History Perseveres: Pacific Telephone Building

A soaring urban monument, the Art Deco office building at 140 New Montgomery languished for nearly six years until social media trailblazer Yelp relocated its headquarters to the rehabilitated Timothy Pflueger-designed skyscraper last fall. STORY ON PAGE 6

Heritage has a long history as a thoughtful and credible voice in the preservation of San Francisco’s rich architectural identity. Our organization has touched the day-to-day lives of many, many San Franciscans through its advocacy efforts aimed at preserving the best in our urban environment.

And yet, Heritage is not quite a household name in San Francisco. In recent months, our staff has made tremendous strides in bringing Heritage to the attention of a much wider audience through strategic partnerships with other non-profits, as well as government and private organizations.

For instance, through the forthcoming citywide Latino historic context study, we have formed an alliance with the San Francisco Latino Historical Society and published Calle 24: Cuentos del Barrio, a self-guided walking tour booklet. Our summer youth program, Discover SF!, will continue to engage dozens of local students through a budding collaboration with the National Park Service. We have also established a new association with the San Francisco Chapter of the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA). Mike Buhler has actively forged alliances and found common ground with BOMA’s historic building committee, work that has resulted in an exciting joint effort between our organizations! Together, we have produced a handsome deck of playing cards featuring vintage photos of historic San Francisco commercial buildings (page three). These partnerships represent the very best of our efforts to fulfill our mission of outreach and education.

Reaching new audiences, early this year Heritage was accepted into Whole Foods Market’s “Nickels for Nonprofits” program at their Franklin Street location. When customers bring in their own bags for groceries, they have the option of receiving a ten-cent credit or donating the savings to a selected nonprofit organization. Through April, “SF Heritage” will be displayed at every register, with more information about Heritage and the Haas-Lilienthal House featured on their community bulletin board.

These developments are just a few examples of how Heritage is raising its visibility and connecting with a broader, more diverse population in our city. All of these efforts are buttressed by our new membership levels, in which the individual rate has been lowered to $40. This change brings us in line with local preservation organizations across the country and makes joining Heritage accessible to a larger constituency, helping us become known to many more households in San Francisco. The update followed considerable research on membership categories and dues in similar organizations.

To close, I would like to note that our annual Soirée is fast approaching! We have a wonderful venue – The Palace of Fine Arts designed by Bernard Maybeck. This elegant event will commence alongside the lagoon and under the Palace dome. We will then move inside for a seated dinner and the rest of the evening’s activities. Please be sure to request an invitation.
“Splendid Survivors” Playing Cards
Heritage and BOMA Partner to Commemorate the City’s Iconic Architecture

Last fall, Heritage and the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of San Francisco embarked on a new partnership to create a one-of-a-kind gift in celebration of the city’s distinguished historic architecture. BOMA San Francisco, which is one of the city’s oldest business organizations and the largest to represent the commercial real estate industry, counts among its members dozens of historic downtown properties.

The first-edition deck of playing cards, “San Francisco’s Splendid Survivors,” features 52 sepia-toned images of historic buildings, including 44 landmarks built between 1872 and 1938. The cards come in a linen finish with a black core and arrive in a hard, clear plastic “clamshell” gift case.

Many of the photos in the 56-card deck are from Heritage’s unique archive, including images from the 1978 downtown survey that inspired the 1979 publication of Splendid Survivors: Downtown San Francisco’s Architectural Heritage, authored by historian Michael Corbett. Featured properties include the Audiffred Building, Hallidie Building, Hibernia Bank, Hobart Building, and Shell Building. The card backs include a detail from the lobby of the recently-renovated Pacific Telephone Building, featured on page six.

The sepia-toned playing cards first debuted in December 2013. Each deck is available for $10 (plus shipping) and may be purchased online at sfheritage.org or at upcoming Heritage events.

Five Questions with Edward Duran, Taquería La Cumbre

1. WHAT IS THE STORY BEHIND THE RESTAURANT’S OPENING?
Micaela and Raul Duran, the original owners of Taquería La Cumbre, first began selling their now-famous “Mission-style burritos” at the modest lunch counter in the corner of their meat market at 515 Valencia Street in 1969. As their burritos gained in popularity, the couple expanded the market into a restaurant in 1972.

