THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF WORLD'S FAIRS

SAN FRANCISCO'S PANAMA PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION OF 1915

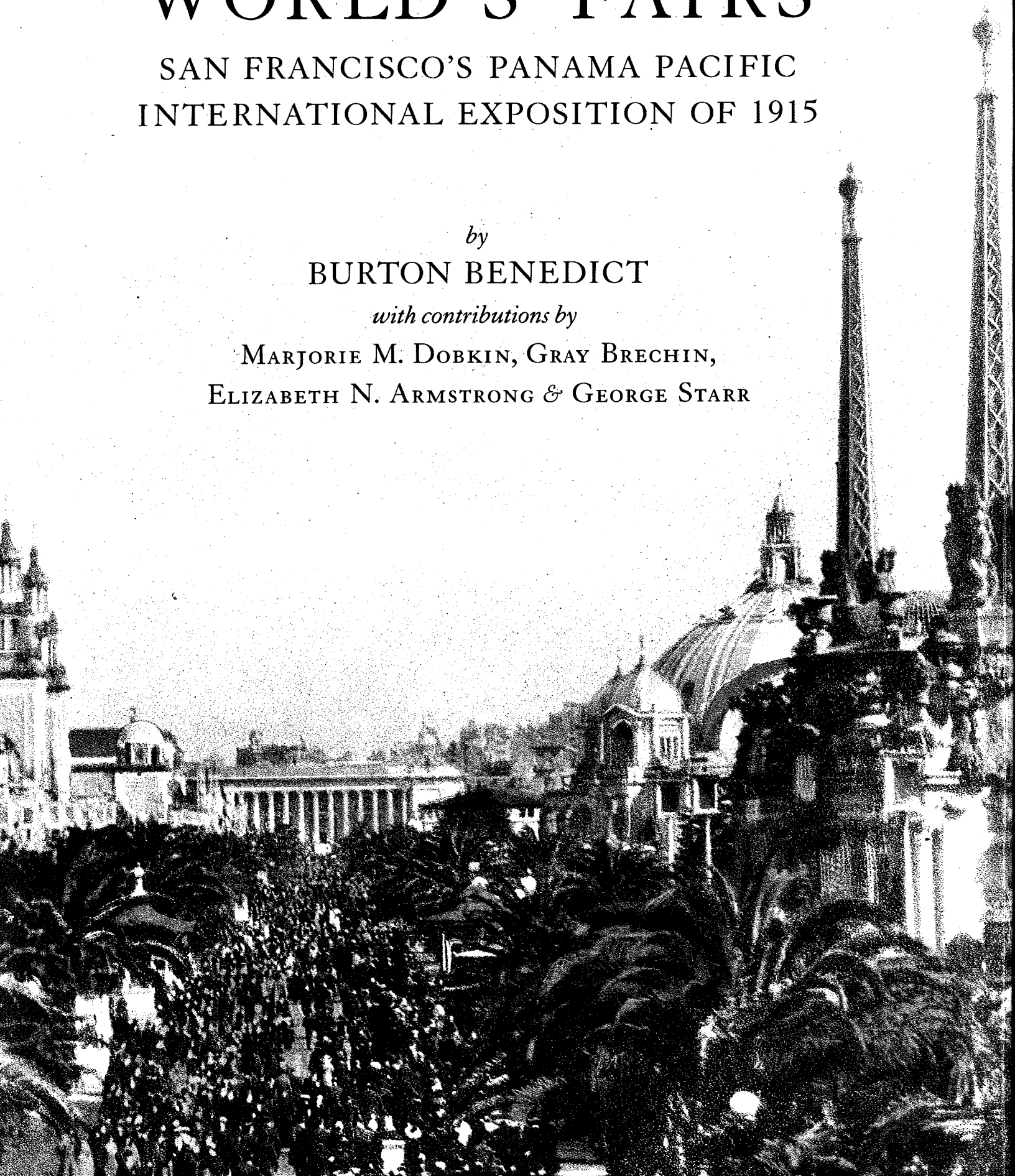
by

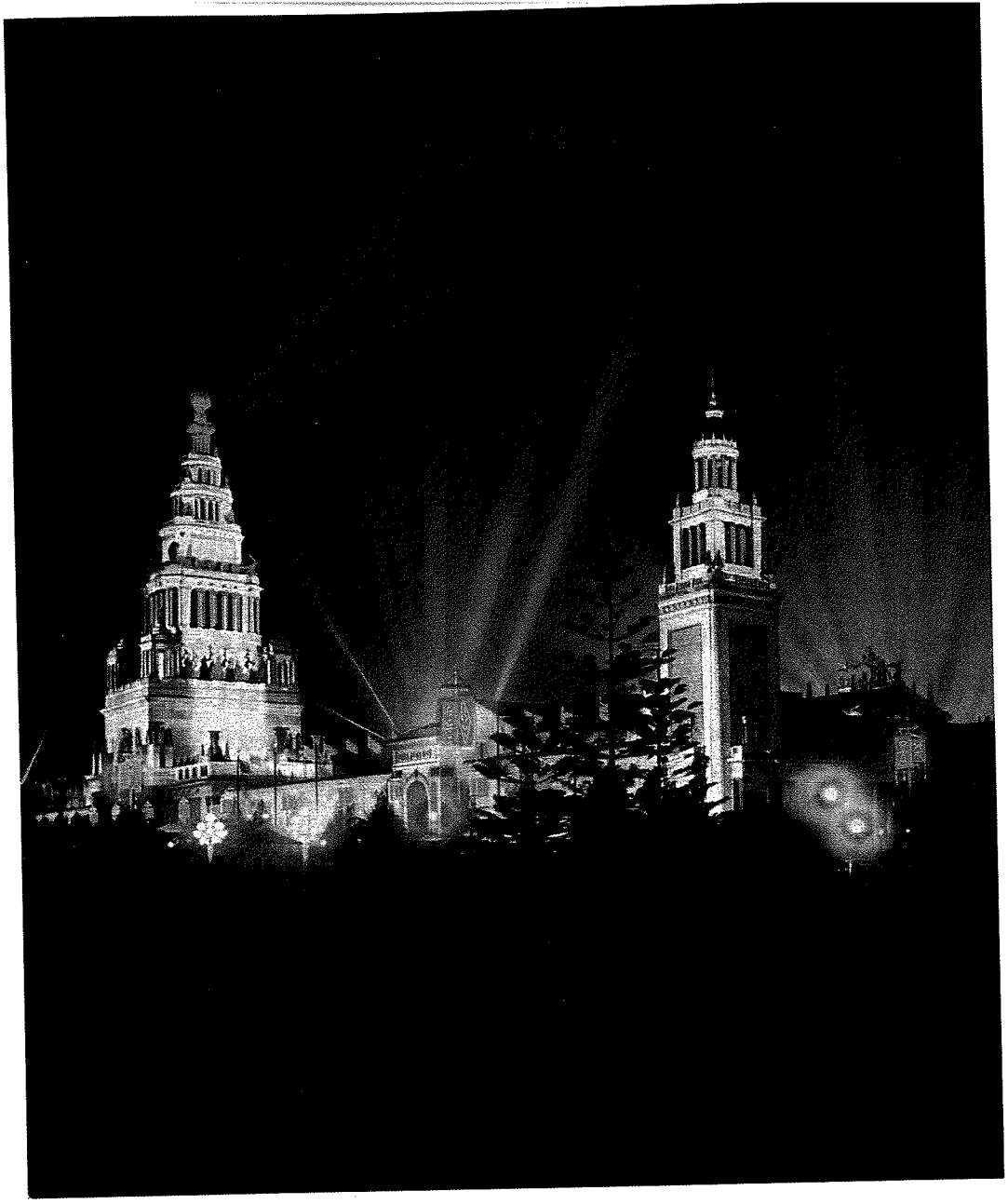
BURTON BENEDICT

with contributions by

MARJORIE M. DOBKIN, GRAY BRECHIN,

ELIZABETH N. ARMSTRONG & GEORGE STARR





Night view of Thomas Hastings's Tower of Jewels at the 1915 San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition. Reproduced from The Jewel City in Natural Colours *(San Francisco, 1915).*

SAILING TO BYZANTIUM: THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE FAIR

by Gray Brechin

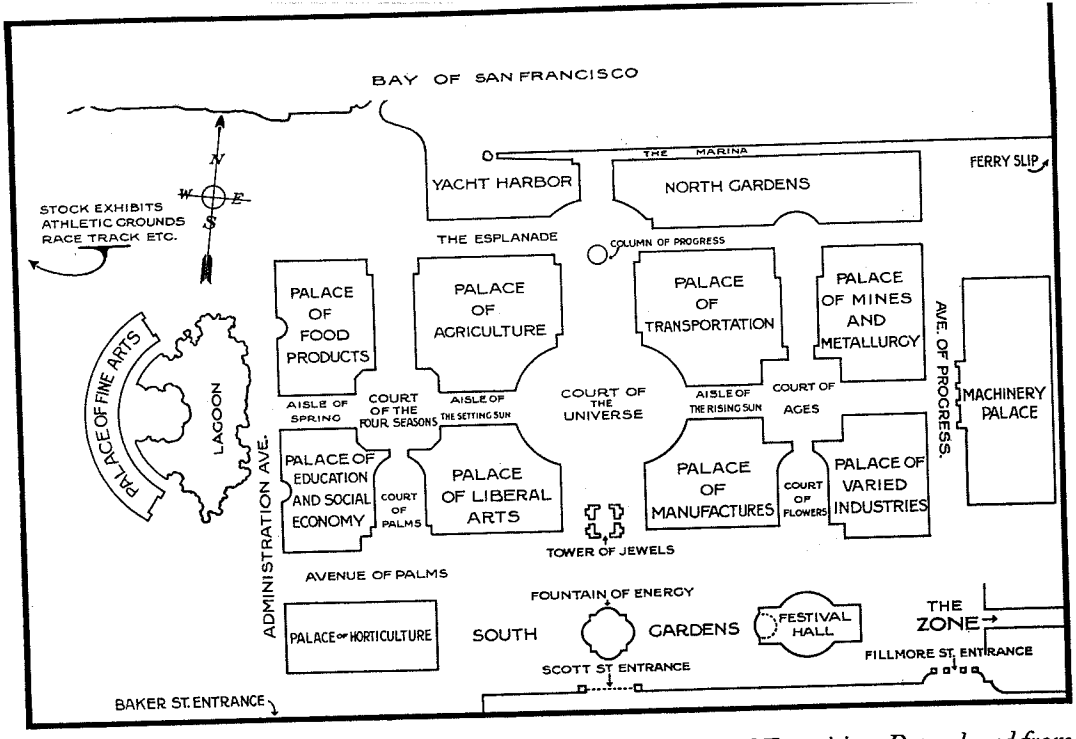
At one point on the western edge of North America, the long wall of the Coast Range funnels inward to a precipitous cleft. A passenger on a steamship in the summer of 1915 entering The Narrows would have beheld an enchanted spectacle, for ranges of golden hills, like the wings of a vast stageset, opened around the bay and receded into the California hinterland. Just ahead and to starboard,

minarets backed by a long ridge of closely-packed mansions. Had it been twilight, a colossal tower rising from the center of the city would have been enveloped in an ambient film of light, the ancient walls would have been lambent with color and moving auroras would have filled the sky overhead.

This was what San Francisco wanted to be, but could only sustain for nine months. It was an evocation of a past that never was. It was the Panama Pacific International Exposition.

Writing to a friend in 1915, young Edmund Wilson expressed the enthusiasm that millions of visitors felt for the fantasy city: "I probably shall not be able to convince you of how good the Exposition is. It . . . is architecturally so successful that it at once raises the question why, if American architects can build temporary buildings as good as this, can't they build permanent ones of the same kind."[1] Having noted that "A Western city makes Trenton look like Athens," Wilson went on to predict that "A great lesson should be learned from this Exposition! I look forward to the regeneration of America by means of architecture."

