The College of Environmental Design began its fall 50th Anniversary celebration in a packed Wurster Hall auditorium on Friday, September 25, 2009. The fall program, tracing the past fifty years at CED, started with two fascinating lectures: the first from Dell Upton on the histories of the environmental design professions, which was followed by Sir Peter Hall on planning 20th-century cities.

The evening was introduced by CED’s new dean, Jennifer Wolch. She informed the audience of CED’s long history, and defined the College’s function as an institution. “(William) Wurster wrote, ‘Our first duty is toward our students, of course, but we have another and very pressing duty. That is our duty to California, as a fast-growing and increasingly urban state, and we must serve her well in creating beauty, preventing disorder, and making the best use and preservation of her natural resources. Hills, water, land, and forests must all be carefully conserved as the structures of man compete for the space they occupy.’”

Professor of Architecture Paul Groth followed Wolch, introducing Dell Upton, professor and chair of UCLA’s Art History Department. Groth commended Upton for his distinguished career and original research and publishing.

In a special ceremony, UC Berkeley Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

Upton’s lecture, titled “Architectural History and the CED Idea,” traced the role of Architectural History in relation to the conception of CED. Upton expounded on Wurster’s idea of CED by saying, “Part of the insider/outside discourse in architecture is that architectural education should be both integrative and disruptive.”

Professor Emeritus of City & Regional Planning Mike Tietz brought Sir Peter Hall to the stage. He said, “Peter is probably the preeminent scholar and historian of planning and urbanism perhaps in the world today.”

Sir Peter Hall, Professor Emeritus of City and Regional Planning who currently teaches at University College, London, continued the enlightening retrospective on CED’s past fifty years with his talk, “Planning Past and Future: Early 21st Century Reflections.”

“I would like to commemorate the college as an example of what a college truly is and should be,” Hall told the crowd, “and that is an assemblage of scholars pursuing their individual lines of research, but in a form of deep exchange of ideas and knowledge. That is what CED was founded to do fifty years ago and so triumphantly continues to do today.”

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George Breslauer awarded Professor Emeritus of Architecture Sam Davis with The Berkeley Citation, Berkeley's highest honor to its faculty. The honor is given for distinguished or extraordinary service to the University. The Berkeley Citation remains confidential prior to being awarded, which made for a touching scene as Davis was called to the stage. Breslauer read some of the nomination letters received for Davis. Professor of Architecture Mary Comerio wrote, “His work on housing the homeless demonstrates the importance of social responsibility and ethical professional practice as an example for our college and university.”

The evening concluded with a lovely reception outside in the Wurster Hall Courtyard.

On Saturday, the celebration continued with two engaging panel discussions. Russ Ellis led the first panel of emeriti professors, including Clare Cooper Marcus, Stanley Saitowitz, and Michael Teitz, in a conversation about the historical and philosophical roots of CED’s approach to design and planning education. Harrison Fraker then led a panel of some of our most accomplished alumni, including Ray Kappe, Carol Galante, and Mario Schjetnan, in a discussion of the impacts of CED on the professions.

The Professors Emeriti Panel, “History and Traditions of Design Activism,” focused on the development of CED as an academic institution and a place for
creative endeavor. Professor Emerita Marcus succinctly put it near the end of the panel, “We should be getting people out of Wurster Hall. As teachers, I think we need to get out of this building—sorry to those who currently teach in this building, as I did for most of my life—and get out into the real environment… and teach something different. Be creative in how we teach.”

The second panel, featuring some of our most gifted alumni out in the environmental design fields, was titled “Legacies of Environmental Design Education at CED.” Carol Galante, of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; Ray Kappe, founder of the Southern California Institute of Architecture; and Mario Schjetnan, founder of Grupo de Diseño Urbano, discussed how their time at the CED helped them develop the ideas and impulses that led to their success.

“We had one studio in which landscape, planning, and architecture came together to do a project—A Planning Study of Berkeley,” Ray Kappe spoke of his time at Berkeley. “And that was one of my best experiences here. This one (project) was really very, very important to me.”

