

ROBERT CAMERON'S

ABOVE LOS ANGELES

Revised
Edition
2004

with text by
JACK SMITH

ABOVE LOS ANGELES

by ROBERT CAMERON

A new collection of historical and original
aerial photographs of Los Angeles

with text by
JACK SMITH

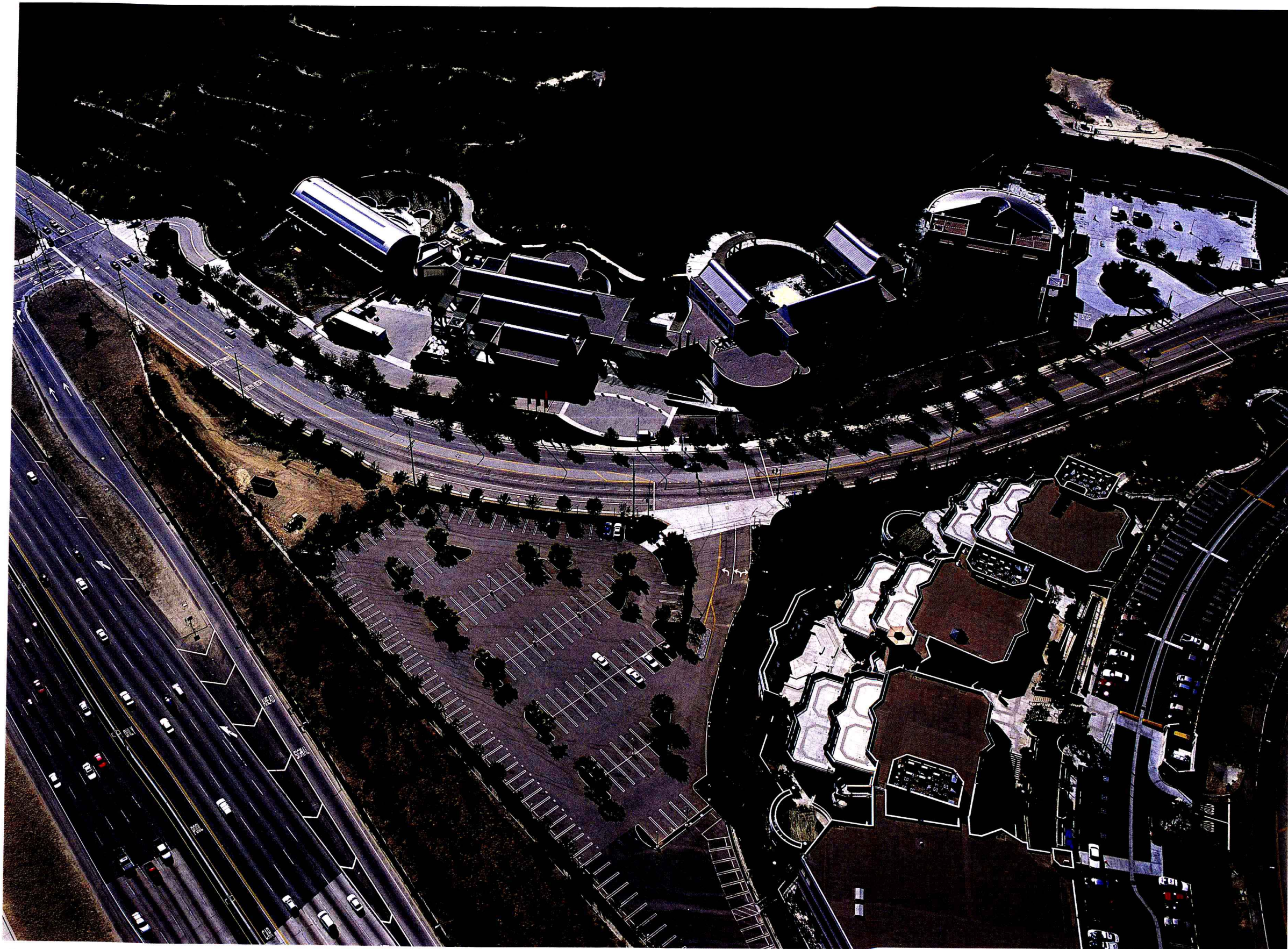
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(*opposite*) Sunset makes an ember of 73-story First Interstate World Center, highest building west of Chicago. Tower cost \$350 million. Its elevators rise 1,400 feet per minute. It shadows the old fire-damaged downtown library.

