



• BALBOA PARK • CENTRAL MESA PRECISE PLAN •

Historic Context

The Central Mesa before the Expositions

In 1868, 1,400 acres of pueblo lands were set aside by San Diego City trustees for use as a public park. With this visionary step, Balboa Park came into existence as one of the largest urban parks in the United States. Through the years, citizens have struggled to preserve this precious tract of land for public park uses. The first major threat occurred in 1871 when a bill was introduced in the State Legislature to sell the property to private interests. After the bill's defeat, a new affirmation of its public ownership was framed and it stated in part, "these lands are to be held in trust forever ... for the purposes of a free and public park and for no other or different purpose." However, in less than ten years encroachments began. Park land was used for a variety of non-park purposes such as a high school, a children's home, a city pound and a gun club.



Cabrillo Canyon c. 1908.

Until the turn of the century, the Central Mesa remained in its natural state while other areas of the Park began to be planted with trees. Civic minded private citizens were responsible for much of the improvements to the Park during this period of time. In 1902, George Marston, acting on behalf of the Park Improvement Committee engaged the services of Samuel Parsons to develop a master plan for the Park. At that time, Parsons was the President of the American Society of Landscape Architects and a widely respected park planner. Upon his arrival in San Diego in December of 1902, Parsons was impressed with the Park's unique setting between a series of mountain ranges and the vast expanse of the Pacific. His plan for the Park called for an informal, natural treatment that discouraged formal gardens and instead featured tree shaded canyons, open sunlit mesa tops, and pedestrian walkways that "crept along the brinks of canyons and down across the slopes." The plan also discouraged the use of structures in the landscape in order to preserve the natural character of the site. During the following years, Parsons' plan for the Park began to be implemented on the West Mesa along Sixth Avenue.

On July 9, 1909, a comment made at a Chamber of Commerce meeting by G. Aubrey Davidson set in motion a chain of events that resulted in the 1915 Panama - California Exposition. Davidson wanted to promote San Diego's position as the west coast port closest to the Panama Canal. An Exposition



would display San Diego's mild climate and abundant opportunities for commerce. The idea received broad-based community support and plans for the Exposition were begun.

In 1910, the Building and Grounds Committee selected the Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects of Brookline, Massachusetts to develop a site plan for the Exposition. The Olmsteds chose a site at the southern portion of the Park near the city in order to preserve the Central Mesa as open park. The architecture was to be a variety of California and Southwest vernacular styles, including Indian, Mission and Pueblo types.

In January 1911, the committee chose Bertram Goodhue as principle Exposition architect. Goodhue's area of expertise was the lavish Spanish Baroque style of architecture. Between January and September of that year, planning decisions were made that have shaped the uses of the Central Mesa ever since. Instead of locating the Exposition buildings near the city, the committee opted to locate them on the Central Mesa where dramatic views of the ocean and mountains would reveal to visitors the natural wonders of the region. The new site enabled Goodhue and his associate Carleton Monroe Winslow to maximize the rich architectural vocabulary of the Spanish Baroque and create a fantasy city that manifested the grace and extravagance of old Spain.

Although the architecture was executed on a small scale and the landscape featured lush gardens, open plazas and distant views, the Olmsted brothers were opposed to the plan and resigned from the project. Goodhue's vision proved to be a resounding success, primarily because of the pleasing balance that was achieved between architecture and landscape. Count Salazar, Consul General of Spain, remarked to his hosts after his visit to the Exposition, "We have buildings in Spain just as beautiful, we have gardens just as fine, but nowhere in my country have I seen such a perfect blending of the two. You have Out-Spained Spain!". Sensitive planning ensured that the man-made environment struck a harmonious equilibrium with the works of nature that enveloped and permeated the Exposition site. The Exposition established the Central Mesa as a regional cultural center, a significant botanical resource, and the gem of San Diego's public wealth.

THE 1915 PANAMA CALIFORNIA EXPOSITION

Buildings

The buildings of the 1915 Panama California International Exposition are centered in the Prado area of the Central Mesa. The ornate Spanish Colonial buildings were skillfully designed to integrate with gardens, promenades and plazas. Together they created the atmosphere of a romantic, ideal Spanish city of the past.



