In November of 2012, firm leaders and friends of Page & Turnbull, past and present, were interviewed in honor of the firm’s 40th anniversary. The firm’s early days were relived, memories preserved, and thoughts shared on the future.

This Oral History is a collection of the transcripts from those interviews. The words have been colloquially transcribed to preserve the character and voice of each speaker.

Included in the reflections are interviews with Jay Turnbull, who walks us through two of the firm’s most important Bay Area projects: the San Francisco Ferry Building and the Walt Disney Family Museum.
I’m Jay Turnbull. I’m a founding Principal at Page & Turnbull and currently its president.

I came to architecture more or less by a family legacy. My parents were in the business. My father was an engineer, and my mother graduated as an architect in 1936 from the University of Oklahoma. She went all around trying to find a job and found one at Albert Kahn Associates in Detroit, where she met my father. Shortly before World War II, they established a civil engineering firm, and they both worked at it during World War II. And so, when I was little, I just simply went with them to the office and tried to steal scales and triangles and pencils and so forth. And that’s how I got started in the world of drawing and architecture.

I was a little bit surprised to find myself working in historic preservation. One of the reasons is that my early background had been in working in New York City, first at SOM, and then at the Urban Design Group, which was a group established in the Lindsay administration at that time. All of this work was essentially large in scale, and I thought that’s what I would continue doing. But once I came out to San Francisco, I found myself, in 1975, working for Heritage—the Foundation for San Francisco’s Architectural Heritage, which is a local nonprofit advocacy organization, pointing towards the saving of buildings. I was there as their staff architect for about four or five years. That’s how I really got going in the world of preservation. That’s how I met Charles Page, and found myself working in this area.

I went to Princeton, which has a very small architectural school. They graduated maybe 15 professional degrees in a year. People have said about that school, the one good thing about it is that ‘they don’t teach you anything wrong’, and so we had a great time working there. In terms of the architects that we admired, some of us competed as to how many volumes of the works of Corbusier we could obtain. Generally speaking, Wright was not terribly popular at that time. I was in school in the mid-1960s. I was very interested in the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto because of his interest in site and in program, and in the uniqueness of each building. And so I was particularly interested in him.

I also remember that at school then, there had been a huge national competition for the City Hall of Boston, and the winning drawings—which were by Kallmann and McKinnell—came around and were exhibited at many schools, including ours. And so as soon as this exhibit went up, what we saw was a whole lot of people with brutalist, strong, tough Boston City Hall-type work. This all appeared on the students’ boards. So that’s another thing that happened, during that time.

Charles Page graduated from Yale, was in the service, and obtained a planning degree at Penn. He came out here in the late 1960s intending to do planning and he discerned a need to do work connected to historic preservation. One of the things he did, with Harry Miller, was to start Heritage, the organization of which I was staff architect. But he also started his own office in about 1973. His thought was that there would be a way for
people who were interested in historic preservation to consult with others, and either to save buildings, survey historic resources, or do architecture that had to do with historic buildings. And so this was how his own firm got started. He first had an office in the Kohl Building at California and Montgomery, and then for many years—20 years—his office, and ultimately my office, too, was at 364 Bush on top of Sam’s Restaurant. Then we moved a couple of times, and now we’re on Sansome.

I joined the firm in 1981, but I am aware that one of the earlier things that the group did was to survey the entire state of Nevada for historic resources. I understand they got into a station wagon and batted around the state. Another thing that they did, which really put them on the map, was an evaluation of historic buildings in downtown San Francisco. This was a group of initially about 400 to 600 buildings, very much in downtown, which were evaluated according to significance, history, and their contribution to the community. Michael Corbett headed the group, which included Ellen Lipsey and others of whom I am not aware, but there was quite a group at the time. This project became a book, published by California Living in the late 1970s, known as “Splendid Survivors”. And “Splendid Survivors” then became influential in city planning in the city of San Francisco such that when the new downtown plan went into effect in 1985, many of the buildings previously evaluated by “Splendid Survivors” were protected under the downtown plan.

I think that the legacy of “Splendid Survivors” is, first of all, its influence on city planning in San Francisco even today. Those buildings that are separated into categories of either significance or contribution still are pretty much protected and are mostly still with us. But in addition, the idea of a survey, and of an expanding survey, has continued in San Francisco so that now we have, I would say, 60 to 70 percent of the city surveyed rather completely. And that, I think, is a true living legacy.

I would certainly name “Splendid Survivors” as perhaps the most, and certainly one of the most influential projects. When I came on, we did a museum for the Bank of Canton that was placed into the former United States Sub-Treasury building on Commercial Street. I really liked that project because it was the first one that I worked on. We helped to rehabilitate and restore the Palace Hotel before, during, and after the 1989 earthquake. We were instrumental in rehabilitating the PG&E headquarters, both PG&E and the Matson building on Market Street. We worked on a number of buildings in the civic center, including particularly the California State Building and the Asian Art Museum. Two recent projects that are really important are the Ferry Building, at the foot of Market Street, and the Walt Disney Family Museum in the Presidio of San Francisco.

We’ve done a number of projects in the Presidio, including housing in a number of locations—Portola and Liggett Avenues, Storey Road, and Wyman Avenue. We participated as preservation architect in the former public health hospital, which is now housing. We are architects for the rehabilitation of the Presidio Chapel, and our most important project there was the Walt Disney Family Museum.

The way we like to work with historic buildings is to imagine change within the historic environment. And we’re very cognizant of the historic value of these buildings, and of the valuable parts of them that need to remain. But there are various ways that you can choose to work, which will allow you to affect change within the fabric. Now one of these ideas is to use contrast, where the existing building is strong, and you’re making an addition. You would like it to be expressive of its own time. In that case, you may have a very contrasting composition in the end. An example of that is the Walt Disney Family Museum. There may be other locations where a given building is very much a part of
40 years is an interesting piece of time. It, to me, seems very short indeed. And there were buildings that were going up when I first came to San Francisco in the early 1970s that we are now viewing as possible antiques. They were there, partly mid-century modern expression, and we are trying to save them. And so when we look ahead for 40 years, what I would hope for the firm is that we are still participating, still finding ways to take the very best of what we have— not freeze it in time—but to make changes, and to participate in the community in that way. It’s amazing how quickly the 40 years will fly past. And the very things that we’re concerned about right now— green buildings, energy, some of the things that are on our plate right this moment—we don’t know that they will be the same concerns that we will have in 40 years. But we do know that good buildings will need to be saved.

One of the things that we sometimes fear in the office is that we are the “old building guys.” We are the people who are called in when all else fails and we’ve got to keep a building, and how are we going to do it, and how are we going to get through an entitlement process? I think the myth of who we are is that we deal only with old buildings. But I think that what we want to do, and what we in fact do, is to treat a building creatively with new ideas and new design, and create a whole that is greater than what we’ve encountered before.

We try in this office to not let go of the really valuable things that we inherited from the past. There is a former colleague who operates a museum of antiquated architectural instruments, and he takes scales and slide rules and drafting pens, and places them in a cabinet. And then he photographs that, puts it on the Web. And this is by way of saying: these things are antique and not to be used. Well, they’re tools. These days we have a large set of tools related to the computer. None of that is as important as a set of tools or a campus or a grouping, which has a very powerful set of visual qualities already. In that instance, you strive for what is called compatibility, in which you take the very same patterns that you’re seeing elsewhere and you express them in a contemporary way. But you don’t make too much of a contrasting change with what is already there. We’ve done that at Berkeley. We’ve done that in several buildings at Stanford and, for example, at the Webb School at the Copeland Donahue Theater. And finally, there may be certain buildings that are so strong or so important, or are national historic landmarks, where the changes you propose are perhaps not large in scale— where you simply want to remain very quiet within the fabric. And so regarding being quiet about the changes that have to do with a building, we’ve done that at the Ferry Building in San Francisco and at the Old Mint project here.

I’ve been thinking of the whole issue of success and challenge. To tell the truth, I think that success and failure or challenges are sort of two sides of the same coin. And the two answers that I came up with were: Our success has been survival, and our challenge have been integration into the community. I think that anyone who is in business and has to relate to economic conditions and to what happens in the marketplace— needs to be able to be in business from year to year, and even decade to decade— and I think we’ve done that. I think that’s a great success. I think that we have a contribution that we can make, which raises the issue of challenge. Can you participate in the community? Can you establish an identity within the community, so that when people think of historic buildings and what needs to happen to them, they think of you? By the same token, there are times when survival is really an issue of paying the next payroll. There are times when you don’t know whether you’ve integrated yourself properly into the community itself. And so here is the opposite side of the very same coin.
principles about design, about the way you should approach the use of buildings and the communal activities that take place in them. These attitudes should not change, and we hold onto them. We have good values. What I’d say to somebody who is thinking of coming here is, ‘You’ll be confused. You won’t know what’s going on at first. But I would hope that you would take the time to understand our language. And meanwhile, we’ll try and bring you along with these values that we think are important.’

First of all, I shy away from the use of the term “philosophy” because it seems a little bit larger and more pretentious than what we do here in the firm. But one of the definitions of philosophy is: the way of doing things in the way we work. And so we thought long and hard about what a mission for the firm ought to be. We decided that the two words that had the most resonance were “imagining change.” And what we’re talking about is imagining within historic environments, historic building groupings, or perhaps a specific building that is historically important, and seeing how change can occur within these structures going forward, and going into the future. We have three studios here. We have a group of historians. They play their part. We have architects and designers who need to figure out how these buildings can physically change. We have materials specialists who take a detailed look at how the buildings can be either repaired or restored. So this is the group of people who think about the possible change. But the change has to happen based on the needs of the people who are going to use the building, a look into the future to see what the role of the building is going to become, a consideration of all the things we think are important now in terms of sustainability, energy usage and so forth, but also looking ahead to think about what may change that we’re not even measuring at this time.

Another thing that we might address a little bit is the question of style, because people who work with historic buildings often speak about style. They speak about the particular formal ways in which a building has been designed, about its ornament, what the geometries of spaces and sequences are. And so there is a mistaken view, I think, that style should be what our concern is in addressing change in historic buildings. There are some designers who say: I’m a proponent of only classical styles, or I’m a proponent of the mid-century modern. I’m just an extension of that, or various other things that might be pointed to. I don’t think that’s the issue at all. Style grows out of a set of things that happen in a given moment. It can change based on surroundings or appropriateness. I don’t think that style is the issue.

