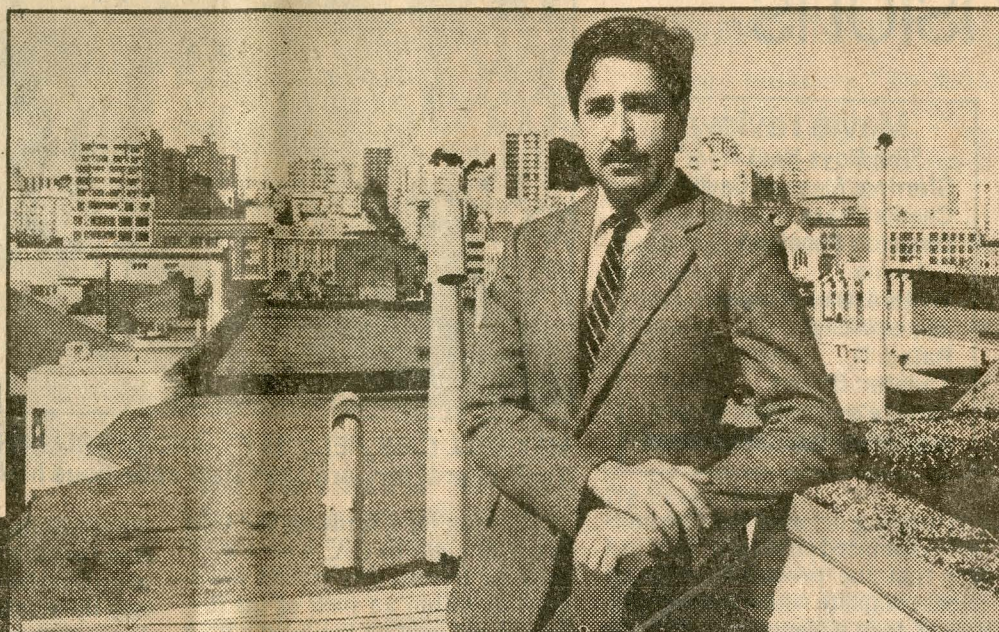


Eye on The City



Randolph Delehanty — 'San Francisco was old enough to be interesting ... but small enough ... that I could learn about it'

Examiner/Paul Glines

An architectural historian looks at preservation and progress in San Francisco

By Mildred Hamilton
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

RANDOLPH DELEHANTY gives one architectural blue ribbon to the red granite, 26-story "flatiron" under construction at 388 Market. And another to the arched branch library built in 1917 at Green and Octavia streets.

He has architectural "gem" designations for such ornate interiors as the old Hibernia Bank at Market and Jones and the Garden Court of the Palace Hotel, and he also has special worries about their less-than-guaranteed futures.

The historian's impressive knowledge and his au-

thoritative opinions on cities and architecture are attracting increasing attention.

Randolph Delehanty lives in an Edwardian building on the west slope of Nob Hill. "This kind of building is among my favorites of the post-fire era," he says as he looks out with pleasure on the "hollow center" bay-windowed blocks of his neighborhood.

A larger-than-life terra cotta head from an old column of a demolished building, stacks of research papers, and walls dotted with maps surround him as he sits and talks and makes lists about San Francisco.

During this day's conversation, he comes up with one list of his four favorite new buildings, another of architectural gems, one of the overall patterns of The

City, and a fourth list setting forth his concerns about development.

After teaching and working in architectural preservation projects across the country, Delehanty chose San Francisco to be the subject of his long-term studies, and to be his home. Now he researches and writes and teaches to help preserve the best of what exists and to influence future growth.

"San Francisco was old enough to be interesting — starting in the 1830s it was on the edge of modernity — but small enough and young enough that I could learn about it," said the 41-year-old, who earned history degrees at Georgetown, the University of Chicago and Harvard. He worked his way West studying the man-

