

ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

Beloved L.A. Landmark Reopens

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Talk about Hollywood facelifts. A beloved Angeleno, which has appeared in *Rebel Without a Cause*, *The Terminator*, and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, is ready for her closeup after a four-year, \$93 million overhaul. The flamboyant John C. Austin–designed Griffith Observatory reopened on November 3.

Local executive architects Pfeiffer Partners and associate architects Levin & Associates, and New York–based exhibit designers C&G partners, restored the building's facade and existing facilities, upgraded technical infrastructure, and added 40,000 square feet of new exhibit, learning, and public space. Stephen Johnson, FAIA, a Pfeiffer partner, says the goal was not to disturb the observatory's legendary white concrete facade and four copper domes, so the firms built most additions under the north-facing front lawn of the existing building, lifting much of the museum on hydraulic jacks to accommodate excavations.

New facilities include a multi-level exhibit gallery and a 200-seat cylindrical presentation theater; the existing planetarium has been completely updated with an acoustical dome, and new projectors, sound, and lighting. On the western edge of the hilltop site, a new "transit corridor" terrace is clad with bronze-colored aluminum and glass and contains a new cafe as well as large instruments that allow visitors to track the movements of Earth in relation to the Sun.

On the building's main level, Art Deco architecture is maintained, while underground visitors get the feeling of being in space. Rubber floors' patterns emulate gases in the cosmos, and planetarium seat fabrics are printed with phases of the moon. C&G Partners' exhibits include the Big Picture, the largest astronomical picture ever created, a scale model of the solar system, a heliostat, and a giant moon rock displayed in a large glass case.

Levin & Associates headed the restoration of the existing building, a massive task that included removing and replacing lead-based paint, filling cracks and holes in the building's surface, repairing and waterproofing copper domes, replacing the planetarium's dome, cleaning interior murals and sculptures, and restoring the walls, ceilings, and travertine marble and rubber tile floors. The firm also opened alcoves, windows, and large rooms that had been filled in over time.

The renovation was paid for by a partnership between the City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks, and the nonprofit Friends Of The Observatory.

Sam Lubell



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