Surfers lie in wait for the Big One at Topanga State Beach, between Santa Monica and Malibu at foot of Topanga Canyon. "Surf's up!" is the rallying call for these mad young men and women who live at the ocean's edge.



The Skirball Cultural Center has established itself as one of the world's most dynamic Jewish cultural institutions.

The Getty Center.

(opposite) The J. Paul Getty Mesuem is in a courtyard surrounded by spectacular gardens and by five two-story pavilions in which world famous works of art are exhibited.

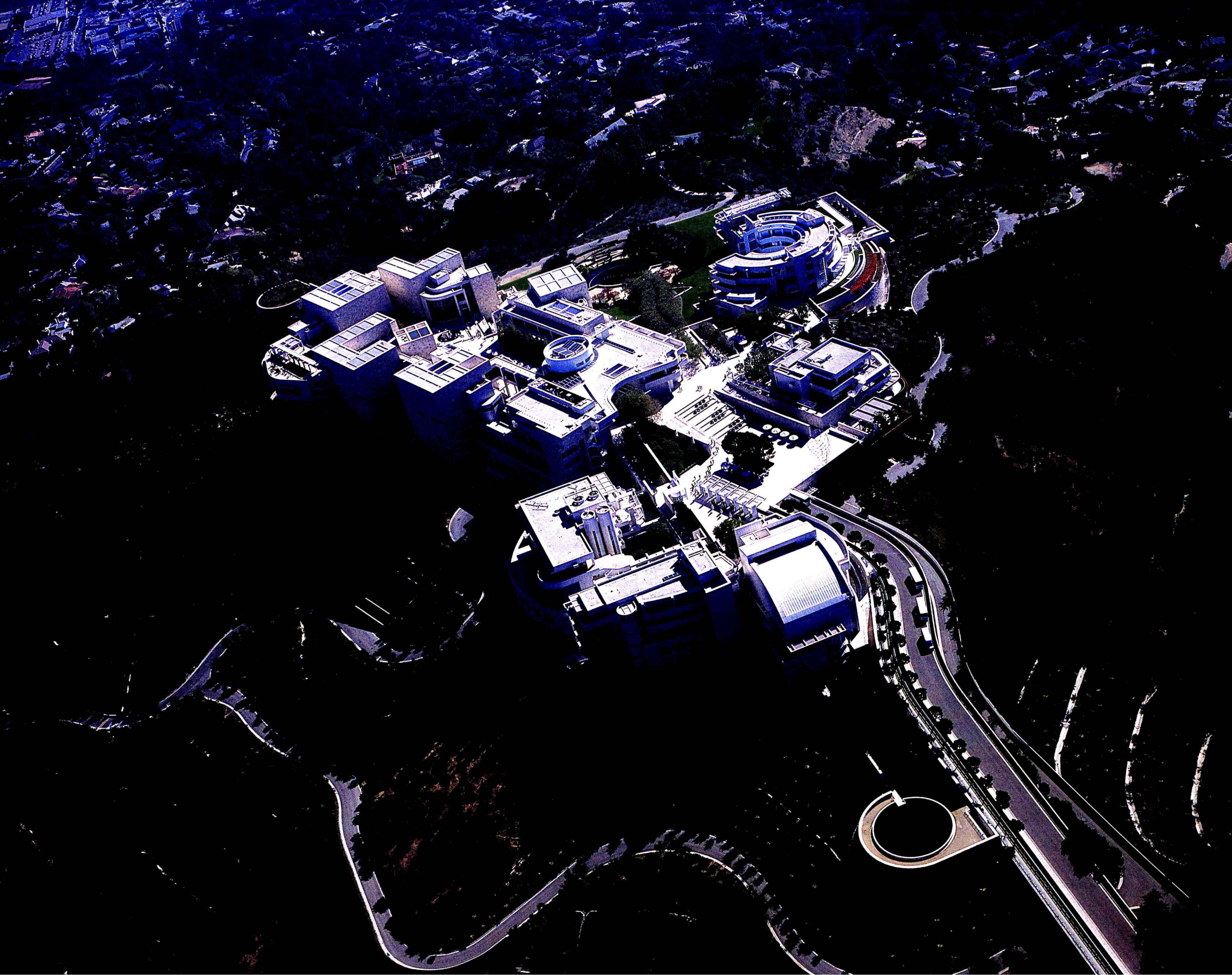


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ABOVE LOS ANGELES INTRODUCTION

By Jack Smith

Foreign critics, including those from the Eastern Seaboard, have been looking down on Los Angeles for a century. Despite the city's growing stature as the metropolis of the Pacific Rim, it has long been a favorite target of journalists, standup comedians and other dubious pundits.

