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CALIFORNIA FREEMASON

FALL
2022 VOL 70 NO 04

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SNAPSHOT

7/09/2022 | 1:10 P.M.

A Seal of Approval

ONE OF THE MOST public displays of Freemasonry—and one of the fraternity's oldest and most treasured traditions—is the Masonic cornerstone ceremony. From George Washington's blessing of the Capitol building in 1793 to the California capitol's cornerstone-laying in 1850, Masons for centuries have proudly dedicated civic monuments big and small. That tradition remains alive, as seen in a pair of events this summer in which Grand Master Jeffery M. Wilkins and other officers of the grand lodge joined with members of **Chico-Leland Stanford № 111** and **Reading-Trinity № 27** to dedicate Veterans' Affairs buildings in Chico and Redding (the latter is pictured here).

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSS HENNINGS/
MOONBEAM STUDIOS

FOR TIME IMMEMORIAL

*The California Masonic Memorial Temple honors fallen
Masons—and also points the way forward.*



THE IDEA FOR a new Grand Lodge building—what would eventually become the California Masonic Memorial Temple—came about in the wake of World War II. It was a time when our fraternity was expanding rapidly, but also grieving for its fallen brothers. Though the building wasn’t completed until 1958, it was meant to honor those who’d “made the supreme sacrifice,” said Past Grand Master Arthur Brouillet in 1946. It would be, in his words, a

memorial “which will be living and pulsating with daily life.”

I certainly think it is. I love that our address is 1111 California, in honor of Veterans Day (celebrated on 11/11). Having served in the Army, this brings me immense pride, especially knowing that so many of our members have served our nation with distinction and honor.

The first time I walked into the building, I was blown away by the massive columns at the entrance and the light-filled endomosaic. This is a beautiful space, and one I love getting to spend time in with my fellow Masons. The more I visited, the more I thought about ways we could share the building’s splendor with the wider community—a way to tell the story of Freemasonry in California to the general public. Starting this fall, we’ll be doing just that, by using QR codes to help visitors understand what makes this building so special.

This being my last message as grand master, I want to take a moment to thank you, the Masons of California, for putting your trust in me. This is the greatest honor that could ever be bestowed on me. I’ve been asked what the best part of being grand master is, and without a doubt, it’s getting to meet on the level with brothers in lodges and at events across the state. My experience as a Mason has been expanded beyond my wildest dreams, and my life has been made so much richer for it. For that, I’m eternally grateful.

I look forward to seeing you all at our Annual Communication. May the Supreme Architect of the Universe bless and protect you, your families, and our beloved craft.

Sincerely and fraternally,


Jeffery M. Wilkins
Grand Master of Masons in California

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Covering
California
Freemasonry

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MATTHEW REAMER

AFFINITIES

The Shredder

IN THE HIGH DESERT, AN ART-
MAKING, SKATEBOARDING MASON
IS REWRITING PERCEPTIONS.

BY JUSTIN JAPITANA

WHEN HE FIRST STARTED his Masonic-skateboard-deck giveaway program, Joey Buice didn’t have much of a plan for how it would work. That was OK with him. As an artist and designer living in the high-desert town of Yucca Valley, on the northwestern edge of Joshua Tree NationalPark, Buice embraces a decidedly improvisational, do-it-yourself spirit. When he’s touched by a creative spark, Buice uses what’s close at hand to meet his needs and, he hopes, make the world a brighter place. Or at least a little less predictable. ¶ So when a local skateboarding company he’d been connected to dropped a shipment of decks off with him, he scrawled the square and compass on them, drove to the local skate park, and gave the

“I like to keep things curvy and moving, because you don’t want to stay in one spot.”

JOEY BUICE HAS LAUNCHED A SKATEBOARD-EQUIPMENT GIVEAWAY PROGRAM THAT HIS LODGE NOW PARTICIPATES IN.

haul away to some grateful, if possibly perplexed, local kids. That spirit of mischievous invention pervades Buice’s life. From his interactive art installations to his involvement in **Yucca Valley Lodge № 802**, Buice’s instinct is to make something out of nothing.

Over the past two years, Buice’s impromptu skate park drop-offs have grown. In addition

to the donated decks, he takes in T-shirts and other merchandise from Gimme Danger, the L.A. clothing company he works for as a buyer, combing secondhand shops in search of vintage items to upcycle. His motivation isn’t publicity, he says, but rather paying it forward. “Sometimes there won’t be anyone at the park, and I’ll just leave some stuff for the next kid to grab,” he says.

AN ARTIST IN REPOSE

As a punk-rock installation artist, Buice doesn’t quite match up with the stereotypical Mason. But his interest in the craft is genuine, and he’s been embraced wholeheartedly by his lodge.

Originally from Lake Tahoe, Buice moved to Orange County and fell into the local punk scene.

That led him to the annual Joshua Tree Music Festival, where he volunteered in set construction and stage design. Four years ago, he relocated to the desert full-time, where he now produces surrealistic art installations. “They’ve given me pretty complete creative control,” he says of the festival organizers.

In his festival designs, Buice works exclusively with repurposed materials, including acrylic house paint and discarded lumber. “I like textured, abstract stuff,” he says. One of his ongoing projects is a one-on-one improvisational show called *Antiplat Atelier*, in which Buice faces a single viewer inside an “Interrogationatron”—basically a repurposed toolshed. Inside, the shed is rigged with artworks and props—there isn’t

always a distinction between the two—and Buice engages the viewer in intense, sometimes nonsensical conversation. “I’m just trying to get them off guard and to leave in a better mood than they came in with,” he explains.

Growing up in the punk scene, he says, “everything was pretty heavy on the DIY, so that’s what got me to put myself out there.”

In fact, Buice says that lately, he’s increasingly drawn back to music—he posts his records on Soundcloud. “I never stopped writing songs and poems, but during the pandemic I found myself writing more,” he says. “It’s a whole different process for me now. It took me to a different place.”

ON THE LEVEL

Buice compares his artistic and life mantras to transition skating—moving from the flat surface up the walls of a ramp or bowl. “I like to keep things curvy and moving, because you don’t want to stay in one spot,” he says. He sees in that an apt metaphor. “Mental-health-wise, [stasis] is not a good thing. Even if you’re swinging back, you’re moving, making momentum and ultimately getting yourself somewhere higher or farther.”

So when in 2018 Buice felt himself being drawn toward Freemasonry, he acted on it. According to lodge master T.C. Dowden, Buice made his mark right away. “Joey isn’t a wallflower,” he says. “He lends a hand every chance he gets, whether it’s painting the dining room or cleaning carpets. He’s a genuinely cheerful, likable guy.”

As for how he fits into the culture of the lodge, which Dowden says has historically tended toward older members, he says Buice has added some much-needed energy. “He’s gregarious,” Dowden says

with a chuckle. “He’s one of the good young millennials. He injects some humor and life into the lodge, but when it’s time to be serious, he’s able to do that, too.”

This year, Buice is serving as his district’s **Masons4Mitts** captain, and his outgoing personality has paid off in fundraising efforts for the youth-sports program. He’s also begun passing the hat after stated meetings to purchase more skateboarding equipment for local kids. Buice says he has designs on having the lodge sponsor a skate competition in the future, and he hopes that when a nearby skate park opens in 2024, the lodge can lay the cornerstone for it.

Whether it’s degree work or kickflips, from Buice’s perspective, it all comes from the same place of creativity. “Temples or cathedrals can look like upside-down skateboard parks if you use your imagination,” he says with a laugh. “You can probably compare the components of skating to the working tools of Masonry or some other life lessons. But I won’t get too ahead of myself.” ♦



MORE ONLINE

Check out a video profile of Joey Buice as he skates, makes art, and explains how Masonry ties it all together.

californiafreemason.org/shredder





POP CULTURE

Mystery in the Lodge

IN MASTERPIECE’S ENDEAVOUR, A MASONIC REFERENCE IS ILLUMINATED.

IN AN EARLY EPISODE of PBS’ *Masterpiece* mystery *Endeavour*, the prequel to the long-running mystery series *Inspector Morse*, a fellow detective mentions that he’s been invited to join “a certain ancient fraternity.” The young Morse replies, “A man can’t serve two masters.”

What’s probably a fairly oblique quip for most viewers is in fact one of several allusions in the series to Freemasonry. Often mysterious and sometimes more, the references to Masonry suggest someone with at least a passing familiarity with the craft. And indeed, series creator Russell Lewis tells *California Freemason* that while he’s never been a member himself, he had a relative who was and that he “did once work as a *plongeur*”—hired help—“at a lodge in Surrey. I thought the building and its decor were quite beguiling, and the objects in [the] sundry display cabinet fascinating,” he says.

Fans of Lewis’s original *Morse* series may recall earlier nods to the craft. An episode titled “Masonic Mysteries” involved the titular detective being framed for a murder at a rehearsal of Mozart’s *Magic Flute*. In *Endeavour*, the series uses the secrecy surrounding Masonry to similar dramatic—though not always flattering—effect. For instance, a storyline in season eight implicates a lodge in a police-corruption ring—a reference to a real-life British scandal in the 1960s and ’70s. Still, for viewers with a connection to Masonry, the thrill of catching the odd glimpse of an apron or officer’s jewel may well outweigh any sinister insinuations. The ninth and final season is expected in late 2022 or early 2023. ♦ —lan A. Stewart

GOING VIRAL

2.8 MILLION

The online reach of this summer’s #ImAMason social media campaign.

+226% 19,000

Site traffic increase to freemason.org May–August vs. January–April 2022.

Single-day engagements with @MasonsofCA Facebook page during campaign.



MEMBER PROFILE

Zahid Peoples

Member
since 2021

Martinez
No 41

Dancer and
entertainer

PHOTOGRAPH
BY MARTIN KLIMEK

California Freemason: You're a professional dancer and sports-team hype man. How did you get your start?

Zahid Peoples: I've been dancing since high school, and I kept at it while I was in college studying for law school. I did a few corporate events and bar mitzvahs, that sort of thing, and then one day I saw a listing looking for dancers for the 49ers. It said it wouldn't pay very much or very often, but it's great

ZAHID PEOPLES FIRES UP
THE CROWD AT A SAN
FRANCISCO GIANTS GAME.

exposure. I'm the kind of person who sees the vastness of an opportunity. So I took the job and danced for the 49ers, and eventually that led me to work with the Golden State Warriors, Oakland A's, and San Francisco Giants.

