

**Preservation in Practice: Adaptive Use of Historic Buildings as Arts Facilities
in the San Francisco Bay Area**

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As a mature student, I had not researched and written a term paper in over thirty years. The last time I did so, I wrote the paper on a manual typewriter, and spent many happy hours in my university library, hoping to find relevant source material. Oh, how things have changed, and yet, interestingly, have stayed the same! Good research requires a keen understanding of the questions to ask, and that will never go away. However, the tools for obtaining information and historical research have proliferated well beyond the library stacks and card catalogs of my past.

My approach to writing this paper was to select a topic of interest and relevance to my career and studies, but also one that enabled me to include primary research. I wanted to combine both library sources and contemporary perspectives in how old buildings in the Bay Area have been adapted and used as arts venues. The four buildings I selected were all built in the first quarter of the 20th century and adapted within the last forty years. I was able to speak with the executive directors of the resident arts organizations included, as well as architects involved in the projects. As I hoped, I was also able to spend time in libraries across the country. All had books and periodicals of use. But the wonder of the internet now means that I was able to look for research material on my local library's website and order a copy from anywhere in the country, that archived materials in the Stanford University Library were at my fingertips, that I could find information in books, periodicals, and studies online, without having to leave my desk.

Preservation in Practice: Adaptive Use of Historic Buildings as Arts Facilities in the San Francisco Bay Area

It is rare to find a nonprofit arts and culture organization that, at one time or another, has not flirted with the idea of having its own venue rather than relying upon the availability, flexibility, and perceived affordability - not to mention the suitability - of someone else's rental facility.

The nine counties comprising the San Francisco Bay Area are home to more than three thousand nonprofit performing and visual arts organizations, second only to Los Angeles in number, and it boasts the highest rate in California of public participation in the arts, at 66% of the population.¹

The precise reason for this is unknown, but the region's reputation as an arts-friendly, creative urban area over many years may have led to the migration of like-minded people to the Bay Area, looking to live in an arts-rich environment. It is notable that a vast majority of Bay Area nonprofit arts organizations, 81%, have annual operating budgets under \$250,000, with only 4% above \$2 million.² The high level of arts activity in the region translates to a large number of cultural facilities, ranging from purpose-built buildings utilized by big-budget organizations, such as Davies Symphony Hall (1980), the War Memorial Opera House (1932), and Geary Theater (1910, built as one of the replacements to the eight theaters lost in downtown San Francisco in the 1906 earthquake), to a wide variety of buildings that were built with another function in mind and over time were transformed into arts and culture facilities. A search of the Bay Area Performing Arts Spaces website returns 251 performance, rehearsal, studio, and classroom spaces currently available for hire in the region.³ What that number does not indicate is the past two decades of high real estate prices and urban density that have forced a large

¹ Ann Markusen, *California's Arts and Cultural Ecology* (San Francisco, The James Irvine Foundation, 2011), 10.

² Markusen, 28.

³ Bay Area Performing Arts Spaces, <http://www.bayareaspaces.org/> (accessed November 30, 2011)

number of artists and arts organizations out of the cities, scrambling to find appropriate, affordable performance and rehearsal spaces.

This paper will provide an overview of four historic buildings in the Bay Area that have been adapted for use as arts facilities by nonprofit arts and culture organizations in order to explore what makes a particular building type more readily transformable into a public performing arts space, discuss the challenges associated with the adaptive use, and outline the impact each building has in its community. In particular, the business models underlying each of these buildings demonstrate that, even within this small sample, a public/private partnership provides a greater likelihood of adaptation success and ongoing stability.

A functional performing arts space is a healthy combination of many basic components: 1) the stage type, with the attendant need for fly and wing space above and beyond the stage, an appropriate floor depending upon the art form, lifts, and the orchestra pit; 2) the seating area, both size and arrangement, as well as the slope and sight lines of every seat in the house; 3) acoustical design; 4) performance support, including facilities for performers and rehearsal space; 5) production, set-building and storage facilities, as well as a loading dock and receiving area; 6) technical facilities, such as lighting and sound systems; 7) audience services, including lobbies, the box office and restrooms, and 8) administrative office and meeting space.⁴ Visual arts spaces have different requirements in order to integrate both the social and aesthetic aspect of museums, galleries, and community art centers. Like performing arts venues, visual arts organizations need administrative spaces and proper public support spaces like lobbies, restrooms and ticket offices; in large institutions, cafes and gift shops are part of the visitor experience. The traffic flow of visitors through the gallery space, and the ability to provide

⁴ Catherine Brown et al, *Building for the Arts: A Guidebook for the Planning and Design of Cultural Facilities* (Santa Fe, Western States Arts Federation, 1989), 99-133.

interpretive displays about the work, are much more crucial in a visual arts facility, however.

Other basic components include: 1) exhibition space with walls and ceilings that provide appropriate backdrops for the artwork; 2) technical support areas such as storage and conservation workshops; 3) educational spaces such as a lecture hall or auditorium, and classrooms; and 4) temperature and humidity control for conservation, and extra security and fire protection for valuable artwork.⁵

Every facility, no matter what the art form, needs to be up to earthquake and fire codes, and provided ADA access for those with mobility challenges. Some facilities may require additional, specialized components. For example, the Old Globe Theater in San Diego has a basement devoted to the wig, costume, and shoe shop, where original garments and headpieces are created for their productions. The Crucible, a fire arts nonprofit in an old warehouse in Oakland, needs industrial-strength fire control tools and systems in its classrooms.

