



LA

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Christina
Hendricks
Rise & Shine

Tastemakers
Fast Forward

Taste Makers

POWER UP

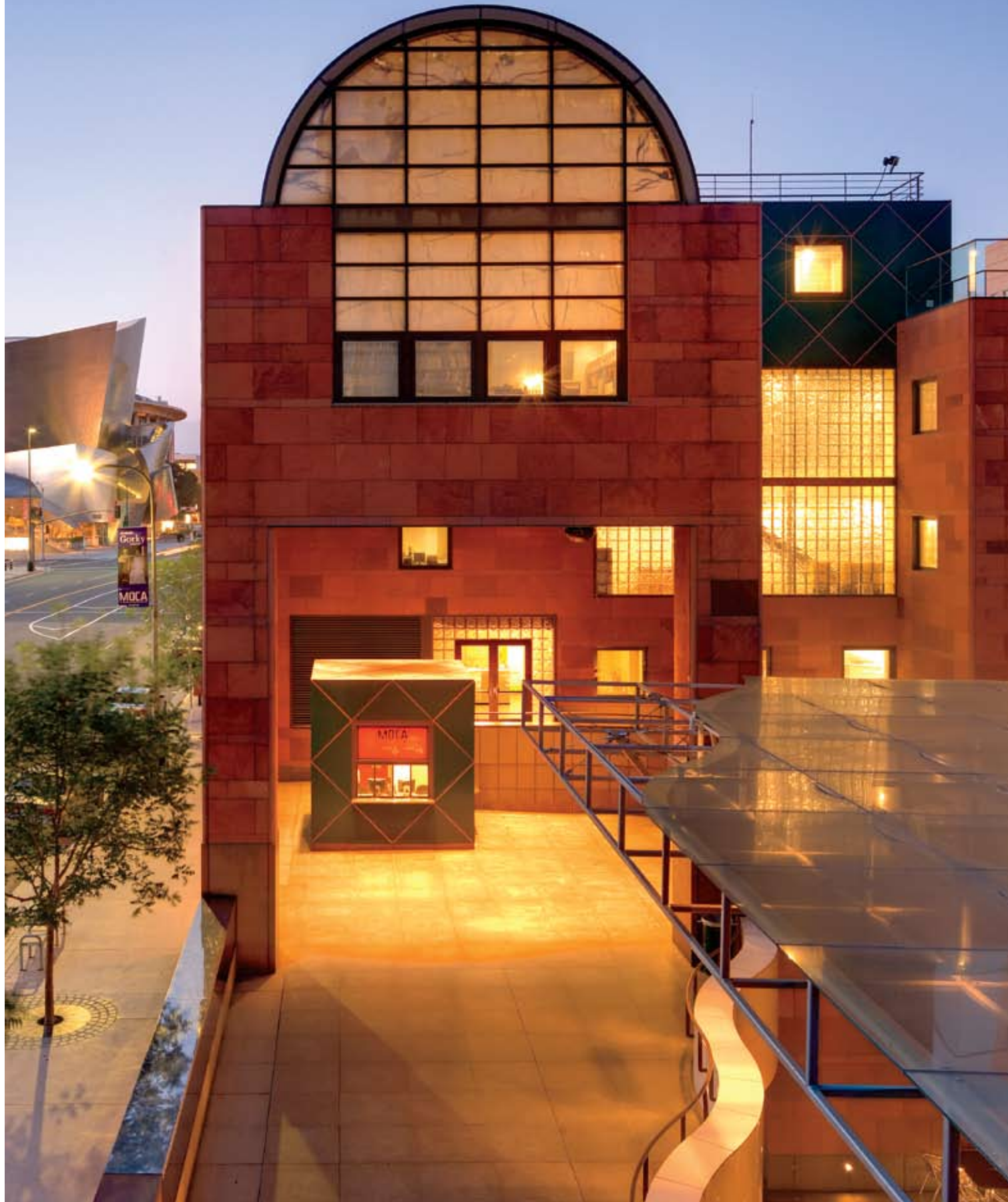
They're not architects or painters. They don't design dresses or menus. But these agents of change exert a profound influence on how we experience food, art, fashion and the urban landscape. They're paving the way for L.A.'s future.

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Jeffrey Deitch officially took over as director of MOCA in June, after shuttering his New York gallery.

MOCA's downtown landmark of postmodern architecture, designed by Arata Isozaki, opened in 1986.



Jeffrey DEITCH CULTURE SHOCKER

“For me, this move feels seamless—from what I did with the gallery to what I’m doing here,” observes Jeffrey Deitch on his second day as director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. “I have to engage people and get them interested in art. Except now, instead of selling the artwork to support what we do, I have to ask for contributions. That’s the business part.”

After 30 years as a New York-based independent curator and high-profile gallerist, Deitch, now 57, has moved across the country to take on a new position and continue his vigorous and constantly evolving dialogue about art, life and the cultural landscape.

Often when journalists report on Deitch, their narrow descriptions stick to his bespoke suits, Harvard MBA and 1980s career at Citibank. He does indeed wear beautifully tailored suits, but his polite manner is almost courtly—a far cry from the avaricious howling of latter-day Gordon Gekkos.

His office at MOCA is still underdecorated, but the atmosphere feels poised and deliberate: no scattershot packing crates, only an ebonized conference table surrounded by ergonomic desk chairs. The one artwork on display—a mid-century Josef Albers print, a green *Homage to the Square*—flashes on the white wall, a bright go-ahead image as insistent as a traffic signal.

Deitch Projects—the New York gallery he founded in 1996 and closed this summer in anticipation of assuming his MOCA responsibilities—utilized three exhibition spaces to present more than 250 shows, performances and

installations. It established Deitch’s impressive reputation for both youth-quaking spectaculars and cross-generational views of recent art history. Fueled by a remarkably liberated curatorial vision, the exhibitions—an astonishing range, from Francesco Clemente’s nimble watercolors to manic installations such as *Black Acid Co-op* by Justin Lowe and Jonah Freeman—attracted an uncommonly broad audience.

“I love the creative audiences here,” Deitch says of Los Angeles. “One of the things that really inspired me about this city was when I came out for the opening of MOCA’s *Superflat* show at the Pacific Design Center in 2001. I’d never seen a museum opening like this in New York. I understood then that L.A. has the ability to draw in this whole new audience—not the art-professional audience but one of younger, creative people who don’t really differentiate between visual art, exciting new movies and new bands.”

Since January, when MOCA’s board of trustees announced Deitch’s appointment, he has been quietly brainstorming and planning new exhibitions: Julian Schnabel was invited to curate a show, opening July 11, that will vividly link all the hyphenates—actor/director photographer/painter—that describe the late Dennis Hopper; video artist Ryan Trecartin will present *Any Ever*, an antic epic of seven interconnected works, beginning July 18 at MOCA’s Pacific Design Center satellite; and in September, *The Artist’s Museum* will provide a revealing look at Los Angeles art since 1980.

Deitch was born and raised in Hartford, a conservative city with a famously dull nickname—the insurance capital of the world—and a historically daring art museum. The

Wadsworth Atheneum, the country’s oldest public art museum (1842), is a major site in the history of 20th-century avant-garde. “It had America’s first truly modern museum building, the Avery Memorial,” Deitch says. “For the opening in 1934, they commissioned Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein’s opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*. That idea—of blending performance, music and visual art—is immensely exciting and just what I’m interested in doing here at MOCA.”

Among his curatorial influences, Deitch is quick to cite the landmark Matrix program, an initiative developed in 1966 by curator James Elliott for the Wadsworth. Its purpose was to showcase the work of emerging artists in focused solo exhibitions—a strategy that could easily be implemented in the PDC space.

“Matrix was an innovator in this kind of project room,” enthuses Deitch. “It was so influential to me, the idea that you could do something big in a small space. The Matrix exhibition record has been so open, ranging from hard-core conceptualism to Keith Haring.”

