Weekend Program in May Offers Rare Opportunity to Experience The Sea Ranch

The Spring NCCSAH program will celebrate the 50th anniversary of The Sea Ranch with a tour on the weekend of May 10-11, 2014. The Sea Ranch is internationally renowned for its innovative architecture and the site planning of consulting landscape architect Lawrence Halprin. We are honored to have Donlyn Lyndon and Richard Whitaker join us for the program on Sunday. They are the surviving architects of the firm Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull & Whitaker (known as MLTW), who designed many of the early Sea Ranch buildings.

The weekend begins Saturday May 10 with a self-guided tour (11 AM to 3 PM) of eight houses in the Sea Ranch and Gualala area sponsored by the Mendocino-Sonoma Coast Soroptimists. A reception from 3:00 to 5:30 PM features wines from area vineyards at the Gualala Art Center, and a catered buffet dinner concludes the first day's activities, at the historic Stewart's Point Store (see http://stewartspointstore.com/).

Dick Whitaker leads off on Sunday morning, at the Del Mar Center, with a talk and a viewing of selected items from the Sea Ranch archives. A tour of the Dimitri Vedensky house (1972), now owned by Whitaker, precedes a box lunch and a tour at Donlyn Lyndon's house. After lunch we will visit one or two south end homes, and Mr. Lyndon will lead a walking tour, via one of the Esherick hedgerow houses, ending at Condominium One (MLTW, 1965), considered one of the most significant residential designs of the mid-20th century (listed on the National Register and winner of the AIA Twenty-Five Year Award). This stop includes Charles Moore's own condo (still owned by his family).

The Sea Ranch, *Princeton Architectural Press, new edition, 2013. Cover photo by Jim Alinder*

From Indian Hunting Ground to 20th Century Retreat: A Very Brief History of the Sea Ranch Site

Flight over the Sonoma coast in 1962 inspired development of The Sea Ranch. Photo: Eros Hoagland for the New York Times

After nearly half a century, The Sea Ranch retains the almost mythic status it achieved as soon as the first residences appeared, tucked into the land and designed with care and sensitivity to the extraordinary natural setting. Critic and essayist Diana Ketcham has likened the impact of Sea Ranch to that wrought by Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie House, influencing residential design across the continent. (*New York Times*, May 31, 2001).

Early History

For ages before the European settlement of California, the Pomo Indians frequented the wind-battered coast of what is today Sonoma County for hunting, fishing and gathering the necessities of life. Rights of private property and active cultivation replaced the Native American practice of living lightly upon the coast side land during the transition between the Mexican and American periods of California history.

In 1846, Ernest Rufus received a land grant from the Mexican governor Pio Pico equivalent to 17,580 acres stretching some 20 miles south from the Gualala River. The previous year, Rufus, a German-born naturalized Mexican citizen who had served in John Sutter's militia, sent Frederick Hugal, also German, to the land he was seeking, to make the improvements necessary to secure the grant. Hugal built a cabin and a warehouse, fenced in pasture for cattle and planted fruit trees and vegetables.

Logging the Ranch

The rancho, known as Rancho de Hermann, or German Rancho, passed through a succession of owners, and eventually resolved into smaller properties, including the 3220-acre Knipp-Stengel Ranch and the Rutherford Ranch. Robert Rutherford lost his 985-acre property to foreclosure in 1895. Bender Brothers Mill and Lumber Company acquired it, in 1903, and purchased the Knipp-Stengel ranch, as well, that same year. The Bender Brothers, having previously built a landing on the water to ship timber products, constructed a large mill on the bluff and a saloon, store and warehouse on the county road. They named the place Del Mar.

Within six months the company went into receivership. The court assigned the lumber operation to Frank Glynn and Hans Petersen, who moved onto the property with his family. Workers drawn to logging and milling jobs built cabins that formed the core of the community of Del Mar. In 1905, a school was constructed.

A fire destroyed the mill, in 1910. The school building, located at the corner of Halcyon and State Route 1, along with a warehouse, two barns and a deteriorated wooden railroad bridge, stand as reminders of the once thriving settlement. Two years after the fire, the trustees overseeing the Bender Brothers property sold it to Bay Area capitalist Walter Frick.