For the most part, nonprofit arts organizations have four venue possibilities open to them. An organization can buy land and build a new facility, much like SF Jazz is doing with its \$60 million SF Jazz Center, touted by the organization as the first concert hall of its type in the Western United States. An organization can lease a new or old building, like Joe Goode Dance Company in an old American Can factory in the Mission District of San Francisco, conducting a capital campaign if necessary to make any necessary adaptive improvements to the property (in Joe Goode's case, a new sprung dance floor and studio and office partitions), money that will be lost once the organization moves to a new facility. A landlord can raise rent and evict a tenant, as well as forbid certain artistic activities and renovations under this scenario. An organization can remain itinerant, as a majority of them do, renting various facilities that are the appropriate size, if it exists, for its rehearsals and performances. This can be an expensive option, as many rental

⁵ Brown, et al, 139-162.

facilities are union houses or have strict guidelines on how the facility can and cannot be used; a competitive Bay Area rental market means that there is little date flexibility in scheduling. Lack of their own facility can make organizations feel rudder-less, and marketing and branding a moving target can be a challenge to developing new audiences. An organization can purchase and adapt an older building to its needs, providing preservation of what may be a historic property; called adaptive use, this can also be an expensive option, depending on the original purpose of the building and how difficult it is to adapt it to the many needs of an arts facility. Any one of these options can be appropriate for an organization's budget, lifecycle, and art form, but for the purposes of this paper, we will focus on the latter.

Adaptive use (sometimes referred to as adaptive reuse) is “the most common form of survival of old buildings into renewed value; when a building designed for one purpose is put to completely different use, its value deepens,” according to Stewart Brand.⁶ Adaptive use converts a building to accommodate new functional requirements, in accordance with the possibilities and the constraints the building offers.⁷ It can offer an interesting design challenge for an innovative architect, who has to build new functionality within the parameters the building provides while preserving architectural integrity. It fits in with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the treatment of historic buildings, particularly preservation, restoration and rehabilitation. There are cost benefits, because materials and a basic structure already exist, unlike new buildings; even when some environmental problems exist, such as the removal of asbestos, adaptive use is often more cost-efficient.⁸ Adaptive use can also be more environmentally-friendly and sustainable, because of the possibility of recycling materials for

⁶ Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn, What Happens After They're Built*, (New York, Penguin Books, 1994), 103.

⁷ Ozen Eyuce and Ahmet Eyuce, “Design Education for Adaptive Reuse”, *International Journal of Architectural Research*, Volume 4, Issue 2-3 (July and November 2010), 419.

⁸ Linda Burnett, “Repurposing”, *Contract*, Volume 48, Issue 8 (August 2006), 62-65.

other uses within the property. Older buildings also tend to be more sturdily built, and often have larger windows, cutting down on energy costs and artificial lighting. In an area with limited new and available buildings, the use of an older, in some cases neglected property can not only offer an affordable and environmentally-friendly facility option, but provide an opportunity help reverse blight in neighborhoods that are becoming derelict. A building's connection to the past and to its community, and the ability to give new life to it through adaptive use, provides context to the built environment as well as a basis for urban renewal. As Ozen and Ahmet Eyuce state, "To ensure the continuity of the past, without discarding the requirements of the contemporary spatial standards, is one of the most important aims of the adaptive reuse projects."⁹

Some buildings are less adaptable, either because of their size or their specialization. A large institutional prison, for example, "was constructed to discourage change by the occupants."¹⁰ Churches and old movie theaters are also usually large, pitched or sloping horizontal spaces that can be difficult to subdivide. Houses and warehouses are, by contrast, more easily convertible to other uses. Houses are "the one species of building most thoroughly co-evolved with human use," and because of the variance in size and style, can be used for many different purposes.¹¹ Warehouses, particularly those built between 1860 and 1930, have a lot of volume, and are built to last, with good natural illumination and nondescript space, like a blank canvas.

Historically in the United States, the buildings most commonly adapted for performance spaces have been old movie and vaudeville houses because of their existing stages and theater seating. These original buildings tend to have shallow stages only 20-30 feet deep (professional theater, dance, or orchestra performances require at least 35 feet of stage depth), poor sightlines

⁹ Eyuce and Eyuce, 426.

¹⁰ Brand, 108.

