



SOHO presents  
A Tour of



Historic



Tile in San Diego





*Cover Tile mural on a house in Mission Hills; above California Building Tower in Balboa Park, covered in California China Products Company tile.*

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California was one of the leading producers of decorative art tiles and architectural terra cotta in the United States between 1910 and 1940, with more than 40 companies manufacturing art or commercial tiles within the state. After only a few decades, the once flourishing California tile industry was brought to an end by the Great Depression, the rise of Modernist design, and the widespread preference for utilitarian, white-bodied wall tiles following World War II.

Tiles shaped much of Southern California's architecture and design through the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. California China Products Company (CCPCo), founded by Walter Nordhoff and his son Charles (later the co-author of *Mutiny on the Bounty*) played a pivotal role in the use of decorative tiles in California architecture. Along with partner and mineralogist John H. McKnight, the Nordhoffs formed their company after a study of geological conditions in San Diego County convinced them that conditions were favorable for the manufacturing of fine porcelain and china wares. While their original idea was to create porcelain products, it was their brilliant polychromatic Hispano-Moresque-style *faience* tile that brought them fame.

The introduction of *faience* tile by CCPCo coincided with the emergence of the Spanish Colonial Revival movement. Despite the company's brief six-year lifespan (1911-1917), it made its mark on tile heritage through an important contribution to the revolution of Southern California's architectural landscape. Based in National City, CCPCo was one of the most innovative tile manufacturers in California at that time. Its high gloss glazed tiles, with rich deep colors matched only by their durability and usefulness as an outdoor material, were well received by the commercial market and set the standard for succeeding generations of tile makers.

California China Products may be San Diego's hometown favorite, but most tiles used in private residences came from other companies such as Batchelder, Claycraft, Gladding, McBean, Taylor, D & M, Malibu, and Catalina potteries, among others. Local architects such as Richard Requa, Lillian Rice and Cliff May made great use of them.



Lincoln Hotel, 1913, few examples of fully tiled façades still exist in San Diego.

Using decorative tiles on the interior of homes was a popular expression of artistic taste in late Victorian and Craftsman era architecture. It was during the Spanish Revival period, however, that the use of tile truly exploded in Southern California as architects began to see how tile allowed them to introduce color, pattern and design for ornamentation while surviving the natural elements. The 1915 Expo started the Spanish Colonial Revival movement, but it took a few years for it to actually take hold. By the 1920s and '30s, when many of San Diego's historic neighborhoods such as Loma Portal, Kensington and Talmadge were developed, it was the architectural style of choice.

Along with the Expo's design influence, home decorating magazines, real estate developers and furniture manufacturers made Spanish, Mexican and Moorish themes the most popular style for California homeowners at that time. Considered functional as well as aesthetically pleasing, tiles were used extensively to clad benches, form fountain spouts and basins, and adorn stair risers both indoors and out. Tiles were set into walls around windows and doorways and could be found extensively on interior floors, stairs, entries, kitchens and bathrooms.

In Craftsman-style homes, the fireplace hearth and mantel was most often the area to feature decorative tile work. Historical or nature motifs in matte glazes provided a perfect backdrop for the "heart and hearth" philosophy of the Arts & Crafts movement. In houses of the 1920s and '30s, bathrooms and kitchens exhibited a bold palate of colorful tiles on walls, baseboards, sinks and around bathtubs. In many cases, with the application of elaborate tile, motifs and color, it was the bathroom that became the real showplace of a home.

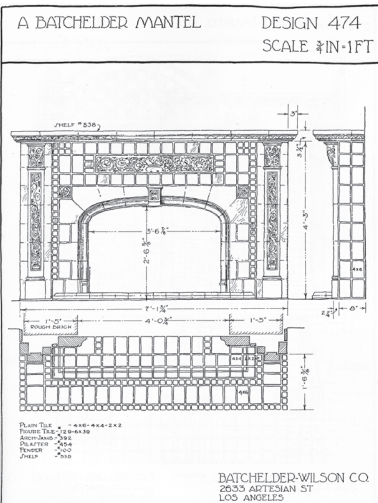
Today, a fireplace covered in original California tile can add thousands of dollars in value to a house. Tile enhances both the aesthetic and monetary value of a historic home. It is something to be treasured and bragged about, not destroyed by unnecessary kitchen and bathroom upgrades where this tragic mistake most commonly occurs. Created to weather constant use and the passing of time, the classic styles, designs and period colors of California-made tile continue to look beautiful and never become dated.

## 1855 & 1863 Altamira Place

### Mission Hills

Located side-by-side in Mission Hills, the two-story Mission Revival style residences 1855 and 1863 Altamira Place were constructed by Richard M.

Hathaway in 1925. The Richard M. & Laura M. Hathaway/Charles T. Leigh House or *La Casa de Las Siete Candelas* is the larger of the two houses and contains more architectural detailing on the interior.



Both homes feature fireplaces produced by the Batchelder-Wilson Company of Los Angeles. 1855 Altamira Place has a modest fireplace with a rich brown-colored “fire frame” and hood set into the plaster wall. The design is very similar but not identical to a fireplace identified as No. 263 in a 1923 edition Batchelder catalog. The feature also includes a tiled hearth and a mantel-like tile shelf built into the wall above the firebox. It is shown here to illustrate the range of styles available from this one company from the simple and basic to the more elaborate.



*La Casa de Las Siete Candelas* features a larger, more ornately tiled fireplace. Identified as *Mantel Design No. 474* in a later Batchelder catalog from 1927, the Italian style fireplace has pilasters and a decorative floral motif. Other examples of Batchelder tile are found elsewhere throughout the house. The entrance to the original music room is adorned with a tile depicting a lute player (No. 566) from Batchelder's American Art Tile series. Warm-red tone pavers and decorative accent tile on the floor of the entry hall



1863 Altamira Place, *La Casa de Las Siete Candelas*.



1855 Altamira Place



are also thought to have been produced by the company.

“The fireplace is a permanent, built-in feature of a room. Rugs, wall coverings, draperies and furniture may be changed from time to time; but the fireplace remains either as a source of perennial satisfaction or as a constant

challenge to one’s sense of appropriateness. If it is thoughtfully chosen it will lend itself gracefully to any reasonable scheme of decoration.” - *Batchelder Tiles: A Catalog of Mantel Designs*. (3rd ed., 1927. Introduction.)

### **2806 Gregory Street, North Park**

This 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival style home features two distinctly different types of interior tile. A stunning Art Deco Claycraft Potteries fireplace provides a focal point in the living room. Identified as Claycraft’s Design No. 3001, the interesting fire frame consists of a combination of decorative arch tiles, mitered arch tiles, rectangular tiles of varying sizes, and diagonal tiles. The Claycraft company is known best for depicting idyllic scenes such as those containing medieval castles, knights and heraldic motifs. This fireplace, however, has a strong geometric character.

Between 1921 and about 1939, Claycraft produced about 500 different design tiles. During the 1920s, the company published at least six catalogs. Located in Los Angeles, Claycraft was driven by father and son Fred and George Robertson, whose family had been in the tile making business for generations.



Fred was the general superintendent of the company while George was the designer. In 1934 the Robertsons left to form Robertson Pottery.

The colorful and lustrous Hermosa tile used liberally in the kitchen and bathroom has an entirely different character than the subtle and sophisticated Claycraft art tile on the fireplace. In the kitchen, yellow with black accent Hermosa tiles cover every counter and backsplash area, as well as the broad shelf in the window above the sink, and the portion of wall behind the stove. In the bathroom, lavender and black Hermosa tile is used in abundance on the countertops, as wainscot, around the fixtures, as well as on the floor. The wainscot features a thin tile band decorated with violets.





## 1263 Myrtle Avenue Marston Hills

This Mission Revival 1922 bungalow has a distinctive exterior featuring a full-length front arcade with repetitive arches, short thick columns, large curving brackets and an attic vent dormer. Throughout the interior and on the back patio, the home is also a showplace of historic tile.

The kitchen and bathroom feature the most eye-catching examples of tile work in the house made by the American Encaustic Tiling Company (A.E.T. Co. Ltd.). In 1919 A.E.T. Co., a New York-based company

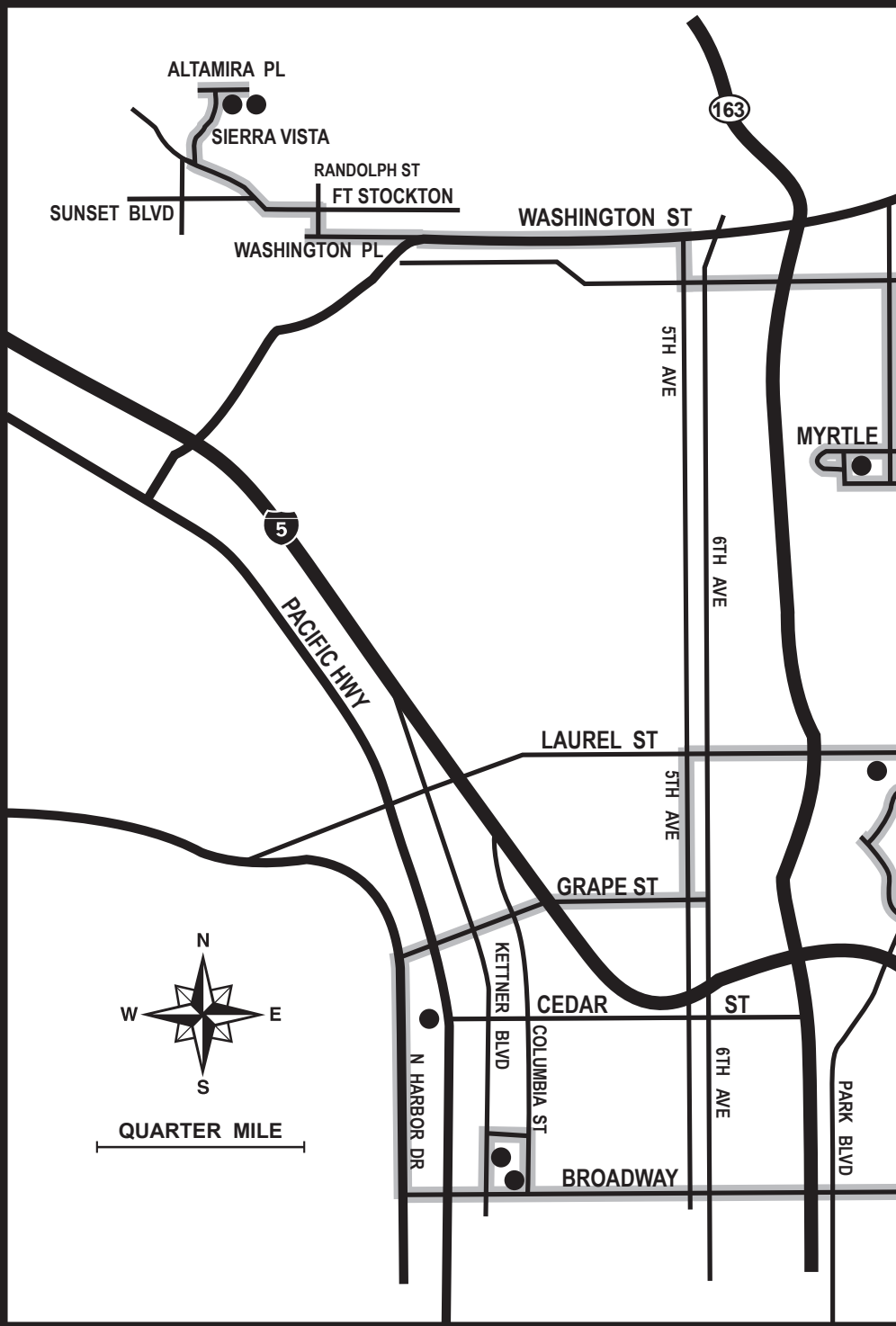
with large manufacturing facilities in the East, had purchased the West Coast Tile Company in Vernon, south of downtown Los Angeles, where it soon began producing *faience* tiles. Two years earlier in 1917 West Coast had bought the equipment, molds and trade name from California China Products when it closed its doors. Hence there is a San Diego connection to these early American Encaustic tiles.

