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## **Gothard Restroom**

### **Summary**

The Gothard Restroom is architecturally significant. It is the only structure envisioned for Phase I of the development of the Central Park landscape which was actually built as planned. Budget cuts and funding redirection undermined most of the original plans for this period including other buildings.

This simple structure represents a broader original plan reflecting a critical era in which ecology, humanism, and modernism were gaining significant artistic, architectural and social traction. The role of the natural world in sustaining man's happiness in an increasingly mechanized and hurried world was celebrated. At the same time, methods of reversing mankind's damage to that landscape was increasingly explored.

In 1968, the city received a report entitled "An Idea for Huntington Beach Central City Park" prepared by the firm of Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams, landscape architects, and architect Alfred Caldwell. Both Eckbo's firm (later renamed EDAW) and Caldwell were already enormously prominent in their respective fields. In April, 1970, they followed with a report on "Marketing Demand and Financial Analysis." On September 15, 1969, they were hired to design and coordinate the development of Phase I of the new park.

Their ideas spanned every aspect of the park site from quarry to amphitheater. In particular, two new buildings were intended – a glass and steel multi-purpose building and a "Restroom-Shelter". Severe budget revisions significantly curtailed planned park site development. Only the "Restroom-Shelter" was built, known colloquially today as the "Gothard Restroom."

Not only is the building significant due to its conception by the legendary team of EDAW and Caldwell, it is also significant as the only structure erected during Phase I.

## The Gothard Restroom

In the 1960s, today's "Central Park" was a forlorn landscape featuring a gravel pit, a mushroom farm, various often boggy swamps optimistically referred to as "lakes", a helipad, a police firing range and even a bedraggled old redwood water tank. Still, there were those in the community – especially Norman Worthy, then head of the Parks Department – who envisioned its possibilities as a sprawling park-site filled with amenities attractive to a growing population. Finally, after a successful campaign called "Parks for People", funding became available to begin to build the dream. A dizzying array of HUD grants, some five in all, followed later, but the initial resources clearly came from the PFP campaign. A vision for the new park emerged:

"Central City Park will be a community park. It will be passive with emphasis on a natural landscape. There will be beautiful large groves of trees and generous open areas. Walks and paths will wind in and out of the trees taking people to hills and valleys in the park. There will be views to the lakes and distant mountains.... The meadow in spring will have wildflowers, the trees beautiful blossoms...."<sup>1</sup>

Further, "Music in the amphitheater and art at the library will expand the park's appeal. A beautiful garden in a quarry and nature walks through isolated meadows will create worlds apart from the suburbs."

Clearly, it was a time when notions of ecology, reuse, and the importance of the natural world to the happiness of man were in full swing. The reversal of mankind's harmful acts to it were also acknowledged. Various aspects of "land recycling" were required. "Restoration" and "re-naturalization" of the area was needed, as was the harsher idea of "remediation" – chemical contaminants had to be dealt with as did digging up bullets and shell casings from the pistol range.

City staff had numerous ideas about what the park should offer – Mr. Worthy particularly championed an 18-hole golf course. Public input was also sought. Ultimately, a Teen Center, a model rocket range and boating were all considered as was rebuilding the old redwood water tank as an "Observation Tower."

In 1968, the city received a 34-page report entitled "An Idea for Huntington Beach Central City Park, prepared by the firm of Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams (EDAW) in conjunction with architect Alfred Caldwell. Addressing all aspects of park site development, they proposed only two types of buildings for inclusion – a multi-purpose room to be located near Huntington Lake, and a "Restroom-Shelter", three of which would offer necessary physical amenities while also providing a shelter from which to view the surrounding landscape. (Attachment I). On

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<sup>1</sup> OS 112 Concept for the Park, HUD grant application supplement

September 15, 1969, they were hired to design and oversee park development. Their reach proved expansive for several years thereafter. They reported on marketing and financial matters, especially demographics and concession planning, in 1970.

