Martin's office prepared plans for the building "shells," which included the canopies. Unlike at Northgate, but again similar to Gruen's scheme, the canopies were set high so that all signs and other elements related to the stores themselves could be treated as a unit below, in full view of customers and subordinate to the overall character of the precinct (figure 242). Martin fur-

241

Lakewood Center, view of mall. (*Southwest Builder and Contractor*, 27 October 1950, 31.)

ther coordinated the process by reviewing individual store designs to ensure harmonious relationships.

While the street was not an archetype for Lakewood, the results, more than at Northgate, suggested a planned urban landscape. The array of storefronts contributed to this effect; but the predominant ambience was one of order. The site plan possessed Beaux-Arts overtones in its pervasive biaxial symmetry. The complex had an equally distinct hierarchy—the size, shape, and position of each part enunciating its relative importance. However significant the mall as a merchandising space, there was no question as to which side was the front, with the vast May store dominating the ensemble and centered on the primary axis at the end of a tree-lined drive. Plantings, approach routes, and the placement of buildings also gave the complex a clear relationship with the surrounding streets and the site of the municipal center, directly across Lakewood Boulevard. The concern for visual clarity extended to such minor, albeit expensive, details as grading the front car lot on an almost imperceptible slope to give more emphasis to the buildings and less to the automobiles from the periphery—a device Stein had studied for similar reasons in his Whittier Boulevard project (figure 243). Unlike Northgate, where the Bon Marche store projected far beyond its neighbors, the stores at Lakewood had minor recesses, giving continuity to the front elevation end to end. Furthermore, in contrast to the subdued treatment of storefronts fac-





ing the car lots at Northgate and the nondescript character of those at Shoppers' World, counterparts here were much the same as those facing the mall, so that the complex seemed accessible and inviting from its approach paths (figure 244).

#### SEQUELS

Lakewood Center established a significant precedent in southern California for the construction of large, fully integrated retail complexes, each oriented to a pedestrian mall and conveying little semblance of a conventional urban retail district. Within the Los Angeles metropolitan area, thirteen other regional malls were open or nearing completion of their first phase by 1960.<sup>53</sup> Several more were community-sized centers anchored by a junior department store.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, after Valley Plaza, no regional center was built in the area without a mall as its spine.<sup>55</sup> None of the new complexes was as large as Lakewood; nevertheless, the average size was impressive. Three had between 400,000 and 450,000 square feet of retail space; three between 500,000 and 600,000; five between 675,000 and 800,000. Among the biggest, eight occupied between fifty and eighty-five acres; eight were planned for fifty or more store units; and the same number had parking lots accommodating between 5,000 and 7,000 automobiles. Three had department stores of roughly the same size as the May Company at Lakewood; at least four others had a department store of over 200,000 square feet. Nationwide, only New York rivaled Los Angeles in the number of large new shopping centers within the metropolitan area.<sup>56</sup>

The development of regional malls in Los Angeles occurred at a more or less even pace between the end of the Korean War and the close of the decade. Plans for at least three such complexes were announced in 1953, although construction began on only one of them. Two more were

242

Lakewood Center, detail of Bond Clothes storefront at opening, 1952. (Hearst Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

