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People

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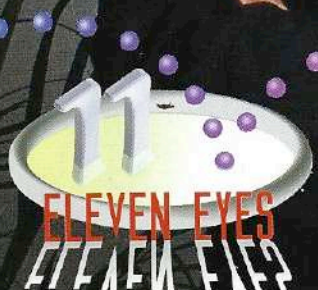
●建築家

KEN TANAKA

*The Art of Living
in Downtown Los Angeles*

特集

マルチメディアを知るマルチコラム
マルチメディアってナンダ!?



今年のお花見は、じっくりと桜を愛でる
気軽なカクテルパーティはいかが？
おとなも子どもも楽しめる社会科見学
好奇心旺盛なあなた、エキストラが向いているかも
吉本興業に学ぶ、不況に強いワケ
ビジネスレター上達の極意は「習うより慣れる」
ビタミン・ミネラルの上手な補い方
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実践！ナビコネクションで情報生活

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1994 APRIL

The Art of Living in Downtown Los Angeles



Ken Tanaka

Interview / Maggie Powers

If you're going downtown to Al's Bar at night, you have to decide who's going to drive. Or rather, who's going to park their car.

Al's Bar is on Traction Avenue in downtown Los Angeles. It's east of Little Tokyo and the Temporary Museum of Contemporary Art, east of Alameda, east of the railroad tracks. It's in a part of town that houses most of the city's shelters and missions, where dozens of homeless people can be seen from one block to the next. This part of town is also an enclave for painters, graphic artists, photographers, designers, architects, sculptors and musicians: people who work where they live, people who are attracted by the huge spaces and lower rents that old lofts and renovated warehouses provide.

One such person is Ken Tanaka, an architect who lives on Traction, just down the street from Al's Bar. He keeps his Porsche safely inside the protective walls of his apartment compound, a modern cinderblock building with bright, lemon yellow window frames.

I buzz Tanaka's number at the security gate and he runs down to greet me, looking very much like an architect with his shaggy, below-the-ears black hair, black turtleneck and horn-rimmed glasses. When I ask him if parking here is safe, he surveys my new car across the street. "Better park

inside," he smiles. "Just to be on the safe side."

In the daytime, it's not a scary neighborhood. In fact, on this clear, warm January day, it feels friendly and inviting. And different than any other neighborhood in Los Angeles.

We walk up a flight of stairs to Studio 108. I meet Tanaka's wife, Hisaka Kojima, a graphic artist and writer; we talk about the book she's just finished editing, *Los Angeles Nude*, while Tanaka makes three cappuccinos.

The hiss of the cappuccino machine and the relaxed jazz in the background give the room a warm, Sunday morning feeling. A ceiling-high metal frame bookcase, full of books, lines one of the cinderblock walls; art pieces are tastefully arranged on the others. Clean, modern-looking side tables and chairs are casually set around the rest of the room; their dog, Picasso, settles into one of the chairs by the door as we begin to talk.

I ask Tanaka how he likes living downtown.

"It's exciting. It's good," he says. "You know, if we stepped out into the street, it's not very safe. But we know how to handle that kind of situation."

"We have good neighbors----- photographers, sculptors, painters," he continues. "That's the good thing, living in this kind of environment. If we are in a nice, residential neighborhood, there is no



excitement. It's safe, it's nice...but not too much communication."

That seems to be what the 39-year-old Tanaka thrives on, both personally and professionally. Tanaka chose Los Angeles as his destination in the United States, partly because an old friend was studying at UCLA and partly because he felt the activity in architecture was the most interesting here.

"I was so excited," he says of his arrival in 1980. "I was just riding around, all over the city. And I knew what I wanted to see."

He wanted to see certain buildings, and he wanted to meet the well-known designers and architects he had studied in Japan.

Tanaka received his Bachelor of Arts in architecture from Tama University of Fine Arts in Tokyo. After his arrival in Los Angeles, he spent 6 years working for the well-known architectural firm A. Quincy Jones Associates, during which time he garnered a green card.

An interest in other aspects of design sent him back to school at UCLA, where he earned a Master of Arts in industrial design. In 1990, after doing freelance projects for a

number of other architectural firms,he opened Ken Tanaka Studio—in his studio home downtown,of course.

"We are almost established," says Tanaka,referring not just to his business but to the kind of architecture he would like to do."My clients are artists,designers,that kind of people.That's the kind of group I established in the last 10 years.So projects are coming in through these people."

In the boom days of the

'80s,says Tanaka,there were many opportunities and he worked on a number of commercial projects.Since the economy in Los Angeles slid downhill,he has been doing mostly residential work.

