

Wrapped for Wear

A controversial high-rise is set to weather the opinions of Angelenos for the next 2,500 years.

By Jana Madsen
Photography: Tom Bonner Photography, www.tombonnerphotography.com

You can't not notice (W)rapper. It sticks out like a bandaged sore thumb in what was formerly an industrial manufacturing area of Los Angeles. Stretching above the low-rise community, the 17 stories are an attention grabber on a scale its neighbors are entirely unaccustomed.

Completed in 2024, the building's design was 25 years in the making.

(W)rapper, Los Angeles

The form language of (W)rapper was birthed from a 1998 art installation Eric Owen Moss Architects (EOMA) created at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, OH. The installation was part of "Fabrications," a three-museum exhibition of full-scale architectural works by 12 architects. EOMA's contribution was a sequence of curvilinear steel forms meant to suggest bleacher seating, although highly deconstructed.

The work was created in response to the Wexner's own design. "The architect of the museum essentially investigated the use of grids, right angles, and the repeat of that pro forma in various ways," recalls Eric Moss, Architect, EOMA, Culver City, CA. Dancing Bleachers, with its curved lines and sweeping arcs, offered an alternative understanding of shape, form, and space.



When Samitaur Constructs' Frederick and Laurie Samitaur Smith approached EOMA with the possibility of a high-rise in an industrial area of Los Angeles ripe for revitalization, EOMA was eager to reimagine the art installation's essence at a whole new scale. "We rolled out this Dancing Bleachers form language and used it as the structural organization. That gave us, at least in part, the construction and the form and the support for the project," Moss explains. The Smiths, a former dancer and art assistant to Pablo Picasso, embraced EOMA's vision.

A High-Rise in a Low-Rise Area



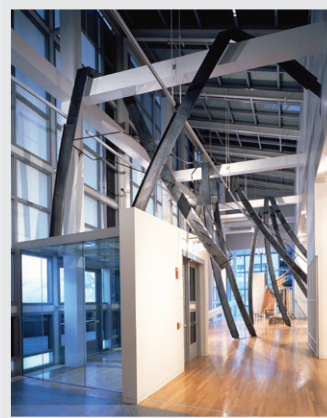
At 235-ft. tall, (W)rapper towers over existing buildings whose heights max out at just 45 ft. The previously derelict, largely deserted Westside area is being reimagined as a creative hub. "It seems to be a plausible response to the question of what to do with these abandoned industrial manufacturing zones that are found all over the United States," Moss says. EOMA has been working on the revitalization of this area (along with a similar site in Culver City) with Samitaur Constructs for more than three decades.

"The zoning, and what they call in planning, FAR [Floor Area Ratio], was complied with. We haven't added square footage, we just distributed it as a high-rise building."

—Eric Moss, Architect. EOMA, Culver City, CA

(W)rapper is a 184,180 rentable square foot, 17-story office tower located at the intersection of Jefferson Boulevard and National Boulevard. (W)rapper's proximity to the metro line, and direct pedestrian link from train to building lobby, adds favorability to the location. Below the office floors is a two-story cast-in-place concrete subterranean garage. The building is capped with a two-level rooftop deck.

(W)rapper's appearance is an exercise in contrast. What might at first glance appear to be a rectangular mass is anything but. At the east elevation, an external staircase weaves up the side of the building in a zigzag of cement plaster material. The angular bends of the staircase cut the negative space around the tower. The visual heaviness here is balanced on the east with aluminum window wall glazing that at each floor seems to bulge and bloat against the structure's curvilinear wrapped bands. The elevator core has been externalized and moved to the south side of the building, creating a somewhat T-shaped overall building footprint.



Dancing Bleachers Art Installation



DIAGRAMS

Engineered with 20 triple-pendulum base isolators, (W)rapper can move 30 inches in any direction during seismic events. As a result, the building boasts an unprecedented, estimated lifespan of 2,500 years, guaranteeing its place in the Los Angeles skyline for more than a millennium.

(W)rapper's innovative exoskeleton allows the interior to be completely column-free, setting it apart from conventional high-rises. The distinctive exterior bands that crisscross around the building are connected to the floor framing steel I-beams, which are visible from the exterior.