In choosing the form of a new structure or an addition to an existing structure, or the way even that you would make change within an existing structure, I think you do choose it based on the needs of those who will use it, on what you can see going into the future, and certain constrictions or narrowness or limitations with which you may be faced. I think what I would say is that I’m really fortunate to have found myself—in quite a surprise—within the world of historic preservation, first as a partner of Charles Page and then as a partner of a number of others who have come along. I am truly fortunate for having the number of creative people that have come to this firm and gathered around me. I’m not thinking that I’m the reason for it, but nonetheless, we are a happy tribe and I think we really do terrific work.

The most fun that we have in our office is sitting around on a Friday evening wondering how this building can change or how this site can be master planned for a generation of future use. That’s what we like best. I think that’s what many in the design profession would say.
I’m Linda Jo Fitz. I am a wealth manager at a company called Aspiriant.

When I came to San Francisco, I had never lived in a big city before. I decided I wanted to work in historic preservation because I had done historic preservation volunteer work in a town near Sacramento, California. So I started looking for a job and found one at the offices of Heritage, which were in the offices of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. I was the only employee at that time, and I was learning all kinds of things every day. Eventually we had 14 employees, one of whom was Jay Turnbull.

I have many recollections of Charles Hall Page, which is what I called him. I never called him Charlie like his contemporaries did. I guess it was because he was essentially my boss, because he was president of San Francisco Architectural Heritage, and I was the employee. So even though we weren’t very far apart in age, he had such a personality and such a power that it was sort of a formal relationship. He, at that time, was the sole or main person at Charles Page & Associates, the planning and architecture firm that he started, but I had no relationship to the firm at all. I was busily trying to meet his every whim when I was the staff person for Heritage.

He was a person that made a big impression, and he was a person who had a passion for historic preservation. He had charisma, and he had enormous focus.

I didn’t ever think about him as being a person with a firm. I always thought about him as the historic preservation guru because he knew everyone in the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He knew all the players around the country. He knew all the important preservation events that happened, like historic Savannah, and all the characters involved in that. And he knew all the preservation techniques that went with that, the main one at that time being historic preservation easements. And he just kind of lived it.

He really cared about cities. As a city planner, he really was concerned about how cities could be for people, and not just be sort of mechanistic, and of course, historic preservation was part of that. He translated that passion into the idea of starting Heritage, and making sure everything with Heritage was done right. All the brochures had to be right; all the newsletters which Jay and I worked on many years had to be perfect. And everything had to be just right. When we eventually got the Haas-Lilienthal house, he wanted to make sure it was being curated appropriately. He wasn’t a hands-off leader of Heritage. And so, I didn’t really think of him as a person who worked. I thought of him as a person who ran Heritage, and raised money for Heritage.

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In the area of charisma, he was astounding. He and his friend, Harry Miller, got all the initial work done to form Heritage. They did all the legal work. They made a board of directors from among the people that they’d gone to high school with, who were still around San Francisco. It was about 11 people. They were all classmates so they were all around the same age. I could have done the math, I suppose, but I guess he was in his
early 30s then and he went out and raised money. He went to the parents of all those people and raised money. It was just marvelous, the charisma of caring about future generations, having the historic buildings be available for future generations so that you could understand the present by understanding the past. It was just really incredible.

Then the idea of focus, I mean he was relentless. It did occur to me when I was thinking about talking with you all today, that he really had a kind of an integrated life, because the firm was involved in historic preservation, and then he did the National Trust work, and then he did the Heritage work. And then he had all these friends that were all involved in the same passion of his. And he just made it all work. He was the expert in the West, and perhaps in the country, on historic preservation. It’s just an incredible story.

I think I’ve made some progress on getting historic preservation to be more outwardly stated as being one of the factors that SPUR [San Francisco Planning & Urban Research Association] really thinks about. When I got heavily involved in SPUR three or four years ago, I complained that the historic preservation was hiding or non-existent. And they said, no, no, no. We take historic preservation into account. And I said, well, I think we need to make it clear.

I noticed that in a paper that we recently finished on disaster recovery, one of the recommendations in it is before the disaster, to get all the historic buildings in San Francisco identified through historic building surveys, so that in the event of a disaster, there won’t be any hesitation about which are the important buildings that we need to make sure that we save, and which are the buildings that sadly might have to go.

The world is changing so fast, I don’t really try to give a lot of advice about careers. I’d say that historic preservation is definitely more integrated into our world than it was in the 70s. It’s more complex, as you know from the projects that Page & Turnbull has done with things like the Ferry Building. Where cutting the holes in the second floor of the Ferry Building was pretty readily accepted by the community - once they really understood why that programatically worked for the building - where there was a time when that just couldn’t have happened. And so I think that there is more room for more to be done that involves saving historic buildings. But historic buildings probably are pretty expensive to save, and I’m not involved in the finance side of that at all. If that’s the case, there will be issues about wanting to tear them down in favor of putting up something easier to maintain.

Looking around San Francisco at the population mix that we have, we should be thrilled—and we are thrilled—that we have more new businesses coming in, and more uses happening, especially in the South of Market area. But all of those people working in the high-tech area south of Market, work horrendous hours. And of course we already know that all those lawyers north of Market work horrendous hours, and they make up probably most of that population. And so we’ve always had trouble getting people to pay attention to historic preservation because they work too much. I think that’s going to continue to be an issue, with the influx of new young people who are working really hard. In fact, the other issue in our society that makes it harder is that, in my view, that most families—to be able to afford a house—have to have both spouses working, so that if you have both spouses working, then you don’t have any free time, because that’s the only time you see each other. So I fear that all of the volunteer activities, whether it’s caring about historic preservation or caring about social services, gets put on the back burner more than it ever did.
Shortly after that, we had a survey of San Rafael. I remember doing that survey, thinking, ‘This is so much fun. This is so great, and when this is over, I’m just going to have to go and get a job, because it was just one little thing after another.’ But it never stopped, and in fact, the office got really busy. In my part of it, what we specialized in the first few years, was surveys. We did surveys of California cities, and then Texas, Arizona, and Nevada cities and various places.

When I started, the office was in the Kohl Building, at the corner of California and Montgomery. I was actually the first employee to show up every day. Bruce Judd was still upstairs at Page, Clowdsley & Baleix. I think they were on the seventh floor; we were on the fourth floor. Anyway, I was there, and Charles was there and it was not until after we moved to 364 Bush that there were more employees and more work. I think that’s when Bruce [Judd] came in; he left the other job and came into this one.

Splendid Survivors was our big project from about ’76. I guess we began planning about ’76 to ’79, when it came out, and I’d actually like to talk to Charles about this again, because I’ve been asked this and I forget exactly. My memory of it is that there was an article in the Chronicle that said that there was about to be the biggest building boom in downtown San Francisco since 1906. So that’s one piece of the story.

On the other side, David Gebhardt’s architectural guide book to San Francisco and northern California had just come out. They didn’t really like classical buildings or conventional mainstream kinds of buildings, and the sorts of things that were in downtown San Francisco. They said snide things about a couple of buildings. I would hear, literally hear, after that book came out, I would hear people parroting, repeating the word, out of

I’m Michael Corbett, and I’m an architectural historian. I have an office in Berkeley and practice on my own.

When I was a senior at Princeton, about to graduate in the spring of my last year, I didn’t know what I was going to do. I was in a class in architectural history taught by Will Morgan, and he said something about the National Trust for Historic Preservation and I just thought, ‘What’s that?’ After the lecture I went up and talked to him and that was my introduction to the subject. I had never heard of it. I didn’t know anything about it. But it really just caught me, just the word caught me. After I graduated, I came to San Francisco, and he knew John Frisbee, and through him, I went to see John Frisbee above where Bill Stout Books is now, Montgomery and Jackson. He advised me to do volunteer work, go to Heritage. Heritage at that time was across the hall. So I met Linda Jo [Fitz] and Randy Delahanty and began doing volunteer work for Heritage. And by doing that, I met Charles [Page]. This was in the fall of ’73. And in the spring of ’74, Charles had a job and asked me if I wanted to work on it. And that was, I think, the first project we had—it was a historical study— of the Napa Opera House, the Sam Kee Laundry, and there’s a third building in the group, in Napa.
the guide book, saying what they thought, just strangers on the street, saying what they thought about buildings.

So I thought, what we need is to put different words in people’s mouths. I began talking about doing a survey, and here we have this big building [boom] coming along, and Charles was interested in it. I don’t really know how Heritage got the bug, but at our end, it was an idea that we promoted and that eventually caught on.

Doing the survey—everybody in the office was involved to some extent, taking photographs or doing bits of research. But mostly, I did the research. Jan Beecher took the photographs. I’ve forgotten who the graphic designer was, it’s in the book... Robin Sweet. Robin, who was not married yet, I think, when that started, did the layout. We came up with this idea of having a review panel to review the evaluated results. And we thought the review panel would give us credibility, and also Jeremy Kotas was in the planning department. The planning department didn’t really know what we were doing or didn’t care. It was so different from the way it is now, when there’s a whole bureaucracy of preservation in the planning department. At that time, there was none at all. We had to kind of trick them, sort of lure them, into what we were doing. And we wanted Jeremy, and we wanted the planning department implicated in the results. We thought if they participated, then that made them advocates for the survey. And that did help us later, when, after the book came out and we were working on the downtown plan. That wasn’t in the office. That was at Heritage.

But in those days, the difference between Heritage and Charles’ office was not always really clear, because he was involved all the time with them, and we were doing that project, which was kind of their main thing at that time.

Was it difficult to get published? I don’t think it was difficult. Publishing was certainly different at that time. Somebody knew the California Living Books, which was the Examiner, or it had just separated itself from the Examiner and we went to them, and they said yes. I don’t think there was any protracted period of time. One thing that we tried to do was, we wanted the book finished and ready to go before we found a publisher; because we didn’t want a publisher telling us to do things in a different way, because it was all of a piece. It was all conceptually one thing, and we didn’t want it to be changed. They didn’t care, so from our point of view, that was a good publisher.