CFM: Your job is to get people excited and have fun. Are you able to bring that into your life outside of sports?

ZP: It's a lot like Masonry. It's this band of brothers. We're all working toward a common goal, and that's elevating the experiences people have. That's why I'm an artist. I love creating entertainment, especially for someone to be able to go, "Wow."

CFM: Who are some of the acts you've performed with?

ZP: I've break-danced with Run-DMC. I danced onstage with P-Lo at Outside Lands. I've performed with the Foo Fighters, Gwen Stefani, E-40, Weezer. And then for Super Bowl 50, I was an on-field performer for Beyoncé, Bruno Mars, and Coldplay. That was the most incredible experience.

CFM: How did you get interested in Freemasonry?

ZP: My grandfather on my mother's side was a Mason. I didn't know much about it, but it was always in the back of my mind. Then, in 2019, I was touring with a Disney Junior show called *Choo Choo Soul*. I met a guy there who'd brought his kids to the show, and he was a Prince Hall Mason. And I thought, I'd like to get into this. So I read through 15 hours of *Freemasonry for Dummies* and thought, I resonate with all of this.

CFM: Have you ever been roped into performing at your lodge?

ZP: [Laughs] No one ever has to rope me into dancing! I end up performing out of pure reaction. So yeah, last New Year's Eve party, I did a little lead-follow where I call out the moves and do a couple eight counts. That's just what I do. Someone told me that night my dancing is infectious. To me, that's perfect. ✨ —IAS

MORE ONLINE

Check out Peoples's
dance moves at
[californiafreemason.org/
peoples](http://californiafreemason.org/peoples)



MASONIC EDUCATION

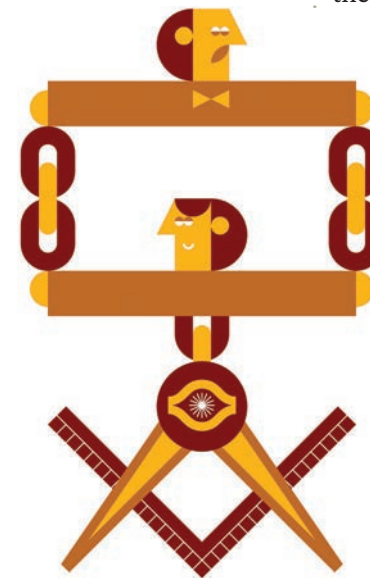
Generations in the Making

THE SELDOM-SEEN LEWIS DEGREE
BINDS MASONIC FATHERS AND SONS.

ON A THURSDAY evening in May, Jerome Ortiz prepared to experience something few Masons ever get to see. In front of a packed lodge room, his father, Victor Ortiz, would raise him to the sublime degree of Master Mason. From then on, the two would know each other not only as father and son, but also as brothers.

There's yet another name for members of the select group of second-generation Masons raised by their fathers: a Lewis, in reference to an ancient iron tool used to hoist large stones. The rare occasion of a Lewis-degree conferral can be commemorated with a special pin shaped like the tool, a sort of looped shackle with three vertical bars underneath.

While it's widely recognized elsewhere, the Lewis degree was formally introduced to California only in 2016, by then-Grand Master David Perry. Perry compares the metaphor of the Lewis with the opening verses of *1 Kings 2:1*, when David encouraged his son Solomon to live an upright life. Perry learned about the custom through his travels to other jurisdictions. Not coincidentally, that same



year, he participated in a Lewis ceremony by raising his own son, Nicholas Leija, at **Napa Valley No 93**. That same night, Leija's childhood friend, Russell Medina, was also raised by his father, Mikal Litzza, making it an extra-rare double Lewis degree night. At the Annual Communication that year, Grand Master Perry presented the Grand Lodge of California's

first-ever Lewis jewel to Nicholas. Says Leija, "As Masons, we're trying to raise good men. What better way than through your son? I'm proud of my dad for bringing back the Lewis award."

For his part, Perry says he now feels "blessed to have lived a life my son feels like following."

That's a familiar refrain among California's Lewis Masons. "It's very emotional for a father to see his offspring

follow in his footsteps," says Victor Ortiz, who traveled widely as a member of the Navy and even served as grand master of the Grand Lodge of Japan. "I have three boys, and I never told them to join. They need to come of their own free will and accord. It's hard to explain the feeling—the joy—of knowing my son is coming to an organization that really was my life."

The Ortiz family shares more than just Masonry between generations, as both father and son have served in the military. Jerome Ortiz, of **Claude H. Morrison No 747**, says that dual bond is strengthened when he meets other veterans or active-duty members in lodge. To know he shares that sense of camaraderie with his father makes his membership even more special.

So while it's often said that you can choose your friends but not your family, the Lewis degree shows that sometimes, you can have both. ✨ —TONY GILBERT

RITUAL

Masterfully Done

A SPECIAL DEGREE CONFERRAL BRINGS SAN DIEGO'S LODGE
MASTERS TOGETHER.

FILE THIS UNDER possible Masonic firsts: This May, **S.W. Hackett No 574** in San Diego held a second-degree ceremony for Ethan Carswell with current masters sitting in every position. "The theater of it was really next-level," Carswell says. "I met some great people and great mentors." The officers on hand included David Murray (**Santa Maria No 580**), who served as master; Jeffrey Powell (**Consuelo No 325**) as senior warden; Nicholas Hoffman (**Black Mountain No 845**) as junior warden; Walter Von Westphalen (**Point Loma No 620**) as secretary; Ronald Banci (**South West No 283**) as treasurer; and Percival Bautista (**Silver Gate Three Stars No 296**), who served as marshal and presented the charge. In addition, Jonathan Robles (**San Diego No 35**) served as chaplain; Roberto Reyes (**East San Diego No 561**) was senior deacon; Mark de la Cruz (**Amity No 442**) was junior deacon; David Descoteaux (**Heartland No 576**) was senior steward; David Diaz (**Lux No 846**) was junior steward; and Michael Singer (**Novus Veteris No 864**) was tiler. "It was top-notch," Carswell said. "It makes me want to give back to the lodge that gave me so much." ✨ —IAS



RIGHT: ORNATE DECORATIVE PLASTERWORK COVERS THE CEILING OF THE SECOND-FLOOR BALCONY OF THE SANTA BARBARA MASONIC TEMPLE.

ABOVE: LODGE MASTER MARK SPURLOCK-BROWN POSES ON THE RENOVATED BALCONY.



LODGE PROFILE

The Spit-Shine

HOW A SIMPLE RESTORATION JOB IS REVITALIZING SANTA BARBARA № 192.

SEVEN YEARS AGO, when Nikolay Seraphim was hired to retouch the entryway to the stately Santa Barbara Masonic Temple, he looked over the old building from across East Carrillo Street. Each time he looked at it, his eyes kept drifting upward.

Seraphim, a stonemason by trade, had worked for years for a restoration company, bringing old city halls, theaters, and churches back to life. So he had an inkling that the four-story, circa-1925 temple was hiding a few secrets. Above him, on the second-floor balcony, something was out of place. The arched ceiling was painted a flat, dull white, unlike the ornate character of the rest of the building. So he pored over old photographs and even asked some of the longest-tenured members of **Santa Barbara № 192**, including 86-year-old Past Master Nevin Chamberlain, if they knew anything about the ceiling. No one did.



So Seraphim started peeling away the paint, layer by layer. And before long, the balcony's brightly colored, gold-lined plasterwork began to emerge—an exquisite brocade of Masonic symbols and figures. Today, as one walks past the old Carl Werner-designed temple (the same architect behind notable Masonic temples in Sacramento, Oakland, and Bakersfield), it's practically impossible not to look up and marvel at the many mermaids, candelabras, and working tools carved into the archway.

The building's exterior restoration offers a nice parallel to the revitalization happening within. And it underscores just how important the physical characteristics of many Masonic lodges are to the sense of community and place—not to mention intrigue—they inspire. Whereas many other lodges of Santa Barbara's vintage decamped from their stately downtown halls

in favor of large suburban centers with ample parking, those that remained in place retain a powerful connection to their town's history. Says lodge secretary Jeff Matson, who also serves as the head of the Rose Croix chapter of the Scottish Rite, it was the building's architecture that first drew him in. After first laying eyes on

“I didn’t know what any of it meant, but I knew I had to join.”

its mysterious ornamentation, “I didn’t know what any of it meant, but I knew I had to join,” he says.

Today, the temple still seems to beckon to people. Standing out among the sea of Spanish-style structures in downtown Santa

Barbara, the building was one of the few in town to survive the massive earthquake of 1925, which struck just weeks after the temple's completion. In addition to Seraphim's recent work, plans call for adding a memorial plaque to the ground-floor façade later this year, near where the lunchtime crowd hangs out. The lodge also hosts frequent movie and game nights and degree rehearsals for each of the several bodies that call it home, including chapters of the York and Scottish Rite. That's created a sense of momentum for the lodge, which recently celebrated its sesquicentennial. “It feels like we’re being rediscovered by a new generation,” Matson says. “We’re seeing more younger guys coming in, in their twenties and thirties.”

More work is underway inside, too: A second-floor reading library is being renovated, where researchers will be able to tap into the lodge's extensive history. (The charter for Santa Barbara № 192 is from 1868; two other since-consolidated lodges that met there, La Cumbre № 642 and Magnolia № 242, date from 1875 and 1926, respectively.) In addition to the Scottish Rite's RiteCenter language program offices on the fourth floor, other parts of the byzantine temple include a large costume and changing room, lodge halls for the blue lodge and Scottish Rite chapters, additional offices, meeting spaces, a dining hall, and commercial kitchen. Plans are also forming to commemorate the building's centennial in 2025.

