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.[9] 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.

STEIN

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.

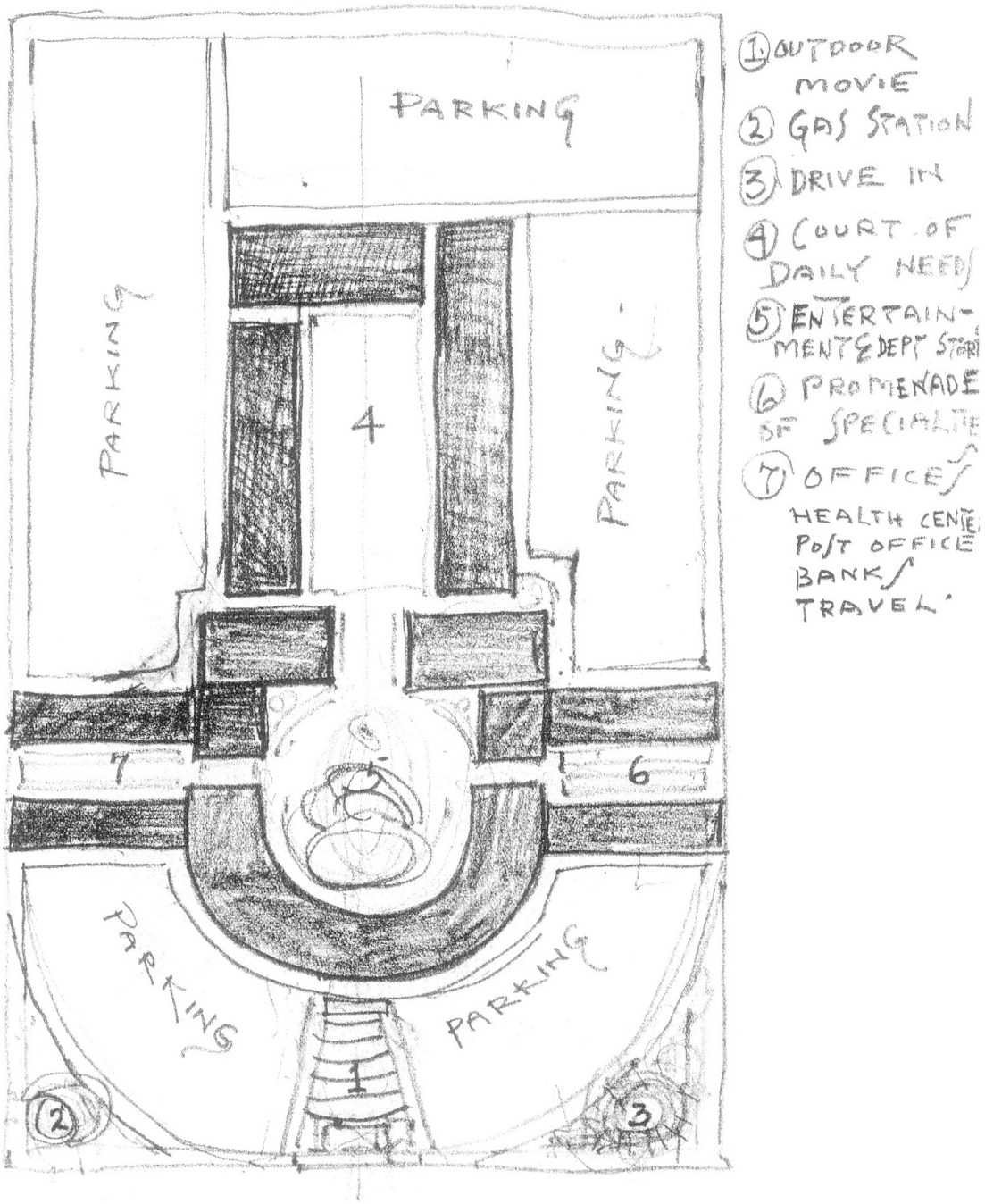
Few architects tried harder than Clarence Stein to give form and direction to the shopping mall during the late 1940s. Stein's experience

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.[10] 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.[11] 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.[12] 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.[13] Stein's layout appears to have been predicated on the belief that people would require no encouragement from the configuration itself to



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.[14]

219
Schematic study for shopping center, probably on Whittier Boulevard between Goodrich and Gerhart streets, Commerce, Clarence Stein and Lewis Wilson, associated architects, 1948. Site plan. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)

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."[15] 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.

