

Julia Morgan, Architect, and her Challenges

By Susan J. van der Meulen, Architect



Portrait of architect Julia Morgan (1872-1957), identification card photograph taken during her time in Paris, ca. 1897-99

Julia Morgan (1872-1957) was a distinguished California architect, the first woman trained as an architect at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, graduating with the class of 1902. During her prolific career, she was responsible for designing Hearst Castle at San Simeon, California, working first for wealthy widow Phoebe Appertton Hearst and then for her son, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) for thirty six years. She worked initially for architect Bernard Maybeck who had originally encouraged her to study in Paris, and later for Paris classmate John Galen Howard, but soon set out to establish her own office and employees. She designed such Hearst family properties as Wyntoon Chalet, Jolon Hacienda at Milpitas Ranch, the Hearst Building and the San Francisco Examiner Building. During her career she was also kept busy designing a host of schools, churches, hospitals, Presbyterian residences, and YWCAs, including a Chinese ‘Y’ with beautiful brick work at 965 Clay (pictured), a Japanese ‘Y’ at 1830 Sutter in San Francisco, a Presbyterian residence, an Emanuel sisterhood residence, women’s clubs, and community centers in California and Hawaii. Her work is justly celebrated.

In reading the Wadsworth book, I was dismayed to read of her experience with a male colleague, found in Chapter Three, “Getting Started”: “Phoebe Hearst also wasted little time in contacting the young architect she had met as a student. Hearst’s University of California building program- her gift to the university- was underway, headed by John Galen Howard. Also a former student at the Ecole, Howard hired Julia to work for him. Julia joined the design team for the first building, the Hearst Mining Building. A memorial to Phoebe Hearst’s husband, a former U.S. senator and miner who had become a multimillionaire by buying mining land in the West, the building was to look like the California missions with white walls and overhanging red tile roofs. When Hearst inspected the Mining Building, she was pleased with what she saw. She told John Howard to find Julia Morgan more work. He made Julia his assistant supervising architect on the next Hearst gift to the campus (1903), an outdoor theater shaped in a semi-circle like one in Epidaurus, Greece... Julia knew she had to work fast and not make any mistakes.” This building was to be the first classical open-air theater in the United States, made of reinforced concrete, a success for her. Next was the Mills College bell tower in Oakland CA, the Wyntoon complex on the McCloud River with Maybeck, and the Hacienda del Pozo de Verona at Pleasanton CA. “As Julia worked on the Hacienda and other projects, she was eager to leave John Galen Howard’s employment and work entirely on her own. When a story surfaced

that Howard was boasting to his colleagues that he had a wonderful designer, ‘to whom I have to pay almost nothing, as it is a woman,’ Julia stepped up her search.” In 1904, Julia took the state examination for certification as an architect, becoming the first woman to be licensed as an architect in California; she then moved into a small office on Montgomery Street in San Francisco. “Many San Francisco Bay Area architects called on Julia Morgan in her new office, but not John Galen Howard. He never forgave her for going out on her own. For many years, he used his influence as the supervising architect of the University of California building program to bar her from making any important contributions to the campus.” pp. 28-37, Wadsworth.

An “Investor’s Business Daily Article” by Christina Wise tells how Julia Morgan also went to work after her first professional office was destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 (also recounted by Sara Holmes Boutelle in her book Julia Morgan Architect). She set up a new office at the Merchants’ Exchange Building, and set to work redesigning the Fairmont Hotel and rebuilding San Francisco via numerous commissions for her new firm, so that “she is now considered one of the twentieth century’s most influential architects of regional design”. She “combined Arts and Crafts and Mediterranean styles—as seen in her design of the Hearst ‘castle’ at San Simeon, California—and helped define California architecture”, says Wise. “Morgan looked at each commission as a chance to design the perfect building. And she made her clients her top priority.” In the architecture field, where competition is a fact of life, this sad instance of the John Galen Howard brand of man’s inhumanity to woman occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century to a distinguished practitioner of the art, when women had not made many inroads into the profession. It is not a stretch to find that women are still experiencing subtle forms of discrimination in the architecture field in the new century. Without underestimating what it takes to be a successful architect, it is important to view one’s own experiences in the field in the lens of what is expected of the practitioner, and to continue to strive for excellence. However, after a project is completed, an architect is known for what they have done, categorized, and sized up. In my own case, twenty five years of work for two residential practices, where I had done entirely pencil drafting (still my favorite form of the art) at the request of the employer, ensured that, despite subsequent CAD classes, I did not really survive professionally into the new era. The story is a complicated one. I find now however that I can work for myself using both drawing methods, which provides me great flexibility. I still admire Julia Morgan’s professionalism in carrying on despite the criticism and opposition of her male peers, and I understand that her male employees were very loyal to her. Bravo Julia!



