

Component Feature: AIA San Francisco – Collaboration and Celebration

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AIA San Francisco is celebrating, and we have many reasons to do so! 2006 marks 125 years of our service to the community and to the profession. Mayor Gavin Newsom declared September “Architecture and The City” month. And, on October 3, we reopened our offices in the historic Hallidie Building after a complete interior remodel. In this article, I offer my thanks to all who have made this such a successful year, and I share my own thoughts about what makes AIA San Francisco an exciting, dynamic, and leading organization. In looking at the significance of each of these events, we get a glimpse at who we are as an organization, how we got to this point in our history, and where we might go in the future.

In celebration of our milestone anniversary, the chapter, with the support of McGraw-Hill Construction, created a publication, *Celebrating 125 Years of San Francisco Architecture and Architects*. This publication serves as a touchstone for the events and ideas that have led the chapter to the present. The images are a snapshot of buildings that stand as testament to the profession’s vision, and the commentary offers us a challenge to envision the future. Sally Woodbridge, Tim Culvahouse, FAIA, Craig W. Hartman, FAIA, Ali Moghaddasi, Pierluigi Serraino, and Marshall Foster help us look at San Francisco—Then, Now, and Tomorrow. If you would like a copy of this publication, please contact us at aiasf.org. Another activity designed to help us celebrate was AIA San Francisco’s inaugural exhibition in our remodeled space, *Informing the Future of Bay Area Architecture: 125 Years of Architectural Traditions, Technology, and Innovation*. This exciting exhibit tells the history of San Francisco through its buildings. It highlights important architectural works in San Francisco and Marin County over the last 125 years through the trends and technologies that made them possible, from adobe to glass. Charles Chase, AIA, of San Francisco Architectural Heritage, curated the exhibit, with significant support from Architectural Resources Group, Architects and Planners.

2006 marks the third year in which a month-long series of more than fifty lectures, tours, films, and exhibits shines a spotlight on San Francisco and its architecture. This architectural festival appeals to both professionals and the general public as it engages everyone to experience the city in new ways. While the festival is organized and presented by AIA San Francisco and its newest offspring, The Center for Architecture + Design, it represents the efforts of hundreds of volunteers, numerous partners, and sponsors who make the festival possible. This year, more than any other year, the press covered the festival’s every move, and most events witnessed record turnouts. One of the most popular activities, the San Francisco Living: Home Tours weekend, which took place September 16-17, saw more than 1,500 people come out from all over the Bay Area, as well as England, Mexico, New Mexico, New York, Portland, and elsewhere, to get a glimpse of the best in Bay Area residential design. This two-day, self-guided event showcases modernism at its finest and features a wide variety of architectural styles, neighborhoods, and residences. In addition, the chapter co-hosted three powerful conferences as part of the festival: Western Interiors Design and Home Show, the Dwell On Design Conference and Exhibition, and West Coast Green Residential Building Conference + Expo. These events brought such notable speakers to the Bay Area as Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Sarah Susanka, AIA, and Ed Mazria, AIA, who presented his 2030 Climate Challenge to the community and the profession.

Of course, the highlight of the year has been the completion of our office remodel, the culmination of a three-year effort. The new space represents unprecedented collaboration and teamwork among all parties involved and is one of the first LEED certified interiors in an historic building that is open to the public. (At the time of this writing, we believe that the project will achieve LEED Gold.) This mammoth undertaking was led, watched over, and carefully guarded by Toby Levy, FAIA, without whom we would have had a very different experience. Early in the process, the chapter engaged in a careful and thoughtful process to select our architect, Fred Quezada, AIA. An impressive team of consultants was brought together to guide us as we developed our program and our plans. Our goals were clear: The space must accommodate the office, gallery, and meeting space functions associated with AIA San Francisco. The design must address the acoustic and mechanical deficiencies inherent in a historic, cast iron, curtain-wall structure. It must include enhanced technological and audio/visual systems. Most importantly, we must remain true to AIA San Francisco’s commitment to

sustainability and incorporate the use of green building products, materials, and systems.

From the original task force of consultants to the final team responsible for construction and furnishings, the remodeling project has been a massive effort. Through a concentrated fund raising effort led by Charles Higuera, AIA, and Ellen Magnin-Newman, as well as a two-year assessment of our members, the chapter put together a budget of approximately half a million dollars. We now have a completed project that is valued at close to \$1.5 million! The general contractor, BCCI, their subcontractors and suppliers, the furniture industry, the audio-visual community, numerous volunteers, and others have demonstrated the power of teamwork and commitment. The AIA San Francisco has a new home that is timelessly contemporary, incredibly functional, and a testament to the vision of the chapter. Everyone poured their hearts and souls into the project, and I am incredibly grateful.

Individually, each of these activities would be a strong accomplishment and an example of the programmatic successes that make AIA San Francisco one of the largest and strongest chapters in the country. And yet, these are only a small and symbolic portion of what AIA San Francisco is all about. The power behind these obvious successes is the people that we represent and the teamwork and collaboration that are brought to every endeavor the chapter undertakes. With a limited but extremely talented staff, Margie O'Driscoll, our executive director, accomplishes the impossible. She puts architects first, and she makes sure that we look good. These are the assets that form the foundation of our legacy as well as the basis for our vision of the future.

As the third largest AIA component in the country, AIA San Francisco is a reflection of our community and its dedication to civic engagement. San Francisco is a city of diversity and a global melting pot and, like our city, AIA San Francisco has led the way in the creation of a diverse profession from Julia Morgan to the present. Our members are passionate advocates for more livable communities, and we have a long history of working with local political leaders and activists to improve the quality of life in the Bay Area. We collaborate and share leadership with many other organizations. Mentorship is a key component of our work as we continue to find ways to open the profession to become more reflective of our society and to develop future leaders for our community. We also have a notable history of leadership within the national institute. Several former AIA San Francisco presidents have served as national presidents and in doing so have helped to shape the future of our organization and profession.

As an organization of architects, we have responded to our environment while simultaneously working to improve it. Earthquakes, a reality of our past, our present, and our future, have shaped our buildings and our profession. We understand better than any other group how best to prepare for disasters and how a community can revitalize itself after one. The rebirth of San Francisco following the 1906 earthquake would not have been possible without architects defining a vision for its future. Following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, AIA San Francisco brought forward a vision of a revitalized waterfront to reconnect the city with the Bay. Today, these plans are being realized. We have also been instrumental in helping the nation and the Gulf States, recently devastated by Hurricane Katrina, address issues of disaster preparedness and recovery. The skill of our architects to articulate a community's vision of a better future and aid in achieving it is what sets our profession and AIA San Francisco apart.

What is our future? It is my belief that we must continue to assert our leadership in the quest for more livable communities as we chart a more sustainable future. This year the AIA and the U.S. Conference of Mayors are partnering to meet the 2030 Challenge of lowering the green house gas emissions in buildings. AIA San Francisco has long been a leader in this effort, and our new office is one more example of our commitment. We will be working with our members, the mayor, and the city to leave no one behind in this effort. As a profession, it is our responsibility to develop and share research in building materials, practices, and technologies that lessen our impact on the environment. It is important that we continue to educate the public about the value of good design and advocate for policies and practices relating to the built environment that respect and honor the earth. As part of this effort, we have created podcast tours of the new office that provide information on the materials and systems incorporated into the project. Please download the tour from [here](#), **and, by all means, please visit the space.**