

UC Berkeley

Places

Title

Berkeley, Emeryville -- Reinventing the Wild West [The Place of Work]

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2423z7zd>

Journal

Places, 10(1)

ISSN

0731-0455

Author

Nemeth, Terezia

Publication Date

1995-07-15

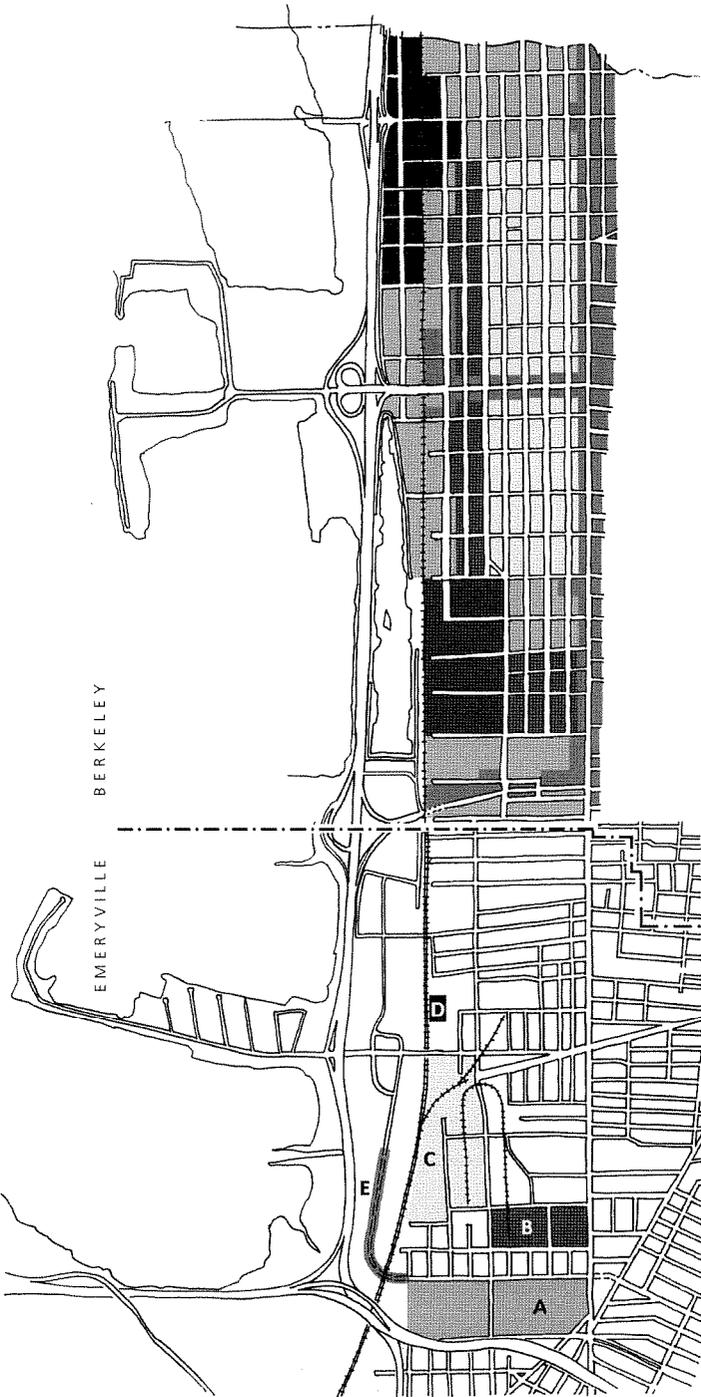
Peer reviewed

- Manufacturing
- General Commercial
- Mixed-Manufacturing
- Mixed Use-Light Industrial
- Mixed Use-Residential
- Residential