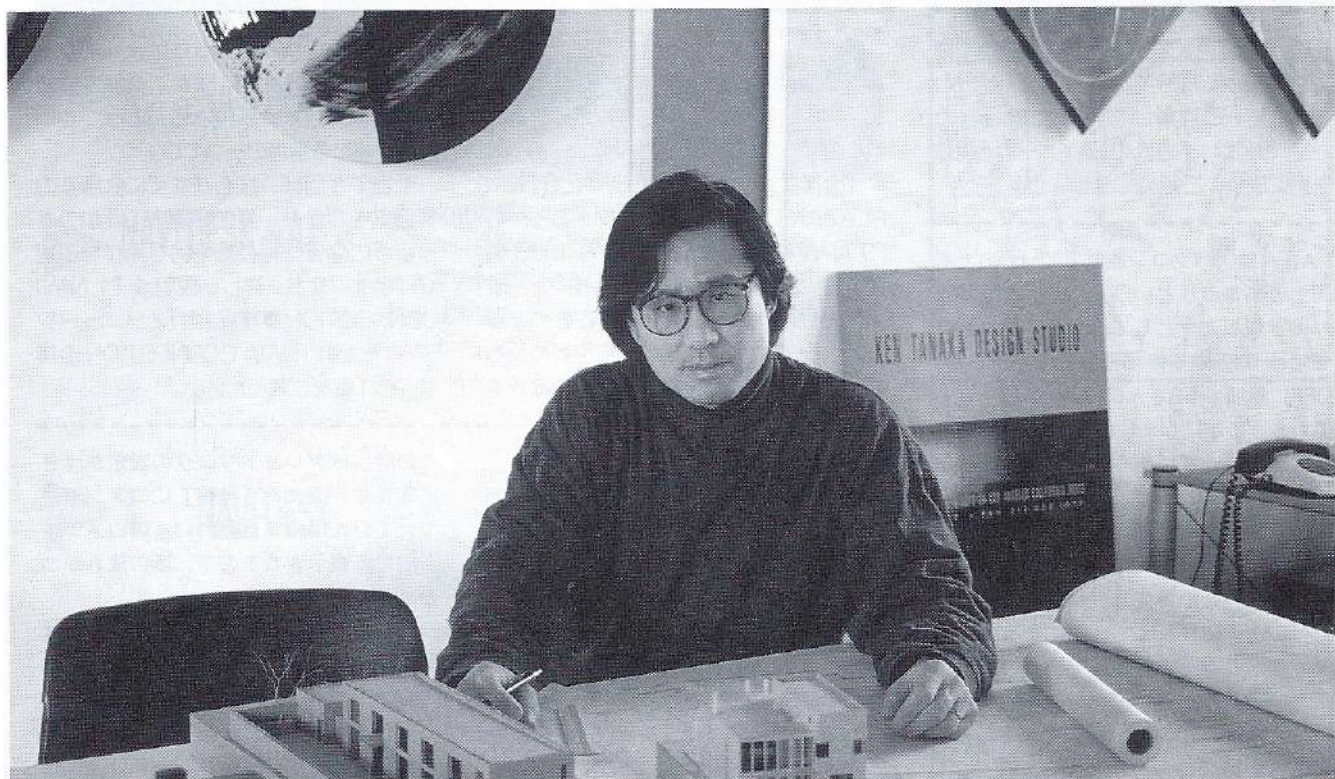
He shows me transparencies of two recent projects,residential additions with clean white lines,high ceilings,beautiful light and a sense of harmony.

(Later,I ask Tanaka what kind of music he likes."New Age and classical," he responds."New Age

music is more like my architecture—that's why I like it." He pauses and smiles wryly."I don't want my clients to listen to that lousy rock music in my buildings.")

Ideally,says Tanaka with a laugh,they would like to have enough financial security that "we don't have to do anything we don't want to do."

"We're not talking about getting rich or anything like that," he explains."We are both creators,so we try to create something very unique—art,architecture,whatever.That's our



goal."

To that end,Tanaka and Kojima are currently working on an architecture project to satisfy their particular,unique vision.

"It's not for the public.It's very individual,private," says Tanaka."But if we make just a few people happy,then we'd feel satisfied."

In the meantime,there is the art of living.

"Design is a kind of lifestyle,how we create our own lifestyle.So

everything is important...how we eat,how we live,how we drive,how we dress.Everything must be on the same level."

Even banking.Tanaka laughingly recalls almost leaving his bank because they introduced a new logo—an ugly one."That was awful," he smiles."I just didn't want to carry the checkbook."

As I'm leaving our interview,I notice the round,3-legged black barbeque sitting on the deck outside

their front door.This must be one of the few universal items,like the car,that cuts a horizontal swath across lifestyles in Los Angeles.It's just like a million other barbeques on a million other balconies and porches.

It strikes me as strangely suburban here,something that one might be more likely to see in a nice,residential neighborhood where nothing ever happens.

But then,it is rather nicely designed.