

CALENDAR

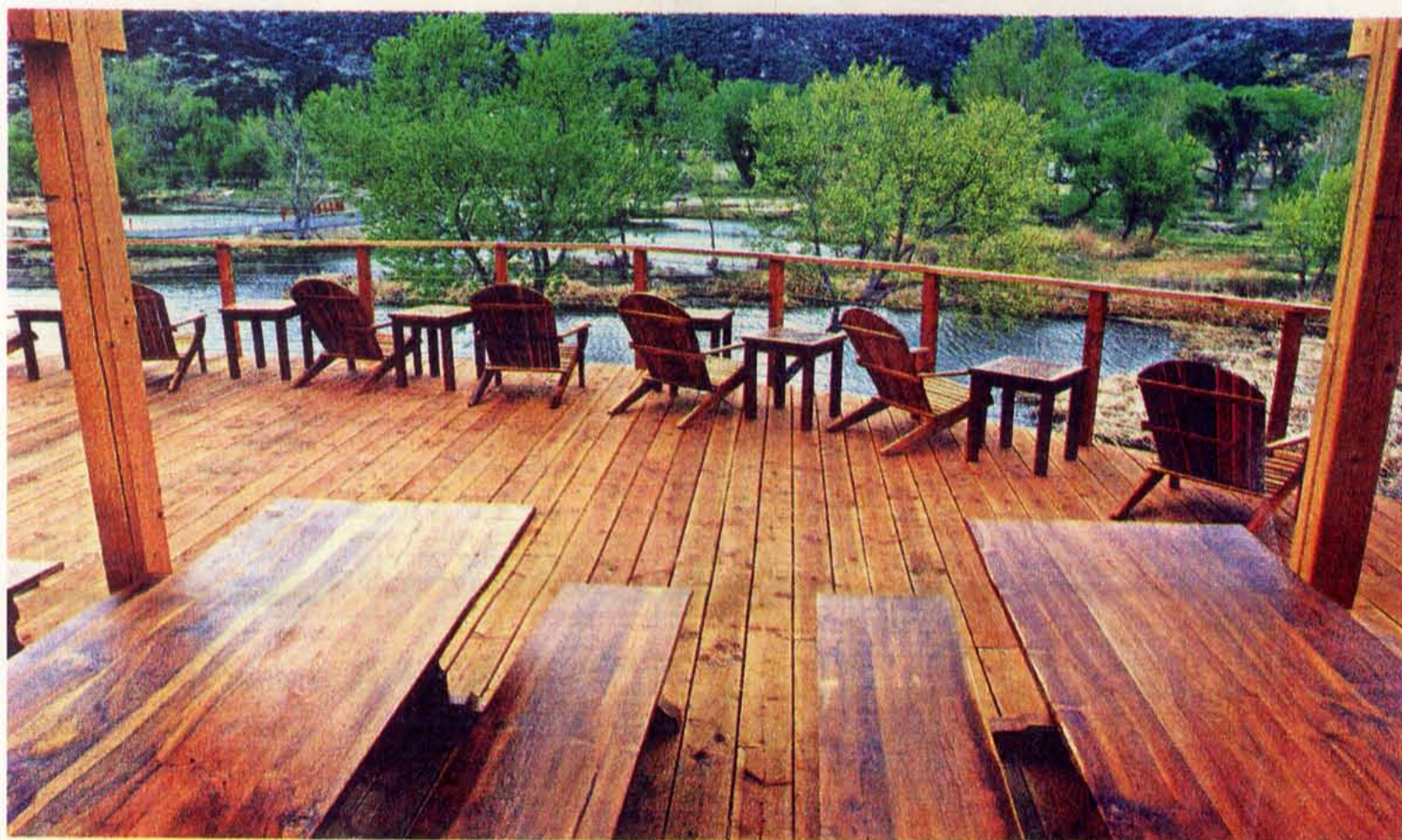
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'We take advantage of the canyon. The lakes, the breeze, the morning sun, the afternoon sun.'

MICHAEL PALLADINO

— Architect,
Painted Turtle Camp



Photographs by ANN JOHANSSON For The Times

TO THE EDGE: Bordered with Adirondack chairs, the expansive wood plank deck of the camp's dining hall offers a serene lake view.

Camp Challenge

Away at Painted Turtle, all signs point to wellness, thanks to a visionary group.

By HILARY E. MACGREGOR
Times Staff Writer

Lake Hughes

MICHAEL PALLADINO worked for more than a decade on the design and construction of the Getty Center. He has since designed the San Jose Civic Center, the UCLA Broad Art Center, the Crystal Cathedral International Center of Possibility Thinking in Garden Grove and the federal courthouse in San Diego. But designing a camp for chronically ill children presented him with his most unusual challenge to date: to create a cam-

pus that evokes the architectural language of a summer camp but conceals all medical and technical support. In short, to create a place where these children could forget, for just a little while, that they are terribly, terribly sick.

