

Bernard Maybeck's Berkeley Masterwork to Get Critical Repairs

The First Church of Christ Scientist, built in 1911, is considered Bernard Maybeck's masterpiece, a seminal work that has remained largely intact for almost a century. Designated a national historic landmark in 1977, it is one of the latest recipients of a Save America's Treasures grant, which will not only help repair a deteriorated and leaking roof, but brace the structure against earthquakes.

The grant program, administered by the National Park Service, will give \$550,000 to the project. Matching funds will be raised by the nonprofit Friends of First Church, which is managing the rehabilitation. The Getty Foundation funded a thorough assessment of the building's condition; full restoration is expected to take \$5.8 million.

Maybeck designed every last detail, from the gilded cast plaster to the paint and furniture. The ornate interior, which critics say creates an atmosphere of "amazement and delight," has suffered considerable water damage. Structural beams have rotted as well, and have to be replaced.

The First Church was an eye-opening innovation in its time. The structure was like no other church in the nation, writes Sally Woodbridge in *Bernard Maybeck: Visionary Architect*. "It fused Gothic elements with

section of the church—will be reinforced.

The structure is only four blocks from the University of California, which houses the Maybeck archives. Architects, scholars, and students from around the world visit every year, as do thousands of visitors. The American Institute



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Left and right: Two views of Maybeck's masterwork, photographed in 1955.

Byzantine massing and Mediterranean pergolas to produce a building so frankly eclectic that only a wizard like Maybeck could have kept it from being visually chaotic." While Maybeck made a nod to the past by using traditional medieval building techniques—which one might expect in a church—he incorporated the latest materials available to architects in 1911. Reinforced concrete, commercial sash windows, and a new cement-asbestos siding called Transite had not been seen in places of worship before. Maybeck pushed the limits of what a church could look like, combining Old World gravity with brilliant colors and homey California craftsman elements. From the street, the shallow-pitched roof lines and the wisteria-covered trellises suggest a domestic sanctuary from the early part of the century. Inside, the plainly religious blends with classical touches, an allusion to the rational principles of Christian Science.

Maybeck's creation was hugely influential, inspiring many architects who followed. The church was an early example of the First Bay Region Style, characterized by a *mélange* of European and western elements.

The seismic strengthening is as essential as the roof work. The church is less than a mile from the Hayward Fault; seismologists believe that Berkeley will eventually experience a major quake. Steel plates and straps will be used to secure parts of the structure. Chimneys will be braced too, and concrete piers—which already support a

of Architects ranked the church among its top three in the United States, alongside Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Chicago and H. H. Richardson's Trinity Church in Boston.

For more information on Save America's Treasures grants, go to www.saveamericastreasures.org or email NPS_treasures@nps.gov.



LEFT AND RIGHT ONLINE ARCHIVE OF CALIFORNIA



LEFT A. R. HROMATKA, RIGHT GEORGE GRANT, BOTH NPS HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION