Julia Morgan: Gender, Architecture, and Professional Style

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Architect Julia Morgan (1872–1957) cultivated a professional style that enabled her to exert authority in a male-dominated profession. This article focuses on three aspects of that style: her costume, her relationship to the media, and her downtown San Francisco office. Rather than a shy woman who sought anonymity, Morgan was a savvy professional with a strong gender consciousness who actively sought success and shaped her own destiny. Her story provides insight into the history of women in the professions and the gendered landscape of the Progressive Era city. Since Julia Morgan left behind few words regarding her social views, professional intentions, or architectural philosophy, this article is also an interdisciplinary exercise that investigates the intersection of biography, material culture, gender, and the built environment.

On May 15, 1929, the University of California, Berkeley, conferred upon Julia Morgan its highest award, an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. In his tribute to the San Francisco Bay Area architect, President William Wallace Campbell described Morgan as a “distinguished alumna of the University of California, artist and engineer; designer of simple dwellings and of stately homes, of great buildings nobly planned to further the centralized activities of her fellow citizens; architect in whose works harmony and admirable proportions bring pleasure to the eye and peace to the mind.” Local papers carried the story as front-page news and included photos of the architect at the ceremony. Dozens of clients, colleagues, and friends sent congratulations, citing the honor as a well-deserved recognition of her vision, genius, and social service “that sheds a glory over the endeavors of all womanhood.”

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Twenty-five years earlier, Morgan could not have imagined such public praise and general respect for her work as she battled the potentially debilitating effects of gender stereotypes in this male-dominated profession. In retrospect, she could attribute much of her success to her professional style and the way she established authority and crafted relationships with the public, clients, colleagues, and employees.

Although she would have been loath to admit it, gender significantly shaped Julia Morgan’s professional style. From childhood through the completion of her architectural training at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, she developed a strong sense of society’s prescribed roles for women and the resulting constraints on her personal and professional development. One of her earliest commissions, the campanile at Mills College in Oakland, exposed her to the power dynamics of the client-colleague-architect triumvirate that she would have to negotiate throughout her career. In response to these gender constructs and the culture of the architectural profession, Morgan presented herself in ways that directly affected her authority over and relationship to clients, colleagues, and employees, marked in particular by her costume, her relationship to the media, and the spatial language of her downtown San Francisco office. A reexamination of Julia Morgan’s costume underscores the details women had to consider in the early twentieth century as they emerged from the domestic sphere. Her savvy use of the media allowed her to build a professional reputation and maintain a public profile without having to engage in competitions.

1. Julia Morgan (1872–1957) was one of the first major American women architects. She designed over 700 buildings, mostly in California, including homes, hospitals, and college and university buildings. She is probably best known as the architect of William Randolph Hearst’s massive estate, San Simeon. Sara Boutelle, Julia Morgan, Architect (1988; New York, 1995), 49; “Academic Pomp Marks Granting of Degrees at U.C. Commencement,” Oakland Tribune, May 15, 1929, p. 3; San Francisco Examiner, May 16, 1929, p. 1; “Class of ’29 is Graduated at Berkeley,” in ibid., 21; “Highest Honor Given Woman,” San Francisco Chronicle, May 16, 1929, p. 15; letters of congratulations, 1929, folders 12 and 13, box 06, series 02, Record Group I, Julia Morgan Collection, Special Collections Department, Robert E. Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (hereafter Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly); and Florence Stull to Julia Morgan, May 17, 1929, folder 13, box 02, series 06, RG I, in ibid.
or express herself in words. Her financial district office likewise contributed to a re-imagi-ning of the geography of women in the city during the Progressive Era, while the plan and use of her office space reinforced her position of authority. Julia Morgan’s professional style played down or even rejected language, both written and spoken, which has resulted in a limited sampling of her thoughts and ideas as expressed in her own words. Consequently, she challenges us to rely less on text than on actions, material culture, space, and the built environment in developing an interpretation of gender discourse.

Gender consciousness and identity formation

Born in 1872, Julia Morgan grew up in an apparently typical, upper-middle-class Victorian household that adhered to conventional gender roles. Her father, Charles Morgan, worked outside the home and dabbled in politics, while her mother, Eliza Parmelee Morgan, raised the children and served as the moral center of the family. By his own admission, however, Charles Morgan achieved limited success.\(^2\) Eliza Morgan controlled the material fortunes of the family. As the daughter of Albert O. Parmelee, a wealthy cotton trader from Brooklyn, New York, Eliza Morgan inherited a fortune upon her father’s death in 1880, around which time she also invited her mother to live in California.\(^3\) The combined wealth of

\(^2\) Charles Bill (C. B.) Morgan first traveled to California in 1865. He purchased land in Santa Paula to drill for oil, but the land was dry. Twenty years later, he bought over 200 acres of land in Shasta County, along the Pitt River, to mine for iron, and co-founded the Shasta Iron Company. The company did not dissolve until 1975, but it never produced much income. Apart from these ventures, C. B. Morgan ran for public office (and lost), served on the school board, and served as the bookkeeper of a company that produced farm machinery. C. B. Morgan to Julia Morgan, Jan. 21, 1900, folder 12, box 01, series 01, RG I, in ibid.; C. B. Morgan to J. de Beuth [Short?], Sept. 5, Oct. 13, 1865, carton 1, BANC MSS 79/60c, Hart Hyatt North Papers [circa 1898–1950], Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; C. B. Morgan to Uncle, Sept. 11, 1865, in ibid.; de Beuth [Short?] to C. B. Morgan, Nov. 17, 1867, in ibid.; records of Shasta Iron Company, carton 1, BANC MSS 81/55c, Hart Hyatt North Papers [circa 1889–1962], Bancroft Library; Boutelle, *Julia Morgan*, 20–21.

\(^3\) Exactly when Sarah Emma Parmelee moved in with the Morgans is unclear, but she was living with them in July 1890 and died the following April. Eliza Parmelee (E. P.) Morgan to Julia Morgan, July 5, 1890, folder 10, box 01, series 01, RG I, in Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly; Sarah Emma Parmelee was buried on April 28, 1891, at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. “Burial Search,” Green-Wood Cemetery, http://www.green-wood.com/bur_search.asp, accessed Jan. 10, 2007.
these two women, more than the intermittent windfalls of Charles Morgan, generated the financial stability and material comfort that marked Julia Morgan’s childhood.

These inverted gender dynamics extended into the emotional sphere as well. Eliza Morgan traveled with her four children to Brooklyn Heights in 1878, ostensibly to tend to her ailing mother but actually to give her husband time to rescue the family from imminent financial disaster. Charles Morgan’s financial endeavors did not go well. He had to live at a boardinghouse while the family was away, but his trials paled in comparison to those of his wife. Within a five-month period, she had to deal with everything from toddlers’ tantrums to scarlet fever, the death of an infant niece, and a house fire in which Eliza was burned so severely that she had to have her wedding ring sawed off, could barely write, and needed a concoction of opium and morphine to ease the pain.4 In a telling role reversal from the Victorian image of the patriarchal husband and obedient wife, Eliza Morgan once reprimanded her husband, “I do not like sentimental letters. . . . [Y]ou are supposed to be a man. . . . If your life and business does [sic] not suit you, it’s no worse than it has been, and you ought to enjoy a rest from family cares and domestic duties. You should be thankful for your liberty to go and do as you please.”5 Not only did Charles Morgan fail to provide for his family, but he also openly expressed feelings of love, loneliness, vulnerability, and inadequacy. Eliza Morgan, on the other hand, did not rejoice in her roles as mother and wife; she clearly exerted more authority in the marital relationship and offered her husband little emotional sympathy. Throughout her childhood, then, Julia Morgan learned that men could not necessarily be relied upon for financial, social, or emotional stability, and that women could embody great strength and power. As a child, however, she had no model for applying these understandings outside the home.

