



Peer Reviewed

Title:

Will "Le Mickey" Play in Paris? [Dispatches]

Journal Issue:

[Places, 6\(4\)](#)

Author:

[Hardy, Hugh](#)

Publication Date:

1990

Publication Info:

Places

Permalink:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0vh1q7wv>

Acknowledgements:

This article was originally produced in Places Journal. To subscribe, visit www.places-journal.org. For reprint information, contact places@berkeley.edu.

Keywords:

places, placemaking, architecture, environment, landscape, urban design, public realm, planning, design, Dispatches, Mickey, Paris, Hugh Hardy

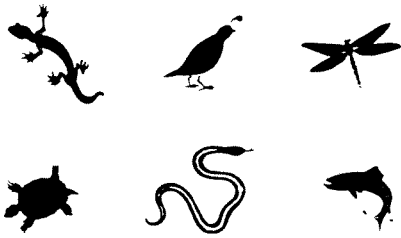
Copyright Information:

All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author or original publisher for any necessary permissions. eScholarship is not the copyright owner for deposited works. Learn more at http://www.escholarship.org/help_copyright.html#reuse



eScholarship
University of California

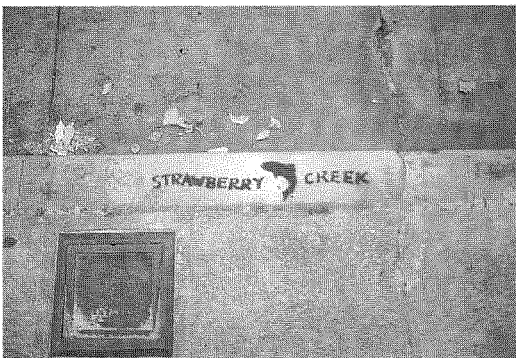
eScholarship provides open access, scholarly publishing services to the University of California and delivers a dynamic research platform to scholars worldwide.



ty design into a concrete vision of how familiar neighborhoods and streets could be transformed—visions residents could embrace and act upon.

The ecocity conference suggested relationships among nature, resources, the economy and people that would be the foundation of new communities, and a new sense of place. But to engage people in its ultimate vision, the ecocity movement must speak the language of place in the most specific terms possible, and in communities that already exist today.

—Todd W. Bressi



Painted curb markers show the original routes of Berkeley's creeks. Each creek is assigned a unique logo (above).



Curves and speed bumps in the Milvia "slow street" discourage auto use.

WILL "LE MICKEY" PLAY IN PARIS?

Paris—At first the idea of a Disneyland located in France seems unlikely, if not downright unpatriotic. In a country whose cultural pride and self-assurance are unequaled, Mickey and Minnie's \$2.9 billion invasion spread across nearly 5,000 acres appears too fantastic. Why import a surrogate American Main Street, a reproduction Mississippi riverboat, or animated versions of Grimm's fairy tales to Europe? Isn't such fantasy the stuff of Hollywood? Don't people travel to Europe because it's *real*?

Euro Disneyland, planned to open in 1992 (coincident with further development of the European Common Market and the connection of Great Britain to mainland Europe by high-speed rail), is France's opening bid to become the recreation capital of Europe. An open expanse of countryside is being converted to support a new cash crop: tourists. Through clever financing and adroit operation, Disney, an entertainment giant made wealthy by theme parks, movies and allied product sales, stands to enhance profits greatly while teaching new generations of Europeans to sing: "M-I-C! K-E-Y! M-O-U-S-E...!"

The numbers are incredible. Projected attendance for the first year is 11 million. But this is for only the first theme park, a 500-room hotel and 595-visitor camping ground. When complete, Euro Disneyland will have two theme parks, a total of 18,200 hotel rooms, 2,100 camp sites, a 15-acre "entertainment center," 173 acres

of offices, 185 acres of corporate park structures, two golf courses, 2,500 single-family homes, a 23-acre shopping center, a water recreation area, 3,000 multi-family residences and 2,400 time-sharing units!

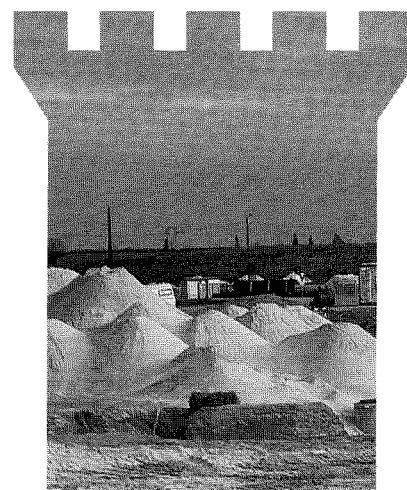
Can this cultural invasion succeed on land so proudly and resolutely French? To ask the question is to be unaware of the pervasive legacy of Hollywood around the globe. "Le Mickey Mouse" is no stranger to France. Neither are the artifacts of Disney's formula village, whose five basic parts will be replicated here: Main Street U.S.A. (Victoriana), Frontierland (Wild West), Adventureland (Children's stories), Fantasyland (*Le château de la belle au bois dormant*) and Discoveryland (Future).

Architectural elements will be executed and staffed with the same skill and professionalism that characterize all Disney operations, but there will be adaptations for the French climate. Provisions have been made for indoor promenade spaces that will adjoin Main Street. The Japanese solution of enclosing all of Main Street was rejected as unsatisfactory.