¹¹ Ibid.

to the rear of the stage, and very little backstage, dressing room or storage space – specifications that most performing arts organizations require – and the cost to upgrade them to accommodate current technology can be daunting. The lobbies and orchestra pits are also generally too small for most modern performing arts purposes. Commercial storefronts, with their large windows, high ceilings and massive display walls to draw in arts audiences (and customers), have often been used for visual arts exhibitions and galleries, but tend to let in too much light for performance spaces and may be small with inflexible internal space for a box office, stage and seating. Churches generally have small lobbies, but have been created for the public to come together, and so seating is already in place, although fixed wooden pews are only a short-term and uncomfortable solution to seating for performances. Warehouses have potentially useful large open performance spaces, but it can be expensive to add structural elements or cut through existing walls to make it suitable for performances and audiences.¹²

In the San Francisco Bay area, there are a large number of historic (but not necessarily significant) buildings that were built for one purpose but have been adapted for use as arts venues. They fall into eight general categories: factory/warehouse buildings, churches, commercial retail space, decommissioned military bases, government (such as post offices), residential, schools, and vaudeville/movie houses. These facilities are located throughout the Bay Area, and, while generally representative, do not paint the full picture of arts and culture venues in the region. Considering the ongoing challenges of density and high costs, coupled with the region's robust appreciation for Bay Area architectural history, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a plethora of arts organizations that have looked to turn existing, sometimes quirky old buildings into their facilities to take advantage of the often favorable economics of reuse and resource conservation.

¹² Brown et al, 168-169.

The benefits of having the arts situated locally and within neighborhoods are also important. According to research conducted by ArtSpace Projects, a nonprofit real estate developer focused on arts-driven community transformation, creative placemaking, or the use of the arts in urban design, has a compelling impact on communities. Arts spaces benefit communities by: 1) animating deteriorating historic structures and/or underutilized spaces; 2) bringing vacant and/or underutilized spaces back on the tax rolls and boosting area property values; 3) fostering the safety and livability of neighborhoods without evidence of gentrification-led displacement; 4) anchoring arts districts and expanding public access to the art; and 5) attracting additional artists, art businesses, organizations, and supporting non-art businesses to the area.¹³

The four properties presented in this paper represent four of the eight major building categories for adaptive use in the Bay Area: an industrial power substation, a church, a commercial retail building, and a school, all in very different communities.

Contemporary Jewish Museum – San Francisco, California

The 1906 earthquake and resulting fires in San Francisco decimated the city, destroying 28,000 buildings and leaving 20,000 people homeless over a 490-block area that included both business and residential occupants, making it “the worst municipal disaster in American history”¹⁴, and yet San Franciscans rapidly began to rebuild the city, considered unusually sophisticated architecturally at the end of the 19th century.¹⁵ According to the 1947 edition of *California: An Intimate Guide*, “The new business section, which rapidly arose from the ruins of

¹³ Ann Gadwa and Anna Muessig, *How Artist Space Matters* (Minneapolis, ArtSpace Projects, 2010) , 54

¹⁴ T.H. Watkins., *California, An Illustrated History* (New York, American Legacy Press, 1983), 277.

¹⁵ David Gebhard, et al, *A Guide to Architecture in San Francisco & Northern California* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City, Peregrine Smith Inc., 1973), 16.

the old, is entirely modern, and despite the setback caused by the fire, San Francisco has progressed steadily.”¹⁶

Situated in the South of Market (SoMA) section of downtown, between the Embarcadero and 11th Street – San Francisco’s first industrial area - the Pacific Gas & Electric Co. substation on Jessie Street right off of Market and Mission Streets was originally built in 1881; because of a series of fires, it was enlarged and rebuilt several times, until it was almost completely destroyed in the 1906 earthquake.¹⁷ That tragedy led to the 1907 rebuilding of the substation in order to provide energy to the city, designed and constructed by renowned architect Willis Polk, the head of Chicago architect Daniel Burnham’s San Francisco office.

Burnham had, in 1905, presented a plan to the municipal powers to develop a “City Beautiful” model in San Francisco, with monuments, neoclassical architecture, and a general return to a noble order in civic life, led by the city’s layout and buildings.¹⁸ This grand design never happened, but one can see the neoclassical nature of the electric



substation, with its simple, horizontal brick and terra cotta wall, arched doorway, and cherub embellishment above another door, hiding the heavy industrial equipment within. The

The front of the old substation after restoration. Photo: Julie Fry

¹⁶ Aubrey Drury, *California: An Intimate Guide*, (New York and London, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), 244.

¹⁷ Roger Olmstead and T.H. Watkins, *Here Today: San Francisco’s Cultural Heritage*, (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1968), 92-93.

¹⁸ Gebhard et al, 19.

building was in use as a substation until 1924, and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 under Criteria C, but remained vacant until its opening as the Contemporary Jewish Museum in 2008.¹⁹

During most of the 20th century, the SoMA area grew more industrial and blighted, and eventually became a Skid Row-like downtrodden and transient neighborhood. The construction of the George Moscone convention center in the early 1980s led the way to additional efforts by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) to improve the area with the creation of a new neighborhood, Yerba Buena. It now includes Yerba Buena Gardens, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, and, in the 1990s, the beginnings of a new museum district anchored by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Today there are additional museums such as The Museum of the American Diaspora and the Cartoon Art Museum, and a plethora of hotels and restaurants – a neighborhood transformed for tourists and residents. The Jessie Street substation, because of the reputation of Willis Polk as an innovative architect, became “a cause célèbre of the historic preservation community in the 1970s” when the Yerba Buena neighborhood was newly slated for redevelopment.²⁰ Many buildings in the urban neighborhood were subsequently demolished as part of the redevelopment – reminiscent of the 1906 earthquake – but the substation and the church next to it were saved; the former was offered to the now 27-year-old Contemporary Jewish Museum (CJM) for the site of their new institution in 1995 to provide exhibitions and education programs that explore and celebrate contemporary Jewish life for the diverse Bay Area population.²¹

¹⁹ Vernacular Language North, http://www.verlang.com/sfbay0004ref_slideshow_wp_sf_02.html#222-26_jessie (accessed December 2, 2011)

²⁰ Connie Wolf, ed, *Daniel Libeskind and the Contemporary Jewish Museum: New Jewish Architecture from Berlin to San Francisco* (New York, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc, 2008), 39-40.

