The Annenberg Community Beach House project is the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the historic 5 1/2-acre Marion Davies Estate originally constructed in the 1920s.

The design of the new pool house reinterprets the key historical elements of the original structure. Central to the architect’s design was the reinvention of the original columns through the use of symbolic columns along the pool house exterior.

The architect’s aesthetic vision called for a highly refined concrete mixture and special form system to create these columns. The precaster worked closely with the architect to develop samples of the mixture, final texture, and lift/brace points. The resulting precast concrete columns, with their perfect color, shape, and harmony, are as dramatic as the columns of nearly a century ago.

So what's so special about the beach house? Hollywood history. For as long as they've made films in Hollywood, those with power and money have flocked to Santa Monica. In the 1920s, the beach north of the Santa Monica Pier was known as the Gold Coast because the people who built houses there were rich and celebrated, among them were four of the men who created Hollywood; Irving Thalberg and his wife, actress Norma Shearer, oil man J. Paul Getty, comedian Harold Lloyd and leading man Douglas Fairbanks.

William Randolph Hearst might have been the first media mogul of the 20th Century. In his day, Hearst owned newspapers and magazines, radio stations and movie companies. Santa Monica’s Gold Coast was so desirable that in 1929, Hearst, one of the richest and most powerful men in America, commissioned Julia Morgan (the architect of the Hearst Castle) to fashion an estate for his mistress,
actress Marion Davies. Morgan had already established herself as a premier architect and she is considered to be the most important female architect of the first half of the 20th Century. The Georgian mansion she created had 110 rooms, including a room covered in gold leaf with more than thirty-five fireplaces. The estate also had a pool with marble staircases and tennis courts. Called "The Beach House," it was the grandest property in the neighborhood at a cost rumored at $7 million. The Beach House served as Davies’ primary residence from 1929 to 1942 and was the backdrop against which Davies and Hearst threw lavish parties, solidifying their reputation as the power couple of Hollywood.

The property was sold in the 1940s to a private party, then the State took it over and leased it to the Sand and Sea hotel and beach club. But the mansion didn't have enough bedrooms to make it as a hotel and all but the pool, servants’ quarters and tennis courts was demolished in the late 1950s.

Then the 1994 Northridge earthquake rattled the property to its foundation and all structures except the beach café were designated unsafe to occupy. A while later, the City tried to find a private party willing to fund the $18 million rehabilitation project. Walter Annenberg’s daughter and advisor to the Annenberg Foundation, one of this country’s leading philanthropic organizations, awarded a $21 million grant to help restore, renovate and reopen the former Marion Davies estate.

In April 2009 the beach house reopened as a public recreation spot and renamed the Annenberg Community Beach House. Since then, this beach house has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Santa Monica area.

For more information, please visit: http://beachhouse.smgov.net/