Chinese YWCA, 965 Clay Street, San Francisco, 1930, front facade on sloped site



Exterior lantern fixture, Chinese YWCA, by Julia Morgan

Sources: Julia Morgan, Architect of Dreams by Ginger Wadsworth, Lerner Publications Company, Minneapolis MN 1990; “Investor’s Business Daily” article, 2005, entitled “Architect Helped Rebuild City/Be Determined: Julia Morgan came back stronger after 1906 San Francisco Quake”

Photos from www.sanfranciscochinatown.com, copyright of Tiger Business Development, Inc.

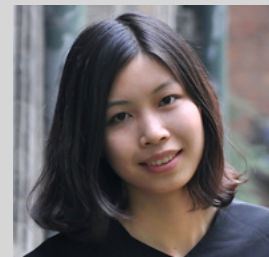
The “Have It All” Myth for Women Architects

by Ziyuan Wang

This year the media has seen a resurgence of heightened interest on womanhood and femininity, imbued with unnerving tones of post-financial-crisis anxiety. While the controversial Time magazine July/August cover story on attachment parenting is still generating new threads for debates, an autobiographical story entitled “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All” stirred up a new wave of heated discussion in the mainstream media. The phenomenon of highly educated and over-achieving women, epitomized by the author of the Atlantic article, Anne-Marie Slaughter, who willingly opted out of a fast-ascending career track for maternal responsibilities, has become even more prevalent, even though feminism has widely changed the discourse on workforce diversity.

Although female professionals are not struggling to find employment opportunities anymore, thanks to generations of feminist fighters before us, what’s concerning us today is the unattainable pinnacle of success for women professionals. Ambitious and capable as Anne-Marie Slaughter is, she still had to step down from the high-level White House position and “settle” for a teaching job at Princeton. The challenge here is not a hard choice between career and family, she didn’t go from working to full-time at-home mom, but the pain of giving up her imminent success in a leadership role in the government, due to her motherly duties. What she is lamenting is the lack of flexibility and understanding for women who aspire and have the ability to rise up to the top. She claims that the demanding schedule of her government job simply renders it impossible to have a home life. It’s as though to become an industry leader these days, a woman has to work like a man and live up to the demands of a male leader with no regard to the conditions of womanhood. Simply handing jobs to women is no longer enough; the workplace needs to make it possible for women to succeed differently.

The rude awakening came to us that women couldn’t succeed by disguising ourselves as men. But acting like a man is not going to efface the inherent gender differences, which is more fundamental than we are willing to acknowledge. For architects, this ongoing debate on work life balance is even more relevant. While this particular article in the Atlantic is geared towards a small fraction of highly achieving mid-career women, it is a cautionary tale for young women architects who are passionate about their work and want to make a difference in the real world. Unfortunately, the architecture profession is still lagging behind in the gender diversity movement. In the May 2008 issue’s editorial of “Architecture Record” magazine, Robert Ivy poignantly criticized the alarming lack of gender diversity in the architecture industry, citing facts that “while women now account for approximately half of the student population in schools of architecture, their numbers among registered architects in the AIA hovers around 13.8 percent.” Four years later, this fact still rings true. Women architects still have



