

Silver Medal Winner  
**Los Angeles Design Center**  
Los Angeles, California



This is an excerpt from:

# Building Sustainable Neighborhoods

THE 2007 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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# LA Design Center At-A-Glance

## WHAT IS THE LA DESIGN CENTER?

- ❖ An 80,000-square-foot complex with furniture showrooms, gallery and meeting/event space in South Los Angeles;
- ❖ A well-designed conversion of two derelict warehouses that introduces quality design into an economically challenged area;
- ❖ The first phase of a master plan intended to create a furniture showroom district in an area historically dedicated to manufacturing;
- ❖ A project created and financed by local, self-made entrepreneurs in part as a way of giving back to and revitalizing the community.

## PROJECT GOALS

- ❖ To contribute to the revitalization of the area by instigating the development of a furniture and design showroom district, drawing customers who would otherwise be unlikely to visit this part of the city;
- ❖ To provide a place for community gatherings and events;
- ❖ To house the sales headquarters for the Cisco Brothers furniture business;
- ❖ To use good design to transform the area – reaffirming beauty and openness to the community, fostering positive and life-enhancing values, optimism, and a sense of what can be possible.

## Project Chronology

**1992** Rodney King riots (the fifteen-year anniversary was being remembered at the time of the site visit);

**1996** Cisco and Alba Pinedo open their factory in the neighborhood, two blocks from the site of the LADC;

**2003** Pinedos buy the L.A. Design Center site;

**2004** LADC opens; wins AIA National Institute Honor Award;

**2006** Pinedos buy the site immediately adjacent and to the north.

**2008** Planned initiation of Phase 2.

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Rodney King.

**2003**  
Pinedos buy the  
LA Design Center site.

**2006**  
Pinedos buy the site immediately  
adjacent and to the north.

**1996**  
Cisco and Alba Pinedo open  
their factory in South Central.

**2004**  
LADC opens; wins Los Angeles  
Chapter AIA design award.

**2008**  
Planned initiation of Phase 2.

## KEY PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

### *LADC Developers/Owners:*

FRANCISCO (CISCO) AND ALBA PINEDO

### *Consultants and Contractors:*

JOHN FRIEDMAN and ALICE KIMM, Architects

STEVE FORBES, Brunswick Builders, General Contractor

CHRIS SITCAT: organizes arts events at the LADC UpSpace Gallery

### *Community:*

BERNARD PARKS, L.A. City Councilmember

DAVID ROBERTS and MIKE HERNANDEZ, staff for  
Councilmember Parks

FRANCES ANDERTON, KCRW Public Radio

INES BROUSSARD, Ed.D., Chesterfield Project

RENATA SIMRIL, Forest City Development

NICCI SOLOMONS, Executive Director, AIA/L.A

PAULETTE DIMETRIU, South Cone (furniture retailer)

REVEREND REGGIE JONES, potential tenant

## Project Description



*South Los Angeles street near LADC.*

South Los Angeles is a vast area stretching from the edges of downtown for many miles toward the port cities. It has been so strongly associated with poverty, crime and other social ills that it was recently renamed – it used to be called South Central Los Angeles – though one could question whether this will actually improve its image. Notwithstanding a number of important improvements in the area, signs of the destruction wrought during civil disturbances following Rodney King’s arrest and beating fifteen years ago are still visible in abandoned buildings and trash-filled empty lots. The area, largely African American, also has a substantial Latino population, though not nearly to the same degree as the city overall (see demographic profile, below). It is also poorer and has lower levels of employment than the rest of L.A.

The project fronts on Western Avenue, a major north-south arterial that runs for many miles and gives access mainly to commercial and industrial businesses. The project site is in a mostly industrial area consisting of structures of many vintages – from older brick warehouses like the ones LADC acquired and converted, to more recent concrete tilt-up buildings. Most are one or two stories tall. While some appear well-maintained, many are in a state of disrepair. Next door to LADC is an empty lot that is part of a contested redevelopment project. Nearby abandoned buildings are occupied by homeless people. Given the nature of its surroundings,



LADC stands out as, by far, the most attractive property in the immediate area.

