



## KEEPING PACE

In the 1950s agriculture was the prevailing expression of landscape in Southern California. My boyhood memories of the San Fernando Valley recall the Los Angeles River as a wonderful source of life, and as the years went by I continued to be fascinated by that riparian environment. Although I was aware that development was bringing environmental changes, at the time I lacked the perspective to foresee the consequences. Upon my return from college, I found the landscape had been replaced with a desolate and sprawling suburb. The river had been paved over: ostensibly as a new flood channel ...a de facto dumping ground for bottles and abandoned shopping carts. A paradox crystallized in me at that point, one with which I have struggled ever since: the desire to build and the need to work with nature rather than against it.

Thirty years ago I was working for Burke, Kober, Nicolais, and Archuleta in Los Angeles designing regional shopping centers. Jon Jerde was the director of design and had been a great influence on me since our student days at USC. But my efforts to develop professionally were thwarted because there was constant pressure to bring the design to completion, and never enough time to think things through. As soon as one project was finished another began, and it was always the same: 60 to 80 acres open land were flattened and paved – and then graced with a centrally placed shopping mall.

The themes and mannerisms of the architecture were rapidly changing. With my conviction in one stylistic ideal hastily changing to belief in another, the architects I had once admired seemed to lose their heroic stature. This disillusionment, combined with the frustrations of spending too much time in traffic – shopping center after shopping center – led me to the decision to strike out on my own. Feeling too removed from the natural order of things, my wife and I headed north. We sought a slower pace, a place where the destruction of the landscape in the cause of architecture could be measured in square feet rather than in acres.

I'm striving for balance. We live on 50 acres in Sonoma County and find toads, turtles, and giant salamanders on our entry porch. My practice, consisting mostly of residential work, is busy. One house follows another, much the way the shopping centers did 30 years ago, and the energy and creative demands are exhausting. I've discovered that the slower pace of building has not slowed me down personally, to which I attribute a combination of expectations, circumstance and personality. The work still consumes me. The difference is that the sites are not paved, and the construction (and destruction) timetable is more to my liking.