

Women's Showcase

A Designing Prodigy Of th

By ELIZABETH FRYER

In 1919, publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst commissioned a prominent architect in the San Francisco area to design a playground for his family and his guests on top of a hill in central California in what is today known as San Simeon. The already well-established architect accepted Hearst's assignment, and spent 28 years designing guest houses for Hearst's celebrity friends, showcases for his European art collection, animal shelters for his exotic zoo, camps for the workers and an indoor and an outdoor pool, which take advantage of the compound's view over the Santa Lucia Range as well as its view of the Pacific. The architect even designed a small water treatment plant for the compound, which is still used today by the city of San Simeon, population less than 500.

By the time of Hearst's commission early in the 20th century, this architect had already designed all or parts of over 450 private homes and public buildings in the San Francisco and surrounding areas. Most notable of the works at the time were two buildings on UC's Berkeley campus: the Hearst Mining Building and The Hearst Greek Theater, both of which were built in honor of and through the funds of William Randolph Hearst's famous mining tycoon father. Who was this famous architect, whose

works were, and still are, so admired?

Born in 1872 and graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in Civil Engineering in 1894 and from L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris with a certificate in architecture in 1902, Julia Morgan is arguably the most prestigious woman architect in history.

Working closely with Morgan during her undergraduate career, a professor, Architect Bernard Maybeck, urged her to continue her studies in Paris at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts. On her family's funds, Morgan arrived in Paris two years after her undergraduate studies were finished yet was denied entrance to the design school because she was female. After receiving letters of reference from Maybeck, and after Morgan entered and won many prestigious architecture competitions in Europe, the school could no longer deny that, perhaps, they were refusing a designing prodigy. Morgan took the entrance exam, finishing 13th out of 392, and began study in 1898.

In 1902 she earned her architectural certificate and returned to San Francisco where she began working for a design firm headed by John Galen Howard. It was through this employ that Morgan worked on the Hearst buildings on UC's Berkeley campus. Having this experience on which to draw, the gutsy Morgan started her own architecture firm in 1904 and soon was designing private residences in Berkeley,





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Besides private residences, Morgan designed churches and chapels, campus and school structures, hospitals, gymnasiums and a series of YWCAs in California, Hawaii and Utah. She retired in 1951 at the age of 78, after designing more than 700 private homes and public buildings, the most elaborate of which is Hearst Castle in San Simeon, California, once a private residence but currently a California State Historical Monument open for public tours.

The beginning of the 2001 film "The Cat's Meow," concerning a death on board a yacht belonging to Hearst, shows brief glimpses of Morgan's work, while www.hearstcastle.org gives a more complete look at Morgan's designing brilliance at San Simeon. Sixty of her structures, complete with pictures, are listed at www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/jmindex/genericindex.html.

The site www.juliamorgan.org gives information about Julia Morgan Center for the Arts in Berkeley, California.

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Piedmont, and the San Francisco area.

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