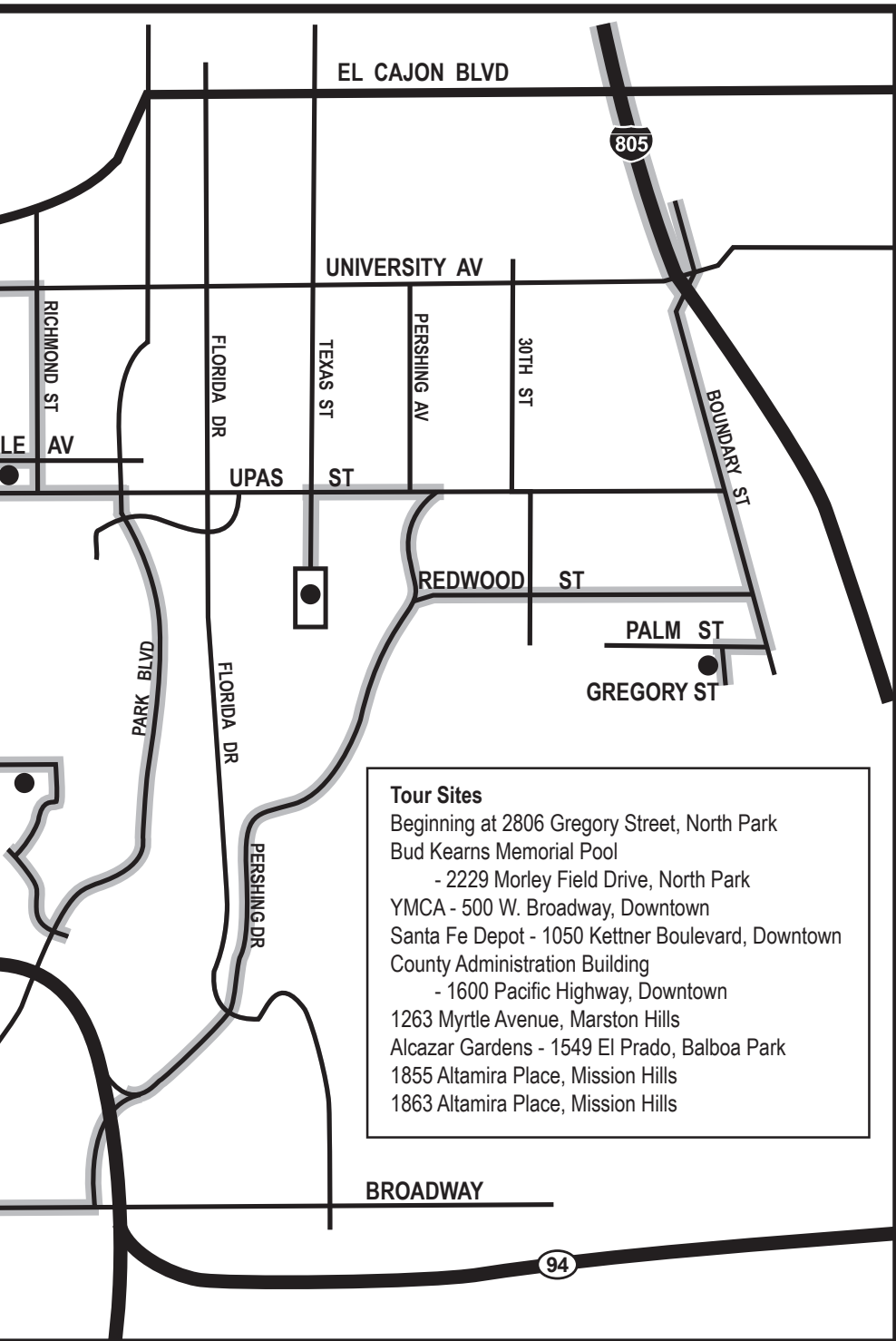
Lustrous and colorful it is used on virtually every surface of these rooms. In the kitchen, pale yellow tiles with blue accent tiles cover countertops, backsplashes, walls and entrances. In the bathroom, pink and turquoise dominates. A turquoise porcelain sink and turquoise tile floor stand out against pink tile countertops and wainscot. Most impressive are the separate arched bathtub and shower stalls. Overall, a great amount of detail is present in the bathroom, which also boasts turquoise tile around the windows, a rose motif band on the wainscot, and porcelain sconces.

