

# URBAN FIELD NOTES

## Six haikus about SF's renegade buildings

An additive archive of cultural landscapes and observations compiled by SPUR members and friends. Send your ideas to Urban Field Notes editor Ruth Keffer at editor@spur.org.

Caseworker: David Prowler

CASE  
STUDY #20

Contextual. Appropriate. Tasteful.  
Harmonious.

Boring.

How much energy is spent making sure that new buildings "fit in"! Sometimes we're better off thanks to this design-by-committee. But what we lose is the surprise of the unexpected, the quirky stuff that makes a city special. I agree with Pablo Picasso: "Ah, good taste! What a dreadful thing. Good taste is the enemy of creativity."

Luckily, some buildings have fallen between the cracks. Buildings that break the rules. They probably wouldn't even get proposed today. Their neighbors would be at the barricades. Planning staff would review and comment, and sponsors would back down.

These are the renegades, the iconoclasts. Here are a few I love:

- That great deco apartment house towering over its Pacific Heights neighbors, way over the height limit.
- How about a glass box right in the middle of historic Chinatown? A gem.
- All over downtown, funky shacks in parking lots, placeholders with personality.
- The SF Mint, looming like a mysterious fortress over the Market Street Safeway. Who would even propose a huge structure in mid-Market?
- Preservationists howled when City Landmark #178, the Women's Building, got muralized.
- On 18th Street, within a row of Victorians: suddenly it's the Bauhaus.

David Prowler is a development and planning consultant in San Francisco ([www.prowler.org](http://www.prowler.org)). He was the Mayor's project manager for Mission Bay and the Ballpark. When he served on the Planning Commission he tried to keep his personal tastes out of his decisions.



### 18th near Valencia.

A city landmark /  
Full body tattoo  
shocking / But  
still a beauty

### 18th near Sanchez. Not like its neighbors / No frills here: refreshing lines / Best, it's for elders

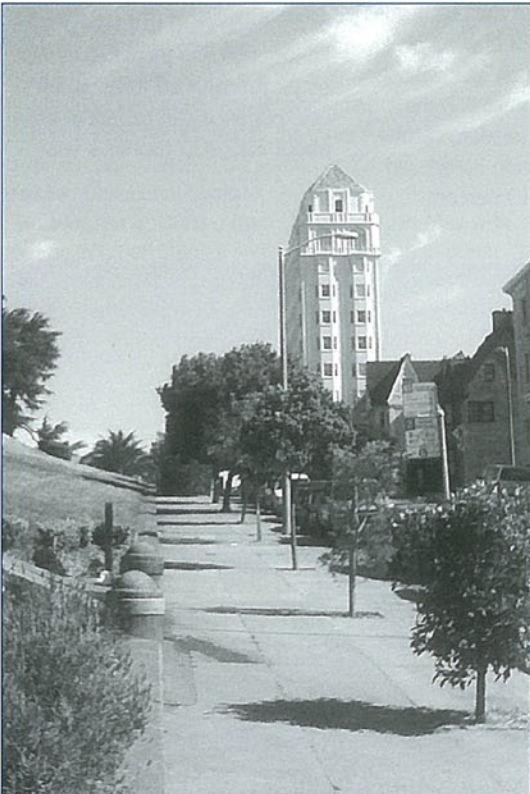


**Duboce at Buchanan.** Above Safeway hill / What could go on inside here? / Some kind of worship?



**All over town.** Modest little shack / But sweet if it kept you dry / On rainy day: roof

**California at Grant.** Clean, modern structure / Facing hokey tourist scene / Honest, light and trim



**Washington at Steiner.** Way over Pac Heights / Red roof, white walls to the sky / Couldn't happen now