Russian Interlude

Frick learned of a community of Russian Baptists who, fleeing religious persecution in Russia, had arrived in San Francisco in June 1912. He knew that the Russians, led by Emil Noshkin, were interested in acquiring land in an isolated area that they could settle and farm, preserving their traditional ways as a community. He leased the Del Mar property to them.

The October 26, 1912, issue of the *San Francisco Call* reported on Noshkin's progress, noting that 80 people had settled in homes at Del Mar. The population was expected to reach 300 within a year. "General farming, including the growing of cereals, fruits and potatoes, will prove the principal occupation, while dairying will follow a close second." (*First Farm*, by Harry Lindstrom, The Sea Ranch Archives Committee)

From left: The Sea Ranch architects Richard Whitaker, Donlyn Lyndon, Charles Moore and William Turnbull, photo taken in 1991, when Sea Ranch received AIA 25-year award. Photo: Jim Alinder

Prospects for success of the Russian settlement looked good, and in January 1913, Noshkin offered to buy the Ranch. Frick agreed, and the parties negotiated the sale of 5,000 acres for $250,000. What happened then in not entirely clear. Within three months, the Russians were behind in payments, and by 1914 they were forced to leave the land, which reverted to Frick. Today, a circle of stones marking a Russian grave is the only trace of the colony.

Walter Frick retained the property, which he developed as a sheep ranch and named Rancho Del Mar (The Sea Ranch), until his death in 1937. Remaining from the period of Frick's tenure are the shepherd's cabin at Black Point, One-Eyed Jack's cabin, the shearing shed, the ewe pens at Monarch Glen, and the playhouse next to Del Mar School.

Property taxes were not paid on Rancho Del Mar for four years following Frick's death. In March 1941, in a tax sale at the Contra Costa County Courthouse (Frick's legal residence at the time of death), Margaret Ohlson of Annapolis (about eight miles east of Sea Ranch) and her four sons purchased the ranch for $100,000. The Ohlsons continued sheep ranching the land right through and beyond World War II.

Remains of the Ohlson era at Sea Ranch include two family homes (1953). The Ed Ohlson house is today part of the Del Mar Community Center, and the Elmer Ohlson house is the Ohlson Ranch Center. The larger of two barns north of the Community Center dates from 1946.

Development of The Sea Ranch
The Sea Ranch was the vision of architect Al Boeke. On a day flying over the Sonoma County coast, in 1962, he imagined a development of a second-home community that would embrace the rugged natural environment he saw below. He was, at the time, vice president of planning and development for Oceanic Properties, a division of Castle & Cooke, the real estate arm of Dole Food Company. He was also an adherent of the "new-town movement", whose principles he was applying to the development of Mililani on Oahu, also for Oceanic.

The new-town movement was rooted in 19th century reforms in Britain, inspired by Robert Owen. It advocated model planned communities or garden

Hedgerow house, architect Joseph Esherick

cities as a response to urban ills brought on by the Industrial Revolution. It was taken up in the United States by the Progressive Movement of the early 20th century but gained momentum here only after World War II.

At Boeke's urging, Oceanic bought the Ohlson Ranch. He assembled a team of consultants known to be particularly sensitive to environmental conservation, including architects Joseph Esherick, Charles Moore, Donlyn Lyndon, William Turnbull and

Condominium One view of courtyard. Photo by Jim Alinder, courtesy of Princeton Architectural Press

Richard Whitaker, and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin.

Preliminary to development of the site, thorough environmental studies identified native plants and wildlife and analyzed climate and soil conditions, with the intention of restoring the original natural state of the site as much as possible. Clearing of debris, planting of trees and reseeding fields with native grasses and wildflowers reversed the effects of more than a century of exploitation of the land.

Oceanic formed a Sea Ranch homeowners association empowered to ensure conservation of the environment and at the same time established a design committee to oversee planning. With that, in 1964, Sonoma County approved a development plan for the south one-third of the property.

