



Detail of the Chalet Hollywood, 2013–14.

Social Structure

by Leigh A. Arnold

"Chalet Hollywood," at once a stage for community-building, an architectural experiment, and a happening, opened in 2013 in a back-alley storage space off Hollywood Boulevard. During its 16-month run, "Chalet Hollywood" garnered notice in the Los Angeles Times, Wallpaper, The New York Times, and a slew of other publications. This October, artist Piero Golia, who conceived the Chalet, will reinterpret the project in Dallas. Working with architect Edwin Chan, who designed the Chalet Hollywood, Golia will completely transform the Nasher Sculpture Center's Corner Gallery from a sleek, austere space to something far more luxurious and inviting. The goal of "Chalet Dallas" is the same as that of its L.A. predecessor: to serve as an intimate gathering spot for influential and creative minds to meet and interact in a relaxed, beautiful environment.

TA Contributor Leigh Arnold recently spoke with Chan and Golia about the project and how they will adapt it to its new, vastly different environs in Renzo Piano's Nasher

gallery. What follows is a condensed version of their conversation.

Leigh Arnold: How did the Chalet begin?

Piero Golia: It started from complaints that, in L.A., you never get to see your friends; I thought, “The place should be so fantastic and special that — finally — people will agree to leave their homes.” That’s why the architecture and art were so obsessively important. We started from building a unique space and then expanded to trying to have this space become more than just a place. In the beginning, I hated the word *salon* because, to me, it sounds like five people sitting on a couch talking about un-useful theory. Instead, I think the beauty of the Chalet is that it was more than [just] people on a couch predicting the revolution or talking about philosophy. That’s why I say the Chalet is a tool for community-building.

LA: What made you turn to Edwin as your architect?

PG: I needed somebody who could understand that we were not building just walls, but that we were building something way more theoretical. ... Edwin, among the architects I know, is the most ready to approach architecture not as buildings, but as social models. And I have to say, with great arrogance, I was bright. He really did it. That’s maybe my only glory in the thing. ... I really felt I made the right phone calls.

LA: Edwin, why did you want to be a part of Piero’s project?

Edwin Chan: There was no question in my mind that this was a project that I would be very privileged to be a part of, for two reasons. Number one was my admiration and respect for Piero as an artist. But also, [I admire him] in terms of the way that he explained the project to me, of trying to create a space where the architecture and the art are a [single] integral experience. That, I think, is a very unique challenge from an artistic, architectural point of view. In terms of my professional experience, I’ve worked on some large-scale projects, like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris that just opened. But those are stand-alone museums; the galleries themselves have to be a kind of sanctuary for the art, for lack of a better description. So they’re white spaces, so to speak. The Chalet offers an opportunity to imagine a different kind of artistic space that is not a white box, [but rather a place] where people are encouraged to interact and socialize along with the art.



Top Detail of the Chalet Hollywood, 2013–14.
Bottom Detail of the Chalet Hollywood, 2013–14, during a performance by American dancer Stephen Galloway.

Exterior view of the entrance to the Chalet Hollywood, 2013–14.

