

JOHN LEIGHTON CHASE: 1953-2010

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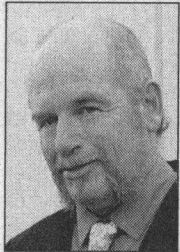
Urban planner who wrote about SC architecture dies at 57

By JOHN SAMMON

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John Chase was remembered fondly by friends and co-workers as a man who was witty, dressed flamboyantly, had a great sense of humor and a deep love for his adopted town of Santa Cruz, whose architecture and history he chronicled in a book.

Chase died Aug. 13 in West Hollywood of a heart attack. He was 57.



CHASE

"He was an original," said Judy Steen, a long-time friend and a member with Chase in the Santa Cruz Historical Society. "You'll never meet anybody quite like him."

An architectural critic, writer and urban designer, Chase attended UC Santa Cruz from 1971 to 1975. While studying art history, the Pasadena native began writing as a reporter for the UCSC campus newspaper City on a Hill.

He became so fond of the community he wrote and published the "Sidewalk Companion to Santa Cruz Architecture" in 1975 with money borrowed from his parents.

"It was not done for class credit, but for his love of

Santa Cruz," Steen remembered.

The book was a history of the unique buildings in Santa Cruz. Chase rode his own bicycle through neighborhoods, recording everything unusual with his camera and taking exhaustive notes on 3,000 index cards.

"He worked at a frenetic pace, and he loved unusual architecture, everything from a Queen Anne mansion built in 1880 to a humble little bungalow," Steen noted.

Chase described one building in Santa Cruz built in the Deco 1930s Streamlined Moderne style as an "offspring of a toaster and an ocean liner."

He also spent months in the library poring over old copies of the Santa Cruz Sentinel

preserved on microfilm.

"In addition to the architecture, John was interested in the people and the stories behind the buildings," Steen said. "For example, he'd look in the archives and find out there was once an opera house at Union and Center streets. He'd find out about the people who came there in the old days. To him it was more than just a building on a street."

The "Sidewalk Companion" was distributed by the Santa Cruz Historical Society, an organization Chase joined. He became a leader in the town's fledgling historical preservation movement, and led an effort to save the historic McHugh & Bianchi Building, built in

1887, at the head of Pacific Avenue.

Though it was torn down in 1974, the effort led to passage of Santa Cruz's first historic preservation ordinance and the creation of the Historic Preservation Commission.

A second edition of the "Sidewalk Companion" was published in 1979, and a third revised edition in 2005.

Steen said that although Chase moved to Southern California, he still retained a close connection with Santa Cruz. He returned after the 1989 earthquake to see what changes had been made.

"We had a grand tour, and I think he was pleased," she said. "There were more apartments and people downtown, and he wanted that mix."

JOHN LEIGHTON CHASE

BORN: May 21, 1953, Pasadena

DIED: Aug. 13, 2010, West Hollywood

OCCUPATION: Urban designer

HOME: West Hollywood

EDUCATION: B.A. in art history from UCSC, 1975. Master's in architecture from UCLA, 1980.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Early leader of the historic preservation movement in Santa Cruz

SERVICE: A public memorial is planned from 4-7 p.m. at Fiesta Hall in Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood.