

# UC Berkeley

## Places

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# Places Archive: Downtown

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Downtown, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder. It marks the triumph of civilization and the hollowness of authority. It stands for architecture, politics, culture, the future and the past—all depending on your point of view.

What better word to test the keyword search in the *Places* archive; and the four pieces I selected offer their own Rashoman-like take on what we should value and how we can measure a society's health.

"A Redevelopment Success Story," by Jay Claiborne (*Places* 15.2), shows

one perspective, the established order consolidating territory and proclaiming victory. We read about "highly talented city officials" and "an influential group of local leaders" and "the importance of a civic context for private development"—hence, the use of redevelopment funds for everything from sycamore trees to light-rail lines.

But another school of thought would hold that what cities need is an aesthetic vision rather than a public-works checklist. In "Urbanism Downtown" (*Places* 13.2), Todd Bressi explored renewal efforts in Albuquerque and Milwaukee that map out how things should look and where growth should go: "both rely on carefully calibrated architectural

imagery—suggestive in character but generic in representation—to convey a sense of place."

All of which ignores the box for the wrapping, Michael Pyatok would argue—and looks right past the inner-city residents who are struggling to gain access to the American Dream. His eloquent "Martha Stewart vs. Studs Terkel?" (*Places* 13.1) says the first priority is not the "picturesque architectural qualities that will attract people with more discretionary income." It is "designing neighborhoods that promote economic opportunity for people who are already there."

The only author who takes downtown as it is Louise Mozingo. In

**Above:** Revitalized First Street in downtown San Jose—from Jay Claiborne's article in *Places* 15.2. Photo courtesy of San Jose Redevelopment Agency.



“Women and Downtown Open Spaces” (*Places* 6.1), she studies two San Francisco plazas to see why women prefer one and men prefer the other. The answers involve benches and trees, staking out turf vs. fading into the landscape; but the real point is that design shapes every aspect of the cities we share, even a decision as ephemeral as where to eat lunch.

Four sets of values, four schools of thought, four ways to be. And here’s the beauty of it: each one rings true. Downtown—the concept, as well as the place—is as complex as modern

life itself. It needs to be viewed from as many angles as possible, keeping in mind that no one view is absolutely right.

**Top left:** New Urbanist proposal for downtown Albuquerque — from Todd Bressi’s article in *Places* 13.2.

**Top right:** New neighborhood-oriented housing near downtown Oakland — from Michael Pyatok’s article in *Places* 13.1.

**Bottom left:** Women and men use San Francisco’s downtown open spaces differently — from Louise Mozingo’s article in *Places* 6.1.

## Places on the Web

In November *Places* launched a new website and digital archive at [www.places-journal.org](http://www.places-journal.org). The world of publishing, particularly academic publishing, is changing, reflecting a shift toward the Internet as an important method for seeking and disseminating scholarly and technical information. Within this larger universe of media, printed copies of journals remain a critical companion to the increasing prominence of virtual publishing. A printed journal also serves as tangible proof that ideas are highly esteemed—of enough lasting value to sustain a spot on a personal bookshelf. But it is with this larger understanding that the Board of the Design History Foundation and the Editorial Advisory Board of *Places* also

launched a year-long effort in 2006 to enhance the journal’s online presence. Throughout, our idea has been to take advantage of current trends in design practice and scholarship by establishing a website that is more interactive and will allow expanded dialogue with our readers.

Websites provide new opportunities, many of which are playful and investigative. At the same time, we wanted our new site to provide a useful online resource. For this reason, our site contains several new features. One is a news and events section, which will report on activities taking place in and around our affiliated partner schools. Another is the aforementioned digital archive of more than twenty years of content—which is fully searchable. A third

feature is what we have called “threads,” short essays inspired by articles from the archive.

John King, urban design critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, assisted in development of this last feature. He also bravely tested the waters by writing the first thread, on “downtown.” Our graduate-student editorial assistant, Catriona Stuart, has now written a second thread on “public space.” We continue to look for new writers for this section. Please consider this an invitation.

We hope that you enjoy the new website, the archive, and our ever-expanding community both in print and in cyberspace. Thank you for your current and continued support. We welcome reader comments by email to [places@berkeley.edu](mailto:places@berkeley.edu).