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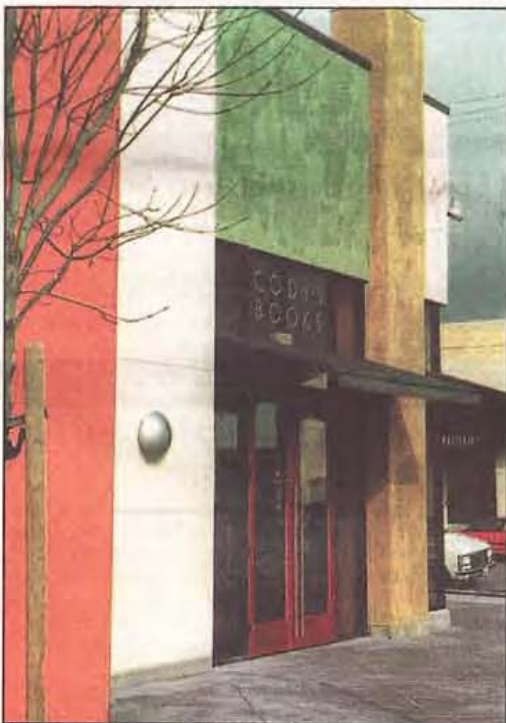
New Berkeley Bowl, due to open by winter.



Architects David Trachtenberg (left) and Gene Sparling.



Monnens-Addis Design studio.



Cody's Books on Fourth Street.

All photos courtesy of Trachtenberg Architects

Architects of the new millennium

By Marc Breindel

Bernard Maybeck, Julia Morgan, and ... David Trachtenberg? A quick look around suggests Trachtenberg may be heir to Berkeley's architectural throne, at least for the late '90s. The 39-year-old Cal and Harvard grad has designed such instant icons as the KPFA Building (in association with Abrams, Millikan and Associates), Cody's Books on

Fourth Street, Peet's Coffee and Tea headquarters (in Emeryville, but everyone knows Peet's belongs to Berkeley), the soon-to-break-ground Berkeley Bowl, and a slew of less visible, but equally distinctive businesses and homes.

Uniting all Trachtenberg's local projects is an unmistakable Berkeley sensibility. Trachtenberg insists he has no

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Cody's sues Barnes & Noble, Borders Books

Independent bookseller joins 26 others in class action against national chains.

By Marc Albert

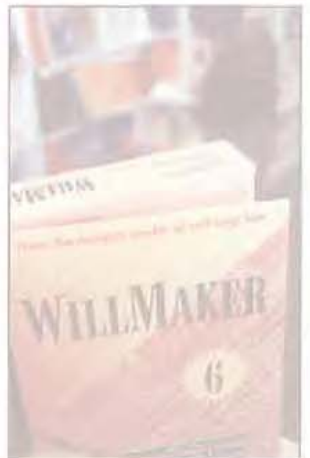
Barnes & Noble and Borders books allegedly get secret discounts, special advertising and promotions, and preferential treatment on unsold books, according to a lawsuit by the American Booksellers Association (ABA)—including local Cody's Books—filed in Federal District Court in San Francisco.

Neither Borders and Barnes and Noble would comment on any aspect of the suit.

Cody's owner Andy Ross books joined 26 other independent booksellers nationwide filing the suit on March 18. In a speech Monday night before the Bay Area Book Reviewers Association, Ross accused the chains of unfairly stamping out independent competition.

"These discriminatory arrangements put independent stores at a serious competitive disadvantage and pose a threat to their survival and to the diversity of American Bookselling," Ross said.

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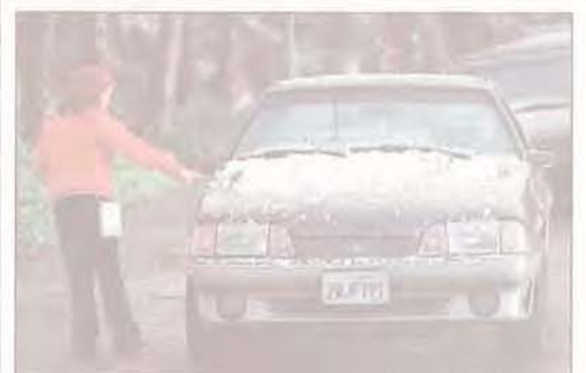
Nolo's goods on 9th Street.