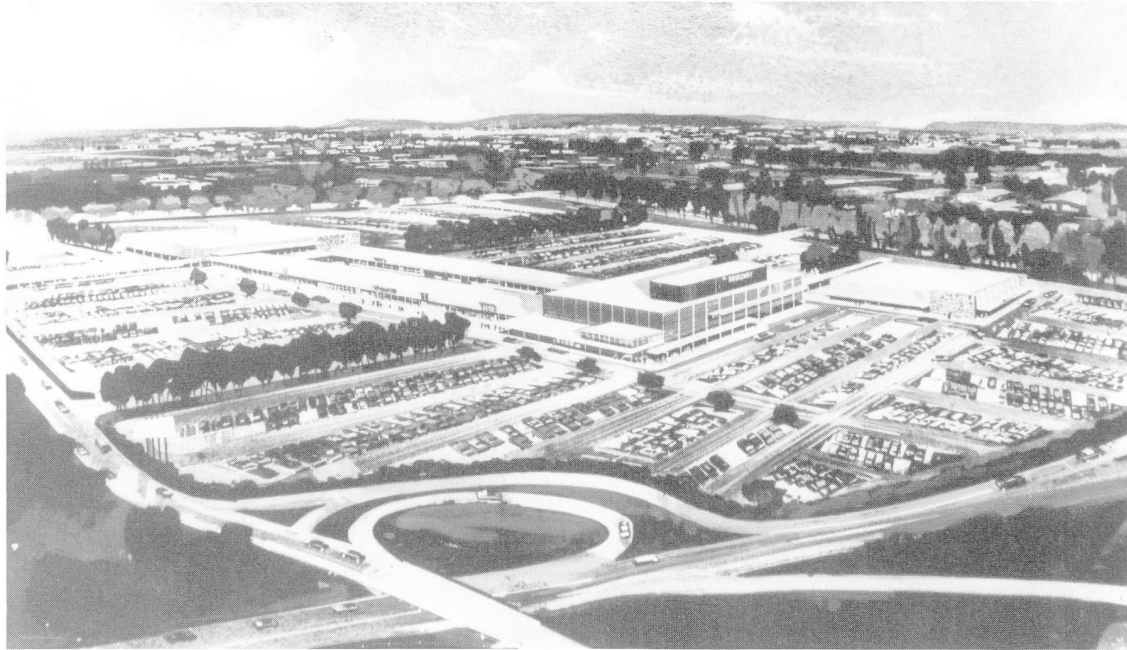
243

Lakewood Center, general view showing May Company store and adjacent buildings. Photo author, 1986.

started in 1954 and in 1955; three each in 1956 and 1957, and one each in 1958 and 1959.<sup>57</sup> Two complexes had at least a major component of their master plan opened in 1955. They were joined by one more the following year, four each in 1957 and 1958, and two in 1960. Throughout the period, there was an overriding consistency in layout, tenant structure, and physical character. Among the shopping malls designed before the Korean War, Northgate and its immediate progeny, including Stonestown and Lakewood, were the most obvious precedents for this work. Continuity was fostered in part because two of the earliest sequels (Anaheim Plaza and Los Altos Shopping Center) were designed by Stonestown's architect, Welton Becket, and a third (Eastland) was undertaken by the same team (Eichenbaum, May, and Martin) responsible for Lakewood. Yet by the mid-1950s, the characteristics of these shopping centers reflected tendencies that were national more than particular to southern California or even the west coast.

As at Northgate and Lakewood, the tenancy of Los Angeles malls for the most part included a major department store branch as the retail anchor, balanced by an array of sizable chain outlets and smaller specialty shops. Nonretail functions tended to be limited to closely related support facilities, including restaurants, banks, a few recreational enterprises such as movie theaters and bowling alleys, and an equally modest number of offices, usually for medical and other services people were likely to combine with shopping trips. The broader planning reform agenda of creating a retail complex that also functioned as a civic and/or cultural center secured no more than token acknowledgment. The pedestrian mall in these





facilities tended to be a long and relatively narrow space where paved surfaces rather than landscaping predominated and where store windows were the primary objects of attention. Much as at Northgate, the buildings generally were treated as a neutral backdrop, without the cultivated variety of storefronts proposed in Gruen's projects and realized at Lakewood. But the most pronounced departure from Lakewood and Northgate was in the positioning of the major stores.