College introduced her to a life beyond the domestic sphere. She enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, during a period of significant change for women students. Between 1889 and

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4. See letters from E. P. Morgan to C. B. Morgan, Oct. 1878 to March 1879, folders 04–09, box 01, series 01, RG I, Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly.
5. See ibid., especially E. P. Morgan to C. B. Morgan, Nov. 24, 1878, folder 05, box 01, series 01, RG I; emphases in original.
1891 they founded clubs and gained access to new spaces and extracurricular activities. Phoebe Apperson Hearst, widow of mining magnate and Senator George Hearst and mother of media tycoon and politician William Randolph Hearst, also established a scholarship fund for women students in 1891. Chartered in 1890, Kappa Alpha Theta, Berkeley’s first sorority, was the most important institution to shape Morgan’s undergraduate years. At the time, the sorority valued academic performance over social affairs; thus, while Julia Morgan was often the sole woman in the mathematics and science courses required to fulfill her major in civil engineering, she found regular community in a group of women who encouraged and fostered intellectual achievement. More importantly, she lived at the chapter house instead of her parents’ home, literally loosening her ties to the domestic sphere and allowing her to engage in academic life without distraction. In 1894 she graduated with honors. Bernard Maybeck, a young architect in Berkeley, promptly hired Morgan to work at his studio, encouraged her to seek artistic training at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art in San Francisco, and persuaded her that the Bay Area could not yet produce the best architects in the world. For that kind of education, Maybeck insisted, she would have to go to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, which then offered the most prestigious architectural training in the world—but only to men.

Paris, and specifically the École des Beaux-Arts, awakened Ju-

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Morgan’s gender consciousness in revealing ways. The school’s decision to allow women to attend evening classes during the summer of 1896, for example, placed her in regular association with women artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as with members of the *Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs*, a group founded in 1881 to advance the place of women in art. These courses offered little architectural education, but at the time—and again twenty years later—she commented on the importance of her exposure to bohemian life and women from all over Europe.

In late spring 1897, just five weeks before the first day of examinations, women were granted permission to compete for admission to degree programs, a decision that resulted in organized protests.

among the male students and temporary closure of the school.\textsuperscript{11} Such short notice, not to mention the hostile atmosphere, presented a challenge to all aspiring female applicants, but Morgan faced the task of mastering a particularly broad range of knowledge for the architecture exam.\textsuperscript{12} Influenced by the politicized atmosphere of the women’s classrooms, Morgan pleaded along gender lines for the faculty to waive her entrance examinations. She was the only woman trying to enroll in the architecture program, she argued, and hence posed no real threat to the competition. Her request was denied.\textsuperscript{13} She failed that first examination, noting that she was at least in the majority. When she learned that she failed the exam a second time in October 1897 because the jury “’ne voudraient pas encouragé [sic] les jeunes filles,’” she decided to try again, “just to show ‘les jeunes filles’ are not discouraged.”\textsuperscript{14} 

Before Julia Morgan could prepare for the third examination, however, she had to secure a position in an atelier. While most architecture students had little trouble finding a place in one of the free ateliers at the École or, for a fee, in an independent atelier in the city, Morgan faced a daunting task. Louis Pascal, one of the most popular maîtres among American students, respected her work but refused her admission to his atelier.\textsuperscript{15} In general, atelier

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\item The protests resulted in at least one arrest; see Procès verbaux des séances du Conseil Supérieur d’enseignement de l’École des Beaux-Arts, June 10, 1897, AJ52 20, Archives nationales françaises (hereafter Archives nationales); Garb, Sisters of the Brush, 103–104.
\item Bernard Maybeck to the Conseil de l’École des Beaux-Arts, April 29, 1897, in AJ52 409, and Ministère de L’Instruction Publique, des Beaux-Arts et des Cultes à l’École Nationale et Spéciale des Beaux-Arts to Maybeck, May 7, 1897, in Archives nationales; Julia Morgan to Pierre and Lucy LeBrun, July 19, 1897, folder 01, box 02, series 04, RG I, Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly.
\item Procès verbaux des séances du Conseil Supérieur d’enseignement de l’École des Beaux-Arts, May 5, 1897, AJ52 20, Archives nationales.
\item The atelier of Victor Laloux was the most popular among American architects. He mentored ninety-seven Americans over the course of his career. Jean-Louis Pascal’s atelier was the second-most popular, with forty-eight American students. Arthur Drexler, ed., The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts (New York, 1977), 459; Julia Morgan to Pierre and Lucy LeBrun, June 8, July 5, Oct. 4, 1896, Jan. 24, Feb. 27,
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life alternated between (or even combined) hard work with smoking, drinking, singing, talking, pranks, and general revelry.¹⁶ Julia Morgan’s brother, Avery Morgan (who had no trouble finding a place in Victor Laloux’s atelier when he arrived in the summer of 1898 with a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering and little studio training), complained about this culture and was often the victim

Figure 2. Julia Morgan in front of Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, c. 1900. Julia Morgan Papers, Special Collections, California Polytechnic State University.

of atelier pranks. On such occasions, he would return from the atelier dripping wet, his hat torn and ruined. No atelier would accept his sister, regardless of her talents, so long as this culture of debauched masculinity persisted. Julia Morgan herself responded dubiously to the idea of mixed ateliers: “I don’t think . . . that is a very possible arrangement.”

Maybeck again proved pivotal in shaping his protégée’s future. He introduced her to François-Benjamin Chaussemiche, winner of the École’s highest honor, the Prix de Rome, and considered one of the finest young architects in France. Chaussemiche expressed an interest in starting an atelier for women and during the summer of 1898 took Morgan under his wing. A few months later, Julia Morgan took the entrance examinations for a third time and passed, ranking thirteenth out of 392 applicants. Thus, on November 14, 1898, she became the first woman to be accepted into the architecture program at the École des Beaux-Arts. Once accepted, the institution’s centuries-old tradition of submitting work anonymously rendered Morgan’s gender relatively moot, and, in just over three years (as opposed to the average six years), she became the


18. François-Benjamin Chaussemiche (1864–1945) studied architecture under Jules André and Victor Laloux at the École des Beaux-Arts. In 1891 he earned his architecture degree, and two years later he won the Grand Prix de Rome. Chaussemiche was appointed principal project inspector for the Gare d’Orsay and became chief adviser for public buildings in 1900 and then chief architect for public buildings of the national palaces in 1904. Michel Prévoost and Roman D’Amat, eds., Dictionnaire de Biographie Française (Paris, 1959), 884; Julia Morgan to Pierre and Lucy LeBrun, May 30, 1898, folder 02, box 02, series 04, RG I, Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly.
first woman to earn a degree in architecture.\textsuperscript{19} She returned to Oakland in 1902, equipped with her prestigious degree, a strong sense of herself as a woman in a traditionally male profession, and the knowledge that she could overcome gender as an obstacle if her work were given the chance to speak for itself.

A monumental task: 
The design and construction of \textit{El Campanil}

Like all Americans who studied architecture at the École, Morgan expected to build a respectable career and to design structures of all types and sizes. Her parents and sister had assured her that the Bay Area was ripe for a building boom and that she would play a prominent role in it. Their predictions proved correct: By the close of 1902 Julia Morgan had designed a house for her friends Frederick and Mabel Seares at the University of Missouri, Columbia. She also secured a position in the office of John Galen Howard, the Beaux-Arts-trained architect who had been appointed to oversee the final design and construction of the University of California campus as well as to head its new school of architecture. During this time Morgan helped design the Hearst Memorial Mining building and supervised the construction of the Greek Theater.\textsuperscript{20} Her career appeared to be heading in the direction she had anticipated.