Texas to ban Nolo books

By Marc Breindel

Although hardly as ribald as "Lady Chatterly's Lover," and no nearly near as provocative as "Catcher in the Rye," Nolo Press's "Living Trust Maker 2.0" could be

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March goes out like a lion

Hail fell in Berkeley on Saturday afternoon, proving El Niño wasn't through yet. April Fool's Day brought more showers.

Runoff elections face another vote

By Marc Albert

A decade of runoff elections may come to an end in November, if voters approve a proposal made last week by members of the new City Council majority.

Councilmember Dona Spring cited public expense and low voter turnout in runoff elections when she proposed lowering to a 40 percent plurality the number of votes needed to win city offices. Currently, officials must receive over 50 percent or face a runoff election. Spring also criticized the system for increasing the cost of running a campaign.

The measure, which some councilmembers denounced as undemocratic, would be placed on the ballot as an amendment to the city charter.

Voting along party lines 5 to 4, the council asked the city attorney to draw up an initiative to change the current system. After much debate, the council left undetermined the percentage that would trigger a runoff. Some members insisted 45

percent was the most appropriate figure.

When the current system was proposed in 1986, the leftist Berkeley Citizens Action (BCA) party's statement against the initiative warned the system would cost taxpayers \$125,000 every two years to hold runoff elections. Proponents, in their response, claimed "runoffs are extremely rare," and held costs

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McClung home.

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"architectural axe to grind," that he's simply harmonizing with his surroundings, yet it's hard to imagine the same man who builds such unpretentious, utilitarian buildings as his airy, gardened Monnens-Addis Design studios (see above), suddenly changing gears and drafting a mile-high chrome skyscraper for downtown L.A.

Anyway, it doesn't seem Trachtenberg wants to change gears, even if he could. And, although Trachtenberg works on projects all over the Bay Area, he and his wife and young daughter have no intention of leaving their adopted hometown.

"Everyplace has its own spirit, its own soul," Trachtenberg said on a recent tour of his firm's projects. "The day I came to Berkeley, I said, 'This is the place for me.'"

Trachtenberg founded Trachtenberg Architects in 1990, with big prospects and not much else. He had a Master's degree in architecture from Harvard University, and a B.A. from UC Berkeley. He had worked for Skidmore, Owning & Merrill of San Francisco, one of the largest architectural firms in the country; and for Abrams, Millikan & Associates, the firm primarily responsible for Fourth Street.

The company started in Trachtenberg's one-bedroom apartment, but quickly grew into its current south Fourth Street address. Eugene Sparling joined as an associate in 1993, boasting a Master's from Columbia University, and experience with William McDonough Architects, plus two other giant New York houses. Sparling had designed things as big as 38-store office buildings and as small as table lamps.

The associates were joined by Project Designers Tamala Anderson, Christian Daurer, and Patricia Solis; consultant Katarzyna Kowalksa-Ekstrand; Office Manager Michele Yin; and a host of collaborators and interns. Together, they've built scores of buildings.

One quality has united all the firm's work so far: the architects "live and breathe" every job from start to finish. Although all recognize the firm may someday grow to take on huge projects the associates can't oversee so closely, for now Trachtenberg Architects means hands-on designers, and proud of it.

"I'm a little suspicious of people who are working on a project in Peking, and Malaysia, and Singapore and Rome," Trachtenberg said. "I don't understand how they can possibly understand the setting well enough in such a short period of time to make something meaningful."

Sparling shares his partner's concern about the increasing "placelessness" of architecture. "I think it's really quite unfortunate to think that we live in a world where there's not enough confidence in one's local talent to (hire locally). One wonders why we have to go all the way to Switzerland when we have enough talent right here, or where we could develop enough local talent."

Fortunately, this area may be one of

the few large urban centers where fresh talent has a fighting chance, the associates concur. "I think that in this part of the world, you can succeed on the basis of merit," Sparling said. "If you do a good job, you can probably get another one. I like the Bay Area, in that respect."

A sense of place

Trachtenberg got a chance to prove himself early on. University Press and The Musical Offering café founders Bill and Karen McClung hired the fairly green young professional to build a new home off Tunnel Road, when their old home burned in the Fire of 1991. They knew they were taking a chance — Trachtenberg had not yet designed a house alone in 1992 — but they liked his previous work, and considered him an architectural soul mate.