Courtesy EOMA

(W)rapper meets Los Angeles' city planning goals for transit-oriented development (TOD) with easy access to the Expo Line light rail that runs right by the building to the north.



(W)rapper's elevator core has been externalized and located on the building's south side. It is supported with a steel plate shear wall system and finished with a cement plaster brown coat.

The Wrap at (W)rapper

The building's most notable design feature, and the one that gave rise to its name, is the lattice of sweeping bands wrapping themselves around the glazing. These aren't just for looks. They are the building's exoskeleton. While the structural system of most high-rises is a grid of column supports, the (W)rapper's floorplates are column-free. "There's no internal structure," says Moss. Curvilinear one-by five-foot steel tubes covered in exterior-grade cementitious fireproofing fold around the building until they reach the ground. "It's not a structure you can buy. This is a structure that has to be fabricated," adds Moss. The floor framing wide flange steel I-beams are visible where they connect to the curved bands on the building exterior.

"It's a dual system," explains Dolan Daggett, Project Director, EOMA, about the building's steel structural system. "The bands are one part of the system and, in the core on the south, there's a steel plate shear wall system. The two systems work together to support all the lateral and gravity loading requirements."

The cementitious fireproofing on the bands and two-coat cement plaster finish on the core are deceptive. "A lot of people see the building and think it's a concrete building. It's not," says Moss. "There was no way those curving tubes were ever going to be made out of anything but steel."

Uninterrupted floorplates provide unlimited flexibility for maximum design freedom. "We pulled the core out of the building and placed it against what essentially is the main block of the building on the south side, so the elevators and stairs don't interrupt the internal workings of each floor," notes Moss. Column-free floors have variable heights of 13 ft. 6 in., 16 ft. 6 in., and 24-ft. tall, the latter of which provides hanging mezzanines. "The variability is as if you were on the street and you walked across the river to Culver City, and to each building you went to sitting on grade, there was a different organization and a different height. We essentially took that horizontality of Culver City and stacked it vertically in (W)rapper," explains Moss.

Pavers

Stepstone is a leader in producing premium precast concrete products, including Stair Treads, Wall Caps, and Pavers. Its California Architectural (Cal Arc) Pavers are skillfully handcrafted, wet-cast concrete pavers designed for commercial and residential use. The company proudly offers a strong selection of 12 standard colors, from warm tones to cool shades, to bring customers' visions to life in concrete.

Stepstone
stepstoneprecast.com



Trellis

Custom Living Screen panels were fabricated by The Western Group to fit into a prefabricated structure for (W)rapper's trellis. Constructed of welded steel wire, the oversized panels provide a rigid framework for climbing vines. This modular trellis system unites nature with the built environment. Adding greenery to the panels improves air quality and provides natural shading and cooling, as well as noise and pollution reduction.

The Western Group
architecturalwire.com





Fireproofing

GCP's MONOKOTE Z-146 is high-density, cementitious fireproofing designed to meet specialty, commercial and industrial fireproofing requirements. It is a Portland cement-based, factory-mixed material requiring only the addition of water on the jobsite for application. MONOKOTE Z-146 is spray applied directly to structural steel (beams and columns), providing up to 4 hours of fire resistance. Its physical characteristics are excellent for areas where high-durability and clean conditions are demanded.

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Glazing

Solarban 70 Solargray glass is an innovative product that combines the benefits of two advanced glass technologies. It merges the aesthetic appeal of a harmonizing cool, medium-gray tinted glass with the energy efficiency of a solar control, low-e coating. This unique combination not only enhances the visual appeal of buildings, but also significantly improves energy performance by reducing solar heat gain and optimizing natural light. Perfect for modern architectural designs, it offers a balance of style, functionality, and sustainability.

Vitro Architectural Glass
vitroglazings.com

"I think the building is really a combination of poetics and prosaics together. That's the underlying sensibility for the project and a lot of the projects that we do."

—Eric Moss, Architect, EOMA, Culver City, CA

"I don't really much care how it's defined when somebody looks at it, but it's interesting that it's so often misunderstood as what it is. A lot of people see the building and think it's a concrete building. It's not."

—Eric Moss, Architect, EOMA, Culver City, CA

Aluminum Window Wall

Arcadia's windows are custom built to meet each project's size, design, and wind load.

