

---

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Architecture + People in San Diego

Rick Meghidido · Wednesday, November 6th, 2019

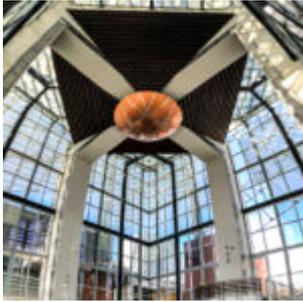
San Diego's downtown transformation conveys an important message to many cities' challenges. It is possible to increase density while maintaining high standards of design quality. It is possible to mitigate traffic by bringing efficient public transportation. It is possible to build high-quality public buildings within the budget.



San Diego Central Library



San Diego Central Library



San Diego Central Library – Atrium



Torr kaelan, San Diego



Salk Institute, La Jolla



Chiully Sculpture at the Salk Institute



Downtown Condominiums



Downtown Condominiums



“Serpent Tree” by Niki de Saint Phalle

It was late May when we first considered the possibility of registering for a Brendon Burchard “Influencer” seminar in San Diego in October. “We haven’t been there for about a decade. It sounds like a good excuse,” I said. We signed up. It was a good decision. What we saw and learned in a few days well exceeded our expectations.

“What’s new to see in architecture?” I asked Google while doing basic research. A small, five-story, zero energy mixed-use building, Torr Kaelan, caught my attention. It had been designed by Rob Quigley, an architect unknown to me. Some of the building’s details reminded Carlo Scarpa’s design. Googling more on Rob Quigley, I reached the San Diego Central Library project. I couldn’t tell much by looking at the photographs that I found online, but I marked it as a place to visit.

We decided to set our base in Little Italy. I found a lovely small hotel, *Urban Boutique*, next to a European-style piazza known as *Piazza della Famiglia*. It was located a mile-plus from the event we planned to attend. “We could do some exercise by walking the distance in less than half-hour,” I said to Ruth. Once we arrived there, we parked the car and didn’t move it until we left.

We found the downtown area transformation, since the last time we had been there, very impressive. It had become a thriving center easily accessible by foot, bike, car, or public transportation. Its urban scale was right, the traffic was moderate, and we noticed a number of new, well-designed condominiums.

Yet the biggest surprise was the central library. It had been conceived as “a 9-story archive of flexible space, sandwiched at the top and ground floors, with diverse and accessible public amenities.” The library opened in 2013, following a protracted 17-year period of design and construction. The material of choice was concrete, for both cost and maintenance. A spacious atrium and a roof garden are accented by a symbolic dome provided an urban identity to the building.

We couldn't leave San Diego without revisiting Louis Kahn's Salk Institute in La Jolla. It triggered some memories. In our late twenties, we were newly graduated architects working in Tel Aviv for architect Ram Karmi. When Kahn visited Israel, Karmi invited Kahn and his wife for dinner at his condo, and I asked us to join them. At the end of the evening, he said, “Pick up Kahn tomorrow morning at his hotel and take him to see the Central Bus Station.” I had been working on the details of it for several months. The huge building, then under construction, was mostly done in exposed concrete. Karmi scheduled to meet us for lunch at 3:00 PM, joined by Karmi's first wife, Carmela.

From 3:00 to 6:00 PM, Louis Kahn talked. We felt like having lunch with Socrates. Kahn's intellect was very high, and his language was, at times, incomprehensible to us.

We had made our first visit to the Salk Institute at the end of our “Frank Lloyd Wright's pilgrimage, during which we visited and photographed over one hundred of Wright's works across America. At the time, the Salk Institute was one of the most famous buildings in the world. Seeing it again was less impacting, yet now I could read that, while the work in concrete remained impeccable, its greatness was in its scale and in the way the large court opens to the ocean.

The event that provided the excuse to drive to San Diego had a crowd of about two thousand people. It was one of the most diverse I had ever seen. Its participants came from most of the fifty states, from many countries, and their ages ranged from teens to people in their seventies.

Our weekend in San Diego was a productive one!

This entry was posted on Wednesday, November 6th, 2019 at 5:11 pm and is filed under [Architecture](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.