Ostensibly a celebration of the Panama Canal's completion, the Panama Pacific International Exposition was, in reality, a festival of self-congratulation and advertisement for the city that had so rapidly risen from the ashes of 1906. By 1915, few vestiges of the calamity were left, except for the raw newness of the area east of Van Ness Avenue. But regret attended the celebration as well; San Francisco, it was widely observed, was *not* the same city. "San Francisco," observed a visiting Eastern architect in 1912, "is a better city undoubtedly than it was in 1905, but it is hardly sufficiently better to compensate its citizens and its visitors for what has been lost."[2] With the self-satisfaction attending a heroic rebuilding came remorse that such a splendid opportunity to realize the 1905 Burnham Plan had been missed. That plan, commissioned of the eminent Chicago architect and planner Daniel Burnham by civic-minded business leaders, envisioned a hilly Paris by the Golden Gate (see p. 69). Its idealistic megalomania and the massive disruption of existing land-use patterns that it would have required insured its doom in the rush to rebuild the city. Certainly by 1909 downtown was more cohesive and cleaner, with the predominantly cream-glazed terra cotta facades that newly lined Grant, Post and Kearny Streets a refreshing antidote to late-Victorian visual chaos. But the great ceremonial gestures—the boulevards, esplanades, park chains, and civic center that Burnham proposed—were missing. "Its citizens like to talk about it as the Paris of America," noted the same architect. "But French restaurants, electric lights, and a prevailing atmosphere of gaiety do not make a Paris. A metropolitan city must be tied together by a plan which provides for every essential economic and aesthetic need; and San Francisco still remains devoid of such a plan."[3]



Ground plan of the 1915 San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition. Reproduced from Palaces and Courts of the Exposition *by Juliet James (San Francisco, 1915).*

The first plans for the Panama Pacific International Exposition seem an atonement for the haste with which the inner city was rebuilt; they sought to convert the entire city into an exposition with permanent improvements. Concentrated nodes in Golden Gate Park, Lincoln Park and Harbor View, on Telegraph Hill and along the waterfront would have been connected by splendidly lit and planted boulevards, including Market Street and Van Ness Avenue, which would have converged at a new Civic Center. A permanent tower, eight hundred fifty feet high, would have been built on the heights of Lincoln Park to commemorate the "heroic pioneers" and to serve as an immense lighthouse at the Golden Gate.