Reinventing the Wild West

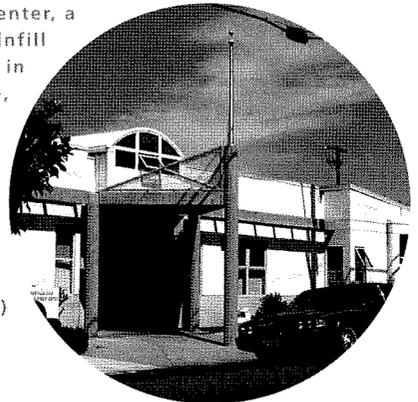
Terezia Nemeth

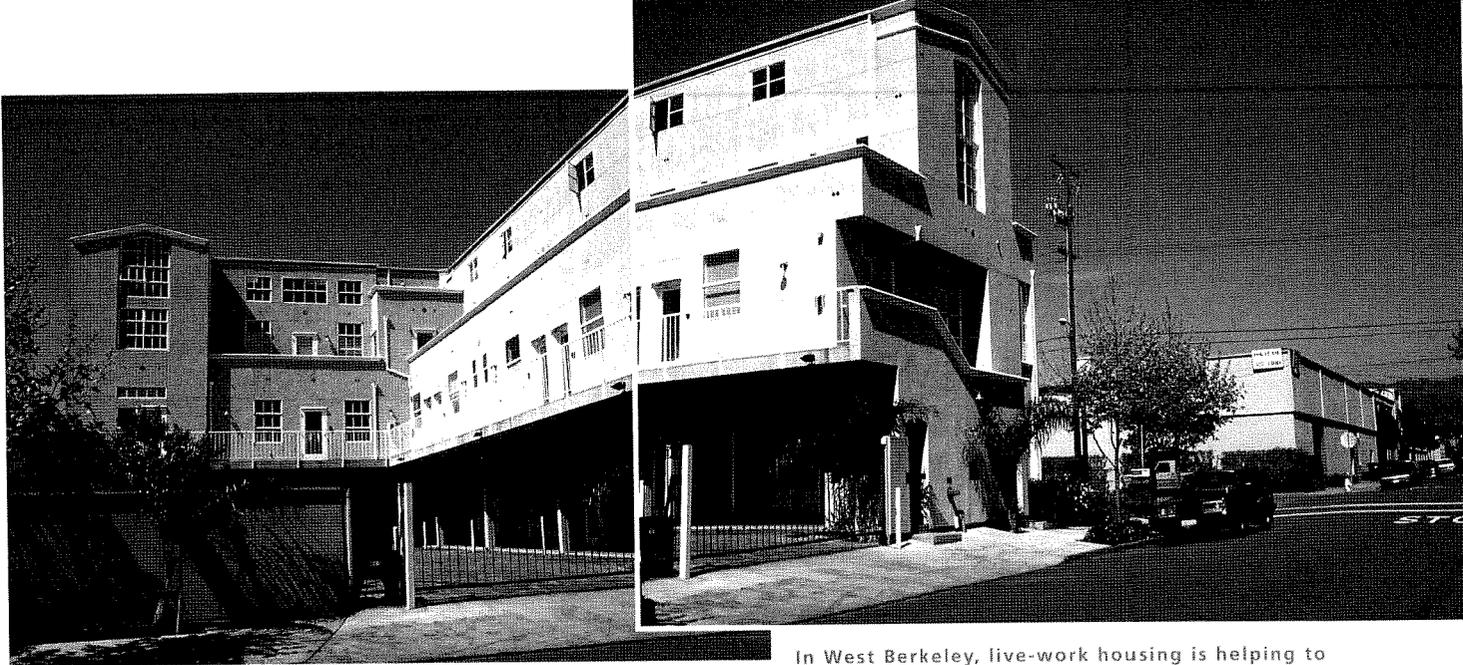
Emeryville and Berkeley share a common heritage as vibrant early industrial settlements across the bay from San Francisco, and both have experienced the exodus of major industries in recent decades. Each of these next-door neighbors has been successful at reshaping its once-thriving industrial areas, but their responses have been remarkably different, following from their history, physical fabric and politics — from the distinct nature of each place.