Sir Peter Hall returned to give the Concluding Remarks for the fall program. He said he had a hard time summing up an incredibly rich set of discussions. He did so marvelously, though, with some final reflections about understanding how differently things were done fifty years ago as compared with today.

“What are we up to in CED?” Hall asked the audience. “What should we be up to? All that I’ve heard this morning tells me, and I’m sure it’s told you, that the essence of what CED is for, is to really understand the relationship between people, nature, and buildings.”

“I think the abiding sense I have at the end of this morning,” Sir Peter Hall said, “is how we reconcile the CED vision, what this college was founded for 50 years ago, and what it continues to practice, with the changes that occur in the outside world, which have been, as we’ve seen in various presentations, so profound over half a century.”

On Sunday, the celebration continued beyond Wurster Hall with expeditions to locations around the East Bay and Napa Valley. Alumni and faculty led tours of their projects that focused on innovative design, affordable housing, environmental planning, historic preservation and other aspects of sustainability.

The Napa tours included visiting the Parduxx Winery, built by Gould Evans | Baum Thornley, Inc. The tour was led by the firm’s principal, Douglas Thornley, and showcased the traditional agricultural building complex plan with a unique ten-sided fermentation facility, that was inspired by the form of traditional round barns.

The other Napa tour visited Opus One Winery, built by Johnson Fain. Principal Scott Johnson led the group through the 70,000 square foot, low-profile structure, exploring the dual role of iconic structure and functioning winery. Johnson highlighted the role of the architecture as an expression of the wine made there.

Among the several engaging East Bay tours was the visit to William Wurster’s Greenwood Common. The tour was led by Waverly Lowell, author of Living Modern: A Biography of Greenwood Common. Participants on this tour learned the history of how the buildings and landscape came to be and toured three of the exceptional houses and gardens.

Another of the other fascinating tours highlighting CED’s influence on East Bay architecture was Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland. This tour was led by the building’s designer, Craig W. Hartman, who is a partner at Skidmore, Owens, and Merrill. With a building form based on an inner wooden vessel contained within a veil of glass, the tour showed, the design conveys an inclusive statement of welcome and openness as the community’s symbolic soul.
The other East Bay tours included a trip to Strawberry Creek Park in Berkeley, which was led by Professor Matt Kondolf and Jane Wardani, with commentary from Carole Schemmerling and Roger Leventhal. Members of the CED community also took a boat trip, led by Caltrans Engineer Brian Maroney, to the Bay Bridge and Treasure Island.

A final group visited the Salt Flats in the South Bay. CED Professor and kite photographer Cris Benton, along with microbiologist Wayne Lanier, led a three-mile hike to their favorite spot at the South Bay salt ponds, an unassuming drainage ditch they have dubbed “The Weep.” At the Weep, Cris got out his kite and showed how he captures surprisingly beautiful images of the landscape using the wind and a home-made remote for his camera. Meanwhile, Wayne set up his field microscopes to inspect the amazingly diverse creatures that create the colors and textures we see in Cris’ aerial photos.

The celebration concluded on Sunday night with a reception at The David Brower Center in Downtown Berkeley. The building’s competition-winning design builds upon the inherent richness in the combination of affordable housing, environmental education, and a venue for the intersection of art and ecology. This reception and talk was hosted by Daniel Solomon, Principal at WRT | Solomon E.T.C. Architecture & Urban Design, the firm behind the Brower Center.

From September 25–December 22, 2009 an exhibit curated by Professor Raymond Lifchez with the assistance of Carrie McDade entitled, Environmental Design/A New Modernism: 50th Anniversary of the College of Environmental Design, 1959–2009 graced the Volkmann Reading Room in the Environmental Design Library. The exhibit focuses on seminal moments from 1959 to 2009 in the evolution of the CED founders’ vision, whereby teaching, research, and practice were informed by the social and natural sciences. In recent decades, this vision has come to include the computer sciences. It features original drawings, photographs, documents, books, and artifacts drawn from the Environmental Design Archives, the Environmental Design Library, the Bancroft Library, the University Archives, IURD and CEDR, and private collections.