At the same time, local architect Ernest Coxhead proposed staging the fair along a beautified waterfront. Instead of concocting the usual plaster city, divorced from urban realities, Coxhead's novel proposal would have deliberately exhibited the activities that made San Francisco one of the world's foremost ports, while leaving behind enduring improvements. More candid than most of San Francisco's civic leaders, he stated the underlying purpose of any exposition for the host city: "What we want to do is to interest the world in our resources, we want them to stay here, invest their money here, and help us to develop the untouched, unparalleled resources that lie at our hands. . . ."[4]

Yet another architect suggested that the Mission and French Renaissance styles be rejected for a common Gothic theme, for ". . . the genius of our civilization is emphatically Anglo-Saxon," and "wherever the Anglo-Saxon and Spanish civilizations have come in contact the irrepressible conflict between them has flared forth in war." With a final flourish of Social Darwinism, he

exclaimed, "How grandly it would grace this farthest western frontier of the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon, where it faces its anti-type, the oriental!"[5]

Early in 1912, the grandiose plans to hold a multi-nodal, citywide fair were scrapped because of the enormous cost involved. The site was narrowed to 635 acres at Harbor View and in the adjacent Presidio. The State undertook a nine-million-dollar improvement of the waterfront that resulted in the wall of classical and Mission revival bulkheads that stand along the Embarcadero. Under the new mayor, James Rolph, Jr. (also vice-president of the Exposition Company), plans for a new Civic Center were prepared and the Exposition (now Civic) Auditorium rushed to completion, while the competition-winning City Hall was begun.

Site planning for the fair began immediately and quickly resulted in four innovations that distinguished the Panama Pacific International Exposition from previous expositions and which were symptomatic of a degree of planning coordination rare not only for expositions in general, but for San Francisco in particular.

The Court Plan

Ernest Coxhead devised one of the most brilliant layouts ever created for a world's fair. Since the 1893 Chicago exposition, world's fairs had been laid out as typically beaux-arts ensembles of classically-derived buildings in a formal landscape ordered by major and minor axes. Such planning formed the basis of much City Beautiful thought and can best be seen in the San Francisco Civic Center, whose French Renaissance-inspired buildings are arrayed around the central axis of Fulton Street. At the Panama Pacific International Exposition, however, eight major exhibition palaces were tightly arranged around three major inner courts and five minor forecourts. The seventy-foot walls of the buildings thus broke the westerly wind and gave shelter to pedestrians. This compact plan, in which space becomes the positive element and buildings simply a neutral infill, greatly lessened the walking distance that had been such a liability of the sprawling St. Louis fair in 1904. Architects were given courts rather than buildings to design: the firm of McKim, Mead and White created the central Court of the Universe (see p. 159), Louis Christian Mullgardt the Court of the Ages, renamed the Court of Abundance (see p. 153), and Henry Bacon the Court of the Seasons (see p. 140). They were thus responsible only for the exteriors of four buildings, while the structures themselves (simply huge industrial sheds) were produced by the exposition engineering department. George Kelham designed the smaller Courts of Flowers and Palms opening off the South Gardens with their flanking Italian Towers, while W. B. Faville was in charge of the outer walls with their embellished portals and half-domes.

The official historian of the fair noted that "adornment commonly associated with interiors of buildings was lavished on the exterior to make these

courts, so that it was said that the plan presented the aspect of an Exposition 'turned inside-out.' So distinct was this appearance, that it inspired one commentator of usually powerful vision to see in it a tendency towards an invasion of fourth-dimensional space."[6] Outside of this tight core, individual buildings—the Horticulture and Festival Halls and the Palaces of Machinery and Fine Arts—were arranged more conventionally in relation to the major and minor axes of the fair, but their domes related to the domes in the skyline of the inner fair. Beyond this, order fell off considerably; state and national pavilions fanned out west of the Palace of Fine Arts in the Presidio, beyond which was a loose grouping of livestock buildings and racetracks, while the Zone offered its visual chaos of amusements around Fort Mason.

The Panama Pacific International Exposition was thus organized in three roughly concentric bands: a tight inner core of palaces and courts, a secondary band of individual buildings and gardens and a loose outer perimeter of amusements and areal concessions. It is the first two, and the remarkable core in particular, that constituted the "City of Domes" or "Jewel City." Noting that the plan of the buildings should be as agreeable as the buildings themselves, the beaux-arts-trained Bernard Maybeck wrote:

> If the plan of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition group of main buildings were reduced in scale to the size of a golden brooch and the courts and buildings were made of Venetian cloisonné jewelry, the brooch thus made would pass as the regular thing in jewelry without causing the suspicion that it represented a plan for a World's Fair.[7]

Lighting

While previous fairs had used outline lighting with bare bulbs on building exteriors (a technique frequently used for advertising in theatres and commercial structures at the time), the Panama Pacific International Exposition was the first exposition to make general use of indirect lighting and was generally agreed to be loveliest at night. William D'Arcy Ryan, director of the illuminating laboratory of the General Electric Company at Schenectady, New York, supervised all illumination, creating numerous theatrical effects. Tall Venetian masts topped with shields and banners directed light from powerful magnesite arcs at the walls of the palaces, bathing them with a soft, shadowless radiance. Perfect reflections were thus assured in still pools in the courtyards. Searchlights on the roofs of the palaces and the towers raked the sky and spotlighted heroic sculpture on the skyline, casting their silhouettes through the fog. The Scintillator, a battery of forty-eight searchlights off the Marina manned by a company of marines, executed precise drills every night, weaving artificial auroras in the fog or, on clear nights, animating clouds of steam lofted by a stationary locomotive.

Each court had its distinctive nocturnal color scheme: underwater lights in the Court of the Seasons created glowing green pools; the fountains in the Court of the Universe were a stellar white; while the Court of the Ages featured infernal red. This most theatric of all the courts also featured "altars" decorated with writhing serpents from which rose clouds of red steam. In the Court of the Universe, Adolph A. Weinman's statues of "The Rising Sun" and "The Setting Sun" were mounted on sixty-foot columns of dense glass that glowed soft white at night.

The enormous green glass dome of the Palace of Horticulture became radiant after dark as the light of another battery of searchlights hidden in its tropical shrubbery was projected upward against the underside of the dome through revolving lenses and colored screens, simulating an immense fire opal.

