



FROM THE EDITORS

Growing up in Rubidoux in the 1980s, the Fourth of July meant watching the fireworks, and waiting for the fire. Cars would line the old Stater Brothers parking lot, family lawn chairs and coolers staking out asphalt “picnic spaces,” AM radios blaring the local station’s simulcast of Americana music. First the fireworks would light up the sky, hues of pink and blue and gold exploding from the top of the mountain, illuminating the night sky between our quarry town and the orange trees and Victorians of Riverside, beyond. Inevitably, just as the 1812 Overture began, someone would spot the first flame. Embers had come down, still hot, on the parched brush. By the time the show ended, the grass fire would be raging. Residents would remain, transfixed, as the Americana simulcast returned to country and western, watching their mountain burn.

Of course, fires should never be romanticized. They are swift, powerful, and destructive forces. More times than not, those Fourth of July fires, quickly doused by nearby firefighters, were followed by others, blackening the Inland Empire sky, sending residents to rooftops with hoses, forcing a week of indoor summer play. There is a fine line between the beauty of an unintended outbreak and the stark fear of the wildfire raging beyond our control. Of this we are reminded on the hundredth birthday of the state ballot initiative, that feature of our constitution that spawns armies of signature gatherers and constitutional chaos. The reformers who created the process had laudable goals. But like embers from a skyrocket, the unintended consequences have taken on a life of their own.

Yet in the right place, at the right time, fires are just what we need to clear the underbrush, fertilize the soil, and make space for sunlight and new growth. This issue of *Boom* reminds us that in spite of the state’s reputation for superficiality, and its picture-perfect postcard-ready façade, life here is enriched by the pleasures of dissonance and driven by the quest for the unexpected. Radio waves transport Spanish-language jokes of la migra through Los Angeles’s immigrant neighborhoods, turning

uncertainties into knowledge, fear into laughter. Newly popular landscape tours reveal our appetite for quirky places and singular characters who might teach us far more about the meaning of home than the vacuous vistas of California advertising. Under the radar of our politics of division and animosity, The Proud Bird—restaurant/banquet hall/monument—enacts a hidden history of migration and inclusion—just take a seat. Somewhere the sounds of Fairouz and Peter Gabriel are still mingling, putting a child to sleep to a lullaby of disharmony, comforting and real.

It's easy in a place like California to stay fixated on the fireworks. The pretty patterns draw us in. But most of us who live here know better than to be fooled by promises of controlled explosions. California is on the edges, where embers ignite. In dissonant tunes and unexpected laughter and interwoven lives, unplanned fires burn, and our view shifts from the sky to the earth. History suggests we should applaud these outbreaks—and keep our hoses nearby.

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