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FOREWORD

Lorcan O'Herlihy

A word to our readers: In looking back on the past 25 years of our practice we are continually floored by how much the world has changed, and with it, the practice of architecture. In the 1990's when I began my practice, architecture was considered a luxury. Design was more about formal polemics, exploring materials and technology, and how you could push form, than it was about the people who were living in it and the cities being occupied.

Since then, the world and our understanding of its delicate balance has changed, and with these changes architects have had to take back up the Modernist's mission to make the world a better place, to solve larger social ills. Today, architecture is no longer simply about designing a building as an isolated object, but instead about engaging with all the forces that are shaping our world-- social, political, environmental. This has inspired a school of architects who are exploring a more humanistic approach to the built environment and who are engaging the fate of cities, as more and more people flood into them. Some of them really want to be there, some have been forced to be there by enormous economic shifts. This cosmic change is the fulcrum of our architectural practice.

I like to think of architecture as a living, breathing organism that plays a significant role in how we interact with the world. In this way, I believe that architecture needs to be understood as a social act, as a tool with which we can connect to politics, economics, aesthetics, and smart growth to promote social equity, human interaction, and cultural evolution.

There is no denying that these larger societal forces, in tandem with the advent of technology and the rise of social media, has sped up the pace of life and paradoxically made us more isolated and far less social. And, so, I believe that it is more important than ever to design spaces that encourage and promote human interaction, especially as cities are growing at a pace never before seen, and people are living closer and closer to one another.

This emerging reality has imposed on architects the obligation to evolve policy and initiate conversations to promote smart growth. Our approach has become more bottom-up, more nuanced, and considerate of the culture and ecology that is already present, to avoid displacing people (as was done in the past), to make neighborhoods inclusive across age, race, and socio-economic strata.

This book follows from these concerns and is our attempt to take stock and reflect upon the course of our work over the past two and a half decades. Specifically, we are interested in looking at the evolution of the cities and neighborhoods in which we are working, to see how they affected us and how we've affected them.

In 2017 we published *Amplified Urbanism* (Publisher Name), with the goal of provoking conversations about how cities may become more dynamic, sustainable, and productive environments. The book summarized our ideas about urbanism. We invited seven like-minded authors to contribute interdisciplinary ideas and insights into the diverse dimensions of city life – from radical new forms of public performance art and unorthodox community gatherings to innovative infrastructure strategies related to evolving transportation networks and sensitive urban flood plains. The book was more of a think piece and an opportunity to place us within a larger discourse.

Many years before, *Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects* was released, a book that included the four commercial projects on Main Street in Santa Monica, where this book begins. That period, in the mid-1990s, was the start of a more social agenda for my practice, when I began to shift from designing houses in the hills to investigating how I could break down the public-private divide that existed in Los Angeles and encourage a more public-facing lifestyle.

This present book, you might say, is a combination of those two publications. *Architecture Is a Social Act* is not, merely, a compilation of beautiful designs. The 28 projects presented here are showcased as portraits of the times in which they were created. This book. We are interested in how our work derives from and speaks to a site's history and context, and is always informed by the people who live there. The book mirrors our practice, where we always begin with facts on the ground, working from the bottom up, never the top down.

Organized as a chronology that begins in the 1990s and ends just before 2020, the book is broken up into six sections, each representing a tipping point for our practice-- periods where the work was launched in new directions with new sets of challenges. From activating main streets, to designing housing of all shapes and sizes, to bringing hope to the homeless, and developing strategic plans for the future growth of cities such as Detroit and Raleigh, all of the work is represented within a larger social framework.

Architecture no longer has the luxury of parachuting in on the winds of big ideas. It's the minute particulars of everyday life that make our work today meaningful and frankly relevant. And, we hope, transcendent.

HOUSING OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES 2000 - 2010

- 2000 61% of Americans live in cities
- Average Cost of new house in California is \$236k(up \$70k from 4 years earlier)
- Los Angeles population 3.7 million (up from 200k from 1990)
- 2001 9-11 attack on New York's Twin Towers
- George W. Bush is elected as 43rd president of the United States
- 2002 'I do believe in the American Dream [and] owning a home is a part of that dream, it just is. Right here in America if you own your

own home, you're realizing the American Dream.' George W. Bush

- 2006 Average cost of a home in the US reaches all-time high of \$311,700 nationally, (\$550k in California)
- Home prices then begin to fall for the first time in 11 Years. Home Permits Fall 28%
- 2007 Subprime industry collapse; several subprime lenders declaring bankruptcy, announcing significant losses, or putting themselves up for sale that triggers a The Great Recession Won a global scale
- 2009 Governments in the US and around the world pump trillions of dollars into the financial system and into the economies hoping to avert another Great Depression. By the end of the year, unemployment continues to increase, markets had recovered and most thought the worst was over.
- Average California home prices in hit low of \$245k, down from \$550, two years earlier
- 2010 Los Angeles Population hits new high and continues to rise: 3,792,621 city; 9,818,605 county; metro 12,828,837[55]

Formosa1140

2004 – 2009

Los Angeles famously lacks urban public space, averaging 3.3 acres of parks per 1,000 residents. That puts it 74th out of the one hundred largest cities in the United States. In West Hollywood, a small city of 37,000 sitting at the foot of the Hollywood Hills, the problem is far worse, with only one percent of total land allocated to public greenspace. The compact city, with a population density greater than every major American city with the exception of New York, was built to capacity decades ago. With no land to expand its existing parks, or build new large ones, West Hollywood decided to find ways to green up the city. This was at the very moment, in neighboring Los Angeles, that residents were addressing the same crisis by making their own parks out of blighted, empty lots. In 2007, the City of West Hollywood became one of the first cities in the nation to adopt a green building ordinance that linked density to open space.

