

Pacific Heights Architects #8 - Warren C. Perry



The focus of this series has been Pacific Heights architects and the homes they designed for themselves in the area. The home at 2530 Vallejo designed by Warren Perry for himself and his family is a blend of classical and shingle styles. The author is grateful for material shared by Perry's grandson, architect Thayer Hopkins.

Warren Charles Perry was born May 12, 1884 in Santa Barbara, California, but grew up in Berkeley where his family had moved when he three years old. He graduated from Berkeley High in 1903 and began undergraduate studies in Civil Engineering at U. C. Berkeley. That same year a Department of Architecture had been established, under the direction of John Galen Howard, University Architect and a friend of Warren's father. Perry took a number of classes from Howard and during the summers of 1906 and 1907 worked in Howard's San Francisco office. With Howard's encouragement Perry traveled to Paris in the fall of 1907, with his mother in support, to take the entrance exam to study at the renowned *École des Beaux-Arts*. Passing the exam, he was accepted into the *atelier* of Gaston Redon, a former *Grand Prix de Rome* winner who held the position of *Architect du Louvre*. Perry accumulated enough credits in three years to reach the *Première Classe* and returned to the Bay Area in 1911. He accepted an appointment as a member of the faculty of the Department of Architecture at Berkeley in the fall semester and also joined Howard's architectural business practice at 604 Mission to work on residential and commercial projects. In 1913 Perry passed his State architectural license exam, being awarded license number B783, and established his own practice, first sharing Howard's office at 604 Mission and later moving to 260 California where his office remained until he retired.

When Howard's contract with the University was not renewed in 1927, Perry succeeded him as Chairman of the School of Architecture and two years later was appointed Dean of the School, a position he held until 1950, when he in turn was succeeded by William Wurster. In 1927 Howard's original function as Supervising Architect for campus buildings, which had become a full-time job in itself, was taken over by George Kelham, designer of the old Main Library in San Francisco, which is now being transformed into the Asian Art Museum. Together Perry and Kelham designed the George C. Edwards Track Stadium, which opened in 1932 as the only stadium in the world designed exclusively for track and field events. Substantially renovated in 1998-2000, it now named Goldman Field in honor of the father of the lead donor for this privately funded project.

Perry's teaching responsibilities did not allow a great deal of time for private practice, but in 1922 he designed 2458-60 Green, a house with a minor second unit, and in November of that year bought the lot on which he was to build 2530 Vallejo for himself, his wife Joy, and their daughter Carolyn Joy Perry (born in June 1923). 2530 Vallejo was completed in 1925 and a second child Warren Wilson (Buzz) Perry was born in April 1927.

2530 Vallejo is a blend of the classical and shingle styles. The classical ornament is limited to the pediment over the entry, the keystones in two windows, and the abbreviated cornice. The shingles wrap around the corners of the house and create a uniform skin that is virtually uninterrupted by moldings or ornament, which is the hallmark of the



The shingle-style house on Vallejo Street that Perry designed for himself and his family

shingle style. The overall effect is fairly austere, but the shingles give the house a warm tone that makes the austerity acceptable. Perry's creative interior touches included a hydraulic elevator from the basement to the first floor, capable of carrying a lot of groceries or one small person, which used seven gallons of water to raise the elevator. The outflow was siphoned off to water Perry's rose garden!

Perry's modern exposition of the shingle style can also be seen in two later adjacent houses at 3140 Pacific (1926) and 3150 Pacific (1932), and a remodeled Victorian at 3028 Clay. Other prominent houses in the City designed by Perry are the Italian Renaissance-style corner house at 2585 Pacific (1924), 570 El Camino del Mar in Sea Cliff, designed in 1930 and photographed for the June 1932 California Arts & Architecture magazine, and 165 Terrace Drive in St. Francis Wood, designed in 1936.

Serving alongside the previous subject in this series, Frederick H. Meyer, Perry was a member of the State Board of Architectural Examiners, the licensing authority, for 13 years from 1931 to 1943 and its President for two of them, 1934-35. He also served as Vice-President of the San Francisco Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for two years, 1936-37, and then as its President in 1938. Perry was recognized for his contributions to architectural education and the profession by being made a Fellow of the AIA, the highest honor that institution bestows, in 1947.

Perry retired in 1954 at the age of 70, but kept active and continued to live at 2530 Vallejo until his death in 1980 at the age of 95. Two of his last projects prior to retiring were the remodeling of St. Mary the Virgin Episcopal Church at 2325 Union and the relocation, rotation, and redesign of the Octagon House at 2645 Gough for the Colonial Dames of America.

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