*Bertram Goodhue's dream city,
1915.*

With the exception of the Museum of Man, the Botanical Building, and the Organ Pavilion, these buildings were originally intended to serve as temporary structures that would be used only for the duration of the Exposition. Indeed, Bertram Goodhue forcefully argued the case for their demolition. He did not foresee, however, that the buildings he designed would touch such a deep chord of romance for an idealized vision of California's past. In fact, Goodhue's designs sparked a revival of Spanish Colonial architecture on the west coast and encouraged an increased interest in the use of architectural ornamentation. The Spanish Colonial revival also served as an inspiration to the deco movement which incorporated ornamentation into modernist forms.¹



Not only did the influence of the architecture extend beyond the Exposition, but most of the buildings themselves have endured. Some have been reconstructed, some are standing with their original framework. All add to the enjoyment of Balboa Park visitors today.

Figure 3 is the 1915 Exposition Plan.

Landscape

The gardens and plazas of the 1915 Exposition contributed to the magical quality of the Prado as much as the architecture. The highly ornamental architecture conjured up the romance of Spain while the lush and exotic landscape evoked the feeling of a subtropical paradise in the midst of the desert of the American Southwest. Included in the Central Mesa landscape for the 1915 Exposition were large public plazas, shaded arcades and pergolas, a variety of formal gardens, an enclosed botanical building, a lath building, informal expanses of lawn with views to the ocean, heavily vegetated canyons, small enclosed formal patios, and wide pedestrian promenades.



The Plaza de Panama—the outdoor living room of the 1915 exposition.

Clarence S. Stein, an associate of Goodhue who had been trained at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, was responsible for the Exposition site plan. It was based on a central axis that began and ended with plazas, utilized a major plaza as a central focal and hinge point, and linked the three plazas with pedestrian promenades and arcades. The arcades also served as thematic linkages and entries to the Exposition buildings and gardens along the Prado. The site planning created a variety of plazas and open space areas that provided a pleasing rhythm and harmony of spatial experience.



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The central axis of the Prado was one example of this interplay of space. Walking east from Cabrillo bridge, the visitor was drawn to the entry by California Tower, the primary vertical focal point of the Park. A sense of arrival was experienced when entering the formal, enclosed California Plaza which served as an outdoor foyer to the Prado. Exiting the plaza, two rows of arcades on either side of the main pedestrian promenade provided a sense of continuity between the Science and Education Building on the left, (now the Old Globe entry and Museum of Art Sculpture Garden), and the open feeling of Montezuma Garden (now the Alcazar Garden) on the right. The arcades served as transitional ties between one building style to another, and also provided sheltered circulation links from plaza to plaza. One observer has written "This balance of void and solid, and the continuity lent by the covered walks and arcades, is the most successful element in the design of the Exposition." ²

Continuing to walk east, the visitor came to the Plaza de Panama, which was designed as the central open space of Goodhue's "city-in-miniature". The plaza did indeed successfully function in much the same way as a vital central city plaza in Spain or Italy would. With its openness and activity, it served as the central focal point of the Prado, as well as the hinge point for the east/west axis of the Prado and the north/south axis to the Organ Pavilion. Following the pedestrian promenade and its attending arcades further east, the visitor passed through an elegant assembly of exposition buildings and came to rest at the eastern terminus of the Prado, the Plaza de Balboa. This plaza also served as the eastern entry to the Exposition.

The horticulture of the 1915 Exposition made a major contribution to the character of the Exposition. The landscape planting theme could be aptly described by three adjectives - exotic, lush, idyllic. These qualities were made tangible by the enormous variety and quantity of exotic species found at the Exposition. The Exposition contained two million plants of 1,200 varieties. Considering the fact that species such as Bougainvillea were just beginning to be introduced to California, this variety of plant materials was staggering. Eugene Neuhaus, in his book, The San Diego Garden Fair illustrates the quality of wonder that the horticulture contributed to the 1915 Exposition. "One immediately discovers that the *raison de'etre* for most Botanical buildings does not exist here. One observes that there is no difference whatever between the luxurious growth of the gardens everywhere in the Exposition and the carefully tended growth within the building. What seems at first to be a sheltering roof, turns out to be a lattice roof admitting light and air of the same kind one finds without."