Within a couple of years, however, she learned, yet again, despite her credentials, skill, devotion to work, and popularity among friends and acquaintances, that gender might preclude her from realizing her goals.\textsuperscript{21} A specific episode exposes the obstacles

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\textsuperscript{19} Julia Morgan to Pierre and Lucy LeBrun, Nov. 14, 1898, in \textit{ibid.}; Liste des élèves admis dans la seconde classe d’architecture,” Nov. 15, 1898, AJ52 483, Archives nationales; Julia Morgan to Pierre and Lucy LeBrun, March 1, 1897, folder 01, box 02, series 04, RG I, Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly; Boutelle, \textit{Julia Morgan}, 28; Julia Morgan’s transcript in Dossiers individuels des élèves, AJ52 409, Archives nationales.
\textsuperscript{21} One oft-told story relates that Morgan became disillusioned and infuriated when John Galen Howard told a friend that he had a fantastic draftsman whom he did not have to pay much because she was a woman. While plausible, the story is only hearsay, an unsubstantiated rumor circulated by former employee Dorothy Wormser Coblentz and subsequently repeated in biographies and articles. Dorothy Coblentz,
Morgan faced: In 1903 Francis Marion “Borax” Smith and his wife, Mary, commissioned Morgan to create her first monumental work, a bell tower for Mills College. Two years later, *El Campanil* was unveiled with great fanfare and public attention. As she discovered throughout the project, however, clients and colleagues differed in their support for her endeavors. The former almost blindly and enthusiastically supported her, while the latter expressed extreme skepticism—if not outright hostility—to the idea of a woman architect.

Questions of technology exposed tensions over power and creative authority between Julia Morgan and Bernard Ransome, the builder for the campanile. Reinforced-concrete construction was an important issue in California architecture at this time. Every issue of *Architect and Engineer* contained at least one article related to the strengths and weaknesses of concrete, with debates ranging from the aesthetic values of concrete, to overall cost and labor concerns, to fire resistance and earthquake safety.\(^{22}\) Instructions for mixing and building with concrete also appeared in these articles, and an entire journal, *Cement Age*, was devoted to the technology.

If anybody in the Bay Area could claim expertise on this subject, Bernard Ransome and Julia Morgan were those two people. According to architectural historian Peter Collins, Bernard Ransome’s father, Ernest Ransome, was “the only person exploiting [reinforced concrete] in America” during the 1860s. He introduced the technology to San Francisco in 1870 and patented two inventions in the 1880s. Francis Marion Smith hired the Ransome family in 1888 to build the Alameda Borax works refinery, the first reinforced-concrete factory in the United States. In 1902 Ernest Ransome patented a space- and money-saving system that allowed for more window space and introduced new potential for the aesthetic value of concrete buildings. Julia Morgan studied this technology in the mandatory construction course at the École, a course generally recognized as the most difficult requirement students faced. She also described in detail the building of the Grand


For Susan Mills, president of Mills College, and Mary Smith, whose husband paid for the project, Morgan's work on the campanile marked an extension of the Progressive concerns to which they and other California women devoted themselves. These concerns included education, child welfare, woman suffrage, working women, health and housing reform, environmentalism, and cultural production. As Mary Smith wrote to Mills, “We wanted [the campanile] to be a great success for many reasons, one, the greatest of these, it was planned by a woman, and for a woman's college.”

One can argue about who had greater expertise in concrete technology, but undeniably Morgan was hired to oversee the campanile project as the lead architect and the person of greatest authority. Like any architect, Julia Morgan used language in the specifications to reiterate her status. She directed that the builder must present the architect with samples of the aggregate, for example, before the architect allowed the cement to be mixed. While this language did not represent any particular departure from the hierarchical relationship between architect and builder that had evolved with the professionalization of architecture during the late nineteenth century, Morgan’s gender exacerbated conflicts among architects, contractors, builders, and laborers that had come with this evolution. Morgan understood this; perhaps in an attempt to deflect attention from her gender, she referred to herself in the masculine form.

Bernard Ransome did not take well to his secondary status. He began to undermine Morgan’s authority early in the course of the campanile commission. During the fall of 1903 Morgan had to apologize for construction delays because Bernard Ransome insisted

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Architect and Engineer, 12 (April 1908), 20–24, 49–56; Chaffee, “The Teaching of Architecture,” 83; Dossiers individuels des élèves, AJ52 409, Archives nationales; Julia Morgan to Pierre and Lucy LeBrun, Feb. 11, 1899, folder 02, box 02, series 04, RG I, Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly; L. Ferembach to Julia Morgan, Aug. 15, 1901, folder 1, box 1, Julia Morgan Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter Julia Morgan Collection, Environmental Design Archives); Boutelle, Julia Morgan, 52.

24. Mary Smith to Susan Mills, Feb. 19, 1904, Record Group 18, Mills College Archives, Special Collections, F. W. Olin Library, Mills College, Oakland, California (hereafter RG 18, Mills College Archives).

that the blueprints be sent to his father. Before Ernest Ransome’s comments on Morgan’s design and calculations arrived, Mary Smith expressed qualms about Morgan’s abilities to President Mills. “I hope Mr. Bernard Ransome will personally superintend the work,” she wrote. “[Miss Morgan] should insist upon him as an overseer.”26 Mary Smith had more confidence in Ransome’s abilities, for only he had overseen the construction of reinforced-concrete buildings for the Smiths’ other enterprises. At this point, Julia Morgan still held the position of highest authority over the project, but Mary Smith’s misgivings portended change.

By the end of the project, Bernard Ransome had deprived Julia Morgan of virtually all credit for El Campanil. Just two weeks before the dedication ceremonies, Mills received another letter from Mary Smith. The two women agreed that special mention should be made at the dedication of Julia Morgan’s role in designing and constructing the campanile, but Francis Smith and Bernard Ransome thought otherwise. Francis Smith, wrote his wife, “says that Mr. Ransome claims that he had to reconstruct the whole thing, and had to be governed by his own ideas on the subject.” Significant changes had been made to the structural design; Bernard Ransome’s call to apply his father’s system of six-to-eight-inch walls of concrete between the buttresses prevailed over Morgan’s original design for twelve-inch walls, which did result in a lighter and less expensive building. Bernard Ransome went further, asserting “that Miss Morgan knows very little about cement.” In light of our knowledge of her credentials and experience, his comments to the Smiths were disingenuous at best. Mary Smith closed her letter to President Mills by stating, “It is needless to say that Mr. Smith has the greater faith in Mr. Ransome, and is thoroughly convinced that his statements are correct beyond the shadow of a doubt. And we desire that at the dedication, Mr. Ransome’s work be recognized as fully as the architect’s if not more fully.”27 The Smiths’ readiness to believe Bernard Ransome’s arrogation of credit underscores their fundamental skepticism that a woman could participate successfully in all aspects of a traditionally male career. In the end, Bernard Ransome’s name appeared above Julia Morgan’s on the program for the dedication ceremony. He had successfully exploited

27. Smith to Mills, March 29, 1904, in ibid.
preconceived notions of gender difference to undermine her professional status and to bolster his own.