Their shared bibles were Christopher Alexander's "Pattern Language," and Charles Keeler's "The Simple Home." Keeler's book, in particular, describes "living close to the ground, living simply, living with nature and beauty," as Karen put it. Indeed, her earthy brown adobe-style house closely hugs a terraced garden, with so many windows and porches that one forgets one is ever inside. The constant parade of ducks and chickens in and out of the high-ceilinged kitchen further blurs the distinction.

"It's kind of noisy back here," Karen chuckled, as a troop of mallard ducks marched past the window above the kitchen sink behind her. "And, also, we get six eggs a day, which is kind of a problem. We're forever giving away eggs!"

Trachtenberg clearly understands such a lifestyle. He suggested a dark green stone for the kitchen floor, and the McClungs are glad they took his advice. "You can't potty train a duck," Karen says.

Of course, the McClung home cost half a million dollars, not counting the land (the insurance money didn't quite cover it; the new furniture is slightly more "folksy" than planned), and Trachtenberg was expected to make the house stylish as well as functional.

He succeeded in conveying elegance largely through fine design — the lines flow from living room to bedroom luxuriously — and clever details. For example, he designed the central mahogany banister to be polished "naturally" by human palm grease, so it always shines. And, when he saw the wide spacing of the vertical beams, he insisted on doubling the number to close the gaps; the result has a distinctly craftsman look.

"He's easy going, but he's got really high standards," Karen said. "And, he's got a really good sense of design."

Bill thanks the architect's mother, an interior designer herself, in part. He visited Mitzi Trachtenberg's home, and found it "a house to live in," as well as "a beautiful old house," as Karen described it. After seeing Trachtenberg's sister Amy's paintings, McClung decided the whole family has "a natural sense of proportion." Some of Amy's paintings hang on the McClung's new walls, alongside those of his own daughter, Nicola McClung.

Cody's on Fourth Street

Amy's paintings also hang at Cody's Books on Fourth Street, which opened in the fall. Actually, Cody's is only borrowing the art; it's still for sale. Like the McClungs, Cody's owner Andy Ross hews to an independent bookseller's budget, even while competing with national behemoths Barnes & Noble and Border's Books. Ross counted on his architect to do more with less, a Trachtenberg trademark.

"We actually find the request to do more design with less money a welcome opportunity," Trachtenberg's literature reads.

Cody's certainly gave Trachtenberg that opportunity. Ross admits he demanded the impossible of his architect, and was amazed when the project was completed on budget, on time, looking great.

"I didn't know he was going to create a work of art, which he did," Ross said.

No one walking in to Cody's would guess any corners were cut. It fits snugly into the chic Fourth Street scene, just another fancy shop. But, if you look closely, you'll notice it's really a collection of concrete boxes artfully arranged. As with the McClung house, certain details stand out — custom hardwood doors and counters; carefully directed lighting; long blond wooden shelves that curve into the back of the store like a nautilus shell; rich greens, rusts and mustards that echo the earthy expensive Fourth Street look — in short, pure style.

So successful was Trachtenberg at spinning silk out of concrete at Cody's, that people have asked him who made those custom gray metal light fixtures in the entry, and how much they cost. Five dollars, he says; they came straight from an industrial catalog, and were "custom" bent into an angle at Trachtenberg's shop.

Such light touches as simple metal fixtures appeal to Trachtenberg: "I use the word 'ordinary' with real affection... You could say we (at the firm) have an affection for what's commonplace."

You could also say Trachtenberg is unusually aware of his surroundings — social as well as physical — a real asset for a Berkeley architect. At Cody's, for example, the environment included some angry neighbors who had fought and lost a battle to end the commercial strip just south of the new bookstore, as the West Berkeley plan arguably designated. Trachtenberg hoped to build a store that would not be picketed from day one.

As usual, Trachtenberg found a clever way to give the neighbors some of what they wanted. He pulled Cody's entrance out five feet into the wide sidewalk (still within the store's property line), with the front door facing the main drag to the south making it clear to all that the commercial strip would stop there.

"It's thrust itself out into the space as far as it can," Trachtenberg said, looking north from Peet's Coffee. "I think Cody's really does represent the definitive end to the retail development northward along Fourth Street, and that the building is designed so as to emphatically state Cody's as an endpoint."