Care was taken to insure that there was no "backyard" to the Exposition. The wide expanses of lawn, informal shrub planting, and meandering walkways behind Prado buildings were designed to give the impression of the outskirts of a Spanish town. The lush horticulture combined with sensitive site planning featured a variety of spatial experiences for the pedestrian and created an atmosphere of leisure, hospitality, and beauty that certainly must have relaxed the spirit and dazzled the senses.



Central Mesa Development Between the Expositions

Three months after the close of the Panama California Exposition, the United States declared war on Germany and the City offered the Exposition buildings to the Government for use by the Navy. After the war, the majority of the buildings were in a sorry state of repair and the city made plans to demolish them and create formal gardens in their place as the Exposition designers had originally intended. San Diegans, however, had different ideas. An appeal went out to the public to renovate the buildings with the slogan "Cross the bridge and find yourself in another world." In 1922 the buildings were repaired using both private and civic funds.

During the 1920's, the Central Mesa's identity as a public park and cultural center began to develop. The cultural role of the Central Mesa was continued during this period as the San Diego Society for Natural History, the San Diego Museum, the San Diego Floral Association, the San Diego Zoological Society, and the San Diego Scientific Library took residence on the Central Mesa.

In 1925, John Nolen produced a plan for the Park, which recommended against further encroachments onto open park land and suggested formal connections between the Park and the Bay be established.

George Marston, who led the campaign to save the Exposition buildings five years earlier, wrote a letter to the San Diego Union which illustrates the planning issues that faced civic leaders during that dynamic period of the Park's history. "Our city charter wisely places general control of all park land under one body. There are already a score of corporations and societies that have a foothold in Balboa Park and there will be more in the future. Balboa Park is primarily a park to be cherished as a place of natural beauty. Although it is one of the largest parks in the country, the time is coming when the building of hospitals and school houses, or even libraries and museums must cease, or else we shall have a city there instead of a park."

In 1925, the city lost two Exposition buildings. The Sacramento Valley building at the north end of the Plaza de Panama was removed to provide space for a new Fine Arts Gallery designed in a Spanish Renaissance style by William Templeton Johnson. That same year, the Southern California Counties Building burned to the ground (ironically on the night of the annual Fireman's Ball) and was replaced six years later by the Natural History Museum which was also designed by William Templeton Johnson.

A significant change to the Plaza de Panama was the addition of the statue of El Cid designed by Anna Hyatt Huntington. The limestone base was designed by William Templeton Johnson and the statue was dedicated on July 5, 1930.

The Exposition buildings were again threatened to be demolished by the city in 1933 due to the danger they posed to the public from falling cornices and parapets. Once again the structures were saved, this time largely due to the



efforts of a citizen's group led by Gertrude Gilbert. The Federal Government, through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, provided the majority of labor and funds for refurbishment and the local Chamber of Commerce raised the remainder of monies required. This great community effort provided the catalyst for creating the California Pacific Exposition in 1935.

As the building renovations were nearing completion in the spring of 1934, an idea was put forward to stage another World Exposition on the Central Mesa. The newly restored Exposition buildings would be put to their original use and also guide the design themes for the proposed event.

Despite the fact that the country was in the midst of the Great Depression, forward-thinking citizens began to solicit public support and raise the necessary financing. On July 27, 1934, the exposition corporation was formed. By September 19, the financing goal had been surpassed by 100%.

Richard C. Requa, who had overseen the restoration of the original Exposition buildings was appointed as director of architecture for the new project. Requa, like Bertram Goodhue, was a student of Spanish Architecture and had written a book describing the architectural details of Spain and the Mediterranean. The formidable task of designing and constructing the entire Exposition was accomplished in less than six month's time. The California Pacific International Exposition opened on May 29, 1935.

The 1935 California Pacific Exposition

Buildings

The California Pacific Exposition of 1935 added several significant buildings to the Central Mesa which are in active use today. These structures are



A view of the Palisades during the 1935 Exposition.



concentrated in the Palisades and Spanish Village areas of the Park. The architectural character of these buildings range from prehistoric American forms to architecture contemporary to the time of the Exposition. Richard Requa, the architect of the 1935 Exposition intended the architecture of the Palisades area to provide a more complete history of Southwest architecture than the 1915 Exposition achieved. A progression of architectural styles are displayed in the Palisades ranging from the Pueblo style of the Recital Hall, the Mayan style of the Federal Building, a combination of ancient Mayan and 20th Century treatment of masses and ornamentation displayed by the Municipal Gym and Automotive Museum, and finally an example of what was then the latest in modern industrial architecture - the Aerospace Museum.