2. FAVORITE MEMORY OR STORY ABOUT LA CUMBRE?
Flour tortillas were not widely available in the early 1970s, so Micaela and Raul hired a Mission High School student to make them from scratch each morning before school. The young man was Jorge Santana, who would eventually go on to play guitar in the classic Latin Rock band, Malo.

3. WHAT SETS LA CUMBRE APART FROM OTHER RESTAURANTS IN SAN FRANCISCO?
Micaela and Raul ran their restaurant with a simple philosophy: provide only the finest and freshest ingredients in every serving. Those who love authentic Mexican dishes will appreciate our traditional burritos, tacos, and enchiladas. For seafood lovers, we sauté our fresh fish and wild Gulf Tiger prawns in a delectable garlic, lemon, and wine sauce.

4. DOES LA CUMBRE HAVE ANY SPECIAL TRADITIONS?
We carry on a tradition of love for the arts. Our hand-carved table bases were produced on-site by a Mexican artist in 1967. Muralist David Brieno painted the artwork in the back of the restaurant, which features an Aztec ritual anticipating the arrival of Cortés. Last, but not least, our 100-year-old statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe has resided at the restaurant since the early 1970s, leaving only once for the bicentennial celebration at Mission Dolores in 1986.

5. ARE YOU KNOWN FOR ANY SIGNATURE ITEMS?
Our Mission-style burrito!
San Francisco is known across the globe as a center of queer culture and activism, rendering it a fitting locale for leadership in LGBT preservation. Last fall, historians Shayne Watson and Donna Graves submitted a successful grant application to the City of San Francisco’s Historic Preservation Fund Committee to develop a citywide historic context statement about LGBT history. The project is sponsored by the GLBT Historical Society.

The study, expected early 2015, will document important themes, people, and places associated with the city’s diverse LGBT communities from the 19th century through the 1980s. The project officially launched during a community meeting held at The Women’s Building in the Mission District in November 2013. Co-presented by Heritage, The Women’s Building, and the GLBT Historical Society, the event invited community members to share their personal stories and insights about significant themes, neighborhoods, and places.

Only three San Francisco Landmarks have been designated for their association with LGBT history: the Castro Camera and Harvey Milk Residence, the Jose Theater/NAMES Project, and Twin Peaks Tavern, all located in the Castro. While the Castro neighborhood will certainly be a subject of further inquiry, Graves and Watson plan to uncover lesser-known histories as well. The stories of bisexuals, queer people of color, and transgendered people, for example, will be a major focus. Upon its completion, the report will guide City agencies, preservation professionals, and communities involved in the preservation and interpretation of LGBT historic sites.

While the study will be groundbreaking in its breadth, it is not the first to document the city’s LGBT history. In 2004, the Friends of 1800 published the country’s first LGBT historic context statement, “Sexing the City: The Development of Sexual Identity Based Subcultures in San Francisco, 1933-1979,” providing a foundation for queer preservation in the city and future studies. Page & Turnbull prepared a draft report in 2010 for the Western SoMa Community Task Force: “Recognizing, Protecting and Memorializing South of Market LGBTQ Social Heritage Neighborhood Resources.” Both reports document significant aspects of the city’s LGBT history, identify important sites, and provide recommendations for their preservation and interpretation.

The topic has also engaged preservationists in Los Angeles and Washington D.C. The City of Los Angeles was awarded a grant last year from the California Office of Historic Preservation to survey LGBT historic sites. The National Park Service also announced its “LGBTQ Theme Study” in 2013 to identify sites of national significance for potential listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, the project teams in San Francisco and Los Angeles received funding from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for a Historypin project on LGBT sites, sponsored by the California Preservation Foundation. These local initiatives will help identify sites for potential listing in national, state, and local registers.
Plans Unveiled for Civic Center School of the Arts
Proposal Would Retain Certain Historic Buildings

At a special school board meeting in January, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) presented plans to move the Ruth Asawa School of the Arts (SOTA) to the Civic Center, tapping SFJAZZ Center architect Mark Cavagnero to revive plans for a new campus on the block bounded by Van Ness Avenue, Hayes Street, Franklin Street, and Fell Street.