Under Deitch’s direction, MOCA is organizing a media-morphing collaboration with actor/artist James Franco, examining exhibition possibilities with Rodarte designers Kate and Laura Mulleavy and mounting *Art in the Streets*, the first major museum survey dedicated to graffiti and art inspired by street culture. “I’ve been coming out to Los Angeles every year since 1980. I have so many personal and professional relationships here,” he says. “In 1981, Sherrie Levine was at CalArts, and she invited me to be a guest critic. I met Barbara Kruger there, and we started a dialogue.” He pauses and seems to be considering the passage of time and the interconnected-

“I love the creative audiences here. L.A. has the ability to draw in...not the art-professional audience but one of younger, creative people who don’t really differentiate between visual art, new movies and new bands.” —Deitch

ness of lives. “Now, Barbara is on the board of MOCA.” Suddenly, the dramatic move to museum director appears to be as seamless and fascinating as a Möbius strip. —Susan Morgan

Frederick+Laurie SAMITOUR- SMITH CITY COUNSELORS

The tale of the Samitour Tower—that 72-foot-high corkscrew construction of rough metal and fanlike screens rising on the corner of National and Hayden in Culver City—takes a few odd twists and turns. It involves, among other things, Paris in 1968, Malcolm X and B movies. But those are mere pit stops and detours. Ultimately, this is the story of two idealists, Frederick and Laurie Samitour-Smith, and their commitment to promoting the arts, creating jobs and fostering a sense of community in neighborhoods blighted by crime, unemployment and other urban woes.

Before his adventures in urban development, Frederick



Frederick and Laurie Samitaur-Smith have been pressing their progressive agenda for three decades.



Samitaur Tower's muscular form echoes the energy and creative spirit of its Culver City environs.

“The old way to do things when writing about traditional cuisines was to go in with an interpreter,” Gold says. “That’s the chamber-of-commerce version of eating. I prefer babbling my way to the heart of the menu.” —Gold



was a journalist and screenwriter, and Laurie was an actor. They were linked by a conviction that art and culture could connect people—and perhaps even save the world.

In 1968, while on assignment in Paris, Frederick witnessed the police beating student demonstrators. Media attention only seemed to inflame the violence. “You can’t be an idealist and think you are going to correct something in society through writing and pictures and not feel grief at the realization that you in part contributed to people’s deaths,” he says.

Back in the States, Laurie’s life was unfolding in its own peculiar direction. After years of serious training in acting and classical Spanish dance, she found herself with small roles on *Gunsmoke*, *Riot on Sunset Strip* and *Hot Rods to Hell*. It wasn’t exactly how she had envisioned her life as an artist.

After returning to the U.S. in the early 1970s, Frederick moved between Northern California, where he managed his family’s prune farm, and L.A., where he began to distill a vision for an enlightened approach to business. He met

Laurie in 1978, and a domestic and professional partnership blossomed. “We were talking about the same kinds of issues and ideas,” says Laurie. “We didn’t realize it at the time, but those issues and ideas became part of the foundation of our marriage—and our mission.”

Frederick recalls being influenced by Andy Warhol’s revolutionary experiments mixing art and commerce, as well as Malcolm X’s belief in the relationship between urban environments and the behavior of people who live in them.

He got the idea that real-estate development could be a path to progressive social action. “Maybe the facade of a building could be a palette or a canvas,” he says. “I could take some section of this city and repaint it...or put my dramaturgy in the mortar. This was a way of bringing art and hope to people who needed both desperately.”

“My reaction was, *real estate?*” Laurie says. “It was the farthest thing from how I imagined we could express what we wanted. But soon I got it.”

The Samitaur-Smiths began renovating derelict buildings in the then industrial no-man’s-land of Culver City in the early 1980s. In 1986, they selected Eric Owen Moss Architects for a building at 8522 National Boulevard. That collaboration—public-spirited developer meets avant-garde architect—still continues and has had an enormous impact on the face and fortunes of Culver City.

But nothing bears witness to the Samitaur-Smiths’ belief in the power of art and beauty like the new Tower project (designed with characteristic sculptural brio by Moss and his collaborators). This beacon of rusted metal and concrete—the first of eight the couple hopes to build along the Exposition Light Rail Transit Line, set for completion in 2011—is con-

ceived for multiple functions.