For Matson and others, the hope is that the TLC shown for the historic temple will continue to serve as the lodge's most visible advertisement for Freemasonry generally. At a minimum, it helped bring one new member into the fold. In fact, just a few months after beginning work on the building's façade, Seraphim submitted his petition to join. Today, he's a Master Mason with the lodge. ♦ —IAS



TRAVEL LODGE

In L.A., an Artist Leaves His Legacy at Lodge

THERE'S NO MISSING THE EGYPTIAN-INSPIRED WALL ART AT DOWNEY UNITED № 220.

WHEN RAJ CHAMPANERI passed away last June, there was little doubt that his memory would live on inside Downey United № 220, where he'd been a member since 2014.

In fact, his legacy there isn't likely to be forgotten anytime soon: He's the member behind the showstopping Egyptian-themed mural and sculpture that covers the hall's entire 16-foot-long eastern wall, after all. Affectionately known as the “Raj Mahal,” the piece includes an 8-foot-tall golden square and compass that juts out from the wall, creating a floating effect. On either side of it are two life-sized sarcophagi, painted to appear three-dimensional. Behind them, the wall is plastered in elaborate hieroglyphs and

plexiglass replicas of Masonic jewels. In 2020, Champaneri explained, “The closer you get to the wall, the more character it reveals.”

Champaneri was an artist and designer outside of lodge, too. Among his creations are his so-called “Exoticmishaps,” a collection of meticulously crafted dioramas of car crashes involving luxury automobiles. Another series was his “Goldgraphs,” images made with paint mixed with ground-up metals and diamond dust. In his career, Champaneri produced works for the likes of Queen Elizabeth and Janet Jackson.

However, at least for the members of Downey United № 220, it's the Raj Mahal that will live on, a testament to the mysticism and wonder that Freemasonry inspires. ♦ —JJ

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATHEW SCOTT

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW REAMER



The Temple

For 64 years, the California Masonic Memorial Temple has evolved along with the fraternity that calls it home. Now it's entering a new era. BY CHRISTOPHER VERPLANCK

IT'S A WARM SUMMER evening in San Francisco as patrons line up to enter the California Masonic Memorial Temple. In less than an hour, the comedian Chris Rock will begin his set. As is increasingly common, guests have been asked to lock away their phones, so the queue to pass through the front doors is backed up onto California Street, where the city's iconic cable cars periodically roll by.

Despite the slow-moving line, tonight's audience seems to be in good spirits, displaying the cheerful giddiness of a big night out. That's a near permanent fixture here, as the auditorium stage is host to some 79 live shows per year, along with numerous private and corporate events. In all, about 250,000 visitors pass through the doors of the California Masonic Memorial Temple annually, making it one of the city's most visited venues.

Drinks in hand, the guests make their way to their seats. On their way, they pass by several noteworthy markers: a golden square and compass carved into the white marble of the building's façade; twin 23-foot-high marble columns flanking the front doors and topped by celestial and terrestrial globes; and the 48-by-38 foot endomosaic mural, full of images and references to the history of Freemasonry in California. A few snap photos of the evocative surroundings, but tonight's crowd for the most part seems unaware of the architectural, historical, and especially fraternal significance of the building they're visiting. In fact, a

large majority are unlikely to even know the building's full name. Outside of the fraternity, very few people ever refer to the California Masonic Memorial Temple. To most, it's simply "the Masonic."

That's no accident. Since opening in 1958, the CMMT has always played a dual role. To the fraternity, it's the general headquarters of the Masons of California—their meeting place, library, and the staff offices of the Grand Lodge of California. Its operations also support the charitable activities of the California Masonic Foundation. Externally, it's an entertainment venue geared toward the enjoyment of a public with slim knowledge of Freemasonry. Now, almost 65 years later, there's hope that the building—by whatever name it's known—can play yet another role: as a vehicle to help propel Freemasonry in California into the future.

"MORE COMMODIOUS QUARTERS"

Freemasonry in California goes all the way back to the gold rush of 1848-50, when fortune seekers from around the world—including many Masons—flooded into the state. The Grand Lodge of California was initially established in April 1850 in the so-called Red House on Fifth and J streets in Sacramento, exercising jurisdiction over 11 lodges across California and Hawaii. Masons played an important role

Patrons line up on California Street outside the California Masonic Memorial Temple before an evening concert—one of 64 shows per year at the iconic venue.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WINNI WINTERMEYER



From left: The first Grand Lodge building in San Francisco, located at Post and Montgomery; the building in the wake of the 1906 earthquake and fire; and the later Grand Lodge temple at 25 Van Ness.



From the beginning, its location and design were meant to demonstrate a sense of the fraternity's civic pride and institutional might.

in securing California's admission to the union in September 1850, and many of California's early civic and business leaders were Masons, including Samuel Brannan, Thomas Starr King, and Leland Stanford.

The Grand Lodge relocated to San Francisco in 1863. For many years, it was headquartered in an impressive hall at the northwest corner of Post and Montgomery streets, where it remained until the 1906 earthquake, which destroyed the building. After meeting at various locations for several years, the Grand Lodge moved into the new San Francisco Masonic Temple at 25 Van Ness in 1913, where it stayed for nearly half a century. Designed by Bliss & Faville in the Venetian Revival style, the building is now operated by the city of San Francisco.

Postwar, the fraternity began to outgrow the Van Ness building and required, in the words of a later temple committee member, "more commodious quarters." Membership in fraternal societies such as the Masons, the Elks, and the Odd Fellows surged after World War II. Between 1946 and 1953, the number of Masons in California nearly doubled, reaching

a high of 225,000. That growth had a profound effect not just on the fraternity, but on the state as a whole. For members of the Greatest Generation, the war had been a tremendous social mixer, and the subsequent rise of suburbanization broke apart traditional ethnic enclaves. In the newly built suburbs, fraternal societies provided an Americanized alternative to traditional religious and ethnic-based organizations. In addition to opportunities for socializing, fraternal organizations offered a sense of belonging, especially with their ritualized pageantry and charitable activities.

By the late 1940s, the 20,000-square-foot Grand Lodge temple on Van Ness was straining to

accommodate the yearly Annual Communication. By 1952, the situation was critical enough that the meeting was moved to the 8,500-capacity San Francisco Civic Auditorium, where it would be held for each of the next five years. Meanwhile, the administrative functions of the Grand Lodge were also severely short on space. A 1947 report commissioned by the Grand Lodge recommended finding a new home at once, to be ready for move-in by the fall of 1950.

The booming fraternity, which had added 100,000 members in less than a decade, needed a new home to match its new scale and ambition. So it looked to the top of the hill.

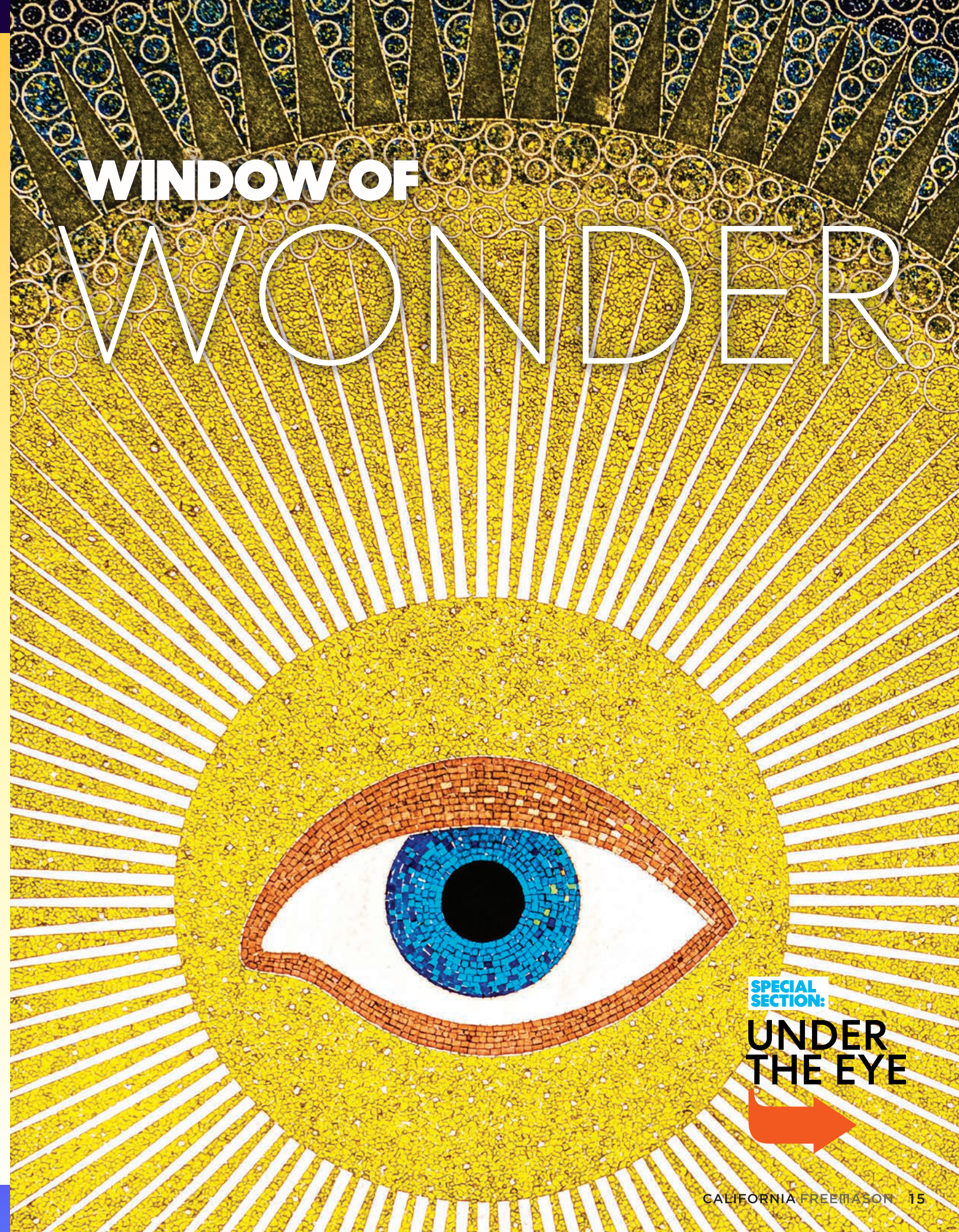
A HOME ON HIGH

The location of today's California Masonic Memorial Temple is significant, though it was perhaps a stroke of luck that it ever worked out. Standing proudly atop Nob Hill, one of San Francisco's most coveted neighborhoods, the modernistic temple is a departure from the stately Beaux Arts hotels and apartment buildings that surround it. From the beginning, its location and design were meant to demonstrate a sense of the fraternity's civic pride and institutional might. (Among its eminent neighbors are Grace Cathedral, the seat of the Diocese of California; the elite Pacific-Union Club; and the luxurious Fairmont Hotel, where Tony Bennett first sang "I Left My Heart in San Francisco.")

