

STAPLES**Center**

Third in a series on the opening of the \$400-million Staples Center.

COVERAGE**THE BOSS**

Robert Hilburn reviews Bruce Springsteen's first show at Staples Center. **F1**

THE BUILDING

Architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff reviews downtown's new sports-concert palace. **F1**

THE ATTRACTION

Springsteen—Boss of All Ages—draws fans who cross generational lines. **E2**

OPENERS**KINGS**

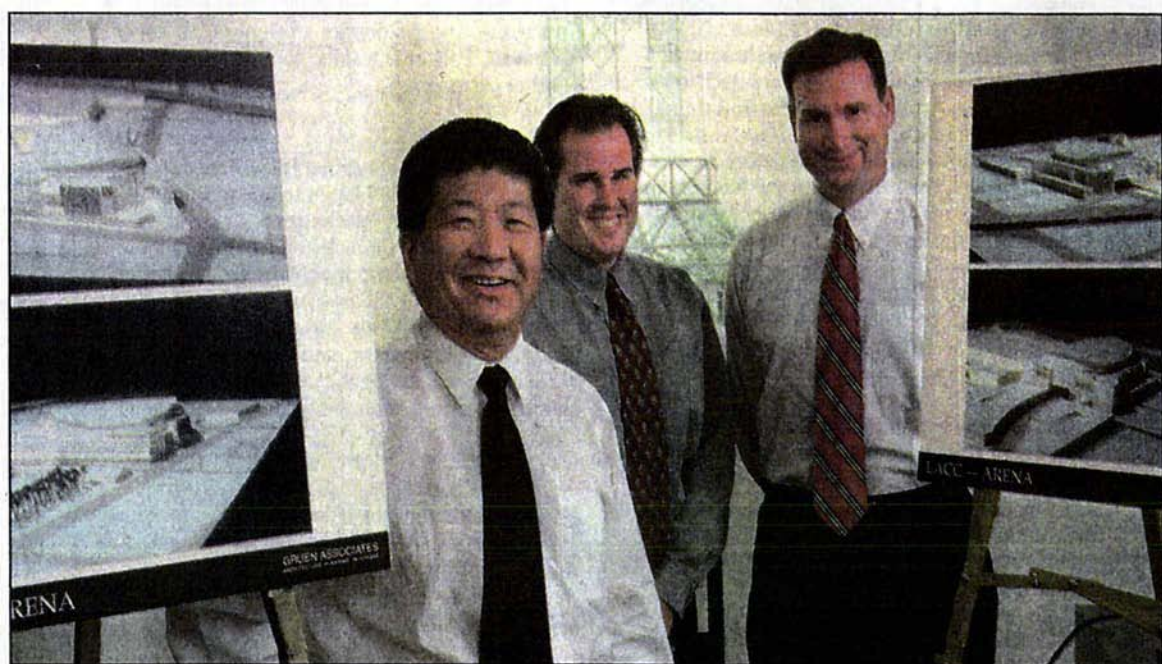
Wed. vs. Boston

CLIPPERS

Nov. 2 vs. Seattle

LAKERS

Nov. 3 vs. Vancouver



CON KEYES Los Angeles Times

Architects Michael Enomoto (left) and Craig Biggi (center) contributed ideas along with consultant Charlie Isgar.

By **DAVID WHARTON**
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Word spread quickly in the fall of 1995: The Kings had been sold and the new owners wanted a new arena for the team.

From the start, Philip Anschutz and Ed Roski Jr. had in mind a plot of land near Chinatown or perhaps a site at Union Station. Inglewood was also in the running.

But a little-known city consultant named Charlie Isgar had yet another idea. He wanted the arena built beside the Convention Center, where it might revive a shopworn neighborhood.

Trading on his reputation as a sometime advisor to Mayor Richard Riordan, Isgar finagled a meeting with Roski. The easy-speaking son of a Colorado rancher was so confident that he brought a few notes scrawled on a sheet of paper and nothing else.

"People always talk about deals that get done on the back of an

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Birth ^{OF} A Building

Persistence Paid Off for Small Group That Was Driving Force for Bringing Staples Center Downtown

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envelope," he said. "That was me."
The response?
Thanks, but no thanks.

□

Four years later, Staples Center stands on the northeast corner of the Convention Center grounds.

Some of the biggest names in the city put it there. The wealthy team owners who paid for construction. The Los Angeles city councilmen who hammered out an agreement on the land. Even Cardinal Roger M. Mahony had a role.

But the project might never have gotten off the ground if not for a small and diverse group of people who combined efforts—partly by chance, partly by design—in the final weeks of 1995.

Begin with Isgar, director of special projects for the Coliseum Commission, who refused to be dissuaded.

"I walked out of that first meeting with Roski knowing that I hadn't told the story well," he said. "But I didn't give up on the vision."

