

Pacific Heights Architects #2 - George Applegarth

When David Parry first moved into San Francisco in 1979 he had the good fortune to buy a condominium in a seven-unit Pacific Heights building designed by the subject of this month's article - George Applegarth. Not yet working every available hour in real estate, he recalls many an evening spent laying on his living room couch, mesmerized by a beautiful coffered ceiling. Only much later did he come to appreciate the work of Applegarth and to realize, after he had been inside enough Applegarth-designed homes, that including a coffered ceiling in the living room and/or dining room was something of a trademark, or a stamp of quality, employed by this great architect.

George Adrian Applegarth was a Bay Area native, born in Oakland in 1875 and educated at UC Berkeley. His parents were English, as was his uncle George H. Sanders of Wright and Sanders, for whom he worked in the 1890's as a draftsman. At U.C. Berkeley, Applegarth studied under Bernard Maybeck and was encouraged by Maybeck to train in Paris at the renowned *École des Beaux-Arts*. Applegarth was accepted in the *atelier* of prominent French architect Victor Laloux in November 1902. At the time of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, Applegarth was in New York working for architects Barney and Chapman on his graduate project. By his own account, he stowed away on the next transatlantic ship to get back to Paris to collect his diploma, which was awarded in July 1906. Returning to San Francisco he worked first for L. B. Dutton and then in 1907 he formed a partnership with Kenneth MacDonald, Jr. who had also trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. The two collaborated on over 30 commercial buildings and many residences, especially in and around Presidio Terrace, including #3 and #5 in 1908, #27, #30 and #34 all in 1909, and #4, MacDonald's own home, in 1911. In 1909 they also designed the very innovative and charming group of connected homes and apartments (now condominiums) at 1-11 3rd Avenue, which have a hidden walkway connection to the Terrace.



George Applegarth and the house at 2775 Vallejo which he designed as a wedding present for his wife

After the partnership with MacDonald dissolved in 1912, Applegarth went on to design by himself some wonderful homes, apartments and public buildings in San Francisco. His most prominent contributions to San Francisco's architectural heritage were both commissioned by Alma de Bretteville Spreckels. After marrying Adolph Spreckels, son of Claus, the wealthy sugar refiner and newspaper owner, Alma decided to build San Francisco's largest mansion, 2080 Washington at the corner of Octavia. Still known as the Spreckels Mansion, this wonderful limestone-clad view home is now owned by author Danielle Steel.

As a patron of the Arts, Alma also commissioned Applegarth in 1916 to design the California Palace of the Legion of Honor which she and Adolph donated to the City as a European Arts museum. The colonnade is a copy of the *Palais de la Légion d'Honneur* in Paris, a Louis XVI townhouse built in 1786, also now a museum, which is located a short walk along the Left Bank of the Seine from Applegarth's former architectural school. The interior of the California Palace was entirely Applegarth's design, however, and this building became his personal favorite of all of his work.

Applegarth's Beaux-Arts influences of rigid symmetry, perfect proportions, columned entries, and

coffered ceilings can be seen in many of his residential designs, such as 201 Locust and 3730 Washington, both in Presidio Heights and designed in 1915, and the house which is the subject of this month's article, 2775 Vallejo, his own home, designed and built in 1916 as a wedding present for his wife Gwen. At the same time, Applegarth designed 2785 Vallejo, immediately to the west.

2775 Vallejo, in the Italian Renaissance style, is a model of restrained Beaux-Arts elegance. On a 49 ft. wide, steep up-sloping lot, the home has the beautiful coffered ceiling in the living room, enjoys a full Golden Gate view, and has a terraced south garden which gave Applegarth much delight. The original structure had to be enlarged in 1923 by an extension to the east, as the Applegarth family grew.

Applegarth also found time around 1916 to remodel the 1886 Pacific Heights building at 2206-12 Vallejo, known as Schilling Place. Along with two 1920's apartment buildings at 1900 Broadway and 2160 Pacific, Schilling Place and 1-11 3rd Avenue have all since been converted to condominium ownership, a testament to the quality of the buildings and the appeal of the apartments to individual owners.

Ahead of his time, Applegarth began planning in the 1920's for a parking garage under Union Square. That project was subsequently awarded to Timothy Pflueger and completed in 1942. In 1952, he started researching multi-story, self-parking structures and as one of his last major projects in the City, in 1953 he designed the curvilinear Downtown Center Garage (Mason at O'Farrell), another pioneering structure in San Francisco. Fit to the end, Applegarth died at the age of 96 on January 19, 1972 after driving himself to hospital when he became ill.

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