The fraternity of the mid-20th century fit securely in among those lofty neighbors. But the location was also a manifestation of a forward-thinking vision for the fraternity and its headquarters—one that saw the organization playing an important role in the city's social and commercial life. Unlike its previous locales, the new Grand Lodge temple would exist not solely to serve the members of the fraternity. Instead, revenue-generating elements of the building would help fund the Masons' charitable arm (what would later become the California Masonic

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WINDOW OF WONDER



SPECIAL SECTION:

UNDER THE EYE



WINDOW OF WONDER

Emile Norman never became a household name. But his massive artwork remains a treasure of California Freemasonry.

BY SARAH HOTCHKISS

NOT EVERY ARTIST is an inventor. But when it came to the massive light-filled multimedia mural that greets visitors at the California Masonic Memorial Temple on Nob Hill in San Francisco, Emile Norman's mode of artmaking was so novel it needed a name.

Stretching practically the entire length of the foyer's southern wall, Norman's "endomosaic" is a stunning sight, one that for more than half a century has made an indelible impression on the thousands of visitors each year who come to the building. In scale and splendor, it's one of San Francisco's most impressive pieces of public art and the crowning achievement of a creative visionary.

Gazing over the 48-by-38-foot work, which is chock-full of Masonic symbolism, the mind whirrs with questions. But perhaps what's most interesting about the piece is how it came to be at all. How did a little-known Big Sur artist, working well outside the mainstream, with no formal training or any connection to Masonry, wind up creating something so integral to the home of California Freemasonry?

Ultimately, the story of the endomosaic is one of serendipity—but also of curiosity, artistic experimentation, and love.

AN UNLIKELY MEDIUM, AN UNLIKELY ARTIST

It may be that Emile Norman was destined to become an artist, but the circumstances of his childhood didn't exactly encourage it. Born in 1918 and raised on a walnut farm in the San Gabriel Valley, he made his first sculpture at the age of 11 from a piece of found granite, ruining his father's wood chisels in the process. "My mother kept heckling me that I should stop all that nonsense and learn an honest trade," Norman, who died in 2009, recalled in the 2007 documentary *Emile Norman: By His Own Design*. "She didn't know who I was. Never did." But that background schooled him in other ways, and steeled his determination to succeed on his own terms.

But what really set Norman apart in his artistic career was his unlikely medium. According to the late artist's nephew, Carl Malone, who worked alongside Norman in his later life, "He really had quite a love affair with plastics." During World War II, when most metals went to military use, the nascent plastics industry grew as manufacturers looked for alternative materials. So while the Museum of Modern Art remained focused on traditional formats like oil on canvas, Norman was piercing cellulose acetate

with a hot electric needle. A *New York World-Telegram* article from 1944 called 26-year-old Norman's work with plastic "fascinating." His great innovation, according to a *New York Times* review published that same year, was freeing plastic from its industrial and commercial uses and putting it to aesthetic ones.

Among his novel creations were fantastical head-dresses (some of which appeared in the 1946 film *Blue Skies*) and decorative screens and boxes. Norman filed five patents dealing with the manipulation of plastics. "Every time I do a work of art, I learn something technically and artistically," he said in the documentary. "I'm an experimenter."

Emile Norman and Brooks Clement, circa 1961.

PHOTOGRAPH BY YOUSUF KARSH, COURTESY OF EMILE NORMAN ARTS FOUNDATION



Norman in his Big Sur studio with a panel destined for the CMMT mural.

EMILE NORMAN ARTS FOUNDATION

Although he was candid about his methods, Norman could also be very secretive—for instance, no one was allowed in his studio. He also hid much of his life from the outside world, including his sexual orientation. At a time when bar raids could end with men's names and addresses in the newspaper, Norman closely guarded his attraction to men.

That began to change when Norman met Brooks Clement, the man who'd be his partner for the next three decades. In 1946, they moved to Big Sur and began building the house that in some ways would stand as Norman's greatest work of art. In the documentary, Norman recalled clearing the land on Pfeiffer Ridge with glee: "That was the butchiest part of my life. I loved running that bulldozer," he said. While Norman made his art, Clement ran the Emile Norman Gallery in nearby Carmel, documented their work and research trips, and, according to newspapers of the time, "managed" Norman's career. Their custom-built home, with its expansive views of the Pacific, became a gathering place for friends, the starting point for hikes along the surrounding ridges, and the backdrop of their life. Tucked away from the wider world, they were free to build a life together, be open

about their relationship, and enjoy the embrace of their neighbors.

Beneath their living space was Norman's studio, filled with tools, equipment, and jars of crushed glass, where he sometimes worked 18 hours a day. Over the years, his art included delicate wood-inlay panels he called Nature Poems, carved bas-reliefs, and graceful sculptures of animals created by combining wax, wood fragments, and epoxy. Precursors to the endomosaics appeared in Norman's window displays at places like Bergdorf Goodman in New York, which sometimes included leaves and butterflies pressed between layers of plastic to create shoji-like screens.

Until his death in 1973, Clement continued to assist Norman's work; sometimes the couple signed their collaborative work "Clemile." On

the Masonic endomosaic, Clement's name appears just under Norman's.

Today, Norman's work is in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Monterey Museum of Art, but the majority of his output is privately owned. Much of it never left their home. As Will Parrinello, who directed the Norman documentary, points out, "The house is itself a work of art, and it was designed to house his artwork."

THE RIGHT PLACE, THE RIGHT TIME

It wasn't far from his Big Sur studio that Norman became forever linked to California Freemasonry. In 1954, he created his first endomosaic display for the Casa Munras Hotel in Monterey, depicting the history of the town. There it caught the eye of the modernist architect Albert F. Roller, who earlier that year had won the commission to design the California Masonic Memorial Temple. In 1956, Roller sought out Norman to develop a pair of showstopping works for the temple. (In addition to the endomosaic,

Norman created the large bas-relief frieze on the building's northern face.) For David Wessel of Architectural Resources Group, who led a massive 2006 restoration of the endomosaic, part of what makes the piece special is its integration into the temple's overall design.

Says Wessel, "As a product of the plastics movement that had its genesis during World War II, it's completely appropriate for a midcentury building. The materials, the design, and the placement in the building—everything."

Norman had no connection to Freemasonry. To familiarize himself, he dived into the history and symbolism of the fraternity. In 2006, he told *California Freeman* that he interviewed dozens of members and borrowed

His great innovation... was freeing plastic from its industrial and commercial uses and putting it to aesthetic ones.

Behind the Window

It isn't just the scale of Emile Norman's endomosaic that makes it special. From its esoteric iconography to its allusions to fraternal and state history, the artwork rewards a closer reading. Here, a few clues. —IAN A. STEWART

CENTER PANEL

1. Masters of the Lodge

THE SUN AND ALL-SEEING EYE, WITH GRAND LODGE OFFICERS' SYMBOLS

Towering above the mural is the all-seeing eye, a reminder that our actions are seen and judged by others—and that we are accountable to one another. Beneath it are the emblems of the elected officers of the Grand Lodge: the radial sun (representing the grand lecturer); crossed keys (grand treasurer); level (senior grand warden); square and compass with sunburst and quadrant (representing the grand master, the highest-ranking Masonic elected official), the square-and-compass with jewel (deputy grand master), plumb (junior grand warden); and crossed key and pen (grand secretary).

2. The California Freemason

FIGURE WITH APRON, VARIOUS IMAGES

The central figure represents the past, present, and future of California Freemasonry. Surrounding the figure, who wears the Masons' white lambskin apron, are symbols of the state's prominent industries of the 1950s, from wine and logging to shipping and film, depicting the diverse backgrounds and skills of California Masons.

3. The Founders

AMERICAN AND CALIFORNIA FLAGS

Masons have played important roles in the founding of the United States and of California. In fact many of the builders of early California were Freemasons.

4–5. The Settlers

THE WAYFARING MAN AND THE SEAFARING MAN

Representing the earliest American settlers who reached California by land and sea, the figure at left is the wayfarer, who holds a piece of fruit to represent the state's agricultural riches. Behind him are the gold miner, holding a pick, and the trapper, holding a musket. On the right, the seafarer represents the traders who arrived in California in the early 1800s. Behind him are a fisherman and a ship captain, likely representing Levi Stowell, who sailed the charter for California No. 1 from Washington D.C. to San Francisco via the Isthmus of Panama.

6. Emblems of Masonry

THREE STEPS, POT OF INCENSE, BEEHIVE, AND SWORD

Horizontal bands of images run throughout the mural with esoteric meanings to Masons. Beneath the wayfarer and seafarer, they include three steps, symbolizing the three degrees of Freemasonry; a pot of incense (symbolizing a pure heart); the beehive (representing industry and cooperation); and a sword atop the Constitutions of Freemasonry (guarding Masonic traditions and values).

LEFT PANEL

7. The Celestial Beings

STARS, SUN AND MOON, AND SPRIG OF ACACIA

Framing the top of the mural are symbols of the stars, the sun and moon, and the acacia tree. In Masonry, astrological symbols including the sun, moon, and seven stars are used to demonstrate constancy and regularity. The "blazing star" is often used to depict "Masonic light," or knowledge. The sprig of acacia—an evergreen—represents the immortality of the soul. The wood from the acacia tree was used in the construction of King Solomon's Temple.