The original concept for Spanish Village and the House of Pacific Relations was to create architectural examples of the building types used by the common people of Spanish Colonial days. It was intended to serve as a small scale counterpoint to the grand Spanish Colonial architecture of the 1915 Exposition.

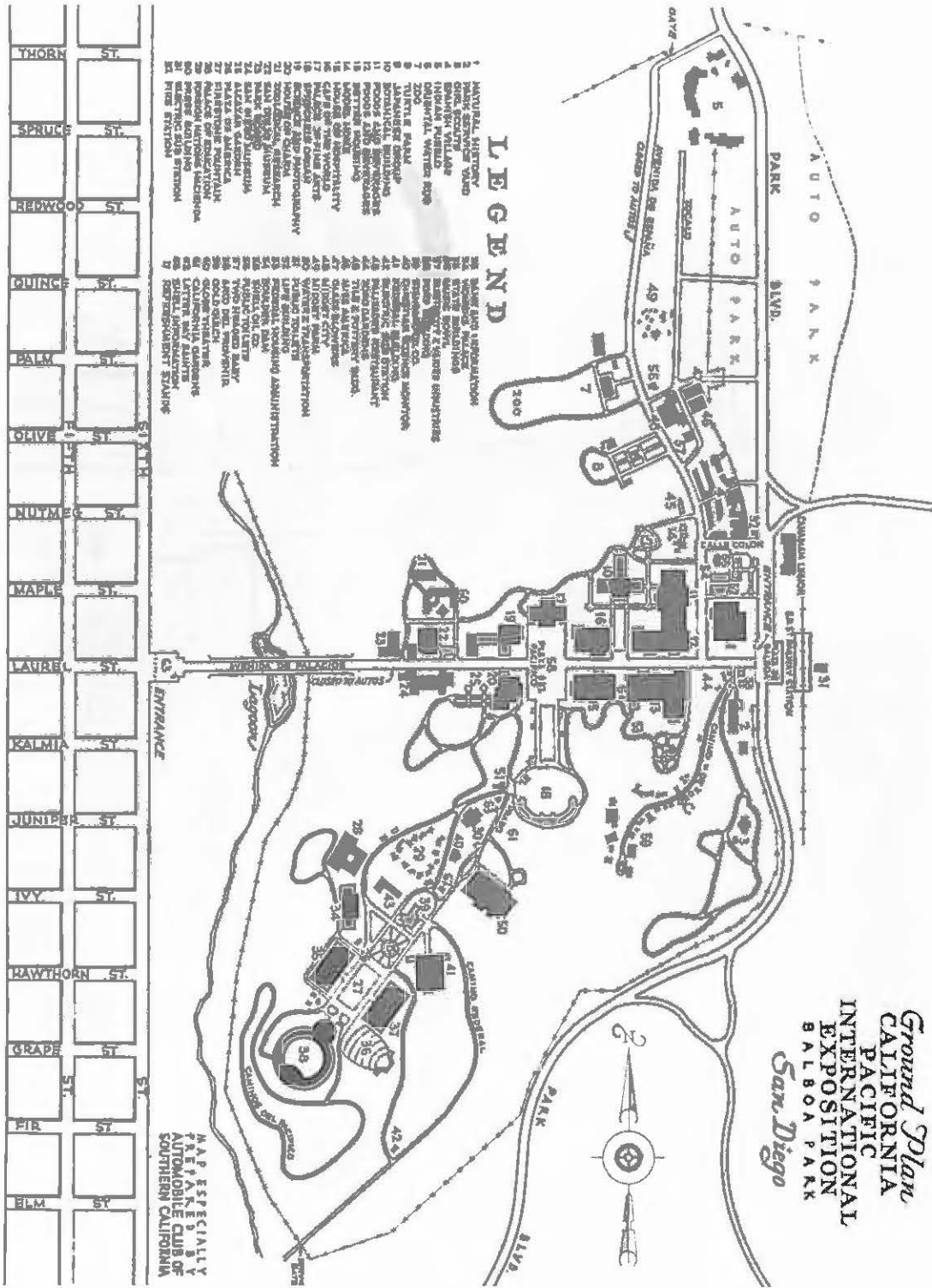
The specific intention for the House of Pacific Relations was to provide architecture at a personal scale that would be slightly off the beaten path between the Prado and Palisades and provide representatives of diverse nations an opportunity to meet in an atmosphere of tranquillity and hospitality. In contrast, Spanish Village replicated the vitality of a Southwestern mercado filled with the bustling activity of shopping, dining and entertainment.