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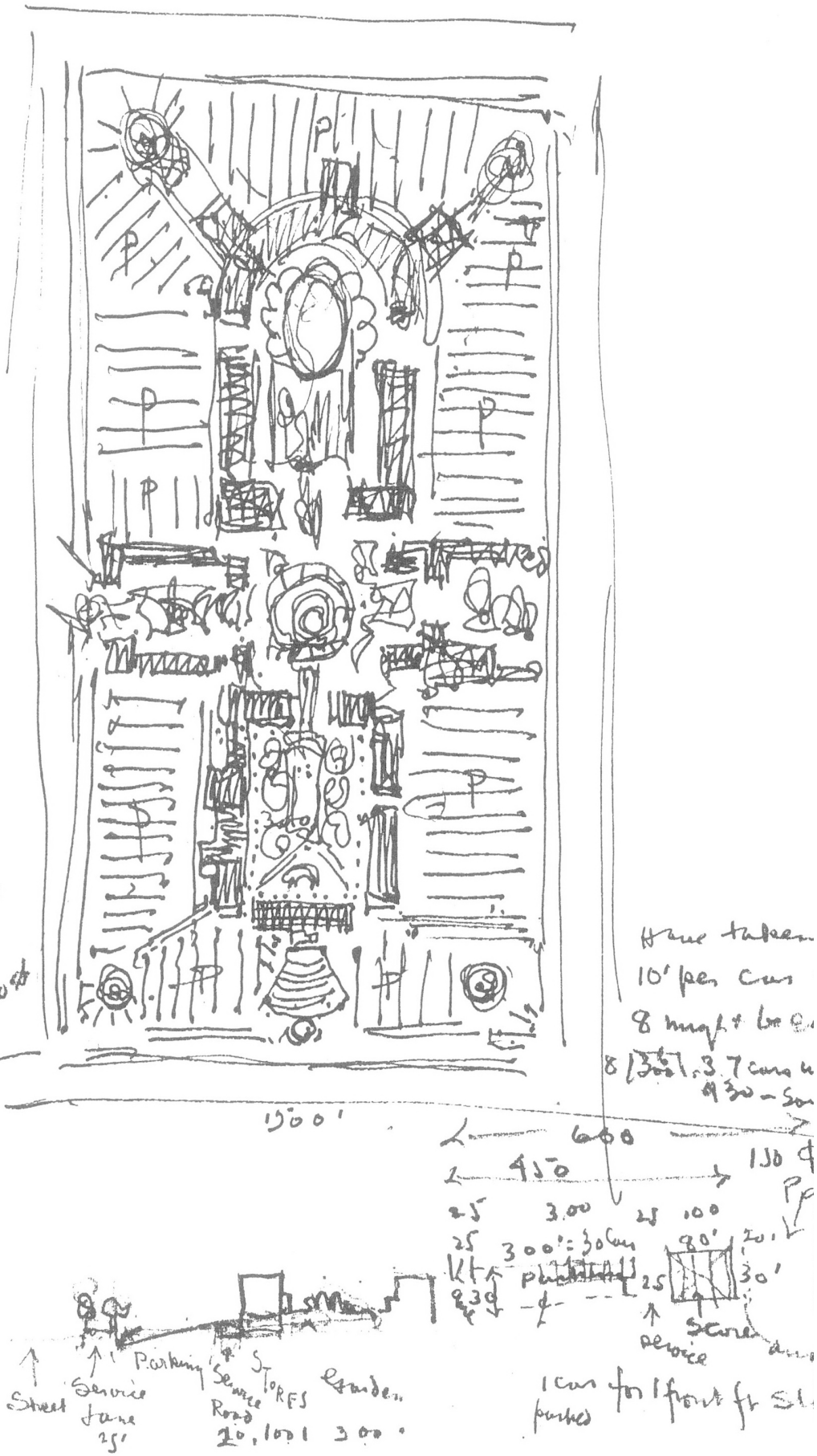