The new proposal would retain and reuse the former High School of Commerce (135 Van Ness), including the historic Nourse Auditorium. 135 Van Ness is expected to house the new high school, as well as an arts and education resource center for the school district. The library building on Fell Street and the gymnasium along Hayes Street -- both eligible historical resources -- would be demolished and replaced with a new entry plaza and infill construction. The Newton J. Tharp Commercial High School, located at 170 Fell Street, is not proposed for inclusion in the SOTA program, but rather would be marketed as a private development opportunity.

The project site occupies part of the local San Francisco Civic Center Landmark District, significant for its association with the City Beautiful Movement and the 1945 founding of the United Nations. One of the most significant structures on the site is 170 Fell Street, a yellow brick Renaissance Revival-style structure built in 1910 at Grove and Polk and moved to its current location in 1913. The other, the High School of Commerce, was built in 1926 and represents the Civic Center’s only Spanish Colonial Revival-style building. Both are designated City Landmarks.

After a remarkable early history, the High School of Commerce experienced a long decline and continues to languish. The building is unusable as a school in its current state because it fails to meet seismic safety standards for public schools required under the Field Act. It has housed SFUSD’s administrative offices since 1951. 170 Fell Street, which suffered major damage during the Loma Prieta earthquake, has been mothballed for a quarter century.

The idea to relocate the SOTA to the block surfaced in the 1990s. SFUSD has since put forth several redevelopment proposals, some contemplating demolition, but regulatory roadblocks and a lack of funding have hampered progress. Following Ruth Asawa’s death last summer, the concept has gained new traction. On January 15, the school board unanimously endorsed a resolution to pursue the $242 million needed to create the proposed complex. Heritage will thoroughly review the project and its potential impacts on historic resources as plans develop further.
One of San Francisco’s most celebrated structures, the Pacific Telephone Building, sat vacant for nearly six years until developer Wilson Meany completed its rehabilitation of the iconic building in 2013. Built in 1925 for the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company, the era’s premier West Coast communications company, Timothy Pflueger’s 26-story Art Deco tower made an emphatic statement on the city’s landscape as one of its first modern skyscrapers. With Yelp having signed a 100,000-square-foot lease through 2020, 140 New Montgomery has been imbued with new life as home to one of the nation’s leading technology firms.

Pflueger’s Masterwork Invigorates Downtown

In the years following World War I, San Francisco underwent an economic boom, prompting a wave of new construction in the city’s Downtown and Financial District. Technological advances led to the expansion of the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company, which sought to consolidate its employees into one building. When the company decided to commission a 20-story skyscraper for its new headquarters, it invited five leading San Francisco architecture firms...
to submit proposals. The winning design came from Miller & Pflueger, representing the firm’s largest commission until then.

As the building’s principal architect, Pflueger was inspired by the concept of communication while invoking modern and Asian influences to enliven his design. Opening in May 1925, the result was a magnificent Art Deco skyscraper built in an F-shape plan with three setbacks. Intended to be visible from all sides, the tower was clad in white and gray speckled terra cotta, a material popularized during the 1920s, and emblazoned with eight 13-foot-tall eagles at its crest.

As the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company was a subsidiary of the American Bell Telephone Company, Pflueger adorned its main façade with the parent company’s “Bell” symbol, in addition to several architectural details suggestive of 1920s-era telephones. Asian references included a large grille on the front elevation evocative of a Chinese screen and a hand-painted ceiling pattern in the front lobby that depicts horned deer, a symbol of longevity, and phoenixes.

Other interior features included a sleek tile and steel cafeteria on the 22nd floor for the company’s mostly-female workforce, an auditorium on the 26th floor for technological presentations, and a board room on the 18th floor adorned with a mural by Arthur Mathews.

At the time of construction, the Pacific Telephone Building was San Francisco’s tallest skyscraper and one of the tallest on the West Coast. The icon influenced the next generation of San Francisco architects and remains one of the city’s most revered buildings. An early milestone for Pflueger, the commission spurred a long and successful career for the architect. He went on to design or consult on many renowned projects, including 450 Sutter, Pacific Stock Exchange, and the Paramount Theatre in Oakland, and was one of the architects of the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition.

