

James Goldstein Office – Historic Cultural Monument Application

Description

The Goldstein Office is an interior office space located at 10100 Santa Monica Boulevard, Suite 2030, in the Century City area of Los Angeles. The Goldstein Office was designed by architect John Lautner in 1987, for businessman James F. Goldstein. It is located in a fairly straightforward 600,000-square-foot, 26-story, late Modern high rise office building, rectangular in plan, that was constructed in 1971 and designed by Skidmore Owings and Merrill architects. The building is oriented in an east west configuration paralleling Santa Monica Boulevard in the block between Avenue of the Stars and Century Park East. The elevator core and services are located in the center of the building with office suites on the perimeter of two double loaded pedestrian corridors on either side of the floor.

Located on the 20th floor, and almost in the center of the northern side of the building, the Goldstein Office space looks directly down at the Los Angeles Country Club and provides expansive views of Holmby Hills, Beverly Hills, and the Santa Monica Mountains. It contains approximately 850 square feet in a rectangular configuration with the total limits of the leased space measuring 34 feet 3 inches in length by 24 feet 9 inches in width. The floor plan of the office was laid out on a 20 degree angle to this existing leased space. The office consists of two distinct sections. The first contains the secretary's desk and reception area, and the second Mr. Goldstein's office area. These two sections are separated by a combination of two partial height walls, one angled and canted and clad in black slate, and the other clad in copper, and a series of mitered and butt jointed clear glass panels that run vertically at the edges and along the tops of walls as clerestory windows.

The central slate clad wall that runs at a 20 degree angle from the western side of the space towards the eastern, and turns at a 45 degree angle at approximately the middle of the space, is canted and is supported both by steel beams bolted to the concrete floor below, and by the opposing forces of the two angled sections. The glass clerestory window panels acoustically separate the secretary's space from Mr. Goldstein's private office at the perimeter, yet allow natural light to infuse the whole interior.¹ The secretary's desk, also clad in black slate, is cantilevered off this wall and appears as a natural outgrowth from it.

The entrance to Goldstein's private office is through a door sheathed in brushed copper, that when closed seamlessly disappears into the partial divider wall that is also sheathed in brushed copper. Inside the private office semi reflective brushed copper walls project from the eastern side of the space at alternating angles. With the exception of Mr. Goldstein's desk, furniture in the office was also designed by Lautner, including; a low, cantilevered sofa/settee with black leather upholstery which faces an irregularly shaped coffee table resting on a structural glass base with beveled edges, and constructed of the same black slate as the floors and

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dividing walls. The entire floor of the space is covered with black slate tiles in a triangular pattern that echoes the angles and geometries of the walls and ceiling.

The lowered ceiling consists of rectangular panels of clear Douglas fir separated by narrow recessed copper reveals. The panels and reveals run together seamlessly in undulating/cascading tracks towards the windows on the western perimeter of the space. Small circular down lights are carefully centered and recessed into the fir panels. Contractor Robin Poirier devised a system of magnets and safety chains to allow for easy removal of the ceiling panels for accessing light receptacles.²

Significance

In 1972 businessman James F. Goldstein purchased the home that Lautner had designed for the Sheats a decade earlier. By 1980 Goldstein hired Lautner to begin remodeling areas of the original house. Much of this included replacing original windows and built in fixtures in the master bedroom suite with advanced butt jointed structural glass systems and electronic controls that were not available in 1963 when the house was first constructed.³ This process of experimentation with design, materials and technological systems in the house continued until Lautner's death in 1994. Goldstein's passion for refining the house and for Lautner's work, led to a strong relationship between architect and client that lasted until Lautner's death in 1994.

Jim Goldstein was arguably one of the most important clients of the later period of Lautner's career, and certainly his most important patron. It was therefore no surprise that in 1987 Goldstein approached Lautner with the idea of re-designing the interior of his existing office in a Century City high-rise building. Goldstein had been spending a great deal of time in his office, and wanted a work environment that would also provide an organic expression of space.⁴

Lautner approached the challenge of designing a small office interior in an existing high rise floor plate in the same way he did with his residential projects.⁵ By orienting new interior walls, and slate floor tiles at an angle to the existing floor to ceiling windows in the western wall, and by introducing a ceiling of stepped inclined Douglas fir panels, Lautner was able to transform a standard office space into a dynamic composition of complex spatial geometries.