But the most spectacular effects were reserved for the 432-foot Tower of Jewels, the centerpiece and portal of the walled city. Its arch was larger than the Arc de Triomphe and its stepbacked tower, heavy with military trophies and crowned with a great armillary sphere, easily topped the backdrop of Pacific Heights and made it visible throughout the Bay Area. The Tower was hung with over 102,000 "Novagems," large faceted and colored glass "jewels" backed with mirrors and hung by wires to gyrate and flash with every breeze. Concealed lights and nearby searchlights suffused it with what was described as a "living film of light." Frank Morton Todd, the official historian of the fair, described the special effect known as "The Burning of the Tower," which symbolized the burning of San Francisco in 1906:

> Concealed ruby lights, and pans of red fire behind the colonnades on the different galleries, seemed to turn the whole gigantic structure into a pyramid of incandescent metal, glowing toward white heat and about to melt. From the great vaulted base to the top of the sphere, it had the unstable effulgence of a charge in a furnace, and yet it did not melt, however much you expected it to, but stood and burned like some sentient thing doomed to eternal torment.[8]

On a somewhat happier note, the Novagem Jewel Company published a doggerel tribute to the wondrous tower:

> Oh! Tower of Jewels so wondrously bright
> Thy Novagems sparkling by day and by night
> Flashing their fame o'er the land and the sea
> Jewel City—1915—P.P.I.E.![9]

Color

While local color had been used in previous fairs (notably at Buffalo and St. Louis), the dominant impression was of whiteness. "The Great White City" of 1893 at Chicago had, after all, come as a revelation of apparent hygiene and

order to Americans of "the Brown Decades" and had wrought a revolution in architectural color. Probably the most remarked feature of the Panama Pacific International Exposition was the wholesale use and coordination of color under the direction of Jules Guerin. At the time, Maxfield Parrish and Guerin were renowned for their romantic watercolors and were considered the foremost color specialists of their age. Guerin was early called upon to coordinate all colors in the fair and worked closely with architects, painters, sculptors, gardeners and lighting experts. Architects' line drawings to be used as guides for the painting and plastering of the palaces were sent to Guerin, who painted them with his deft, late-Impressionist technique (see p. 163). His thoroughness was remarkable; he worked with John and Donald McLaren to harmonize flowerbeds with adjacent walls, designed uniforms and banners, and even had the sugary Monterey sand on the footpaths roasted to a rich cinnamon brown.

The color scheme was meant as a joyous celebration of the California landscape. The leonine Coast Range hillsides, tawny with dry grass for much of the year, had first shocked immigrants from wetter climates. "In the early days," noted novelist Mary Austin, "when all the West was full of belt-loosening, breath-easing sound as men accommodated themselves to its largeness, the color of California was a thing to make one gasp. It affronted the puritan temperament with its too abundant charm. . . ."[10] "Bleak," "terrible" and "barren" were adjectives commonly used to describe the strange, treeless land. By the turn of the century, however, with the comforts of urban civilization readily available, the color and form of the landscape were increasingly appreciated and touted. Hardly an issue of the *Overland Monthly* or *Sunset Magazine* lacked the almost obligatory paean to the humble California poppy that then covered hillsides in far greater profusion than today. George Sterling's empurpled poems, in particular, are heavy with coloristic excess. "Gold" was the favored adjective to describe the terrain and its products; Robert Reid's murals in the coffered dome of the Palace of Fine Arts rotunda symbolically illustrated the four golds of California—gold, wheat, oranges and, of course, poppies.

Mary Austin saw the exposition as the natural outgrowth of the Western environment:

> [The West] has made this exposition the richest dyed, the patterned splendor of all their acres of poppies, of lupines, of amber wheat, of rosy orchard, and of jade-tinted lakes. Beside a sea which runs from lion color to chrysoprase and sapphire blueness, they have laid down a building scheme which is as bright as an Indian blanket.[11]

Fully aware, as were architects of the time, that classical architecture had *not* originally been white, as the Chicago fair was, Austin noted that one would have to "hark back to the days of Pompeii and the Greco-Roman splendor to

find its like," but that even such a comparison was insufficient, "for the color of California is to the color of Italy as a rose is to its pressed remembrance in a book."[12]

Jules Guerin himself wrote that the landscape was his inspiration:

> I saw the vibrant tints of the native wild flowers, the soft brown of the surrounding hills, the gold of the orangeries, the blue of the sea; and I determined that, just as a musician builds his symphony around a motif or chord, so must I strike a chord of color and build my symphony on this.[13]

Architect William Woolett was nearly unhinged by the spectacle:

> No greater Roman holiday was ever made than this. Shades of Stanford White stalk nightly in this wonder place, where the gemmed star maidens look down on dusky sisters clothed in Oriental sepia. The dead spleen of Vitruvius should gather grit to see so lordly a scheme go through the color pots. Yellow domes atop these classic piles proclaim against the cerulean blue in unmistakeable paean, "Who did this thing?"[14]

Hand-tinted photographs suggest that the fair was a garish display of pinks, blues, orange and red. Primitive color films suggest more muted harmonies entirely in keeping with Guerin's watercolors. Frank Morton Todd's description of the Palace of Fine Arts gives some idea of the tonality of the exposition:

> The columns of the peristyle were pale green, the groups of four [columns] were ochre. The wall of the gallery was Pompeian red, with a vine covered pergola overhead. The dome of the rotunda was burnt orange with a turquoise green border. Below its panels an attic of green marble.[15]

Instant Age

The Panama Pacific International Exposition was a communal re-creation of a make-believe past for the raw, young settlement in California, an "ancient" walled city of plaster and lath lasting only nine months and then falling as in some biblical calamity. The romanticism of the fair was uniquely Californian (Edmund Wilson wrote of the state: "It is the only place I have seen in the United States where romance seems pervasive and inevitable"[16]) and was the cumulative product of the court scheme, illumination, color and—most of all—material.

Previous fairs had employed lath frameworks covered with white plaster to simulate marble. These nougat palaces fooled no one, created a fierce midday glare, yet were relatively inexpensive and quick to build and demolish.

The idea of using a different facing material originated with McKim, Mead and White's 1910 Pennsylvania Station in New York, a structure mod-

eled after the Roman Baths of Caracalla and so vast that finishing the entire interior with Roman travertine proved entirely uneconomical. Instead, an artificial travertine was fabricated that so closely matched the real material as to be indistinguishable. When selected to design the Court of Honor ("Court of the Universe") at the Panama Pacific International Exposition, an architect in the McKim, Mead and White firm suggested the exterior use of artificial travertine for the entire fair. Paul Denivelle of New York was engaged and developed an exterior facing that assured the desired effect.

The base travertine was a mellow old ivory with horizontal striations and vesicles. It was used for wall surfaces, balustrades, fountains, and a great deal of the sculpture. Red Numidian, yellow Sienna, and other rare marbles were simulated as accents against the buff travertine ground.

Expositions since Chicago had appeared as "new" classical cities, but the Panama Pacific International Exposition's "walls, columns, and statues seem as though several centuries had linked them to the soil. What a welcome contrast to the white and garish buildings one usually finds in exposition grounds!"[17] Here was a city that, even if it hadn't been built in a mythical mediæval California, should have been.