The design committee drew up guidelines for construction and landscaping that required that homes, limited to two stories and painted in muted natural shades, be designed and sited to blend into the natural setting. The partnership of Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull and Whitaker (MLTW) realized these design principles at Sea Ranch in a complex of ten residences known as Condominium One, completed in 1965. With Joseph Esherick's hedgerow houses, it became the standard for Sea Ranch. "Its architects stood the 1950s ranch house on end, in vertical dwellings with exuberant, light-filled overhead spaces. Their tall silhouettes suggested the Western mining shed." (Ketcham)

Condominium One drew immediate attention, nationally and internationally, and began to harvest the

And still the place works its magic. The original development by Esherick and MLTW retains its appeal, sustained by such additions as architect Obie Bowman's fifteen "Walk-in Cabins," tucked among redwoods above Route 1, completed in 1972. The Sea Ranch experience retains its power over the imagination:

> "In the early mornings, when the ocean is enveloped in fog and the scent of wild iris hangs in the air, the possibility for solitude can be found on a wind-tossed path. Deer eyes stare from slender meadow grasses, and a curve in the trail along the headlands can unexpectedly yield a squadron of pelicans zooming skyward on ocean thermals."
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> "Utopia by the Sea," Patricia Leigh Brown,
> *New York Times* Travel Section,
> December 12, 2008

awards it would accumulate over the years. In 1991, the AIA, in bestowing its 25-year award of enduring excellence, cited Sea Ranch for being "profoundly conscious of the natural drama of its coastal site" and for achieving "an alliance of architecture and nature that has inspired and captivated a generation of architects." At the same time, Charles Moore received the AIA's highest honor, the Gold Medal Award.

Except where noted, the content of this article is derived from the research and writing of Susan Clark. An architectural historian with a home on The Sea Ranch, Ms. Clark manages a historical consulting business in Santa Rosa. Her 1990 master's thesis at Sonoma State University focused on the history of The Sea Ranch area, and she is continuing research for future publications.

California Coastal Commission and The Sea Ranch
In 1968, the county approved the plan for the remaining two-thirds of the ranch. However, in 1972, a new factor entered the equation with voter passage of Proposition 20, the California Coastal Zone Conservation Act. The initiative established the California Coastal Commission and six regional commissions and set criteria for the preservation, protection, restoration and enhancement of the environment and ecology of the state's entire coastal zone. The legislature made the Conservation Act permanent in 1976.

After a virtual moratorium on building during seven years of unsuccessful negotiations between The Sea Ranch Association and the Commission to arrive at an acceptable plan, an act of the state legislature broke the impasse. Development resumed in 1983. Yet, as Diana Ketcham wrote, "The original Sea Ranch spirit proved hard to sustain." By then, Boeke had replaced Halprin and the original architects with in-house design staff in Honolulu. Boeke himself, who provided the initial impulse and vision for The Sea Ranch, left Oceanic in 1969.

As the property became more a matter of "hot" real estate and less a communal effort by nature lovers to conserve the land they loved, the original design guidelines were seldom honored. By the 1990s, the northern portion of Sea Ranch saw construction, in a virtually suburban configuration, of "improbably large and luxurious houses" that block ocean views.

Interior Condominium One, Unit 4
Photo: Jim Alinder, courtesy of Princeton
Architectural Press

The Sea Ranch Tour

Registration

The cost of the tour for NCCSAH members is $170, non-members $190. Prices include the Saturday, May 10, self-guided house tour, wine reception and dinner at Stewart's Point Store, as well as the coffee/pastries, morning talk/ archives tour, box lunch and afternoon architecture tour on Sunday, May 11. *Prices do not include lodging*. Please send your check made out to NCCSAH to: The Sea Ranch Tour, c/o Ward Hill, 3124 Octavia St., #102, San Francisco, CA 94123. Include your name, e-mail address and a <u>mailing address</u> (very important because we will be mailing tour information to attendees). We have limited space, so please send your check as soon as possible. For your convenience there is a registration form on this page.

Lodging

Use the link below for a list of lodgings in the Gualala/Sea Ranch area. Vacation rentals are often the most interesting and economical lodging option (especially if you have a group of 4 to 6). Sea Ranch has 600 vacation rentals, many rented through agencies. Some owners rent directly on Airbnb. If you plan to attend the tour, arrange lodging as soon as possible.
http://www.gualalaarts.org/visitor/index.html#Lodgings

Reading List

The Sea Ranch: Fifty Years of Architecture, Landscape, Place and Community of the Northern California Coast, Donlyn Lyndon & Jim Alinder (revised edition 2013, Princeton Architectural Press).

