

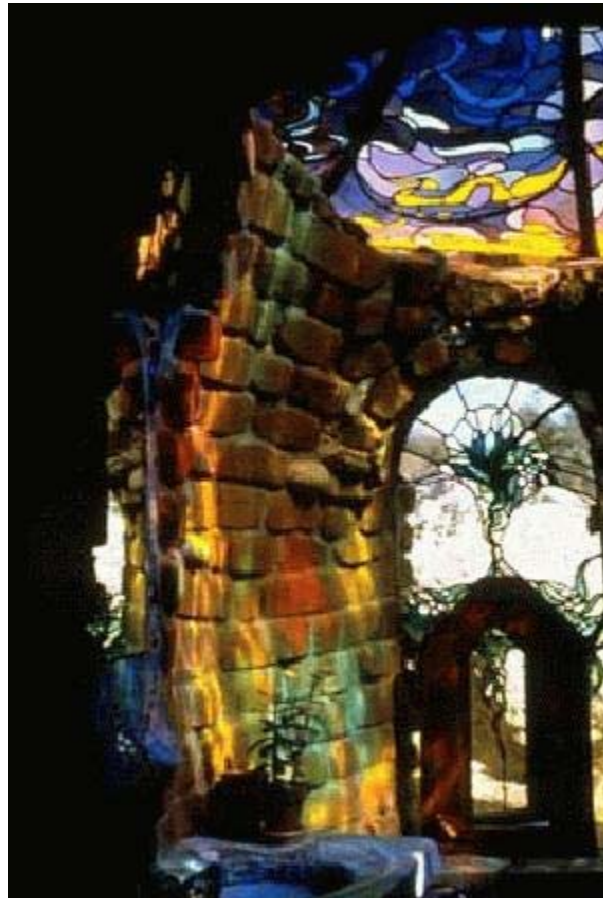
From chaos "an endless work party of jubilation": can architects heal a scorched and scarred San Diego?

By Tia Blassingame

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At the close of October, four wildfires—Cedar, Paradise, Otay and Roblar—terrorized San Diego County. From the tight-knit community of Scripps Ranch to the historic mountain town of Julian, the fires consumed more than 380,000 acres, over 2300 residences, 71 mobile homes and caused 16 deaths. The structural damage is estimated at close to \$900 billion dollars; the personal cost is incalculable.

Speaking with Mike Asaro, a principal of the San Diego-based Architects Delawie Wilkes Rodrigues Barker, about the role of architects in rebuilding and healing the communities fractured by the wildfires, it is clear that architects can help, as professionals and community members, by educating people about the design and construction process. In the Scripps Ranch neighborhood, 350 houses were destroyed. A long-time resident, Asaro has sought to make sense of the logistics of rebuilding and maneuvering through the permitting and contracting process for residents. "Being an architect, it was natural to help people understand what it means to rebuild," Asaro remarked.



Interior View of the Hubbells House before the fire

Immediately after the fires, Asaro, working with his brother and Brian Mooney of Mooney Associates who are both Scripps Ranch residents, formulated near, mid-term and long-term goals for homeowners' rebuilding plan. The group covered diverse topics: decision points from working singularly or pool group resources, defining construction terminology, elucidating the building permit process and project delivery methodology: traditional design-bid-build, design-build, or negotiated contract. Immediate objectives encompassed clean-up, demolition, and safety assessment. Mid-term goals focused on cost-effective rebuilding of the community. Long-term goals included issues of brush management or early warning systems. Asaro observed: "Scripps Ranch was developed within an existing Eucalyptus Forest. We need to examine if that makes sense to repeat".

In Santa Ysabel, artist James Hubbell and his wife Anne lost their house, studio and all personal effects. Furthermore, the conflagration destroyed over 300 paintings, models, sculptures and stained glass windows that James had crafted. The Hubbells invested 45 years personally and artistically into the site. Sadly the complex was uninsured, despite this great loss the Hubbells as so many other San Diegans devastated by the wildfires intend to rebuild. In an open letter from the Hubbells' friends was a firm belief in the capacity of art and architecture to transcend the present desolation. "The phoenix now sits without wings, deep in the ashes, but it can and will fly if we join together to make a place dedicated to encouraging people to build their dreams for a better future. In that place, guided by James' vision, we can help build beauty and peace together within the patterns of nature where we all belong".

Hubbell and Hubbell, the firm run by James and his son, architect Drew L. Hubbell, marry art and architecture with a visionary hope, or expectation, that integrating design with nature—beautiful and at times terrible—promotes healing and harmony.

Blending the practicality of architecture with the beauty of art and nature into "soul-stirring", cost and energy-efficient structures might seem noble yet unattainable until one reviews the catalog of Hubbell projects: residences, schools, chapels, sculptures and mosaics. The firm's current projects include the energy-efficient, straw-bale Friends Center and Tijuana's Pacific Rim Park, scheduled to open in July 2004.

Even as the Hubbells continue to create thoughtful, organically built environments across San Diego County, in many respects the fires have accelerated the process of transforming their property into an artistic refuge. Through their non-profit Ilan-Lael Foundation and with donations, the Hubbells strive to rebuild the property into an artists' sanctuary in addition to placing the land in trust. Currently volunteers can participate in work parties to clear the fire damage.

Artistry and imagination can energize devastated communities; professional guidance can inform us about the complex logistics of rebuilding. Architects with their knowledge and vision might help San Diego to heal itself.

For more information about Hubbell and Hubbell, their rebuilding efforts, check their website: www.hubbellandhubbell.com/home.htm. For more information about Scripps Ranch, check: www.scrippsranch.org.

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