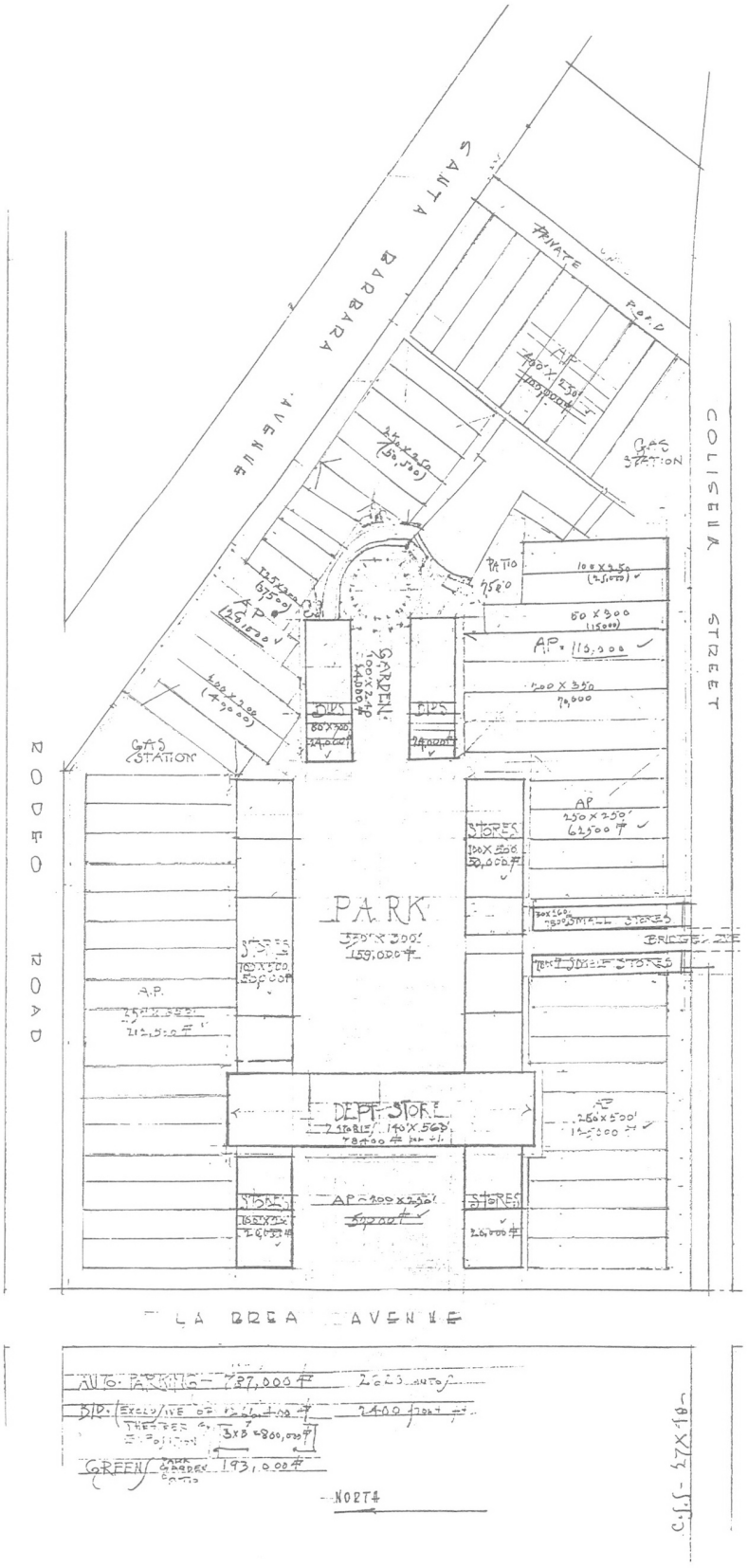

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Schematic study for shopping center, probably on Whittier Boulevard, 1948, Stein and Wilson, associated architects. Site plan. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)

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.)

