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**The LAPD's
Big Bang Squad**

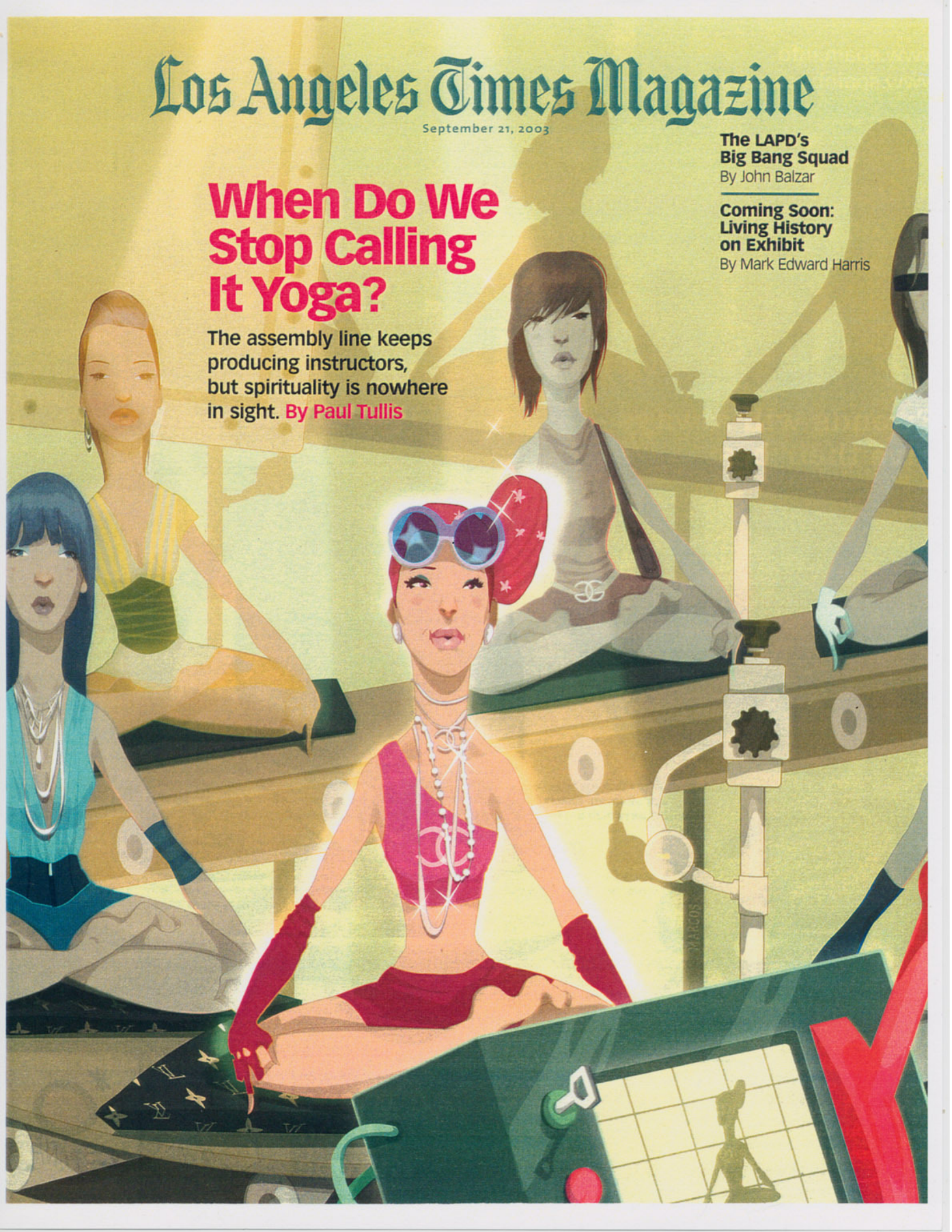
By John Balzar

**Coming Soon:
Living History
on Exhibit**

By Mark Edward Harris

When Do We Stop Calling It Yoga?

The assembly line keeps producing instructors, but spirituality is nowhere in sight. **By Paul Tullis**





Spiritual Roots

The Sinai Temple Garden in Westwood Takes Inspiration From the Old Testament

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BY SUSAN HEEGER + PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVE LAURIDSEN

riving down Wilshire Boulevard through Westwood you could easily miss a drift of olive trees above a wall, their silver boughs tossing patterns on a tall structure among the office and apartment towers. This building is a synagogue, and the trees belong to something rare along this strip—a garden.