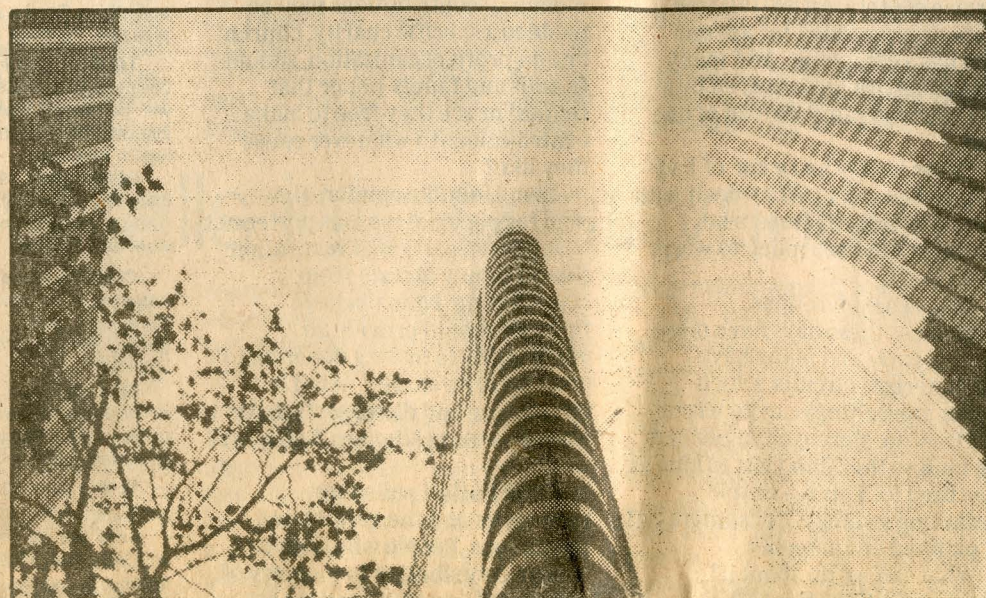
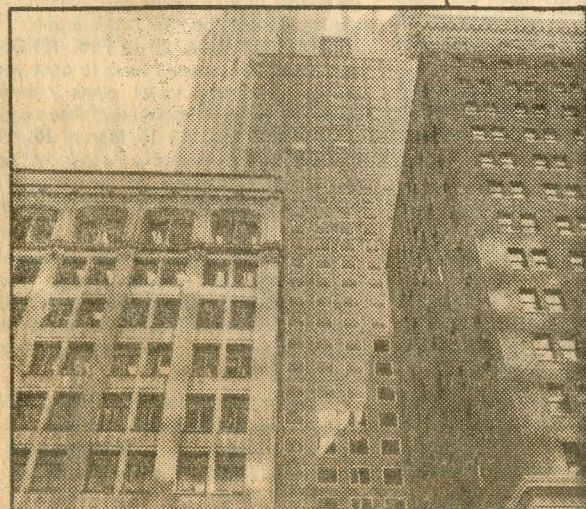
built environments and the social history of cities before he picked San Francisco as the place to live in and to write his first book.

"San Francisco: Walks and Tours in the Golden Gate City," a guide to historical and architectural treasures, came out in 1980, after his five years as historian and first staff professional for the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage. Since then he has written "California: A Guide Book," and "Preserving The West" on seven Western states. And there are more books in his future.

"I'm raising money and collecting material for my next project, which is writing the history of the 200

— Please see EYE, E-4

Newcomers



Endangered species



EYE

— From E-1

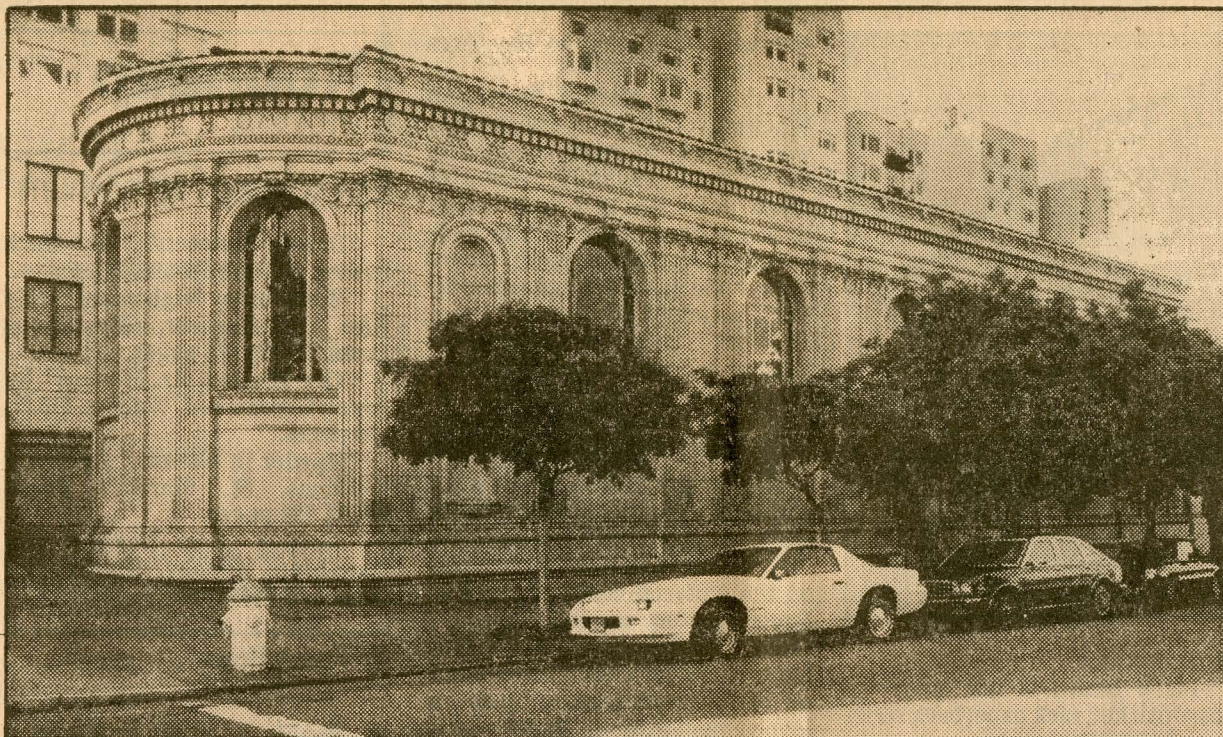
plus parks in San Francisco. That," he points to a fat file, "is the compost pile of my park study. It represents many years of research."