Construction of the Goldstein Office began in late 1987, and was not completed until the spring of 1989. Andrew Nolan was the project architect, with Julia Strickland assistant, Andrew Nasser was structural engineer, and Robin Poirier and Associates was general contractor.

Robin Poirier was just starting in his career when he first met John Lautner. Poirier began apprenticing with Lautner and eventually became an assistant to project contractors. Working under Lautner, Poirier learned the architect's organic approach to design and construction, and had the opportunity to work for two of the general contractors, Johnny

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de la Vaux and Wally Niewiadomski, who realized Lautner's most unique designs in constructed form, including the Chemosphere and Silvertop houses.

The Goldstein office was the first Lautner job that Poirier was completely responsible for from start to finish as a general contractor, and his understanding of Lautner's vision allowed him to construct the project according to the architect's precise specifications. The installation and fabrication of the space was an intensive and complex process, with components being fabricated and constructed on site from scratch. Almost everything in the office space is oriented at a compound angle. Glass panels were carefully cut to fit the tight angles created by the intersection of the cantilevered slate walls and the alternating ceiling planes. Installation of the slate took three to four months, and the ceiling with an accuracy of 64th of an inch, required five to six months of careful cutting and fitting. At approximately \$450. per square the total cost of construction came to over \$400,000. Lautner would come by periodically to check on the progress of the job and quality of workmanship. Poirier claims that it is the finest work he has ever done.

John Lautner is unquestionably one of the most original and important American architects of the twentieth century. He apprenticed under Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin East and West, where he absorbed the core values and ideas behind Wright's philosophy of organic architecture. However, unlike many of Wright's apprentices who never really reached beyond the work of "the master", Lautner took what he had learned from Wright and the environment and culture of Taliesin and developed his own intuitive sense of structure and space, which he applied to every project throughout his career. Lautner never repeated himself. When Lautner left Taliesin, he came to Los Angeles to begin his own architectural practice, which he continued here for 56 years until his death in 1994. His individual genius and profound contribution to the architecture of the City cannot be underestimated.

The Goldstein Office is an excellent example of the work of John Lautner. While it was designed towards the end of his life and career, it is pure Lautner. All of his commitment to "real architecture" and a single and central "idea" were applied here. "It is a complete organic piece of Lautner design."⁶ "It is the work of a mature master architect with very few restrictions, for one of his most important clients."⁷

While Lautner designed many important commercial projects in Los Angeles during the early period of his career, including Google's, Coffee Dan's, Henry's Coffee Shops and Drive-ins, and The Speer Office building, almost none still exist. There are very few remaining non-residential projects by Lautner that have survived in total, and the number within the City of Los Angeles is even lower (See table 2). It is the only remaining unaltered office space designed by Lautner.

The Goldstein Office is one of the few remaining non residential examples of Lautner's work, and is without doubt the most intact, exhibiting a high

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degree of integrity. It was constructed with an extremely high level of craftsmanship, and is in excellent original condition. It was featured on the cover of the book "John Lautner, Architect", New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1998, Edited by Frank Escher, it was featured in "The Architecture of John Lautner", Rizzoli, New York, 1999, by Alan Hess, and in publications including: the Mid-September 1989, issue of Architectural Record, The Los Angeles Times, November 17, 1998, Designers West, February, 1990, and the Worth, Robb Report of July, 2003.

The Goldstein Office is an important and excellent example of Late Modern office design, and is the work of a master architect, whose individual genius influenced his age, John Lautner, and therefore meets the criteria for listing as a City of Los Angeles Historic Cultural Heritage Monument.