Preservation practice was really different then. It seemed like every project we worked on, we had to convince people from the big picture down to the details of why they should be doing this. It wasn’t clear. It was not widely accepted. There was little support in terms of laws. There was a landmarks ordinance in San Francisco. The National Register existed, but they weren’t as strong as they came to be. There was no CEQA [California Environmental Equality Act], so we were always trying to convince people. Now I find that I’m often on the other side. I’m actually saying, not that I’m not a preservationist, but let’s look at this rationally. Let’s look at this in a big picture. Preservation is so entrenched, that sometimes it’s overdone.

Working for Charles was perfect for me when I started because it was really the first job I had and I didn’t know really what I was going to do, or what I could do. Charles had visions. He had a vision of his firm, a vision of Heritage and of historic preservation, but as a manager, he left me alone. There were a lot of really good people who came out of the office in those years—Steve [Farneth] and Bruce [Judd], Ellen Lipsey, and Chuck Hasbrook. I’m sure I’m leaving people out, Jack Schafer certainly. We flourished in that
environment, because he was there, and he was always a good advisor, but he was not a micro-manager. He wasn’t telling us what to do, or what to think, and so it was a great environment.

For somebody going into preservation now, I would advise them to get out and look at stuff, look at lots and lots of buildings. That was a part of what we did. I didn’t mention this, but one of the people who was not in the firm, but around it a lot in those days, was John Beech. All the architectural historians in this area who are my age and older will all say that John Beech was the one who taught us to look at buildings. He worked with us on a lot of these surveys, and that was a terrific experience, not just because we had his eyes, but also because he had this voracious appetite for going out and looking at stuff. We’d survey all week, and then on the weekend, he’d want to drive around and look at stuff. I think that was a great background. I would advise people to do that. That kind of brings the passion into it, which, if you just go to school in preservation, it’s a career choice rather than a passion. I think that in those early years, that was certainly a common thread among the people who worked there, and who worked in the field, that we did it because we wanted to.

At some point, I can’t remember exactly what Charles was saying, he wanted an architectural partner, and he wasn’t quite sure what to do, and talked about different people. This was probably after Steve and Bruce left, and I thought that Jay Turnbull and he should talk, that you guys would have a lot in common. When I made the suggestion, Charles knew of Jay, and was already thinking about him, but I like to think that I pushed that forward a little bit.

At that time, the field of preservation and architecture was polarized. People interested in preservation were not necessarily interested in new design or in the city, considering the city as a whole problem, or a whole thing to deal with. And so, in thinking about who would make a partner for Charles, I had known Jay at Heritage, and I thought of Jay as someone who was interested, like Charles, in historic preservation, but not exclusively. Historic preservation is a great thing and a great idea, but we live in a larger world with all kinds of problems. That seemed to me to be, not such a common thing, and the makings for a good partnership. •
Heritage. I was a docent immediately at Heritage because I was very interested in learning about Victorians in San Francisco, and Linda Jo [Fitz] was, of course, at that time, the staff person at Heritage managing the docents. I worked for Henry for about a year, and then went over and talked to Charles [Page] about possibly working for him because I was aware, through Heritage, of his practice. I interviewed with Charles and Bruce Judd, who was the first architect hired, and they hired me into the group. I think I was probably the 4th or 5th employee. I think maybe Michael [Corbett] was first, and then Ellen Lipsey was also there, and Bruce Judd. Something like that. It was at 400 Montgomery Street. I was there for four and a half years, and it was great, great fun.

At that time, there wasn’t any real professional practice in preservation, and so Charles had started Heritage. He was really committed to preservation planning. He also felt that architecture was part of that. So I, along with Bruce Judd, managed the architectural side of the practice, and Charles and others led a range of planning activities. Early on there were a number of important surveys and we also did a number of feasibility studies for historic buildings.

Charles really put together the big house move in the Western Addition where, rather than tearing down Victorians, they were moved to selected sites. I think he was interested in developing these houses, but I think he was also interested in creating a model for his practice, showcasing what you could do with historic buildings. He bought two of the houses in that first house move, which were both located on Broderick Street, which we rehabilitated and rented. And I don’t know if that was the first completed project that Charles’ office did, but it was quite early. So that was a job.

We did various others in the four years I was there, including a property in Whittier.

I’m Steve Farneth. I’m a Principal at Architectural Resources Group, a couple blocks over, and it’s a pleasure to be here. I’m an old alumnus of Charles Page & Associates.

I started my training at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, and worked there about a year prior to and during college. I was very interested in historic buildings. There was no program in historic buildings, so I worked on HABS teams in the summers, and that was my introduction to preservation. I wrote my thesis on it, but nobody was very interested in that. I worked in Pittsburgh for about a year. It was the recession of ’74. I had a great job, but I really wanted to go to New York. There were no jobs in New York, and my best friend was in San Francisco working for a one-person architectural firm doing houses. He had worked for Frank Lloyd Wright. He was a very Wright-ian designer. And John said, ‘Well, if you get here in three days, you can help me finish this [Construction] D[ocuments] package, and, I haven’t told Henry, but I’m leaving for the Peace Corps, so once he gets to know you, then you can just take my job.’

I put things in a backpack and got in my Corvair, which I wasn’t sure would make it. I got there in three days, took on that job, which was fun, but immediately got involved in Heritage. I was a docent immediately at Heritage because I was very interested in learning about Victorians in San Francisco, and Linda Jo [Fitz] was, of course, at that time, the staff person at Heritage managing the docents. I worked for Henry for about a year, and then went over and talked to Charles [Page] about possibly working for him because I was aware, through Heritage, of his practice. I interviewed with Charles and Bruce Judd, who was the first architect hired, and they hired me into the group. I think I was probably the 4th or 5th employee. I think maybe Michael [Corbett] was first, and then Ellen Lipsey was also there, and Bruce Judd. Something like that. It was at 400 Montgomery Street. I was there for four and a half years, and it was great, great fun.
safety standards, and what other—using the state historic building code—previous standards are appropriate. And so, we have much more sophistication now about how these issues are approached. And actually, a lot more sophistication now in the client base, in recognizing that old buildings have a patina that’s worth preserving. In the early days, nothing had been really restored. Everyone really wanted to make their buildings look like new, and it was hard to tell clients that you didn’t have to replace windows. You didn’t have to do a lot of the work that people wanted to do. But, developers especially felt—and really the code officials also—felt there had to be reliability, and there was much more reliability in new materials. So that has changed dramatically and dramatically for the better.

I guess the other change is that when we started, there were no training programs. I went to the program at ICCROM [International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property] in Rome. It was really fantastic professionally for me. But at that time, mostly architectural schools were not teaching anything about preservation, and Columbia was still young, and Penn hadn’t really gotten going. So, there wasn’t a trained layer of professionals. There were a bunch of architects who were really interested in it, like me or Bruce or Jay or others, who were interested in developing standards, and developing professional practice. But there wasn’t a whole other layer of people, including the review bodies. They were not very sophisticated either. All those things have changed.

Everybody there chose to do this kind of work. There was nobody who was there just to do a job. It was not based on the ability to make a profit. There wasn’t a real business plan, but there was absolutely a mission. And that’s what, I think, kept this really together, and made the "payroll savings plan" fun because we were really enjoying it. We felt like we were doing something that nobody else was thinking about at that moment.

There’s so much more sophistication about how we inspect a building, how we learn about its history, how we treat its materials—a lot more information about that. We certainly understand far more about public safety, what’s important to bring up to new safety standards, and what other—using the state historic building code—previous standards are appropriate. And so, we have much more sophistication now about how these issues are approached. And actually, a lot more sophistication now in the client base, in recognizing that old buildings have a patina that’s worth preserving.

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There were just a bunch of architects who were interested in old buildings and enjoyed the challenge of trying to preserve them, but also make great new places through preserving buildings. And so, it was a very open-ended moment. A lot of that flexibility has
developed in good ways, but certainly it’s changed.

I think the passion to do this kind of work, I had it before I went to work for Charles. But I think that the group that he had there at the very beginning, we all carry on in other ways with that same passion. I still feel that excitement about doing this kind of work. And the other thing I guess I mentioned was the difficulty in making a profit. My partners would say that this behavior was instilled in me by Charles Page, and I never grew out of it, and I still can’t make a profit on my projects. But I think that’s going back to this mission-driven idea. You really want to do the best job you can for the money available, and you do that, and you just do a little more.

I think it has changed a lot, and I had thought about that. We have these great schools. We’re producing really great people, and they have tremendous knowledge in the conservation of materials, or government practice, or preservation standards, or preservation planning. But by and large, the architectural schools have not produced a type of architect who is focused on preservation. And in some ways, I don’t see that. I see the profession of architecture embracing historic preservation as one piece of everybody’s practice. And frankly, most of the architects we work with are great designers, but they’re looking at different things than a preservation architect.

If I was looking for one development in the profession in the future, I would hope that there still remains within the architectural profession, people who choose to focus on historic buildings and bring together all of the different aspects of the preservation projects. Rather than where I see it going sometimes—where we have larger architectural firms capable of managing these big projects—along with a series of specialist firms who handle materials and other things, but no one to deal with the overall holistics of the building as preservation. I would hope this would be a development in the future and that architectural schools recognize that there is some discipline, a little different from a straight design profession.

I think every firm—and I know in our firm [Architectural Resources Group], people who come into it tend to think the history of the firm began when they arrived—there’s always a background that is built on. And certainly Page & Turnbull has become a tremendous design firm and preservation firm. It’s fun to think about my roots in the very, very earliest days. So I do appreciate that.

I would like to just say a couple of additional kind words about Charles Page because Charles was a very quiet, very reserved man, but the accomplishments that he created, really, the creation of Heritage; the early preservation advocacy to the city; some of the people who were associated with him, including Gee Gee Platt and other preservationists in the city, we owe a lot to them for where we are today. Leaving was a very difficult thing from that perspective, because I had a lot of respect for Charles, and for all the others—Michael, and Jack Schafer, and others. That was bittersweet, but at the same time I was very young and very ambitious, and I thought it would be fun to try and manage a practice on my own. ✮
I'm Tom Dufurrena, a Principal at Page & Turnbull.