8. The Foundations of Freemasonry

PILLARS, TAPERS, ALTAR, BIBLE, AND SUN

A band of Masonic imagery here alludes to some of the most important themes in Freemasonry. They include the twin pillars found at the entrance to King Solomon's Temple, and which are depicted in every Masonic lodge room. Next to that is an image of three burning tapers, representing the "lesser lights" of Freemasonry (the sun, moon, and the master of the lodge). Beside it is the altar, which is a place of communion with the divine. Finally, the holy book (here a Bible) topped by the square and compass represents the three "great lights" of Masonry; while the letter "G" stands for geometry, the foundational science of stonemasonry.

9. Historical Vignettes

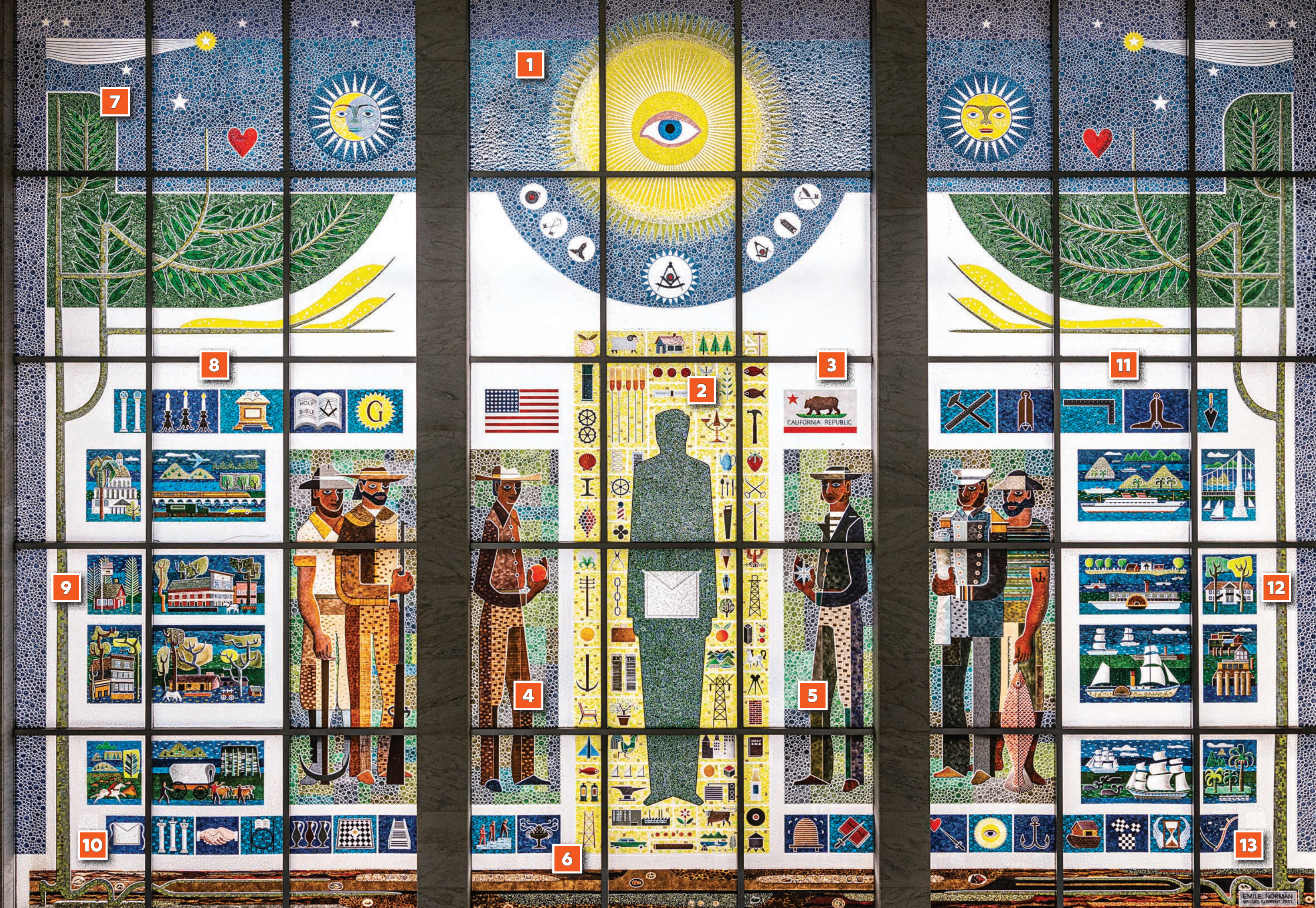
TRANSPORTATION, EDUCATION, AND EXPANSION

The eight vignettes at left paint a picture of history and progress in California. At the top left is the state capitol, next to images of the automobile, train, and airplane. Both recall Masonry's contributions to the state's government and infrastructure. (In fact, 19 governors of California have been Freemasons.) Beneath them are an image of a schoolhouse and Masonic lodge rooms. The schoolhouse represents the birth of the California public education system, founded by Freemason John Swett. The scenes at bottom left represent the covered wagon that reached California by land. At left is a Native American on horseback, representing the state's first inhabitants and the settling of the frontier.



SEE MORE ONLINE

Scan the QR code to learn more about Emile Norman and the story behind his endomosaic masterpiece.



10. The Degrees of Masonry

APRON, PILLARS, HANDSHAKE, HOLY WRITING, VESSELS, MOSAIC, STAIRCASE

Square images along the bottom-left of the mural represent icons related to the degrees of Freemasonry. From left, they are the white apron that is given to the new initiate; three columns (representing wisdom, strength, and beauty); and the holy book upon which all members take their oaths. Beside them is a handshake, representing friendship; and vessels of corn, wine, and oil (the wages paid to early stonemasons, now used ceremonially in the consecration of a new building). The Mosaic pavement, tessellated border, and blazing star represent the "ornaments" of the lodge room. The staircase at right is comprised of three, five, and seven steps. The first three steps represent life stages (youth, manhood, old age), followed by the five steps that allude to the five orders of architecture. Finally the seven steps represent the seven liberal arts and sciences (grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).

RIGHT PANEL

11. The Working Tools

24-INCH GAUGE AND COMMON GAVEL, PLUMB, SQUARE, LEVEL, TROWEL

The icons running horizontally across the right-hand panel depict the stonemason's working tools, used allegorically in Freemasonry to illuminate important concepts. From left, they are the common gavel and 24-inch gauge (used metaphorically to divide the 24 hours of the day into useful employment); the plumb (representing uprightness); the square (morality and truth); the level (equality), and trowel (used to spread the "cement of friendship.")

12. More Historical Vignettes

HISTORY AND PROGRESS ON CALIFORNIA'S WATERWAYS

The scenes of sea life depict the Masons' bridge-building efforts that contributed to international trade. Beneath them, four panels illustrate the seafaring industries and the 1846 landing at Monterey by Admiral John Drake Sloat, thought to be the first Mason to arrive in California. At bottom, two panels depict the early schooners that arrived in California by way of the Hawaiian Islands. Some of the first-known Masons to land in California were sea captains like John Meek, who in 1852 became a charter member of the first Masonic lodge in Hawaii.

13. Life Lessons

SWORD AND HEART, ALL-SEEING EYE, ANCHOR, ARK, 47TH PROPOSITION OF EUCLID, HOURGLASS, SCYTHE

Rounding out the bottom panel are more Masonic symbols that allude to teachings contained within the Masonic degrees. From left, they include a depiction of a sword pointed at a naked heart (symbolically, a reminder to guard one's heart against impure thoughts) and the all-seeing eye that's always above us. Next to them are the anchor and ark (symbolizing hope and confidence), and the 47th Proposition of Euclid (used to create a perfect right angle). The final two images, of the winged hourglass and the scythe, represent mortality and the brevity of one's time on earth.

PHOTOGRAPHS ON COVER AND LEFT BY WINNI WINTERMEYER; TOP RIGHT COURTESY OF ARC CONSERVATION SERVICES



Fighting Against the Light

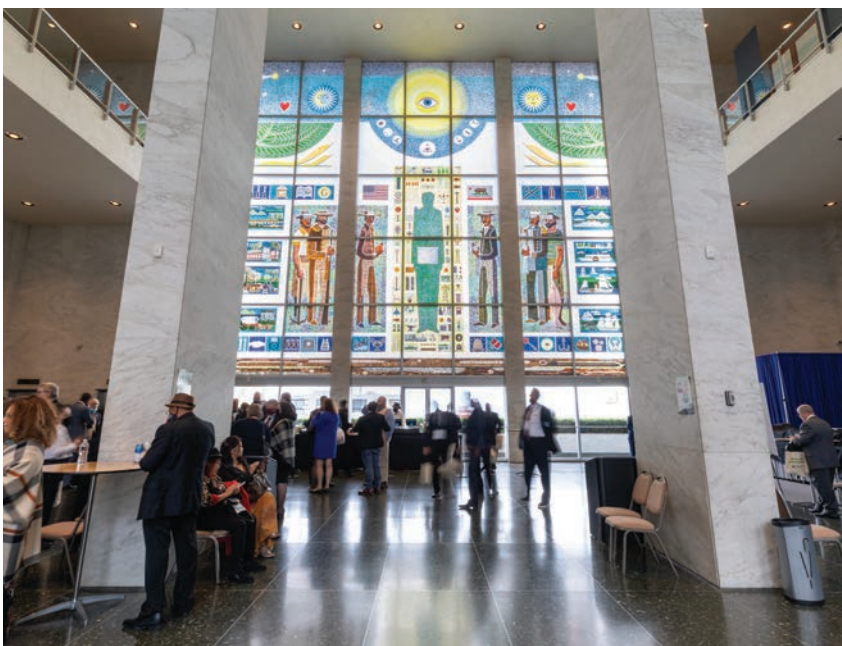
IT STARTED WHEN THE all-seeing eye began to weep. First a little, then more—the little bits of the colored glass that gives the massive endomosaic inside the California Masonic Memorial Temple its wonderful texture and hue had come unglued and began to tumble down between the pressed acrylic that frames the work.