Historic Context

John Lautner, upon arriving in Los Angeles in 1939, felt "it was so ugly I was physically sick for the first year I was here."⁸ But more than any other architect in 20th century Los Angeles, Lautner molded Los Angeles' landscape to fit his vision. "The dominance of Superficiality must be ignored!" he proclaimed in the prologue of his autobiography, published in 1994.⁹ Constantly reinventing himself throughout his career, while often neglected and misunderstood by critics, he remained creative and vital as an architect until his death in 1994.

Born in 1911, Lautner spent an idyllic youth, walking in the woods and swimming in Lake Superior in northern Michigan. Blessed with intellectual and artistic parents, he helped them construct the family log cabin when he was only twelve years old. He first learned of Frank Lloyd Wright from his mother, who read the 1932 autobiography. Already dismissive of the architectural schooling of the time, Lautner completed his college degree at Northern Michigan University in English in 1933, and in 1934 embarked to Taliesin.¹⁰

It was at Taliesin that Lautner thrived: unstructured classes, plenty of physical labor, and a complete immersion in Wright's philosophy of construction, what he called "grammar." As Lautner interpreted it: "I really learned that you have to have a major total idea or it's nothing, you know; it's just an assembly."¹¹ John Lautner worked on the Broadacre City model in Chandler, Arizona, and trekked back and forth from Taliesin in Wisconsin to Taliesin West in Arizona. But after six years with Wright, Lautner's wife Mary was ready to leave Taliesin, and the couple moved to Los Angeles. In 1939, Frank Lloyd Wright hired John Lautner to be the superintendent of the Sturges House in Brentwood.¹²

John Lautner oversaw the construction of the Sturges House and another Wright-designed house. But soon after his arrival, Lautner decided to strike out on his own. In 1940 he designed and completed his own house on Micheltorena Street in Silver Lake. Architectural critic Henry Russell Hitchcock called it the "best house by an architect under 30 in the US."¹³

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Other early residential projects include the Bell Residence in the Hollywood Hills (1940) and the Mauer Residence (1946), both projects passed on to him by Wright. Wright himself considered Lautner the "Next-Best-Architect-on-Earth" (aside from himself).¹⁴

In *John Lautner*, published by Taschen in 1999, Barbara-Ann Campbell-Lange writes: "Lautner drew with the mind of a carpenter, building while he was drawing. The idea mattered above all else. The idea was unique to each client. Every house and every site was understood as a distinct challenge."¹⁵ But Lautner was also receptive to his clients' ideas. According to Helen Taylor Sheats, who along with her husband, Paul, first worked with Lautner on L'Horizon Apartments in Westwood in 1948:

John was fun to work with and always open to new ideas. . . Our final project was on a cliff in Bel Air. He did several schemes for this house and they weren't quite right. One day while I was at the studio John began folding paper and arranging it on the topographic model. Suddenly he had three triangular folded plates hugging the hillside and the basic scheme was formed. . . I wanted more light in our living room 'cave' and John made a pattern of 4" skylight spots in each coffer. Our budget constraints led to using 'Old Fashioned' glasses for these skylights.¹⁶

During World War II Lautner worked for private companies with defense contracts, like his friend Paul Speer, who had helped Lautner build his house in Silver Lake. (Lautner later designed the Speer Contractors Office Building on Cahuenga Boulevard in 1956.) At the close of World War II, Lautner went to work for a local architect, Douglas Honnold, who was responsible for iconic restaurants like *Ciro's* and the *Trocadero*. But Honnold was more of an 'establishment type,' and Lautner eventually left the firm. He had also begun a relationship with Honnold's wife, Elizabeth, whom he married in 1950.¹⁷

During his tenure with Honnold, Lautner would do important commercial work, including *Coffee Dan's* in 1942. After leaving Honnold in 1947, he designed a remodel of *Henry's* drive-in in Glendale. In 1949 he designed *Googie's Coffee Shop* at Sunset and Crescent Heights, and "unknowingly gave an entire range of jazzy modern buildings a name."¹⁸