Elsewhere, at the rear of the house, the floor of the breakfast room is laid with a mixture of square and rectangular terra cotta tiles with glazed accent tiles.



*Facing page* At 1263 Myrtle Avenue the back patio and pathways throughout the garden are covered entirely in tile both on the floor and on planter boxes; *above* Bathroom shower and tub enclosure at 1263 Myrtle Avenue





**Tour Sites**

- Beginning at 2806 Gregory Street, North Park
- Bud Kearns Memorial Pool
  - 2229 Morley Field Drive, North Park
- YMCA - 500 W. Broadway, Downtown
- Santa Fe Depot - 1050 Kettner Boulevard, Downtown
- County Administration Building
  - 1600 Pacific Highway, Downtown
- 1263 Myrtle Avenue, Marston Hills
- Alcazar Gardens - 1549 El Prado, Balboa Park
- 1855 Altamira Place, Mission Hills
- 1863 Altamira Place, Mission Hills



## California Building & Santa Fe Depot

The exceptional tile work of California China Products adds distinction to two of San Diego's most notable landmarks: the Bertram Goodhue-designed California Building in Balboa Park and the Santa Fe Railway Depot. Of all the structures at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, it was the California Building, with its 180-foot tower and massive sixty-foot high dome with glorious compass rose designs adorned in CCPCo tile, that drew the most attention and would become one of the most beloved and photographed buildings in the park.



In downtown San Diego, the spectacular display of CCPCo's work on the 1914-1915 Santa Fe Railway Depot, designed by the San Francisco-based architectural firm of Bakewell and Brown, is the one of the building's most distinguishing features. Extensive Hispano-Moresque style tile decorates the domed towers on either side of the entry arch, as well as the walls and floor of the impressive waiting room.

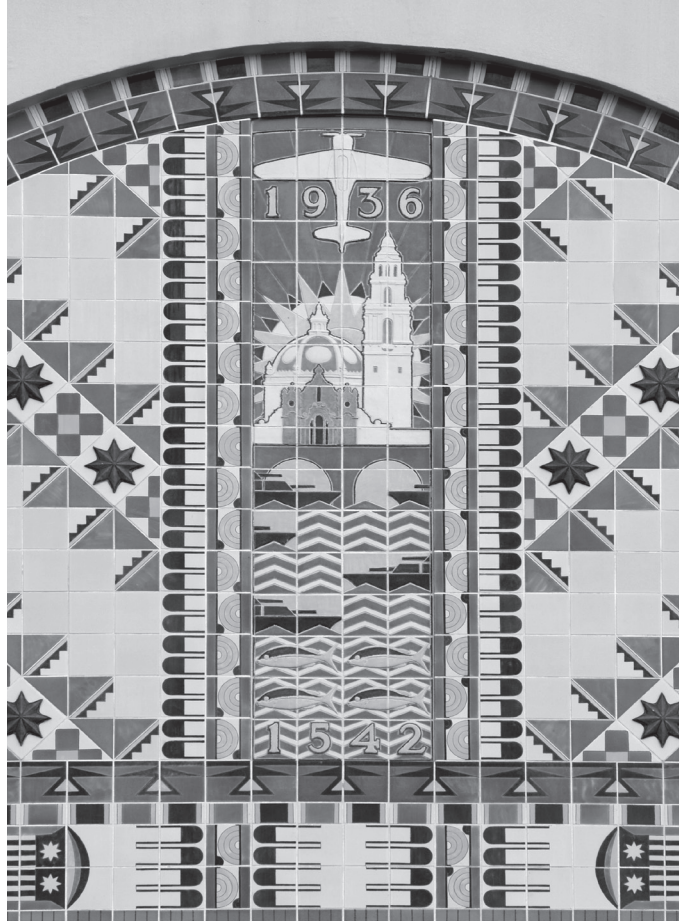


*Facing page top* California Building; *bottom* part of an interior wall at the Santa Fe Depot;  
*above* tiled domes of the Santa Fe Depot