The layout of Lakewood was successful owing to its enormous size. All parts of the complex were considered more or less equally desirable because, in addition to the centrally placed department store, there were one or more secondary anchors—a junior department store, variety store, and supermarket—at each end. Less ambitious regional malls could not follow this tripartite arrangement with the same success since they had fewer large units. As a result, the favored layout in southern California and many other parts of the country soon became the “dumbbell” plan in which the major stores were placed at or near the ends. This configuration was planned, but not implemented, as early as 1949 at Shoppers' World. The concept gained additional publicity with an unrealized 1951 scheme undertaken by Marshall Field & Company for 1,500,000-square-foot center at Skokie, Illinois.<sup>58</sup> Probably the first executed dumbbell design plan was Stonestown, which opened in July 1952, not long before the planning got under way for the post-Korean War generation of shopping centers. Stonestown also provided a model in terms of the types of anchor units: a junior department store and huge supermarket, together balancing the major department store at the other end. Preliminary plans for several southern California successors called for a centrally placed department store, but almost all the executed designs utilized the dumbbell configuration.<sup>59</sup>

244

Lakewood Center, general view of store block. Photo author, 1986.

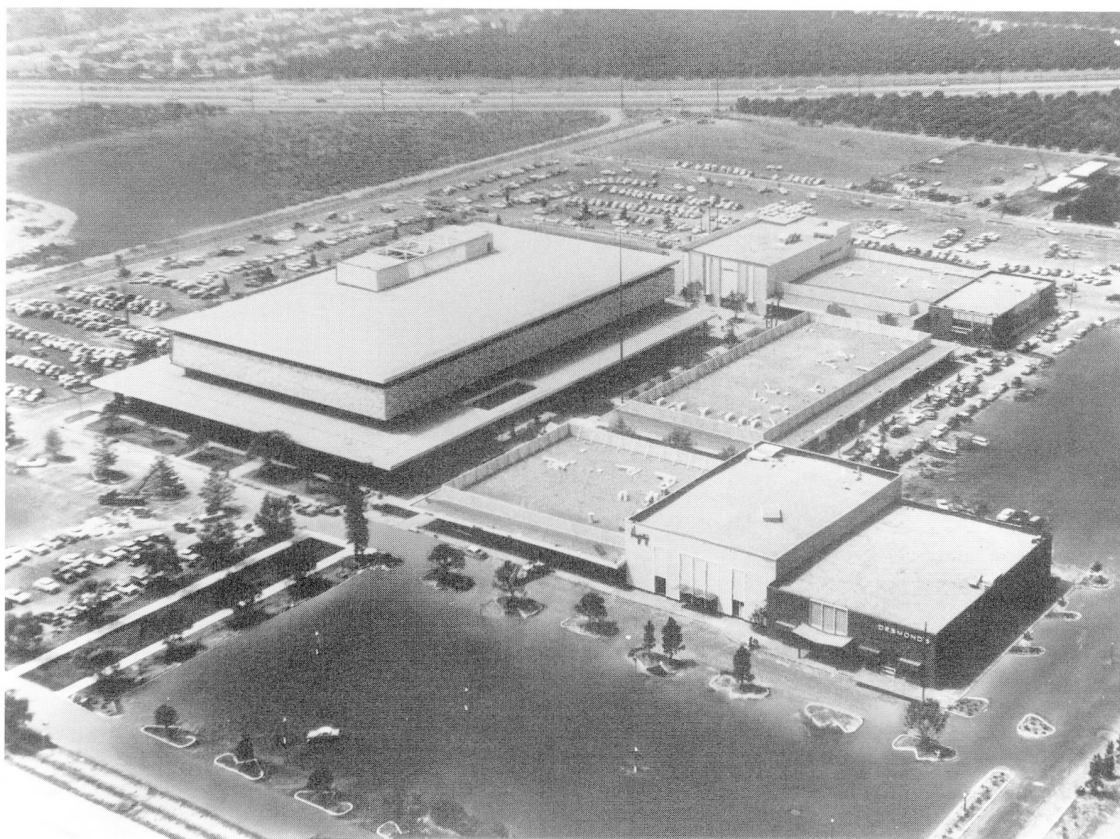
245

Anaheim Plaza, Santa Ana Freeway, Crescent Drive, Euclid and Loara streets, Anaheim, 1954–1957, Welton Becket & Associates, architects; later additions, demolished 1993. Aerial perspective, 1954. (Hearst Collection Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