Two open-air amphitheatres at the base can accommodate up to 300 for lectures, panel discussions, readings and screenings. The steel decks of the multistory structure are designed to make people want to gather. An adjacent landscaped courtyard lets the space expand to host up to 3,000 for arts festivals, live music and theater and dance performances. Nearby exhibition and café spaces bolster the concept of the Tower as the centerpiece of a truly public art forum.

The idea, as Frederick sees it, is that by making the best in human achievement and creativity as free and available as air, a sort of alchemy happens—the environment elevates the people, and then the people start to transform their environment. Jobs spring up. Crime evaporates. Prosperity blossoms. And not just locally—as part of the Tower project, the Samitaur-Smiths are developing a Website so that the whole world can be part of the conversation going on in Culver City.

“We hope to inspire and motivate others—something like a forest fire that just catches on,” Laurie says. Frederick punctuates the sentiment: “The deal is, we have a lot of faith in people.” —Samantha Dunn

Jonathan GOLD

FOOD PROCESSOR

Sitting at a barside table in Cole’s downtown, one of his favorite cocktail spots, Jonathan Gold swirls a rye old-fashioned, pontificating on all things gustatory—truly, ALL things.

A steady stream of insight ensues. On libations: “With cocktails, if the dilution is correct and it has the proper chill, it almost doesn’t matter what’s

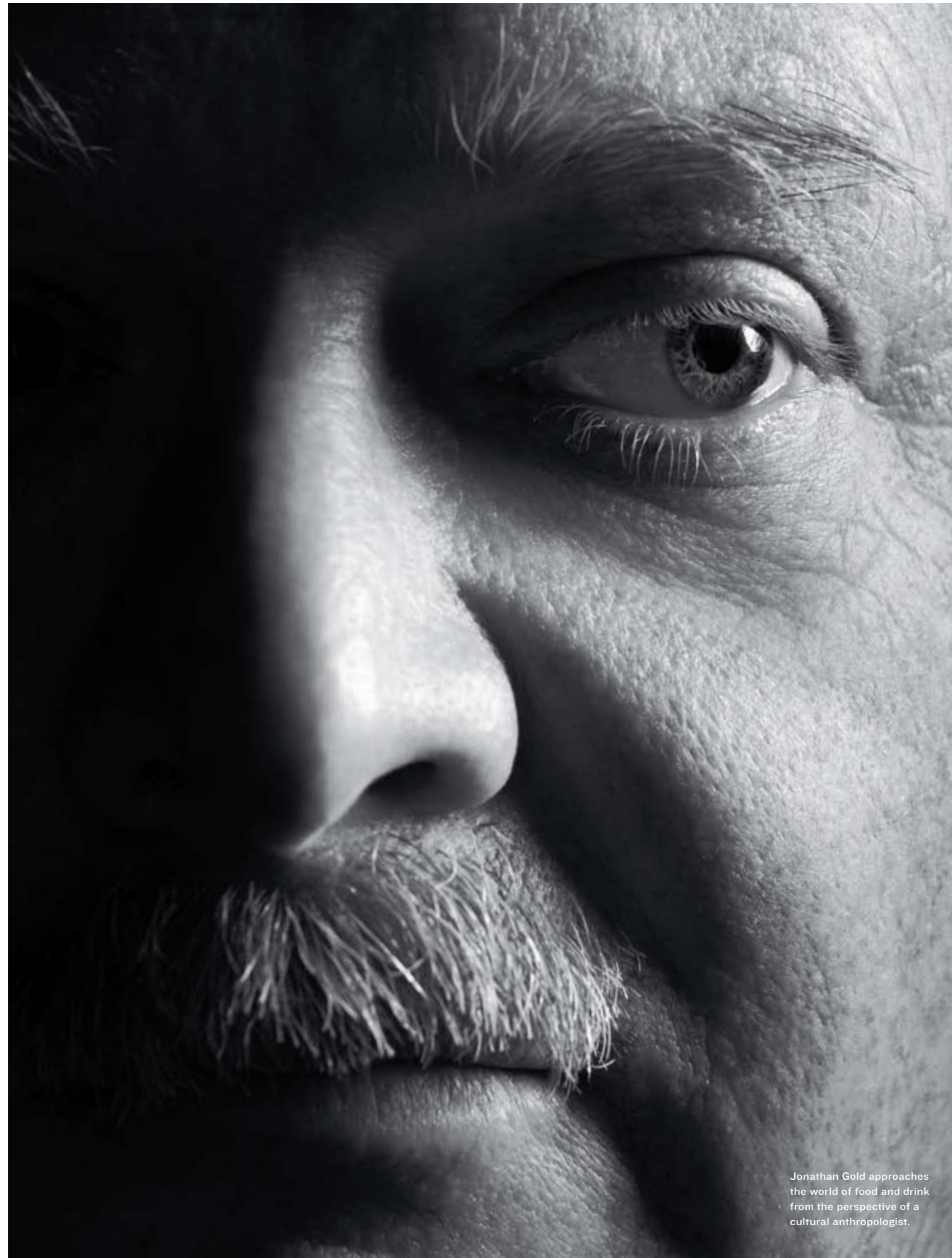
in it. It’s going to be great.” On local Mexican food: “Los Angeles has always had the reputation of having great Mexican food, but we really didn’t have great regional Mexican until about 15 years ago.” And on the ethics of eating octopus: “I have read a f--k of a lot about octopus intelligence. It does not have a centralized brain.”