Another architectural introduction to the Park during the 1935 Exposition was the Old Globe Theater. This reproduction of the famous Elisabethan Theater in London was home to the Globe Players who performed during the Exposition.

Figure 4 is the 1935 Exposition Plan.

Landscape

Exposition architect Richard Requa intended the landscape for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition to harmonize with the existing landscape from the 1915 Exposition and to be a permanent addition to the Park. His intent was not to create a new landscape theme for the Park, but to enhance the existing landscape and contribute to the permanent character of the whole landscape composition.⁵ Requa retained the existing plazas and gardens in the Prado from the previous Exposition and created a new landscaped pedestrian plaza that covered the entire Palisades area. He designed a new central courtyard and garden (Cafe del Rey Moro Garden) for the newly remodeled House of Hospitality, and also redesigned and changed the name of Montezuma Garden to Alcazar Garden. Other gardens in the Central Mesa that were original to the 1935 Exposition are Zoro Garden and the House of Pacific Relations Central Courtyard (originally containing a pool and rock garden). In addition, a pedestrian bridge spanning Palm Canyon was installed for the Exposition and has since been removed.



1935 Exposition Plan

13 June 1991

Figure
4







The House of Hospitality received two new landscaped spaces for the 1935 Exposition. The House of Hospitality courtyard is a classic Spanish design that was patterned after a patio in Guadalajara, Mexico which Richard Requa greatly admired. The Cafe Del Rey Moro Garden was inspired by a Spanish hillside garden that Requa called a perfect example of an "architectural garden" -a garden which is an outdoor extension of the building.



*The Cafe del Rey Moro Garden,
1935.*

Alcazar Garden is a modification of the area that was known as Montezuma Garden during the 1915 Exposition. The original plan of the space remained essentially the same, but the archways, fountains and seating that Requa added reproduced the look of a similar garden in Seville, Spain. The new site amenities were faithful reproductions of the originals, even to the arrangement and color of the tile. The neo-classic pergola at the west end of the garden was retained in the new design.

With all three gardens, Requa contributed Moorish themes to harmonize with the Spanish Baroque buildings of Goodhue. The fountains, tile, patios, and other design elements of these gardens add to the richness and variety of the spatial experience of the Prado and reinforce the 1915 landscape theme of a lush exotic paradise by their appearance. In addition, the original symbolism of the Moorish garden design elements as representations of Paradise in the life to come also harmonize with the idyllic design themes of the Prado from first Exposition.

A temporary change to the Prado that served the immediate needs of the 1935 Exposition occurred in the Plaza de Panama. A central arch was constructed to house public address speakers and lighting equipment. Two artificial lagoons flanked the arch and contributed to the spectacular effects of the nightly night shows by reflecting light into the sky. At the close of the



Exposition, along with other special lighting equipment and accessory structures, the arch and pools were removed and the plaza was quickly restored to its former condition.

The Palisades was the major area of expansion for the 1935 Exposition. According to Richard Requa, the central landscape element for the Palisades was a large open plaza reminiscent of those found in Latin American cities.⁸ The Exhibition buildings were arranged around the plaza to display the progression of architecture in the Southwest from prehistoric to modern times. The buildings were sited formally on the southern terminus of the Palisades and were more informally positioned on the northern end. The irregular configuration of the northern area complemented a wooded canyon that was located near the Federal Building where Presidents Way exists today. The Standard Oil Building, the Water and Transportation Building and the Palisades Cafe framed the northern end of the Palisades open space and were removed after the Exposition. Requa designed the landscape treatment to supply color and adornment to the architecture and an "everchanging pattern of natural beauty flung against backgrounds of unadorned wall masses."