It was at this very time that we partnered with our client, Richard Loring, on our third and most ambitious housing project yet, one that would simultaneously fulfill Weho's mission and become a social experiment in its own right. What emerged was Formosa1140, located in an older part of West Hollywood once filled with small Craftsman and Spanish Colonial Revival homes and duplexes built for the lower ranks of film studio workers. The block had long since been transformed into a nearly unbroken wall of stucco dingbat apartments; our job was to design an 11-unit housing complex on the site of a derelict craftsman-turned-crackhouse. The new project was informed by the successes and challenges of our Habitat825, in a far more upscale part of West Hollywood, where we'd created a generous setback to promote a semi-public zone between the dwelling and the street.

Although not architecturally significant, the City of West Hollywood was pushing to save the Formosa Avenue house, since development at the time was frowned upon. Plus, the craftsman was one of the few remnants of the original street. After months of deliberations between city officials, neighbors, our office, and the client, everyone agreed that demolishing the house and replacing it with housing and a publicly-accessible pocket park would be a win-win solution.

It took some wrangling but ultimately, we found a way to make this unique public-private partnership work by having the landowner lease



2005

Subprime industry collapse; several subprime lenders declaring bankruptcy, announcing significant losses



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2009

Subprime industry collapse; several subprime lenders declaring bankruptcy, announcing significant losses, or putting themselves up for sale that triggers a The Great Recession on a global scale

the park, in perpetuity, to the city -- a first for West Hollywood. The city paid for the park, and will continue its upkeep. In one stroke, we unearthed open space, promoted neighborhood beautification on an especially bleak street, and provided much-needed housing, all the while creating a prototype for the city for block-by-block urban infill and greening.

The 11-units of Formosa1140 total 28,000 square feet, sharing at 13,442 square foot lot with the pocket park. Less than a block south, at the corner of Formosa Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard, is the Formosa Cafe, a 100-year-old Hollywood watering hole and greasy spoon once filled with film biz celebrities. One of these was Lorcan's father, Dan O'Herlihy, who'd wet his whistle with his friend Orson Wells when they were working together at Warner Hollywood, just across the street. While much of the design for the 11-unit project was informed by the pocket park, it was the naugahyde red of the Formosa Cafe that would be our muse and become a hallmark feature of the project.

A big part of our job was to rethink the courtyard apartment -- the horseshoe layout that once upon a time was found on nearly every block in Hollywood -- and to extend the building's outdoor spaces into the park. As originally conceived, the new building would be sitting to one side of the lot, carving out the new park space, and making the apartments integral to surrounding green. This effectively bisected the parcel lengthwise, setting aside one third (4,600 square feet) for the residents, neighbors, and the general public to share during daylight hours. Alas, early on, the city decided to build a fence along the street, closing off the park during the overnight hours and diminishing what we conceived of as a strong connection between building and the enveloping site.

The park was not the only defining feature, however. The building's vibrant color palette and unique metal facade created a visually striking presence in a neighborhood dominated by neutral-colored stucco boxes. The building's exterior combined staggered geometric blocks of red and orange panels with perforated metal sheathing shielding the windows. This permeable screen projects outward from the building to the street and park-facing facades, providing shade to the units. The variation of privacy screens and open balcony voids within the building's skin gives residents a visual and visceral connection to the public park. At the project's core is the building volume, cloaked in black wood paneling that seems to disappear, making the contrasting red/orange scrim pop.

Formosa 1140, we believe, created more than space for one pocket park or good architecture for a street on a downward trajectory. In 2011, soon after we opened Formosa1140, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced a plan to develop 50 pocket parks scattered throughout L.A., some as large as a city lot and others as small as a parking space. We'd like to think that Formosa1140 was a harbinger, a forward-looking model of how to integrate public and private space. We showed how to find green real estate where none existed and how to bring neighborhoods closer together.



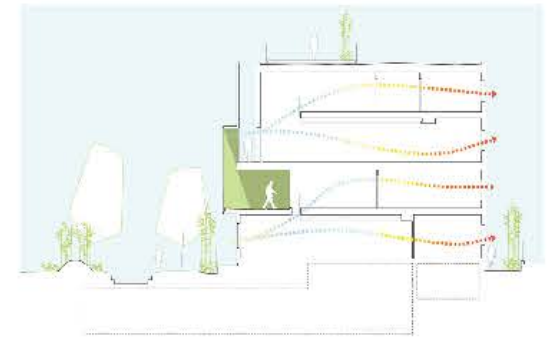
'FORMOSA was one of those projects where, when I show it to people they're just stunned, whether it's in person or pictures, because it kind of looks like a painting more than a building.' Richard Loring



Floor Plan



Cross Section







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LOHA engages the ever-changing complexities of the urban landscape, embracing architecture's role as a catalyst for change. With a conscious understanding that architecture operates within a layered context of political, developmental, environmental, and social structures, LOHA seeks to elevate the human condition via the built environment.



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