Revitalizing 140 New Montgomery

American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T), the parent company of the American Bell Telephone Company, maintained ownership of the building until 2007, when it was sold to Wilson Meany and Stockbridge Capital Group. The developers originally planned to convert the skyscraper into luxury condominiums, but the project was delayed due to the 2008 economic collapse. In 2010, when the city witnessed a dramatic increase in demand for office space, the new owners elected to preserve the building’s original use to attract technology companies vying for space in San Francisco’s Central Corridor. The opportunity caught Yelp’s attention, which relocated its 500 employees to 140 New Montgomery in 2013. With space to accommodate 800 employees, anchor tenant Yelp has room to grow.

Rehabilitation work commenced in early 2012, sensitively guided and executed by project architect Perkins+Will, preservation architect Page & Turnbull, and general contractor Plant Construction. In addition to seismic, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing upgrades, many of the building’s historic architectural features were restored. Among the preserved spaces is the opulent Art Deco lobby with detailed bronze doors and a hand-painted plaster ceiling. On the exterior, the building’s distinctive terra cotta piers and 13-foot-tall eagle statues have also been restored. In addition, the interior marble staircase, vintage light fixtures, historic “Bell” symbols, marble toilet partitions, and office doors and frames were repaired and preserved. The original mailbox in the lobby has been creatively repurposed as an interactive interpretive kiosk. Interesting new features include the installation of 1,300 operable windows, bike accommodations, and exposure of the building’s interior brick and concrete walls and ceilings. More than half of the floors feature 360-degree views of San Francisco.

Looking to the Future

In 2009, San Francisco Heritage awarded Wilson Meany and their architect an award for “Best Proposed Adaptive Reuse” for the condo-conversion plan originally proposed for the Telephone Building. While the earlier plan recommended a sensitive treatment for the historic building, the final plan and ensuing project represent an even greater success by maintaining the original use.

140 New Montgomery offers the same high ceilings and open floor plans as the single-story warehouse buildings that have attracted many of the technology firms relocating to the city’s Central Corridor and South of Market areas, but within an Art Deco tower. With companies such as Salesforce.com, Airbnb, Zendesk, Autodesk, Mozilla, Yammer, and Zoosk moving to these neighborhoods, Yelp’s new home at 140 New Montgomery connects the southern Financial District to SoMa and the Yerba Buena Arts District.

Editor’s note: This article was corrected for online publication. Special thanks to Therese Poletti for contributing to this article.
Ten Mills Act Contracts Approved
Board of Supervisors Extends Tax Relief to Owners of Historic Properties

In the year since San Francisco’s Mills Act program was revamped in mid-2012, the City has more than doubled its total number of Mills Act contracts, providing unprecedented access to the State’s most important economic incentive for historic property owners. The Mills Act reduces property taxes — sometimes by 50 percent or more — in exchange for a ten-year commitment by the owner to make specific improvements to the building. Eligible applicants include owners of locally designated Landmarks and contributors to local historic districts, as well as properties listed in the National Register, whether individually or as contributors to a historic district. Heritage advocated for Mills Act reform for nearly a decade and played a crucial role in shaping the 2012 amendments that have made it easier for San Franciscans to realize tax savings under the city’s Mills Act program.

As fully described in the Fall 2012 issue of Heritage News, the amendments were introduced by Supervisor Scott Wiener in collaboration with the Planning Department and Heritage. The Historic Preservation Commission and the Planning Commission both made further refinements to the legislation. Significant changes included reduced application fees, standardized application and contract forms, and an annual application deadline of May 1. Automatic eligibility is limited to properties with an assessed valuation of $3 million or less for single-family dwellings and $5 million or less for multi-unit residential, commercial, or industrial properties, although an exemption from these caps may be granted by the Board of Supervisors for “particularly significant” buildings, for which a Historic Structure Report has been completed.

The first property to qualify for a Mills Act contract post-legislation was the Nightingale House (Landmark No. 47).

In December 2013, the Board of Supervisors approved ten new Mills Act contracts, including seven contributing properties to the newly-created Duboce Park Landmark District. The proliferation of new Mills Act applications, and their swift approval by the Historic Preservation Commission and Board of Supervisors, demonstrates that the City’s Mills Act reforms are working as intended. This new slate of contracts, in particular, represents an important milestone for preservation in San Francisco, signaling greater economic opportunities for dedicated stewards of the city’s historic architecture.