"It would have been easier for us to design a hospital," says Palladino, design partner in the Los Angeles office of Richard Meier & Partners, which is internationally known for its rigorously modernist buildings. "We design white [See Camp, Page E23]

A rustic place meeting special needs

[Camp, from Page E1]
buildings with a lot of glass."

The Painted Turtle Camp is the latest in a family of camps for sick children founded by actor Paul Newman. But it was Page Hannah-Adler and her husband, record producer Lou Adler, who were the visionaries, founders and creators of this camp, who called on everyone they knew and many they didn't to contribute. It will cater to children ages 7 to 16 who are unable to attend summer camp in California either because there is no camp with the medical support they need or because they are too poor. Seventy percent of those who will attend live at or below the poverty level. As at every Newman camp, a week of summer vacation is free.

After seven years of planning, fundraising, designing and dreaming, the Painted Turtle Camp is set to open in June. From the gymnasium floor donated by the Lakers to the Shamu-shaped pool donated by SeaWorld to the world-class architectural plans that Palladino and project architect Michael Gruber produced pro bono, it is a \$23.5-million labor of love.

Overcoming restrictions

It took two years just to find the land. The property had to meet dozens of requirements. It had to be a 15-minute helicopter ride from a hospital, lie below 3,500 feet in elevation and, ideally, contain a lake (Newman is a fisherman, Hannah-Adler explains, and he feels strongly about this). When Hannah-Adler first saw the property, she was not optimistic. "We were driving through Palmdale, and I was thinking, this is not going to work," she recalls on a tour of the camp with Palladino. "I am not a good visionary. When I looked at this property I saw a rundown RV park."

To her surprise, all three pages of medical requirements checked out. Newman gave his OK, and the Adlers snapped up the 183 acres in a wind-swept valley in Lake Hughes for \$1 million. That was in 1998. Figuring out the layout of the campus was a psycho-terrestrial puzzle. "There were three [topographical] zones, and we couldn't build on the wetlands," Palladino says. That put whole swaths off land off-limits. In addition, county restrictions prevented them from building too close to the hills. Everything had to be wheelchair accessible, but not noticeably so, and no building could be farther than 600 yards from the dining hall.

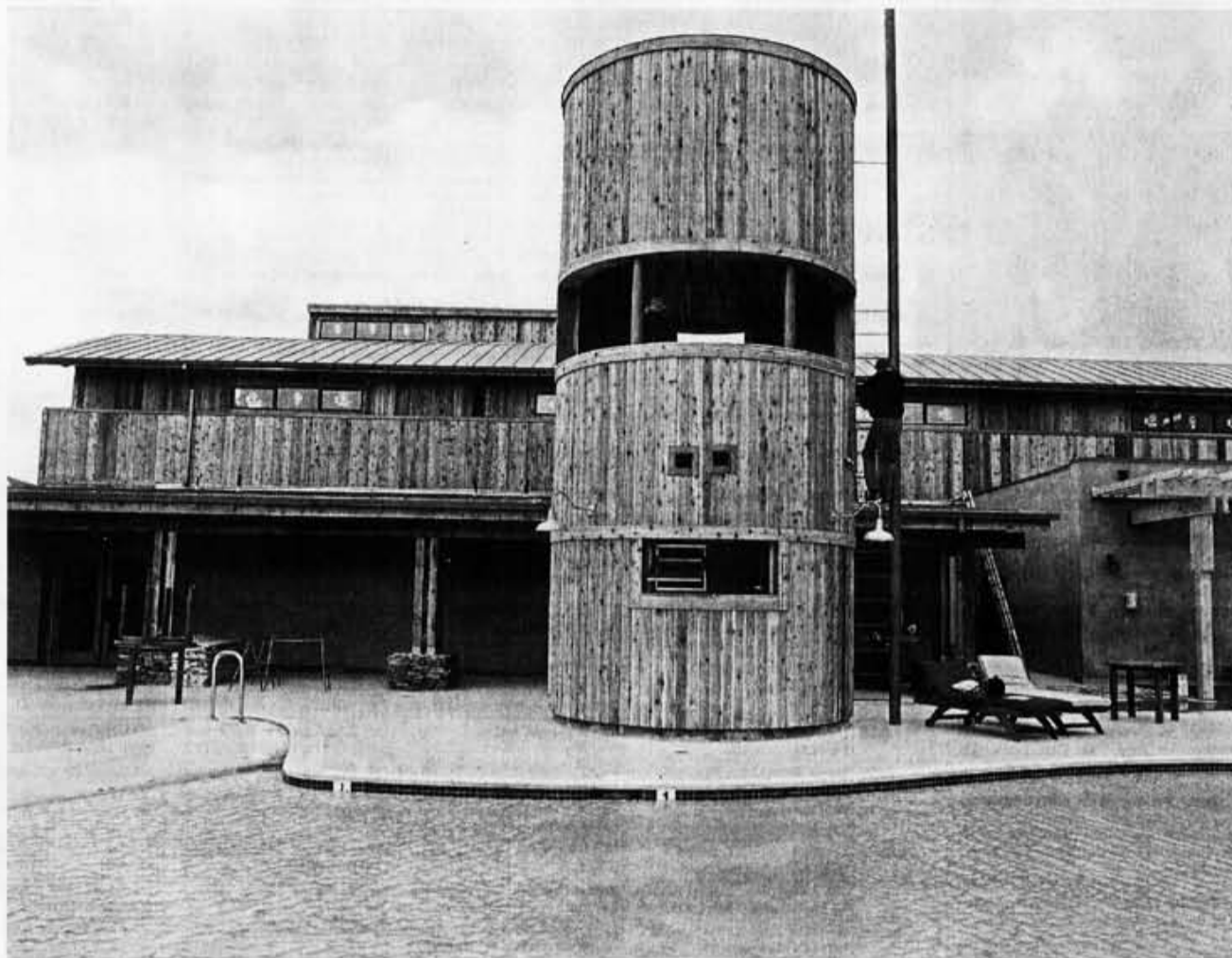
And this is hot country. Located about 70 miles north of Los Angeles on the edge of Angeles National Forest, it is cooler than the deserts of Palmdale and Lancaster, but the temperature regularly rises over 95 degrees in summer. Many of the children attending the camp would require climate-controlled environments.