There are, however, many other signs of renewal in the area. Residential zones consist of small, well-kept houses mostly owned by African Americans and Latinos. There is a new, high-design library some blocks to the south. And a few doors to the north is a very large, recently-constructed shopping center, Chesterfield Square, financed in part by city redevelopment money. It accommodates a wide variety of local and chain retail establishments,



including a bank, Starbucks, several fast food outlets, a supermarket, and a drug store. Reportedly, this center has greatly expanded the retail opportunities in the neighborhood. Typical of most shopping centers, it faces inward, has little relationship to the street, and does little to support pedestrian traffic.

SOUTH LOS ANGELES DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE 2000		
	LOS ANGELES	SO. LOS ANGELES*
Population	3,731,437	47,105
White	49.1	8%
African American	9.9	74%
Asian	11.1	0.9%
Latino	48.9	23%
Median Income	\$42,667	\$35,142
Individuals Below Poverty Level	20.1%	23.3%
In Labor Force	66.2%	55.1%

**Note:** %s by race exceed 100% since Latinos can also be counted as African-American or White  
**Source:** American FactFinder (<http://factfinder.census.gov/>) for Zip Code 90047  
 - Fact Sheet - Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights

### THE PROJECT DEVELOPERS – CISCO AND ALBA PINEDO

The LADC has a highly personal quality that is impossible to understand without grasping the story of its developers, Francisco (Cisco) and Alba Pinedo. They immigrated to Los Angeles from Mexico as children and their families settled in South L.A. Alba worked in a local and Cisco lived a little further to the east. During high school, they met at a local church; both were active in the community. After a few years, and with a very small capital investment, they founded Cisco Brothers to manufacture furniture, a skill Cisco had developed working after school in an upholstery shop.

**Left:** Lumber yard adjacent to the Design Center.  
**Right:** New public library mural.



They began to experience success and purchased a building for their manufacturing operation in another area of South L.A. During the disturbance and destruction that followed the Rodney King beating in 1992, theirs was one of two buildings in their block that was not burned, a measure of their continuing commitment to the community and hiring of local workers. Needing to grow again, they considered many options. In the post-Rodney King era, the city offered a variety of incentives through Rebuild LA and the local empowerment zone – though the Pinedos claim they did not need the financial inducements. As they considered investing in the area near Western and Slauson, they were aware of the risk and yet also felt a desire to return to the neighborhood where they had grown up and to make a contribution to the community. In any event, they bought a building in the area two blocks from the LADC site that is still their main factory. It is clean, renovated to modern standards, and equipped with a variety of machinery, some of which is quite high-tech.

The Cisco Brothers furniture business presents a striking success story. Their business model is designed to allow them to compete in a world dominated by cheaper imports from Asia. It calls for them to make high-end customized furniture which can be produced and delivered quickly and which can be tailored to needed dimensions and finished in one's choice of fabrics. Most of their products are wood and/or upholstery – and many are “green,” using natural, healthy, or recycled products – such as non-out-gassing foams, natural fibers, and non-VOC finishes.

Cisco's flexibility in adapting to changing conditions is also striking. He lost seventeen of his twenty largest accounts, mostly because they were forced out of business by large national retailers like IKEA, Crate and Barrel, Ethan Allen, buying their stock from China where the labor input to a piece of furniture is perhaps \$5, compared to \$300 in the U.S. He recognized that he could not compete on price, but had to focus on quality and customer service. It is impressive to hear Cisco, who did not go to college, speak cogently about changing global business conditions and strategies, including his shift from straight retail, where he could not compete with Chinese imports, to the higher-margin, custom production niche where he is able to carve out a market share.

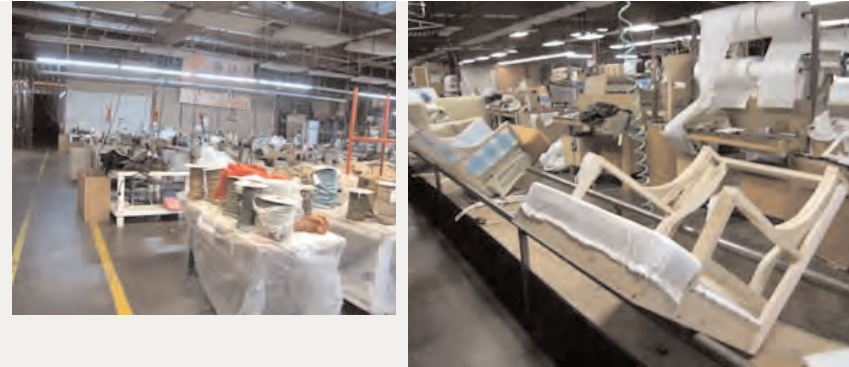
Cisco Brothers employs 300 people, many of whom live in the neighborhood, and the company pays them above-market wages

*Alba and Cisco Pinedo.*

and benefits. Cisco has five direct sales or commercial showrooms in addition to the L.A. Design Center, including some in more upscale areas of Los Angeles (La Brea Boulevard, Pasadena) as well as in Laguna Beach, New York, and North Carolina.