Arcadia Inc.
arcadiainc.com

An external staircase climbs the building's east elevation. Covered in cement plaster, this angular feature contrasts with the curvilinear nature of the building's steel bands and abundant use of energy-efficient glazing.

Exterior Plaster

Parex's Fiber-47 Armourwall Sanded Scratch & Brown is a factory controlled high-quality blend of portland cement, lime, fibers, and proprietary additives. It conforms to ASTM C926, which is designed as a replacement to jobsite mixed scratch and brown basecoats. It complies with code criteria for exterior portland cement plaster and sets in 30-45 minutes after mixing, depending on conditions.

PAREX USA
parexusa.com





Floorplates are free of columns and a central core. Along with variable floor heights of 13 ft. 6 in., 16 ft. 6 in., and 24 -ft. tall, (W)raper offers tenants maximum design freedom.

Building Resiliency

(W)raper is a building like no other in the United States, and that's not a statement based solely on aesthetics. Located in an area with many active faults, designing for seismic activity is not only critical, but also mandated by building codes. (W)raper is the only U.S. high-rise commercial office building that is a base-isolated structure.

Twenty triple-pendulum base isolators under the building's steel-framed podium at grade support the tower and deliver the highest possible seismic safety rating in the United States. "The isolators allow the building to move 30 inches in all directions during an earthquake," explains Daggett. "It's the concept of resilience. In a catastrophic event, the building's structure survives. And not just survives, it's not damaged."

Each isolator's three pendulums become active at different earthquake intensities. As ground motion gets stronger, displacements increase, according to manufacturer Earthquake Protection Systems (EPS). EOMA notes that the base-isolated structure makes the building five times more seismically resilient than a typical American high-rise. "The day after the earthquake, you can go back to work," says Moss. "The isolators theoretically make that possible. The building will be up for 2,500 years—at least if you believe the people who are doing the computations—while everything else around it has fallen down."

As you drive into (W)raper's parking facility, the isolators are visible. "These pieces of technology are part of the experience of the building," Moss notes.

Base Isolator

Earthquake Protection Systems' Triple Pendulum Isolator provides better seismic performance, lower isolator costs, and lower construction costs compared to other seismic isolation technology. Each of the isolator's three pendulums become sequentially active (isolator displacements increase) as earthquake motions become stronger. EPS isolators are designed to limit seismic damage and conform to the company's Continued Functionality Standard.

Earthquake Protection Systems
earthquakeprotection.com



The building contains 20 triple-pendulum base isolators to enable movement during earthquakes. (W)raper has the highest possible seismic rating in the United States and a predicted life of more than 2,000 years.

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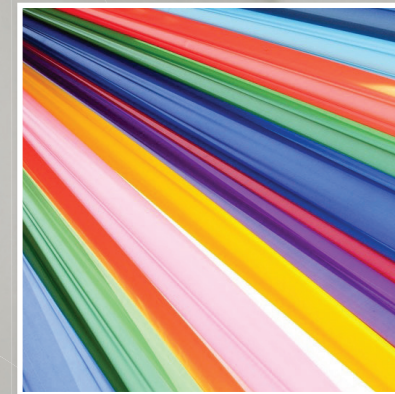


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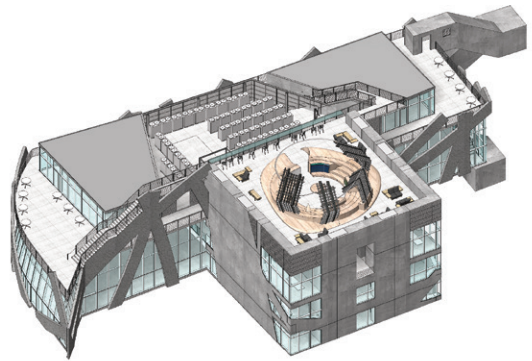
Facing the Future (and the Criticism)

When critics aren't attacking (W)rapper's size and design, they're railing on its large carbon footprint. Made from 5,400 tons of steel, their objections are not unfounded. Moss points to the building's predicted life—measured in millennia—as justification. And to those who simply find its appearance vile, he simply doesn't care. "There are people who disagree with it, who disagree with its scale and who disagree with its appearance. There are a variety of opinions," he says. "My guess would be that whatever the opinion is the first 20 minutes won't be the opinion 20 years from now, either way."