The prominence of EDAW and of Mr. Caldwell was already immense. The firm was created in 1939 when Harvard-educated landscape architect Garrett Eckbo partnered with his brother-in-law, Edward Williams. Francis Dean joined the team in 1948 and Don Austin did so in 1964, only five years before the firm was awarded the Central Park contract. By then, however, they were already highly involved in “environmentally sustainable planning at the regional scale” and highly regarded. Eckbo’s book, *Landscape for Living*, was considered instrumental in defining Modern landscape architecture. The firm’s many credits include creation of the California Urban Metropolitan Open Space Plan which Hawaii also adopted, and urban plans across the globe from the Denver Botanic Gardens to the Civic Center in Osaka, Japan. Eckbo taught at the University of Southern California School of Architecture from 1948 until 1956.

Work with the USC architecture program likely connected Garrett Eckbo with architect Alfred Caldwell. When Samuel Hurst became Chair of the department in 1962, and “determined to reunite architecture with fine arts”, he lured the prominent like-minded to teach there, among them Alfred Caldwell, who remained there for a few years during the 1960s. Long before coming to USC, Caldwell was renowned for his pioneering work in the Prairie School of design principles. He railed against urban sprawl and championed conservation, reflected in his designs for parks throughout Chicago and elsewhere. Caldwell’s celebrated published works reflected his interest in preserving the natural world including his *In Defense of Animals* followed by *Atomic Bombs and City Planning*.

News of the beginning of the Central Park design project was publicized widely. On October 4, 1970, an article in the Los Angeles Times noted that Erik Katzmaier of Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams would serve as project manager with Alfred Caldwell as consulting architect. Katzmaier, a young principal with EDAW, whose prior work included a park in Iran, was an energetic advocate. His earliest critical challenges at the site were a proposal to bisect the park with a road and the forced levelling of the hilly landscape. His letter in response was nothing short of impassioned:

“We build a park – that living thing. The soil, trees, shrubs, flowers and grass, all of which give life to man.”

Reflecting on the site’s various former unfortunate uses, he noted: “Our site epitomizes neglect and mismanagement.... There remains one testimony to what wants to be – a hill with soil that supports grass and perhaps in a few years trees and birds.”

“If the words of today, ecology and environment, mean anything, they mean that a hill and peace in the park must be preserved.”<sup>2</sup>

On April 29, 1973, the Los Angeles Times featured an update on the park’s development. In it, Katzmaier explained that the changes would seem dramatic when the “man-made wilderness” took shape. He discussed the many kinds of trees that would be planted, the planned transformation of a slope into a meadow and the placement of water-ways powered by recirculating pumps in the area. The site would be made complete as a cultural resource center when the new Central Library was completed. The article featured a photograph of the Restroom-Shelter, surrounded by a terraformed landscape still under construction.

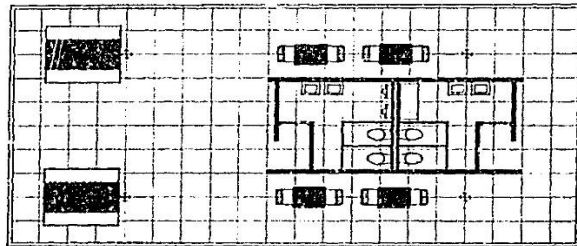
Katzmaier offered enthusiastic predictions about what might be done in the future with an additional 200 acres. These were met with skepticism from Tom Severns, then director of environmental resources. Severns noted the cost and gave the odds for their fruition at “no better than “50-50””. His observations proved prescient.

Since approving the original contract with Eckbo, Dean, Austin and Williams and consulting architect Caldwell, the city contended with numerous issues in order to complete and expand the park as originally intended. Funds were short but perhaps most challenging were unexpected threats of losing potential adjacent land acquisitions intended for park expansion to developers. Developments like Huntington Shores quickly capitalized on the proximity to the park as an attractive amenity. Nearly constant re-planning of budget dollars and grant funding occurred as the city worked desperately to acquire the surrounding land. Acquisition required diversion from improvement funding.