John Gunther called it "Iowa with Palm Trees," contrasting its subtropical beauty with its lack of sophistication. Novelist William Faulkner, who corrupted his talent by writing movies for Hollywood, scorned it as "too large, too loud and too banal." Woody Allen observed that its only cultural advantage was "being able to turn right on a red light."

Reflecting the confusion of most visitors, *The San Francisco Chronicle's* Herb Caen complained that he came to Los Angeles for a visit "but couldn't find it." Gertrude Stein was speaking of Oakland, not Los Angeles, when she said "There's no there there;" but it seemed so apt that generations have misapplied it to L.A.

Bob Cameron looks down on Los Angeles, but not with contempt. He looks down at it from helicopters, airplanes and blimps. And he has found it. There is a there there. From heights of 500 to 8,000 feet, he has photographed Los Angeles like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. He has made what the dyspeptic columnist Westbrook Pegler called "a sprawling civic idiot" comprehensible. It is up to us to put it together.

Los Angeles has hundreds of thousands of residents who have never seen the ocean; hundreds of thousands who live on the Westside have never been downtown (they can get divorced in Santa Monica); hundreds of thousands have never been to the Music Center or the Museum of Art or been inside the Coliseum; millions have never even seen the sprawling Westside mansions where ten of thousands of millionaires reside.

Bob Cameron brings these disparate elements together. His perspective is one of awe, discovery and sometimes disbelief, as if his camera is recording what his common sense must deny.

Los Angeles at last seems real. Cameron's far-ranging camera takes us from the snow-capped San Gabriels to the surf at Topanga Beach; from the palatial homes of Bel Air, Beverly Hills and San Marino to the Hollywood Hills, with their 1920s lath and plaster castles, like miniature movie sets. We see the sweep of the central plain from Griffith Park to the ocean, crowded by tens of thousands of flats and private cottages of the 1920s and 1930s — a sea of rooftops; in one shot his lens encompasses the mansions of Hancock Park and the humble homes of Watts.

As Londoner Jonathan Miller, the theatre director, said after an extended visit, "It is a geometropolitan predicament, rather than a city. You can no more administer it than you could administer the solar system."

Perhaps the only way to sort out this geometropolitan predicament is from above, piece by piece. In a few pages, for example, we get a blimp's eye view of the 100th Tournam-

ent of Roses Parade, of the 1989 All Star game in Angel Stadium, of a Raiders game in the Coliseum, of a night game under the lights of Dodger Stadium.

We see Los Angeles at work and at play: the forests of masts at Marina del Rey, idle while their masters labor in the steel and concrete towers of Century City; the plants of the aerospace industry; the busy Los Angeles-Long Beach harbor (first in the nation) with its toy Queen Mary and the Spruce Goose (the Howard Hughes all-wood airplane) under its white bubble.

We see the objects of our culture: the great universities and museums; the upstart downtown skyline (which at last has burst through the old 13-story limit) towering over such tiny relics as Bertram Goodhue's library and Pershing Square; and the accidental natural wonder of the La Brea Tar Pits, with their prehistoric bones.

Since he had some control over his results, Cameron's Los Angeles may be slightly idealized. His skies are generally clear, except that some of his sunsets are made deeper by smog. In his picture of the downtown freeway interchange, the lanes are mercifully uncrowded, a phenomenon that becomes increasingly rare. But the camera does not lie. We have clear days, too; and sometimes the freeways are unclogged.

Like the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, which considers the counties of Ventura, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Los Angeles as a super-metropolis of 14.1 million people, Cameron ranges far beyond the statistical limits of Los Angeles (465 square miles, population 3,400,500) to highlight many of those proverbial 40 suburbs in search of a city, and the cultural boom of Orange County with its campuses, elegant shopping plazas, financial skyscrapers, opulent hotels and its proud Performing Arts Center.