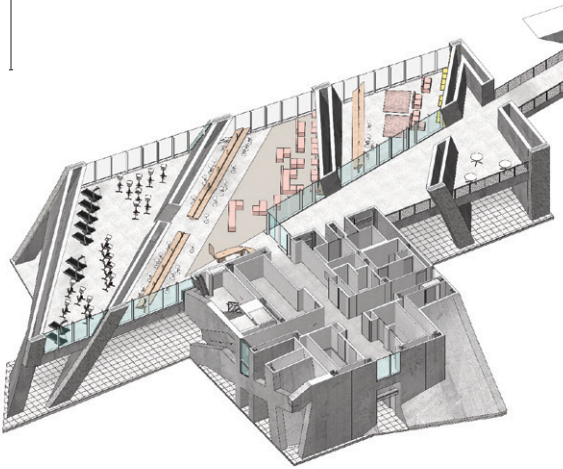
The building's predicted longevity and permanence mean it will not only face the scrutiny and adoration of people today, but also those living and working in Los Angeles for thousands of years to come. The reaction Moss hopes remains constant through time though, is one of intrigue. "The qualities of

curiosity and wonder, I think, might be important to people's lives, in general terms. And if the building suggests that, if it conveys that, if it carries that message, and maybe not to everybody, maybe to some percentage or maybe even to a few people, or in different ways to different people, then I think it's done its job," he explains.

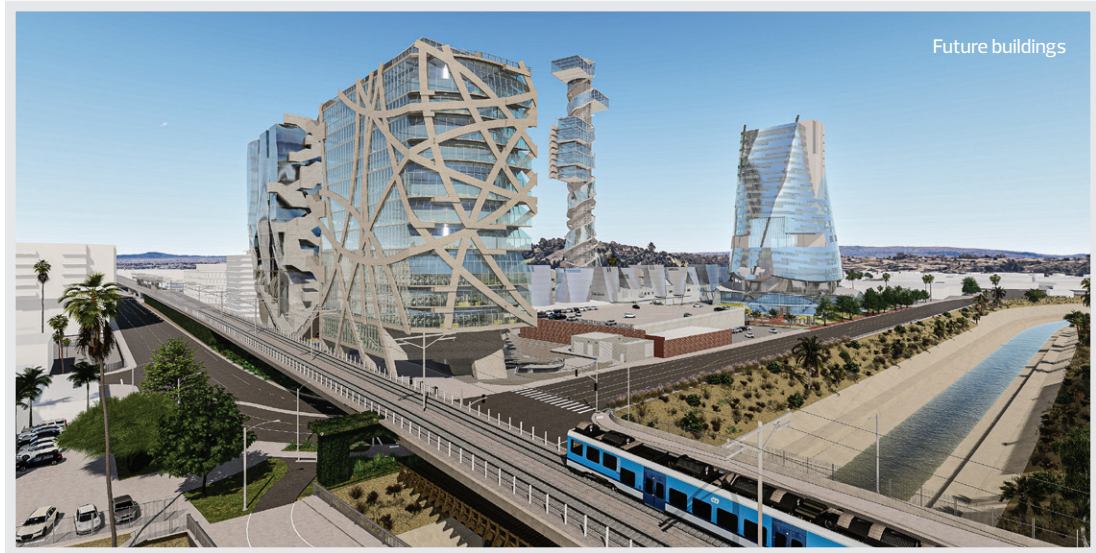
(W)rapper won't be standing alone for long. More development is planned for the site. Two other towers have already been approved by the City of Los Angeles. (W)rapper's sister high-rise will be built next to it on the east and is the byproduct of (W)rapper's original two-building plan from the early 2000s. "(W)rapper 2 is in process. And then there's something we call euphemistically *the Turtle*, which is another tower. And then maybe there's a fourth tower, which is a media tower," says Moss.



The rooftop of (W)rapper, accessible via elevator and an external staircase that zigzags up the building's east elevation, offers a unique vantage point. As the only high-rise in a low-rise community, its amenity deck boasts unobstructed panoramic views of the downtown Los Angeles skyline and the Westside.



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