

San Francisco

Building The Dream City

416 pages, profusely illustrated with
455 archival photographs, maps, drawings
and 140 full-color photographs

An account of the buildings of San Francisco and the people who built them.

THE HIGHLY READABLE TEXT begins with the arrival of the Spaniards and the founding of Mission San Francisco de Asis in 1776. The periods of Spanish and Mexican rule, the Presidio, the Mission Dolores pueblo, the land-grant Ranchos, and the founding of Yerba Buena in 1835 set the scene for the Yankee and European immigrants, who came first in a trickle, and then in a flood after 1848.

Each wave of immigration brought new dreamers to the tip of the peninsula: the Spanish padres dreamed of converting the natives and building a Christian agrarian society; the rancheros and their Yankee successors hoped to build a new life in a new land. The gold and silver mines, the timber and shipping and trade industries, the railroads, and the great agricultural domains produced an economy that allowed even ordinary citizens to indulge their wildest fantasies in house design and decoration.

Immigrants from Europe, Asia, and the eastern United States all left their mark on the city in the form of houses and commercial buildings that went up with amazing speed, often to be burnt and replaced by even more imposing structures. Prosperity trickled down to every social level, and building continued at breakneck speed throughout the 19TH Century and beyond. Even the humblest cottage had its bracketed cornice and its classical window caps. Thousands of these structures, including the palaces built on Nob Hill, were lost in the Great Earthquake and Fire of 1906. Yet outside the boundaries of that fire are thousands of surviving buildings that predate 1906. Many of these have been restored, often to better-than-new condition; hundreds of others await the creative imagination, hard work, and cash that go into a careful, informed restoration or remodeling.

The premise of this book is that a house is a direct reflection of a person's taste, prosperity, education, accomplishments, and hope for the future — in short, the embodiment of a dream. San Francisco has satisfied the dreams of generations of citizens, who built their dwellings with adobe, canvas, wood, iron, granite, brick, steel, concrete and glass, all contributing to the collective dream of a beautiful, tolerant, livable city in a spectacular location. That dream is still with us.



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