



John Baumann in his  
Twin Peaks studio in the 1970's

*The focus of this series is architects who had an influence over the way Pacific Heights looks today. John Baumann was the only son of a prolific architect, H. C. Baumann, who was featured in article 16 in this series. Like his father, John had a long career designing residential property in San Francisco, retiring only recently. They could both be called upon to provide an appropriate, modern design for a site, quickly and economically. Together they provided a consistent and reliable level of service to the local construction industry for the last 75 years of the 20th century.*

John Edward Patrick Baumann was born in San Francisco on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1920, the son of architect H. C. Baumann and his wife Joan (Essner). When John was born, the family had just moved into their house at 822 Noe, where John grew up, joined by a sister two years his junior, named Joan after their mother.

The Great Depression brought to a close the 1920's apartment building boom in the City, which had been such a productive period for John's father. H. C. Baumann had invested heavily in the construction of the Bellaire Tower at 1101 Green and suffered financially as a result. But the family house on Noe was owned free and clear and H. C. remained busy, accepting more commercial and industrial assignments. John would help his father after school and at weekends as a teenager, becoming an accomplished draftsman and accepting small drawing assignments from builder-clients turned over to him by his father. He recalls providing renderings for the Stoneson Brothers "Thrift Homes" for a fee of \$10 per linear front foot! Behind the façades the floor plans of the houses were the same, or mirror images, but the different, yet consistent appearance from the street made the whole development attractive.

John graduated from Mission High School in 1939 and joined the Bethlehem Steel Company as a draftsman. In August 1942 he joined the Army. His drafting skills were recognized immediately and he was assigned to work on ship conversions for the Army Transportation Service at Fort Mason, San Francisco's main Port of Embarkation, turning older vessels into troop carriers. Further into the war he was transferred to work in New Orleans, outfitting ships to send infantrymen to fight in the Ardennes Offensive (the "Battle of the Bulge").

After five years in the Army, John rejoined his father's office at 251 Kearny Street and gradually developed his own clients. One of them was Oliver Rousseau, for whom his father had also drawn many plans. An example of a building designed by John Baumann and built by Rousseau is 1160 Greenwich, built in 1948 on a Russian Hill cul-de-sac off Hyde Street. Other clients in John's career included developers Grace Perego, Jack Lippman, Angelo Sangiacomo, and the Hayman Bros.



The American Institute of Building Design was founded in 1950 as a non-profit professional organization dedicated to the development, recognition, and enhancement of the profession of building design. John became one of its earliest members and was proud to display the AIBD logo.



**2898 Jackson  
a 14-unit building designed in 1963**

After his father died in 1960, John worked for several years in partnership with licensed structural engineer Edward F. McKeon. In 1963, Baumann & McKeon designed 2898 Jackson Street for builders George Mustin and Ray Finegan, who had bought the property on the northeast corner of Broderick in July of that year. It comprises 14 units, including an owner's penthouse. The building is designed in three tiers, stepping up the hill. Each section is three living levels above parking or storage rooms. The overall building thereby conformed to the new 40 foot height limit which had been put in place in many residential neighborhoods following the outcry over the 1961 construction of the Fontana Towers.

Mustin & Finegan sold the completed building in February 1964 to Ernest O. Bourgeois and Svend A. Markussen, who held it for three years, selling it in February 1967 to investor Joseph B. Oram. Joseph and Louise Oram in turn sold it in July 1975 to the present owners. They have lived in the penthouse unit for over 30 years, commissioning Baumann in 1985 to design a 300 square foot addition to its interior space, at the same time extending the terraces.



**The terrace off the owner's unit at 2898  
Jackson with a view of Twin Peaks.**

A sampling of other Pacific Heights buildings designed by John Baumann includes 2060 Pacific (24 units, 1950), 2250 Buchanan (19 units, 1955), 2899 Jackson (10 units, directly opposite the featured property, 1955), 2420 and 2430 Steiner (each 12 units, 1956), 1889 Broadway (22 units, 1957), 2364 Pacific (8 units, 1958), the condominium building at 2410 Pacific (10 units, 1960), another condominium building (this one with a swimming pool) at 1998 Pacific (18 units, 1964), 2038 Divisadero (12 units, 1964) and 1611 Vallejo (16 units, 1965).

In Cow Hollow John has three designs within a block of each other at 2875 Greenwich (18 units, 1951), 2740 Greenwich (21 units, 1965) and 2812 Greenwich (3 units, 1972). The former Plantation Inn, now Joie de Vivre's Hotel del Sol, at 3100 Webster on the northeast corner of Greenwich, still retains its classic mid-1950's motor lodge layout as originally designed by John Baumann. On Union Street, two mixed-use buildings designed by John are 1945 Union at Charlton Court (18 units, 1964) and 1806 Union (3 units, 1970).

In the Marina John designed many buildings between 1950 and the late 1970's. The corner group at 1665 & 1685 Chestnut (each 24 units) and 3250 Laguna (30 units) dates from 1950-51. 1949 & 1955 Chestnut (each 13 units) were built in 1978. Midway through that time span, in 1963, he designed the condominium building at 1734 Bay (18 units) and another corner group at 1995 Chestnut (24 units) and 3334 & 3344 Chestnut (each 15 units).

Following the 1989 earthquake John provided designs for the replacement buildings at 400 Avila and 2101 Beach (both 18 units), and 190 Cervantes (12 units), all three reconstructed and sold as condominiums, and also 2130 Beach and 1925 Jefferson (each 12 units), which both have recorded condominium maps, but are being retained as apartments by their owners.

Working continuously through the entire second half of the 20th century, John became the favorite architect of many of the builders working in San Francisco and was honored by the Residential Builders Association. He has not kept records of how many houses, flats and apartment buildings he has designed and, until he obtained his State architectural license in January 1986 (number C16739), his name would not appear on the new construction permit for a building. Original plans need to be pulled from the archives of the Department of Public Works to verify his designs. The total number of buildings would easily extend into the thousands, however. A drive around just a few neighborhoods to identify and record some of them is a slow process with frequent stops! In Anza Vista and Laurel Heights many of the flats and apartments were built from his plans.

John designed about 30 buildings on Arguello, between 1967 and 1998, so many that it is known in the local real estate construction industry as “Baumann Boulevard”. The list ranges from number 299 to 777 and that does not include corner buildings at Geary, Balboa and Cabrillo that have addresses on those cross streets! 300 and 306 Arguello, each 24 units built in 1972, are typical examples.



John Baumann receiving his Proclamation from Mayor Willie Brown. Joe O'Donahue of the Residential Builders Association looks over the Mayor's shoulder.

With his son Bruce, John took up the Shaolin Kenpo form of karate in his mid-40's, becoming a black belt in 1978 and advancing to the 3rd degree level in 1992.

As recognition of John's distinguished and productive career, and also of his 80th birthday, Mayor Willie Brown was pleased to sign a proclamation designating June 17, 2000 as John E. Baumann day in San Francisco. Although not accepting any new work today, John remains fit and well, still spending time in his Twin Peaks architectural studio, listening to big band music and enjoying the view over his favorite City.

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