In 1956 Lautner met Kenneth Reiner, a 40-year-old "millionaire inventor and manufacturer" who was the "ideal Lautner client: inventive, philosophical, ready to try new things, and wealthy."¹⁹ Reiner contacted Lautner to build him a family house in Silver Lake for around \$75,000. Reiner and his partner supported Lautner financially so he could focus on what was later called *Silvertop*. This relationship lasted until 1964, when Reiner's marriage and business failed. The house remained unfinished, until it was eventually sold to Phillip and Jacqueline Burchill. Although the Burchills commissioned Lautner to finish the house, his original vision was never fully realized.²⁰

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In 1958 John Lautner was hired by Leonard Malin, an aircraft electronics engineer. Malin had inherited a steep site on a narrow street, and he had only \$30,000 to spend.²¹ Dubbed "Chemosphere" by Malin, the house is one of "the great houses of Los Angeles, according to Alan Hess. "A flying saucer hovering below the ridgeline on its way to landing; a family home for an aerospace engineer; a space age bachelor pad. But it is also a clear example of design and craftsmanship. It solves a problem of hillside construction and it captures the view; it embodies the technological faith of its times and is vivid sculpture."²²

It was yet another of Lautner's faithful clients, Jim Goldstein, who would provide the architect with financial security during difficult times.²³ Goldstein, a businessman, first hired Lautner to remodel the Sheats House, built in 1963. Goldstein also commissioned Lautner to design the interior spaces of his Century City office, an opportunity, according to Alan Hess, to create a "unique work of art."²⁴

John Lautner was made a Fellow of the AIA in 1970, and he was awarded the Gold Medal by the AIA, Los Angeles Chapter, for lifetime achievement in 1993. His work continues to be honored and recognized. As recently as August 14, 2005, the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* featured an article entitled, "Remembering John Lautner" by architecture critic Michael Webb.²⁵ The latest version of Gebhard & Winter's *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles* (2003) includes eleven of Lautner's designs, constructed from 1939 to 1991.²⁶

Endnotes

¹ Dietsch, Deborah K., "Playing the Angles", *Architectural Record*, pg. 77, Mid-September 1989

² Telephone interview with Robin Poirier, August 13, 2005

³ Hess, Alan, "The Architecture of John Lautner", Rizzoli, New York, 1999, pg. 177-178

⁴ Cotter, Marianne, "Cooper and Slate", *Woth, Robb Report*, pg. 136-137, July 2004,

⁵ Dietsch, Deborah K., "Playing the Angles", *Architectural Record*, pg. 77, Mid-September 1989

⁶ Telephone interview with Alan Hess, August 13, 2005

⁷ Interview with Frank Escher, August 13, 2005

⁸ John Lautner, *John Lautner, Architect*, ed. Frank Escher (London: Artemis London Limited, 1994), 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-19

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ Terry Waters, "I Was a Visitor at Taliesin East," in *Lautner: A Tribute. Journal of the Taliesin Fellows, Issue 18*, ed. Louis Wiehle (Los Angeles: Taliesin Fellows, 1995), 11.

¹⁵ Barbara-Ann Campbell-Lange, *John Lautner* (London et al: Taschen, 1999), 14.

¹⁶ Helen Taylor Sheats, "I Met John at a Presentation," in *Lautner: A Tribute. Journal of the Taliesin Fellows, Issue 18*, ed. Louis Wiehle (Los Angeles: Taliesin Fellows, 1995), 11.

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¹⁷ Alan Hess, *The Architecture of John Lautner* (New York: Rizzoli), 41-42.

¹⁸ Alan Hess, *Googie: Fifties Coffee Shop Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle), 66.

¹⁹ Hess, *The Architecture of John Lautner*, 103.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

²² *Ibid.*, 108.

²³ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁴ Alan Hess, Interview with John English, by Phone, Los Angeles, California, August 17, 2005.

²⁵ Michael Webb, "Remembering John Lautner," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, (August 14, 2005), 31-32.

²⁶ David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2003), 515.

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Interview with Frank Escher, August 13, 2005

Telephone interview with Alan Hess, August 13, 2005

Telephone interview with Robin Poirier, August 13, 2005