- A: East Baybridge Mall.
- B: Kaiser-Permanente site.
- C: Chiron site.
- D: Amtrak station.
- E. 40th street extension.

This day-care center, a strategic infill development in Emeryville, makes a transition between light-industrial and residential areas. (Illustrations courtesy Terezia Nemeth)





In West Berkeley, live-work housing is helping to fill in a neighborhood that was once more solidly manufacturing.

Modulated Links

Seventy five years ago West Berkeley (then Ocean View) was home to a variety of industries, including Pioneer Starch and Grist Mill, Manasee Tannery, California Ink (now Flint Ink) and Cutter Laboratories (now Bayer). It was a diverse neighborhood, including inexpensive worker housing and small, locally oriented stores and saloons intermixed with the industrial uses.

Today Berkeley offers few opportunities for new development. Most exist in West Berkeley, where the departure of major industries has left large gaps in the city's active fabric. But West Berkeley's history as an established, working-class neighborhood and its fairly extant street grid confounds the wholesale restructuring of underutilized areas.

West Berkeley has charted its resurgence by creating, through an intensive and arduous eight-year community pro-

cess, a plan to guide development efforts towards a clear vision of the place. The changes have been subtle in comparison to action-packed Emeryville, but the plan is bearing fruit: small-scale conversions of industrial buildings to new uses, including light industry, commercial and residential; the emergence of centers of focused activity, such as a specialty retail area; the reinvestment of existing businesses, such as Bayer's 30-acre research, development and production campus; and

Stitching in Between

Emeryville's earliest reputation was as a working-class entertainment area, complete with an amusement park, race track, saloons, card rooms and brothels. Later it became a haven for heavy industry and large food processing enterprises, including ironworks, slaughterhouses and meat-packing plants.

This history set up a physical, social and political structure that encouraged large- and small-scale redevelopment to occur very quickly and randomly, but with great impact. Emeryville still has a low population and a physical structure characterized by many large parcels. Its business and political lead-

ers have moved aggressively to transform the small city from an industrial enclave into the commercial heart of the East Bay. Now Emeryville is faced with stitching together its nodes of activity in hope that it can become something greater than the sum of its parts. The task is formidable: turning suburban megaplexes and insular industrial campuses into interconnected urban areas.

East of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks lies most of the city's historic industrial fabric, where a multitude of large- and small-scale changes have been occurring. This part of the

city houses the headquarters of new light-industrial enterprises like Chiron, a biotech plant, and Sybase, a software manufacturer. The newest projects are a 10-acre hospital, research and office campus for Kaiser-Permanente and the 30-acre, "big box" retail East Baybridge Mall. These very large projects have reshaped Emeryville's physical structure, creating somewhat isolated centers of activity.

At the same time, many warehouse and industrial structures have been converted into live-work offices, wholesale operations and small-scale industrial and commercial ventures

the continued reinvestment and expansion of residential areas. This mix of projects is creating links between existing ventures and new enterprises and having a modulated effect on the surrounding neighborhoods.

The plan establishes four land-use districts, finite zones with characteristically predominant land uses and development patterns. The districts provide a basis for identifying the spectrum of permitted uses and densities that will reinforce each area's existing character.

For example, the "mixed use-light industrial" district (about fifty square blocks on scattered sites) has traditionally been light industrial in character, along with a few exceptions — scattered houses, a Mexican restaurant, a branch of the East Bay Humane Society, a recording company in a multi-story tower and offices in converted industrial space. New development has

enlivened the area with restaurants, professional offices, artist space and wholesale retailers. The development has grown incrementally from its core at the center of Ninth and Parker streets, helped in part by the pattern of regular blocks and the prevalence of on-street parking, which generate and encourage pedestrian movement.

To the north of this area is a mixed-use residential and industrial district. As enterprises like the Berkeley Pump Co. began to move out, this district lost its manufacturing vitality, leaving older residences scattered among an array of abandoned industrial structures and disconnected from the more solidly residential areas further east.