For those out there who have been sleeping under a rock, Gold is the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of the *L.A. Weekly*’s “Counter Intelligence” food column. The “high-low priest of the L.A. food scene,” as the *New Yorker* calls Gold, has built a reputation as our city’s (and arguably America’s) top food critic. He consistently shows unmatched culinary bravery—Gold was eating daring foods long before the Food Network’s Andrew Zimmern—and a compassionate exploration of L.A.’s global fare, treating taco trucks with the same reverence as a Michelin-rated restaurant.

“I write about those places, too,” he says of Los Angeles’ more decadent eateries. “But I’m of the mindset that the bigger the kitchen, the more people sweat in your food.”

His work takes him to every corner of Los Angeles—no strip mall in our megalopolis is too remote or below the radar. His obsession for off-the-beaten-path cuisine leads him to do crazy things like scour Chinese phone books to find restaurants he’s never tried—health code ratings be damned—and he’ll eat there a minimum of three times before penning a review.

“The old way to do things when writing about traditional cuisines was to go in with an interpreter and a guide,” Gold says. “That’s the chamber-of-commerce version of eating. I prefer babbling my way to the heart of the menu. What really excites me is the prospect of finding a new cuisine.”



Jonathan Gold approaches the world of food and drink from the perspective of a cultural anthropologist.

Gold's catholic tastes lead him to the far corners of L.A.'s culinary scene. A favorite dish: pigs' ears from the Lazy Ox Canteen.



PEDEN+MUNK

These days, that isn't so easy. By his own estimation, Gold has sampled every ethnic strain of cuisine L.A. has to offer. He believes we are the number one destination for food on the planet—and his boosterism has drawn the attention of a skeptical East Coast elite.

“Jonathan writes about culture, rather than cuisine, and he does it brilliantly,” says former *New York Times* food critic Ruth Reichl, who brought Gold to the *L.A. Times* in 1990 for a six-year stint before taking him with her to *Gourmet*. “When I asked him to write for the *Times*, I thought he was, by far, the most interesting critic in the country. Dozens of wanna-be food writers do their best to imitate his style.”

Gold's writing is eminently readable, which helps account for his mass appeal and influence. It doesn't take a foodie to appreciate his eccentric metaphors and pop-culture references (in which, say, broths are not spicy, they're “violent”).

Tony Chen of the L.A. food site SinoSoul is among a growing number of Gold-inspired bloggers and fanboys. “Annoyingly, I've been accused of being a ‘wannabe’ JGold on several occasions,” Chen says. “That allegation serves to only denigrate his stature.”

Indeed, Gold has rewired the way Angelenos see their city by celebrating the insular tendencies that foster hybrid cuisines like Isaan Thai or Islamic Chinese. We're living in what he describes as an “anti-melting pot.” And that is good for foodies.