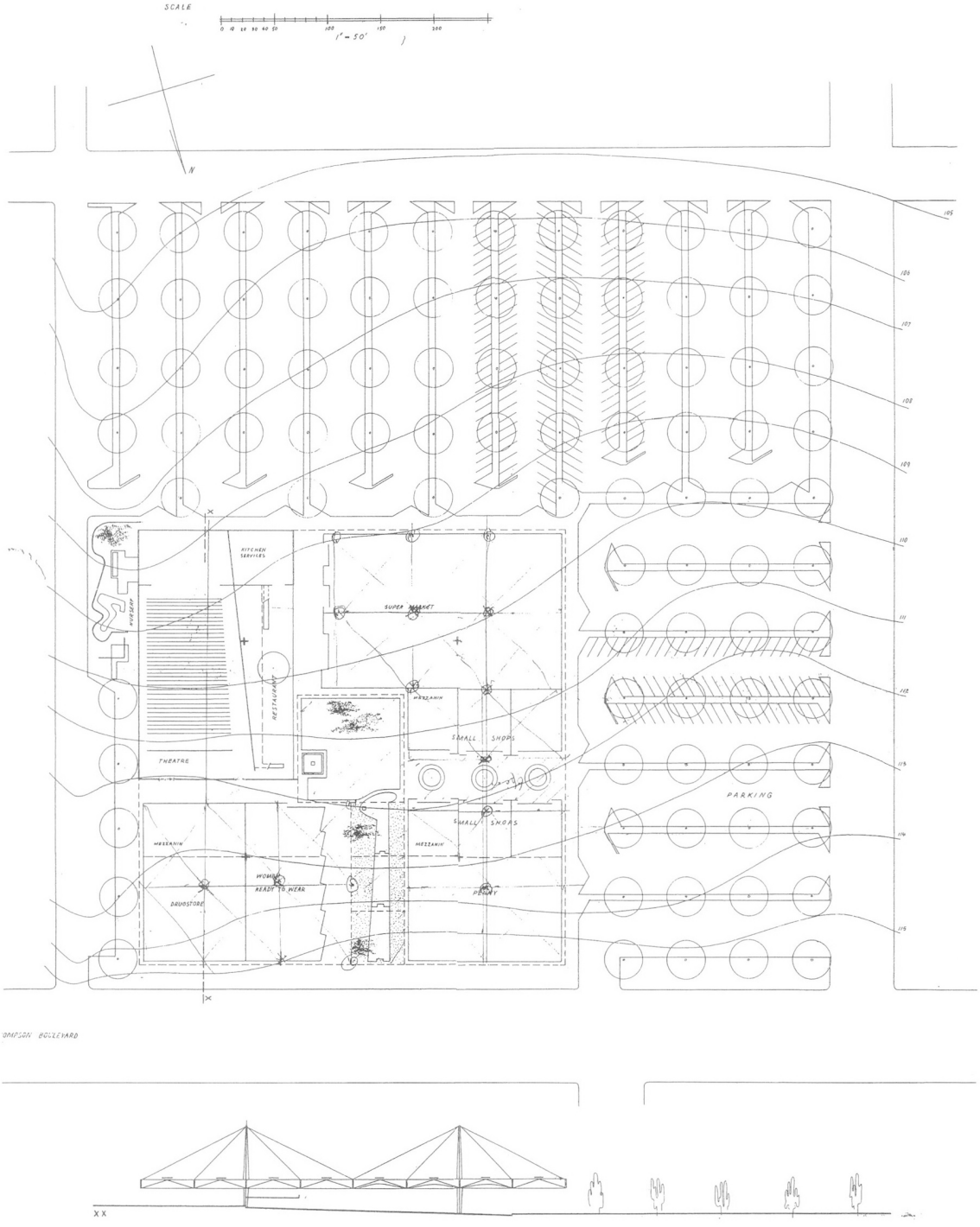
Remarkably, the site lay only about a dozen blocks from the Crenshaw Center. Wilson asserted that the two would not compete. The area's growth was such that "every large merchandiser in the United States will eventually be located in this area, and . . . with the proper . . . [design, the client] would be in the best position of offering them the first choice rather than Beverly Hills or Wilshire Boulevard."[16] 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.[17]