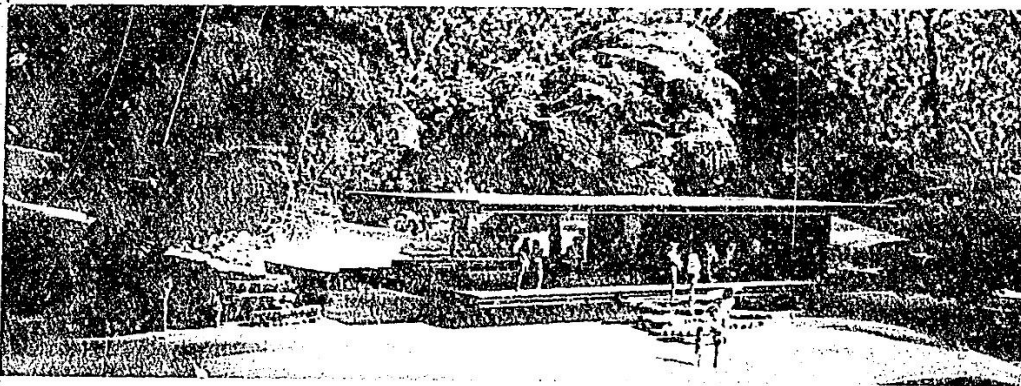
Much of the landscape hoped for in Phase I was achieved, including irrigation and the groundwork for water ways and a “natural” wildlife area. Costly structures did not fare as well. In the end, only the restroom-shelter known today as the “Gothard Restroom” was placed as intended. Its spot on a slight rise still offered views of the park and its elevation above the ground hinted at an imaginary stream. Its overhang still offered shelter to visitors. It remains the significant architectural feature of this era of Central Park’s development and the contribution of the highly significant landscape architects who created it.

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<sup>2</sup> Erik Katzmaier to Tom Severns, May 7, 1971.



BUILDING 27 FEET X 54 FEET



RESTROOM — SHELTER

Attachment I – Restroom-Shelter illustration from “An Idea for Huntington Beach Central City Park, EDAW 1968. The report concluded with a drawing of the expected view from the structure.

# Designs Started for Huntington Beach Park

Final schematic drawings, engineering plans, landscape and architectural details have been started for the first phase of the new Huntington Central Park in Huntington Beach.

The environmental planning firm of Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams, whose master plan by associate designer Erik Katzmaler was accepted by the City Council in May, is proceeding with the final details while the

city is still acquiring land for the 400-acre project.

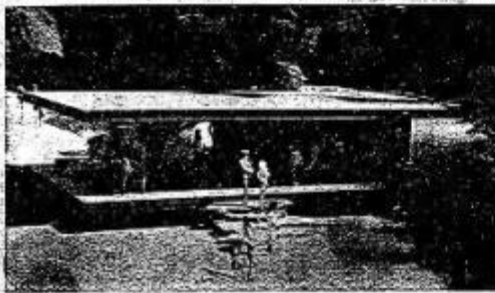
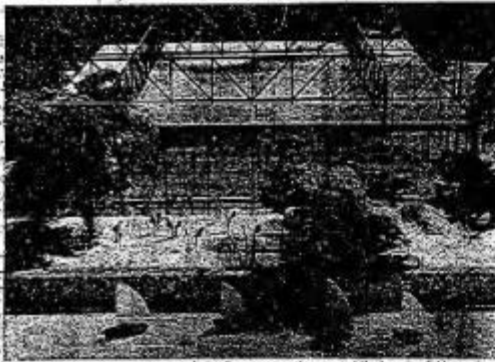
The park was programmed as a major feature of a \$30 million park development bond issue which was passed in June, 1969. The estimated construction budget for the first phase of the three-phase project is \$1,275,000.

Site of the park, at Talbert Ave. and Golden West St., almost in the geographical center of the

city, is now a dumping place with unused quarries, sheds and abandoned industrial structures. It has two small lakes and many marshy areas.