The decision to locate a major showroom in South Los Angeles is central to a plan to attract commercial buyers, designers, and retail shoppers to a part of the city where they otherwise might not come. Because of the investment risk involved, this decision can only be understood in light of how committed the Pinedos are to the community. They are highly involved in charitable and non-profit activities; for example, Cisco serves on the boards of the metropolitan area's largest public radio station (KCRW; where Cisco Brothers advertise) and also of Genesis LA, a non-profit that offers economic development consulting assistance to businesses and developers. This level of community involvement helps to explain their goals for the LADC, their choice of location, and their inclusion of community space and community-based functions. While they realize their customers do not come from the community, they still wanted a way to include community space in the project.

The Pinedos' working relationship appears to entail a certain tension, with Cisco's more visionary and expansive energy pulling outward and Alba's sensible financial constraints pulling back. This dynamic seems to work quite effectively. Alba points out that, while their



business is successful, their entire nest egg is invested in this community, the risks are real, and the projects like LADC tend to run over budget and are not self-sustaining. Cisco counters that, while the cash flow is not there now, the development is working as a capital investment. Clearly, though, if LADC had been seen they primarily in financial terms, they might have invested elsewhere to get higher or safer returns.

## DESIGN PROCESS AND CONCEPTS

In 2003 the Pinedos bought the property that is now the LADC. It consists of two brick warehouse buildings totaling 80,000 square feet, connected by an outdoor courtyard. They then hired John Friedman Alice Kimm Architects to design the renovation.

It is interesting to chart the path through which the Pinedos came to select an avant-garde design firm – perhaps best known for highly-styled bars and nightclubs with names like “The Brig” and “Club Sugar” – for this project. This is another area in which their

*Cisco Brothers manufacturing facility.*



PHASE 1 – Original Condition



PHASE 1 – Design Rendering of LA Design Center



PHASE 1 – Completed LA Design Center

savvy and sophistication should not be underrated. They had met John Friedman through mutual friends, been impressed with his work, and commissioned him to redo their local factory offices as well as their showroom in North Carolina. Cisco had enjoyed their initial collaborations, commenting that it is “hard to find an architect who can sense what the client really wants.” Cisco’s projects require an economy of means, since they are low-budget conversions of industrial space where a high-design impact is desired. Friedman spoke of his approach to using the “right moves in the right place” to get the maximum effect – and described Cisco as a client who was constantly looking for more and better results. Apparently, the work evolves as a dialogue between the two of them.

The concepts that generated design decisions began with a deep respect for the existing building and site and a desire to retain the qualities of the materials and spaces – together with a recognition that the budget was very limited, so that each “intervention” or action had to count for a lot (that is, produce a high ratio of effort-to-effect). The architects are very much in the current mainstream of Los Angeles architecture, interested in ideas of materiality, transparency, translucency, layering, wrapping, skins, adding surfaces that can be conceived of as “clothing” or “dressing” the building, and the like. In Cisco’s view, Friedman and Kimm, more than some design-oriented architects, are serious about meeting their clients’ needs and helping them maximize the potential of their buildings.

*LADC before and after: Kimm Friedman Architects.*



The site offered an existing open space, really just a parking lot, facing the street, framed by buildings on two sides and partially on the third. This parking lot was transformed into a plaza, outdoor event space, and “motor court”. They did this by paving the court in two tones of concrete with strips of grass between the sections “in order to create a rhythmic pattern across the space.” They also added a screen of translucent polycarbonate panels, a portion of which faces the street (and which can show images projected from behind), which then turn into the courtyard and cover part of one of the buildings on the upper level. The brick buildings are also

partly wrapped in a green cement board on the first floor; these, too, turn into the courtyard. Wooden screens cover other parts of the brick and are intended to recall the wood structure on the interior. A sliding gate – needed for security – was created from perforated steel sheets which join like interlocking fingers with an aesthetic that significantly softens the security image. Plantings at the street are of cacti and other succulents – attractive but vandal-resistant – while inside the courtyard, there are palms that echo the street trees. There is also a fabric canopy over portions of the courtyard, filtering sunlight and creating a changing shadow pattern on the ground.