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.[18] 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).

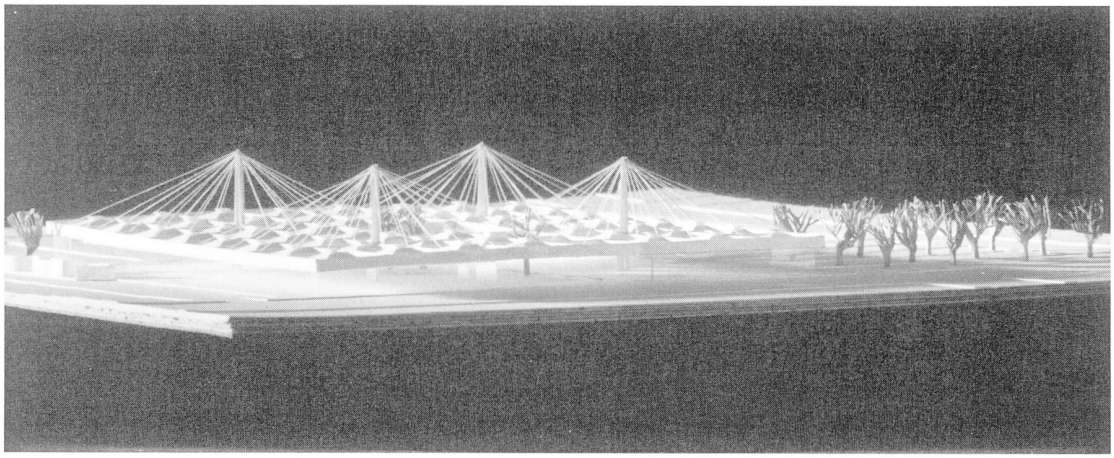
The problem of confined space could be overcome by making it appear more expansive than it actually was, or by making confinement an attribute, as was done at the Farmers Market. A fusion of both approaches was attained in the remarkable design for the Ventura project prepared some months after the initial 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."[19] 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.[20]