The public praise that Julia Morgan received for the campanile, words that would advertise her work and shape her professional image, reinforced these gender stereotypes. For example, many of the comments made during the dedication ceremony praised the aesthetics of her work. One person called the campanile a “quaint and picturesque” work of architecture. Another speaker proclaimed that “this tower [was] reared by the genius of a woman’s brain” but described her genius as the product of “instinct with her creative spirit,” rather than of years of training and hard work. He further commended Julia Morgan for her “noblest self-sacrifice and wholehearted devotion,” which would serve as “an inspiration to other women to all high and lofty achievement.”28 She earned real praise and respect from the local business, intellectual, and philanthropic elite who attended the dedication that day, but by couching their praise in the rhetoric of femininity—instinct, devotion, and moral superiority—they undermined the integrity of her efforts to be recognized as a serious, expertly trained, and professional architect.

In spite of what may appear to be conditional praise, it should be noted that El Campanil did lead directly to further commissions for Julia Morgan. President Mills was so pleased with Morgan’s design and the public’s reception of it that she commissioned her to design the new campus library, to be named after the daughter of its benefactor, Andrew Carnegie. Morgan served unofficially as the campus architect for most of the next decade. The devastating earthquake that jolted Bay Area residents from their beds early in the morning of April 18, 1906, also reinforced the praise lavished upon Morgan’s work and catapulted her into the ranks of the most sought-after architects in the region. The campanile and the recently completed Carnegie Library survived intact, serving as models of reinforced-concrete construction.29 Of course, at the time of

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29. Rosalind Keep, *Fourscore Years: A History of Mills College* (Oakland, Calif., 1931), 102. The campanile survived the quake “without a crack,” and the new library was “as firm as a rock.” Architects from around the state visited the Mills campus to study these models of reinforced concrete construction. Large and technically complex commissions poured into Morgan’s office during the months immediately following the catastrophe, including structural repairs for San Francisco’s newest luxury hotel, the Fairmont. Octavius Morgan, “A Los Angeles Architect’s Impression of the San
the campanile dedication, Morgan could not have predicted these events and their impact on her career. Instead, her immediate experience with the Mills College project made abundantly clear that gender, rather than skill and merit, was driving her career. She would have to develop professional strategies to mitigate this situation.

**Self-fashioning: The body politic**

Jane Armstrong, a reporter for the *San Francisco Call* who interviewed Julia Morgan in 1907, held strong ideas about what an architect should look like. She expected to find the woman in charge of the post-earthquake reconstruction of the Fairmont Hotel “dressed in a color scheme of the impressionistic school.” Instead, she found “a small, slender young woman, with something so Quakerish about her that I felt all preconceived notions come tumbling about my head. . . . Here was a young woman dressed in drab and severely hair pinned [sic].”[^30]

Ever since Armstrong published this description, most chronicles of Morgan’s life and work have emphasized her costume. Some writers have underscored the utilitarian aspect of Morgan’s wardrobe: “Eschewing a regular purse, which would encumber her hands, she utilized suit pockets to carry necessaries,” wrote Morgan’s first biographer, Elinore Richey.[^31] Others have argued that Morgan’s attire embodied her self-contradictory character:

She was a tiny, fragile-looking woman not much over five feet tall, but she could swing a sledge hammer with the strength of a hefty man. She was given to wearing severely tailored suits, but she wore them with cream-colored French silk blouses. . . . She spoke softly, but when she issued orders it was with the finality of a Marine drill sergeant.[^32]

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Most often, however, writers have equated Morgan’s clothing choices with her painfully modest demeanor and quest for anonymity, an inevitable product of her Victorian upbringing. Their favorite quotation to emphasize this point comes from former Morgan employee, Dorothy Wormser Coblentz: “She looked like a nobody.”

While all of these interpretations contain an element of truth, they ignore the historical context in which Julia Morgan fashioned her costume, denying her the conscious act of deciding how to dress. Early in her career, Morgan exchanged the enormously puffy sleeves, fancy high collars, and ornately decorated blouses of her college years for her plainly tailored dark suits with nearly straight sleeves and skirts, worn with white French blouses, starched collars, and short neck ties. The costume combined the practical concerns of a working professional with consideration for outward appearance and the culturally charged meaning of clothing at home, in the architectural profession, and in American culture at the turn of the century.

The architectural profession provided model dress codes for Morgan to follow. Artist and illustrator Alexis Lemaistre commented in his history of the École des Beaux-Arts that architects always arrived “correctly dressed” in the most elegant and artistic fashion. Capes, smocks, open-collar shirts, full beards, and “pot hats” completed an aspiring French architect’s outfit. This tradition crossed the Atlantic in exaggerated forms. Architectural historian Dell Upton has argued that turn-of-the-century Americans had a fixed image of the architect: “white, middle-class, forceful,” and an artist. This formula allowed architects like Bernard Maybeck, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Henry Hobson Richardson to wear flamboyant costumes, such as Maybeck’s smocks and long beard, Wright’s berets and capes, and Richardson’s medieval peasant robes. These men built their professional reputations partly by flouting cultural norms for men’s fashion. While most American architects actually wore suits that were typical of any other white-collar professional, exceptional men like those mentioned above informed the popular image of the architect, upon which people like reporter Armstrong based their assumptions.

Julia Morgan understood that flamboyant styles in the Maybeck/Wright/Richardson tradition carried significant risk, particularly in the budding career of a woman. Nobody impressed the power of appearances upon Julia Morgan more than her mother. Of Maybeck and his family Eliza Morgan once wrote, “Today Emma saw the Maybecks on the Boat dressed in their worst Berkeley clothes—she escaped them as she considers them embarrassing acquaintances. . . . He is a kind nice looking man—when dressed
External appearances weighed particularly heavily in Eliza Morgan’s judgment of an individual, and she reminded her daughter repeatedly that outward appearances shaped a client’s first impression. Since Julia Morgan initially depended upon family, friends, and acquaintances who shared views similar to those of her mother and sister, she likely assumed that she might risk alienating them by adopting a flamboyant persona. Moreover, if Maybeck’s appearance sometimes elicited ridicule, a similar costume for Morgan would certainly compromise her chances for earning respect among colleagues or clients. The author of the Call article, for example, not only expected to find Morgan dressed in bright colors but equated such expectations with women whose “talent [was] merely a by-product of a wonderful new set of mannerisms and a novel and fuzzy way of doing the hair.”

She was, in other words, prepared to meet a woman of modest, even superficial, goals. Julia Morgan’s surprisingly plain appearance directly affected the reporter’s interpretation of the architect.

The average male American architect provided an alternative uniform, much like that worn by most professional men during this period: a plain dark suit, a light-colored shirt, starched shirt collar, and tie. While practical—durable, less cumbersome than a woman’s long dress, and easy to move and scale ladders in at construction sites (actions that Morgan performed)—this uniform had its limitations, too. For a woman, it could signify unorthodox, disruptive, and possibly radical tendencies. At the time, questions of women’s sexual orientation, the presumed feminine or masculine qualities of their dress, and participation in higher education and careers all were likely to elicit fear of disrupting the social order. German sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s theories of the “Mannish Lesbian” were gaining popularity in America, providing scientific language to justify these fears. At the same time, adopting male dress had become a feminist tactic to protest against oppression and Victorian expectations of women’s roles in society. In either case, such deviant or politically charged dress styles could offend the more conservative sensibilities of Julia Morgan’s clients.

