

Joseph Worcester and Kindred Souls

First of all, the Swedenborgian Church can be ascribed to Brown only in that his office was formally responsible for it, The church is, in realty, an Arts and Crafts collaboration. As such, it shows another side to Brown's character and personality. An upper-class establishment architect, accustomed to major projects, most of them conventional in purpose and traditional in style, Brown was also capable of joining this band of free spirits to produce a building teeming with utopian purpose.

The demi-urge behind the project was the Rev. Joseph Worcester, pastor of the Swedenborgian Church and an architect in his own right whose simplified shingled homes of Russian Hill helped to create an idiom of domestic architecture known today as the Bay Region style. The Boston-born Worcester was at once a Swedenborgian mystic and Telegraph Hill bohemian, a worshipper of nature (as a revelation of the mind of God) and a lover of history, human culture and the art past.

All in all, Worcester stood in delightful contrast to most of Brown's clients from the *haute bourgeoisie*. Under the pastor-architect's guidance, Brown assembled the talented collaborators who in turn produced a building that, like any successful art, was at once a simple thing—yet a score of other things. To sort out the intentions and influences that went into the making of the Lyon Street church is to unravel the skein of avant garde aesthetic consciousness in *fin-de-siecle* San Francisco.

An Underlying Mediterraneanism

Take the matter of Mediterraneanism, the persistent belief that California should take as its aesthetic model the art, architecture, and lifestyles of Southern Europe. The first formal inspiration behind the Swedenborgian Church is from this movement. Returned from Italy, Porter showed Worcester a sketch he had done of a hillside church in the Po Valley near Verona. Worcester wanted this sketch as the basis of design, but with an element of Mission Revival thrown in because the Franciscans had first brought Mediterranean architecture to California—hence, the brick-and-concrete church's general orchestration of arch, grillwork and wall, tower and tiled roof. To complete the link with missions, a cross from Mission San Miguel in Salinas Valley was emplaced in the garden.

Spirit and Nature:

A Garden Parable

Worcester also wanted his church to be a mini-cathedral of Swedenborgianism, suggesting the interpenetrations of spirit and nature, the seen and the unseen. To do this, Brown and his collaborators drew upon that fascination with Japanese and *japanoisierie* that was also characteristic of the *fin-de-siecle*: in this case, the appropriate Shinto tradition of the walled-off garden shrine in which a subtle but deliberate landscaping makes a symbolic statement. Around a serene pool in the center of the garden of the Swedenborgian Church was planted a rich array of trees— cedars of Lebanon,

olive, sequoia, elm, pine, myrtle, hawthorne, maple, plum, crabapple, Irish yew—the whole of it intended as an allegory of the worlds of the Bible, Europe, America, and the Far East (there was also a Japanese vase and gong on the premises) finding confluence and resolution in this one quiet spot, this *hortus conclusus* in San Francisco.

The Interior:

An Arts & Crafts Domesticity

For the interior of the church, Porter designed two circular stained-glass windows—a dove alighting on a fountain, against a background of apple blossoms; St. Christopher carrying a Christ Child across a swollen river—and William Keith painted four murals depicting the subtle changing of the California seasons. In lieu of pews and conventional church appointments, there is an atmosphere of arts and crafts domesticity, to include an off-center fireplace in the rear of the church and 80 handmade maple chairs with seats woven from tule reeds from the Sacramento Delta. Madrone tree trunks with bark left on—selected and cut on the Glenn Ranch in the Santa Cruz Mountains, wrapped in burlap, and shipped up to San Francisco by wagon so as to avoid damage—arch overhead in support of the ceiling, an effect at once Gothic and Californian.

The Madrone arches were the idea of the young Bay Area Architect Bernard Maybeck, the woodcarver's son who would do such wonderful things with wood in the course of his career. After graduation from *L'ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris, Maybeck