The horticultural theme for the 1935 Exposition remained consistent with the remainder of the Park. Once again, a wide array of exotic plant materials was utilized just as in the 1915 Exposition. The goal of this diversity of plant material was to demonstrate to Exposition visitors the mild character of San Diego's climate in which almost any plant on earth could grow and flourish.

Central Mesa Development After the Expositions

During World War II the Central Mesa was again used by the Navy as an extension of the Navy Hospital. The exception to this use was Spanish Village, which was used by the Army. Military use during the war did not alter the buildings significantly, but Spanish Village sustained extensive alteration and was further damaged by vandals before restoration work could begin. In 1948, the miniature train and the War Memorial Building were added to the northern portion of the Central Mesa.

Significant changes to the Prado occurred during the 1960's. Two prominent 1915 Exposition buildings were demolished to make way for structures that drastically altered the architectural and spatial character of the area. After much controversy, the American Legion building was demolished in 1965 and replaced by the Timken Gallery. During this period, the Medical Arts building and the attached arcades that extended to the Museum of Man were demolished to make way for the expansion of the new west wing of the Museum of Art. Both new additions introduced architecture to the heart of the Prado that was not compatible with existing Exposition buildings. The formal symmetry, spatial transitions, and carefully articulated enclosure of space was significantly impacted with the destruction of the original buildings and their arcades. After these changes occurred the City Council adopted a



new architectural policy for the Prado designating the Spanish Colonial theme as mandatory throughout the 1915 Exposition area. Also at this time a National Historic Landmark designation for the Exposition areas was applied for and awarded to preserve the remaining Exposition architecture. Figure 5 shows the boundaries of the Historic Landmark Zone.

The eastern portion of the Prado was the focus of Park improvement activity during the following decade. In 1971, the Food and Beverage Building was reconstructed and renamed Casa del Prado. Although the configuration of most of the building changed, the facades and ornamentation facing the Prado were faithfully reproduced.

A new version of the Plaza de Balboa was constructed in 1972, made possible by the realignment of Park Boulevard. In order to complete these improvements the original Exposition site relationships were significantly altered. The arcaded trolley station which was built in 1915 and served as the eastern terminus of the Prado was removed and the adjacent Carousel that had been installed at that site in 1922 was moved to its present location. The new alignment of Park Boulevard freed the East Prado from auto traffic, returning it to its original use as a pedestrian promenade.

The Reuben H. Fleet Space Theater was completed in 1973, adding a major structure to an area of the Prado that had no previous exposition buildings of that size.

These improvements to the east Prado and Park Boulevard in the 1970's were the most visible fulfillment of the guidelines put forth in the Master Plan which was developed for the City in 1960 by Harland Bartholomew and Associates.

On March 8, 1978, the Old Globe Theater was destroyed by arson and in order to continue its summer season, a temporary outdoor Festival Stage was constructed in the adjacent canyon. When the Old Globe was reconstructed in 1982, it was decided the Festival Stage would be a permanent facility. Today, the Simon Edison Centre for the Performing Arts includes the Old Globe, the Cassius Carter Centre Stage and the Festival Stage. This complex forms an Elisabethan enclave in a secluded area of the Prado.

Arson also claimed the Electric Building in 1978. The permanent structure built on the same site in 1981 is an enlarged version of the Electric building and accurately reproduces the front facade of the original. It is now known as the Casa de Balboa.