Delehanty ruefully considers his money needs and the computer graphics he can't yet afford and says, "I'm in between jobs. A writer is like an actor, always in between jobs." He is looking at the parks from 1837 to 1980 to show how they were accumulated, what they meant to The City and its residents, and to offer long-term help in making wise decisions about the parks. One result will be a book.

While that project moves ahead on one level, the historian reports activity on several others. His new course, "Architecture and Society in the San Francisco Bay Area," will begin next Tuesday. (For details, write to him at 1427 Larkin St., No. 4, San Francisco 94109). He's also negotiating with publishers, writing articles on a variety of architectural topics, consulting, lecturing and appearing before the Planning Commission.

In February, for example, he testified that shade from a proposed 26-floor addition to the Sheraton-Palace Hotel would "irreparably damage" the daytime lighting of the Garden Court, "recognized as one of the most important places in The City."

What will happen to the now-closed Hibernia Bank built at Market and Jones in 1892 is another major concern. Delehanty smiles as he says, "Walking into the high-ceilinged, opulently detailed banking hall with its extravagant plaster-work (the best in San Francisco),



Examiner/Paul Glines

The Golden Gate Valley Branch Library, Green and Octavia, gets a 'blue ribbon' from Delehanty

and beautiful stained-glass skylights is like walking into San Francisco's fabled past."

He put a lot of shoe leather into doing just that after arriving here in the late 1960s. "I prowled the neighborhoods." He also read much of the "superb" history of the Bay Area in Bancroft Library at the University of California.

"I concocted a preposterous plan: to write about every building built in San Francisco." As it turned out, he didn't do that, but he did put that knowledge to use as an evaluator for "Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage," the 1979 book of the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage.

San Francisco's consciousness of the value of its architecture came a

little too late to prevent urban renewal's demolition of blocks of Victorian houses. Delehanty did get here in time to join preservation-alert corps. "The City is now aware of the vintage buildings worth restoring."

In the late 1970s, he began to move his attention from houses and office buildings to public buildings, parks and streets. "There are still threats to privately owned buildings, but they are spotty because of such things as the Downtown Plan and 40-foot height limits."

The future fight seen by the urban historian involves preserving municipal services to prevent "private opulence and public squalor." The high level of branch libraries, parks, little shopping areas provide the "wonderful quilt, the richness

of texture that make San Francisco attractive."

The Golden Gate Valley Branch Library, 1801 Green St., was cited as a "jewel." Designed by architect Ernest Coxhead in 1917, "a good period for design," it fits into and enhances its neighborhood. "It is marvelous that The City has such things."

The City's buildings are not as important as its patterns, he says, listing these examples: the traditional low-rise configuration of residential blocks with "hollow centers" and yards in the back; the streets with views of bay, hill, park or sky to "give a sense of release and space"; the bay windows — "we are a bay window city," and the high level of city planning starting from the fire laws of the 1850s.

"Those are the four great design features of San Francisco. The buildings within them are good. Those that violate them stand out like sore thumbs."

