

San Francisco Chronicle

SFGATE.COM | Wednesday, December 30, 2009 | PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER \$1.00 *****

TOP OF THE NEWS

World/Nation

- ▶ **Iran unrest:** Students clash with militiamen at a Tehran university and the hard-line government blames last weekend's deadly protests on Western influences. **A2**
- ▶ **Putin's plan:** Russia's prime minister says his nation should develop new offensive weapons to "preserve a strategic balance" with the United States. **A4**
- ▶ **Border phones:** GPS-enabled cell phones created by UC San Diego faculty would tell migrants where to find water. **A4**
- ▶ **Heart devices:** UCSF researchers fault the FDA approval process for stents and other heart devices. **A6**

Sporting Green

- ▶ **Pro Bowl primed:** Vernon Davis, Patrick Willis and Andy Lee are selected from 49ers, and Raiders Nnamdi Asomugha and Shane Lechler are also Miami-bound. **B1**
- ▶ **Ray Ratto:** Mark DeRosa can play the infield and outfield, which is just the kind of help the Giants need. **B1**

Business

- ▶ **Revealing personal information:** With people so willing to share, have online social networks made privacy a thing of the past? **D1**
- ▶ **Real estate report:** According to one measure, home prices in the San Francisco area rose slightly while values in many parts of the country slipped in October. **D1**



Brant Ward / The Chronicle

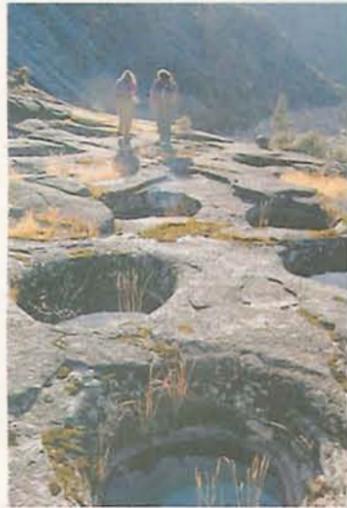
Bay Area

- ▶ **Sea lion mystery:** Pier 39's marina, above, is strangely silent after the resident sea lions inexplicably disappear. **C1**
- ▶ **Christmas count:** Teams of volunteers head out for the annual regional bird count. **C1**
- ▶ **Steel ahoy:** Metal needed to rebuild the Bay Bridge finally leaves a Chinese factory more than a year behind schedule. **C1**
- ▶ **Appealing to top court:** Attorney General Jerry Brown will ask the state Supreme Court to back a law preventing felons from having bullet-resistant body armor. **C1**

Datebook

- ▶ **Digging the decade:** A look back at home and garden trends over the past 10 years. **E1**
- ▶ **All the right moves:** Pondering trends in dance in the past decade. **E1**
- ▶ **How they see us:** A new book looks at the U.S. image abroad. **E1**
- ▶ **Miss Bigelow:** Dancing and dining to raise funds for CPMC. **E3**

SCIENCE



U.S. Geological Survey

Geologists say the Miwoks made these basins for salt.

Basins could be early salt 'factory'

By David Perlman
CHRONICLE SCIENCE EDITOR

Somewhere in the Sierra Nevada, a granite terrace the size of a football field holds hundreds of mysterious stone basins representing what geologists believe is one of the earliest known "factories" created and used by ancient Miwok Indians to make tons of salt to trade with tribes up and down California.

James G. Moore, a geologist with the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park, learned of the strangely pitted terrace from detailed maps made more than a century ago and hiked the region in May to study what he determined were clearly hand-hewn objects.

He examined 369 of the circular artifacts only a few yards from two streams of saltwater fed by a nearby spring and a lake that was equally salty.

Moore and his colleague at the USGS, Michael F. Diggles, believe the circular basins were handmade by the Miwok people in an impressive display of early technology. They have published a detailed account of their findings in an official Geological Survey report, but because the area is now an "archaeologically sensitive" site and its location protected by law, Moore is permitted only to say that the

DECADE IN REVIEW *S.F.'s Top 10 in Architecture*



Lance Iversen / The Chronicle 2008

J.R. Fieser plays basketball by the Kayak House at Mission Creek Park.

New millennium scores style points

By John King
CHRONICLE URBAN DESIGN WRITER

The first decade of the 21st century marked the San Francisco landscape in ways that nobody would have predicted a decade before.

New glass towers stand south of Market Street, many filled with residents and one set disconcertingly close to the Bay Bridge. The old rail yards of Mission Bay are home to a UCSF campus and upscale condominiums, the latter lining a once unpleasantly fragrant creek. Lauded international architects have placed bold buildings in provocative locations.

In this city, the process of getting a project approved makes it easier to cut deals than to let architects do

their best work, and too much of what's been built is inept or cynical or both. Even so, the decade saw a heartening number of memorable additions to the landscape. Some are Big Buildings by Big Names, but most are locally produced, modestly scaled.