35. E. P. Morgan to Julia Morgan, Sept. 29, 1901, folder 11, box 01, series 01, RG I, Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly.
The absence of a well-defined uniform for women architects underscores their liminal position in the profession as well as the opportunity for experimentation. Berkeley architect Lilian Bridgman donned an eccentric outfit. She regularly wore long Chinese silk robes in green, blue, or gold, a velvet band around her neck, and her hair pulled back loosely in a bun while she worked in her rustic studio in the Berkeley hills. This type of clothing was common among elite women and, according to Joan Jensen, may have signified solidarity with minority cultures or self-identification as belonging to an oppressed group in American society. The attire also suggests that Bridgman, like her mentor, Bernard Maybeck, embraced a romantic relationship to the art. Similarly, the independently wealthy Connecticut architect, Theodate Pope Riddle, could be found wearing silk scarves, pearls, and a fur stole. Neither of these women depended on architecture to earn a living in their daily lives, giving them the freedom to dress as they pleased without worrying about public reaction. Most women architects of Morgan’s generation adopted more understated attire: blouses and dresses with open or square neck lines, detailed with lace trim or embroidery, cinched waists, and hair pulled back in a loose bun. These women included Katherine Budd, who studied with Morgan at the atelier of Pierre de Monclos in Paris and went on to pursue a notable career in New York; Hazel Wood Waterman of San Diego; and Boston architects Lois Howe, Eleanor Manning, and Maria Almy. While none of these women designed only domestic architecture, they all justified their presence in the profession as a natural extension of woman’s inherent domesticity and found a voice in the professional and popular press by publishing articles related to women’s traditional sphere, the home.


femininity in the details of their clothing, these women reinforced their self-defined relationship to the profession.

Julia Morgan’s signature style likewise reflected her desired status in the field of architecture. Unlike the contemporaries mentioned above, Morgan did not believe that women were naturally disposed to designing houses or kitchens. According to Walter Steilberg, such a notion “would have made her furious.” Houses did not fuel her passions, nor did she try to build her practice on such a premise. Fittingly, Morgan’s severe appearance exuded a level of professionalism akin to that of most male professionals. At the same time, familiar signifiers, like the hair bun and skirt, reminded clients and colleagues that she was a woman and diminished any threat to the social order that her chosen career might have represented. French blouses suggested Morgan’s worldliness and a touch of style without allowing fashion to overshadow the depth of her professionalism and goals, while the highly tailored suits matched her emphasis on quality and precision in design and construction. Morgan’s uniform blurred the distinction between masculine and feminine, marking a shift toward modern ideals of womanhood that valued women for their work and minds rather than their biological destiny or superficial looks.

A 1928 photograph of Julia Morgan, Bernard Maybeck, and their employees at Morgan’s Merchants Exchange office captures the dynamics of her costume. Maybeck, the eccentric artist, sits front and center, with his white smock, long beard, and his pinky in his mouth; standing directly behind him in the back row is Julia Morgan, complete with dark suit, white shirt, and hat. A sea of men in dark suits, ties, and light shirts surrounds her. At five feet tall, she nearly disappears into the woodwork. Or, considered another way, she blends in with the crowd, marking her successful


Figure 5. Julia Morgan (back row, center) with Bernard Maybeck (front row, center) and their employees, c. 1928. William G. Merchant/ Hans U. Gerson Collection, 2001–15, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley.
integration into this male-dominated profession. By looking like “a nobody,” as Coblentz remarked, Morgan’s clients and colleagues were less likely to fixate on her sex or idealized fantasies of her as a pioneering woman who blazed a trail. Instead, she could get on with the business of architecture.

Self-fashioning: In the media

Lilian Forney, who worked as Julia Morgan’s secretary for decades, recalled that numerous journalists tried to do stories on the architect. All were roundly refused. Morgan’s historians have relied upon anecdotes like Forney’s to conclude that the architect shied away from all publicity and avoided the media entirely. Diane Favro, for example, has described Julia Morgan as invisible, and Sarah Boutelle has explained away Morgan’s relationship to the press in one sentence: “Her admiration for the anonymity of the medieval artisan may have been at the root of this unwillingness to appear in print, or perhaps it was just her personal reticence.”

Still, the absence of Morgan’s words in newspaper articles does not mean she abandoned the press altogether and retreated into anonymity. By the time Forney joined Morgan’s office in the late 1920s, the architect had completed hundreds of buildings, and William Randolph Hearst’s megalomaniacal—and profitgenerating—projects were keeping her office busy. She no longer had to prove her reputation or solicit clients. She could finally turn her back on the media she so disliked. During the previous two and a half decades, however, Morgan actively, if reluctantly, maintained a public profile and sanctioned the publication of her work to enhance her reputation among clients and colleagues alike. Her style forces us to reconsider modes of publicity.

Morgan’s disdain for the media was grounded in personal experience. Local newspapers had chronicled her activities from the moment in New York when she boarded the boat for Paris, and they continued to do so throughout her years at the École. Parisian papers like Le Figaro and the feminist weekly La Fronde made special mention of Morgan—although usually not by name—in their coverage of women artists and their efforts to gain access to all as-

42. Boutelle, Julia Morgan, 46.
pects of the École. By 1901 the press was becoming a burdensome
distraction. In October of that year London’s *Pall Mall Gazette* pub-
lished an article that implied she had completed her degree at
the École. Similar stories soon began to appear in New York and
Bay Area papers. “Celebrity clippings” arrived daily at the Morgan
home in Oakland, several of them stating that she had already
earned her diploma and would soon return to the United States.
Her family grew increasingly impatient with the frequent disrup-
tions of reporters knocking at the front door, and they did not hes-
itate to express their frustration in letters to their daughter and
sister.\(^{43}\) Meanwhile, Julia Morgan had learned that she would earn
no points for her latest project at the École, so she had less than
three months in which to earn the six points needed to complete
her degree.\(^{44}\) The media repeatedly cast her in an iconic role, em-
phasizing her singular status or the manliness of her pursuits and
focusing on the person and the dream, rather than on the work
and reality. These journalistic tendencies, combined with inaccu-
rate details and loss of privacy, all contributed to Julia Morgan’s
early wariness toward the press.

A child of the mid-Victorian period, she had been reared in
a culture where published words increasingly defined every aspect
of life. As Burton Bledstein has put it, “A riot of words and a crisis
of confidence alarmed a society which began placing its faith in
professional persons,” who, in turn, increasingly used popular and
professional publications to exert their authority.\(^{45}\) In keeping with
this cultural practice, and despite her distaste for publicity and
self-promotion, Morgan granted her first interview to Jane Arm-
strong of the *San Francisco Call* in 1907 during the reconstruction
of the Fairmont Hotel. In contrast to the articles written about Ju-

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43. *Saturday Weekly*, March 28, 1896; *La Fronde*, May 22, 1898, p. 3; newspaper
clippings, Dossier 707 BEA, La Bibliothèque des femmes Marguerite Durand, Paris;
The First Lady Architect,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, Oct. 28, 1901, later reprinted in the *New
York Times*, Nov. 12, 1901, p. 2; Points about People,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, Nov. 27, 1901, p. 4;
“We Qualifies in Paris as Architect,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec. 8, 1901, p. 14; E. P.
Morgan to Julia Morgan, Nov. 4, 13, 22, Dec. 6, 15, 29, 1901, folder 11, box 01, series 01,
RG I, Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly; Emma Morgan North to Julia Morgan,
Dec. 7, 1901, in *ibid.*; Gardner Morgan to Julia Morgan, Sept. 29, 1901, folder 15, in
*ibid.*; and Parmelee Morgan to Julia Morgan, Nov. 5, Dec. 16, 1901, folder 16, in *ibid.*
44. E. P. Morgan to Julia Morgan, Oct. 26, 1901, folder 11, box 01, series 01, RG I, in
*ibid.*; Dossiers individuels des élèves, AJ52 409, Archives nationales.
45. Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the De-
Julia Morgan during her École days, now she could define in her own words exactly who she was and what she did as an architect. To the journalist’s assumption that Morgan must have “reveled . . . in this chance to squeeze dry the loveliest tubes in the whole world of color,” Morgan responded, “My work has all been structural.” She pointed to the staircases, skylights, bar, and offices that were within the domain of her responsibilities. To emphasize her technical expertise, Morgan explained that she had had to replace a glass dome, adding, “You have no idea how much important detail is involved in a skylight of such magnitude.”