²¹ Ibid.

Internationally renowned architect Daniel Libeskind was selected to design the \$47.5 million museum for his first North American commission, and his fourth Jewish museum. His approach



A glimpse of the "yud" attached to the side of the old substation. Photo: Julie Fry

was to combine the history of the landmark historic building with “the dynamism of contemporary architecture.”²² Planning included discussions on the internal space and how to make best use of the huge open industrial space: angled or straight walls, the use of light in galleries, how to make exhibition and education spaces flexible, and, mainly, the traffic pattern and the experience it would provide to the museum visitor.²³ The resulting 63,000-square-foot museum, which includes the obligatory museum café and gift shop, marries the old and the new in a neighborhood surrounded by both. The sweeping

internal white gallery walls are juxtaposed against the original brick walls and cast-iron window mullions of the substation’s shell; massive steel I-beams providing seismic bracing. Externally, the original building stands as it always has, the heavy brick wall facing the street. It is the only feature of the building preserved in its original place; the other walls were dismantled and used in other parts of the museum. Libeskind added square footage and pizzazz with an extension clad with metallic blue steel on the back and side of the building; inspired by the Hebrew phrase “L’Chaim (to life), it takes the form of two symbolic Hebrew letters: “chai” (life), the “chet” and

²² Contemporary Jewish Museum <http://www.thecjm.org/index.php> (accessed November 20, 2011)

²³ Wolf, 41.

the energetic symbol “yud”, honoring the importance of both the power substation and Willis Polk’s role in rebuilding San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake.²⁴

In seeking to meet the museum’s mission “to be a lively center that fosters community among people of diverse backgrounds through shared experiences with the arts”²⁵, the placement and reputation of an historic San Francisco building in the middle of a revitalized urban arts and culture district has been crucial. Attendance has increased by over 100,000 people annually since its opening in 2008, and its budget has increased from \$7 million to \$12 million, with expenses almost doubling. The budget is growing alongside a healthy endowment of \$25 million, notable during this period of recession and funded primarily by individual donors and foundations.²⁶ The museum is now considered an active and lively part of the cultural fabric of SoMA and the city, as well as part of the wider international Jewish museum family. According to Daniel Libeskind, “the CJM is itself a symbol dedicated to the revitalization of Jewish life in San Francisco and beyond. The new building itself synthesizes the past and the future by reinventing the historic fabric in the context of contemporary architecture.”²⁷

Julia Morgan Center for the Arts - Berkeley, California

Julia Morgan, one of California’s premiere architects known for her arts and crafts approach to design, was even better known for her work on Hearst Castle, a job spanning 28 years, starting in 1919. But before that defining work, a commission early in her career led to the design and construction of St. John’s Presbyterian Church in Berkeley in 1908-1910. The 1906 earthquake in San Francisco left many people homeless, a number of whom moved to the East Bay; these were some of the same people who were keeping Ms. Morgan’s new architecture practice busy

²⁴ Wolf, 42.

²⁵ Contemporary Jewish Museum <http://www.thecjm.org/index.php> (accessed November 20, 2011)

²⁶ California Cultural Data Project, FY2008, 2009, 2010 data profiles.

²⁷ Wolf, 107.

with building their replacement homes. A group of these transplants wanted to recreate a congregation to reflect the one they had lost, and found a double lot near the University of California-Berkeley campus on which to build another St. John's. Their request was for simple and economical Sunday school and church buildings. Keeping costs well below \$2 per square foot, Ms. Morgan focused on using natural materials and simple lines. With its plain studs and Douglas fir planks, the wall and roof trusses were left exposed inside the church; the outside is of stained shingles and redwood clapboard, rather like a barn, but with Tudor and Romanesque leanings. Because the church was built in a residential area, Ms. Morgan made sure that the building fit in with the surrounding houses and did not call too much attention to itself by keeping low to the ground under wide spreading gables; horizontal lines run throughout the



Interior view of the church. Photo: Environmental Design Archives, U.C. Berkeley

property. The small interior, with pews for less than four hundred people and a gently sloping floor, was lit by clerestory windows, casting a cozy glow on the overhead beams and supports. The building was happily used as a place of worship by the congregation until a bequest enabled them to build a larger church nearby,

which was completed in 1973, leaving the Morgan building vacant and vulnerable to demolition

and redevelopment. The ensuing fight to save the church from the wrecking ball led to the formation of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association.²⁸ As recently stated by Kim O’Connell, “Churches are key to a city’s architectural character and its social and religious history, preservationists say. Often, these advocates will stamp a capital L on these landmarks through official historic designation. At the state or local level, such designations can limit what happens to church buildings by preventing significant alterations or demolition.”²⁹ As Richard Wagner points out in the same article, churches are generally difficult to adapt, not in the least because of their large size.³⁰ In this case, the small church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, considered one of Ms. Morgan’s finest buildings, the same year that it was sold to Samuel Scripps, the founder of the American Society of Eastern Arts.³¹ Clearly visualizing how the church could be used as a performance space,