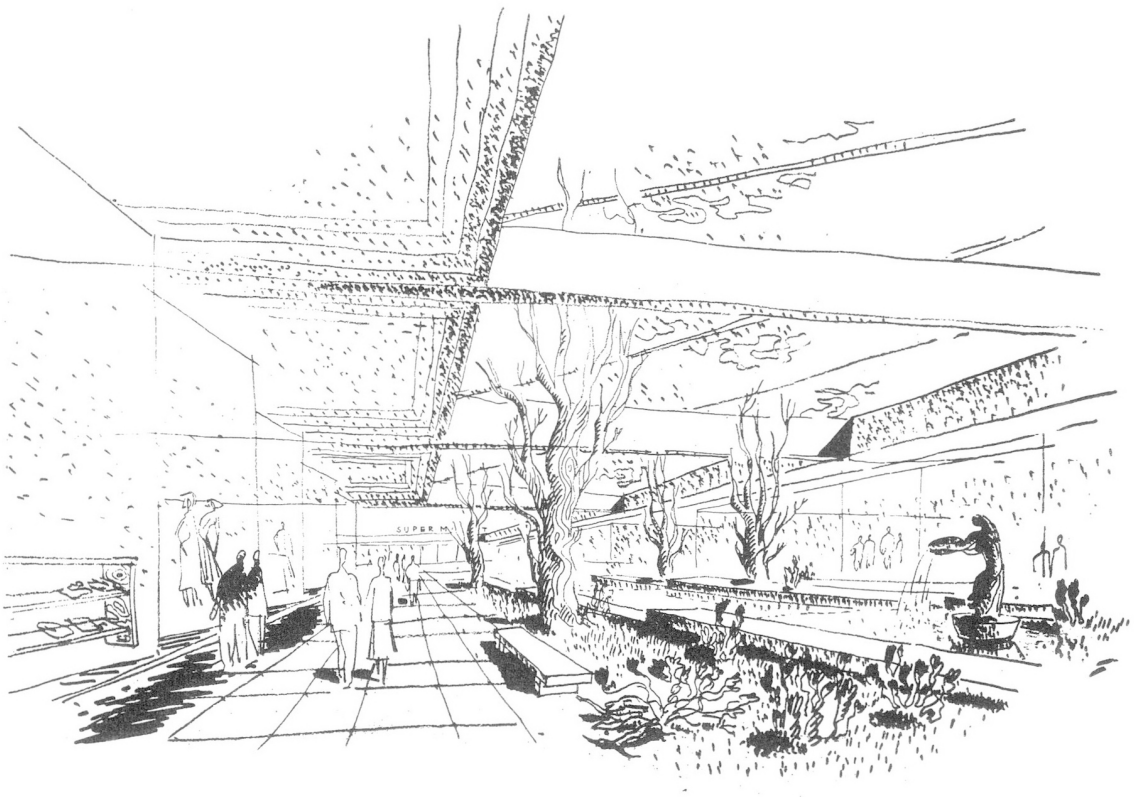
If the Ventura design demonstrated how the mall could enhance a compact arrangement of retail space, a more or less concurrent proposal explored how the mall could serve as an instrument of dispersal. The scheme was developed in 1949 by Robert Alexander as a master plan for the newly incorporated community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

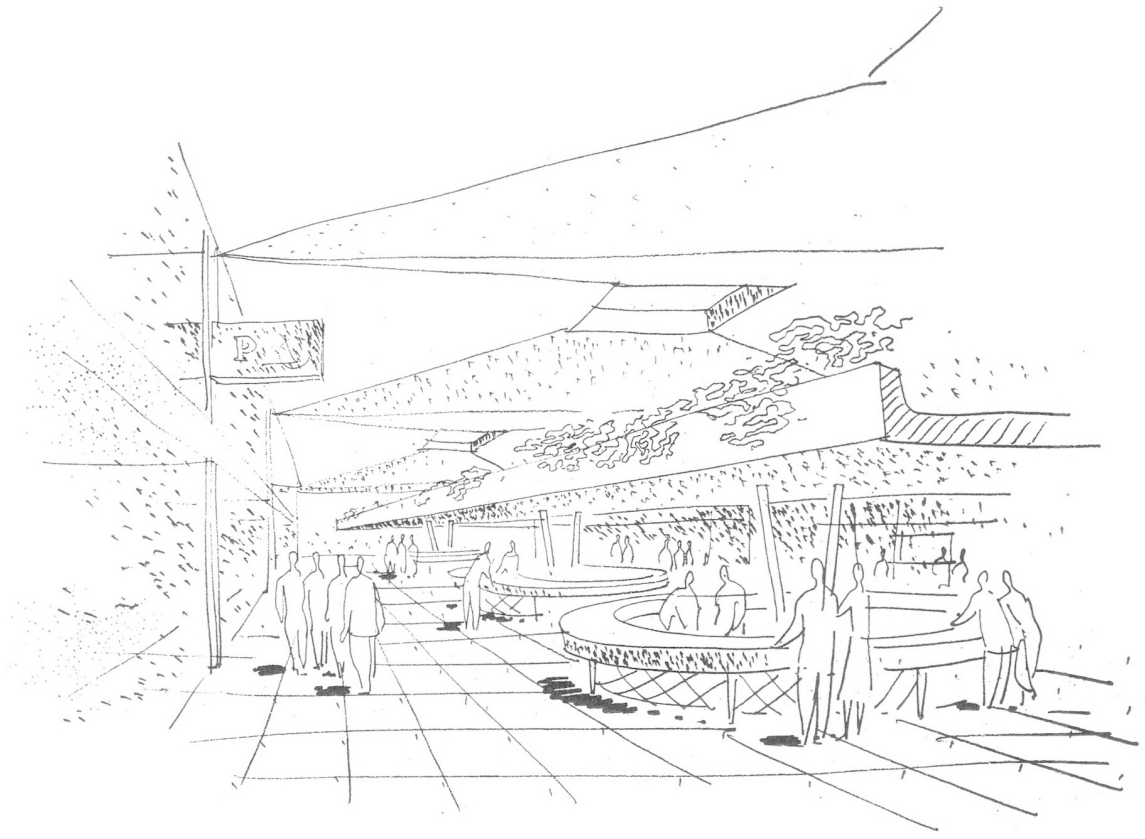
224
Shopping center, Ventura, Nowicki and Stein, model. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)

