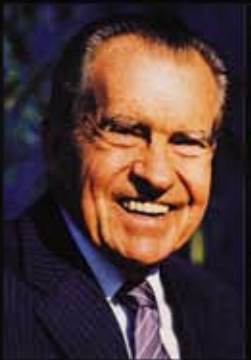




# 100 PEOPLE WHO SHAPED ORANGE COUNTY



THE ORANGE COUNTY  
REGISTER



YGNACIO NANETTI, THE REGISTER

**CONSERVATION:**

Donald Bren walks with U.S. Interior Secretary Gale Norton at Irvine Regional Park in May 2005.

# 1963 | Land baron Bren built much of Orange County

**D**onald Bren began with one house: a Lido Isle custom home financed with a \$10,000 loan from Bank of America.

From that solitary beginning, Bren built an empire that culminated with ownership of the Irvine Ranch, covering one-sixth of Orange County. He is the last of a vanishing breed: the California land baron. Few people have as much influence in where people live, work and play as Donald Bren.

Along the way, he has built Mission Viejo, much of Irvine and Newport Coast, each with that rarest of traits in a builder: the sensibility of an architect. He hunts down design ideas in old cathedrals and piazzas. He became a billionaire, and one of the most influential people in Orange County.

He grew up in West Los Angeles, the son of movie producer Milton Bren and stepson of actress Claire Trevor. He spent his summers in Newport Beach, where his family moved when he was in his late teens. His father's yacht, *The Pursuit*, won a trophy at the first Newport-to-Ensenada race in 1948.

At 26, in 1958, after a three-year stint with the Marines, Bren's pursuit of wealth and influence began in Newport Beach. He formed the Bren Co. and erected his first few homes. Then he secured seed money to build a half-dozen homes in what is now Tustin.

He dove into every detail, giving faucets and other fixtures as much attention as

roads and parks. In addition to homes, he built a reputation. He arranged the new community with the same care that was starting on the nearby Irvine Ranch. By 1963, he had won the confidence of the O'Neill family to build the 11,000-acre community of Mission Viejo.

Bren's biggest break came from the sale of the Irvine Co. and its huge tracts of land, forced by the lobbying of heiress Joan Irvine Smith. She orchestrated the teaming of several investors to buy the ranch, and included builder Bren.

Unlike the other major investors, Bren put everything he had into the deal. He didn't dilute his share of the company by bringing in other investors. That left him with 34 percent of the Irvine Co., more than anyone else.

Bren was in a position to win majority control in 1983, accomplished by borrowing \$560 million and transferring the debt to the Irvine Co. after the purchase - a leveraged buyout, years before such techniques became commonplace. Irvine

Smith tried to block him, failed and then demanded her fair share in a buyout. That triggered an eight-year legal standoff finally ending in 1991 with the payout of \$256 million to Irvine Smith and her mother.

Bren was now the sole owner of the Irvine Co. He planned to make the most of it.

After building the Irvine village of Westpark and remodeling Fashion Island in the late 1980s, he embarked on the million-dollar custom lots of Newport Coast, the expansion of Irvine Spectrum and plans for the build-out of Irvine.

His influence extends beyond the building of housing tracts and shopping centers. A longtime ally of former Gov. Pete Wilson, Bren made the Irvine Co. one of the state's largest contributors to the Republican Party. It wields considerable influence in Sacramento.

Bren understood the value of parks and open space. A map of Irvine Ranch glows with the green of 53,000 acres. It includes the 17,000-acre Open Space Reserve, wilderness managed by the Nature Conservancy.

Now in his early '70s, Bren hopes to complete the build-out of the Irvine Ranch within his lifetime - leaving an impact on the landscape of Orange County that may never be matched.

# 1960

## Watson's vision for Irvine found many imitators

Look around the county at the latest housing development – indeed, look around the nation – and one thing strikes you. Hey, this looks like Irvine!

Success breeds imitation, and few cities have experienced either as much as Irvine. Yet many of the ideas replicated elsewhere came from the mind of Ray Watson.

He was 32, an architectural planner from Northern California, when the Irvine Co. hired him in 1960 as part of a team laying out the future city. Later, he was elevated to vice president of planning. With William Pereira's master plan for a new UC Irvine campus and a new town to surround it, this was an opportunity to do something fresh. And with a huge landowner like the Irvine Co., it was possible.