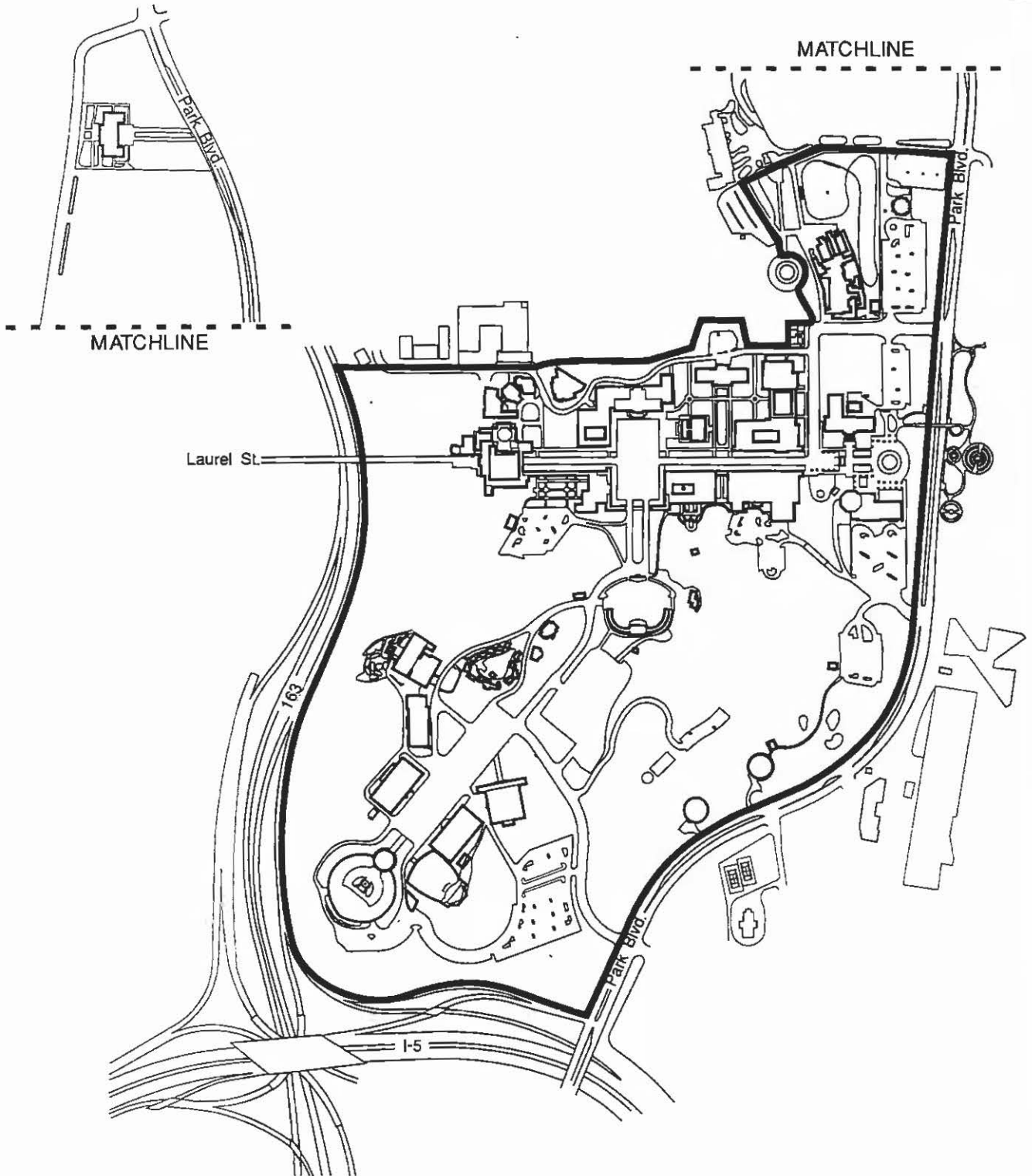
The most recent structural addition to the Central Mesa has been the construction of the first phase of the Japanese Friendship Garden in September 1990. The Garden began in 1968 with the construction of the Charles C. Dail Memorial Japanese Gate, north of the Organ Pavilion.





Notes

1. Marcus Whiffen and Carla Breeze, *The Art Deco Architecture of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984)
2. Carleton Monroe Winslow, Jr., *The Architecture of the Panama - California Exposition, 1909-1915* (M.A. Thesis, University of San Diego, 1976), 62.
3. Florence Christman, *The Romance of Balboa Park* (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1985), 48.
4. *Ibid.*, 48.
5. Richard S. Requa, *Inside Lights on the Building of San Diego's Exposition: 1935 San Diego*: Author, c.1937, 87.
6. *Ibid.*, 99.
7. *Ibid.*, 127.
8. *Ibid.*, 55.
9. *Ibid.*, 59.
10. *Ibid.*, 120.



National Historic Landmark Zone

13 June 1991

Figure
5