Ziyuan Wang

a long way to go in fighting professional prejudices in the traditionally male-dominated profession. Due to this self-conscious struggle to blend in, it has been an open secret that woman architects, especially the ones with far-reaching prominence, don’t like to be noticed by their gender, and are deeply offended when their designs are recognized as having “feminine” qualities, not to mention the difficulty in raising children with a calendar fully booked for the coming 20 years. Some suspect it is illusionary to expect society to see architects as “genderless” due to the scarce numbers of female architects who made it to the top. The fact that feminism in architecture hasn’t prospered is in itself a failure to assert us as equals. Why push us to think and work according to the patriarchal standards? Why shy away from the limelight that praises us as female role models? A survey of some 700 women architects from The Architects’ Journal shows that 80% of the surveyed architects think “having children puts women at a disadvantage in architecture” and 61% think the building industry has not fully accepted the authority of the female architect. In this reality where gender discrimination is still commonplace in the macho industry, simply averting attention is not the solution. The increasing numbers of female architects entering the workforce need to come to terms with the fear of standing out as women architects. After all, “blend in” is an act to further perpetuate the patriarchal values in architecture. Despite the negative associations with feminism, women architects have yet to find a way to fight the sexual politics at work, if not positioning themselves as gender equality advocates.

At the same time, we need to recognize the work-life balance dilemma is not a gender specific issue. As some critics have pointed out, work-life balance is a human condition rather than a working mom problem. Salaried men don’t suffer any less than working moms, and the challenge varies for everyone. There is a grain of truth in Anne-Marie Slaughter’s sentiment that the workplace needs to provide a structure more suited for the hustle and bustle of contemporary home life. No matter what gender they are, people who want to compete in the game and arise to the top are finding it increasingly difficult to “have a life”. In light of this reality, professional women should not feel guilty or inadequate for not having it all. The humanly impossible standard of “having it all”, which need to be addressed as a patriarchal model, will put women in a perpetual cycle of dissatisfaction.

To many, me included, Anne-Marie Slaughter’s definition of female success is a single-minded reflection on the achievement of feminism. A diversified workforce calls forth diversified values, and a flexible social structure to facilitate the realization of such varied values. The democratic capitalist society of America promises everyone the opportunity for the pursuit of happiness, and happiness has a different definition for everyone. A more progressive way to look at the equation calls forth more alternatives to the simple-minded and often self-destructive criteria of success. No matter whatever the gender, architects today sacrifice too much trying to balance professional ambitions and home life qualities, especially in this economy. Long work hours and around the clock availability are among the many contributing factors, which give little considerations for employees’ emotional well being. In addition to increasing awareness for women architect empowerment, we also need a collective vision for an updated and realistic solution to work life balance.

MEMBER NEWS. UPCOMING EVENTS + MORE . . .

November		December	
12	Eva Castro, Lecture Series, at the Art Institute	TBD	Holiday Party
TBD	Jeanne Gang Exhibit @ AIC and Happy Hour		
2012- 13 Executive Brd.	2012- 13 Brd. of Directors	2012- 13 Newsletter	Corporate Members
M. Spencer, President	V. Bocanova, CWA Foundation Liaison	K. Haig, Editor-in-Chief	City of Chgo, Public Bldg. Commission
C. Andreas, 1st VP	L. Hancock, Membership	K. Haig, Journalist	Harley Ellis Devereaux
G. Cavanaugh, 2nd VP	L. Grigaitis, Lecture Series		Hutter Architects, Ltd
S. Hunt, Secretary	P. Benvenuto, L. Nicholls, G. Paradowicz,	S. van der Meulen, Journalist	Landon Bone Baker Architects
C. Andreas, Treasurer	Scholarship & Diversity	L. Nicholls, Layout, Graphics	Muller + Muller, Ltd
D. Fox, Past President	K. Haig, Newsletter		Urban Works
	L. Nicholls, G. Paradowicz, Events		
			Sponsor
			DIRTT
			165 West Chicago Ave, #200 Chicago, IL 60610