I've wanted to be an architect since, I think, the 6th grade. However, I grew up in a very remote part of Nevada, where it wasn't really understood what an architect actually did. It was just a word that people used about somebody that built stuff. I've always been really interested in building things and drawing, and did a lot of artwork. So it was just a label that stuck. Whenever anybody asked me what I wanted to do, I always said I wanted to be an architect. I did some building after high school and I worked in construction. I went to school to take art and engineering at the University of Nevada while working construction, and then got accepted into architecture school at the University of Oregon. And it really clicked, at that time, that's what I wanted to do. I loved design. I knew about building and it confirmed what I had always thought of myself, that's what I wanted. But, until I got out of college and worked in an office, I'd never had a job inside. I'd never been anyplace where I wasn't outside doing things. So it was challenging at first. Just the idea of sitting inside for a whole day and not being outside or doing anything, but I eventually got used to that.
This is exciting new technology and it’s evolving as we’re going. We’re working with it in AutoCAD. We’re soon to be working with it in Revit, and there’s a lot of great potential for it. One of the things that scanning really helps us do—because the parks are spread all over the west—is to be able to gather all that information remotely and use it in a really high level way back at the office. It is a great boon for us when we’re producing drawings and doing reports. That’s a technology that we’re invested in now, and I think we’ll continue to use. And then also these remote communication tools, like GoToMeeting, and things like that, we use a lot and we’ll definitely use more.

I started working at the firm in 1994. It’s been a great place to work with really interesting and challenging projects. It’s really true what people said about how the culture and atmosphere nurtures the staff. There have been some great projects that I’ve had the pleasure to work on, and that I’ve been thinking about over time. There’s such a number of really interesting projects, but on the other hand there’s been some really great people that have come through the firm, a lot of talent, and they’ve gone on to do other things or be a competitors, but it’s been really interesting being around that many really talented people and being involved in some really great projects.

Some of the earlier ones were the Ferry Building. That was a monumental project. It was great to be involved in a project that was so important to the community, and really the nation. I used to live in North Beach, actually about a block from here when I first started, so I used to go to the Ferry Building for years. But because it was closed off to the public and shielded by the freeway, I never really thought about it that much. It was just a nether world back then. So, when the opportunity came up to be able to work on it, it was really fantastic. It was a great experience working with the whole team. And then...
seeing the transformation of that building from what it was behind the freeway to what it is now. Whenever somebody comes into town, that’s where I want to go. And they’re like, wow, this is really great. And it wouldn’t have been a place to go if somebody came to town before. It’s like, “The Ferry Building—what’s that? Why would I go down there?” So that’s been really great.

Another series of projects that we got over time that have really been interesting to me was a number of the state parks that we worked on ten years ago. And it was kind of funny. I went to interview in Sacramento. There was nobody else available at the time, so I took the boards, and it was a small interview, and we talked through it. And then we found that we were awarded the project. And then I went back to negotiate or understand which projects, and I had to meet with a series of ten project managers letting me know all these projects. And they were all rushed. It was a Friday. So I was trying to download all this information. It turned into a huge number of projects to manage over that period of time. But it was really fantastic to visit these places, such as Hearst’s Castle, where we worked on the ceilings and the roofs, and are also able to be involved in so many great structures throughout California. It was a pivotal time when there hadn’t been enough money to take care of these projects properly, and it was just as the economy was shifting. So there was a lot of work that needed to be done in a lot of these parks and we happened to be in the place to do that, and it was a great experience. It was really fun.

As I mentioned, I think when I first started working at Page & Turnbull, it was really known as a solid, design firm. It wasn’t necessarily seen as a preservation firm, but people that I knew, saw it as a solid design firm that really took care of people, and nurtured the people. And I see that as the thread going forward for another 40 years. It’s still a really solid design firm that nurtures people and is really vested in its projects.
My name is Carolyn Kiernat. I am an architect and a Principal at Page & Turnbull.

I grew up in a beautiful historic house in Madison, Wisconsin that really started to have an impact on me at a young age. I moved to Arizona and studied architecture there in college and I really enjoyed design, but there was something missing for me. I took a couple of summer jobs with the National Park Service and I ended up working with the Historic American Engineering Record. For me, that was just where the excitement was, working with rusty old things in the desert—things that had a patina on them. I decided to study preservation in graduate school. I went to Columbia. I studied in the preservation program there, and immediately after that, I ended up coming to San Francisco. And that’s how I ended up at Page & Turnbull.

Before I went to graduate school I was living in San Francisco with some friends. We all ended up here after college. I’d heard of this firm that did preservation work and I just basically gave them a call and asked if I could come in for an interview. I submitted a resume and portfolio to them, and I got a call from a guy named Tom Hardy. He was one of the principals at the time, and he was a senior architect at the firm. He invited me to come in and meet with him and Charles Page. I had a really great interview with Tom Hardy and Charles Page, but there were no job openings at the time. So, I went away, tail between my legs, and looked for another job. I ended up doing some retail design work for a while, and then I went to Columbia. And just as I was finishing up in New York, I got a call asking if I’d be interested in flying out to San Francisco to interview again with Page & Turnbull. They had an opening.

I was so impressed that two years later they had still kept my resume on file and once they had an opening, they gave me a call. This time it was Jay Turnbull who called me. I told him I was too busy to fly out and interview at that time. I was going through finals, it was just a tough time, and I was unable to imagine flying across the country for an interview. So, he offered me a job over the phone, and said, ‘Well, Charles has met you, so that’s good enough for me.’ I flew out the week after graduation and showed up at the firm. I was certain nobody would expect me or recognize me, but they embraced me. It was really the work of Page & Turnbull and the interview with Charles Page that brought me here. I imagined I would stay for a couple of years, but it’s really Jay Turnbull who kept me here. Just getting to know him through the years and having him as the most amazing mentor is really what kept me in the office all of this time.

I sat next to him for eight or nine years straight. I could hear his conversations, how he dealt with clients, the gentleman that he was and always is, just his levelheadedness in dealing with difficult situations, and really his eloquence in discussions of the built environment, and what can happen—to buildings and to urban fabric—and just listening to him, and having him as that voice of the firm, but also that person that so many of us want to be. He’s really the reason that I stayed, and that so many of us do.
Page & Turnbull is a very tightly knit family of sorts. People tend to stay here. They stay for a long time, or if they do leave, they remain a part of the Page & Turnbull extended family. Nobody ever truly leaves Page & Turnbull. We tend to populate the planning department. We’ve populated Washington, D.C., with preservation architects. I think we’re really all over the country now.

Page & Turnbull to me is a place where you can really cultivate who you want to be as an architect. There’s freedom to experiment and do what you’re interested in, and find out what it is that you’re best at, and to know that you always have the support of Jay and the other principals behind you.

I think that the greatest success so far in the firm—and other people I’m sure will mention this as well—is the Walt Disney Family Museum. In the 15 years that I’ve been here it’s the biggest success. It’s a project where we had to put into practice what we preach. We often review other firms’ work, and look at issues of compatibility and contextual design. It really was an opportunity for us to design the contemporary addition on a historic building, to do something that we thought was appropriate, and to convince policymakers, stakeholders, and the local community that it was the right thing to do. So all in all, I think, it was an incredible success.

The challenges for me really eclipse what we’re doing at Page & Turnbull, it’s really the challenges in the world of preservation, in general, and it has to do with the limitations of policy and the perception of preservation and preservationists. I don’t like the word “preservationist.” I think we are architects, and we work with the built environment, and we love to work on historic buildings, but we want to bring them into new life, new use and new economic viability. And in order to do that, we need to be open to change within the historic environment. And some of the policy that’s out there in the world today—much of it happens and was created at the federal level—prohibits us from really taking a step forward with a lot of these historic buildings. It often does aim to freeze a building at a moment in time, when we’re looking for the next step in a building’s evolution.

Where would I like to see Page & Turnbull 40 years from now? I would love to see Page & Turnbull as basically the go-to firm for preservation and adaptive reuse. I would love to see the reputation that we have in San Francisco just as strong in Los Angeles and Sacramento, and I’d love to see it expand beyond California as well. I don’t see any reason that we couldn’t have as strong a reputation in any metropolitan city in the U.S. I do think we will expand our work overseas. We’ve already started to expand into China, and I think that there’s a great opportunity for us to do restoration, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse throughout the world if we’d like to.

One of the most exciting projects I’m working on now is the old San Francisco Mint. It was built in 1874, and it’s a National Historic Landmark, so it’s one of the most important buildings in San Francisco and really on the West Coast. It was basically the West Coast repository for gold from the 1870s on, until the 1930s when all of the gold in California, or all of the gold at the old Mint, was moved to Fort Knox.

So, it was our Fort Knox, which I think is fascinating. We’re working with another architecture firm to transform the old Mint into the Museum of the City of San Francisco. It’s a really wonderful project. It’s been very slow in developing. I think we’ve been working since about 2002, so at least ten years.
In 2012, I was president of the AIA San Francisco chapter. It was really an exciting position, a little daunting one for me to take on, but it’s been fun. It’s been really exciting. What I noticed is that there are really two preservation people on the AIA San Francisco Board of Directors right now and I didn’t realize what a need there is for education about preservation, preservation policy, and really an interest in broadening other architects’, other clients’, and other firms’ views of what the preservation world is about. Being on the board has made it clear to me that there’s an attitude in the city about preservation and preservation architects, and it’s an attitude that I think is very conservative. I think we are viewed as a very conservative group of designers.

The AIA Board of Directors deals with a lot of policy issues. Whenever there’s a policy issue at city hall, at the board of supervisors or the planning commission, we like to chime in with a policy statement—with a recommendation—anything that deals with the built environment. In this past year, we had issues related to the Historic Preservation Commission, the Planning Ordinance, Articles 10 and 11 of the Planning Code. We’ve also written articles and proposed modifications to legislation about changes to CEQA—the California Environmental Quality Act—and bird-safe buildings. These are new guidelines that have been put into place in San Francisco.