Watson wanted bold, broad strokes for this canvas, using Pereira's master plan as

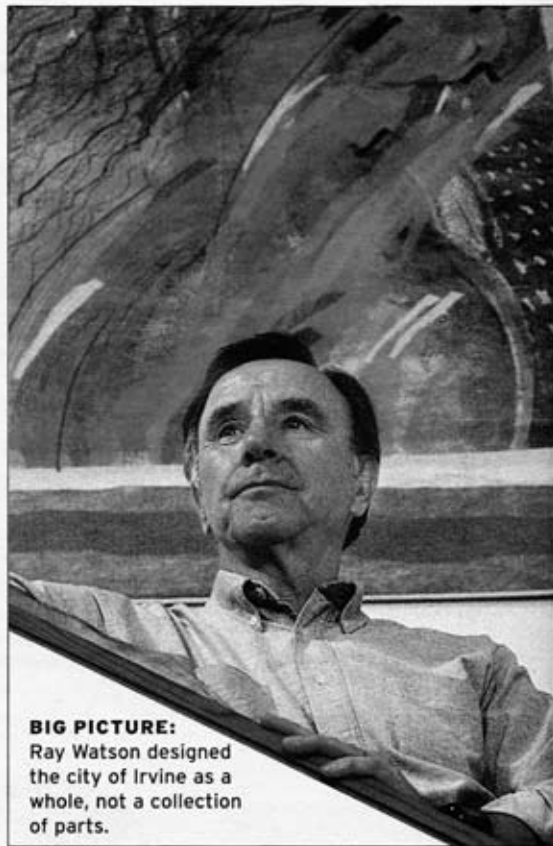
the frame. The city was considered as a whole, not piece-by-piece like most communities. The city was to be a series of villages, each carefully arranged in relationship to one another. Neighborhoods were blended with greenbelts and schools and ball fields and shopping centers and roads, fitting together like a jigsaw puzzle.

There was a lot of experimentation. Shopping centers were placed not on major roads, but in the middle of neighborhoods. A variety of homes and townhomes was offered, to keep neighborhoods affordable. Watson's ideas were tested first on East Bluff in Newport Beach, then in Irvine's first village, University Park, built next to the new UCI campus.

Watson rose to executive vice president for development, then to president of the Irvine Co. in 1973. It was a difficult time, with complex environmental studies required before building and a public soured with the Irvine Co. after a bitter battle over the fate of Upper Newport Bay.

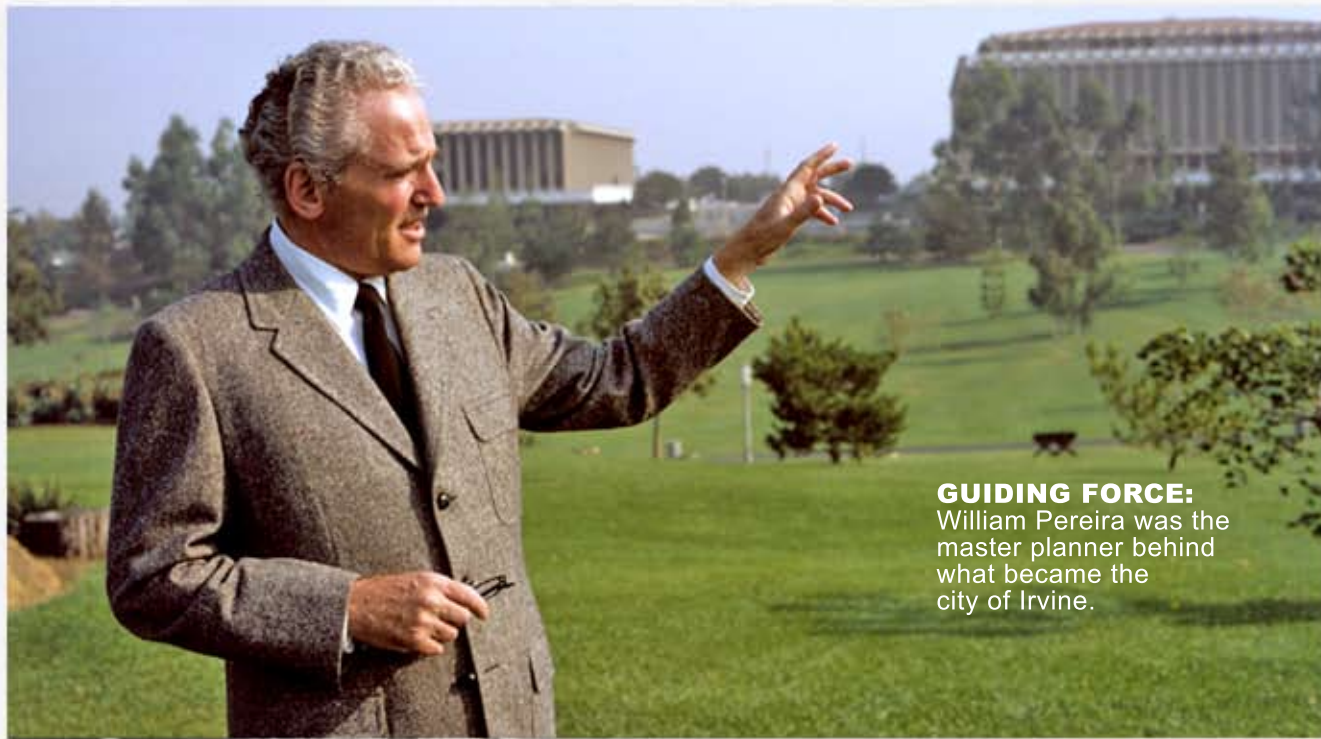
Watson left the job in 1977, formed his own development company and later joined the board of Walt Disney, only to return to the Irvine Co. as a board member after Donald Bren took control of the firm.