Front of the church. Photo: Mary Ann Sullivan

Mr. Scripps built a simple stage and launched the Center for World Music, but this only lasted a year before the building was sold again, this time for specific use as an arts venue. With its fine acoustics, a stage, and a place for audience members to sit, the church building as performance space was a natural fit.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, The Julia Morgan Center for the Arts, was incorporated in 1980, and a variety of small performing arts groups performed in the 328-seat space, including the Berkeley

²⁸ Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association website
http://www.berkeleyheritage.com/berkeley_landmarks/st._johns_presb.html (accessed November 20, 2011)

²⁹ Kim O’Connell, “The Trouble With Church Preservation”, *The Atlantic Cities*, November 29, 2011 (accessed online)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Sarah Holmes Boutelle, *Julia Morgan, Architect*, (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1988), 70.

Opera, which took advantage of the excellent natural acoustics of the building, and the Berkeley Ballet Theater. No further renovations took place to turn the building into a bona fide performing arts space until 1989, when Berkeley architects Bendrew and Lorraine Jong bought the building for \$1.75 million and borrowed \$850,000 for the building's first major adaptive use renovation. Mr. Jong remembers the church starting to fall apart when he was growing up; once he purchased it, he focused first on repairs and steel beam seismic reinforcement, as well as making the entrance and interior seating suitable for disabled access. The architects replaced every window with safety glass, and every window frame with redwood.

For theater use, the proscenium opening was a problem because of the existing pulpit and pipe organ, along with two major supporting columns on either side; these were removed and additional steel beams were added for roof support. The architects added an orchestra pit and green room, improved sight lines throughout the nave, provided new seating and lighting, and, inevitably, more restrooms. The acoustics were fine because of the materials and the small size of the church; musicians love the way that wooden buildings pick up reverberations and therefore, every note. In general, churches do not have a large lobby area, one of the shortfalls of adapting a church for a performance space; however, because of the relatively small interior, the lack of a large lobby has not been considered enough of a problem to either add on to the front of the building, ruining the simple lines and adding unnecessary volume, or to reconfigure internal space.

In order to create a sprung dance floor, the architects dug out the area under the stage and reframed it with bouncy joists. They took the extra dirt and bricks and made a wheelchair accessible walkway to the front door, and leveled the lobby with the sidewalk. "Something," says Ben Jong, "that Julia Morgan would have done, use existing materials from the building to

make it accessible to all.”³² After ten contentious years of working on bringing the building up to performance standards, with little support from the City of Berkeley, as well as presenting 250 arts events per year, the Jongs gifted the building to the Julia Morgan Center for the Arts in 2000. The work they did was considered by Mark Wilson, a founder of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, to be “a perfect example of adaptive reuse of a historic building. Sitting empty would be disastrous. It needs work.”³³

A strategic plan completed by the center in 2008 – after the entire board resigned in 2006 because of a lack of financial and organizational stability - underlined its importance as a small performing arts venue, particularly for music and dance, within the local arts environment of theater-centric, larger performance spaces, and its availability as a rental house. It still has some unresolved issues: limited back stage amenities, such as load-in, set storage, and dressing rooms; modest lighting, rigging and sound amenities; lack of parking in its residential neighborhood and distance from public transport.

The Julia Morgan Center for the Arts still manages the building for its resident companies, Berkeley Ballet Theater and Berkeley Playhouse, and also acts as a rental venue for other small arts organizations and community groups, but its finances are vulnerable, as they are for many small nonprofits with budgets under \$500,000. A recent grant from the California Cultural and Historical Endowment provided money for a new shingle roof, heating and air conditioning, stage repairs, and preservation of the building’s redwood exterior.³⁴ Sitting on a Julia Morgan jewel, the organization needs to find some way to better leverage that asset in order to better reach the needs of the local arts, residential, and university communities.

³² Bendrew Jong, architect. Telephone interview with author, November 30, 2011.

³³ Kimberly Chun, “Morgan Center’s Next Step/Berkeley Arts Center Dances Financial Tightrope”, *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 28, 1999 (accessed online).

³⁴ Mimi Morris, *Preserving California’s Treasures*, (Sacramento, California Cultural and Historical Endowment, 2011), 27.

East Bay Center for the Performing Arts – Richmond, California

Richmond, California is in Contra Costa County, part of the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area. In the early decades of the 20th century, Richmond benefited from the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco which drove people east to live and work, together with favorable industrial conditions like cheap fuel and good transportation, and was therefore able to attract a number of major industries. The city center boomed during World War II, and busted soon after, and has not yet recovered, with vacant buildings, high unemployment, and alarming crime rates, with the “dubious distinction of being the most violent neighborhood in the second most dangerous city in America, according to recent FBI statistics.”³⁵

The Winters Building was built in what was then considered Richmond’s burgeoning downtown in 1923 by Adolph Winters, a local businessman, on land he purchased in 1919, perhaps as part of the post-war economic boom, and designed by San Francisco architect A.W.



The Winters Building. Photo: East Bay Center for the Performing arts archive.