There wasn't much time to try again. Anschutz and Roski had an agreement with Laker owner Jerry Buss: If a new arena was ready for the 1999-2000 season, the Lakers would move there with the Kings. If not, the deal was off.

That left scant time for scouting locations, and the developers already had their leading candidates.

Roski said, "We didn't really give [the Convention Center] much consideration at the start."

So Isgar asked Michael Enomoto, an architect at Gruen Associates, to help with a last-ditch proposal. Isgar turned to Enomoto because they had worked together on retrofitting the Coliseum after the 1994 earthquake and because Gruen designed the Convention Center expansion in 1993.

"And because he had no budget," Enomoto said.

Working for nothing, the architect and a colleague, Craig Biggi, developed two thumbnail proposals for the Convention Center site.

One plan would have had the arena spanning 11th Street. It was a complicated design but highly visible from the 110 freeway.

The other plan had an arena at 11th and Figueroa, the site where it was ultimately constructed. Because Enomoto knew the Convention Center, he knew the existing structure on that corner "looked permanent but wasn't." The land could easily be cleared.

The designers worked overtime through the holiday season, sketching ideas and assembling models.

"That would usually take a long time," Enomoto said. "I was there with my Exacto knife at night, working really late."

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About that time, Anschutz and Roski were having a change of heart.

A tour of sports venues across the nation was all it took. They saw arenas and ballparks near downtown areas in Cleveland, Nashville, St. Louis and Denver.

"It became apparent to us that if you put one of these arenas in an



RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times

Staples Center, the new \$400-million arena in downtown Los Angeles (lower left), became a reality because of a small and diverse group.

No Earthquake Damage Found at New Arena

Staples Center engineers and operations staff hurried to their new arena in the early morning hours after a 7.1 earthquake had rocked Southern California last Saturday. The workers found no evidence of damage from the Hector quake, a spokesman said. Because the arena is privately owned, city inspectors were not called to the scene.

—DAVE WHARTON

urban location, they really work and they make a difference to the city," Roski said. "We came back and decided, 'You know, we've got to consider the Convention Center.'"

The site at 11th and Figueroa gained another ally in Steve Soboroff, an advisor and friend of Roridan, who came to the project by way of dollars and cents.

Soboroff was poring over the city budget when he discovered the Convention Center was drawing tens of millions in municipal funds each year. Adding an arena to the complex seemed a way to make it profitable.

So, in late 1995, Isgar and Soboroff joined forces. One man had done the legwork, the other had political clout. Their first mission: Arrange another meeting with Roski.

"Charlie had gone to work in a big way," Soboroff said. "He was very passionate and very organized."

Sketches, photographs and models adorned a conference room at Gruen, at the edge of Beverly Hills, on Jan. 17, 1996. Roski, who has been through countless such meetings in his effort to bring an NFL team to Los Angeles, recalls that day only vaguely.

But others in attendance say the millionaire real estate developer was cool at first, sitting in a chair by the door, keeping distance between himself and the long table.

"That, in my mind, was not a

good sign," Enomoto said.

As time wore on, however, Roski inched closer. Soon he was moving around the room, looking at the models from different angles, asking questions and offering suggestions.

"I could tell, as an architect, things were rolling," Enomoto said. "He was involved and he could see this wasn't just pie in the sky."

Though the deal was far from being struck, everyone walked out of that meeting with new hope for the Convention Center proposal.

"We made a good presentation," Soboroff said. "Our vision made a lot of sense."

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The Convention Center proposal eventually took hold, but Gruen didn't. Anschutz and Roski selected another firm, NBBJ Sports & Entertainment, to design Staples Center.

The project was marked by terse if not bitter negotiations, a running feud that involved the developers, Soboroff and councilmen John Ferraro and Joel Wachs. Mahony, mindful of a new cathedral under construction to the north, lobbied on the arena's behalf.

These are the names most likely to be remembered in connection with the downtown sports palace. But Isgar and Enomoto are not entirely forgotten.

Soboroff paid to have their names engraved on tiles in a plaza outside the arena's main entrance. Roski thanked Isgar, among others, in a full-page advertisement. And some of those early ideas—brainstormed over a few crucial weeks in 1995—can be seen in the \$400-million arena that now stands at 11th and Figueroa.

The building has a futuristic wing of offices; Enomoto and Biggi envisioned a similar wing of stores and restaurants. There is a giant corporate logo across the roof, where the early designers had a Kings' logo.

"Certainly we were disappointed we didn't get to finish the job," Enomoto said. "But I think NBBJ did a great job and I'm really excited to see some of the ideas Craig and I had coming to fruition."

All it took was a little persistence.

"Damned if it wasn't a hard birth," Isgar said. "But it worked out all right."