The AIA Board of Directors chimes in on these so that we, as architects, can affect the type of legislation that’s being enacted in this city. It’s a really important role for the AIA to take, but what I’ve noticed in the past year is that there’s not always an understanding among the architects in town of the role that preservation legislation plays, and I think it’s often demonized in a way.

There’s a lot of negativity about preservation, and I think the impression tends to be,
more often than not, that preservation is used as a tool to stop development. That
is a myth that I like to work on breaking. Preservation can be used as a tool to stop
development, but that’s not what we’re here to do. We think that development is a tool
for preservation. So we’d like to flip that equation around and start to move forward with
more preservation-oriented development projects.
I’m **John Lesak**, and I am a Principal of Page & Turnbull. I wear many hats within the firm, but my two primary ones are manager of the Los Angeles office as well as managing our preservation technology studio.

I have a unique background, which I attribute to the fact that I can, but sometimes don’t, make decisions quickly. When I was five, they did one of these first grade “What do you want to be when you grow up?” tests. So I have, from when I was five, said “I want to be an architect when I grow up.” It’s been there since the get-go, so to speak. When I was in junior high and high school, I realized that I like lots of different stuff. I’m interested in more than just one thing. I progressed through an educational career, sometimes engineering, sometimes material science, sometimes architecture and design, sometimes interior design, sometimes humanities. I tend to branch off in these different things. When I finally had to choose, I started in material science and that continued. When I was a graduate student, I worked for the National Science Foundation on a grant project and I did research on self-healing concrete, of all things, twenty-five years ago.

But then I realized that didn’t seem to quite be the fit, so I did a little bit of engineering and I liked it, but it still wasn’t quite right. I took some design classes and I really liked the design aspect. I was actually at Michigan State at the time and I transferred schools. I got into an architecture program. Then I went through that, and I really liked that, and I worked for a while. I worked for a technical architect when I was in undergraduate school and did roofing and wall systems and that sort of thing. I really responded to that. I liked it quite a bit. But then it came time to choose a graduate school; I had lots of opportunities, and I took the best deal in some ways. I ended up going into a hybrid program that was structural engineering and architecture combined and that was a really good fit for me because it let me do different things and worked to my strengths. When I came out of that program, I ended up going to a firm that did forensic investigations and I liked the problem-solving aspect of it. Coincidentally, the guy I worked for the first time—he really was a mentor of mine—worked for this firm before, and then had gone off on his own, but he always worked on existing buildings. They always worked on challenging problems so it was always a problem-solving type of thing.

Even then, I was working on historic buildings in Chicago, before I was even out of school—the Museum of Science and Industry, the Wrigley Building, and some iconic buildings downtown. I worked on the Prentice Hospital, which is a controversial preservation case right now in Chicago. I liked that kind of challenging how-do-I-fix-this, how-do-I-make-this-better, how-do-I-spin-this-thing-into-the-future part of architecture. As I developed my career within this company, I really gravitated towards those problem-solving exercises and that’s how I came to the profession.

I came to Page & Turnbull twice, so I’ll tell both stories. If you include my mentor, who went back to the firm I worked for, I’ve worked for two companies over 25 years—one being this big forensics company and the other being Page & Turnbull. They have
moved here. I was here for a couple years, and I have an autistic son, so I have interesting family dynamics. But where we were living and the schools weren’t quite right. When I first started my career, I spent about a year and a half in Los Angeles after the Northridge earthquake, and I actually fell in love with Los Angeles at that time. I thought it would be very interesting to live in Los Angeles because to me it’s almost a combination of San Francisco and Chicago. It takes aspects of those cities and melds them together and I responded to that. An opportunity came up to go back to my previous firm in Los Angeles and start an office in LA. I found that intriguing, so I took the deal and went. I was there for two years and it was okay—some good projects, some bad.

So I did that, and after four years, we had some family issues back in Chicago that we had to go take care of, so my wife and I moved back to Chicago. And it was interesting—we had our kids there and part of my role there was traveling quite a bit. I worked in support of historic preservation projects and historic preservation of building envelopes—the roofing, the wall, the window—all around the United States: New Orleans and St. Louis and Washington, D.C., and all these different places. But we decided after we had kids that 1) We hated winter and we didn’t want to do winter anymore, 2) We missed California quite a bit, and 3) I really wanted the opportunity to do more design-related things in and around preservation. I was getting tired of just wall systems and roof systems and windows. I wanted to do space planning and interact more with clients and that sort of thing.

What does Page & Turnbull mean to me? I have a hard time disassociating my personal life from my work life. Page & Turnbull is really an integral part of my life. My wife works with me at the office part-time. I spend a lot of time at the office. I bring a lot of stuff home. And it’s become part of who I am. I really do associate myself with my job—being a preservation architect.

I had a couple different job offers. I ended up taking the Page & Turnbull offer and we moved here. I was here for a couple years, and I have an autistic son, so I have interesting family dynamics. But where we were living and the schools weren’t quite right. When I first started my career, I spent about a year and a half in Los Angeles after the Northridge earthquake, and I actually fell in love with Los Angeles at that time. I thought it would be very interesting to live in Los Angeles because to me it’s almost a combination of San Francisco and Chicago. It takes aspects of those cities and melds them together and I

We started looking for opportunities in San Francisco, and I’d worked with Page & Turnbull on the U.S. Federal Courthouse in Los Angeles—which I’m still working on almost 20 years later—with Frederic Knapp, who was a partner here. I had scheduled a couple interviews, and either I saw something or I just called Frederic and he said “Oh you’ve got to come in, you know, you’d be a great fit.” I came in and met Jay and, again, it was more of a cultural thing that just felt very comfortable to me. It felt like a home.

I had a couple different job offers. I ended up taking the Page & Turnbull offer and we
through a lens of time, so we’re actually very future looking in how we look at our existing built environment. I think that that’s what really differentiates us. We want to respect the past. We want to take the good things from buildings and bring them forward into the future. But we’re also looking at, what does society mean today? What does society mean tomorrow? And I always talk about Moore’s Law, which is that the rate of change and rate of technology is doubling every year.

I actually had an email exchange about this last night, but things are changing so fast that society needs these kinds of tethers to remind ourselves from where we came. What are our core values, what is important? And also remember the tragedies. We do need to capture things that weren’t so good and remind ourselves so we don’t repeat the mistakes. I think Page & Turnbull does that. We really look at it through the lens of design and built environments, but we do that on many different levels. I think that continuing on, that rate of change is going to be faster and faster, and the pressures against cultural resources in the built environment are going to be more and more. But I think that we need to remember to respect them. We need to remind ourselves that they’re resources that have already been spent in some ways. We need to capture those, hold on to those, and make the highest and best use out of them.

The Moore’s Law thing really makes us stop and think. Ten years ago I didn’t have a cell phone. I barely had email. Computers were horrible; a plotter was a huge exercise. Now you just do it without thinking. And I think 40 years from now the technological changes are going to be so rapid and advanced that we’re really going to be using robots to preserve the lunar landing site on the moon. I mean, that’s the type of exercise that I expect to be doing 40 years from now. I expect to be programming microscopic robots to remove stains from the top of the Bank of America building here in San Francisco because that technology will be available to us.

Again, it’ll be multiple generations of people working together to have a solution that’s ethically sound, technologically sound, and the right thing to do for that period of time. So that’s what I hope we’ll be doing 40 years from now.

I think one of the questions that had come up is, What are some things that you’re happy about and what are some of the challenges that exist? My thought is, I like to have clients for long periods of time. I’ve always been proud of the relationship I had at Stanford when I was in San Francisco, and being able to take what was originally a very small role on a project there, and spin it up into lots of different projects at Stanford, and lots of different relationships. And when I came back to LA, those relationships helped to build the Webb school projects. We’ve had seven or eight projects with Webb in the six years that we’ve been in Los Angeles. Those are the types of things of which I’m proud. Those relationships and working with groups that are like-minded and can help us be part of a team to have a collaborative solution is great.

Challenges are—ironically, after talking about robots on the moon—technology and how to work together collaboratively at a distance? It’s great to be able to walk over to somebody’s desk and sit and share ideas and share sketches. But when you’re 300 miles away, it’s not the same thing. So, how can we maximize the use of the tools that we have at our fingertips, to have those same types of collaborative exchanges and relationships, and not be frustrated by bad phone connections and hard time hearing, that sort of thing? That’s the thing that I thought I’d put out there.

We think about the built environment over the span of time, and it’s actually hard for
people to get around the concept of time and what that means to the built environment. The built environment changes radically, even over a very short span of a few years. And it can change radically, as we saw on a project like the Ferry Building, where you have an earthquake, and a freeway goes down, and all of a sudden, all these opportunities open. You can look at it as challenges—Oh, we don’t have a freeway system anymore. We’re going to have to rebuild the freeway system because we need that. Or you can look at it as an opportunity.

I do think that Page & Turnbull looks for the opportunities within the existing built environment. We’re actually very good at finding them. We know we can pick out the good bits and pieces. These are the things we should keep. The other stuff—let’s have flexibility moving forward. Let’s bring new pieces, contemporary pieces, and future-driven uses into this site or this space or this landscape or this area. And when we do it right, you have amazing results, because you have vibrant places that people engage with. People understand there’s roots here, there’s a past here but they also enjoy what’s going on at that moment. And as they think about their lives moving forward, it becomes part of it. We want this to be part of our lives. We want to come back here again and again and again. So, we do that very well. I think we do that better than anybody.
I’m Ruth Todd. I’m an architect and an urban designer and a Principal with Page & Turnbull.

I’ve always been drawn to beautiful old buildings and have tried to figure out how they were put together. One of the things that I recognized when I was growing up in suburban South Carolina, is that the house I grew up in, although it was a very nice house, was not the same kind of house that my parents or my grandparents or my great grandparents had grown up in. Those were hand-crafted unique homes, and mine was a suburban house, not very different from anyone else’s that I knew. It made me aware of customization, setting and response to climate, and how buildings can make you feel. So, when I was applying to college, and choosing a major that might interest me for a lifetime, I made the connection that architecture was really a perfect blend of art, science, and technology, and something that I might be able to be good at.