At the interior, the means were again very economical. The wood and brick structural elements were sandblasted and left exposed. New skylights were cut in the roof and an opening cut into the second floor over the new lobby where a sculptural steel stair was inserted. A small grouping of offices was created at one end, using polycarbonate panels to glaze the walls (again, repeating a material from the exterior). There is also a specially fabricated steel entry door and some floating platforms within the showroom which highlight featured products.

The result is highly effective. The courtyard and portions of the exterior visible from the street are very attractive; modern, while respectful of the original materials and forms. The showroom spaces work very well, providing open and flexible interiors. The

newly inserted elements are easily recognizable as such, yet are harmonious in their coexistence with the older materials.

Following renovation, the Cisco Brothers furniture showroom occupies 30,000 square feet, along with another rather large furniture showroom, owned by South Cone Furniture. The balance of the buildings provide space for a coffee shop or restaurant, a large events venue, and a gallery.

## CONSTRUCTION

The buildings were apparently in quite bad shape when the project started, with broken windows that had allowed pigeons to roost. They were full of trash and had the remnants of a drug den, so significant clean-up was necessary.

The project was constructed by a mix of professional builders and the Pinedos' own staff, which did much of the finish carpentry (using skills they bring from the furniture trade). The architects prepared drawings in stages, with demolition and structural phases first, followed by finishes. They worked with a sympathetic and flexible builder who was willing to submit multiple bids as the project progressed. In all, there were five separate permits and over twenty sub-bids.



There was, apparently, no fixed budget for the conversion, just a desire to get the most “bang” for the limited “bucks” available – and much work was done by volunteers and was either non-compensated or highly discounted. As reported by the contractor, he was able to convince some of his subcontractors and suppliers to lower their prices for the benefit of the project.

## COSTS AND FINANCING

Acquisition and construction financing was provided entirely by the Pinedos through private sources. The acquisition costs were not disclosed, but the renovation was said to have cost \$1.5 million, including site development and seismic reinforcement (or about \$15 per square foot), remarkably inexpensive for what was achieved.

According to Renata Simril, who worked for the prior city council member from that district, the Pinedos were somewhat reluctant to pursue or even accept financial assistance – they wanted to give back to the community and felt they did not need help. While no city money went into the first phase, Simril feels that the city is now

*LADC reception desk.*

in a better position to provide assistance, given the Pinedos' proven track record and clear commitment (see the discussion under Future Plans).

This is not to say that the Pinedos did not receive any support from governmental programs. There were, for example, tax benefits from their nearby factory site and, according to the councilmember's office, there are Housing and Urban Development BEDI (Brownfields Economic Development Initiative) funds earmarked for the purchase or development of the next site. These BEDI funds are intended to support the project, but there is no guarantee they will be awarded to the Pinedos, who may have to compete with other developers.

In terms of operations, the LADC is running a net loss, in that the revenue (mostly from rent) it generates does not support the costs of running the complex. This may be because not all leasable space has tenants, the rental rates are low, or the overhead of the community space may simply be more than can be supported. In any case, the center is losing about \$90,000 per year, made up by the Pinedos or one of their businesses. However, this views the project only as a real estate investment (ignoring its possible value as a merchandising tool for the furniture business), and even then fails to take into account tax write-offs, possible capital appreciation, and other information that was not available to the site visit team. An annual operating statement is included in Table 1.

**L.A. DESIGN CENTER OPERATING STATEMENT**  
For Period 1/1/06 to 12/31/06

**TABLE 1 – REVENUE & EXPENSES**

<b>Revenue (rents)</b>	\$241,263.05
Total Revenue	\$241,263.05
<b>Expenses</b>	
Mortgage	\$240,270.25
Trash	\$4,164.62
Gas/Electric	\$39,326.50
Pest Control	\$1,188.00
Insurance	\$18,000.00
Gardener	\$4,200.00
Total Expenses	\$307,149.37
Net Op. Profit (loss)	(\$65,886.32)
Property Tax	\$24,930.98
Net Profit (loss)	(\$90,817.30)



**Left:** LADC furniture showroom.  
**Right:** Stair to furniture showroom.

## TENANTS AND PROGRAMS

There is a broad range of commercial and non-profit functions at the Design Center. Paulette Dimetriu of South Cone Furniture, the other major tenant at LADC, noted that they have been there since the center opened and pay rent at the market rate. Although the location seems to be working well for South Cone, it has been difficult for LADC to attract additional design and furniture operations.