“Jonathan,” says Evan Kleiman, Angeli Caffe owner and host of KCRW's *Good Food* radio show, “is a canny sociologist who uses food to entice us out of our podlike neighborhoods into the greater world of faces and flavors.” There's an underlying concept

here, as Gold has also inspired L.A.'s provincial upper middle class. After all, if a harmless white food critic can hit that taco stand in Highland Park, well, then it must be safe to bring the kids.

Ultimately, Gold's “Counter Intelligence” serves everyone—and it continues to reveal previously unrecognized pockets of culinary greatness. More than that, it serves as a dare. Sure, he will challenge you to sample boiled silkworm cocoons or pig-uterus tacos. But more important, he'll challenge you to get off your ass and explore Los Angeles—because if you can't be a tourist in your own city, it's likely you don't live in a great one. —Matthew Fleischer

Sonia ERAM STYLE SAVANT

If Sonia Eram seems like an unlikely style guru, it's probably because she never set out to have anything to do with fashion. She came to Los Angeles from Iran to attend college (an extremely private person, she declines to say where) and then stayed on for graduate studies in psychology.

When that did not turn out to be the career path of her dreams, she accepted a friend's invitation to open a clothing shop. Within a year, she bought out her partner and was on her way to becoming possibly L.A.'s most highly educated, under-the-radar fashion arbiter.

Eram's relative anonymity as a tastemaker and businesswoman is no accident. She never advertises, very rarely does press and mostly grows her business through personal relationships with designers and clients. Each person I queried about her replied with some variation on the

same theme: “It's about time someone figured out what a genius Sonia is.”

When you walk into Mameg (Kurdish for “breast”) on Santa Monica Boulevard in Beverly Hills, you get the sense there's much more going on than simply the selling of clothes. The word *curated* is tossed around far too often these days, but in this case, it is right on the mark. Art is installed throughout the store, and the clothes themselves are not of the hottest-new-thing variety.

Each garment plays a part in a larger narrative. From the small Japanese label Wonder Collective to avant-garde fashion-world faves like Hussein Chalayan and Viktor & Rolf, the mix at Mameg is certainly not what you find on trendy Robertson.

The proprietor and I meet in the garden adjacent to her store, where even the trees have been turned into an art installation—tiny bells on long red strings dangle from the branches. Eram is a master at steering the conversation away from herself to the designers she admires so greatly. She speaks of Chalayan's pure vision and how he finds inspiration in technology, culture and the human body, calling him “the center of my universe in terms of fashion and design.”

She feels Los Angeles holds a unique place in the fashion world because of the diversity of the city's population. And then with some reluctance, she describes her own philosophy: “I've tried so hard to make Mameg a place where the love for hospitality, genuine curiosity, tolerance for new ideas, as well as past mistakes and purity of design, are welcomed and cherished.”

Much like Ikram in Chicago or Linda Dresner in New York (back in the day), Mameg is

Mameg is a mecca for those who think long and hard about what they wear. “I've tried so hard to make it a place where the love for hospitality, curiosity, tolerance for new ideas, as well as past mistakes and purity of design, are cherished.” —Eram

a mecca for those who think long and hard about what they wear and plot their own course regardless of where the fashion lemmings are heading.

Chalayan sees Eram's special appeal as a function of where she's from and where she now finds herself. “She's Iranian Kurdish, and that affects her way of thinking,” he says. “She and I come from similar places and live in the West. We are displaced, but we also appreciate the cities we live in. Being an outsider creates a sort of floating eye. It could be rootlessness—she belongs nowhere and everywhere.”

He goes on to identify the peculiar quality one senses standing in Mameg listening to Eram lovingly describe each and every piece she touches. “Sonia's personality and what she does are completely intertwined. Because she makes the work an essential part of her life, there is an intense, personal passion.”

And it's just that passion that keeps her friends, clients and collaborators coming back not just for sartorial artistry but for intellectual nourishment. —Cat Doran



The loft-like Mameg boutique in Beverly Hills was designed by the firm Johnston Marklee.

GRANT MUDFORD

Portraits: hair: Giovanni Giuliano; makeup: Stephen Sollitto



Sonia Eram places fashion firmly in the context of art and ideas rather than consumer trends.