Appropriate – The Houses of Joseph Esherick, Marc Trieb (William Stout Publishers, 2008)

The Sea Ranch --- The Diary of an Idea, Lawrence Halprin

William Turnbull, Jr., Buildings in the Landscape, essays by Donlyn Lyndon et. al (William Stout Publishers, 2000)

The Place of Houses, Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon

Dimensions, Charles Moore and Gerald Allen

Chambers for a Memory Palace, Charles Moore and Donlyn Lyndon

An Architectural Life: Memoirs & Memories on Charles W.Moore, Kevin P. Keim (editor), Charles W. Moore (1996)

You Have to Pay for the Public Life, Selected Essays by Charles Moore (edited by Kevin Keim), (MIT Press, 2001)

Charles Moore: Buildings and Projects 1949-1986, edited by Eugene Johnson, 1986 (Rizzoli)

Registration for The Sea Ranch Tour

[please print]

Name _____

Affiliation _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email address _____

Registration: $170 members / $190 nonmembers

  Total Enclosed _____

Please make checks payable to NCCSAH and mail to:
      Ward Hill
      NCCSAH Sea Ranch Tour
      3124 Octavia Street, #102
      San Francisco, CA 94123

For more information please contact Ward Hill at whill@pacbell.net.

Nonmember cost also includes one year's membership in NCCSAH.
Space is limited; reserve your place now.

Please use the form above to sign up for the Sea Ranch Tour and the form on the last page for membership dues.

Tour of Mare Island Navy Yard Draws a Crowd

The October 12th tour of Mare Island Navy Yard attracted 36 participants, the second largest group to attend an NCCSAH program in more than ten years. The all-day event began with a tour ably led by Mare Island Historic Foundation docent Barbara Davis. Highlights included the interior of the base commander's classical revival residence and the craftsman chapel, which houses the largest collection of Tiffany stained glass windows west of the Mississippi.

The group enjoyed a break for a picnic lunch, after which, thanks to arrangements with the tenant, BluHomes, we were permitted to view the interior of one of the cathedrals of industry, a massive glass-curtainwall factory building constructed in 1940.

At the conclusion of the organized portion of the day, participants, on their own with the help of a map and brief guide, were able to survey numerous other structures representative of the Yard's periods of significance, dating from 1856 through World War II. The wealth of historic resources surprised most attendees, for whom Mare Island was *terra incognita*.
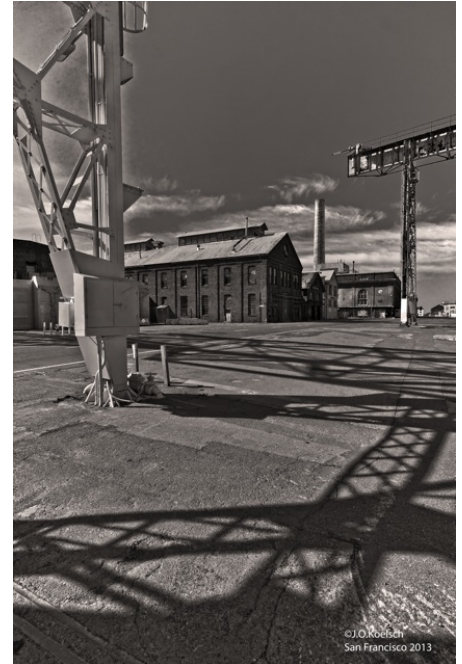
Thank you to Barbara Davis and to docent Joyce Giles, who with Barbara, early in a planning process that included two reconnaissance visits, patiently answered our questions and helped to ensure a first-rate experience for all of us.

Photos above by John Oliver Koelsch and published here with his kind permission

Above: Mare Island docent Barbara Davis expounds on chapel's Tiffany windows. Left: 1940 glass curtainwall industrial "cathedral". Photos: Ward Hill

Other Events Of Interest

Society of Architectural Historians
67th Annual Conference, April 9 - 13
Austin, Texas
http://www.sah.org

California Preservation Foundation
Annual Conference: Redefining Preservation: Dialogues
and Directions in Cultural Heritage
Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove
Tuesday, April 22 - Friday April 25.
http://www.californiapreservation.org/conference.html