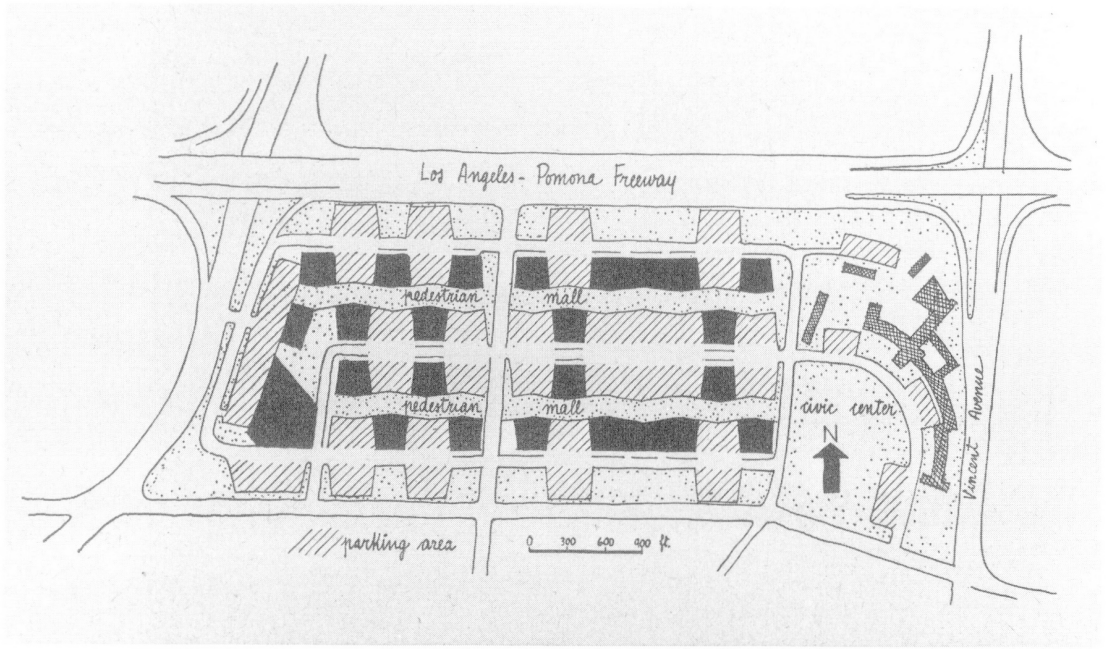
225
Shopping center, Ventura, sketch of mall by Matthew Nowicki. (Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.)

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.[21]

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.[22] 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.[23] 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 studied soon thereafter.[24] 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