



Photos by James Tensuan / The Chronicle

The Berkeley City Club pool was designed by Julia Morgan, who was the first woman to receive a California architecture license and is now the first woman awarded the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal.

How Julia Morgan finally won highest honor in U.S.

Strong case for posthumous Gold Medal built by supporters

By John King

Nobody in the Bay Area who cares about architecture needs to be convinced of Julia Morgan's lasting worth. Her early 20th century buildings — public and private, large and small — enrich the texture of communities across the region.

But when it came time to make the case that a self-sufficient woman who died in 1957 deserved the most prestigious award in American architecture, her boosters left nothing to chance — which is why Morgan's grandniece on Saturday will receive the annual Gold Medal presented by the American Institute of Architects.

"They turned in the most complete and scholarly and persuasive nomination package I've ever seen," said Robert Ivy, the AIA's executive director. "Her lifetime's impact on the profession of architecture has been huge."

Morgan is only the eighth post-



Berkeley's Julia Morgan Theater was once a church. Of the 700 buildings designed by Morgan, 21 are either National Historic Landmarks or are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Online extra

To see a slideshow of Julia Morgan's work, go to <http://bit.ly/1o7Oq1o>.

humous recipient of the Gold Medal, a distinction that puts her in the company of Thomas Jefferson.

More startling, she is the first female architect selected for an honor first awarded in 1907.

Those elements combined to focus attention on the award when it was announced in December. Not all of the attention was favorable; skeptics raised the specter of token-

Morgan continues on A10

FROM THE COVER

How Julia Morgan won Gold Medal

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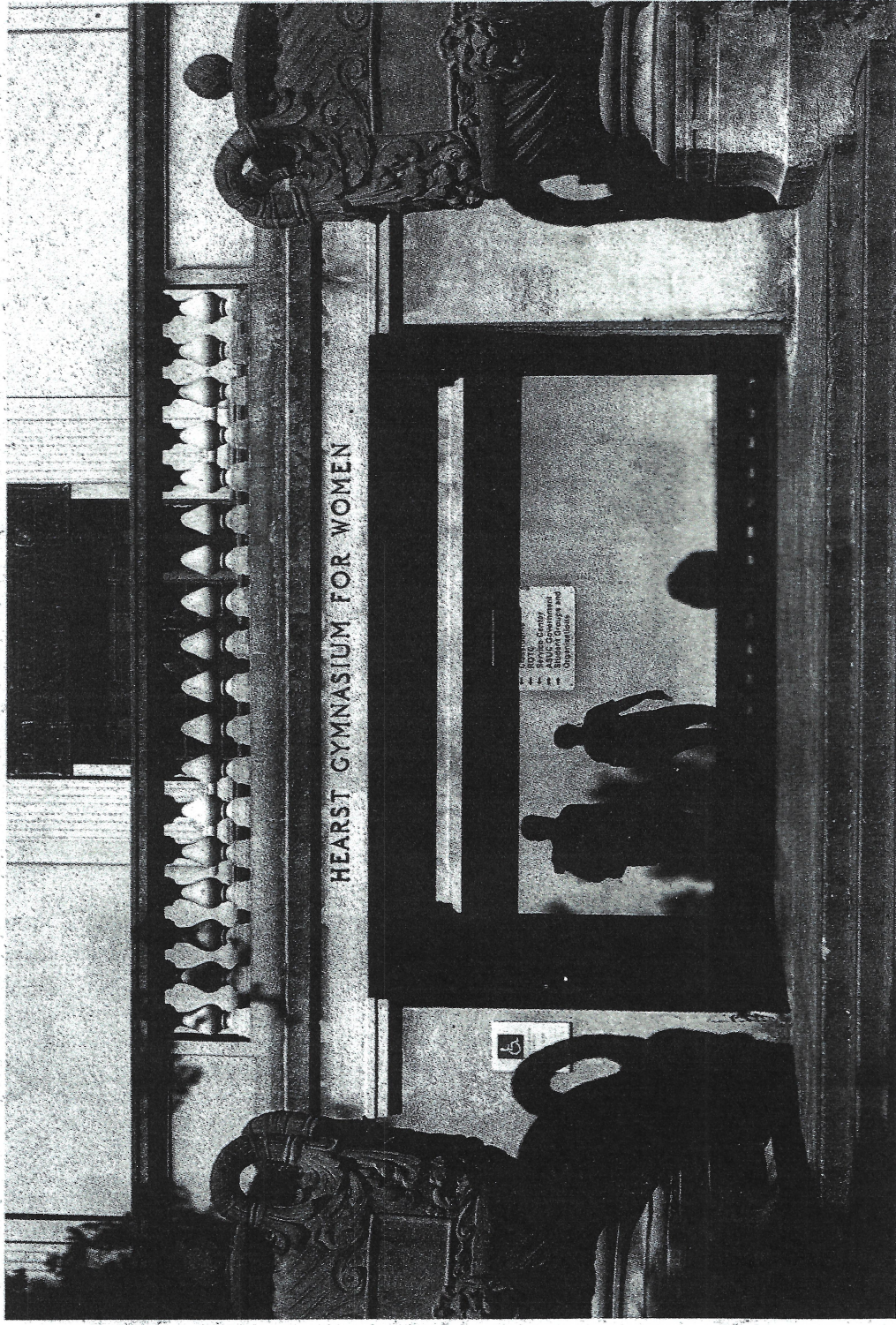
ism, a way to break the males-only barrier with a woman whose best-known building, Hearst Castle, began construction in 1919.