Cornelius, a prolific theater architect.³⁶ The original two-story, reinforced concrete building, with two mezzanines and a full basement, housed a flower shop and a music store on the ground floor, and a ballroom for public tea dances on the second floor. Mr. Winters hosted weekly dances in the building until 1938.³⁷ Its exterior ornamentation still reflects Renaissance and Baroque sources, with arched

windows and detailed cornices and pilasters on the upper level. The building was used for

³⁵ The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, “A Tough Neighborhood Helps Itself”, <http://www.hewlett.org/newsroom/a-tough-neighborhood>, 2008.

³⁶ Michael Corbett, “History and Evaluation of the Winters Building, Richmond, California” (Architectural History Report, Berkeley, 2007), 15.

³⁷ Morris, 50.

multiple purposes over the subsequent years and owners, including a series of stores, a World War II bomb shelter, and a venue for boxing matches. The Richmond Redevelopment Agency purchased the property in 1974 as part of a strategy to revitalize the struggling downtown; by 1977 the building was largely vacant. The agency secured \$525,000 from the city for rehabilitation, and occupied the ground floor, providing space for the East Bay Center for the Arts (EBCPA), an arts education organization started in 1968 and working out of a local church. The first floor and mezzanine were divided into offices, essentially making the building into a three-story building. EBCPA moved into the upper part of the building and offered music classes, of which Mr. Winters would have greatly approved. Recognizing at the time that the needs of a music center were specific (rehearsal space, practice rooms, studios of multiple sizes), the two largest ground floor spaces in the building were utilized as music and dance rehearsal spaces, and the original ballroom - an artistic room, with a sprung dance floor, but not useful for music classes - was separated into studios and offices, as well as a small theater space.³⁸ The building originally had two entrances, each marked by a marquee; only one entrance still exists. Inside this entrance used to be a lobby for the ballroom; it now houses a reception area, stairs and an elevator, and the ground floor windows are of a modern metal storefront variety. The building is not currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Jordan Simmons, a Richmond native who took some of the first classes offered at EBCPA as a child, the organization purchased the Winters Building in 2005 in order to secure the space during a real estate boom, and in 2006 began a capital campaign to raise \$16 million in public and private support for finishing more effectively the adaptive use project begun in 1978 to make this retail building a suitable performing arts education center. According to Mr. Simmons, by 1990 the Winters Building was falling apart;

³⁸ Corbett, 2-4.

water was taking its toll on the building, as it always does, leading to mold and a leaky roof.

EBCPA was offered a bank building down the street at that time, but upon further consideration, it became clear that it would be better to make incremental changes to the Winters Building while inching closer to ownership and raising money in a capital campaign for a major restoration, a significant reach for an organization with a mid-sized budget of less than \$2 million, particularly during a recession. The overarching philosophy of the project was to make sure the building fit the programs they have

(and not what they think they have), and not the other way around. Architect Mark Cavagnero worked with the center staff for two years to design the building, to ensure that every square foot of the building was useful to teaching arts to young people; for example, as important as



A current view of the Winters Building. Photo: Mark Cavagnero and Associates

bathrooms are, they are not prime teaching space, so they went into the basement. The design needed to include bigger public spaces for recitals, flexible space for both performances and rehearsals, and good acoustics and volume control for individual and group practice rooms and presentations. It needed a plan to come up to earthquake and fire codea, as well as ADA-compliance. It needed to enable both chamber musicians and African drumming students to have a high-quality artistic experience.³⁹

Construction began in 2009, and the building – which had to be vacated for most of the past two years – reopened to the public in October 2011; the organization did not miss a day of programming, and served 10,000 people through free events and classes, including 4,000

³⁹ Jordan Simmons, Executive Director, East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, telephone interview with author, November 29, 2011.

students during the past year, without a facility.⁴⁰ With \$825,000 left to raise, a designated \$500,000 building reserve will help to cover increased operating costs and ongoing maintenance and long-term care over time; the facility is now estimated to have a life of sixty to ninety years.⁴¹ The newly-restored, award-winning 16,500-square-foot building has 7,500 more square feet of rehearsal/instruction/performance space, with two 200-seat flexible capacity theater/community spaces with high production values, a dozen new, small studios, and three new rehearsal/classroom spaces.

EBCPA has always been an important and positive presence in the lives of the disadvantaged young people in Richmond, a community center in every sense of the word. Symbolically, the restoration and re-opening of the building is helping the Redevelopment Agency in its continuing



*View of one of two theater spaces in the renovated center.
Photo: Mark Cavagnero and Associates*

efforts to revitalize downtown Richmond; already EBCPA is attracting more foot traffic as an anchor tenant in the neighborhood, and is seeing a greater motivation and response from students and families with the restored space. Today, the Center provides “hands-on exploration for children, a conservatory level training

program, and ensembles in diverse cultural performing art forms for teens, district-wide residencies and after school classes for children from pre-K to 12th grade, and professional

⁴⁰ California Cultural Data Project, FY2010 data profile.

⁴¹ East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, Final Grant Report to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, December 2010.

development for local public school teachers.”⁴² Staff at EBCPA partners closely with the Healthy Richmond program of the California Endowment, and the City of Richmond as they all seek to build a more civil society by providing people with the possibility of dignity and beauty, with the help of EBCPA at the center of downtown life; the roots of the organization and the Winters Building go deeply into the community.