I went to architecture school in the early days of what’s now the sustainability movement, the gas crisis of the ’70s, when people were first paying attention to energy conservation. It was also the first time that adaptive re-use projects were really being profiled in the architecture magazines. I was drawn to the opportunity to reuse old buildings for new uses; recycling them made a lot of sense for a lot of reasons. These were also the early days of the historic preservation and downtown revitalization movements. I thought that there was great potential to give new life to old buildings and have them sit side by side with new buildings, and I felt that this could create a much better, richer and more sustainable community.

What brought me to Page & Turnbull was really Jay Turnbull. He called me up one day and said that he would ‘like to introduce himself to me’, as if I did not already know who he or Page & Turnbull was. In fact, I had gotten the nicest hand-written rejection letter from Jay in the mid-90s, when I had sent him my resume after returning from France as a Richard Morris Hunt Fellow. No one sends rejection letters nicer than Jay’s. Anyway, I met with Jay, and that was a time when the leaders in the firm were really focusing on growing Page & Turnbull and expanding the services that we offer. Jay was interested in the campus planning work that I had been doing at Stanford and outlined the goals of the firm, which meshed with the direction I wanted to take in my career. So I came on board in 2006.

My career has been in three distinct phases. This last part has been at Page & Turnbull, but I started out in the early 80s as a Main Street architect, providing design services to historic downtowns as part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Street Program, that paired historic preservation and economic development to prove that historic buildings are special and can make an influence on the bottom line of a business, compared to a business that operates out of a generic, little retail box. That’s what brought me to California. After that, I spent eleven years at Stanford University as the Associate University Architect, doing a lot of really good historic preservation and planning.
work in response to the damage to the campus by the Loma Prieta earthquake and during a growth boom for the campus.

Some of the successes that I’ve helped the firm accomplish are: in 2006, I really hadn’t been here that long, but we stretched our wings and went after a project in Charleston, South Carolina. It was quite a prestigious project, and we were excited to be selected for it. This was a planning project which has helped the firm stretch our Cultural Resources Studio into much more planning, urban design, and larger scale planning work, in addition to our architecture history research and reports. We updated the 1974 Charleston Historic Preservation Plan and we had a really wonderful time. It was a perfect storm of greatness—client, issues, city, and opportunity. We produced a really thoughtful document that received a National Preservation Honor Award in 2009. That project has led to other work in a very different city—Anchorage, Alaska. What I think is interesting is that by the time we finish our plan in Anchorage, we will have worked for one of the oldest cities in the United States and also one of the youngest cities—and both have been very enjoyable.

I believe it was late 2011 or early 2012 when our colleagues at SOM invited us to join their team on a project in China. The clients that they’ve been working with recognize that there’s an opportunity in China now to really pay special attention to its cultural heritage, especially since a lot of it is being lost by demolition in order to densify for the Chinese population that is moving to urban areas.

SOM has been working in China for a long time, and they think that the time is ripe to not just build high-rise, dense, commercial centers, but to integrate the new with some of the very historic hutongs that are on some of these large redevelopment sites. SOM brought us in to help establish a focal point for their development—a large office and shopping center on a mega-block at a major intersection that incorporates a very historic courtyard-house neighborhood that the city of Beijing and the developer felt was important to preserve.

I really feel that at 40 years, we already are a legacy firm in our field of architecture and preservation. 40 years is a long time and we’re proud to still be around. I hope that 40 years from now, I would feel that we had continued and enhanced that legacy, and that we have grown the respect and reputation that the firm currently has—that we can grow that nationwide or around the world, and work on fantastic projects everywhere.

When I talk to people about Page & Turnbull, I realize that we are a rather unique firm. We’re not your typical architecture firm and we’re not your typical planning firm. People are often surprised at the composition of our staff—we have architects and preservation architects and materials conservation professionals and historians and architectural historians and planners. And it’s pretty rare to find that all under one roof. Page & Turnbull has a lot of different kinds of people, with different and interesting and diverse skills sets, all with a common belief that historic places can enhance our future. I think that makes our office a really great and stimulating and fun place to work. It’s why I’m here.
left that firm and looked for other opportunities. I wasn’t necessarily looking for historic preservation jobs. I was looking for design opportunities, and I worked in a few places. But I got familiar with the name Page & Turnbull. I’d seen it around. People talked about Page & Turnbull. So I sent my resume here and I got invited to an interview.

I was interviewed once and I had a great experience, and I liked the firm and I think the firm liked me, but there wasn’t a position available at that time. So a few years later, I sent my resume again, and I was interviewed again, and again I was very impressed. I liked everyone I met in the firm and it was a wonderful experience. But things didn’t work out. So again, three years later or so I was called by a Principal at that time and he said, you know what, we interviewed you twice. We like you. Just come over. Come over and work with us. And I did. So that was 1997, more than 15 years ago. So it sort of happened. It was mutual attraction, and I landed here thinking that I would not last more than a couple years. As an intermediate designer, you don’t necessarily think about a 15-year commitment when you walk in the door, but here I am, 15 years later, and I love every minute of it.

One of the interesting facts about starting at Page & Turnbull was my first project. I worked with one of the senior designers/architects here at the firm, and when we sat down he looked through my resume and he said, ‘Lada, you have a lot of design skills, it seems like you’re very interested in design. We’re a historic preservation firm. We’re not necessarily a cutting-edge design firm.’ And I said, ‘Well, we’ll have to see about that.’ Page & Turnbull 15 years ago is not Page & Turnbull as it is now. My focus, in all these years, was learning about historic preservation, but also learning about how new, great, exciting designs can be integrated within old buildings. And to me the best value that historic preservation gives people is giving them an opportunity to bring the life of today into historic buildings.

My name is Lada Kocherovsky. I’m an Associate Principal with Page & Turnbull.

For me, architecture was an easy choice. I come from a family of architects and was inspired by my sister who is an architect, as well as my husband who is an architect. My parents are engineers. Being interested and inspired came early—I was the classic case of knowing who I wanted to be by the time I finished grade school. And it stayed, it didn’t go away. On a personal level, I grew up in Russia. I come from a historic city, 400 years old, but my training in architecture was very contemporary. I didn’t specifically study anything that related to historic preservation, but I was being influenced by the fact that I grew up in a historic city, which gave me a layer of understanding of historic preservation issues, but my background is really in design.

Page & Turnbull is an interesting story. I came here with my family in 1992 and I started working with a design firm that actually gave me a lot of understanding of how good design fits in historic buildings. My first project was the Legion of Honor. As a junior designer, I worked on integrating new architecture into a historic building—one of the landmarks of San Francisco. That was good training and it put a stamp on my resume. I
That’s a tremendous accomplishment that Page & Turnbull has done over the years.

There are so many wonderful examples that people don’t necessarily know, or if they do, they don’t associate Page & Turnbull, with bringing this cutting-edge design into the picture. For example, a few clients of ours have worked with us for a number of years in the historic preservation realm. We’ve helped them to facilitate tax credits projects. But when we took them through the Walt Disney Family Museum, they were shocked that Page & Turnbull actually designed such a beautiful contemporary building and built an entire addition in the interior. They were stunned by the fact that we could produce such a wonderful work and they didn’t know about it. I think the biggest challenge for us is to change the perception of people who have known us for years and let them know that not only can we do historic preservation work, restore the building, maintain their building, assess their properties, and help them with entitlements, but we can also bring wonderful new design that makes these buildings usable by people that are interested in being in a rich, contemporary, but historically significant environment. That’s what we can do, and I’d like people to know that.

The Walt Disney Family Museum is a great example of this integration of contemporary design into an historic building. And one of the best features of this building is this walkway from the second floor down to the first floor. We all scratched our heads a little bit on how do we deliver people from the second floor to the first, and at the same time give them this exposure to the wonderful exhibits that would be housed in this space. We came up with the idea that an ADA accessible ramp would need to bring people down, but by doing that, the ramp would need to make turns and twists to expose people to the exhibits, and also tell them that the historic building’s still there. So as you travel, you see the building itself—the brick exterior; which was the exterior facade of the building and the windows. You see all this, and then you absorb the information that is exhibited in this beautiful space, but also understand that you are within this historic courtyard.

So the fact that the ramp was integrated into the historic building in such a seamless way, and it gives people an exposure to both the building, and the exhibit, was a wonderful accomplishment.

One of the latest focuses of mine is trying to rethink interiors of historic buildings. This is not necessarily the work that we have done a lot of, but actually, my inspiration when I was in school was Zaha Hadid. Speaking of historic preservation, it’s not exactly the two things that you put together in your mind, but I’m still very much inspired by contemporary design, and I think that interiors of historic buildings, especially in our regulated environment, are a great opportunity to push the boundaries and explore what can be done there.

One Kearny Club is a great example of that because it’s a space that’s located in a historic 1902 Mutual Savings Bank building at the mansard roof attic space. It’s a very challenging, geometrical space. It’s got a ton of character with exposed steel trusses that support the roof and all sorts of roof planes that create this very tall beautiful space. But it hasn’t been utilized in a long time. So we went in and we figured out that it would be best to expose everything this room allows us to expose—the structure, the geometry of the space—and bring in new facilities that would allow for an amazing place for people to congregate, have parties, and hold conferences. It’s a commercial space and it can be used as a great facility to speak with people across the world. The way the interiors are treated, they’re very understated, but very cutting edge. The furnishings are mid-century modern, and it works amazingly well with the historic environment of the building itself. I’m very proud
with what we did there and I look forward to doing more projects like this.

The Fort Ross Windmill reconstruction is a very special project to me, not just because I’m Russian and this is a reconstruction of a replica of the windmill that existed in the Russian settlement. This project is one of the few international projects that the firm has done, and I do see us doing more work like this. We were contacted by the Russian non-profit organization who supports restoration and revitalization of Russian cultural and historic significance abroad. They were interested in introducing a replica of the windmill that once existed at Fort Ross. And I, of course, had been to Fort Ross many times for events associated with bringing the Russian community together. It’s a wonderful place. It has very special energy, and it was important to bring a structure that had significance 200 years ago for the bicentennial anniversary of the fort.

And to me, delivering a structure that is a replica of a historic windmill is a fantastic opportunity to show the connection between our two countries, which is really important. This project happened to be more important on a political level than anything else I’ve done here in terms of establishing this relationship and really showcasing how far our countries have come together in understanding each other. But it also is very interesting on the technical end, because it’s a structure that was built in Russia, based on historic precedents, and then disassembled, crated, shipped to the United States, and then assembled on site.

