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# Mountain Views News

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## Homes & Property

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**One Of A Kind:** *Featuring unique homes & gardens and the people who create them* Story and Photos By Chris Bertrand



Chris Bertrand

### Monrovia Architect Norberto Nardi:

*Designing small town community concepts across the street and around the world*

architectural circles, thinks of himself as both an architect and an urban designer, and a man who thrives on the magical connection between dwellings, lifestyle and nature. An Argentine-born Italian, Nardi has purposely sited his offices away from the downtown LA environment, preferring instead the urban-suburban climate. Nardi's firm spent years in



Norberto Nardi reviews Corona's Dos Lagos project.

Ontario, in a historic complex originally used as an irrigation supply company, refashioned as his offices and a satellite classroom for his teaching in the Cal Poly Pomona, School of Architecture. After a careful search, Nardi moved closer into the LA megalopolis, this time choosing Monrovia. The firm completed the redesign of a historic, 1920's building on Shamrock, just last year. Originally, the checkerboard brick building housed an auto repair garage and gas station which served the city for decades. The structure of the building captured Nardi's imagination. "I fell in love. It was telling me something," Nardi reflects. Unexpected for a utilitarian auto repair facility, angled exposed structural beams lend an artistic flair, and create a beautiful diamond relief on a white on white, arched ceiling that seems to float above the workspace. The same ceiling structure

was duplicated in a later expansion, space now used for a conference room and offices. The tall, vintage rollup garage doors (though not original if you study the 1920's photo) with two rows of windows remain, flooding morning light into the architect's workstations. A glass room divider down the center of the main building includes a timeline history of major projects on many continents, including Europe, China, Argentina, several sites in Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Closer to home, a landmark project in New Orleans will bring new life to a long abandoned section of Lincoln Beach, famous (or infamous) as the last segregated beach on Lake Ponchartrain. Nardi feels a great affinity for New Orleans, as he spent many years there on the architectural faculty of Tulane University.

Scale models of many of the big projects are also displayed behind the glass divider. Once, a potential client chose Nardi after touring his offices, and coming upon a drawing of the very place he'd honeymooned in Argentina. Nardi had designed the hotel at a famous waterfall at that cliffside, Argentinean site. The connection was made and the job was his. Earthquake retrofit and custom configuring the space for an architectural practice usage also included bathrooms and a kitchen. Extensive soundproofing created an uncannily quiet environment in a building with extensive open space, glass and hard surfaces.

The three color epoxy floor, an homage to the original function of the building, reflects more light back into the workspace. The suffuse light and quiet combine to give the building a sense of weightlessness that is hard to describe. Stepping outside, a brightly colored iron structure used to drably support an ancillary building. Now it will slowly be shaded by advancing ivy, soon creating a shady venue for lunches and meetings, respite from work and as a venue for outdoor events.

"I am totally committed to this place. I don't rent. I'm invested here. My mortgage payment is here. I eat at the restaurants here. I live nearby. This is my last destination. We are connecting in many ways with the community, like the art walk. And you'll see us playing tennis midday on Fridays, across the street in the courts at the park." "I'm a bit of a crusader," he continued, "To show how modern design can be respectful to the past, like I did with this building. I understood that this building has a particular quality to make a statement, and that it is not necessary to have antagonism between history and modernity. They don't have to be separate." "I take a lot of projects in small cities...



1920's photo of the original Shamrock Avenue building

Pasadena, Pomona, Claremont, Irwindale, Sierra Madre. Why? It allows me to be in touch with the people directly," he commented. Here in the city of Monrovia, his firm, Nardi and Associates, is currently at work creating the I-210 underpass connecting the planned Gold Line station to the downtown district. Nardi sees it as an exciting opportunity to create a gateway to the community here. Down in Corona, a huge project underway for several years now has been developed with Nardi's design and under his guidance. Dos Lagos is a 534 acre master-planned, mixed use development near the 15 and 91 interchange. Dos Lagos "combines a mix of residential uses with upscale shopping, dining, entertainment, live-work lofts, business and resort hotels, an 18-hole championship golf course and office space centered around two signature lakes, the namesakes of Dos Lagos," according to the project's website, [www.DosLagos.net](http://www.DosLagos.net). In the 135 acres set aside as a native plant and animal habitat, the Temescal Creek has been restored. Nardi loves that the project has been so well received at all income and age levels. He's delighted that the 950 foot long, signature walkway has become a popular site for weddings and pictures. The green screen structure built with horizontal bamboo pieces on a steel frame, straddles the nine foot waterfall built between the two manmade lakes, an unusual and breathtaking site. In fact, his firm's design of the bridge, lakes and outdoor amphitheater that comprise the "heart" of Dos Lagos, was commended by Architectural Record magazine as "setting Dos Lagos apart" from other live, work and play communities being developed nationally.

When my students come here for classes, I teach by doing. I use my office as a teaching tool, where I show my students what it takes to be in this profession, by my devotion and example. Academia is a crystal ball, removed from reality. Here, we walk and discuss and argue, so they can developing their own compass.

Nardi is a man who purposely doesn't take himself too seriously. As a tenured professor for twenty two years at Cal Poly Pomona's School of Architecture, he freely admits that his attention occasionally flags at faculty meetings. He's even been known to doodle on the day's agenda.

Since his "doodling" skills benefit from his architectural drawing skills, many have become well-honed, political cartoons, several of which hang on the walls of his conference room. Two caught my eye... The cannon aimed at all the proposals for a project and, more humorously, when a department chair position was under discussion, his irreverent doodle placed the chairperson's "crown" atop the "royal chair" ahemmm... commode. Nardi views every new project as a journey on an architectural adventure. He finds spicing it with a little humor, a lot of passion, a little grounded perspective balanced with a healthy measure of creativity and worldwide experience go a long way toward a successful project... whether it's a local office building, a gateway to the city or a mega-complex in China.

For more information on Norberto F. Nardi, visit [www.Nardi-Associates.com](http://www.Nardi-Associates.com) or call 626-981-1257.