Sunset Center – Carmel, California

A school with an auditorium could be considered a natural choice for an arts performance venue, and the Sunset Center in Carmel provides a fine example of this. Carmel is a small, affluent coastal city located on the Monterey Peninsula, considered to be very arts-friendly; in fact, a 1910 article in the Los Angeles Times about the area was entitled: “Hotbed of Social Culture, Vortex of Erotic Erudition: Carmel-by-the-Sea, Where Author and Artist Folk are Establishing the Most Amazing Colony on Earth.”⁴³

The Sunset School, Carmel’s local grammar and high school, added a 700-seat auditorium in 1931 – early on in the Great Depression – considered “the finest assembly hall of any school in the area”⁴⁴. It was so highly valued as a community resource that the City of Carmel purchased the entire building once it ceased being used for educational purposes in 1964 for use as the Sunset Community and Cultural Center, and the auditorium add-on became the Sunset Center. The auditorium was heavily utilized over the next forty years as the home of the annual Carmel Bach Festival, as well as a multitude of other music, dance and theater performances, truly becoming the vortex of cultural activity in Carmel. However, a stage that was too small for a full orchestra, poor sight lines for the audience and abysmal acoustics in the Gothic arch ribbed

⁴² East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, <http://eastbaycenter.org/AbouttheCenter/History/tabid/244/Default.aspx> (accessed November 27, 2011)

⁴³ City of Carmel-by-the-Sea: Official Travel Site, <http://www.carmelcalifornia.com/> (accessed December 1, 2011).

⁴⁴ Sunset Center, “Theater History,” <http://www.sunsetcenter.org/history.html> (accessed November 29, 2011).

interior precipitated the creation of a public-private partnership in 1993 to upgrade the school auditorium to professional performance quality.⁴⁵ In 1998, the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places under criteria C.

Work began on the renovation in 2001, and was completed two years later by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) and several technical consultants. The \$21.4 million price tag was paid for through City bonds and with support from foundation and individual donors.⁴⁶ The building needed quite a bit of functional programming. The first order of business was to literally raise



*The mesh arches for improved acoustics.
Photo: Julie Fry*

the roof to become more steeply-pitched, as well as widen the existing proscenium arch above the stage to provide more fly space above. A matching arch-shaped catwalk was installed to allow improved lighting and rigging control. Because of its importance as a live music venue, drastically improving the acoustic quality was paramount. The original stucco arches broke up the sound and added an unwelcome reverberation; the solution ARG developed was to replace the stucco with perforated metal mesh

arches in the same proportion, which are acoustically porous to let the sound through. Visually, the arches

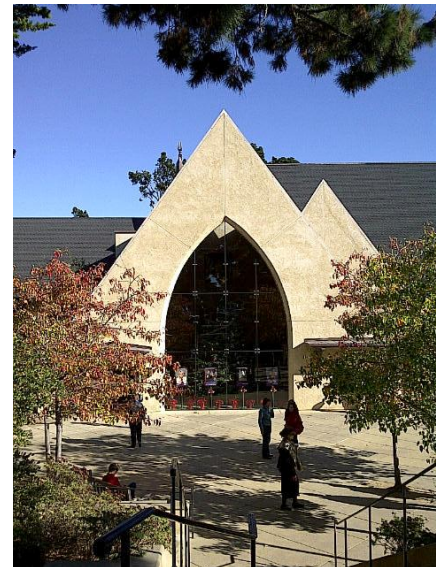
adhere to the original ribbed look of the space, and seem to be made of plaster, until closer inspection reveals the true composition. Adjustable curtains and an electronic sound system have been installed, including fifty-seven speakers in the walls, which allow the reverberation to

⁴⁵ Sunset Center, "Theater History," <http://www.sunsetcenter.org/history.html> (accessed November 29, 2011).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

be adjusted to sound like that of a larger concert hall; an un-amped whisper onstage can now be heard in the back row of the theater.⁴⁷

The doors to a school auditorium generally open directly off of an internal corridor or a public sidewalk, and this was no exception; another major need was the creation of a lobby large enough to encompass a box office and a gathering place for patrons. The challenge to create a lobby that fit in with the historical fabric of the existing building, but that was also recognized as new and of the time was rather Sir Gilbert Scott-like in philosophy. The solution was to add volume to the building (of some initial concern to the neighbors) through an 8,360-square-foot lobby expansion on the front of the building, making the old door of the auditorium an interior door, echoing the roof line of the original building and adding numerous windows which also match the arch of the roof and original windows. The renovation also included, among other things, bringing the Center into compliance with state earthquake and federal disability access codes, and adding restrooms, a new



The new lobby addition. Photo: Julie Fry

orchestra pit with a lift, and dressing and storage rooms – all making the building a bona fide arts center; the school's parking lot still exists for audience members' and artists' use. Although the auditorium project did not include any work on the rest of the original school (currently the Sunset Community and Cultural Center), it did require the addition of a new stair tower off the stage, and an aesthetic tie-in to the rest of the building. Architectural Resource Group's Founding Principal, Steven Farneth, states that in adaptive use projects like this, there are always tensions

