

# The Great Tidepool

**TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA**  
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)



## MORGAN'S MASTERPIECES

One of the many things that I love about Pacific Grove is how it settles so well into its surroundings—Victorian homes rise above misty mornings, bayside trails keep pace with breaking waves, beach bungalows nestle amid the dunes. Nowhere is that more evident than at Asilomar Conference Grounds, where a renowned architect created a magical meeting of style and scenery.



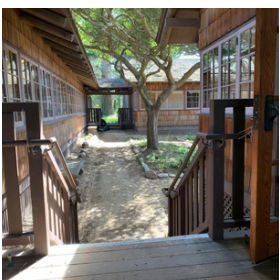
The first woman licensed as an architect in California, the estimable Julia Morgan designed some 700 buildings, including numerous San Francisco landmarks after the 1906 earthquake and a humble little place known as Hearst Castle. But Asilomar, which now features 60 buildings spread over more than 100 acres and draws some 200,000 visitors annually, has been called her “crown jewel.”



Given that Asilomar was largely designed by a woman, named by a woman (a Stanford student named Helen Salisbury), and originally built for women (as a conference center for the YWCA), I invited my mother along for a self-guided walking tour of Julia Morgan’s architecture. So we picked up a pamphlet at the gift shop in Asilomar’s lobby and main hall, where you’ll find several books about Julia Morgan. And I told my mom I was giving her an early Mother’s Day gift—a stroll through the mind of a brilliant and empowered woman.



Between 1913 and 1928, Morgan designed 16 buildings (11 survive and form what Asilomar calls its Historic Core). Phoebe Apperson Hearst Social Hall (named for William Randolph’s mom) was her first. With its redwood walls, exposed ceilings, and large glass windows framing the rolling landscape, it is a fine example of how Morgan’s Arts and Crafts style deferred to the natural backdrop and local building materials. Preservation magazine once concluded, “It would be hard to feel anxious or uncomfortable in this building.”



Our next stop, Crocker Dining Hall, features two fireplaces, which Morgan believed represents the soul of a structure. View determined placement in Morgan’s designs, as in Stop 3, Grace Dodge Chapel Auditorium, where curtains along its western wall can be opened



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to reveal what could pass for a coastal painting. By the time we reached the Visitor's Lodge and the Scripps Lodge-Annex, it was clear why the Historic Core is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Morgan's masterpieces were designed to fit into the landscape, not vice-versa. So Stop 6 on the walking tour (the shingled Stuck-Up Inn—which originally housed college students who called themselves “the Stuck-ups”) wraps around a courtyard created around three coast live oak trees. And Stop 7, Merrill Recreation Center, features a dozen pivot windows offering a view of the dunes and the ocean beyond.



Stop 8 was Pirates' Den, built in 1923 as a dormitory for men, who soon adorned it with everything from a sea chest to a ship's clock. The residents even had a pet parrot and gave themselves names of characters from Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island. Billy Bones. Ben Gunn. Long John Silver.



So the last stop on our architectural outing served as a reminder: A building isn't just a structure. If it awes and inspires and becomes a lasting part of its surroundings, it's a setting for a timeless story.

*The Great  
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