What follows is one arbitrary list, in chronological order, of the decade's best. Because it is confined to San Francisco, you won't find such regional gems as the C.V. Starr East Asian Library at UC Berkeley by Tod Williams and Billie Tsien. Also, the criterion extends beyond pure architecture to works that exemplify the qualities and potential of a city where neighborhoods count for more than icons.

Architecture continues on A10

FROM THE COVER



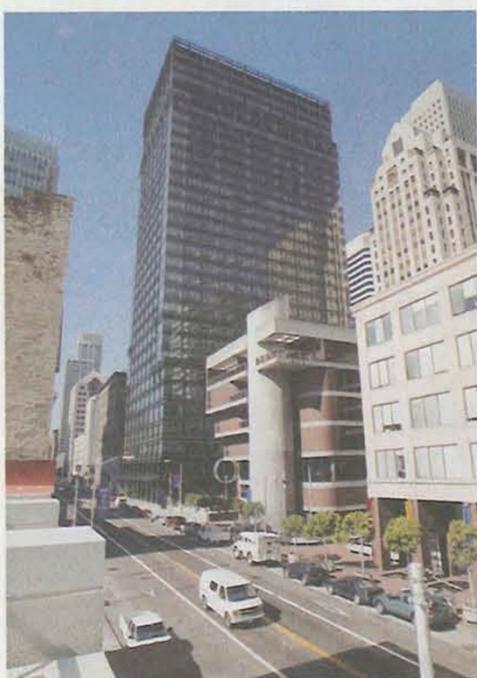
Frederic Larson / The Chronicle 2005

AT&T Park brought the Mission Bay district to life and won over the public on day one, never easy in San Francisco.



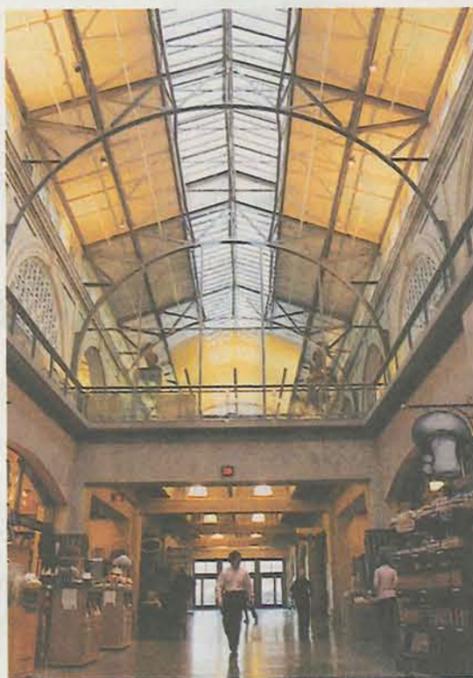
Eric Luse / The Chronicle 2005

Architect Craig Hartman's International Terminal at SFO has a contemplative feel that goes beyond planning what to do in the event of flight delays or lost luggage.



Michael Maloney / The Chronicle 2002

Cesar Pelli sought to evoke calligraphy at his boxy but suave 560 Mission St.



Deanne Fitzmaurice / The Chronicle 2008

The Ferry Building reopened in 2003 and shows historic preservation at its best.



Tim Griffith 2004

Pfau Long Architecture took an innovative approach to the need for more space at Lick-Wilmerding High School.

City's top 10 make an impression

Architecture from page A1

AT&T Park, 2000: Let dogmatic modernists scoff at the brick-paneled walls along King Street; if the Giants' home lacks visual innovation, it's still a wondrous urban catalyst. The ballpark designed by HOK Sports anchors the Embarcadero promenade and brought the long-stalled Mission Bay district to life, thus redrawing the map of downtown San Francisco. Another triumph: The public has loved this structure from day one. The last time *that* happened was the Golden Gate Bridge.

San Francisco Airport's International Terminal, 2000: Architect Craig Hartman of Skidmore Owings & Merrill received acclaim last year for his Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland, but the departure hall he designed for SFO's newest building inspires its own form of contemplative awe. Despite the vast dimensions — 700 feet long, 200 feet deep and 83 feet high — there's a silvery calm to the space, topped by an elegant procession of bowed trusses and warmed by a rear wall of red cherry wood.

560 Mission St., 2002: This office tower is an exercise in poised restraint, a 433-foot-high box wrapped in green-tinted glass overlaid with a taut grid of forest-green steel. "I wanted this to be a bit like calligraphy, lines against glass," said architect Cesar Pelli of Pelli Clarke Pelli. It's also the city's finest recent high-rise, showing that glassy modernism can exude an exquisite depth all its own.