Emile Norman's endomosaic process was both ahead of its time and also, in terms of conservation, something of an untested medium. And nearly 50 years after being installed in the California Masonic Memorial Temple, it was beginning to show its age. "These long-chain polymers, which is what acrylics are, do eventually deteriorate from ultraviolet light exposure," explains David Wessel, the principal of Architectural Resources Group. In 2006, his firm was called in to restore and conserve the work—a massive job that ran to nearly half a million dollars.

It was a learning experience for Wessel, who is not a Mason but says he relished the opportunity to learn about the Masonic symbols contained within the artwork. "The iconography is fascinating. My grandfather was a Mason, so I had a little bit of exposure to it. But it's intriguing. It draws you in."

With Norman's blessing and armed with his original instructions for installing the endomosaic, Wessel's team removed each panel individually and took it to their workshop to assess and treat the tessera (the pieces of the mosaic). Once complete, the team reinstalled the panels and installed UV-filtering panels on the exterior to lessen its exposure to the light.

That said, "the artwork needs light coming through it to be appreciated," Wessel says—meaning that over time, it will continue to deteriorate. So as a failsafe, his conservationists took ultra-high-resolution photographs of each panel, so that should the piece ever need to come down, they can develop a transparency to install in its place. Just in case. —IAS



Patrons gather beneath the endomosaic in the main foyer.

SHOW READY PHOTO

books about Masonry from the Grand Lodge to learn about its iconography. The finished work contains depictions of Masonic tools and symbols including the trowel (friendship), the plumb (uprightness), and the all-seeing eye (benevolence), all framing central figures representing the Masons' contributions to California history. Norman would spend nearly 20 months working on the piece in his home studio. Executed panel by panel with the help of a homemade light table, the 45 sections, each weighing 250 pounds, were trucked up to San Francisco and put into storage until ready for installation.

Much of Norman's other work was on a more human scale, and the endomosaic stands out for its sheer size. "I think the thing that motivated him the most was doing something he hadn't done before," Malone says of his uncle's approach to the project. Norman's process for the endomosaic differed from typical mosaic-making. Rather than apply bits of glass to an object's surface and cement them with grout, he combined all sorts of materials and pressed them between two layers of clear acrylic. Among those used to color and shade the panels are glass, sea-shells, foliage, metals, thinly sliced vegetable matter, and soil collected by Masonic lodges in each of California's 58 counties, as well as the Hawaiian Islands (then a part of the Grand Lodge of California).

The result, even when layered between flat planes, has an incredible tactile quality. Like a pointillist painter, Norman combined 180 hues of ground glass that mix optically to create graceful shading. The cohesion of the overall design is immediate. White and black outlines follow the logic of a single light source, the all-seeing eye at the top of the work.

A LEGACY LIVES ON

Despite the triumph of the endomosaic, which is seen and photographed by thousands of visitors each year, Emile Norman's name has never been widely known beyond a small group of collectors. According to Parrinello, whose documentary is streaming on Kanopy, there was a moment in the early 1960s, when Norman was back east, that he could have pursued a career with a

New York gallery. Instead, he opted to return to Big Sur to pursue his art on his own terms.

Before Norman died in 2009, he laid out plans for a trust to protect both his home and his art. But in 2020, bankruptcy proceedings forced Norman's house onto the market, prompting local fears of demolition—an irreparable loss to the artistic heritage of Big Sur. Thankfully, the home, its artworks, and the 40 acres of land surrounding it were purchased by the newly formed Emile Norman Arts Foundation, funded by a silent benefactor. Heather Chappellet Lanier, Kim Stemler, and Heather Engen, the trio of Big Sur residents behind the foundation, are now working to bring Norman's art to a wider audience.

In a home assembled over decades with love and care, the markers of Norman and Clement's personal and professional accomplishments are finally secure. There are traces of their crowning achievement throughout the space: a scale model of the Masonic endomosaic, a life-size test panel mounted within a door, and dozens of glass jars full of soil from Masonic lodges. "It meant a lot to him, and he kept that part of his life there," Parrinello says.

It was that dedication to his work that drew Parrinello to Norman. The filmmaker remembers their first meeting: "He said things like, 'You know, no one's ever going to give you permission to do what you want except for yourself. So what are you waiting for?'" Parrinello says. "That's how he lived his life." ♦

Emile Norman at the CMMT in 2005, before a major restoration of the endomosaic artwork.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LIZ HAFALIA/GETTY



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Foundation). And, with its planned exhibition hall and performance venue, it would become a fixture of the city's business and entertainment scene—a draw for visitors and Masons alike. In that way, it would be a boon to the economic interests of Nob Hill and downtown San Francisco beyond.

Given that backdrop, it's interesting to note that the location on the corner of California and Taylor streets wasn't the first choice for the new temple. Following the 1947 report, a committee devoted to the search for a new home identified 15 different sites in San Francisco to develop or refurbish. Ultimately, none of them were deemed suitable.

In early 1952, the committee identified a promising 12-story property at 201 Sansome, at the corner of Pine, owned by the San Francisco Stock Exchange and known as the Sub-Treasury Building. However, negotiations over the \$3,000,000 sale fell through; meanwhile, a January 1952 arson at the Van Ness temple caused more than \$100,000 in damages. Suddenly, the committee was under pressure to find a new home, fast. ("Make haste slowly" had been its winking motto.) After looking at several additional properties, in 1953 the committee turned its attention to the southwest corner of California and Taylor. The location, which at the time included a gas station

The modernist venue at 1111 California Street was finally finished in spring 1958, and dedicated later that fall.

and a four-story apartment building, stood opposite the in-progress Grace Cathedral and the Huntington Hotel. The 50,000-square-foot property had frontage on three streets—California, Taylor, and Pine—and was served by the California Street cable car line.

There were several obstacles to developing the Nob Hill site. First, it was zoned for residential use; second, it was expensive. To pay for the land, as well as the costs of constructing and operating the building, the Grand Lodge would have to build a temple with income-generating capability. However, zoning on Nob Hill wouldn't allow for retail storefronts, which had helped subsidize the Van Ness temple.

Street parking was already at a premium in the neighborhood, especially with numerous hotels and apartment buildings nearby. Therefore, a five-level parking garage capable of accommodating over 500 vehicles became part of the building program. At the same time, the hotels provided opportunities for synergy. Many business conventions and trade shows had outgrown hotel ballrooms after the war, and the decision to include a large exhibition hall in the building's design was probably made in consultation with the Fairmont Hotel owner Benjamin Swig, of **Lincoln № 470** in San Francisco. Swig, a major booster of the convention industry in the city,



certainly would have approved of having an exhibition hall only a block from his flagship hotel. Another member of the temple committee certainly did: Walter Swanson, of **Educator № 554**, was manager of the San Francisco Convention and Tourist Bureau.

Financing the project proved to be a tall order. The price of land for the site came to \$1.3 million; plans for construction, including excavating the 62-foot drop from California Street south along Taylor, would come to more than \$6 million. Two ideas for raising capital came to the fore: First, a 50-cent per capita fee that had been introduced in 1951 was raised to \$1 per year in 1952; another \$9 fee for new applicants was also directed toward building costs. Separately, a fundraising drive, initiated by Ernest Bashor, the chairman of the Masonic Homes Endowment Board, called on all members to contribute the equivalent of “one day’s wages”—what came out to \$9 per member—to the project. The names of each contributing member and lodge would be recorded in a public “open book,” to be put on display inside the memorial lounge. (Today that book is kept under glass on the mezzanine level.)

A MODERNIST MARVEL

Meanwhile, architect Albert Roller got to work. Roller, who was a member of **Excelsior № 166**, ably adapted the Masons’ vision to the site, placing the five-level parking garage within the building podium, or reinforced base level, which also contained the exhibition hall on the ground floor. The first floor, accessible by California Street, would serve as the

The temple committee stipulated that the temple’s design philosophy would evince “no stylized tradition or cliché,” in order to stand as a timeless monument.

Artist Emile Norman’s memorial frieze on the building’s exterior represents the branches of the armed forces and the struggle of good and evil.

building’s primary public access point, containing the 50-by-112-foot foyer and the 3,200-seat auditorium. Most of the second floor would be taken up by the auditorium’s mezzanine and the upper part of the foyer. The remainder was set aside for a library and an apartment for the grand master. Meanwhile, the third floor would house an office suite for the staff of the Grand Lodge, Masonic Homes, and other Masonic organizations.

In February 1954, Albert Roller finished his preliminary designs. However, construction did not begin for another 20 months, as construction and fundraising delays pushed back the groundbreaking. The standing apartment house and gas station were finally demolished in January 1956, and excavation and construction followed a few weeks later. The contractor was MacDonald, Young & Nelson.

The temple committee stipulated that the temple’s design philosophy should evince “no stylized tradition or cliché,” in order to stand as a timeless monument. Roller designed the new building’s exterior in a sleek, modernist vocabulary that embodied influences of the “stripped classical” style of the 1930s. The exterior departs from the sometimes arid modernism of the 1950s. The only applied ornament was a memorial frieze by the late artist Emile Norman that, in keeping with the rest of the temple design, is reminiscent of New Deal-era aesthetics. At the left side are four panels depicting men from each of the branches of the armed forces, shown in ageless dress. At the right is a panel depicting a tug of war between the forces of good and evil, democracy and totalitarianism, with an inscription that reads: “Dedicated to Our Masonic Brethren Who Died in the Cause of Freedom.”

Beneath the frieze is a planter bed containing soil taken from each of California’s 58 counties and each of the Hawaiian Islands. (Hawaii fell under the Masonic jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of California until 1989.) The bed contains a row of ornamental olive trees.

At the opposite end of the primary façade is the entrance porch. The porch roof is supported by a colonnade of squared-off columns made from Vermont marble, the same material used in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. At the rear of the porch, flanking the entrance, are a pair of 23-foot-high marble pillars symbolizing the entrance to King Solomon’s Temple. Similar pillars flank the entrance to every Masonic lodge room. In Masonic custom, the pillar on the right is topped by a celestial orb, and the one on the left, the terrestrial.



The first-floor foyer is accessed from the entrance porch. The first thing you see upon entering the building is the stunning endomosaic window. Designed and executed by Norman, the window is made of thousands of pieces of colored glass sandwiched between layers of acrylic. The window comprises three sections, each divided into 15 panels, depicting the history of Masonry in California.