Among features of the completed park will be a botanical garden, an outdoor amphitheater and a golf course. There also will be a \$300,000 multipurpose building, picnic areas, a boat dock and playground areas.

The Eckbo firm prepared the master plan in association with architect Alfred Caldwell, professor of architecture at USC.



**DETAILS OF PARK**—Models of buildings in planned Huntington Beach park show, top, multipurpose structure and, below, a restroom shelter. Land is being acquired for the 400-acre project. Design firm has started final drawings.

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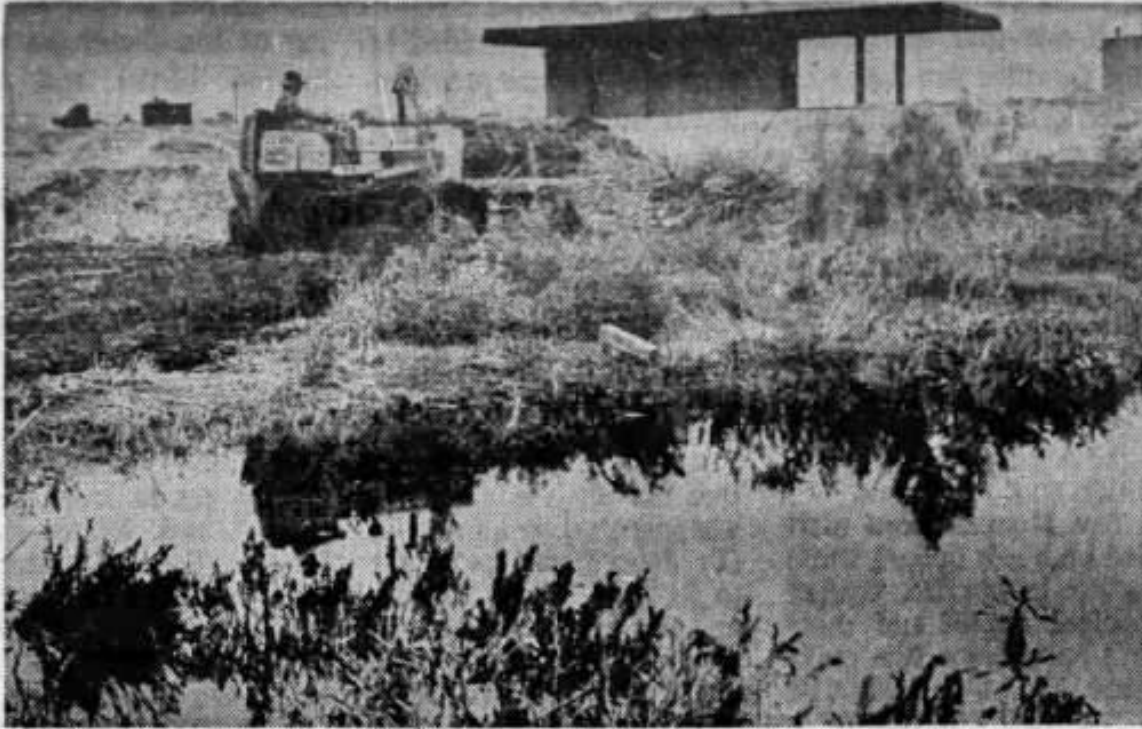
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Attachment II – Los Angeles Times, June 21, 1970. Models for EDAW’s concepts for a multipurpose building and the restroom-shelter. The restroom-shelter was built as planned.



Attachment III – Photograph of EDAW architectural model for the Restroom-Shelter



**PARK SITE** — Mounds of bullrushes are cleared away to carve a system of waterways in peat bog that will be Huntington Beach's Central City Park.  
Times photo

Attachment IV – Restroom-Shelter in place while construction continues surrounding it. Note that this photo may have been printed in reverse.

Los Angeles Times, April 29, 1973