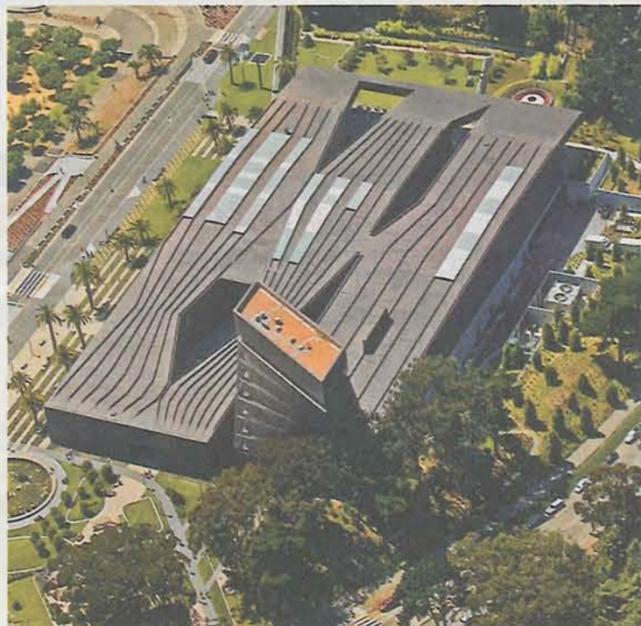
Ferry Building, 2003: In which an iconic survivor of Old San Francisco enters the 21st century. Not only were the classical arches and clock tower fastidiously restored, the ground floor once used for storage was reborn as a food hall attuned to the region's culinary life, its corridors filled by ferry-bound commuters as well as shoppers and tourists. The fusion of new and old by the design team headed by SMWM (now Perkins & Will) reminds us that, at its best, historic preservation lays the groundwork for the future.

Lick-Wilmerding High School, 2003: Here's one way to expand a campus: Slice into the earth and insert glassy studios along a walkway open to the sky, framed by older structures. That's how Pfau Long Architecture satisfied the need for extra space at this private high school emphasizing the technical arts. What's important isn't the cool factor; it's the way truly innovative architecture can take unexpected forms and, in the process, energize everything around it.



Chris Hardy / The Chronicle 2005

SOMA Studios offers a shot of color to an otherwise gray block.



Judith Calson / Special to The Chronicle 2006

The Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron, winners of the Pritzker Prize, designed the new de Young Museum.



Kurt Rogers / The Chronicle 2007

The building at 1234 Howard St. turns condominiums into abstract art.



Michael Macor / The Chronicle 2007

Pier 14 metal railings enhance the feeling of a footbridge into the bay.



John King / The Chronicle

Mission Creek Park offers a welcoming contrast to freeway ramps above.

SOMA Studios & Family Apartments, 2004: No local firm has a better track record than David Baker + Partners at mending the civic fabric. This affordable housing complex makes the list for the unusually generous retail space with floor-to-ceiling windows that reveal a community grocery store — and the way the walls above it dance with a syn-copated mix of orange and yellow, lime green and sky blue. Yes, contemporary design and traditional urbanism can go hand-in-hand.

M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, 2006: Of San Francisco's three new buildings by winners of the vaunted Pritzker Architecture Prize, this one designed by the Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron is the most satisfying. Even if you find the exterior forbidding with its tectonic copper-clad form alongside the Music Concourse in Golden Gate Park, step inside. Galleries drape a muted atrium sliced by views of palms and ferns; the observation tower is a diaphanous presence with views that skim the forested park. Every detail deserves a close look. And the closer you look, the better it gets.

Pier 14, 2006: The need for a breakwater produced this tough revelation, a 15-foot-wide and 637-foot-long concrete pier lined by metal railings with horizontal bars that enhance the sensation you're on a catwalk above the depths, leaving the city behind. This pier by Roma Design Group uses design to make the connection to the bay more intense — and proves that new elements along the water don't need to pretend they were there all along.

1234 Howard St., 2007: The buildings of Stanley Saitowitz's Natoma Architects have the aura of immaculate machines, crisp and perfectly formed, and this mid-block jewel is no exception, with its two deep clear bays set perpendicular to the street, cloaked in aluminum blinds that glow in the sun. Less successful is the ground floor that rebuffs pedestrians with its perforated metal wall. But the trade-off here is worth it: an exhibit of how 18 market-rate condominiums can attain the luster of art.

Mission Creek Park, 2008: Much of the emerging Mission Bay feels predictable and pat — but this park beneath freeway ramps is a surprising joy with such flourishes as the swale of Japanese bloodgrass snaking past athletic courts. To this space by Marta Fry Landscape Associates, add a kayak storage building by MKThink that suggests a billowing tent of translucent blue plastic, and the result is genuinely unique. In other words, the kind of spot that makes a redevelopment district start to feel like a real neighborhood.