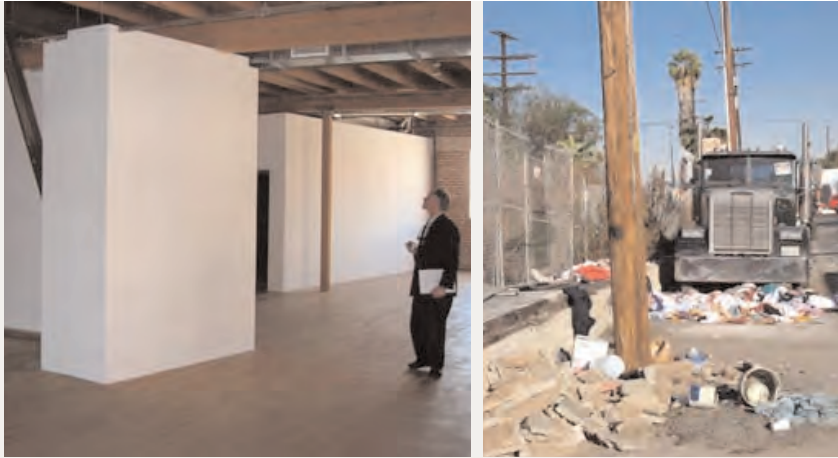
For two years until the winter of 2007, there was a café in the complex, operated by an artist. It closed – apparently for other than financial reasons – but there is a non-profit organization interested in reopening it. This potential tenant, a minister with his church and related non-profit businesses, would use the meeting space for church services (he was setting the space up for one during the site visit) and also take office space for, among other operations, a finance company.



*Church event setting up in rental space.*

Cisco has lent the courtyard, large meeting space, and galleries for community uses free or at a nominal charge to non-profits, while renting out the space to those who can afford to pay. Among the events that have taken place there is the annual awards banquet and gala of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), which attracted almost 700 people. For this event, the AIA looks for a newly-built venue by a strong designer – and were very drawn to the LADC, which had won a design award the prior year (in the past they've had events at the Getty and at a Morphosis-designed Science Center). There was an interesting dialogue with their board about whether to go to South Los Angeles, with concerns that members might be reluctant to travel to South L.A. Having decided to go ahead, they planned buses from downtown, but almost no one signed up for them. They provided valet parking and security guards, but there were no problems. They utilized almost the entire complex, including the courtyard and gallery, with a reception at the Cisco showroom. Younger AIA members attended and stayed later than usual at such events. There is also some evidence of a longer-term impact of this event – one noted architect (Michael Palladino from Richard Meier's office) was reported to have started an outreach program to the local schools. The event was held in October 2005 for an agreed-upon fee of \$3,000, but they never got a bill from LADC, suggesting that the Pinedos viewed the event as providing them with beneficial PR. There have also been





more local and personal events, including church services, weddings, and Quinceañeras (Latina fifteen-year-old coming-of-age parties).

The UpSpace Gallery, on the second floor, is the main site for art-related events and shows. Chris Sitcat, an artist who is also employed at the L.A. County Museum of Art, organizes events and shows. He uses his contacts in the art world, while Cisco provides the space, printing, and publicity. Chris expressed excitement about working with Cisco and having the use of such a “vibrant” and “restorative” set of spaces. He explained that he funded his work at the LADC, in part, through occasional commissions on works of art sold during exhibitions. Other of his efforts seemed more like volunteer, community contributions. The following is a partial list of UpSpace events; one of them was a show of the works of local kids (note that during 2006 another organization was running the gallery; we do not have a list of their events):