His immediate concerns involve such things as window replacement in vintage buildings. "All over The City we see gradual degradation. There is not enough awareness of the importance of fine window design, especially if the windows face the street. The modern metal replacements are a lot like that asbestos shingle that was put on houses in the 1940s. Windows are the eyes of the building."

Delehanty does not want to stop growth, but he wants to fit new buildings into the urban context so each relates to its location. Another concern is access to sunlight for new buildings and for the parks. "We can design to use the sunlight."

His fourth "fundamental concern" involves neighborhood-scaled services "to keep this a good place to live in and to grow up in." To the efficiency experts who say, "centralize," he responds, "That's not the right answer. We must decentralize and keep a smaller scale."

He links San Francisco's strength to its being a community of communities. "It is wonderful to be a part of it, and to watch it. So many people are committed to The City and find ways to get involved in some aspect. You can't throw a stone and not hit a neighborhood group."

Delehanty is working for preservation — architectural, neighborhood, district — to help keep The City's affordable housing stock. "We'll never stop change, but we can control change."

Eye on The City is an occasional series on design and architecture in San Francisco.

Buildings worth a second look

FOUR NEW buildings admired by Randolph Delehanty are:

■ 388 Market St., a 26-floor red-granite "flatiron" occupying the entire lot formed by Market, Pine and Front streets. The building is a sleek Skidmore, Owings and Merrill design of three layers: retail, offices, apartments.

■ 130 Battery St., Oceanic Bank, a compact six floor building on a two-story base with a glass-fronted bank, three-story shaft of offices and a "convincing cornice capped by a roof garden." Designed by Mackinlay Winnacker McNeil and Associates.

■ 345 California St., California Center, a 47-story mixed-use tower in the center of a key Financial District block that combines historic preservation, a two-level retail arcade, 33 floors of office space and an 11-story hotel. Designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

■ 555 Montgomery St., Bank of Canton of California, a 17-story dusty rose "strong, smooth, rectangular block capped by a three-step pyramidal mechanical penthouse," which preserves the 1877 Sub-Treasury Building as a museum and offers a banking hall that is a modern interpretation of the traditional ornate "bank temples." Designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

— Mildred Hamilton

Eight San Francisco gems of architecture — from the inside out

BUILDINGS ARE like shoes," says Randolph Delehanty. "The way the inside wears turns out to be more important than the way the outside looks." He selects these eight San Francisco interiors as "architectural gems":

■ The Hibernia Bank, 1 Jones St., at McAllister off Market. "Few spaces in the entire city are as handsome, or as historically evocative, as this one, with its high-ceilinged, opulently detailed hall and beautiful stained glass skylights."

a bristlecone pine from the Sierra, earth's longest-lived tree ... two softly glowing stained glass windows depict water."

■ Palace Hotel, Market Street at New Montgomery Street. "Its glass-roofed Garden Court is sometimes called the most elegant room in San Francisco. It is 120 feet long, 85 feet wide, and 45 feet high, the pillars are covered with scagliola, plaster painted in imitation of marble, and the ceiling is hung with crystal chandeliers."

■ City Hall, Polk Street be-

elaborate Corinthian capitals with their leafy exuberance. The interior is faced with light-colored Indiana sandstone and is paved with light-pink Tennessee marble. There are splendid branched electric torches and florid railings executed in iron and bronze."

■ Temple Emanu-El, Lake Street and Arguello Boulevard. "A stately temple with the great red-tile covered dome, a cloistered court, and fountain. Its sanctuary has a gilt-bronze and cloisonne enamel Ark ... a soaring canopy

tectural designs in this architecturally creative nation. But the real surprise waits inside. Within this small, roughly cubic shop Wright's genius created unexpected grandeur. Inside the two-story-high space Wright set a gently curving ramp that seems to rise weightlessly toward the translucent white ceiling of its own accord."

■ St. Mary's Cathedral, Geary and Gough streets. "The austere simple stone altar is raised up on a platform ... Except for a cross and a baldacchino of hanging aluminum rods, there is no decoration in

■ Hyatt-Regency Hotel, foot of Market Street. "A spectacular lobby, this vast modern space is 300 feet long, 170 feet wide and 170 feet high. Restaurants, shops, cafes, bars, sunken conversation areas and contemporary art animate the skylit space. The focal point for the great space is Charles Perry's four-story-high hollow sphere of golden anodized-aluminum tubes floating in a reflecting pool."

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