In addition to its artificial, weatherbeaten, earth-rooted age, the fair's eclecticism and setting suggested images far more exotic than previous expositions. Admittedly, the architectural vocabulary was overwhelmingly classical—the Court of the Universe suggested the forecourt of St. Peter's Basilica, the Court of the Seasons Hadrian's Villa, the Palace of Machinery the Baths of Caracalla, the Column of Progress Trajan's Column—while Mullgardt's Court of the Ages eluded classification or derivation altogether:

> The Gothic clearly predominates, with traces of English, Spanish, and Portuguese elements. With further hint of Romanesque, of Moorish, and of French influence, these varying elements have been so fused in the imagination of the architect that the resultant creation is independent of them all in its daring.[18]

If any one geographic theme united the inner fair, it was the Mediterranean:

> Under a dominating Moorish-Spanish general form, the single architect of the group, W. B. Faville, of San Francisco, drawing upon the famous styles of many lands and schools, has combined into an ordered and vastly impressive whole not only the structural art of the Orient and of the great Spanish builders, but also the principles of the Italian Renaissance and the architecture of Greece and Rome from which it sprang. Thus, the group is wholly Southern in its origin. There is no suggestion here of the colder Gothic architecture of the North.[19]

Indeed, the Mediterranean inspiration was to be expected in California's climate and landscape, particularly on the shores of San Francisco Bay.

Bakewell and Brown's Palace of Horticulture at the 1915 San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition. Reproduced from The Jewel City in Natural Colours *(San Francisco, 1915).*

More surprising is the vaguely located "Orientalism" of the walled city. One guidebook describes the Palace of Horticulture as "Byzantine in its architecture, suggesting the Mosque of Ahmed I, at Constantinople, its Gallic decorations have made it essentially French in spirit."[20] The color, the travertine walls with their immense portals, the green and golden domes, the vaguely minaret-like towers and the fountains in the courtyards all conjured an Arabian Nights fantasy whether seen from within, from the Bay or from the backing ridge of Pacific Heights. "[The Exposition]," wrote journalist Ben Macomber, "reflects in its plan the walled cities of the Orient of the Mediterranean, where fountains play in the courts of palaces, in public squares and niches in the walls; and pools lie by the mosques, and in the gardens."[21]

It was thus possible for a viewer of the period to create any fantasy he or she might wish from the rich panoply of architectural allusions and illusions presented. The fair was likened to a Maxfield Parrish dream, but it was just as appropriate to see in it the superb Guerin illustrations of Levantine cities that

graced *Scribners Magazine* prior to the fair. Guerin himself likened the fair to a gigantic Persian rug at the foot of Pacific Heights, while William D'Arcy Ryan noted the resemblance to the bazaars of Damascus, Cairo and Constantinople. It was to the latter city that the fair owed its greatest debt of inspiration.

Sailing to Byzantium

The symbolism of the Golden Gate is apparent in its name. Shortly before the Gold Rush, John C. Fremont had christened the remarkable water gap "Chrysopylae," in clear reference to the harbor at ancient Constantinople—"Chrysoceras," or Golden Horn. The name was prophetic, for here was a new gateway between East and West predestined for a city of imperial dimensions and pretensions. In a poem published in the *Overland Monthly* in 1888 and 1907, the cities "At the Golden Horn and the Golden Gate" are characteristically contrasted; Istanbul is noted for its torpid decay and apathy, while San Francisco "[Joys] in her birthright, unafraid/She bares her bosom to the Western sea." The poem ends with the sententious stanza:

> Deepens the shadow of the night of fate,
> And darkness closes round the Golden Horn:
> But radiantly above the Golden Gate
> Breaks the resplendence of a glorious morn.[22]

On the far Pacific Slope, it was widely believed, America would fall heir to the wealth and culture of fabled Byzantium or Rome without their hoary depravity. That promise—and the reality of the jerrybuilt city that actually rose beside the great Gate—is one of the oldest and most consistent themes in San Francisco commentary. As early as 1871, Henry George ruefully remarked that San Francisco had "an opportunity to build up a great city, in which tenement houses and blind alleys would be unknown; in which there would be less poverty, suffering, crime and social and political corruption than in any city of our time, of equal numbers."[23] The city that actually sprawled across the dunes, hills and marshes of the Peninsula was a flagrant admission of failure; its gridiron of streets was imposed "as one might constrict the wayward fancies of a gypsy maiden to the cold, tight-laced ethics of a Puritanical creed,"[24] and its corruption, vice and violence gained it a worldwide reputation.

As a make-believe imperial city, the fair was pervaded with images of Manifest Destiny, Social Darwinism, racism and conquest. The implications of its location by the symbolic Gate, like that of the Gate-oriented university across the Bay in Berkeley, were not missed. Whether through military conquest or commerce, San Francisco would become the bazaar of the Pacific Basin by the superior virtue of Anglo-Saxon enterprise. William D'Arcy Ryan noted in 1913 that "... the Exposition ... will be set actually beside salt water, on the

ultimate frontier of the race's march eastward from its cradle in Asia, on the final coast where only the sea intervenes between it and what surveyors call 'the point of commencement.' "[25]

Fronting on the Bay with the summit of Tamalpais, the promontories and islands of Marin and the mysterious distances of San Pablo Bay and the interior valleys beyond, the jeweled city could be whatever or whenever one wanted it to be. Architect William Woolett conjured images only slightly more fevered than those of other observers:

> In the panorama of this exposition we may in our imagination see in sumptuous array of color, vast bundles of oriental stuffs, vistas of palaces and temples and arcaded halls, and the garden of Babylon and visions of Atlanta come true near the cobalt waters of the Pacific. We may sprinkle this oriental melee of color with gems of the Indus, whilst the galleys of victorious fleets laden with captured splendors vie with each other for landing space at the steps of the Great Water Gate.[26]

The Panama Pacific International Exposition was, above all, a brief realization of the Byzantine myth of perfection in which millions of spectators participated for nine months. Superbly ordered, it was everything that San Francisco was not and has never been; it was a model of cooperative amity in which everything worked efficiently, it was colorful and majestic, its public gestures were lordly, it appeared to be both ancient and perdurable, and it seemed to be the ideal marriage of art and industry. This perfect union, despite jarring particulars such as the Zone, made the walled city seem an artifice of eternity that strikingly resembled William Butler Yeats's own vision of Byzantium. Its soft and mysterious lighting indeed suggested that