## County Administration Center

Designed by architects Samuel W. Hamill, Louis Gill, Richard Requa, and William Templeton Johnson, the WPA-funded project was civic leader George Marston's last great effort. On July 16, 1938, San Diego's birthday, it was dedicated with great fanfare by the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

George Marston was a proponent of the City Beautiful Movement, which factored greatly into the design of the Civic Center and the selection of its spectacular harbor-front location. Red tile roofs, glazed inlaid pottery tile, and arched door and window openings intentionally reflect the Spanish Colonial Revival style architecture found in Balboa Park, with the added strong influence of classical Beaux Arts. The architecture also incorporates elements of WPA Moderne and ZigZag Moderne. Constructed of poured concrete, the exterior pays tribute to San Diego government with a rich display of architectural detailing and symbolism. Decorative tile thought to be Gladding, McBean from Tropico Potteries adorns the ten-foot tower rising above the entrance, as well as the arches above and surrounding the entry doors and windows.



Images on the tiled central panel above the west entrance symbolize parts of San Diego's history, beginning with the date of its discovery and working upward to a fish, a naval vessel, the California tower, and an airplane inlaid with the date of construction.



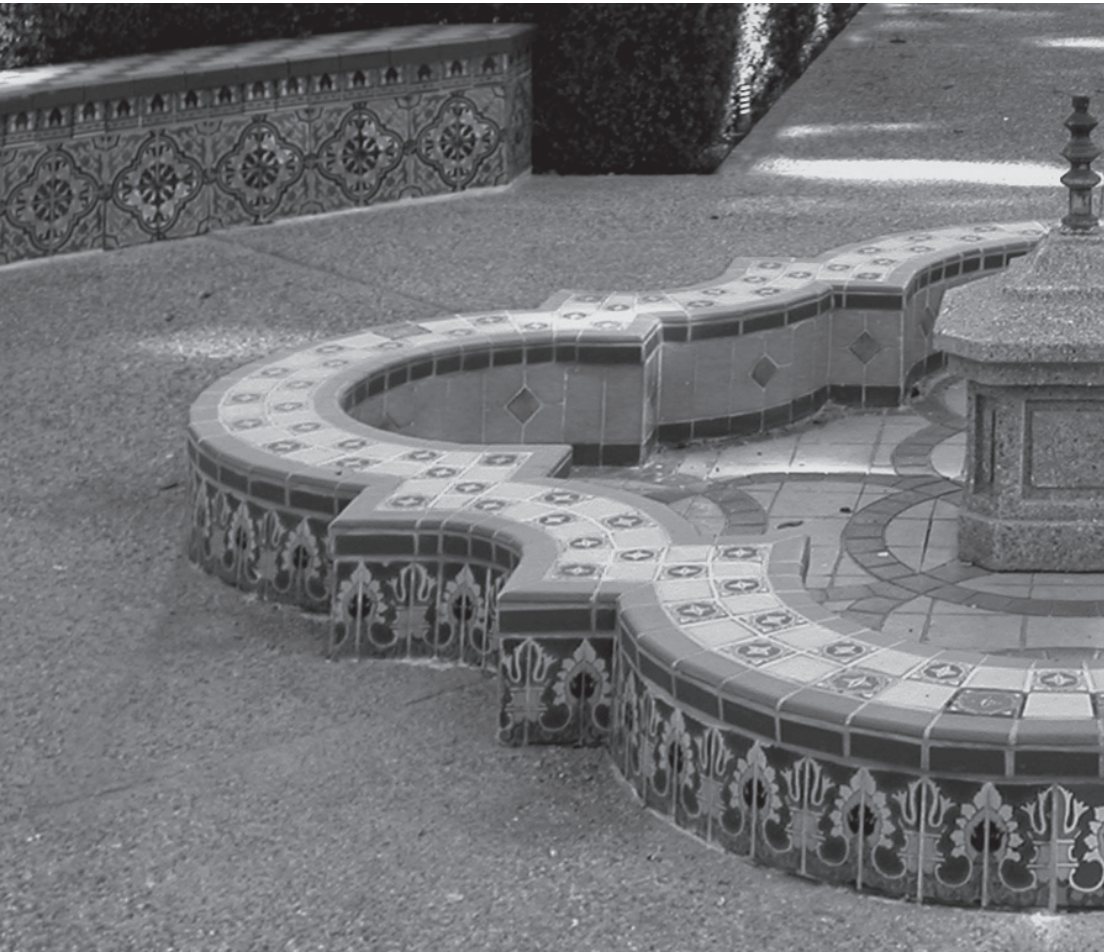


Welcoming visitors to this stunning example of public architecture is Donal Hord's highly symbolic Guardian of Water. Mosaic tile covers the base of the fountain to depict clouds in the form of kneeling nudes pouring water from jars over a dam and into a citrus orchard.

## Alcazar Garden

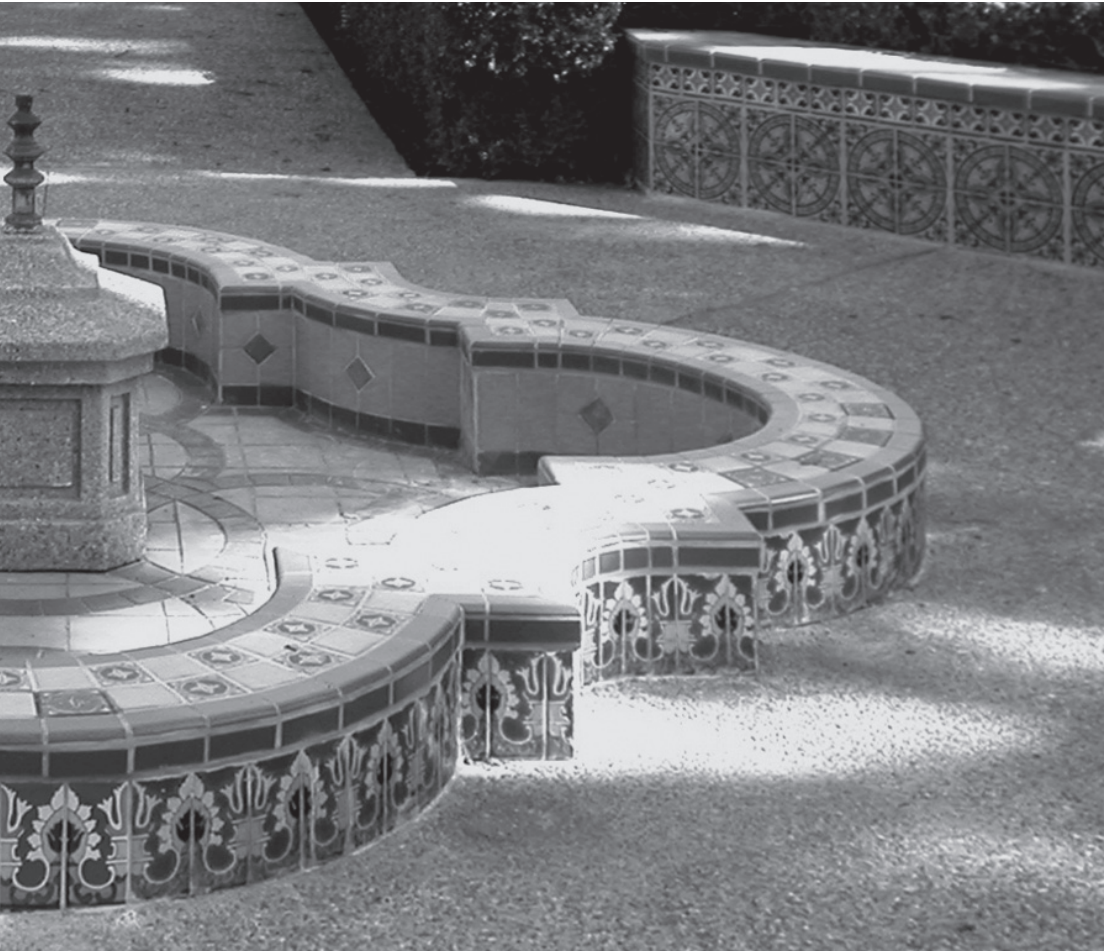
Often ablaze with beautiful blooms, the Alcazar Garden is located between the San Diego Museum of Man and the Mingei Museum in Balboa Park. The Garden has a formal plan defined by walkways, low clipped hedges, flower beds, two tile fountains, eight tile benches and a pergola.