By the end of the interview, Morgan had disabused her interviewer of the notion that a woman’s architectural role was limited to interior decoration. Armstrong conceded that intelligence had no regard for gender, yet the journalist could not reconcile herself to a woman’s unqualified role in a technical profession that required “no amount of sensitive feeling.” She therefore cast Morgan as an exceptional figure, impossible to replicate, and concluded that architecture remained an impractical career choice for “a mere woman.” Armstrong closed her article with a flourish:

When I was crossing the bay that night and saw, rising far over the waterscape, the Fairmont, fitting the skyline without a wrinkle, I wanted to emblazon above it the part that a Woman has played in its construction. And the fact that the foreman nobly insisted it is Julia Morgan, Architect, will not prevent me from hyphenating it as Julia Morgan, (Woman)-Architect. With this statement, Armstrong ignored the intentions behind Morgan’s words and objectified the architect as an icon for women’s progress, rather than as an equal among peers in her profession.

From this point forward, Morgan changed her approach in dealing with the media and in shaping her public image. She granted few interviews, never taught a class or lectured in public, and never published a book, memoir, essay, or a word of commentary on her own work. But however much Morgan disdained the media, self-promotion, and publicity of any kind—and by all accounts, she loathed them—she did not retreat into anonymity.

In a sense, she could not escape the media. Both the architectural profession and the women’s network that made up such a

47. Ibid.
large part of her clientele had their own mechanisms of publicity that functioned without her participation or consent. For twenty years local papers catalogued Julia Morgan’s work and activities in the social pages, resulting in free, unsolicited, and unabashedly enthusiastic endorsements nearly every month. The *Oakland Tribune* alone published over 100 articles and notices about Morgan between 1902 and 1920.\(^{48}\) As Morgan’s work increasingly involved women’s clubs and especially projects for the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), she received mention in national publications for women as well.\(^ {49}\) The *Daily Pacific Builder* listed Morgan’s commissions when permits were granted, as it did for most building activity in the region. *Architect and Engineer*, the most prestigious journal for the profession in California and the West, also documented her work; between 1915 and 1925 the journal listed approximately thirty notices of Morgan’s activities.

Julia Morgan collaborated in fostering some publicity too. Throughout her career, she participated in professional and social events that she must have known would garner media attention. In 1908, for example, she and Ira Hoover, her junior business partner for a brief period, along with other notable Bay Area architects, exhibited to good review selections of their post-earthquake commissions in the assembly room of the Merchants Exchange Building. This was not an isolated incident. That same year, she organized an exhibit for the Home Club, an organization in Oakland dedicated to issues of modern housing to which she had belonged for seven years, that featured the work of architects from the region. The Hillside Club, the North Berkeley group responsible for popularizing the “simple home” in an arts-and-crafts vein in the Bay Area, hosted a comparable exhibition in 1913.\(^ {50}\) By publicizing her work

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50. Willis Polk, John Galen Howard, John Bakewell, Arthur Brown, Charles Dickey, and Clinton Day were among the architects who exhibited work at the Merchants
in this fashion, Morgan confirmed her status without having to engage in a competition or speak about herself or her work. Similarly, when the American Institute of Architects held a convention in San Francisco in 1911, Morgan exhibited examples of her work. In its catalogue of the event, Architect and Engineer included only ten photographs. Two showed Morgan designs, and three more illustrated projects in which Morgan had played a central role in the design, construction, or reconstruction, again indicating Morgan’s participation in building her reputation and the growing respect accorded by colleagues.\(^51\) In 1915 Morgan judged the competition to design the tubercular ward of the San Francisco City and County Hospital. She would have been unlikely to seek this responsibility, which means that her colleagues continued to take notice of her work, particularly the three hospitals she had designed to date.\(^52\) Implicit in the articles associated with the hospital competition is a public expression of praise and acceptance by her colleagues, including John Galen Howard, with whom she was reputed to have had an irreparable falling out more than ten years before. With her participation in the competition, Morgan continued to show a willingness to maintain a public presence in the profession.

Morgan similarly maintained a public presence in women’s networks. For instance, she appeared occasionally at events commemorating the completion of a building. By attending these quasi-public events, she placed herself in the company of affluent, well-connected people who contributed in various ways to the development of the built environment. Once in a while she offered a

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52. “Competition for Municipal Hospital Wing,” in ibid., 41 (April 1915), 107; “Herman Barth Wins San Francisco City Hospital Competition,” in ibid., 41 (June 1915), 69–70. The hospitals include the Kapiolani Rest Cottage (constructed in 1909–1910); an infirmary at Mills College; King’s Daughters Home (1908–1912), a women’s hospital in Oakland; and the hospital at Angel Island Immigration Station (1910–1911). Boutelle, Julia Morgan, 249, 253, 254.
few words of comment to reporters at these events, and her name, sometimes accompanied by accolades, appeared in related newspaper stories. In 1917 Aurelia Reinhardt, president of Mills College, requested from Morgan a biographical sketch to be published in an annual devoted to the activities of women in California and their contributions to the development of the state. Morgan complied. An edited and updated biography appeared in the 1922 publication, *Who’s Who Among the Women of California*, in which Morgan also published photographs of her work and was cited as one of the “main contributors.” Quietly but actively, Morgan kept up a public profile among her most likely clients.

For more than twenty-five years Julia Morgan’s work appeared periodically in the pages of the professional press, presumably with Morgan’s consent and perhaps encouragement. The story behind a 1918 issue of *Architect and Engineer* that was devoted entirely to her work provides the greatest insight into her idiosyncratic relationship to the press and publicity. She allowed Walter Steilberg to take photographs of her buildings for the piece but became upset with him for the first and only time in their decades-long relationship when she saw the published article. According to Steilberg, the written commentary in the article, which Julia Morgan had not sanctioned, infuriated his boss. Steilberg generally limited his comments to such simple descriptions as “The capitals of the columns . . . recall . . . the days which are dear to the memory of every Californian.” Such a comment implies the architect’s intentions, in this case a desire to evoke feelings of nostalgia. Other descriptions described the architect’s inspiration, concern for economy, professional dialogue with other architects’ work, originality, opinion about a given genre of architecture, mastery of the craft, and relationship to laborers and craftsmen. These comments conditioned readers to interpret Morgan and her buildings according to the author’s bias rather than from personal interactions with either the person or the space, as Morgan would have preferred. Even though the words belonged to Steilberg, not Morgan, they

53. Two ribbon-cutting ceremonies that Morgan attended include the Senior Women’s Hall (now Girton Hall) at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Hollywood Studio Club. See “President Wheeler to Address Senior Women,” *Daily Californian*, Jan. 17, 1912, p. 1, and “Film Stars to Aid Club Ceremonies,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1925, p. 7.

54. Julia Morgan to Reinhardt; Louis S. Lyons and Josephine Wilson, eds., *Who’s Who Among the Women of California* (San Francisco, 1922), v, 600, 603.
could be taken as insight into her mind. Steilberg also breached Morgan’s standards of professional etiquette and respect for privacy by describing clients as “persons of culture and broad experience” who often had small budgets. As Morgan’s reaction to this article suggests, she did not have an issue with publicity and professional recognition as much as she did with language, its distasteful misuse, and its potential for misleading readers.