SF Heritage
Soirée 2014
Saturday May 10, 6:00 p.m.
Palace of Fine Arts
http://www.sfheritage.org/upcoming_events/soiree/

Berkeley Architectural Heritage
Outings on Fridays, guided tours, 11:00 a.m.
April 4 - Dockside tour of USS Potomac, Oakland
June 6 - Cohen-Bray House, Oakland

History Chats co-sponsored with
Berkeley Historical Society
Fortnightly on Thursdays, 13 March–24 April 2014
7:00–8:30 pm

39th Annual Spring House Tour, Sunday May 4

http://berkeleyheritage.com/calendar.html

Berkeley Historical Society
Spring 2014 Walking Tours
http://www.berkeleyhistoricalsociety.org/Walks-Temp.html

Oakland Museum of California
Exhibitions:
Inspiration Points: Masterpieces of California Landscape
Through July 13
Bay Motion: Capturing San Francisco Bay on Film
Through June 29
A Cinematic Study of Fog in San Francisco
Through June 29
http://museumca.org/exhibitions

Oakland Heritage Aliance
Spring lecture and tour events
http://www.oaklandheritage.org

Vernacular Architecture Forum
Conference, "Down Jersey: From Bayshore to Seashore"
May 7 - 10, Stockton, NJ
http://www.vernaculararchitectureforum.org

The Film Festival: A Review

The chapter held its first architectural film festival on Saturday, January 18th, at the Vogue Theater, a rare surviving one-screen neighborhood theater which opened in 1910. About 40 film and architecture enthusiasts viewed three movies: "Trip Down Market Street", "Make No Little Plans: Daniel Burnham and the American City", and "Louis Sullivan: the Struggle for American Architecture".

The short film of Market Street in 1906, shot with a camera mounted on a cable car, never fails to have an eerie effect, as we witness the city and its unsuspecting people but days before the great earthquake. A beautifully restored print from Prelinger Archives with narration by Rick Laubscher, heightens the film's impact. Rick was present to answer questions from the audience.

Two giants of Chicago architecture, Daniel Burnham (photo below) and Louis Sullivan (photo above), were the subjects of the longer films on the program. "Make No Little Plans" looked at Daniel Burnham's life and work both as an architect and a city planner. It surveyed his profound influence in the design of steel frame skyscrapers and as master planner of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

Louis Sullivan was a brilliant architect who never quite fit in, feeling not entirely comfortable in either the vanishing world of 19th century romanticism nor in the mechanized world of the 20th, even though his architecture expressed both. Often the camera panned lovingly over beautifully executed design details of Sullivan's buildings.

This film was very powerful and moving in its account of Sullivan's last years, plagued by alcoholism and financial problems, years in which he witnessed the triumph of Burnham's classicism over his attempt to foster a truly American style. In Sullivan's words, "the damage wrought by the World's Fair will last for half a century from its date, if not longer."

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UTILITAS ● FIRMITAS ● VENUSTAS

The mission of the NCCSAH is to further the objectives of the Society of Architectural Historians of which the Northern California Chapter is an affiliate; promote the study and discussion of our region's architectural history and its related fields; visit significant works of architecture; and increase public awareness and appreciation of our architectural heritage. Membership is open to anyone interested in architectural history and its related fields who agrees to pay the annual dues and subscribe to the bylaws of the organization.

NCCCSAH Officers

President, Rich Brandi
Vice President, Paul Turner
Treasurer, Ward Hill
Secretary, Don Andreini
Preservation Officer, Ian Berke

**Remember you do not have to be a member of the National SAH to become a member of NCCSAH
Join or Renew Now!!
Individual $20.00
Student $10.00
Make checks payable to NCCSAH**

Please send your ideas or comments concerning The Newsletter to:
Don Andreini
NCCSAH Newsletter Editor
dandreini@sbcglobal.net

To become a member of the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians
or to renew your dues return this form
and your dues check for $20 made out to NCCSAH
to
Ian Berke, NCCSAH
Ian Berke Real Estate
2824 Clay Street
San Francisco, CA 94115

Name _____

Affiliation _____

Occupation _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail address _____

For your convenience: Renewing members who sign up for The Sea Ranch event may include their $20 membership dues in a single check with their payment for the tour. In that case, use the address on the tour registration form shown on page 6.