⁴⁷ Kevin Howe, "Sunrise on a New Sunset." *The Monterey County Herald*, July 13, 2003: A1.

between retaining the historic appeal of the building while satisfying the non-negotiable nature of its functionality. Preservationists may care about the history – and in this case there were major changes to the building - but not about the function of the building, and the funders or municipal owners may primarily care about the budget. In the end, all of the interested parties were in agreement about the decisions made.⁴⁸

In 2004 the City of Carmel named a new nonprofit, Sunset Cultural Center, Inc. (SCCI), to take over the management and operation of the building “as a place for public, cultural, entertainment and community events so that Sunset Center will serve as an economic and cultural stimulant for the community, the people of Carmel, and its environs.”⁴⁹ It maintains a regular schedule of events, including its long-standing partnerships with resident companies like Carmel Bach Festival and the Monterey Symphony. The city has retained ownership of the building and subsidizes any fundraising shortfalls. With a current budget of nearly \$2 million, SCCI has seen paid attendance decline over the past few years, consistent with the effects of the economic downturn experienced by other nonprofit arts organizations, but attendance at free events has increased, a testament to its mission to meet the needs of its community.⁵⁰ As Nancy Doolittle, a major donor to the renovation’s capital campaign says, “I now attend almost every event at the Center and am amazed at how often I know no one else in the audience”, underlining the fact the Center’s revitalization has enabled the venue to provide more arts events and more arts education programs, therefore providing opportunities to diversify and grow audiences from the immediate community and beyond.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Steven Farneth, Founding Principal, Architectural Resources Group, telephone interview with author, December 2, 2011.

⁴⁹ Sunset Center, “Theater History,” <http://www.sunsetcenter.org/history.html> (accessed November 29, 2011).

⁵⁰ California Cultural Data Project, FY 2008, 2009, 2010 data profiles.

⁵¹ Nancy Doolittle, email message to author, December 4, 2011.

Conclusion

With a small sample of four properties, it is not possible to come to overarching conclusions for the field about which type of building is more adaptable as an arts venue. If anything, each adaptive use project showed that one size does not fit all; in each case, there were different assets and challenges faced by the partners renovating each of the buildings.

According to ArtSpace Projects, the keys to creating and maintaining successful arts spaces of any kind are: 1) affordable, stable space that is physically appropriate for artists and arts organizations; 2) governance structures that foster involvement; 3) active, dynamic, and artistically rigorous internal communities, frequently driven by individual leaders who catalyze engagement; 4) building features, anchor tenants, and special programs that connect with the broader community, and 5) geographic connectivity with a critical mass of arts activity and complementary community development initiatives.⁵²

Each of the four properties discussed met most of the criteria listed above, some more than others. The Sunset Center and the Julia Morgan Center for the Arts started with original buildings that housed a stage-like area and public seating. However, in both cases, the stages needed to be widened or strengthened, and adapted for dance performances. The Contemporary Jewish Museum had a blank slate in the substation, with only the budget, the surrounding buildings, and the need to preserve the front wall as constraints. The East Bay Center for the Performing Arts and the Sunset Center were grassroots enough to work with what they had over the years, making changes as they were able. Functionality was the driving force for each of the projects, a clear vision of how the end product could serve the needs of the communities being served. If form ever follows function, as Louis Sullivan famously said, then in these buildings, form followed function followed form, underlined by the money available for both how the

⁵² Ann Gadwa and Anna Muessig, *How Artist Space Matters* (Minneapolis, ArtSpace Projects, 2010), 75.

adaptation was done and the programs taking place within the buildings. Project and organizational budgets were across a wide range, indicating that while money is a facilitating force in adaptive use projects, it does not need to be a barrier to good, effective work.

For the majority of the buildings, the process of adaptive use has been iterative, with major and minor changes taking place over a number of years, under different leadership, when money and will and favorable politics were in good supply. What has been the lynchpin for each has been how each building – and the nonprofits that utilize them – is valued by the community around it over a long period of time. The Julia Morgan Center for the Arts is the outlier here, the cautionary tale of how not to approach the adaptive use of an important architectural work. Always privately owned, never embraced with significant funding by the City of Berkeley, subject to multiple shifts in leadership and opinion as the property changed hands, the building is valued as an important Julia Morgan building, but not as part of a Berkeley neighborhood. In fact, those living around it are, understandably, concerned about the additional traffic, parking issues, and noise it incurs, making its future vulnerable. Even now it is not clear who is in charge. The Sunset Center has been a beloved institution in a small town for many years, the primary arts venue and community gathering place in the area, no matter the quality of the acoustics. The East Bay Center for the Performing Arts has been a constant and long-term positive influence, on both people and redevelopment policy, in a downtrodden and violent town center. The Jessie Street substation, now the Contemporary Jewish Museum, was tucked away as a valued if unsung architectural jewel in a gritty urban setting that has seen major regeneration over the past two decades.

All of these projects were driven by groups of constituents coming together to preserve, restore, and develop an important community resource. In almost every case, the shared value has manifested itself in a sustainable business model, a private/public partnership that diversifies revenues, leverages the building asset, and shares the burden of restoration and maintenance across the community, all the while strengthening important pieces of architectural and Bay Area neighborhood history.

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