Despite continued misgivings about the media and publicity, Julia Morgan enjoyed seeing her work in print. She once wrote to former employee, Elizabeth Boyter, that she could buy just three copies of an issue of Town and Country that featured “some good San Simeon pictures.” Over the years, authors for architectural journals featured Julia Morgan’s buildings to illustrate articles on reinforced-concrete construction, ornamental plaster work, and school and house design. Architecture magazine also featured her YWCA buildings in Honolulu and San Francisco’s Chinatown. One can imagine that Julia Morgan and her employees took care to watch for and save issues of these magazines as well.

Fittingly, Morgan closed her relationship with the press by subtly using it to shape her legacy. When she accepted the honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of California in 1929, she understood the prestige of the award and the publicity it would generate. Only one or two people received the award each year, and the local papers published at least half-page spreads of images from the ceremonies. According to her secretary, Morgan did not enjoy the special attention; nonetheless, she accepted this moment in the spotlight and stepped onto center stage to receive significant public recognition for her life’s work. Two years later Julian


56. Julia Morgan to Elizabeth Boyter, Jan. 18, 1932, BANC MSS 85/93c, Elizabeth M. Boyter Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.


58. W. W. Campbell to Julia Morgan, May 4, 1929, and Robert Sibley to Julia Morgan, May 7, 1929, folder 11, box 02, series 06, RG I, Julia Morgan Collection, Cal Poly; interview with Forney.
C. Mesic published a lengthy article about the Berkeley Women’s City Club in *Architect and Engineer*. Morgan must have known about the piece as well, since Mesic was one of her employees. Mesic declared the building emblematic of women’s progress and described the architect as “radiant” when she saw the completed project. In essence, Mesic named Julia Morgan as an architect for women’s progress who reveled in that role.\(^5\) We do not know how Morgan responded to this article, but she definitely did not let Mesic have the last word. A few months after the City Club article appeared, Julia Morgan broke her nearly twenty-five years of virtual silence by assessing the status of women in architecture for an article in the *Christian Science Monitor*. She implicitly included her contribution to the field:

I think it is too early to say what contribution women are making in the field of architecture. They have as clients contributed very largely except, perhaps, in monumental buildings. The few professional women architects have contributed little or nothing to the profession—no great artist, no revolutionary ideas, no outstanding designs. They have, however, done sincere, good work along with the tide; and as the years go on undoubtedly some greater than other architects will be developed, and in fair proportion to the number of outstanding men—to the number in the rank and file.\(^6\)

Despite her singular achievements, Morgan refused to place herself on a pedestal or set herself apart from fellow women architects. Instead, she credited clients with any significant changes in the relationship between women and architecture.

**An atelier of one’s own**

In 1907, three years after establishing a private practice and moving her office back and forth between her parents’ carriage house and San Francisco, Julia Morgan opened a permanent office in the Merchants Exchange Building, which was located on California Street near Montgomery Street, in the heart of the city’s financial district, not far from the retail center of downtown. She was not alone among professional women to locate her office in a


Figure 6. Merchants Exchange Building, San Francisco, from *Architect and Engineer* (May 1908), 13.
financial district, but this decision was not an obvious one.\textsuperscript{61} Like her clothing and her relationship to the press, the precise location and use of space in Morgan’s office played an integral role in establishing and maintaining her authority, especially in relation to clients and employees. With a space to call her own, Morgan also had the chance to foster a work culture such as she had never previously known, one that emphasized camaraderie over competition and hierarchy, generosity over profit, and merit and skill over gender.

Throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women carved new spaces for themselves in the urban landscape. Women of Julia Morgan’s class, in particular, campaigned for urban reform, including higher sanitation standards, public education, and child labor and safety laws. They also created shelters, recreation centers, and restaurants for working women, children, and the poor. By the early twentieth century women populated this landscape in significant numbers, with their presence growing dramatically between 1890 and 1930. They worked in shops, factories, department stores, and office buildings as typists, clerks, and secretaries. White, middle-class women increasingly ventured downtown as well, especially as consumers of fine food, theater, lectures, and, especially, retail goods.\textsuperscript{62}

The Victorian tendency to divide spaces into discrete categories for specific groups of people and for designated purposes, however, brought order to these changes and circumscribed women’s place in the urban landscape. Inside the work place, companies tried to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies and work


roles by dividing time, space, and tasks according to sex. Although some women worked in business offices and some men worked in retail shops, Jessica Sewell has argued that “these spaces were imagined as single-gender.” Even San Francisco’s suffragists, who took advantage of this imagined feminine landscape and politicized it by campaigning in storefront windows and along the sidewalks of Market Street, halted their activities at the edge of the financial district and ultimately did not redefine the physical boundaries of socially accepted feminine and masculine spaces.63

Morgan’s decision to locate her office downtown symbolically undermined this gendered landscape. Few buildings survived the catastrophic earthquake of 1906 and the fires that followed, but towering high above the rubble stood the Merchants Exchange Building, a thirteen-story skyscraper designed in 1903 by celebrated Chicago architect Daniel Burnham and one of the most prestigious addresses in the city. It was not simply located in the center of the masculine bastion of commerce and law—it was the hub of San Francisco’s financial district, the most powerful center of commerce on the West Coast. Important law firms established offices there, as did the Pacific Stock Exchange, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, and leading architects like Willis Polk. The rooftop radio tower relayed messages from arriving ships to businessmen throughout the district.64 Julia Morgan established her office on the top floor of this powerhouse of activity, as if to say that the new city rising from the ashes of destruction ushered in a new era of equality among men and women. Of course, Morgan did not literally profess such idealistic dreams, but she did take advantage of the unsettled urban landscape to insert herself into a traditionally masculine space and thereby begin drafting a new map for women in the city.

Practical advantages combined with this romantic symbolism to

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make downtown San Francisco an ideal place for Morgan to locate her office. For example, a California Street office enhanced Morgan’s professional legitimacy and authority among her clients. Instead of entering the informal and familiar quarters of her parents’ carriage house, these clients entered an impressive lobby, beyond which lay the Grain Exchange Hall, a grand space that Morgan had remodeled after the earthquake. It boasts a vaulted glass ceiling, four monumental marble columns, and six paintings of maritime life.65 Clients then traveled to the thirteenth floor where they entered a formal office. Morgan divided this space into four distinct compartments: the central drafting room, where engineers, drafts-people, and model makers worked; a small office for the secretary and bookkeeper; a library that held hundreds of books on art, architecture, and design; and her own private office. Clients met briefly with Morgan in her office, then moved to the library, where plans were discussed at length. As the architect led clients through the drafting room, past the employees (whom clients rarely met), to her private office and the library, she wordlessly reinforced her superior status. The location of Julia Morgan’s architectural practice, combined with her arrangement and use of space in the office, ensured that clients understood their patronage not as a favor for an old friend of the family, but as an act of soliciting the expertise of a professional.