Now new nodes of activity are emerging. The Berkeley Pump Co. buildings have been turned into profes-

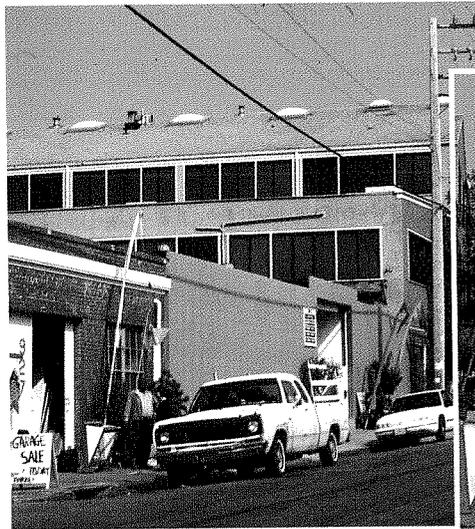
sional office space, live-work units and a cafe. The design and character of the original complex were maintained even as it was adapted for new uses. The complex is decidedly in an industrial area and its design provides a pedestrian scale appropriate to its location, helping to enliven the streetscape and re-establish the links between Aquatic Park and the residential areas to the east.

New light-industrial users such as Peerless Lighting, machine and auto repair shops, are moving into some of the older, nearby industrial structures once occupied by manufacturers that made everything from water pumps to clocks and mattresses. This array of mixed-use development brings people from the industrial and residential areas together around the Tomate Cafe, offices and live-work units.



Small pedestrian-scale courtyards, such as the terrace of this cafe, are opening in the spaces between Emeryville's large-scale industrial buildings.

The plan also includes improved connections to existing parks and community assets, a street tree planting program, and improvements to existing traffic arteries. It has been effective, in guiding the type, size and preferred design of new development in the area. The district concept serves to cluster mutually supportive projects that provide a sense of community and considered growth within West Berkeley.



New investment on Tenth Street, in West Berkeley's "mixed use-light industrial district" — live-work units to the left and Nolo Press offices and retail at the right. The Fantasy Records building, behind Nolo Press, was developed earlier.



(such as printers, restaurants and manufacturers of specialty products like pasta, clothing and medical instruments) — enriching the mix of activities within the city.

Places are emerging where a synergy might develop. North of East Baybridge Mall, surrounding Emeryville's charming old Town Hall, is an area that still has many historic brick warehouse and industrial buildings intact. The city recently commissioned a plan to envision and implement changes that will create pedestrian activity between the mall, the future Kaiser Hospital site and the planned Chiron expansion.

The city has also used its coffers, well supplied through redevelopment generated tax-increment funds, to pay for housing projects, child-care centers, live-work projects, parks and infrastructure improvements. For example, the new Amtrak station started as an isolated island but is now being melded into the city's fabric with better street connections and the addition of a nearby child-care center (sponsored by the redevelopment agency).

Another significant step has been to extend existing streets or create new ones to improve connections between places. One project will connect residential areas to the east with the East Baybridge Mall, the historic industrial area and the large, primarily commercial developments between the freeway and the railroad tracks.

The city is also trying to influence the design of newly proposed projects, Both Chiron and Kaiser, for example, have been encouraged to design "liner buildings" that incorporate retail uses along their public edges. The success of this strategy, however, will depend in part on the location of the retail activity, the volume of pedestrian traffic and the configuration and size of the retail spaces.

Emeryville has always been a place where big, bold things happened. As industry moved out, a combination of large- and small-scale users of all kinds began to claim the space. The result has been a sequence of not-so-well connected, but highly viable and interesting new activities in new and rehabilitated structures.

It remains to be seen whether Emeryville's response — active participation in encouraging redevelopment of key locations, extending streets, making strategic public investments and increasing the review of development projects — can effectively weave together this scattered city. These efforts are constantly being reinvented as new projects are proposed without the restraining effects of a preconceived plan.



An example of Emeryville's architecturally expressive industrial fabric, across the street from the cafe shown on the opposite page.