



## **The Brief History of the Los Angeles Statler Hotel: Preservation of Urban Renewal**

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There is an inherent tension between urban renewal and preservation. In a sense, they represent polarities in conceiving of the urban environment. Renewal presupposes newness and replacement or alteration of what already exists. Preservation establishes a historic context and identifies important physical elements and human activities in the built environment that tie it to that historic context. Preservation also hinges on aspects of physical integrity, an authenticity of location, design, setting, and association, that lends credence to the building or environment that is being preserved. Urban renewal can easily lead to a destruction of some elements of a building, negatively impacting its integrity and relationship to a larger historical context; preservation may slow renewal by insisting on preserving not just the architectural or defining elements, but also their relationship to time and place. Located on the continuum between these polarities is a sense of place, or what the historian Dolores Hayden called the power of place. It is rooted in information, in ephemera, and in communal traditions that capture historic events and people's memories, as well as their uses or exclusions within official histories. Oral histories, ephemera, and archival information are a layer within preservation, but they also feed into the larger context of renewal. This paper relies on archival materials about a particular hotel building, one of the most important hotels in Los Angeles when it opened for business in 1952, as a building block in tracing the history of commercial exuberance and the urban renewal that has often accompanied it in the history of Los Angeles. Originally built by one American hotel empire, then sold to another, the property that is now called the Wilshire Grand Hotel may soon undergo yet another major change, as it is slated for redesign into a luxury hotel with condominiums, a kind of 21st century take on apartment hotels which were popular in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. The hotel's fate was always tied to the demographic and urban changes affecting Los Angeles' city center (downtown). As the owners of the current hotel look forward to its remaking, the extant historic information about the hotel shows how its evolution parallels the evolution of the city.

Discussing the history and the urban setting of a large commercial structure stretches Dolores Hayden's notion of urban landscapes as public history or of Norman Klein's mining of urban history for erasures of common memories and experiences, because it concentrates on powerful economic forces within the city. Yet although this is a story of one commercial property transforming itself in a city that constantly remakes itself, it is also the location of an accretion of human activities and urban layers. The selected ephemera used in this paper offer a window into the production and reproduction of a spatial urban typology

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