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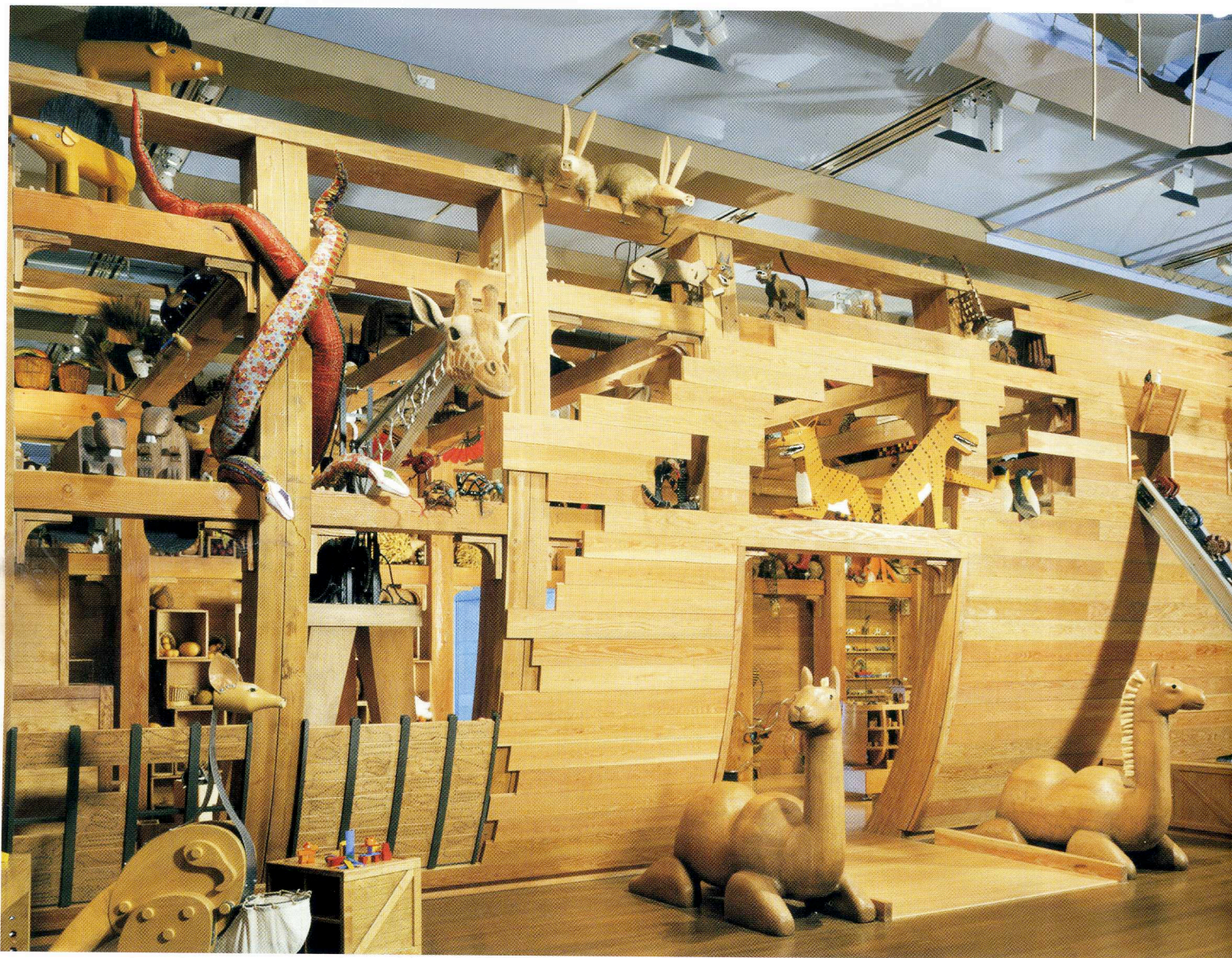
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Animal Magnetism

A new Noah's Ark is floated in Los Angeles.

It was like asking Lars von Trier to make a Disney film, or Philip Roth to write a picture book, but the architects at the Seattle firm Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen—best known for sophisticated urban residence projects—knew exactly what to do when they were hired by L.A.'s Skirball Cultural Center to design an 8,000-square-foot children's museum based on the story of Noah and the flood. To ensure that the center's latest bid to drum up in-

terest in Jewish heritage would attract a crowd, the firm put together a kiddie focus group and asked their subjects what they liked best about the Noah story. "Over and over again they drew the animals boarding the ark on a ramp, 'two by two,'" Alan Maskin, a principal at the firm, says. The adults took it from there.

They began by sculpting the main exhibition room into a massive wooden ark set against a backdrop of stormy skies, then populated it with a whimsical menagerie handcrafted by the Brooklyn-based artist and puppeteer Chris Green. Some of the 186 species of animals are actual puppets, and many are made from found objects: A ship's wheel becomes part of a giraffe's belly, while children's boxing gloves are repurposed as the heads

of a pair of kiwis. "I spent a lot of time trying to choose objects that reflected the stature and shape of the animal," says Green. "There's been some eBay shopping, and some scouring of antique stores and junk shops—I even found some pieces literally in the street, while walking to my studio."

Green, who studied comparative religion in college and once taught puppetry in India to young Tibetan refugees, finds as much variety in his Biblical theme as Noah represented among his cargo. "This is a vision that's not specifically geared to one community. It's a story that's related to other stories, in other traditions, about being a collective, being a steward," he says. "Who would argue with that message?"

www.skirball.org — DIANE VADINO