Snow White's castle will be even taller and more magnificently elaborate than her other three residences in the U.S. and Japan; at the suggestion of an eminent American architect, Euro Disneyland designers borrowed ideas from medieval chateaux in France. The enhanced castle still terminates the entrance view but arrival to the new theme park will be through a giant profiled hotel (The Magic Kingdom Hotel), reminiscent of the Grand Floridian at Disneyworld in Orlando, which in turn is reminiscent of the Del Coronado in San Diego.

In addition, there is a 577-room Hotel New York designed by Michael Graves, a 1,000-room Sequoia Lodge designed by Antoine Grumbach, a 1,000-room Hotel Santa Fe designed by Antoine Predock, and Robert A.M. Stern's 1,000-room Newport Bay Club and 1,000-room Cheyenne Hotel.

The underground service network, which is the maintenance miracle of Florida's Disneyworld (the result of lifting all public space one story above the water table), will not be replicated. Nonetheless, this new village will abound in enough technological



marvels to influence construction throughout France.

The French may not need to develop new appetites for non-stop recreation fantasy. From experience with café life, they already know how to graze. But their vacation habits will have to change if Central France is to become a destination. So far, public response to Disney's architecture depends on a familiarity with imagery translated from film. Will the public response in France to these "real" places be the same as in the U.S.? It will all be beautifully made and Made in France, but will this be a sufficient lure to generate return visits?

The U.S. is in many ways a fantasy of Europe, a place where imagination did run wild. Perhaps it is fitting to have a fantasy U.S. built in France, especially since construction began during the bicentennial of the French Revolution. American consumerism has breached many cultural boundaries. Perhaps this surrogate village, built to honor the consumer, is a valid

From these humble beginnings, the \$2.9-billion Euro Disneyland will rise.

Photos by Hugh Hardy.



cultural undertaking on a continent where political walls now topple almost daily. Just seeing people disposing of so much income is miraculous proof of a valid economic system.

Who knows what Disney may unleash by this economic phenomenon in the the French countryside? Now that Paul Goldberger of the *New York Times* has equated the Disney Corporation with Cummins Engine, Johnson Wax and IBM as a patron of “big-time architecture” and found the results add an “intellectual and aesthetic challenge” to the Disney experience, why won’t France find this aggressively American, high-brow/low-brow mix a destination must?

Besides, whatever the new-found alliance between Disney and architecture, how could the French sneer at having a good time?

“M-I-C! K-E-Y! M-O-U-S-E...!

—Hugh Hardy

TEACHING TIMES SQUARE A LESSON

New York—Times Square is the heart of New York’s glamorous theater district but it is also rife with prostitution, drugs, poverty and, in recent years, vacant theaters. Recently one long-vacant theater re-opened to tell the story of its history and to teach a lesson about how to revitalize cities.

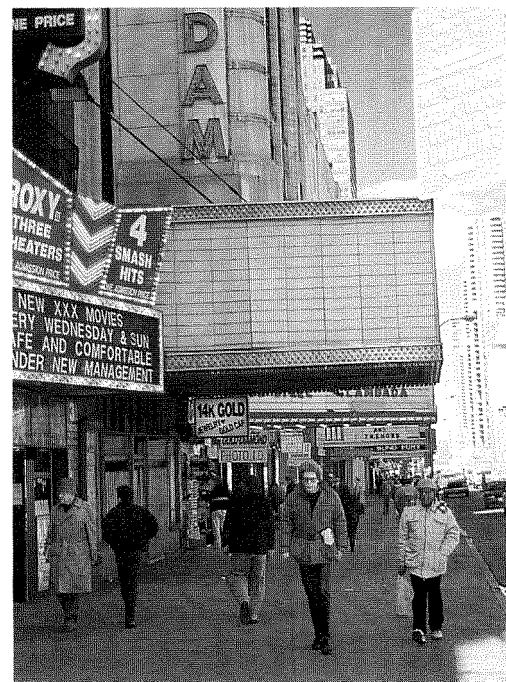
Since the early 1980s, the state-chartered 42nd Street Redevelopment Corporation has been advancing plans to improve the area by replacing the T-shirt and electronics stores, fast-food stands, video arcades and peep shows with prime office and retail space. Several apartment hotels and a block of mostly low-rise office and loft buildings would be replaced with skyscrapers. Just this April, the state finally succeeded in condemning the property it needs.

Theories abound as to the reason for delay: politics, bureaucratic red tape, Manhattan’s overbuilt commercial real estate market. Whatever the reason, the area has been in limbo: Property owners, uncertain how redevelopment will affect their holdings, have been hesitant to invest in new projects or even routine maintenance. One result is that six of nine historic theaters in the redevelopment area have closed.

Last fall, frustrated with the uncertainty, the Durst Organization, a real estate development and management company with interests in a number of properties near the redevelopment site, acquired long-term leases for eight 42nd Street theaters and began refurbishing them. This winter the company donated the use of one theater, the Victory, for the staging of *Crowbar*.

Crowbar, the first theatrical production at the Victory in 60 years, draws New Yorkers to an easily overlooked building in a frequently avoided neighborhood. The play, populated by ghosts of the theater’s former owners, performers and audiences, explores the history of this once-filled house. The unrenovated interior aptly functions as the set: The audience sits in the stage area and the actors parade among the seats, up and down the aisles and across the balconies of the empty house. Images of the changing façade evoke the spirit and mystery of the theater’s 90-year history.

Crowbar is the latest “site-specific” production from En Garde Arts, a company that describes its work as emerging from “an appreciation of the spatial possibilities, historic traditions



The block of 42nd Street that would be redeveloped.