Unlike many architects, who insist on working without distraction from their own clients, much less the neighbors, Trachtenberg says he welcomes civic input. "It was a frustrating experience, but it was also a very inspiring experience to go through the public process," he said of Cody's zoning struggle.

"What we're trying to do here is create some harmony, and to mend the fabric of the city," Trachtenberg went on. "And, so, in order to do that, we can't just go in there and willfully do whatever feels good to us. It's a matter of really listening hard to what the community has to say, and what the architectural and social patterns are, which takes some time to understand."

"That's why this whole process of public hearings and design review is really essential. Because one doesn't really understand all the competing forces here until one's really in it for a while. So, what you're trying to do is try to resolve a lot of competing interests, and when you do it well, it has a kind of synch, and everybody says, 'Ah, that's right.'"

Commerce and people

An important tenet of Trachtenberg's work is that a building should accommodate its space and desired use, and not vice versa. The firm regularly downplays its own work, to that end.

"One hopes to create a situation, a stage, which makes fuller opportunities for human interaction," Sparling said. "I think 'self-referential' architecture is not of much interest to David or myself."

"There's so much in-your-face expression going on all the time that architecture can't compete with it, and more-over it doesn't need to," Trachtenberg agreed.

A good example is the new Body Time building, at 8th and Harrison streets. It straddles the portion of Codornices Creek that was just daylighted in Berkeley's biggest such project, and clearly lets the creek guide its orientation. The lunchroom offers the best view of the creek, a Trachtenberg trademark; his buildings encourage social interaction, with lounges and kitchens that often resemble hip cafés.

The Body Time building is also built with an eye to the future. "Knock-away" wall sections dot the side facing the creek, making it easy for the owner to open storefronts or apartment entrances there. Trachtenberg's building invites tenants to decide for themselves how they will use it.

Down the street, the new headquarters for the Backroads outdoor travel company at 5th and Cedar streets is built around a large garden designed for staff meetings and lunch. David's brother Robert Trachtenberg landscaped the yard, and David was pleased to highlight it.

"I'm always telling people, 'Spend less money on the building, and more money on the gardens,'" David said. "... Most people would rather work outside, if they can, so if you give them access to the outside, you're going to have happier people and more productive people."

Brother-in-law Jeff Miller — the man who landscaped most of 4th Street — has also provided gardens central to Trachtenberg projects, including that in the Monnens-Addis Design studio on 9th Street. (Karen McClung's comment rings true: "When you hire David, you get the whole family.")

Berkeley Bowl

Prominent landscaping will also grace the new Berkeley Bowl. Set to break ground this spring and be completed by December, the Bowl will occupy the old Safeway Supermarket space across Oregon Street from the Thrifty/Rite Aid store on Adeline Street. It'll be a larger space for the Bowl, with more parking.

Such sites have been known to foster community; consider the old Co-op supermarkets. Trachtenberg is encouraging that, creating plenty of room for milling and socializing, both inside and out.

"When we think of our great institutions, we see UC Berkeley — but how many people set foot on the UC campus once they graduate? Berkeley High School is a public institution, but who's ever been there who's not somehow associated with it? Or even City Hall. But, everybody's intimate with the supermarket."

Bowl owner Glenn Yasuda appreciates Trachtenberg's sense of community, and the fact that he and Sparling "have a feeling for Berkeley." That's part of why he hired them.

"In Berkeley, I think you need a good architect who has a good relationship with the city," Yasuda said. "You have to have an architect who can satisfy everyone, the neighbors, and the city."

In fact, Trachtenberg would love to build city hall complexes and school campuses, he says. As his firm expands, such work seems inevitable. Already, it's been hired for such large projects as the 30,000-square-foot Trust for Public Land headquarters in San Francisco, and the 74,100-square-foot, \$9 million Gordon Biersch Brewery in San Jose. Institutional work can't be far off.

Trachtenberg Architects recently made the "short list" to design a new California College of Arts and Crafts campus, a showing that makes both Trachtenberg and Sparling optimistic. Building such an institution would make an architect immortal, in a sense.

Nevertheless, the quintessential Berkeley architects have their feet planted firmly on the ground.

"There's a standard joke in architecture," Sparling says. "You know what I'd do if I won the lottery? Practice architecture until it's all gone."