So Page & Turnbull did the work associated with developing drawings and then getting approval through the state parks because Fort Ross is located on the state parks’ land. We also hired a general contractor who put this structure on the foundation and then made it actually work. This was an amazing process, and it brought together the Russian client, our firm, and the state parks for a wonderful celebration. We’re so happy that this windmill will be on site for many years, and the Russian and American community can come together and understand the history and cultural significance of this land.

40 years from now, I don’t know if I can tell you how I see Page & Turnbull. I’d like to say, I see a globally recognized firm, but we don’t know what the future brings. But whatever happens, I see Page & Turnbull having a special place in the history of San Francisco because we have touched in the last 40 years so many wonderful buildings. And we made people aware of the historic environment and the significance of them. So wherever Page & Turnbull will end up, I know it’s going to be a fantastic place. And I want to be part of that journey.
I’m Peter Birkholz. I’m an Associate Principal here at Page & Turnbull.

I grew up in the ’70s in suburban Chicago. I can really recall that this was the time when the high-rises—John Hancock, Sears Tower—were being built, and there was this over-riding Miesian ethos of huge high-rise buildings coming up. We’d go to the city, go to McCormick Place which, again, was this modernist type of environment. I knew from a young age I wanted to be an architect and just continued to pursue that. It’s been my sole direction.

At some point my parents moved from the Chicago area to western New York and it was an eye-opening experience for me. They moved to this cute little town outside of Buffalo, which was not a cute little town at the time. Around the early 1900s, an arts & crafts movement had been founded there—the Roycroft compound. Elbert Hubbard, had done a mail-order business of producing books and artisan artifacts; for me to live in that kind of history opened up my eyes. In the summers, I actually worked at an institution called the Chautauqua Institution, which, again, was an of-the-century utopian environment. The movement had tent shows that they’d travel throughout the rest of the country, but this was their permanent facility. And they built permanent buildings, amphitheaters out of logs, and it was this very romantic place to go. Victorian buildings, too, and again, it just sparked an interest in history for me that I didn’t really see growing up in a Levittown-type suburb in Chicago.

And then later, after I finished school, I felt like I needed a change. I had always been interested in Julia Morgan, Bernard Maybeck, and the sort of Bay Area tradition, and I had never been out here. So, on a whim, I moved out to the Bay Area and I was lucky to find work with some interesting firms—not doing anything historic, which was interesting—doing more master planning work with The Architects’ Collaborative when they had an office here. We were doing these large, abstract projects working around the world. A term I learned was “form follows parking,” and I was doing planned developments where the buildings were just these rectangles, and I was laying out parking lots. I didn’t find that interesting and I really wanted to get into the nuts and bolts of architecture.

This was at a time when the Japanese economy was just coming up, and I found a job with a branch office of a Tokyo company. They were actually the owner’s representative for the Sheraton Palace, the Kyo-ya Company, that Page & Turnbull was working on. We had an unusual role in that we didn’t really do anything. The office manager in this little branch office played scrabble all day. I had a project, which was to design a restaurant for the company in the Sheraton Palace, but the whole process was strange. I did get to go to Japan and experience Japanese culture on a surface level. Then I left and actually tried to come to Page & Turnbull, and I had an interview with Jay [Turnbull]. Jay actually suggested that having done this kind of interiors work, that maybe I would like to go and work with a classmate of his that was doing international hotels and resorts and things. I went to this firm, which at the time was called the Pfister Partnership and later became Baby Moulton
Turnbull’s forte. It’s on the water, which is kind of interesting in lieu of the recent Hurricane Sandy in New York and global warming. The really fabulous thing about rehabilitating the historic building is that it’s a net zero energy building. It’s doing everything that it possibly could. It’s got solar panels that produce, I believe, 1.3 megawatts of energy. So even though it’s a museum with a high energy electrical use, it’s going to put energy, electricity, back into the grid. They have done a solar water-bay / water heat exchanger, which is going to provide the cooling and heating needs for the project.

And then just incorporating the latest in sustainable energy and insulation; it’s a fabulous project, and it’s really the kind of project I would like to see us do more of in the future. I’ve been following something on the internet recently on a historic building in England. This historic building put solar panels on the building, and now the town and the historic people are raving by saying ‘How you could put solar panels on a historic building? You’ve ruined it.’ To me, it’s inconceivable that anybody could say that. Solar panels are reversible, and we have to be moving in that direction, to incorporate sustainability into historic buildings.

It was a pretty interesting experience with the Exploratorium in that we actually had a tense moment. We had a walk this week with the Secretary of the Interior’s head of the historic review, out of the National Park Service in Washington. He flew out to look at several projects, and one of the things we were really concerned about were these solar panels. They stuck up about 8 inches and—is that okay to have a historic building with solar panels? And he didn’t mention it. Unfortunately, one of the other things that he was concerned about is that the Pier is a big long open space and to bring the program into the building, we had to insert glass walls. We were looking at this on a really sunny day with him, and it looked like a house of mirrors, but he didn’t complain about the solar panels being reversible, and we have to be moving in that direction, to incorporate sustainability into historic buildings.

Jue & Booth. I worked on a great project, which was a historic project in Milan, converting an old monastery into a luxury hotel. We did all the interiors, and it was a fabulous level of detailing and attention to the interior parts of the buildings—detailing things like you would on a ship.

I worked at that firm, on and off, for several years, and then really thought that I wanted to do my own kind of work, and I pursued doing design-build metal work, building out restaurant interiors, and things like that, until I realized that maybe I didn’t have the best business sense. And so I went back into the more mainstream profession and worked with another firm—Tom Eliot Fisch. I was a project architect for Piers 1 1/2, 3, and 5 and Page & Turnbull was the preservation architect on that project. I had a really great experience working with Jay and Elisa [Skaggs] and others here at the firm. After that project ended, I came over and joined Page & Turnbull.

It was at the same time that the Disney Museum was completing its design phase and I was able to help out on the Construction Administration, and I guess the rest is history. So here I am now, and it’s really great to be working on the projects that we do at Page & Turnbull. Particularly in San Francisco and the Bay Area, I think we have a really good surge of projects with repeat clients. The Ferry Building, we’ve worked on with Wilson Meany, and now we’re working on 140 New Montgomery. I worked a little bit on Pier 1, Piers 1 1/2, 3 and 5, and most recently, I’ve been the project manager for our work on Pier 1 1/5—the Exploratorium’s new space that they’re just building out.

Speaking of sustainability on that project—it’s a pretty fabulous building. We were just over there yesterday giving tours in conjunction with Green Build and the fabulous thing about it, from our standpoint, is that it’s a historic building. It’s a tax-credit project—Page & Turnbull’s forte. It’s on the water, which is kind of interesting in lieu of the recent Hurricane Sandy in New York and global warming. The really fabulous thing about rehabilitating the historic building is that it’s a net zero energy building. It’s doing everything that it possibly could. It’s got solar panels that produce, I believe, 1.3 megawatts of energy. So even though it’s a museum with a high energy electrical use, it’s going to put energy, electricity, back into the grid. They have done a solar water-bay / water heat exchanger, which is going to provide the cooling and heating needs for the project.

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panels, so that was a good thing.

The fabulous thing about Page & Turnbull is we’ve got a great group of people that work well together and are nice to work with. I think we bring a great service to our clients in that we have done all this work on historic projects many times before. We often know the answer already, because we’ve done it on another project. But if we haven’t done it before, we know who to go to and ask. We’ve got great relationships in the state and in Washington in the reviewing agencies. We’re a talented group of architects, historians, and materials conservation people, and we have it all in-house. So if we realize we have a problem, we can just turn and ask somebody next to us that probably knows the answer and the best way to solve the problem, and we can therefore bring a cost-effective service to our client.

40 years from now, I would like to see Page & Turnbull be a leader in taking existing buildings and bringing in new use, making them more energy efficient; working on historic buildings, but also doing new buildings. I’d really like us to branch out and do both historic and new buildings and be a leader in working on sustainable architectural projects.

Currently we are working on some new buildings. We’re doing some parks work down in Santa Clara, near San Jose, where there’s a group of parks buildings and we are leading the effort for Martial Cottle Park. And to be honest, I don’t know the details of those buildings, if they’re sustainable or not, but I think they’re going to be really fabulously designed, and they will launch us in the direction that I’d really like to see us go.

We have done new buildings in the past. People think of us as the historic architect, but I think the reality is that we’ve just completed an interior build-out in a historic building that’s a totally contemporary, modern design. We’re working on the Martial Cottle Park’s buildings that I had mentioned down in Santa Clara, a series of buildings that, again, are not going to be traditional. I believe they are a vernacular kind of building, but again, modern. We’ve done academic buildings at Stanford and other places, so I think one of the things we need to do, to move forward, is to let the rest of the world know that we are not just about historic buildings, but we’re about architecture in the existing environment.
I am Melisa Nelson Gaudreau, Director of the Sacramento office of Page & Turnbull. We opened an office in Sacramento seven years ago in 2006. Now we have two other employees and quite a few local projects. I started out in 1999 in the San Francisco office and moved to Sacramento at the time Construction Administration was finishing up at the Leland Stanford Mansion.

In my younger years I spent a lot of time abroad. I grew up overseas because of my parents’ work, and I developed an appreciation for the environment and everything surrounding the culture of the different places where we lived, in particular the buildings found there. In school, I was stronger in math and the performing arts, and so I chose to study architectural engineering as my undergraduate degree, and architecture for my graduate degree. I think I gravitated to architecture because it provided an opportunity to work in a field combining both the arts and sciences. The practice of preservation involves a keen understanding of the technical side, as well as the design side, of projects.

I was drawn to Page & Turnbull because I was very interested in working in the preservation field. The reputation of the firm was well known and the projects they had were extremely interesting. And over the years, I found that indeed the culture here is one in which there’s true collaboration between staff members. We’re encouraged to draw upon expertise and experience of those who have a background in architectural history, architecture, conservation, and work together collaboratively.