Morgan's supporters from the start of their campaign saw something else — a uniquely well-rounded architect with a degree in engineering who designed more than 700 buildings, 21 of which are either National Historic Landmarks or are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The catalyst was Julia Donoho, an architect and attorney who is a regional director of the institute's California Council. She's also on the AIA Board, and had been searching for the right woman to nominate for the Gold Medal since the boys' club nature of the award was the subject of a talk she attended several years ago.

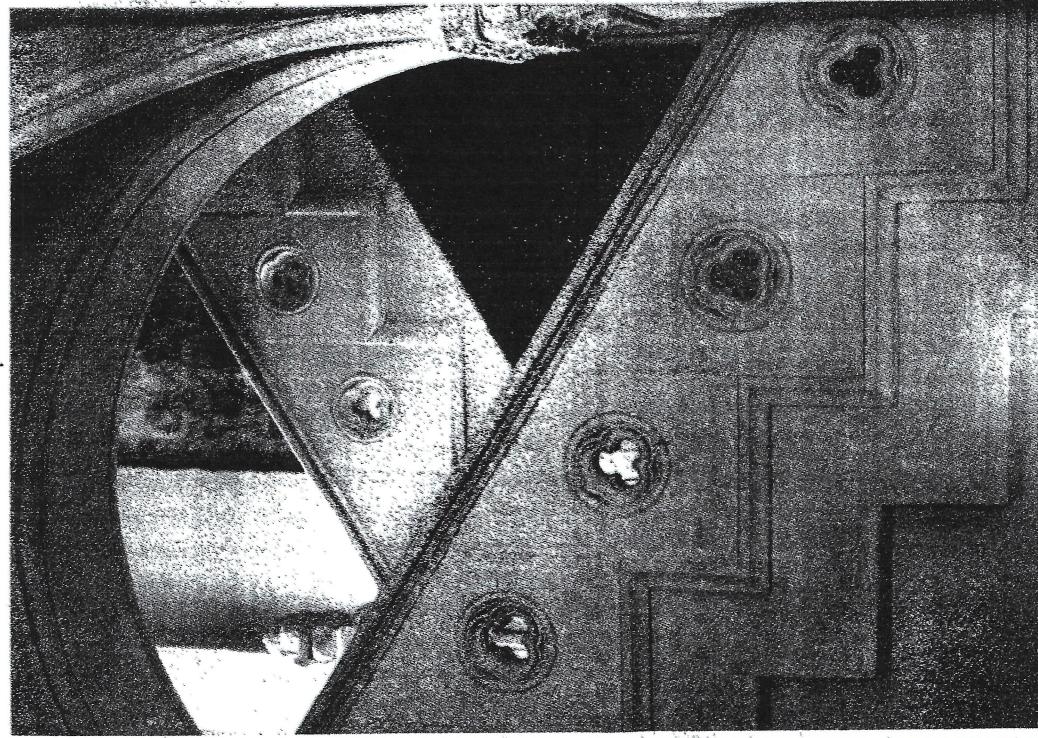
Ideal candidate

In early 2013, she found the ideal candidate: Morgan, trained at UC Berkeley as an engineer before becoming the first woman to graduate from Paris' famed L'Ecole de Beaux Arts in 1901. Three years later she was the first woman to receive a California architectural license.



Kevin N. Hume / The Chronicle

Two people enter UC Berkeley's Hearst gymnasium, designed by Julia Morgan, who earned an engineering degree at the school.



Kevin N. Hume / The Chronicle

The staircase inside the Berkeley City Club, which is one of the Julia Morgan buildings with historic landmark status.

Denise Scott Brown, a hero to activists who feel that women haven't gotten a fair shake from the profession. She's the longtime professional partner of Robert Venturi, her husband, but when Venturi received the coveted Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1991, it went to him and him alone. Last year, 19,000 people signed a petition to extend the honor to Scott Brown as well.

Reverse history, new era

Michael Graves, who brought classically infused postmodernism to mainstream America in the 1980s, extolled Morgan for "showing us how to reverse history and design for a new era." Frank Gehry, whose swirling titanium Guggenheim Bilbao in 1997 made postmodernism seem quaint, described Morgan as "expressing structure in new ways." Both are Gold Medal winners. The fifth letter came from



James Tensuan / The Chronicle

The Julia Morgan Theater used to be a Presbyterian church, one of many neighborhood churches designed by Morgan.

made sure the core section on Morgan's work was relevant for today.