"We are used to working with ADA [Americans With Disabilities Act] requirements," Palladino says, "but this takes it to a whole other level. We don't want it to look like it's for wheelchairs. We are trying to make it look tough, aggressive, camp-like."

Adds Hannah-Adler: "The kids don't notice it, but the parents do, and the doctors do too."

The essence of 'camp'

BEFORE he even set a pencil to trace paper, Palladino and Hannah-Adler analyzed summer camps from Connecticut to Texas, distilling the architectural essence of "camp."



ALWAYS INVITING: The handicap-accessible pool has a "Silo," a lifeguard tower with a warming hut below for campers.



VISIONARY PAIR: Page Hannah-Adler is a co-founder of the camp with husband and record producer Lou Adler.

"When you think about camp you remember smells, you remember your bunk, where it was, what you saw. It's the furniture, the kind of furniture, and feeling like your cabin nestles up against the hill," Hannah-Adler says.

For eight of her own childhood summers, Hannah-Adler attended Cheley Camp in Colorado, where campers bunked in covered wagons. And in 1989 and '90 she volunteered as a counselor at Newman's original Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Connecticut. The experience changed her life — she wanted to start a camp of her own.

Palladino grew up in upstate New York, one of the country's most camp-dense regions, and attended one near Sacandaga Reservoir. "I remember it being buildings of rough-sawn wood, gray and weathered," he recalls. "What this will look like in one year."

Designing the camp was a radical departure for Palladino. "This has to say something about summer. About camp. This is not the type of modern, avant-garde, edgy building you think of when you are making an architectural statement," he says.

Palladino traveled to Texas to see a medical camp. He

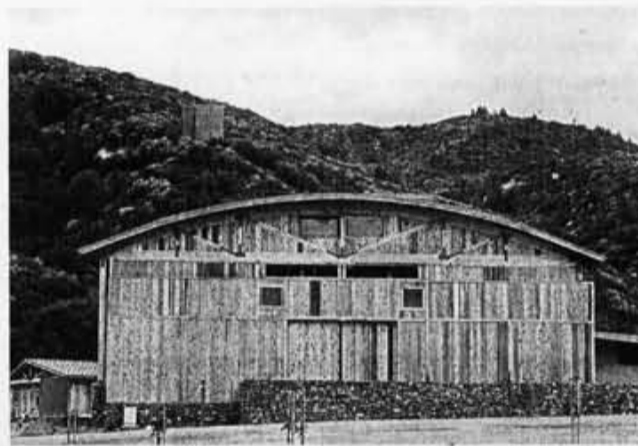
watched video tours of camps in Connecticut, Florida and Michigan. Then he sat with the Adlers and doctors as they told him what the children needed. For hours, weeks and months he listened.

These are the elements, they decided, that make up the language of camp: boathouses, lakes, dining halls and cabins; screened porches, Adirondack chairs and bunk beds; wood and stone, and wild, unruly landscapes.

