

# UC Berkeley

## Places

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# Manufactured

Wonderwall, 1984 World's Fair,  
New Orleans. (Alan Karchmer)

DEAR DONLYN

My favorite chapter in *Chambers for a Memory Palace* is, for obvious reasons, “Light that Plays.” In his letter to you, Charles writes, “Light defines space and the accounts of space are phrased in terms of light,” and describes three kinds of light: “Pagan Light, Mystic Light and Light that Plays.” In your reply, you write, “Light in all its subtle modulations is exhilarating.”

Both of you are writing about light from the sun and about the interplay between architecture and the subtlety of sun’s rays, including shadow, shade, reflection and even sparkle. I would like to add to the discussion by focusing on the role of man-made lighting, or “manufactured light,” as Jean Labatut, our professor at Princeton, used to call it.

# light



Above: Faculty Club, University of California, Santa Barbara, MLTW/Moore Turnbull. (Richard C. Peters)  
 Below: Centennial Pavilion, 1984 Worlds Fair, New Orleans. (Alan Karchmer)



The intermingling of people, places and ideas is made relevant in architecture, and for me the language of lighting is what makes architecture memorable, and what has sustained my work. This language begins with the relationships between what I call the “three S’s” — sources, systems and surfaces. The sources are the lamps, the systems are the various ways to illuminate the spaces and the surfaces are the planes receiving light. An understanding of these three elements is fundamental to every space under investigation. They are inseparable; one cannot be explored without the others.

These elements, coupled with “ambient luminance, focal glow and sparkle of brilliance,” to use the words of the late Richard Kelly, dean of American lighting designers, have always been a major influence on my work. There is another idiosyncratic element I recognize and that is “WACKO,” or lighting effects I like but don’t quite understand why or how

powerfully they work. Taken altogether, these elements are integral to my lighting design approach, as the following projects demonstrate.

My first much publicized lighting design was the faculty club at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Lighting the soaring Piranesi-like spaces was like playing jacks with lights. Fantastic, heraldic neon banners sparkled in the ambiance of the surrounding surfaces, glowing in lights from the chromed wall brackets and the string of lights etching the arches celebrating the dynamic interior. This was crowned by a glistening baroque chandelier (a gift), which hangs over the regal stair, adding brilliant sparkle to the effect of lighting the magnificent dining room.

The Piazza D’Italia in New Orleans became a lighting landmark. Doric light columns and neon Acanthus leaves were woven together with neon light arches, uplighted, glowing entablatures and colonnades with flutes of water and light to animate the night color of this civic plaza. It was this project that first introduced me to the realization the overall effect was “WACKO” — it could not have been predicted, much less completely designed.

The 1984 World’s Exposition in New Orleans, on which I collaborated with Charles, Bill Turnbull and Perez Associates, gave me a chance to explore my language of lighting even more fully, by using night color or “painted light” (ambiance) and “syncopated light” (play of brilliants) to enhance the vivacity and luminosity so necessary to the life of places. The Centennial Pavilions were softly etched in light with sparkling light banners reflecting in the water and surrounded by the glowing lanterns of the Empress Walk, which also reflected in the lagoon. The Wonderwall was a 2,500-foot long fantasia of moving and pulsating light — sparkling strings, neon lines, glowing arches and domes, and shimmering stainless steel leaves in “light trees,” all culminating in the fiery alligators chasing laughing pelicans to ethereal heaven.

I worked on three churches that offer stark contrasts in how the lighting of interior spaces enhances the liturgical requirements. St. Matthew’s Church



Wonderwall, 1984 Worlds' Fair,  
New Orleans. (Alan Karchmer)

Right: Nativity Catholic Church, Rancho Santa Fe, Calif. Moore Ruble Yudell. (Timothy Hursley)  
Below: Gethesmane Cathedral, Fargo, South Dakota. Moore Ruble Yudell. (Timothy Hursley)

