

# ROOM FOR PEOPLE IN A CROWDED CITY<sup>1</sup>

By Brian Fewer

San Francisco, one of the world's most fascinating cities situated on a narrow peninsula bounded by the Pacific Ocean, Golden Gate Straits on the north and San Francisco Bay on the east. The City is anything but flat, having forty-two hills and numerous lesser slopes. The downtown area which I will be talking about is on the bay side of the city and generally the topography is level, the climate is sunny and on most days one will find a breeze blowing in from the bay.

Tremendous changes have taken place in the last ten years throughout this area, dramatically changing San Francisco's skyline. Old buildings of several stories and low sprawling structures have been replaced by modern high rise towers.

A majority of the new structures are owned by the banking industry, insurance companies, oil and utility firms, etc. Density of the buildings has been held to a minimum by City control, allowing for more sunlight, preservation of the views and considerable open space for people.

Changes in other large cities in our country have also been dramatic but for San Francisco to have quantities of new trees and landscaped areas in a downtown that did not provide for such amenities before is very stimulating.

In the past practically all buildings were built up to the property line, using every square foot of this valuable land, also, there was very little vegetation to be seen along the streets.

The design of these new structures has provided welcome setbacks on the property and open areas in the buildings. These areas have been made attractive with landscaping and tree planting, fountains, attractive pavings, benches and floral displays. Also, in very recent years the Department of Public Works has relaxed its standards for the finished surface of the sidewalks. It is now possible to use approved materials such as granite, tile, exposed aggregate, bricks, etc.

Slides graphically show:

## 1. Demolition:

Old low rise decaying and buildings in dis-repair are entirely removed, the land is excavated, pilings and caissons are driven or drilled down to bed rock for support to the new buildings.

## 2. Open Spaces:

Building set backs provide areas conducive to relaxation decorated with plantings in raised containers, perimeter planting of trees including displays of colorful annuals and perennials.

Flowering plants include *Camellias*, *Azaleas*, *Lillium longiflorum* (Easter lily), and annuals and perennials such as primrose, impatiens, begonias, marigolds, viola, chrysanthemum, etc.

Various species of trees are used in the landscape such as *Populus nigra* (Lombardy Poplar), *Pinus radiata* (Monterey pine), *Salix babylonica* (willow), *Eucalyptus polyanthemus* and *E. sideroxylon* and *Platanus acerifolia*.

Sidewalk trees include *Ceratonia siliqua*, *Eucalyptus ficifolia*, *Ficus nitida*, *Pittosporum undulatum*, *Chorisia speciosa*, *Platanus acerifolia*.

Open spaces include park like areas of lawns and trees and extensive expanses of red brick and other surfaces. Sidewalks have been widened and greater set backs of the buildings provide areas for leisure.

Trans America installed a park for the people to enjoy, planted with two dozen *Sequoia sempervirens*, (Coast Redwood), *Prunus blireiana*, (flowering plum), Junipers, including benches and an attractive fountain. Sidewalk trees include *Eucalyptus ficifolia* and *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*.

Union Bank provided marble benches and raised planters planted to *Azalea*, *Begonia*, *Collandula*, *Primrose*, etc. The entrance way is flanked with four *Chorisia speciosa* (meaning beautiful) a tropical tree from Brazil. The sidewalk

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the annual meeting of The International Society of Arboriculture in St. Louis, Missouri in August 1976.

trees are *Ficus nitida* which are protected by iron guards and grates and equipped with lights.

The Pacific Gas and Electric Company included with their new structure raised granite planter beds. The large planters are equipped with drain tile in loose gravel covered with fiber-glass filters. The soil is a sandy loam mix having quantities of organic material in it. The planters are planted to *Ficus*, *Magnolia compbellii*, *Platanus*, etc., and to seasonal flowers, both annual and perennial.

A large wall of water (waterfall) is the main feature at the front entrance of this building (a 14 horse power motor pumps 1200 gallons an hour). The sidewalk trees are *Ceratonia siliqua*. The trees are protected by iron guards and the basin is covered with pre-cast covers.

The sidewalks of Embarcadero # 1 Building are planted to *Platanus acerfolia*, shipped by railroad from Ohio in 36 inch boxes, each tree is watered by an underground irrigation system. The sidewalk tile is from Germany laid in circles and hour glass pattern.

The Ferry Park area was developed by City funds. The sloping lawn areas are planted to a variety of trees including *Pinus radiata*, *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*, *Platanus*, *Poplar*, etc.

Part of this large open space includes the Vallencourt Fountain and an extensive area of red brick paving where the sidewalk vendors can be seen daily.

Several parking lots and championship tennis courts are completely landscaped with gracefully mounded lawn areas, trees and shrubs, which shield the cars plus the courts from view. Numerous trees such as *Pinus radiata*, (Monterey Pine), poplar, Salix, etc. are used in the landscape.

A park in Golden Gateway Development also includes contoured lawns, trees and a tall fountain of stone, the water tumbles down over large square stones.

The World Headquarters of the Bank of America, one of the largest buildings in San Francisco created an extensive area leading to their main entrance having decorative benches and floral displays in containers. The stairs and the landings are constructed of Carmelian granite from South Dakota.

The large abstract sculpture designed by a famous Japanese sculptor, Mr. Naguri, is formed of black Swedish granite weighing 200 tons.

Maintenance of all the plantings of the street trees and the garden areas is handled by a nursery under contract.

Numerous fountains of sizes varying from round tub like forms, small pool types up to very large vent pipe constructions operate gracefully in the parks and in the areas around the buildings.

Art works are used in quantity, some are of stone, others metal and then there are creations in wood.

Market Street sidewalks were widened to 35 feet width paved entirely with red brick and planted with 36 inch boxed London Plane trees, some in double rows. Each tree has a round iron grate, is automatically irrigated and is provided with sub-surface lights.

Granite curbs and granite gutters form an attractive accent to the red brick sidewalks costing \$36.00 per lineal foot each.

The surface improvements along Market Street were financed from a 25 million dollar bond issue passed by the voters several years ago when money was more plentiful.

The new developments are certainly a credit to the respective companies and to the foresight of some City officials. They have made this area of San Francisco a more attractive and better place in which to work and to live.

*Street Landscaping Division  
Department of Public Works  
San Francisco, California*