When word arrived that Morgan was one of three finalists for the Gold Medal, another challenge arose in finding the right person to make the 12-minute presentation on Morgan's behalf at the AIA board gathering in December.

Donoho reached out to Jeanne Gang, a rising star among American architects who, like Morgan, has worked at a variety of scales.

"I didn't know her from Adam. She called me up out of the blue," Gang said of Donoho. But when Donoho followed up with the packet of information on Morgan's career, Gang was impressed.

Chosen on 1st ballot

The showdown occurred Dec. 12, with Donoho introducing Gang while advocates for the two other nominees made their presentations. The board selected Morgan on the first

ballot.

Executive Director Ivy, who didn't have a vote, discounts gender as the deciding factor in Morgan's favor.

"The Gold Medal is for a variety of reasons — the influence of an architect's career on the profession and the environment," said Ivy, longtime editor for Architectural Record before taking the AIA post in 2011. "This is an excellent architect who also inspired generations of women and men."

McNeill, the architectural historian, frames the result of the campaign in a different way.

"There's a lot of symbolism in Julia Morgan getting this award, but she also is very deserving," McNeill said last week. "She sets a high bar for other architects to match."

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What counts 110 years later, Donoho said this week, is the quality of the work.

"Julia did so much of value, in so many different areas," Donoho said, referring to neighborhood churches and women's social buildings as well as private homes of lavish scale. "She has a compelling story."

The first meeting was held in March of 2013 in the Berkeley office of Sandhya Sood, an architect who has studied Morgan as a pioneer of sustainable design and presented a paper on the topic at a 2012 statewide festival celebrating the architect. Different scholars volunteered to write about different aspects of Morgan's work, while Donoho and the other two regional directors of the AIA state council concentrated on lining up letters of support that might help sway the national board.

One of the five letters allowed came from Sen. Dianne Feinstein — who proclaimed Morgan to be "a true California gem" — and another came from Maria Shriver. The others were from an illustrious and deliberately varied trio of architects.