There was even greater impetus to situate the retail anchors at either end when both units were large branches of major downtown department stores and hence of equivalent stature. The idea of having dual anchors was another unfulfilled innovation of Shoppers' World, where a branch of Filene's was to have complemented that of Jordan Marsh. Most department store executives remained skeptical of such an arrangement, believing that competition should come from specialty stores instead. The closest thing to parity these companies were willing to accept was having a junior department store, as at Northgate, which would remain subordinate to the major store in the shopping center's hierarchy. Some change in thinking began to emerge during the mid-1950s, so that having dual anchors became a distinct trend, if not as yet a prevalent one, by the start of the next decade.

Among the early projects of this type to see realization was Anaheim Plaza (1954–1957), which was developed by the Broadway (figure 245). The leadership of what was by then Broadway-Hale Stores was in a good position to realize the benefits of having dual anchors from firsthand experience at the Crenshaw Center. Again working in collaboration with Coldwell Banker, Broadway executives planned to institutionalize what had occurred unexpectedly at the earlier project. There was little question as to how such an arrangement should be resolved when the entire complex was planned. The Crenshaw Center demonstrated the weaknesses of having the two major stores next to one another; the dumbbell plan was the logical alternative that could work to maximum advantage to all parties.<sup>60</sup> However, persistent apprehension about this concept, coupled with fears that the development of regional centers might soon oversaturate the market, prevented the Broadway's plan from being fully implemented until the 1960s.<sup>61</sup> Anaheim Plaza was also the first regional center in the metropolitan area after Valley Plaza to have its siting predicated on the freeway system, a factor that subsequently became key for almost every retail development of this scale.

Another important innovation in regional center design launched during the 1950s, which appears to have originated in the Los Angeles area, was the so-called "fashion square," comprised of a major department store and branch specialty stores dealing primarily in stylish clothing, accessories, and furniture. A few groupings of this kind were created during the 1940s, among the best known of which were the Miracle Mile at Manhasset, Long Island, and what later became known as the Chestnut Hill Shopping Plaza at Newton, Massachusetts.<sup>62</sup> However, probably the first such undertaking in the country where the complex was fully integrated and employed a pedestrian mall as a unifying feature was Fashion Square (1957–1958), a thirty-two-unit complex undertaken by Bullock's at Santa Ana, the largest community in Orange County (figure 246). More than its prototypes, the new Orange County center carried almost nothing in the way of everyday goods and services. Bullock's officials maintained that the majority of their customers made routine purchases and bought "fashion goods" on different occasions.<sup>63</sup> Thus, alongside the 330,000-square-foot



department store were large outlets of I. Magnin, Desmond's, Haggerty's, and numerous smaller stores. Unlike at many shopping centers, the hierarchy was less one of corporate stature than of size. The layout was more informal than at most contemporary malls, with a large, irregular court, formed by Bullock's on one side, small shops on the other, and the three medium-sized stores at the ends (figure 247).

Like the Broadway, Bullock's devised the scheme based on the success of a previous, unplanned venture. When the company's Pasadena store opened in 1947 it was wholly isolated from retail activity, yet within a few years the fronting street had become the spine of a thriving new district of prestigious shops. During the next decade, over thirty stores were built there, and while it was not an integrated development, South Lake Center, as it became known, was widely recognized as a premier retail precinct. For Bullock's the impact of this growth, all of it orchestrated by Coldwell Banker, was so positive that company executives embarked on planning a complex along somewhat similar lines, without the constraints of, or the congestion from, a bisecting street.<sup>64</sup> The organization that had been so instrumental in creating the lone-wolf department store now joined its competitors in pursuing the potential advantages of a fully planned business center.