For more information about San Francisco’s Mills Act program, please visit sf-planning.org.
Soirée 2014 at the Palace of Fine Arts

Each year, San Francisco Heritage celebrates the city’s unique architectural character with our Soirée. We are pleased to announce that Soirée 2014 will be at the Palace of Fine Arts on Saturday, May 10. Inspired by the elegance of this most exquisite venue and the era that created it, this black-tie event will feature cocktails under the rotunda, fine dining, dancing, casino gaming, and a stellar silent auction.

Designed by Bernard Maybeck to showcase fine art for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, the Palace inspired a campaign to preserve the structure as a permanent landmark even before the fair’s closing, with none other than architect Willis Polk declaring, “In all the ages was never a more beautiful building…”

Polk himself had originally received the commission for the building, but was displeased with the location, a water-filled bog that he deemed the worst site on the fairgrounds. Maybeck, who worked for Polk as a draftsman at the time, tried to persuade him to see the bog as a design opportunity. Still unenthused, Polk departed for the Bohemian Grove and tasked his staff with holding an intra-office design competition for the fair’s fine arts palace. Maybeck’s proposal emerged the winner and, after a favorable response from the Exposition's architectural board, Polk relinquished his commission.

The rotunda dome and colonnades were originally erected as stuccoed wood-framed temporary structures, but they would be faithfully reconstructed in permanent materials in 1964. In 2003, the Maybeck Foundation and the City of San Francisco launched a successful public-private partnership and capital campaign to restore and seismically retrofit the dome, rotunda, colonnades, and lagoon. All work was completed in 2010.

As we approach its centennial, please join Heritage in celebrating the Palace of Fine Arts and all whose vision and extraordinary efforts have helped to preserve it for generations to come. Stroll through the colonnades, and enjoy cocktails under the stars, followed by a spectacular dinner dance and entertainment. Prizes for the “super-silent auction” will include dinner at the French Laundry, an art tour of Oliver Ranch, and a private behind-the-scenes tour of Alcatraz, plus much more! With marvelous entertainment and one-of-a-kind auction items, there promises to be something for everyone.

Please join us for a sensational Soirée! For information about underwriting or to receive an invitation, contact Director of Membership and Development Carolyn Squeri at csqueri@sfheritage.org or 415-441-3000 x14. Special thanks to our community partners: SF Recreation and Park Department and Cyrus Noble.
In Gratitude
Honoring Contributions in 2013

Heritage wishes to express its sincere thanks to the following for their generous contributions this past year to Heritage, the Haas-Lilienthal House, and the 2013 Annual Fund:

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New Membership Levels and Exciting Benefits to Enjoy Nationwide

Heritage is pleased to announce new membership categories! Our basic individual membership dues have been reduced to $40 annually, and we have re-introduced the popular Senior/Student membership category at $30. Other membership levels remain the same, with the exception of new categories with enhanced benefits, including Cable Car City ($250), City by the Bay ($2,500), and City that Knows How ($5,000).

Beginning in mid-2014, we are thrilled to offer fantastic new member perks around San Francisco and the country. All current Heritage members will receive personalized Membership Cards to activate the following benefits. Please watch for yours in the mail!

For annual members at or above the $125 Splendid Survivor level, Heritage is now a proud partner of two national reciprocal networks of museums and historical and cultural institutions. Through the Reciprocal Organization of Associated Museums (ROAM) and Time Travelers, our qualifying members will receive admission privileges for two and discounts at gift shops and cafés at over 500 institutions throughout the United States and Canada, including:

» San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, California Historical Society, Walt Disney Family Museum, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
» Berkeley: UC Berkeley Art Museum, Botanical Gardens, and Pacific Film Archive
» Los Angeles: Heritage Square Museum and Museum of Contemporary Art
» Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery, Hillwood Estate and Gardens, and Phillips Collection

For complete lists of participating organizations, visit sites.google.com/site/roammuseums and timetravelers.mohistory.org.

In addition, select Legacy Bars & Restaurants will periodically offer special promotions, discounts, and special events for card-carrying Heritage members. Please watch for these announcements on our website, social media, and monthly E-News and Events emails.

To showcase the expanded roster of categories and benefits, Heritage recently published a redesigned, full-color membership brochure, available for download on our website and in hard copy at upcoming events. For complete information about becoming a Heritage member, please visit sfheritage.org/join or contact Carolyn Squeri at csqueri@sfheritage.org or 415-441-3000 x14.

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