COMING TOGETHER

Finally, on October 27, 1955, more than 2,500 Masons attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the temple, as Grand Master Henry C. Clausen turned over a ceremonial spadeful of earth after ritually

Kenneth Archer, was rescued after three hours.)

Fundraising for the project also proved difficult. The Grand Lodge had vowed not to borrow from the Masonic Homes endowment fund, meaning that members would be responsible for repaying all building costs. In 1954, Grand Master Frank Harwell wrote in the *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge* of the new temple’s long-delayed opening, “There is only one major unsettled question: When? The answer to that is very simple. When the Masons of California and the Hawaiian Islands provide the money. The process can be long or short. It is easily within your power to make it short.”

Under the “one day’s wages” theme, 123,890 members joined the “merit roll” of donors by the building’s opening. Some 457 lodges also received “merit

pouring corn, oil, and wine onto the ground. San Francisco mayor Elmer Robinson, a fellow Mason, declared the occasion “another great day in the history of San Francisco and the history of Masonry in California.”

Construction on the new temple was slow and frequently delayed. Strikes by the carpenters union and in the steel industry caused further slowdowns, and construction was halted on May 9, 1956, when a cave-in buried two workers, killing one. (The other,

Above: The San Francisco Symphony performs in the first concert inside the auditorium on April 19, 1958.

Left: An undated photo shows a car exiting the 500-car parking garage.

The Temple



roll” status. In 1954, those contributions totaled more than \$700,000; in 1957, fundraising topped out at \$1.7 million (about \$18 million today).

Despite the delays, construction did inch along. The cornerstone of the temple was dedicated in October 1956 and the building frame topped out in April 1957. Six months later, the marble cladding on the exterior was in place. Writing in the 1957 *Proceedings*, Grand Master L. Harold Anderson marveled at the sight of the building rounding into shape.

“Hardly a day has passed since construction was started that I have not gone to the top of Nob Hill to watch the workmen at their labors,” he wrote. “I saw it as a mighty steel frame, showing the strength and mighty sinews of California Freemasonry. Then they poured the cement that united the structure into a common mass. And finally, as you will now see it, they adorned the Temple with beauty by applying the white Vermont marble slabs that face the building.... Brethren, a part of that building is mine. And even in its unfinished state it is among my most treasured possessions, because it is not something I have bought, but something I have given. I hope every California Master Mason will be able to look upon the California Masonic Memorial Temple with the same pride and sense of ownership.”

By April 1958, the interior was at last complete. However, the temple was not formally opened until the fall Annual Communication. The official dedication took place on September 29, 1958. Grand Master Leo Anderson presided over the ceremony, which was attended by Masonic dignitaries from 33 states and 11 countries. “This is our new home,” Anderson proclaimed, “a thing of beauty, a living testimonial to the strength and vitality of our great fraternity.” Fittingly, the first Masonic event held in the new temple wasn’t a ritual performance or even lodge business, but rather a meeting to discuss charity: On August 21, 1958, more than 1,200 Bay Area lodge officers gathered in the auditorium to discuss plans for Public Schools Week events that year.

FOR ALL TIME

For nearly 65 years, the California Masonic Memorial Temple has dutifully served the needs of California’s Masons. Its income-producing components, including the parking garage, the exhibition hall, and the auditorium, have helped sustain the Grand Lodge, and revenues generated through them have supported the California Masonic Foundation. They’ve



Above: A circa 1960s trade show inside the exhibition hall.

Right: In this undated photo, the Girl Scouts of America hold their annual convention inside the auditorium.

Below: Chronicle columnist Herb Caen and actress Ruth Roman pose at the 1965 International Film Festival in the temple auditorium.



Below: Bank of America holds its corporate meeting inside the auditorium.

Bottom: One of the many auto shows hosted inside the exhibition hall.



also made the temple a central component of San Francisco’s cultural life. The Masonic auditorium has hosted thousands of concerts by the likes of Barbra Streisand, Bob Dylan, Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles, Frank Sinatra, and many others. In 2010, the national concert promoter Live Nation took over management of the facility, and in 2014 it upgraded the auditorium, enlarging it to a capacity of 3,300.

The exterior of the building remains nearly unchanged, although in 1996 the Grand Lodge renovated meeting spaces on the exhibition level and relocated the library and museum there, at the corner of Taylor and California streets. In 2008, the library was moved back to the mezzanine level, and the vacated space was renamed the California Room.

The most significant change to the building’s interior came in 2019, when a different portion of the exhibition hall space was remodeled to include an intimate Masonic lodge room called Freemasons’ Hall, as well as an adjoining library, lounge, dining area, and bar. (For more, see page 28.) Today, eight different Masonic groups rent the space for their monthly meetings, including some that are not affiliated with the Grand Lodge of California. Now, for the first time since 1958, Masons have a place to practice the ritual, raise fellow Masons, and meet as brothers within the home of California Freemasonry.

The opening of Freemasons’ Hall may represent the building’s most consequential physical transformation to date, but it isn’t the only way in which the temple has evolved. This year, as part of the fraternity’s latest five-year operating plan, there’s a new emphasis

on utilizing the temple to tell the story of California Freemasonry to the public. That means activating communal spaces, including the entrance porch, the endomosaic window, and the California Street exterior, with signage and digital access that allows curious passers-by and onlookers to learn more about the building’s history, its uses, and its meaning. Other programming is being developed that

will allow the fraternity to tap into its most visible—and important—asset to help usher a new generation into the centuries-old tradition.

The California Masonic Memorial Temple stands as a testimony to the foresight of its builders. Over time, the public-facing elements of the temple have allowed it to thrive even as membership in the fraternity nationwide has declined by 75

percent. Now there’s evidence that the decades-long drop in membership is bottoming out, and that interest among millennials might reverse the trend. If so, the California Masonic Memorial Temple remains firmly rooted in place, ready to serve the needs of the fraternity—and the community—for years to come.

Writing about his hopes for the yet-to-be-built temple in 1953, Ernest Bashor, whose “one day’s labor” call helped fund construction and instilled a sense of shared ownership in the structure, summed up his feelings neatly. “We are now confronted with the desire and deep determination that a real monument may be established ... one that will be useful for present-day activities, and one that will stand the ravages of time and forever be for our children and our children’s children a commanding landmark, and an inspiration to all Masons and the public at large.” ♦

The California Masonic Memorial Temple remains firmly rooted in place, ready to serve the needs of the fraternity—and the community—for years to come.



MORE CONTENT ONLINE

Learn more about the California Masonic Memorial Temple, including a time-lapse of the building’s construction, at freemason.org/cmmt



WHAT'S
LD IS

NEW AGAIN

The
Temple

Inside Freemasons' Hall, a collision of the past and future of Masonic lodges.

BY LEILANI MARIE LABONG

WHEN ARCHITECT KEVIN HACKETT was approached about creating a new lodge hall to be housed inside the California Masonic Memorial Temple in San Francisco, his design inspiration came from another age and place. In Britain and Europe, lodges for centuries met in small, cramped spaces either inside, above, or sometimes beneath neighborhood bars and taverns—a practice that lasted until the middle of the 20th century, in many cases.

It therefore seemed appropriate that the only space available for the new lodge room in San Francisco was a corner of the windowless exhibition hall directly beneath the Masonic auditorium, a thundering Live Nation music venue. “Once you choose an esoteric route in life, you end up in some really interesting spaces,” jokes Hackett, the co-founder and principal of the San Francisco design studio Síol and a member of **Logos № 871** and **Mission № 169**.

Five years later, the new Freemasons' Hall is the meeting place of no fewer than eight Masonic lodges, including Hackett's Logos № 871. And far from being some dank bar basement, the lodge room is a triumphant blend of rich midcentury aesthetics (clean lines, brass detailing, organic materials) and timeless classicism (marble columns, stepped wooden moldings). But even amid such elevated trappings, the spirit of those bygone gatherings in humble watering holes prevails. To Hackett and others, the result

The interior of the new Freemasons' Hall, inside the California Masonic Memorial Temple, is a blend of midcentury aesthetics and timeless classicism.

Below: Members including designer Kevin Hackett (second from left) celebrate a festive board at Freemasons' Hall. Bottom: The library and lounge area outside the lodge room invite members to stay a while.



points to the next step for lodges in California: small, special, and endlessly meaningful. “When bigger lodges splinter into more intimate groups, that will be the evolution of Freemasonry,” Hackett says. Here, the architect gives a tour of California’s first “urban microlodge.”

SOCIAL STUDY

Inherently cozy owing to its interior location in the building, Freemasons' Hall has a maximum capacity of just 50 people. Accessing the lodge hall requires passing through an adjacent lounge, library, and gathering space, well-appointed with marble columns, channel-tufted velvet sofas, and framed portraits of past grand masters. The **handsome library** is stacked with Masonic texts, and a central hearth is marked by a mounted sculpture of the Masonic handshake.



Above: The Freemasons' Hall lounge area and hearth features a mounted sculpture of shaking hands, recovered from the Grand Lodge temple that burned in the 1906 fire.

Left: Members play cards in the library.

THE BIG G

Hackett's entrée into Masonry came through the fraternity's historic connection to builders like himself. "They talk about [building] symbolically all the time," he says. His lodge design pays homage to that tradition. A **pentagon-shaped altar**, cut from Italian Carrara marble, represents the spiral creation from the golden ratio. Custom brass screens contain **concentric shapes**—a circle, triangle, and square—exemplifying oneness among the soul, spirit, and body. French oak stepped molding, also installed throughout the lodge, references the philosophy "as above, so below," and suggests the duality in engineering between tension and polarity—key in the construction of the pyramids. Even the temple's barrel-vaulted ceiling is a nod to ancient crypts like the Parisian catacombs and Rome's Mithraic temple ruins.

Below: The textural gradient of the wall recalls the transition from rough to smooth stone.



Above: Members pose in front of the eastern "dawn wall." A pentagonal altar, visible at the bottom of the photo, is cut from Italian Carrara marble.