Rarer still, the garden lacks any ficus, agapanthus or impatiens—the sort of bulletproof stalwarts that survive on city streets. Instead, Sinai Temple's Morris and Julia Gold Sculpture Garden features opulent flowers such as roses and lilies, and a vivid array of foliage plants that include chartreuse asparagus ferns, 'Maori Chief' flax, aloes and Australian willows. It's a tucked-away urban oasis, the enclosing wall blocking bus fumes and discouraging drop-in pedestrians. Its earthen path invites meandering. Its stone benches offer rest and encourage contemplation of Jewish history and tradition.

Consider the garden's art. Amid lavenders and euphorbias, the sculpted, fallen fruit of Rona Pondick's stainless-steel "Apple Tree" evokes Adam and Eve's first garden. In the granite "Stairway" near the path's end, artist Jene Highstein alludes to Jacob's dream of angels rising to heaven on a ladder.

Euphorbia and echeveria bloom along a garden path among acanthus, woolly thyme and dwarf New Zealand flax. Opposite: The stainless steel "Apple Tree" sculpture by artist Rona Pondick is part of the garden's biblical theme. Garden designer Judy Kameon created a surrounding border of 'Goodwin Creek' lavender, 'Maori Chief' flax, *Euphorbia characias wulfenii* and lime thyme.





A garden path flanked by pygmy palms, lavender, white roses and assorted succulents leads to a fountain made from a Utah buff stone, above. Feathery Australian willows and olive trees surround Jene Highstein's sculpture "Stairway," which was inspired by the Old Testament story of Jacob's ladder to heaven, right.

Most of the plants, too, are mentioned somewhere in the Old Testament. Olives feature prominently in Genesis. Hosea mentions lilies, and roses play their part in the Song of Solomon. Even the rock fountain at the garden's heart comes straight from the Book of Numbers, in which Moses produces water from stone so that thirsty multitudes can drink.

"We wanted beauty here but we also wanted resonance," says Nancy Kattler, a Cheviot Hills art consultant who helped the temple take the project from seed money to planting on the narrow plot of a former playground. In 1999, when Richard and Harriet Gold gave initial funding for a garden to honor Richard's parents, the spot was bare dirt with some rusty remnants of play equipment. Kattler conceived the biblical theme and headed a temple committee to select sculptors to create related art. She and her group also hired L.A. garden designer Judy Kameon of Elysian Landscapes to shape the space and choose plants from a list of biblical quotations. "I pictured a place where it might seem you were literally walking through the Bible," Kattler says.

In the spring of 2001, Kameon began to turn the 80-by-25-foot sliver of ground into a strolling garden that would shine during Jewish High Holy Days in fall. She planted fluid, naturalistic beds to offset the area's "bowling-alley" feel. To encourage exploration, she developed plant zones that progress from quiet greens and grays to the heated golds and oranges of flowering cannas, kangaroo paws and alstroemerias. These warm-hued plants, along with white 'Iceberg' roses and verbena, bloom in summer and persist sporadically through







A stone bench set among agaves, aeoniums and New Zealand flax offers a resting spot under the trees, above. Alstroemeria add a splash of color in a planting bed, right.

September. Come spring, the lavenders and euphorbias thrive in beds Kameon organized around Pondick's "Apple Tree." But the landscape's backbone plants are the textural greens, such as small-leaved myrtle, bristly juniper, acanthus and olives, which are all rooted in the Bible.

"Biblical plants belong essentially to a Mediterranean palette, which is great for our climate," Kameon says. "Here and there, I interpreted the list loosely to keep my plantings appropriate."

The olives she planted are fruitless instead of the messy alternative, and the garden's asparagus ferns drink less water than other ferns. Similarly, Australian willows are a dry-climate facsimile of thirstier willows.

Despite its water-wise and generally low-maintenance character, the Gold garden rustles with trees, which Kameon says "create a canopy throughout a hot, exposed space." Crafted from a hunk of Utah buff stone, the fountain provides another cooling element for people strolling after services.

Rabbi David Wolpe calls his temple's garden "a tribute to God, the source of beauty," adding that "art is the human way of imitating God's creation. Originally, the world was meant to be a garden. Creating a garden around a synagogue reminds us of our spiritual roots. And to have that beauty and meaning next to Wilshire Boulevard, with all its noisy commerce and traffic, is truly a gift." <