A functional office required qualified employees, who, especially during the earliest years of Morgan’s career, were usually men. By locating her office in the financial district, she communicated to these men that working for a woman would not devalue their training or stunt their careers. Steilberg admitted as much in recounting his story about coming to work for Julia Morgan: He had worked for two of the most celebrated architects in Southern California, Irving Gill and Myron Hunt, before attending the University of California. Upon graduating in 1911, he sought work with the best architects in the Bay Area and naturally looked to San Francisco to find them. He first sought employment in Arthur Brown, Jr.’s, office, but the Beaux-Arts graduate, who later designed San Francisco’s City Hall, had no work at the time and no prospects in the near future. Brown directed Steilberg to in-

quire at the offices of Julia Morgan. Brown had to ease the young graduate’s skepticism about working for a woman. “Don’t fool yourself, young man,” he said. “She’s one of the best architects in this city. I don’t know of any better.” With an endorsement by one of the city’s best architects and with her office situated among them, Morgan’s gender became irrelevant and Steilberg’s skepticism short-lived.66

An office of her own empowered Morgan, as it would any architect. Indeed, Helena Steilberg Lawton, Steilberg’s daughter, once wrote that Morgan “expressed a feminine monarchistic ‘l’état, c’est moi.’” Most former employees remembered Morgan as a boss who never relinquished control over any aspect of work. Dorothy Wormser Coblentz, for example, recalled that, “if you didn’t understand something from a sketch, you didn’t go to her. . . . You waited for her to come and then you asked. You didn’t go off on any other tack; if she told you to do it thus and thus so, you worked on that. If you came to a stumbling block . . . you didn’t [try your own solution] until she gave you the go ahead.” These circumstances may have been infantilizing and allowed for limited creative input on the part of the drafting staff. This approach ultimately cost Morgan some talented employees, but it also ensured that a Morgan commission was a Morgan commission from start to finish.67

Despite this authoritarian aspect of her management style, Julia Morgan fostered an office culture that few atelier masters in Paris, architectural firms in the United States, or companies in America’s financial districts could have imagined or would have desired. Most architectural firms—whether headed by men or women—and virtually all of the Parisian ateliers remained homogeneous. In contrast, Morgan consciously maintained a heterogeneous staff and achieved a certain level of gender neutrality in her office. Some former employees believed that Morgan hoped to find a protégée among all the women she hired, but most women employees did not express any sense of pressure to perform or special treatment accorded to them because of gender. Only when


she attempted to work in New York City did former draftswoman Elizabeth Boyter awaken to the still reigning patriarchy of the profession. Morgan also ran her office like an atelier. She regularly lost money on her apprentices for a year while they developed their drafting skills, a practice that caused one former employee, Louis Schalk, to complain, “I don’t want to work with or train hopeless prospects.” She heaped upon them considerable constructive criticism, which meant that an architect who apprenticed in the Morgan atelier received the most thorough training in the region and would therefore be welcomed at any other firm. Although their skills and productivity improved, few people achieved a higher status than draftsperson, which sometimes caused particularly talented employees to resign but also fostered an atmosphere where men and women worked side by side in the more or less egalitarian space of the drafting room. Morgan even located her own drafting desk in this room, running counter to the growing pattern in financial districts to separate employees by rank and sex.

Rather than the absolutist monarch that Walter Steilberg’s daughter remembered, Julia Morgan was more of a nurturing matriarch. Whether she followed trends in American business culture is unclear, but the type of office environment she created was similar to what Angel Kwolek-Folland has called “corporate domesticity.” Corporations used women as allegorical figures to project an image as protectors of the home and family, referred to corporate hierarchy in familial terms, sponsored clubs for female employees and baseball teams for men, and hosted family leisure activities like company picnics. Julia Morgan’s tactics were less elaborate, but she, too, treated her employees like family, sharing profits during good years, hosting holiday parties, lavishing gifts upon them and their children even after they left her employ, and offering

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68. The engineering firm where Elizabeth Boyter was working in New York promised her promotions and higher pay, only to deny her both. The man she trained to replace her subsequently earned twice her salary. She ended up working in the chintz department at Macy’s, a job that did not pay enough for her modest accommodations. When Macy’s fired her for low sales performance, she could find only typical pink-collar jobs like selling subscriptions to a new fashion magazine, secretarial work, or substitute teaching. Elizabeth M. Boyter to C. Julian Mesic, Jan. 27, 1932, folder 3, box 1, Julia Morgan Collection, Environmental Design Archives.


help and support when tragedy struck. Actions like these generally kept office morale and productivity high, which enabled her to run the most profitable and prolific architectural firm run by a woman in the United States.

Conclusion

During her formative years in the architectural profession, Julia Morgan encountered obstacles—usually related to gender—that left her isolated, marginalized, and fighting for professional respect based on merit and skill. She developed a professional style that enabled her to overcome these obstacles: a costume and relationship to the media that constituted her public persona and a use of space that undermined dominant gender systems in the urban landscape and business cultures. These choices reinforced her professional authority among clients and employees. Julia Morgan’s professional style was critical to her personal success in the architectural profession. Nevertheless, one has to ask how she used her position of power and prestige to influence the place of women in architecture more generally.

Some scholars have suggested that Morgan’s career had little or no effect on women in architecture. Abigail van Slyck most pointedly stated, “Morgan modeled her career closely on the professional norm established by her male contemporaries. . . . reinforcing the male norm.” Women represented only 1 percent of all architects in the United States in 1958, the year after Morgan died and over a half-century after she entered the profession. Moreover, factors that continue to contribute to the absence of women in the profession, including haphazard schedules, long work hours, little room for advancement within the architectural world, and a demand

71. In 1923, when the house of draftsman Thaddeus Joy succumbed to fire, Morgan sold him a new one for $2. When the Depression forced her to cut staff, she released employees with extra money to survive the next few months of instability, and when Japanese forces struck Pearl Harbor in 1941, she sheltered in her San Francisco home the son of a former employee who had been living in Hawai‘i. See, for example, Boutelle, Julia Morgan, 46–47; Taylor Coffman, Building for Hearst and Morgan: Voices from the George Loorz Papers (Berkeley, 2003), 250, 353; Bjarne Dahl and Bjarne Dahl, Jr., “Reminiscences about Julia Morgan,” an interview conducted by Sarah H. Boutelle, March 11, 1975, in Julia Morgan Architectural History Project, 2: 146–154.

that workers choose between professional and domestic concerns rather than balance them, could equally describe the professional climate a century ago.  

While Julia Morgan may not have revolutionized the architectural profession, she did use her unique position of power to change the relationship between women and architecture. Her office produced three other licensed women architects. She also helped other women launch careers in professions ancillary to architecture. To name a few, Grace Moran became the head of the School of Domestic Science at Cornell University and proselytized about beautifying the home; Alice Joy completed a master’s degree in mathematics at Cornell University, and became a professor of mathematics at Barnard College, an all-women’s school; and Maxine Albro became a celebrated California muralist.  

As Morgan noted in her assessment of the field, women contributed principally as clients during the first third of the twentieth century. Other historians have made similar observations, most notably Alice T. Friedman and Thomas Hines. Where Morgan and so many of her clients differed (as was undoubtedly true of other women architects and their clients) is in their all-female cast. Architecture is inherently a public art form, making the hundreds of houses, more than one dozen YWCA buildings, and the

clubs, orphanages, schools, hospitals, and business establishments commissioned and designed by these women a formidable public and material expression of the many issues that concerned them during the Progressive Era. With each new building, the women raised their public profile and renewed their commitment to the broad development of their cities and state. Each building also created new jobs for women, new spaces for women to occupy in the urban landscape, and new spaces to address intellectual, cultural, physical, or social needs for women outside the home. In other words, Julia Morgan and her clients, as well as women reformers more generally during the Progressive Era, used architecture as a political style and path to power.\textsuperscript{76} If the individual designs of Morgan's buildings do not strike a viewer as revolutionary, artistically daring, or monumental—as Morgan recognized and her biographers to date have generally agreed—their collective impact on the lives of women in the twentieth century suggests otherwise. Julia Morgan used the power and prestige she acquired through her professional style to design a flexible and multilayered stage on which twentieth-century women could act out their many interests. Although her costume and public reticence conveyed the disinterested modesty of a secondary player, her family, friends, clients, and colleagues knew that she commanded a leading role.