

A stunning transformation

Petersen Automotive Museum reopens

Story and photos by
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Following a multi-million-dollar total interior and exterior renovation that lasted over a year, the Petersen Automotive Museum—at the gateway of Los Angeles' famed Museum Row—has reopened.

Its exterior architecture is draped in sweeping, free-form, twisting and turning bands of stainless steel that extend beyond the former perimeter of the existing building, interspersed with

broad, bold swaths of color. The effect of this is particularly dramatic at night, resembling a dynamic time exposure photograph of vehicular traffic on a busy city street, with streaks of color from the headlights and taillights.

The museum's 25 galleries are arrayed over three floors, each with a different and distinct category: History, Industry and Artis-

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The Petersen Automotive Museum was officially reopened with a dignitary-splashed ribbon cutting ceremony on December 3, 2015.

The dramatic exterior architecture of the Petersen Automotive Museum ensures the facility's prominence at the busy Wilshire and Fairfax intersection, while creating a grand entrance to Museum Row, with its revitalization now well underway.

HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE

The Petersen Automotive Museum has celebrated Southern California's passion for the automobile at Fairfax Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard—the third busiest intersection in LA—since 1994. It anchors one end of the Miracle Mile created by developer AW Ross in 1936, before malls and *the place to go*. Ross required parking behind stores, to aid traffic flow. Wilshire was also home to the first dedicated left-turn lanes and the first timed traffic lights in the US. The original building by architect Welton Becket was cutting edge in 1962, when it opened as Seibu, a Japanese department store. Orbach's took over in 1965, closing in 1986.

The building stood vacant for about six years until Robert E Petersen looked at it as possible offices for Petersen Publishing. Mostly windowless, he decided it would instead make an excellent museum. He and his wife funded a large portion of the Petersen Automotive Museum. Vehicles would be displayed in context, on period-correct streetscapes. Second floor themed exhibits would rotate. A third floor Discovery Center would teach art and science via the automobile. The Museum opened in June 1994.

The update is conceived as a beacon to Museum Row, the first project in a revitalization including the Academy of Motion Pictures Museum and LA County Museum of Art. Architect Gene Kohn, of Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) wanted to make the old building communicate speed and motion. A 3D model and 120-page proposal (budgets and engineering could come later) inspired Peter Mullin, of Mullin Automotive Museum in Oxnard, to steer the museum's rebirth. Mockups of KPF lead architect Trent Tesch's metal-ribbon facade design were built at the A Zahner Company in Kansas City. Only minor refinements were needed, for code or property line reasons. Museum specialist MATT Construction was chosen to translate KPF's vision and Zahner's architectural steel into reality. —Ed. ■



PETERSEN



Welcome to the new Petersen Museum. (Top to bottom): 1933 Duesenberg in the Bruce Meyer Family Gallery. | The heart of the Maserati Quattroporte is its drivetrain, as seen in the Maserati Vehicle Manufacturing Production Gallery. | 1957 Ferrari 625/250 Testa Rossa by Scaglietti.

try. A great way to start is by taking the elevator to the third floor. From there you can work your way back down via a magnificent modern, circular staircase that is open on both sides, providing a preview of what is on each floor.

On the History floor, enjoy cars from film and television in the Hollywood Gallery, experience the Ford Model T photo op, and learn about this region's rich automotive history in words, historical photos and artifacts presented by the Automobile Club of Southern California—the largest single component of the 55-million-member AAA which, in turn, is the largest motoring organization in the world. As noted by club historian Matt Roth: "The auto club grew up with the region. Its development and its growth were very much based on the population growth, the spread of settlement and the style of living in Southern California. The automobile threads throughout those stories."

Descend the staircase to the second floor—themed "Industry"—where you will find the awe-inspiring Bruce Meyer Family Gallery and its collection of several of the world's most rare and exotic cars, each one finished in silver.

Visit actual working studios of the Art Center College of Design.

In the Discovery Center, children and adults will learn how automobiles work through *Cars*-themed interactive, actual working exhibits at the Pixar Cars Mechanical Institute. Borrow a CARSpad—a special, customized tablet—and let *Cars* characters guide you through a unique augmented reality experience. It's high tech and fun.

At the Xbox One Forza Motorsport Racing Experience, race a brand new Ford GT and other high performance cars in one of several racing simulators. Be forewarned—if you compete with others to see who can do the quickest lap time, you might find it difficult to leave.

According to Ford's John Clinard, this is the only place in the world where the new Ford GT will be on display for a year. For comparison, there is also a vintage GT40 Mk III.

Visit the winners' circle in the Charles Nearburg Family Gallery, where historic racecars are displayed in front of a 134-foot,

180-degree video wall playing racing footage, as dramatic lighting continually changes.

In the rooms of the Production Gallery, you will see how a Maserati Quattroporte is built on a production line, via displays that feature actual major components and cut-aways of the automobile.

Conclude your visit to the Petersen on the first floor, where you will find some of the finest coachbuilt cars of the bygone art deco era in the Mullin Grand Salon. These breathtakingly beautiful automobiles include an ultra-rare and gorgeous 1936 Type 57sc Bugatti Atlantic and a 1938 Talbot-Lago T150C SS Fioni et Falaschi Teardrop. They are accompanied by relaxing music, and ever-changing colors and graphics displayed on a 166-foot panoramic wall.

In a few months, you will also be able to dine in a restaurant at the Petersen. At the press preview, we sampled some of the Drago brothers' gourmet cuisine, including truffles.

This is one of the very best automotive museums in the world. It is bold, large and colorful, like the best European automotive museums. Its collection of rare, priceless automobiles is stunning. There is ample space between each to enjoy and photograph the vehicles individually. Dramatic lighting, graphic backgrounds, projections of moving light and videos, and music combine to create varied moods appropriate to the displayed automobiles. Numerous interactive video screens inform and entertain visitors. The exterior design of what used to be a multi-story department store is breathtaking and unique. In short, the Petersen Automotive Museum has been totally transformed. For more information, go to www.Petersen.org.

Featured areas of the new Petersen Museum (top to bottom): Three Porsche race cars in front of the video wall of the Charles Nearburg Family Gallery motorsports collection. | 1915 Detroit Electric Model 61 Brougham (battery electric, top speed 20 mph, with an 80-mile range). | A 1954 Plymouth Explorer concept car by Ghia. | Two-wheeled transportation exhibit. | A 1936 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic, 1938 Bentley "Embiricos" by Pourtout and 1930 Rolls-Royce "Windblown Coupe" on the Peter and Merle Mullin Artistry Floor.