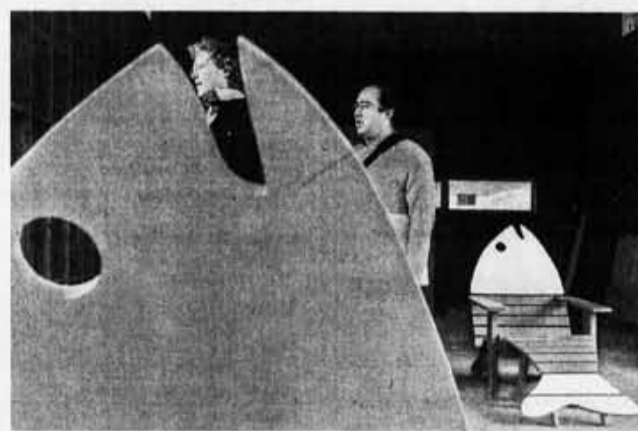
"The image of 'camp' is a dining hall on a lake with a boathouse," Palladino says. "That says, 'All right, this is camp, and I'm here.'"

A cooling effect

WHEN Palladino first saw the site, he envisioned buildings that could cool themselves, taking advantage of the breezes that blow through the valley year-round. Eventually, the campus will sit amid wildflower meadows, organic fruit orchards and secret gardens. The buildings are arranged on an east-west axis known as Main Street, and include a medical center, a dining hall, an arts and crafts complex,



BLENDING IN: The gymnasium is among 25 buildings linked by rough-hewn cedar walls and distinctive zinc roofs.



LAKESIDE: Architects Michael Palladino, left, and Michael Gruber at the boathouse, with its fish-shaped Adirondack chairs.

a theater, a gymnasium, a pool, a boathouse and clusters of cabins, nestled against the hills.

The roofs of each are designed to create a system of natural ventilation. Shaped like upside-down metal skiffs, the roofs are all tipped in the same direction. The rise of the roof pushes the wind up and over, creating a vacuum that sucks the air out of windows in the high end of the building. And because this place speaks of summer, there is always a flow between indoor and outdoor spaces.

"We take advantage of the canyon," Palladino says. "The lakes, the breeze, the morning sun, the afternoon sun."

Certain visual elements link the 25 buildings of the campus. There are the rough-hewn cedar walls, in faded tones of the ranches of the West, and the distinctive shape of the zinc roofs. On every building there is an accent of silver-gray bouquet stone, drawn from a local quarry, designed to make the buildings blend with the natural landscape.

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- MICHAEL PALLADINO

Every building gets enough natural light that it can be used all day without electricity. And always there are small, high windows framing views of the sky, so children confined to chairs can watch the clouds that float by.

While the exteriors of the buildings are natural, and over time will melt into the California landscape like lightning-struck tree trunks in an Ansel Adams photograph, the interiors are a riot of color and playfulness. Designed by Jeffrey Cayle and Kurt Steffen of New York and Los Angeles-based Shannon Sheehan, every detail is conceived to delight, distract. Hairy lampposts (shredded tree trunks that look like they might come dancing to life at night) are topped with colored bulbs to lead campers back to color-coded cabin clusters. Adirondack chairs, their backs painted like fish, wait on the dock at the boathouse.

But it is the Well Shell that perhaps best embodies the collaboration of Palladino and Gruber (also of Richard Meier & Partners) and the interior designers. This is the medical hub of the camp, where children will be dropped off, checked in and examined by doctors. The roof of the domed space is meant to bring to mind a turtle. The form is almost classical, with a Meieresque shelf running around the base that up-lights the dome.

But the interior looks more like a cross between an amusement park and a tiki lounge. The nurses' station is covered in woven bamboo, the exam rooms are covered with murals. Entering the triage room is like stepping into a redwood forest (*tree-age, get it?*): Patients and doctors sit on stumps. Large leather loungers, for children who need dialysis, look out on the lake.

"It is hard for an architect to step back and let other designers do light fixtures and benches," Palladino says.

"As architects we like to control as much as we can. This project was the opposite. We made contributions, like everyone else, but everyone who made any contribution had to say, 'What would the kids like?'"

It is easy to get swept up in the optimism and hope that seeps from the floorboards, the roofs, the quirky quilts, thousands of which were sewn by hand by local women. Countless others contributed labor and love to the project, including House & Robertson Architects Inc., which did the construction drawings. You can almost feel the love that inspired the starry heavens painted in the shower stalls, and the tiled river that flows along the floor of the dressing rooms.

Palladino says his favorite places are the screened porches of the cabins. It's like being a child again just to be there. You can almost hear the mosquitoes buzzing. Inside, the bunk rooms have soaring ceilings with fans, and each bed has a quilt like no other.

"We would not have known how to do this," Palladino says. "This warm, soft, campy..." He trails off, the vocabulary of coziness eluding him.

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