Not all of his experiments survived the test of time. Shopping centers, for example, seem to fare better on major roads. Still, his broad strokes painted a picture that many homeowners love, as do the builders who flatter it with imitation.



**BIG PICTURE:**  
Ray Watson designed the city of Irvine as a whole, not a collection of parts.

FILE PHOTO: YGNACIO NANETTI, THE REGISTER



**GUIDING FORCE:** William Pereira was the master planner behind what became the city of Irvine.

COURTESY OF THE IRVINE CO.

## 1956 | Planner Pereira's vision is manifest in Irvine, campus

The roll call of William L. Pereira's creations is impressive: the Kennedy Space Center, the pyramid-spired Transamerica Tower in San Francisco, Pepperdine University in Malibu, even the re-creation of the 1864 Atlanta fire that climaxed the film "Gone with the Wind."

As the master planner of the 93,000 acres that once formed the Irvine Ranch, he molded much of central Orange County into what we know today: the city of Irvine, its namesake university, various office complexes – and a vision of order and harmony almost unique in the nation.

Pereira first gained national attention for his movie-set designs, including for "Reap the Wild Wind," which won him an Academy Award in 1942.

By then, Pereira had spent more than a decade as an architect and planner, and he began to marry his imaginary worlds to his notions for reshaping the real world in an orderly, enlightened image. Long before housing developments and shopping malls carpeted Orange County, Pereira sought to show a way to orderly growth.

The opportunity first appeared in 1956, when the University of California system began looking for four new campus sites. Appointed to research possible locations, Pereira pointed out 17 options, one of them in the vast Irvine Ranch that made up one-sixth of Orange County.

By 1960, shareholders of the Irvine Co. agreed to donate a campus site to the state – and, daringly, to construct companion cities from scratch rather than sell off land piecemeal. For this blank canvas, Pereira produced a master plan for what became Irvine, the Newport Center and

Fashion Island in Newport Beach.

At its heart was the 1,000-acre campus of UC Irvine, designed to become a symbiotic partner in the community, much in the way Harvard University defined Cambridge, Mass.

"Time has shown of all changing institutions, the university is critical to an industrial community," Pereira said at the time. "It is an important attraction for people looking for a place to live."

Pereira's vision was of a university as magnet for science and commerce, of a balance between retail stores and greenery, of a mix of single-family homes and apartments for all social classes.

UC Irvine admitted its first students in 1965, and home construction began later that year. Five years later, when Pereira drew up a master plan for the rest of the ranch, tens of thousands volunteered to be pioneers in the "new city."

In 1971, the year the community incorporated as Irvine, more than 200,000 visited its model homes. During the first half of the 1970s, Irvine was the West's fastest-growing city. More than three decades later, the new-style college town boasts a population of more than 170,000, plus 24,000 students and 1,400 faculty.

That track record did not quiet critics who found the city as sterile and inflexible as Pereira found it salubrious.



COURTESY OF THE MOTION PICTURE & TELEVISION FUND

**HOLLYWOOD ORIGINS:** William Pereira, right, originally gained renown as a movie-set designer. He is seen here with actors Jean Hersholt, left, and Mary Pickford.

The Irvine that evolved has not become exactly the community Pereira pictured. Home prices soared, the university and well-funded schools perhaps making the city perhaps too desirable.

However imperfect Irvine's execution, Pereira remained committed to the pursuit of orderly town planning.

"Planners are philosophers and humanists, you know," he told the Register in February 1985, nine months before his death at 76. "We are interested in civilization, what changes and what doesn't change. We are concerned with man's aspirations."

# Making Headlines for 100 Years



For 100 years, The Orange County Register has chronicled the remarkable evolution of Orange County. The Irvine Company has been a part of this rich history, first as a rancher and a farmer, and subsequently as a master community planner, builder and real estate investor.



Today, Orange County is an economically dynamic, sophisticated, self-reliant, and vibrant place to live, work, play, learn, shop and invest. We applaud The Orange County Register for the important role it has played covering this, the biggest and most impressive ongoing local story of them all.



**THE IRVINE COMPANY**  
Good Planning Goes A Long Way®

*Incorporated, 1895*