**“Supersonic”** – Graduate Show for Southern California Art Schools, Summer 2005

**“Drive-by and Relax”** – Group Art exhibition, September 2005

**“Speakeasy”** – Group Art Exhibition, November 2005

**“Study in C”** – Musical Performance, November 2005

**“Gobble Gobble”** – Special Event, December 2005

**“The Stream”** – Earth Day Exhibition, March 2007

## COMMUNITY

Clearly South Los Angeles, though mixed in terms of its qualities, is an area where any improvement in conditions is a substantial contribution. Blight, crime, economic underdevelopment, and lack of jobs are critical issues. There are abandoned buildings, some occupied by the homeless. Some of the buildings have burned. There are problems with gangs and drugs; a local park serves as a hang-out. In the industrial zone surrounding the LADC, illegal dumping of trash, toxics, and even dead animals has been a problem; because they could get away with it, dumpers would come from outside the area. In this context, just the presence of the LADC is seen by local leaders as important – a beacon of hope, an image of investment and caring, and an important source of jobs that pay a living wage.

Left: LA Design Center rental gallery.  
Right: Alley behind the Design Center.

Ines Broussard of the Chesterfield project, who is on the Safety Council for the district (appointed by the city councilmember), has worked with the Pinedos on a number of projects, including a clean-up day where they provided T-shirts and other support, including staff participation. She encourages local organizations to make use of LADC's community space and sees Cisco as a partner in working to make things better for the area.

Renata Simril, now a private development executive, said that this area has the highest dropout and unemployment rates in the city. She sees the Design Center, which could have easily located in a much more upscale area, as confidence-building, countering the low expectations of a community that feels disenfranchised. This psychological impact is because, in part, the community feels welcome by the open gates and accessible events. To her, the very fact that there are no graffiti on the walls confirms the local sense of ownership or at least acceptance.

From the point of view of city Councilmember Parks and his staff, LADC is an important contribution to the community and can serve as the catalyst for physical and economic transformation of the area. They express a strong commitment to supporting its next phase (see next section).

## FUTURE PLANS

The project's architects have prepared an expansion and redevelopment plan that shows the design center and related functions growing along an alley (Manhattan Avenue) parallel to Western Avenue and running to the south. This is a "big concept" that would require considerable investment of money and time, as well as the cooperation of many unrelated property owners. However, a number of parcels affected by the plan are owned or controlled by the city, which is now expressing interest in fostering the plan, even though they have also taken actions which are threatening its feasibility.

City-owned parcels include a several-acre empty lot to the immediate south of LADC, which was condemned by the city for an animal control facility. Although such a facility is needed in the area, many in the city and neighborhood, including Councilmember Parks, do



Vacant lot adjacent to LADC.

not feel that it is the highest and best use of this property. This group feels that there are other sites in the area that would be more appropriate, including one formerly used as a police station. One substantial stumbling block in the way of freeing up the site is the fact that the eminent domain condemnation proceeding identified the animal control facility as the purpose for the taking, making it harder to justify another use. In addition, the city has expended millions of dollars on acquisition, relocation, design, and other costs using bond money, which further constrains changes of direction. Questions have been raised about how these funds, reportedly about \$6 million, have actually been spent, and city management overhead has been charged, mostly in advance, raising total expenses to about \$8 million. Some of the key decisions and actions took place during a power vacuum, when the district was essentially unrepresented because of a gap between the prior councilmember leaving and Mr. Parks taking office. Now, the council and six city departments must sign off on any change in direction. Nonetheless, Councilmember Parks expressed his belief that this change will happen in the near future and the property will become available for expansion of the Design Center in some form. The site would have to be sold on the market and could there is no guarantee it would go to the Pinedos.

Another large parcel to the immediate west of the animal control site is also in public hands and awaits redevelopment. This, too, could

be coordinated with the Design Center expansion as could the site of the former police station, just south of the animal control site, which sits along the path of proposed expansion for the Design Center.

However, all plans for expansion of the Design Center need to be tested against the probable level of demand that may exist for this type of space, given that the center has not yet attracted more directly related uses. Cisco recognized that any expansion would have to evolve, possibly towards more mixed use. On the other hand, it could be argued that a larger critical mass is needed to make the concept viable – and city backing for the plan as well as help with acquiring more of the sites could contribute toward this goal. This is consistent with the thoughts expressed by Renata Simril, who felt that the Design Center needs a quarter million square feet (compared to the current 80,000). She also indicated that the city is now more likely to participate than it was earlier, and offer support including Community Development Block Grants and Community Redevelopment Authority funding.