THE DAWN WALL

The theatrically illuminated **sculpture** on the temple's east wall may bring to mind a glowing white moon but in fact reflects the rising sun. Meanwhile, the textural gradient of the marble is a nod to Masons' lifelong work perfecting the rough ashlar to polished stone. Achieving the effect required a range of tools and techniques from Los Angeles stonemason Nathan Hunt, including a hand-point chisel, bush hammer, and sandblaster.

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

The lodge room's location under one of San Francisco's major concert venues posed a challenge to the quiet and contemplative nature of Masonic rituals. Acoustical engineer Charles Salter masterfully decreased the decibels using a combination of strategies, from 24-inch-thick walls with sound-absorbing air gaps to double-layered acoustic Sheetrock. Even the full-height **tufted-leather banquettes** built along the perimeter of the temple contribute to sound-proofing. The result is that a person speaking in hushed tones can be clearly heard by others around the space, their faint echo lending a reverential air to the proceedings. "In rituals, you're repeating words that were said centuries ago and never written down," Hackett explains. "There's a lot of power in the oral tradition of the Freemasons." ✦



MASONIC ASSISTANCE

A Temple on the Hill

IN UNION CITY, THE SIMINOFF MASONIC LODGE HAS A HISTORY GOING BACK GENERATIONS. BY IAN A. STEWART

EVEN FOR A FAMILY whose connection with Masonry goes back generations, one day stands out in the Adamsons' long tenure. It was early 2008, and Larry Adamson was several months into his term as grand master of California. Together with his brother Richard, he'd traveled to the Masonic Homes campus in Union City, where their father, Doc, lived with their mother. That day, Larry Adamson would lead the installation of their dad as the new master of **Siminoff Daylight No. 850**, surrounded by family and hundreds of their closest friends, neighbors, and Masonic brothers.

"My father wasn't a real talkative guy, but that day he looked at me and said, 'Thank you for doing this,'" Larry Adamson recalls. "That was a special moment for me, and probably the most sincere moment I ever had with him."

It wasn't just the familial nature of the moment that made it special, Adamson says. It was also the setting. Before they passed away, Adamson's parents lived at the Masonic Homes for nearly a

dozen years. As a result, the Homes remain deeply important to the family—so much so that Adamson later became chairman of its board, partly out of gratitude for his parents' treatment there. There, in the Siminoff lodge room, which had hosted special Masonic events for more than 100 years, the family was able to celebrate not just a father and his sons, but generations spent in Freemasonry.

A HISTORIC HOME

Bathed in the colored light of its stained-glass windows and surrounded by Masonic antiques and relics going back to the earliest days of the fraternity, the Siminoff lodge room in Union City is one of the most important places in California Masonry—and one where that feeling of tradition is palpable.

The history of the lodge room in Union City goes back almost to the founding of the campus itself. Just four years after the first residents were admitted to the Masonic Widows and Orphans Home in Decoto, as it was originally called (using the earlier

FIFTY-SIX PANELS OF BRIGHTLY COLORED STAINED GLASS WRAP AROUND THE SIMINOFF CENTER AT THE MASONIC HOMES IN UNION CITY.

PHOTO BY MARTIN KLIMEK



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name for Union City), a wealthy Bay Area Freemason named Morris Siminoff presented a gift of \$30,000—more than \$1 million in today's dollars—to erect a Masonic temple on its grounds. Siminoff, a Russian immigrant who'd become a successful textile manufacturer in the Bay Area, was a member of **Fidelity No 120** in San Francisco as well as belonging to each of the chapters of the Scottish Rite. Not much else is known about Siminoff, although at one point he is recorded as having donated a shipment of coats and cloaks for the young orphans who originally lived at the Decoto Home. Tragically, he died suddenly in 1907, at the age of 44, likely a result of injuries suffered falling off a horse during a parade of the Knights Templar in San Francisco.

Siminoff's gift, made alongside his wife, Emma, paid for the construction of a "splendid temple" (as it was described by grand master at the time) of brick and stone. The temple contained the lodge room, an assembly hall, and 16 new rooms for elderly residents. The addition of those rooms allowed the home to convert a former dormitory into its first widows' quarters. (At the time, women and men were housed separately.) The donation also funded the installation of a 350-pipe, electric-powered organ.

The cornerstone for Siminoff Temple was laid on April 22, 1903; six months later, the building was formally dedicated by Grand Master Orrin S. Henderson. More than 3,000 Masons made the trip to the East Bay hills to witness the event. On November 14, **Eucalyptus No 243** of Hayward conferred the first Masonic degree inside the temple; in subsequent months, **Sequoia No 349** of Oakland and **Alameda No 167** of Centerville (now part of Fremont) would use it for third-degree conferrals.

Yet for more than 100 years, no lodge permanently called the temple home. That wasn't the original plan: In the *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge* in 1903, Grand Master Henderson "endorsed and advocated for the many advantages, too numerous to mention, that are to be derived" by forming a lodge at the home. He even went so far as to suggest a name: Preston Lodge, in honor of Past Grand Master Edwin Preston (1895), who had died earlier that year.

"It's really an experience. It's an experience to go and see the history that's there."



EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE ORIGINAL, CIRCA-1903 SIMINOFF TEMPLE IN UNION CITY. THE TEMPLE WAS SHUTTERED IN 1976 AND REBUILT AS THE SIMINOFF CENTER IN 1989.

HENRY W. COIL
LIBRARY AND
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It's unclear why that lodge never came into being, but for more than a century, Siminoff Temple remained a sort of Masonic home away from home, with nearby lodges using it to host special events or degree conferrals, but no group meeting regularly there. By 1976, the temple had fallen into disrepair and was shuttered by state officials for failing to meet earthquake-safety standards.

A NEW LODGE IS BORN

For the next decade, the campus was without a Masonic lodge entirely, culminating in the demolition of the original temple in 1986. That same year, though, an ambitious new construction plan for the Masonic Homes brought the old temple back to life—sort of. As part of a \$16 million development that included the construction of the 120-bed skilled-nursing facility named for benefactor Hugo Lorber, plans included building a new Masonic lodge room, to be housed alongside the campus chapel. Ground was broken on the project in 1987, and the new Siminoff Center, comprising the lodge room, foyer, and chapel, was dedicated by grand lodge officers on May 7, 1989.

The new facility was built from scratch, but designers went to lengths to include elements of the original Siminoff Temple in its design. Bricks from the 1903 temple were salvaged to construct the face of the new building, while the original altar was repurposed and reconditioned. Even the elaborate gas-powered chandelier that had once hung in the temple's entryway was refurbished and made electric. It now hangs above the lodge room.

However, the design flourish that commands the most attention is the expansive set of stained-glass windows. Each of the 56 panels, measuring 4 by 4.5 feet, was fabricated by Judson Studios, the oldest family-run stained-glass maker in the country, and depict Masonic symbols including the square,

plumb, and anchor. In addition to being so near the Masonic Homes' chapel room, the colored windows lend the lodge room a special feeling of reverence.

Despite having a brand-new space available, it wasn't until 2006 that the first seeds of a permanent lodge finally began to flower. That year, a degree team comprised of Masonic Homes residents began meeting and practicing on campus. The team performed for several lodges in the Bay Area, "contributing where we could and sharing our expertise," according to Bobby Joe McCain, one of the original members of the group.

Recognizing an opportunity to make real a dream that at that point had been 103 years in the making, the Grand Lodge in 2006 issued a dispensation to Siminoff Daylight U.D., and on October 6, 2007, the lodge received its formal charter—the day before ground was broken at the neighboring Acacia Creek Retirement Community.

In the 15 years since, the lodge has grown from an initial group of 67 to a lodge of 105 members today, including master Joseph Pritchard, who is also the chief operating officer of the Masonic Homes. The lodge isn't just for residents, either: Just over 40 percent of the members now live off campus. And another dozen members are residents of Acacia Creek who had not previously been Masons—meaning the lodge has more than a few 50-year veterans, as well as several newbies. For many of those members, it's the lodge building itself that inspired their initial curiosity about Freemasonry. Says McCain, "I think we have a very impressive-looking lodge room. It's quite a draw."

McCain points for emphasis to the pair of hand-painted murals by John Dahle Jr., a member of the lodge and Masonic Homes resident who has worked for years as a commercial artist. The murals on the north and south walls depict scenes from the building of King Solomon's temple and feature old west typography, echoing the large mural he painted several years ago in his home lodge, **Nevada No 13**. "They're gorgeous," McCain says of the twin artworks. "They both incorporate a lot of the teachings of Freemasonry. They're more than just a piece of artwork in the building."

To Adamson, who as a member of the Masonic Homes board visits the Siminoff lodge often, the space still holds a special place in his heart. "It's a beautiful complex," he says. "But it's not just that. It's really an experience. It's an experience to go and see the history that's there." ♦



DONOR PROFILE

Mark Pressey

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California Freemason: As chairman of the California Masonic Memorial Temple board, what do you find especially meaningful about the building?

Mark Pressey: Besides being a wonderful building that supports the charitable efforts of the California Masonic Foundation, I love how it also serves as a war memorial. My father served in WWII, and his father became a Mason around the time the CMMT was being built. It was a great honor for him to make a donation and see it get constructed. Whenever I enter the Grand Lodge, I can feel what my grandfather felt then, and it's something I'll never forget.

CFM: What's your favorite thing about the CMMT?

MP: Walking into any lodge, there's this great energy where everyone greets you and you all catch

up. That energy is multiplied a hundredfold when I go to Annual Communication. The building really is a shared experience and a shared history for all of us in the fraternity.

CFM: What can other lodges learn from the CMMT about using their halls to tell the story of Freemasonry to the public?

MP: We hope people see the CMMT and Freemasons' Hall as an example of how to renovate their own lodge space to make them relevant for the next generation. We're adding QR codes around the building, which will link visitors to information about the building as well as about the history of California Freemasonry. We hope this gives lodges some ideas to take home and pursue in their communities.

CFM: Any other favorite memories of the building?

MP: When I was a young parent, I remember pushing my son in a stroller up Taylor Street, the steep hill that leads to the building. My thighs were burning, but I really wanted him to experience coming into Grand Lodge there. ✦ —JUSTIN JAPITANA

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PHOTOGRAPH BY
JR SHEETZ



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