At Page & Turnbull I worked on quite a few projects that have had quite a lengthy period of development. Two current projects are in Yosemite National Park—the Badger Pass Ski Lodge and the White Wolf Lodge. At Badger Pass we initially started with a historic structure report and cultural landscape report. That developed into different master planning options, and now we’re working on the first phase of the rehabilitation of the lodge. This process involves everything from analysis and study, to design and execution of a rehabilitation effort. What’s interesting about the work we do is that the effort involves a combination of very thoughtful investigation and research, followed by analysis of the information and formulation of the rehabilitation work.

I’m also working on the Amtrak station in the Sacramento Depot. It’s been an interesting project in that we’ve had the opportunity to work on phase one, a stabilization and structural upgrade, and phase two, which is a rehabilitation of the entire building. The phase one work is under construction. We’re concurrently solving problems in the field while working on the phase two design work. The building is a great resource, a tremendous landmark for the city of Sacramento. And it’s been really enjoyable working with both the city of Sacramento, the primary user, Amtrak, and the design team. The Sacramento Depot project is a public sector project and its very prominent in the community, so there are a number of stakeholders involved—both at the city, in various agencies, and in the public. We’ve had a number of meetings to sort through options with all those folks involved in determining the best solution.
Page & Turnbull is a firm that strives to find a unique and appropriate solution for every project. This involves understanding the context in which that project, the client, and the user will reuse the structure. We work very hard at researching and understanding that context, and then thinking creatively for the right solution.

I think Page & Turnbull has been a leader in the preservation community here in California. I hope that we continue to be a leader, and in the next 40 years, we will work diligently to discover more about where preservation can go, and what other benefits we can derive from good preservation work. I hope that the work of Page & Turnbull continues to develop, and that we continue to be looked upon as a leader in the field.

With our projects, there’s a lot of work that occurs before you find a solution, put things on drawings, or have things materialize in the field. One aspect I don’t think all people understand is the amount of rigor that it takes to work in this field and the amount of research and thought that’s put into the final product. We do a lot of reports, analyses, and different investigations, different technical studies. That type of preparation for the actual materialization of the project, I don’t think is well understood.

I’ve been at Page & Turnbull quite some time—fourteen years now. The office has always provided a highly supportive environment, as there is a lot of respect for one another here. I’ve been through two pregnancies, raised a family and have a wonderful career at Page & Turnbull. I’ve always appreciated that support and flexibility. I think that was one reason why the Sacramento office came to be. I had an interest in moving my family to Sacramento. We have a personal connection to this city, and Page & Turnbull instantly supported our move here. So I appreciate that, and now we’ve really benefited from our office in Sacramento, something I’m very proud of.

We’re located in the same city as the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) and the California State Parks department. We work with them often from San Francisco, but there is an advantage in being down the street from these key agencies. We have connections with folks who are important in the practice of preservation, and we work with them professionally. We also work with them on local committees in Sacramento.

I think another important aspect of Page & Turnbull is that we have always been a firm that is built upon good people. We have hired great staff members with expertise and terrific capabilities, and built highly successful projects as a result of the staff that have been brought on board. So looking forward, I think that we all have great confidence in Page & Turnbull being an important part of the future of preservation practice, as the expertise and the culture here is so strong. •
FERRY BUILDING
Here we are at the Ferry Building. We understand that this is just about the most successful retail location in the city and has been since its reopening in 2003. The building was rehabilitated between 1998 and 2003—a very short time in developmental terms. In 1998, there was a competition for design. The next two years, design occurred. And then the next two and a half years, construction occurred, with a reopening in 2003. So that is really a very short time. However, the history of the building is much longer. And what made it possible in the first place was the building of the permanent sea wall. As a matter of fact, the location of the sea wall is permanently marked on the sidewalk right here. It was built in 1890, and at that time, the port commissioners decided they needed a new building that matched the power, the money, and the importance of San Francisco in the 1890s.

The port commissioners chose for their architect A. Page Brown, a young man who had recently come to San Francisco in the late 1880s and began working for some of the most powerful and moneymed families in the city. He had worked at McKim, Mead, & White in New York, perhaps the most famous firm in the country at the time. He became a logical choice to design the Ferry Building because he was practicing in the newly fashionable neoclassical style that was so popular on the East Coast. He designed the building you see today. The design was done in the early 1890s, and the building was finished in the mid-1890s. So that was the first chapter of the building. It was damaged but not destroyed in the 1906 earthquake. It was reopened shortly thereafter: It hosted about 100,000 visitors a day, all the way until the Bay Bridge and Golden Gate Bridge were opened. In the 1930s it began a slow decline because of the arrival of the car and the motorbus. And so we had in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s a building that really wasn’t being used very much. By the late 20th century, it was a sad building indeed, and that was the reason that it needed to be rehabilitated.

Inside the Ferry Building, Second Floor
Here we are on the upper level of the Ferry Building. This great lobby measuring 660 feet long was where people would gather before moving into individual waiting rooms through doors on the side of this room, where they would wait for ferry transit across the bay. They would descend onto the ferries themselves, much as you do in a modern airport. The upper level is always the departure level. The lower level is always the arrival place. This was the most important room in the Ferry Building when it was built, but believe it or not, over time, and particularly after the 1930s, this room was completely filled up with offices, storage, and other spaces that had nothing to do with the power of the space that is here right now.

The object of the rehabilitation was to bring this room back in all of its detail. The skylight, which had been painted over, has now been replaced. The windows along the clerestory and the screening below the clerestory all had to be remade. A fair amount of the marble had to be replaced. The marble terrazzo had to be restored. And in fact some of the brick masonry had to be replaced with substitute materials like fiberglass. So all of this was
done, and everyone agreed in that.

As you may have noticed, this is a lively and loud environment, and that’s the way it should be. This is the most important room in the building, and it’s character-defining. From the standpoint of people who are interested in historic preservation, it is the room that must be maintained at all costs. However, the master plan for the new rehabilitation called for retail and a fair amount of activity on the ground floor of this building. In the 1890s, that floor was used for baggage and storage, and for exiting from the ferries, but this time we needed to use it for retail. The idea that the new use on the ground floor couldn’t be connected with the skylights and all of the spatial excitement upstairs was a difficult one for us to swallow, even though people in the preservation movement said—this is what you need to do.

The solution ended up being these openings that you see in the floor that connect the space of this great lobby with the retail space below. That wasn’t an easy thing to get approved. In the end, there was an appeal to federal authorities in Washington. I was one of the people that took part in a trip to Washington in an effort to get this kind of opening approved. In the end, and I think as soon as it was built, everyone realized that you could both have the quality of the space here—the lobby space above—and ally it with the retail space below.

When we think about the way we make changes in historic buildings, this is such a powerful and well-designed building, we don’t want to come in with highly contrasting changes to the building. We didn’t even want to introduce new elements that might be compatible but which were foreign to this building. We think of it as an example of change from within—a necessary change that elucidates what the building already is, allowing it to stand on its own. We think that the one innovative and revolutionary thing that did happen was the openings in the great lobby floor, but beyond that, the changes are minor indeed.

When we think about the historic materials on the walls, a wonderful set of drawings already existed. The original drawings were still in the files of the Port of San Francisco. They were enormously helpful. They included elevations and plans, but they also included specific details and shop drawings, which we used. One of the most interesting aspects, however, had to do with the brick masonry itself. It had been lost in about forty percent of the length of the nave and it was just not economically possible to get new bricks in this configuration. So we took a mold of the existing brick arches and had them reproduced in fiberglass and placed on the wall. And I defy you to be able to tell where the one starts and the other ends.
We’re standing on the main parade ground at the Presidio of San Francisco. Alongside me is a group of eight buildings that were built in a single line by the U.S. Army in the 1890s. Six of the buildings are absolutely identical, and were intended as barracks buildings. Each of them would house two companies of soldiers, each of a hundred men. The plan of these buildings—they’re identical—is in a U shape, and one side of the building mirrors exactly the other side of the building. So this is what happened in the 1890s.

At the turn of the century, Walt Disney was born, a man who became an innovator and made his mark in everything from film animation to motion pictures to television to amusement parks, and finally, even urban planning. He was one of the creative geniuses of the American 20th century that we remember even now.

His daughter, Diane Disney Miller, inherited a great many of his possessions and artifacts. I like to think that most parents give a scrapbook to their children, but Diane had warehouses full of material. And her wish in creating the Walt Disney Family Museum was to tell the story of her father, a story not based on a company and not based on a trademark, but based on what he really was as a human being. So this is how the Walt Disney Family Museum began to be.

One question that is often asked is why Walt Disney’s museum should be here and not in Burbank or Anaheim or some other location in California. We do need to remember that Diane Disney Miller and her husband, Ron, moved to this area about a generation ago. They made their home here. This is what they think of as their base of operations. Diane had established her warehouses and housed Walt’s artifacts here for a good number of years. And then, in a separate historical pattern, we have the development of the animation industry—which relates to the motion picture—here in the Bay Area, in Emeryville with Pixar, in the Presidio itself with Lucasfilm, and of course in Marin County with other Lucas ventures. Here we really have a whole industry that has developed around animation. And of course, all of that stems from the work of Walt Disney beginning in the 1920s and the 1930s.

You may know that there’s very little noticeable change in turning this building into a museum. The reason for that is that all of these porches, all of these buildings—as they front onto the main parade ground—are fixed in people’s imaginations the way they are right now. It would not do for us to change this side of the building, whereas we did make a fairly substantial change on the other side. And the reason has to do with what we call character-defining features. The porches and the walls of this side of the building are really sacrosanct.

We don’t think that preservation means having eyes in the back of your head. We don’t think that it means freezing buildings in time. This building here in the Presidio of San Francisco, which has become the Walt Disney Family Museum, represents almost a perfect set of opportunities to practice the very best of design and preservation and architecture and what we do. It is a set of constraints. It has a set of character-defining features, some of which cannot be changed, such as the front porches and the aligned walls of the front of the building. On the other hand, it offers some very exciting opportunities to make some very innovative changes, which we’ve also done.
Our special thanks to all of those who participated in creating this record. A year in the making, this book along with the 40th anniversary video (viewable on the Page & Turnbull website), is, like our practice, here to preserve the memory of what was.