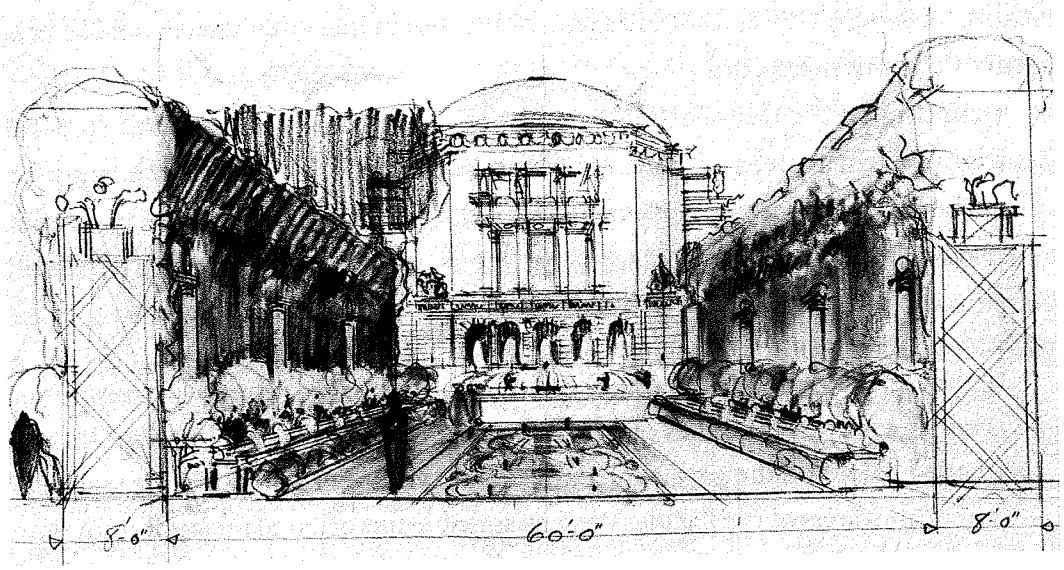
> At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
> Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,

while its sculpture quite literally hailed the superman.

It is this self-conscious "artifice of eternity," created by a rare collaboration of artists, engineers, gardeners, businessmen and politicians, that accounted for the unanimous love that the fair inspired and the vivid memories it engendered even in toddlers. Far more than Disneyland, or anything else since 1915, it seems to have been a magic kingdom whose power lay in its evocation of time as well as of place.

Palace of Fine Arts and Peace Palace

Rivaled only by Mullgardt's Court of the Ages, the Palace of Fine Arts was the most beloved building at the fair, its superbly evocative beauty saving it from ultimate demolition (see pp. 134, 148). While the rest of the fair may have



Charcoal sketch by Bernard Maybeck of his Peace Palace project. Reproduction courtesy of the College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley.

seemed an artifice of eternity, Maybeck's Palace drew much of its success from a melancholic celebration of the transitory. Frank Morton Todd wrote that "it represented the beauty and grandeur of the past. A cloister enclosing nothing, a colonnade without a roof, stairs that ended nowhere, a fane with a lonely votary kneeling at a dying flame, fluted shafts that rose, half hid in vines, from the lush growth of an old swamp. . . ."[27] The elegiacal theme was, Todd also noted, inspired by Arnold Böcklin's moody painting "The Isle of the Dead," while the vocabulary of ruin is clearly taken from the visionary etchings of Piranesi. The melancholic theme—emphasized by the dark and irregular reflecting lagoon, the weeping maidens guarding caskets on the peristyle (meant to hold trees), and the intentional overgrowth that once sprang from monumental planter boxes—is meant to express the sadness that both the artist and the viewer feel for the inability of even the greatest art to reach perfection.[28]

The Palace was universally admired, despite the shocking liberties it took with the classical orders. Professor van Noppen of Columbia remarked that "the Palace of Fine Arts is so sublime, so majestic, and is the product of such imagination that it would have graced the age of Pericles,"[29] while Thomas Edison exclaimed, "The architect of that building is a genius. There is not the equal anywhere on earth."[30] In succeeding years, the Palace became exactly what its creator had intended, a vast and decadent ruin whose garish colors bleached to sunset tones of russet and ochre. Asked in old age what he felt should be done about the collapsing Palace, Maybeck characteristically responded:

> I think the main building should be torn down and redwoods planted around—completely around—the rotunda. . . . As they grow, the columns would slowly

> crumble at approximately the same speed. Then I would like to design an altar, with the figure of a maiden praying, to install in that grove of redwoods. . . . I should like my palace to die behind those great trees of its own accord, and become its own cemetery.[31]

It appears that the Palace of Fine Arts was meant to complement another domed building to the south. Charcoal drawings in the Maybeck papers at Berkeley correspond to a "Peace Palace" that appears on the earliest block plans of the Panama Pacific International Exposition and for which Maybeck prepared advanced schematics. Drawings include elevations, perspectives, and plans of a central-plan Palladian villa on a high arcaded podium connected to the Fine Arts lagoon by an axial pool in a sunken garden. The earliest plans for the Palace of Fine Arts, in fact, show a rectilinear, rather than naturalistic, lagoon extending south toward the projected Peace Palace. The sunken garden itself, it appears, would have been enclosed by John McLaren's living walls (flats of South African iceplant stacked vertically) to create a curious combination of Baroque formality and ruinous overgrowth. The building, probably meant to echo the Peace Palace then being built with Andrew Carnegie's funds in The Hague, was apparently scrapped at an early date for reasons of economy and replaced by a huge revenue-producing hotel, the Inside Inn.

Destruction of the Fair

The Panama Pacific International Exposition proved so popular (and profitable) that long before its closing proposals were being made to save all or part of it. Architect Willis Polk, in particular, lobbied heavily for the preservation of the Palace of Fine Arts, Palace of Horticulture, South and North Gardens, and the Avenue of Palms. Louis Christian Mullgardt told the Commonwealth Club that "when the Exposition buildings are torn down, then we will have destroyed one of the greatest architectural units which has ever been created in the history of the world."[32] The influential club, like many others, passed a resolution pleading for the preservation of as much of the fair as possible.

Speculative forces proved far stronger than the dream, however, and the arches and towers were brought down in clouds of colored plaster, revealing in their fall the underlying lath framework. The South Gardens were scraped clean of plantings, fountains, and sculpture, and small buildings were moved to the waterfront and barged throughout the Bay Area. The North Gardens (Marina Green) and Yacht Harbor remained, a gift of the Exposition, along with the Column of Progress with its "Adventurous Bowman" at the end of Scott Street until, in the 1920s, it succumbed to automobile collisions and was pulled down. The immense California Building (see p. 22), just north of the Palace of Fine Arts, was seriously proposed for a State Normal School, and

Maybeck prepared plans for converting the rotunda of his Palace into an adjacent auditorium while remodeling the entire Palace in a sympathetic Mission style. As plans fell through, the California Building was razed as well, leaving only the Palace of Fine Arts, fortunately unremodeled, to decay by its lagoon. The nearby French Pavilion was reerected in permanent materials in Lincoln Park as the Palace of the Legion of Honor, a copy of a copy of the original Legion of Honor in Paris.