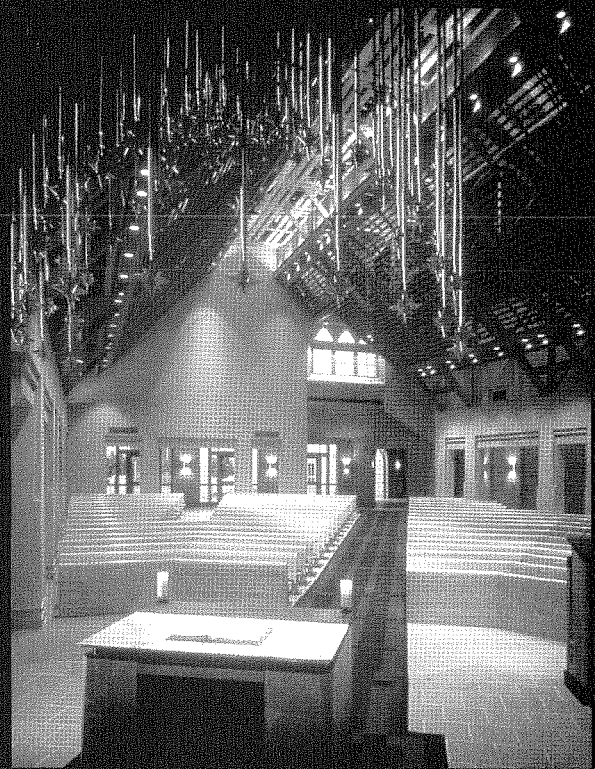
in Pacific Palisades, Calif., provided my first opportunity to involve the community in a collaborative effort for the lighting design. The “light rings” follow the arc of the pews and provide the necessary light for readings; ambient light enhances the classic nave and articulate transept. The “tree of life” behind the altar glows as the centerpiece of the church interior and the surrounding walls are softly bathed by light sconces etched with liturgical symbols providing sparkle in the surrounds.

The Nativity Catholic Church in Rancho Santa Fe, Calif., has a longitudinal nave with a single transept. Semi-circular seating is softly washed in pools of light from concealed lighting in the tracery ceiling and the focus is on the glowing altar under the sparkle of the shimmering baldachin above. The surrounding walls are defined by the back light sconces which delineate the visual boundary of the church interior.

The heraldic lighting in the soaring, Gothic spaces of the Gethesmane Cathedral in Fargo, North Dakota, act as ceremonial symbols for the cathedral interior. Providing both task light and ambient light, they accentuate the use and the solemnity of this traceried interior. The simple austerity of the surrounds is embellished with the sparkle of light from wall brackets. The brackets also mark the ceremonial boundaries terminated by the glowing altar and the stained-glass window, which act together as the focal point of this magnificent interior.

Large public buildings have very complex and diverse lighting functions. The Humbolt Library in Tegal, Germany, incorporates a formal use of a variety of lighting strategies to enhance the different requirements in this library. The double-vaulted interior spine is washed with two systems of direct and indirect lights, in contrast to the surrounding individual reading spaces, called “light rooms,” each of which has its own lighting identity. The central desk in the entrance hall is crowned by a “light ring” that announces its importance in the space and provides the appropriate level of lighting for the tasks. The main curving library hall is surrounded by book-shelf niches, which are illuminated by “light lines” that reinforce their importance in the space among the multiple layers of lights.

The Mountain View Civic Center, in Mountain View, Calif., is a civic complex comprised of an administrative building and other public functions including a civic theater. They are organized around a public plaza. Each building has its own rotunda, each of which is a focal point at night with an internal illuminator marking its importance. The entrance stairs from the



street to the plaza are delineated by light strips for safety and to announce the formal entrance to the complex. The overall ambiance of the exterior illumination is one of subtle demarcation in light, providing a soft palette of light for circulation and public comfort in the exterior garden setting.

The main administrative wing contains a two-story atrium with a grand stair leading to the second-floor gallery and offices. This is crowned by a skylight that is etched with light and has large suspended chandeliers over the stairs, providing focal light and task light to this grand atrium. Wall- and column-mounted light brackets illuminate the circulation system and serve as markers for the glass-enclosed offices.

The American Club in Hong Kong is a large social club set high on a hill overlooking the harbor below. The night lighting of this complex accentuates the many facilities and lush garden setting of pools and outdoor sitting areas. Color of light and layers of light were used to enhance and define the different facilities and to give continuity to the experience of the whole building.

The main dining room, which overlooks the harbor, is a regal, flag-bedecked space crowned by a clerestoried rotunda. Each facet of the entablature above the windows has glowing light panels, which define the geometry of the soaring interiors and set the ambiance of the dining area. A webbed light pendant acts like a large lantern and its soft light gives focal drama to the vaulted room. Internal task lighting accents the serving areas. The entire room is coordinated by lighting controls to set the moods for all modes of entertainment and dining. The color and the furnishings were coordinated with the lighting to give a sense of grandeur to the multiple activities which take place in this beautiful room.

For more than thirty years, I have had the opportunity to fully explore the language of lighting through the many projects I have done with you, Charles, Bill Turnbull and others. My wonderful adventure in lighting could have never been accomplished without everyone's unequivocal commitment to collaboration. To me, authorship was never important as long as the buildings and places were wonderful for people. As Bill Turnbull once said, "it doesn't matter who supplies the idea as long as it is there."

— DICK



Above: Mountain View Civic Center. Turnbull Associates. (Timothy Hursley)

Below: American Club in Hong Kong. Turnbull Associates. (Lincoln Potter)