The five-county statistics compiled by the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce are stunning: the area would rank 11th among the nations of the world in gross product; it includes 165 separate incorporated cities; first in motion picture and television production; first in production of space vehicles and guided missiles; fifth among states (including California) in registered automobiles — 7.37 million; it has 130 foreign banks, eight professional sports teams, 154 universities and colleges, and, believe it or not, it produces 17 to 18 million barrels of beer a year — first in the nation.

It almost seems as if architect Frank Lloyd Wright was not exaggerating when he observed that the continent tilts to the southwest "and everything loose slides into Los Angeles."

The area's astonishing growth from the cow town of 1880, when the city's population was 11,000, is made graphic in this book by the inclusion of several black-and-white photographs from the 1920s, photographs that show the vanished amusement piers of Santa Monica Bay, the

beanfields that grew over most of Pacific Palisades and Westwood, the produce farms that covered the San Fernando Valley, and the orange groves that, according to the Baltimore curmudgeon Henry L. Mencken, "stank of orange blossoms," in what is now downtown Hollywood.

In 1876 the Southern Pacific Railroad had extended its line down from San Francisco to Los Angeles. In 1884 the Santa Fe came in, beginning a rate war and a land boom that was manic. By 1890 the population was 50,000.

Early in the 20th Century New York film companies fled to Los Angeles to escape the motion picture trust's monopolistic control, and to take advantage of Southern California's sunshine. In 1913 Cecil B. DeMille made "The Squaw Man" in a barn at Vine Street and Selma Avenue, and Hollywood was born.

Los Angeles has never been the same. It is often thought of today as the world capital of fantasy — not a real place, but merely an image of light and shadow; a make-believe world in which everyone is an actor.

One phenomenon that escapes the aerial camera is the ethnic diversity of Los Angeles. The chamber predicts a population of 16,755,000 for the Los Angeles area in the year 2000; 40.6 percent being white non-Hispanic, 36.5 percent Hispanic, 7.8 percent black, and 14.4 Asian or Pacific Islander. In 1989 it was 54.1 percent white, 28 percent Hispanic, 8.6 percent black, and 8.6 percent Asian-Pacific.

Contrary to common belief, 50 percent of the population boom since 1980 has come from births over deaths, and a continued "baby boom" is expected to increase that figure by the year 2000.

Meanwhile, the press sometimes contradicts its patronizing image of Los Angeles as a cultural wasteland. Citing its two new museums of contemporary art, the *New York Times* said that "the city is on the verge of attaining world-class status;" and the *Atlantic Monthly* allowed that "it might even emerge as the Western Hemisphere's leading city in the early 21st Century."

More often, today, the city is condemned for its obvious problems: smog, overcrowding, litter, street crime, the high cost of housing, drought, waste disposal, drugs and gridlock. Though the population continues to increase, many Angelenos are getting out to Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Arizona and other more rural states.

Bob Cameron's *Above Los Angeles* is indeed above the Los Angeles that is mirrored in these complaints. The overcrowding sometimes shows, the greed and fantasy, but one does not see the litter nor the crime nor the drugs nor the results of unchecked immigration, and rarely the smog.

From his perch in the sky Bob Cameron shows us the natural and man-made wonders of this geographical paradise. His message, which he has no need to put in words, is that the place, after all, is worth saving.

THE SHORELINE



The "Coast," in purplish twilight. Foreground, a Kubla Khan mansion with tennis court. In cove, right center, beyond Carbon Beach, is Malibu Pier.

Malibu Pier; Malibu Colony upper left.

Malibu Colony, exclusive beach colony is still the playground of the ultra-rich.





Trancas Beach, below Santa Monica
Mountains Recreational Area.







Gladstone's famous sea food restaurant sits on beach where Sunset Boulevard curves into Pacific Coast Highway.

(opposite) Sea Lion restaurant on Pacific Coast Highway advertises its location from its rooftops: "Eat at the Sea Lion, Malibu, U.S.A."



Pacific Palisades in 1921. Fields of lima beans, watered by night mists, grew on much of the land now covered by expensive homes. At upper left, Santa Monica.





Houses teeter at the very edge of the palisades above Pacific Coast Highway.



Northwest shore of Santa Monica Beach.

(opposite) The new Santa Monica Pier begins in the ocean and looks straight down the Boulevard to the sky scrapers in the distance.