It was altogether appropriate that the Panama Pacific International Exposition fell when it did, for it had opened beyond its rightful era, the last of the great beaux-arts fairs. The guns of August in Europe proclaimed a new age and throughout the summer and fall of 1915 news arrived of unprecedented carnage and destruction. Frank Morton Todd lamented:

> The general feeling of helplessness and of endless tragedy was aggravated by the fact that every great teacher that had declared war among civilized nations to be no longer possible was proved to be wrong, and no prophet that promised security to life and prosperity and family and love and culture and other things of peace that make life worth while, was any more to be believed.[33]

While only a Henry Adams might then have perceived the emblems of aggression and oppression that permeated the fair, the war assured that it would never again be possible to so uncritically celebrate the steady ascension of Progress, Technology and Civilization.

Legacy

Many predictions were made that the Panama Pacific International Exposition would mark a new era in town planning and a revolution in Western architecture. However, it was the simultaneous San Diego exposition of 1915–1916 that had the far greater influence through its popularization of the elaborate Churrigueresque style which remained in vogue through the 1920s. Certainly, the San Francisco fair gave impetus to city planning throughout California, but its unique features—the court scheme, the vibrant color, the wholesale use of indirect lighting and the simulation of age—appear to have been possible only at the moment the fair was created, with the possibilities for cooperation and coordination that it presented. It did, however, affect individual architects to a greater or lesser degree.

George Kelham, Chief Architect of the fair and designer of the Courts of Palms and Flowers, became one of the city's leading commercial architects in the 1920s and used Paul Denivelle's artificial travertine extensively for interior finish, most notably in the San Francisco Public Library of 1917. Essentially conservative, Kelham clad the exteriors of his major buildings with grey granite or terra cotta, while the interiors remain a pale memory of the fair.

The phenomenal success of his Court of the Ages marked an epoch in the career of Louis Christian Mullgardt, who had heretofore largely designed superbly site-sensitive bungalows in the East Bay hills inspired, to some extent, by Tibetan lamasaries. The Panama Pacific International Exposition allowed Mullgardt to design on a monumental scale and to use his extraordinary talent for ornament. Thereafter, Mullgardt received larger commissions. M. H. de Young commissioned Mullgardt to invert the Court of the Ages for a new de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park, incorporating one of W. B. Faville's portals for the front door. (This exotic fantasy was eventually stripped to its present austerity when finials began toppling from the building.) In his 1914 Juvenile Court on Otis Street in San Francisco, Mullgardt created an early slab skyscraper using a buff stucco facing combed to resemble the travertine of the Panama Pacific International Exposition. His 1917 Davies Building for Honolulu featured a block-square building around a courtyard with a fountain, heavily decorated with terra cotta the color of a "ripening mango." His last building, the 1928 Infant Shelter Building at 1201 Ortega Street in the Sunset District, shows his highly idiosyncratic use of ornament and eclecticism, while the color, again, is a legacy of the Panama Pacific International Exposition.[34]

No one, however, was as influenced by the fair as was Bernard Maybeck. Like Mullgardt, Maybeck had been largely restricted to the residential designs for which he has become so famous. He was fifty when chosen to design the Palace of Fine Arts, and the international attention that building received marked the beginning of a second career. His smaller buildings at the fair, the whimsical House of Hoo-Hoo and the Livestock Building, were much admired, but received nothing like the acclaim given to the grandiloquent Palace.

Maybeck thereafter preferred to work in pastel stucco and often developed his designs in pastel chalks on enormous sheets of brown kraft paper. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he gratuitously worked on an ideal scheme for the rebuilding of San Francisco, a memorial plan for the World War I dead, which proposed parks, boulevards and palatial emporia "so that when a stranger visits the Bay Cities he will have the sense of being in a perpetual world's fair of form, color, and lights."[35]

Maybeck's plans for a wartime workers' town at Clyde near the Carquinez Straits became known as "the Rainbow City" for the lavish use of color on which Maybeck insisted. Houses, he noted, were to look like California wildflowers against the golden hillside.

In a protracted correspondence between Maybeck and leaders of the Australian government and Canberra architect Walter Burley Griffin, Maybeck suggested that as much of the new Australian capital as possible should be built of lath and stucco, like the Panama Pacific International Exposition, to engender public enthusiasm for the plan so that it would see completion in permanent materials. (Griffin, at one point, frostily informed Maybeck that "plaster or

stucco are hardly considered as temporary expedients [in Australia] for they are largely employed for buildings both commercial and governmental, already deemed to be permanent.")[36]

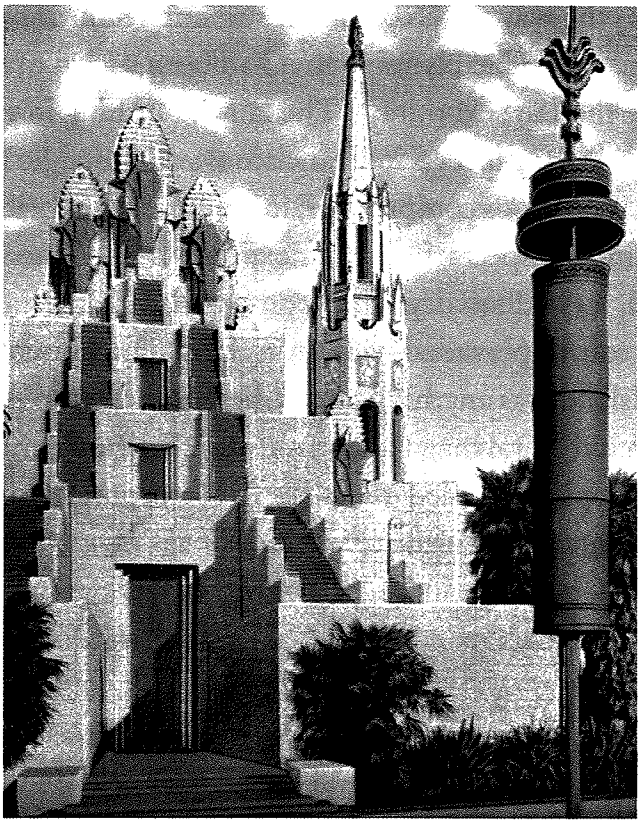
Maybeck best showed the lasting legacy of the Panama Pacific International Exposition on his own late career in the San Francisco and Oakland Packard showrooms for Earle C. Anthony. Both were visible reminders of the fair and were seen by Maybeck as regional responses to the romance of the landscape and the cosmopolitanism of the Bay Area. Of the richly polychromed San Francisco showroom, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that Maybeck had "blended the finest features of Spanish, Roman, Gothic, Corinthian, and Byzantine architecture."[37] (Its strident color scheme has since been painted a tasteful beige, the Byzantine chandeliers replaced with crystal, and the indirect lights which took it through the phases of the day from dawn to moonlight at twenty-minute intervals have been removed by the present owners.)

