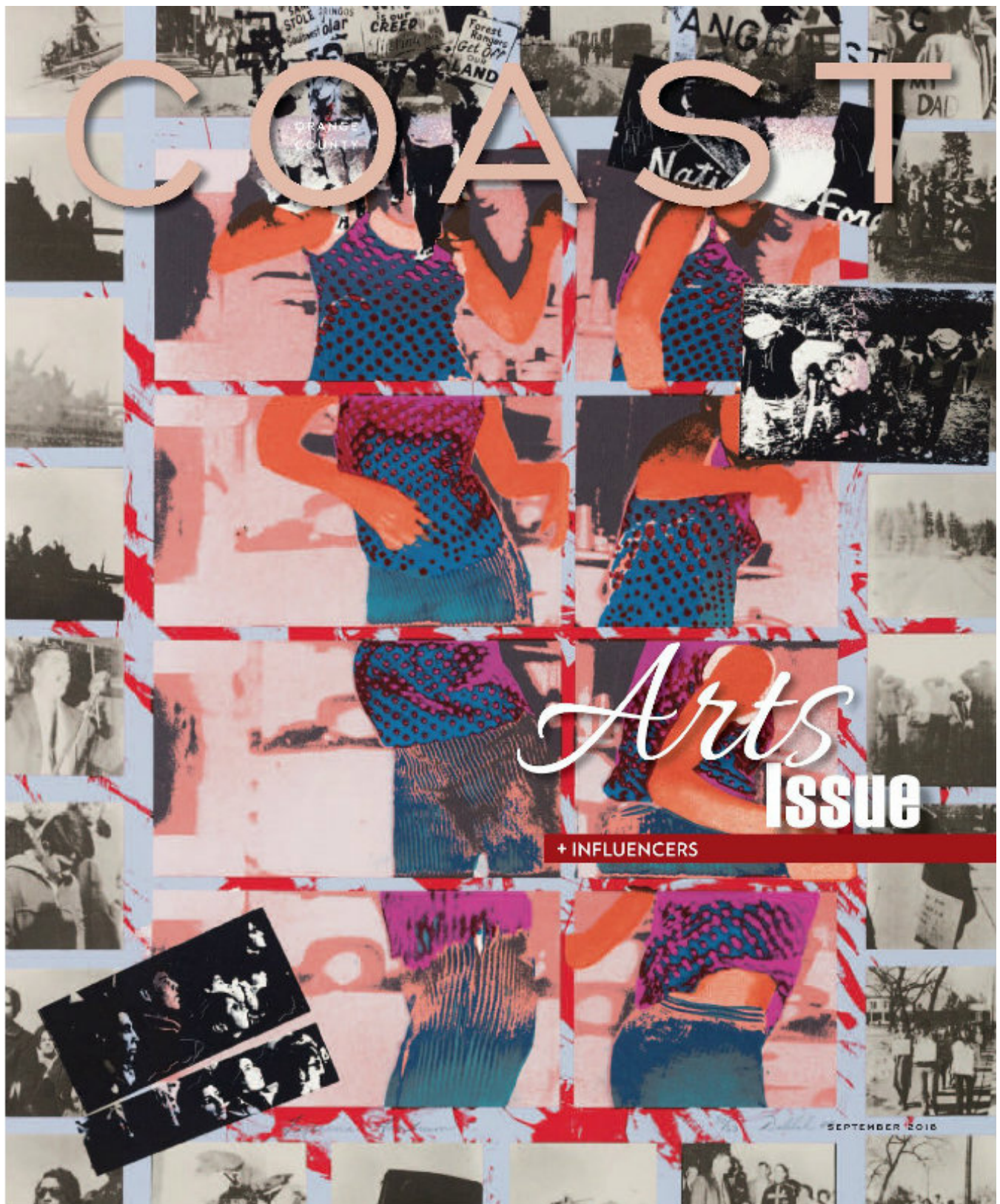


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MARTIN A. BROWER'S

Along the Coast



Laguna Art Museum

LAGUNA ICONS GET A LIFT

Upgrades are underway on two Laguna Beach cultural icons – **Laguna Art Museum** and **Laguna Playhouse**.

Renovations wrap up this month on the museum's two lower galleries, both closed since February. Included is a 20 percent expansion of the galleries and an enlargement of the passageway between them. Design work was provided pro bono by **Anders Lasater Architects**, Laguna Beach.

Renovations to the Laguna Playhouse begin in November, when the playhouse is typically dark, if approvals are received from the city. The \$200,000 upgrade will include a wall of stainless steel mesh facing Laguna Canyon Road and a coating of smooth stucco to the exterior. A change in color palette will be reflected in new tile hardscape in the courtyard, metal canopies, lighting, landscaping and redesigned box office windows. Theater-goers will also see a new sign program, with colorful banners heralding current and coming productions.



Lido Villas

LINING UP FOR LIDO VILLAS

Pre-sales for **Lido Villas**, the 23-townhome collection developed by Landsea, Irvine, on a 1.2-acre triangular site in Newport Beach, will begin in October, and reports are that a long waiting list is developing.

Adjacent to the newly redeveloped Lido Marina Village and near the just-opened Lido House hotel, the 23 townhomes are offered in four floor plans ranging from 1,716 to 2,289 square feet. Pricing will be in the mid-\$2 millions.

Landsea, a subsidiary of a Chinese company, purchased the site for an undisclosed amount in October 2017 from **NPBay Investors**, which had gained full approvals for 23 townhomes from the city of Newport Beach and the California Coastal Commission.

VR INTRIGUE

That ultra-modern single-story building under construction at Jamboree Road and Michelson Drive in Irvine, the former site of St. John Knits, is a 155,000-square-foot creative office building developed by **LBA Realty**, Irvine. Even before completion, the entire building has been leased by a single tenant – the largest office lease in Orange County thus far this year.

Filling the entire building will be **Anduril Industries**, a tech startup founded by **Palmer Luckey**. Luckey designed the Oculus Rift, a virtual reality system, and co-founded **Oculus VR**, which was sold to Facebook for \$2 billion. Anduril plans to combine virtual reality with surveillance tools to build hardware/software systems for the defense and law enforcement industries. Luckey forecasts major job growth for his firm, eventually filling the new space.

FIVE LAGUNAS UPDATE

South County readers of this column keep asking what's happening to **Five Lagunas**, the promised \$260 million transformation of the aging Laguna Hills Mall into a 926,000-square-foot urban village. The same question is being asked by the city of Laguna Hills.

The retail development firm **Merlone Geier Partners**, San Francisco, purchased the 68-acre failing Laguna Hills Mall for \$110 million in 2013 from the giant **Simon Property Group**, Indianapolis. Simon had considered renewing the property over the years but never made a move.

First of the majors to close was Sears. That was expected, and Merlone Geier purchased the Sears building and site with the concept of developing a 1,000-unit apartment community on that portion of the property. Many malls have added or are considering adding apartments.

In 2016 the firm broke ground on what it called Five Lagunas, an urban center that would draw from the five communities in the area with Laguna in their names. Plans included a luxury 14-screen cinema, a fitness center, and shops and restaurants. But suddenly, last March, Macy's closed – a key loss.

Back to the drawing board went the development firm to plan around the Macy's departure. Then bam! JCPenney announced its store will close in October. So no major department stores. A clean slate?

Merlone Geier is still positive, saying, "This is an opportunity to reinvigorate Five Lagunas in a new and comprehensive way." The city, the local residents, and the retail industry are waiting to see what the firm presents.