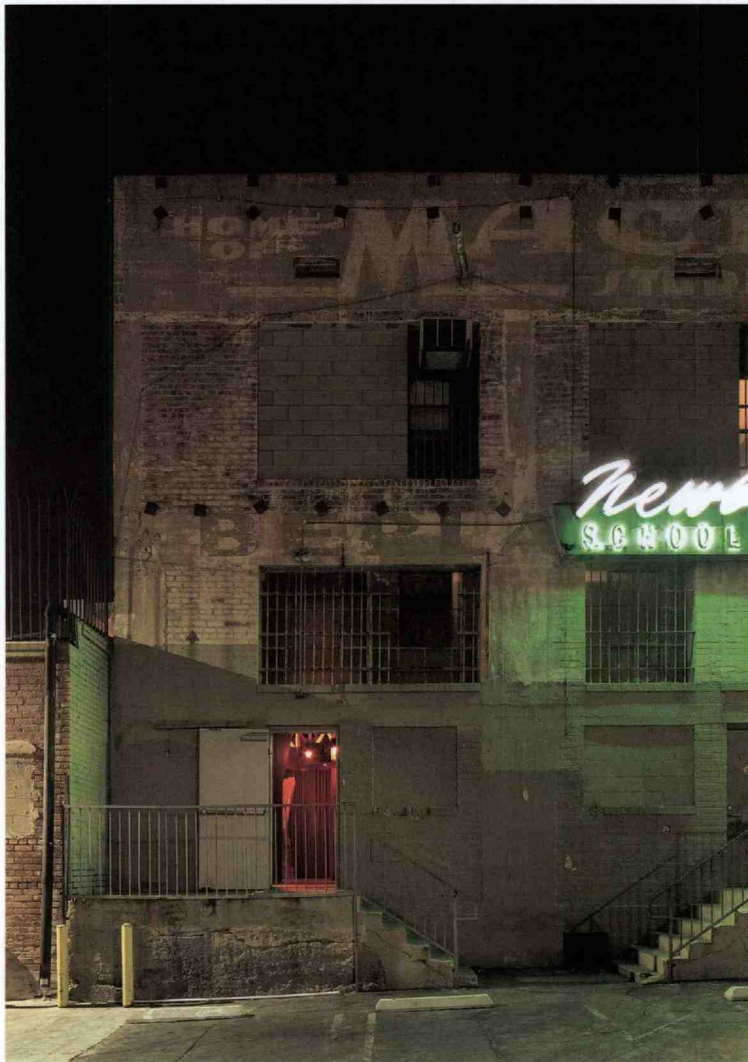


IMAGE BY JEREMY BITTERMAN, COURTESY OF EDWIN CHAN.

LA: Can you talk about the nature of your collaboration?

PG: Both Edwin and I moved very far away from how we originally operate. It's like we both surrendered to a bigger dream. The fact that construction was so slow gave us the chance to question ourselves and reprogram ourselves daily. Edwin was very brave in accepting this way of working: going down to the field, and experiencing the thing, and feeling what was the right next touch. You see it when you walk into the space. You have this feeling that everything has been done slowly, according to the flow; people end up drunk at the right place.

EC: I agree. We sort of thought it would be one thing in the very beginning, but the final product is something that none of us thought of. And it exceeded our expectations in that sense. So, it's very spontaneous and improvised in that way. That's one of the main reasons that I like working with artists: They push me as an architect to do things that I didn't think I would do before. It forces me to behave out of the typical character of what architects are supposed to do.

LA: I am curious about the physical space and the materials for the Chalet Hollywood: what you started with and how you got to the final product. And also, how you plan to adapt the Chalet to its Dallas space within the Nasher Sculpture Center?

EC: The Chalet in Hollywood posed two immediate challenges. The first one was, how does one interpret the theme or the idea of a chalet in the middle of Hollywood Boulevard? Because obviously we're not in the Swiss Alps. So, from the design point of view, the first thing that came to mind was the use of wood, and how one might use wood in a way that was adaptable. That was how we came up with the timber, cut in a modular pattern that could be stacked into groups. It allowed us a way to put the Chalet together in a fairly efficient way. It also provided the opportunity, because it was modular, to be disassembled — and potentially reassembled in a different location.

In adapting it to Dallas, we tried to maintain the same kind of spatial characteristic as in Hollywood, but we gave it a different configuration. In Hollywood, there were three distinct spaces. The design had to do with creating an interconnectivity between the spaces and encouraging people to move and experience all three spaces at different times.

In Dallas, [the Chalet] is one space so the design is the other way around; we had to suggest clusters or enclaves of experiences within



the larger space, creating intimacy without building up rooms.

LA: Is working within the Nasher presenting any challenges? How are you going to make people forget that they're in a Renzo Piano building?

EC: The great advantage of working in a Piano museum is that the building is impeccably constructed. It is an extremely well-executed building with a very distinctive architectural spatial characteristic. At the Nasher, there is this glass wall on one side. I was thinking about the glass wall as a kind of proscenium stage, so in that sense the reinterpretation of the Chalet in Dallas is stage-set-like.

The goal is to try to find this duality between the identity of the Chalet and the architecture of the Nasher. We are hoping that our design — which is still evolving, as you know — will coexist with the Nasher. We don't want to hide what's there; it's a question of building on top of it to complement it — to find a balance so that we can be friends, so to speak.

Leigh A. Arnold is assistant curator at the [Nasher Sculpture Center](http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org). Chalet Dallas will be on display October 3, 2015–February 7, 2016. More information can be found at: <http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/art/exhibitions/upcoming>.

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