But it was in the Oakland Packard showroom that Maybeck used his scenographic skills to their utmost. With Lake Merritt as a foreground reflecting lagoon, he concocted a fantasy inspired, he said, by a palace at Isfahan. Its stucco walls with their deeply recessed arches were spatter-painted to suggest that they had been weathered and sun-beaten for centuries, while colored, indirect lights suffused the structure at night. Architect Irving Morrow astutely noted, at the building's completion, that

> [in 1915], it was fondly predicted that the Exposition would mark the beginning of a new era in the architecture of San Francisco. For the failure of this hope I can attempt no explanation here. Suffice it to say that Mr. Maybeck seems to be one of the few living persons to recall the lessons of that far-off event.[38]

(Indeed, when chosen as Consulting Architect for the Golden Gate Bridge, Morrow partly justified his choice of the controversial "international orange" paint by citing the precedent of the fair; the local landscape, he noted, "would imply a free use of color in general in San Francisco architecture; but except for the Panama Pacific International Exposition of almost a quarter of a century ago, architects have continually evaded this obligation."[39]

Finally, throughout the 1920s, Maybeck worked with Julia Morgan on plans for a Phoebe Apperson Hearst Memorial on the Berkeley campus that would have been a small-scale re-creation, in permanent materials, of the Panama Pacific International Exposition, with polychrome classical buildings and detached architectural groupings resembling ruins enclosing a series of sheltered courts. While only the Hearst Gymnasium was built, and never colored as Maybeck intended, its elegiacal planters almost exactly copy those at the Palace of Fine Arts and its miniature court scheme is reminiscent of the fair's walled city.



Elephant Tower and the Tower of the Sun at the 1939 Treasure Island Golden Gate International Exposition. A souvenir postcard from the Exposition.

Treasure Island

The Panama Pacific International Exposition, although it had little immediate effect on the architecture of the Bay Area, was reincarnated twenty-four years later in the form of "Treasure Island," the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939–40. The design team of that fair was headed by Arthur Brown, Jr., designer of the San Francisco City Hall and the Horticulture Palace at the Panama Pacific International Exposition and, by 1939, the dean of reactionary classicism in American architecture. Working closely with Brown were a number of architects who had designed buildings or courts at the earlier world's fair, or who vividly remembered it. So potent was the memory of the Panama Pacific International Exposition that the architects simply built a stripped, Moderne version of the earlier fair in the middle of the Bay. High walls designed to block the wind sheltered enclosed thematic courts with cosmic names, Jessie Stanton played the role of Jules Guerin as master colorist, and colored, indirect lighting was used once again. Eastern exoticism again prevailed with the use of Cambodian, Malaysian and even Aztec and Incan motifs combined with modernized classicism. Aged wall surfaces were attempted with stucco mixed with vermiculite, and even the Tower of Jewels was reborn as Brown's Tower of the Sun.

Treasure Island, even more than the Panama Pacific International Exposition, was an exposition out of its time. The Chicago Century of Progress in

1933 had pointed the way toward modernistic architecture and the disintegration of beaux-arts ensemble planning that had been such a marked feature of earlier fairs since the 1893 exposition. The fair at Flushing in 1939 also looked to the future, while the fair in San Francisco was a nostalgic nod to the past. Treasure Island was a poor compromise, for the Panama Pacific International Exposition was in all respects the greater exposition; even the vermiculite plaster, it was noted, looked tawdry when compared with the earlier travertine. Built around its courts, pervaded with art and fountains, oriented to the pedestrian, Treasure Island was anything but a vision of the urban American future, for already, in architectural magazines, visionary sketches of modernist slabs in freeway-encircled plazas hailed the advent of corporate modernism. The future lay not in arcaded dream cities, in artifices of eternity, but in urban redevelopment.

NOTES

1. Edmund Wilson (to Stanley Dell), August 29, 1915, in *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912–1972* (New York, 1977), p. 22.

2. A. C. David, "The New San Francisco," *The Architectural Record* 31, no. 1 (January 1912): 6. 3. Ibid., p. 9.

4. Ernest Coxhead, "A Waterfront Exposition Would Mean Permanent Architecture," *Architect and Engineer* 33, no. 2, pp. 50–57.

5. Anonymous, "We Don't Want Mission Architecture for the Fair," *Architect and Engineer* 25, no. 1 (August 1911):102–103.

6. Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition* (New York, London: Putnum's Sons, 1921), 2:283. For an occult exposition on the Exposition, see Cora Lenore Williams, *The Fourth-Dimensional Reaches of the Exposition* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company,1915).

7. Bernard Maybeck, *Palace of Fine Arts and Lagoon* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company, 1915), p. 2.

8. Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, 2:345.

9. Undated promotional brochure in private collection.

10. Mary Austin, "Art Influence in the West," *The Century Magazine*, April 1915, p. 829. 11. Ibid, p. 830. 12. Ibid.

13. Quoted in Elmer Grey, "The P.P.I.E. of 1915," *Scribners Magazine* 54 (1915):48.

14. William Woolett, "Color in Architecture at the Panama Pacific Exposition," *Architect and Engineer* 42, no. 1 (July 1915):67.

15. Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*.

16. Wilson, *Letters on Literature and Politics*.

17. Anon., "The Exposition Color Scheme," *Architect and Engineer* 39, no. 2 (December 1914):112.

18. L. C. Mullgardt, *The Architecture and Landscape Gardening of the Exposition* (San Francisco: Paul Elder & Co., 1915), p. 88.

19. Ben Macomber, *The Jewel City* (San Francisco and Tacoma: John H. Williams, 1915), p. 27. 20. Ibid., p. 21. 21. Ibid., p. 83.

22. Clinton Scollard, "At the Golden Horn and the Golden Gate," *Overland Monthly*, December 1888 and November 1907.

23. Quoted in Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream* (New York, 1973), p. 138.

24. Gelett Burgess, "The Topography of San Francisco," *The American Architect and Building News* 89 (March 17, 1906):152.

25. William D'Arcy Ryan, "New Light on an Exposition," *Sunset Magazine*, March 1913, p. 293.

26. Woolett, *Color in Architecture*, p. 65.

27. Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, 2:315–17.

28. The best discussion of the Palace of Fine Arts is found in William Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972), 3:275–300.

29. Quoted by Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, 2:315.

30. Hamilton M. Wright, "The Miracle Workers of the Exposition," *California's Magazine* 1, no. 4.

31. Ruth Waldo Newhall, *San Francisco's Enchanted Palace* (Berkeley, 1967), p. 75.

32. L. C. Mullgardt, *Commonwealth Transactions*, August 1915, p. 360.

33. Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, 2:133.

34. Foremost Mullgardt authority is Professor Robert Judson Clark. See Robert Judson Clark, *Louis Christian Mullgardt, 1866–1942* (exhibition catalogue) (Santa Barbara, 1966).

35. Bernard R. Maybeck MSS., "Memorial Plan," Documents Collection, College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley.

36. Walter Burley Griffin, in Maybeck MSS., "Canberra," Documents Collection, College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley.

37. Undated newspaper clipping in Documents Collection, College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley.

38. Irving Morrow, "The Packard Building at Oakland," *California Arts and Architecture* 35, no. 2 (February 1929):56.

39. Irving Morrow, "Beauty Marks Golden Gate Bridge Design," *The Arcthitect and Engineer* 128, no. 3 (March 1937): 24.