The proliferation of regional malls in southern California during the 1950s underscored the pivotal place of Lakewood Center in establishing new standards of scale and planning. A decade after Lakewood was be-

246

Fashion Square, N. Main Street and Roe Drive, Santa Ana, 1957–1958, Pereira & Luckman and others, architects; altered, some parts demolished. Aerial view, 1958. (Hearst Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)



247

Fashion Square, mall. Photo "Dick" Whittington, ca. 1958. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

gun, the commercial landscape of the Los Angeles metropolitan area had changed dramatically with fourteen such complexes in operation and proposals for many more under way. Collectively this work not only addressed the demands of an ever-expanding population but posed a serious challenge to the importance of older retail districts—those cast in a traditional mold such as downtown Los Angeles, Hollywood, and Long Beach, and even somewhat newer developments such as the Miracle Mile. As a whole, the complex was now much less hierarchical, with many places serving as primary retail destination points rather than a single, dominant core with several important but subsidiary nodes around it. Downtown's status as the principal center for retailing had completely dissipated. That district was just another among many—physically larger than any one other place, but eclipsed in sales volume and in prestige by the now greater collective galaxy of regional centers. Downtown was considered of little consequence by a great portion of area residents. Outlying developments, whose promoters had once hoped for hegemony at least in a sizable part of the metropolitan area, likewise had diminished roles. Just as Hollywood never became the preeminent retail center for the region, and no one part of the Wilshire corridor secured dominance over the others, so neither Valley Plaza nor Panorama City attained the position of “down-



town” for all the San Fernando Valley. Pioneering examples of each type reaped the rewards of novelty, drawing consumers from far afield at an early stage, but then competitors began to open, and within a decade the territory was more or less saturated.

The regional malls demonstrated that while the new commercial landscape was quite different in appearance from previous endeavors, many of its underlying aspects drew from work begun in the 1920s. Bullock’s credited its Pasadena store with inspiring Fashion Square, but much the same type of district had been created along Wilshire boulevard in large part due to the unprecedented siting of its store there. If the Crenshaw Center provided the obvious antecedent for Anaheim Plaza, A. W. Ross had come close to achieving an equivalent along the Miracle Mile by securing both the new flagship store of the May Company and Coulter’s sizable emporium lured from downtown. Indeed, it could be argued that the Miracle Mile also represented the dumbbell plan in embryo, with the May store at one end and a cluster of heavily used chain outlets offering a complementary balance at the other. The Farmers Market, Crossroads of the World, and earlier shopping courts revealed how a space oriented to pedestrians could serve as a significant asset in the retail field. The large chain store, which provided an essential component of the regional mall, and the anchors of less comprehensive centers were profoundly influenced by the focus on volume sales and self-service pioneered by the supermarket. Finally, there was the concept of one-stop shopping at a place where businesses operated in concert and to which one could drive, thence, park and reach the stores conveniently—an experience that regional malls and dozens of smaller shopping centers allowed Angelenos to take for granted by 1960, but which seemed very novel when it was introduced to the previous generation in the guaranteed neighborhood.

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## AFTERWORD

*The transformation from central shopping district to regional shopping mall occurred piecemeal as a result of numerous factors that no one party could predict and over which no one party exercised control. Major department store companies emerged as the pivotal players in the development of the regional mall just as they had been in the rise of the core retail center. In Los Angeles, these firms became crucial in the decentralization process scarcely a decade after finalizing the matrix for downtown development, and they never relinquished their formative influence on patterns of commercial growth during the years that followed. Yet the big stores found that expansion into outlying areas carried the continual risk of undermining their enormous investment in the city center. Department store executives were nervous about such a fate from the earliest stages of branch development. Los Angeles companies were less cautious than most, perhaps because the diffuse nature of residential development seemed to offer no viable alternative. These companies strove to achieve a balance: to maintain big emporia both in and beyond the urban core. But the equilibrium was short-lived. At midcentury, Los Angeles led the nation in the number of large department store branches, while the city also ranked among the least active in updating its premier downtown establishments.*

*Department store companies expanded outside the city center in part out of fear that chain store firms would seriously undercut their hard-won share of the market if the status quo was maintained. Sears, Roebuck helped create this new, intensely competitive situation by rejecting the*