The evolving nature of demand could lead to some friction with the city over how the parcels should be developed. While the city finally seems to have bought in to the idea of a furniture showroom district (the Pinedos' original concept), the Pinedos (and the market) may now see other uses as making more sense.

Meanwhile, since they were unable to buy the parcel to the south, the Pinedos bought a property immediately to the north of the center, as well as a brick warehouse they are using for their business. While not as easy to connect to the expansion, it can contribute to increasing the critical mass of the project, if it does develop in that manner.

## IMPACTS

The nearby Chesterfield Square shopping center, described at the beginning of this chapter, would appear to be a much greater economic engine than the LADC (because of the scale of development, number of stores, and jobs), making it more difficult to determine what effects might be directly attributable to LADC. The recent real estate boom also makes it difficult to assess the project's impact on surrounding property values. While it clearly represents a major investment that may have raised the area's profile and alerted owners and investors to potentials, it is hard to attribute the rising prices of surrounding properties solely to the LADC, which is a small project within a very large community. Nonetheless, LADC has:

- Created jobs in an area that badly needs them.
- Provided a venue for community activities and brought activities and participants to the community who otherwise never would have been there.

- Created a beautiful, inviting public place that has raised the level of quality in the area, contributed to improving its image, and provided a symbol of hope and possibility.
- Ignited city council interest in supporting the long-term master plan.
- Introduced a model of grouping at least two similar manufacturers to create synergy in showroom facilities.

LADC serves as a **model** for design and community support in this neighborhood and elsewhere because:

- It opens itself to the street and neighborhood, rather than creating a closed-off fortress – and this approach has, perhaps paradoxically, increased security by increasing both visibility and a sense of inclusion and accessibility.
- It shows how much can be done with economical means in rejuvenating deteriorated building stock while respecting its underlying strength and beauty.
- It demonstrates that optimism and reinvestment will be rewarded with success and attract more investment.

Beyond these measures and the question of replicability, the project is remarkable precisely because it is the personal and private commitment of a local, successful couple who strongly desire to “give back” and improve the community where they grew up.

## Assessing Project Success

### SUCCESS IN MEETING PROJECT GOALS

**1. To contribute to the revitalization of the area by instigating the development of a furniture and design showroom district, drawing customers who would otherwise be limited to other parts of the city.** The LADC should be viewed as a seed. It has not yet blossomed into the intended district, although the city has expressed interest in supporting the next phases. Whether this will turn out to be a showroom district or some hybrid including many other functions is not clear. One argument is that the initial development is too small, that a greater scale is needed to make the concept work. Currently, there is only one other furniture showroom at the design center. At the time of the site visit, it appeared that the demand for available space within the LADC was tending more toward non-profits and community-oriented functions, which may not be a bad thing, but certainly represents a change in original intent.

**2. To provide a place for community gatherings and events.**

There have been a number of big and small events, ranging from city-wide draws for art shows and organization galas, to smaller, more local and even personal events (weddings, children's coming-of-age parties). The frequency of such events is not known.

**3. To house the sales headquarters for the Cisco Brothers furniture business.**

This is a clear area of success, as the showroom is operating effectively.

**4. To use good design to transform the area – reaffirming beauty and openness to the community, fostering positive and life-enhancing values, optimism and a sense of what can be possible.**

The project is very attractive and is spoken of positively by all interviewees in terms of its importance and impact (especially on the psyche of the community).



Left: Bollards in LADC courtyard.  
Right: LADC entrance.

## SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMENTS

What was most impressive was the effort by these two private citizens to try to add to and improve their local community, especially given the level of risk involved in this project. The Pinhedos are private people who see their project as a public amenity – a rare enough event. It is, the Selection Committee noted, “every mayors dream” to have citizens like this providing so much investment of time and money, although they worried about the ability of two people working alone to have an impact in a city the scale of Los Angeles. The Pinhedos set very high goals and, in spite of the short time span and lack of help from the city, have achieved some of them.

The design of this space was inexpensive and used simple materials to powerful effects. It makes a strong impact and provides a strong sense of place in courtyard, with its play of light and shadow, and nice interior space. One lesson from LADC is that local governments need to recognize and support these kinds of citizen efforts.

### **Sources**

Project website: <http://www.ladesigncenter.com>



LADC sign at entry.