Richard Requa designed the Alcazar Garden for the California Pacific International Exposition in 1935. Originally created as the Montezuma Garden for the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition, the name was changed to reflect the new design, which was based on the gardens of the Alcazar in Seville, Spain. The shape of the fountains mimic the



original Spanish-Moorish fountains, but the tile patterns are said to have come from American tile catalogs.

The tile fountains and benches showed increasing deterioration beginning about 2004, after an inadequate restoration attempt in the late 1990s. The Committee of One Hundred took on this important restoration in 2005; reproduction of tiles began in 2007 and restoration began in January, 2008. An Alcazar Garden Tile Maintenance Fund has been established and extra tiles have been made for future repairs. Contributions to the fund can be made at [www.c100.org/alcazar.htm](http://www.c100.org/alcazar.htm)





### **Armed Services YMCA**

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the downtown 1924 Armed Services YMCA building was designed by master architect Lincoln Rogers and Frank W. Stevenson to serve the off-duty needs of military personnel, providing religious services and recreational activities such as swimming, boxing, wrestling and weightlifting, plus showers, lockers to store personal possessions, dormitories and other amenities.

The Italian Renaissance Revival style building has a symmetrical façade an elaborate arched entryway supported by classic Ionic columns. The flat roof features ceramic tiles and overhanging eaves supported by decorative



brackets. Other exterior elements include ornamental terra cotta and stucco exterior with quoins, crossette framed arched windows in flanking bays, and classical balconies. On the interior, colorful tile work by Solon & Schemmel adorns the refurbished lobby and basement swimming



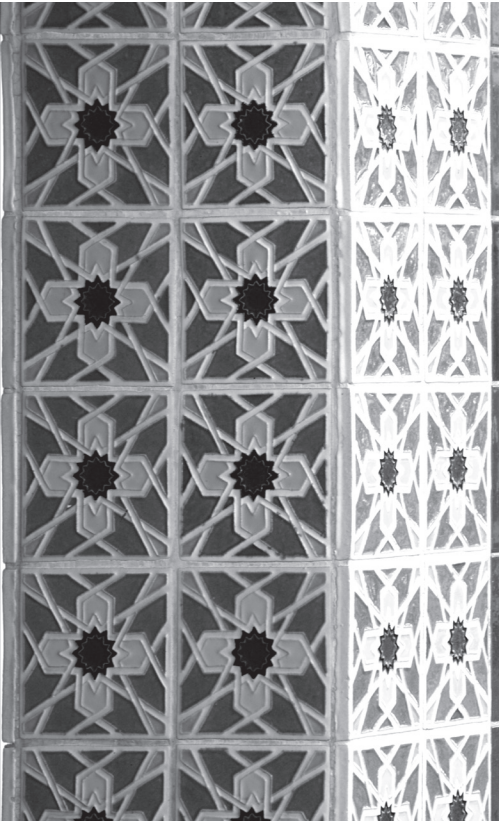
pool. Remaining features on the ground level include terrazzo floors, wall tiles, and a fireplace adorned with decorative brickwork.

Founded in San Jose in 1920, the Solon & Schemmel (S&S) company provided tile for a number of important building projects in California, including war memorials in Berkeley, theatres in Los Angeles, schools in Oakland and San Francisco, YMCA buildings in Hawaii and San Diego, and Hearst Castle in San Simeon. S&S dominated the high-end tile market in San Francisco and, from fountains to stairs, floors, fireplaces, mantels, archways and walls, each S&S installation was considered a ceramic masterpiece.

### **Bud Kearns Memorial Pool**

A gem of a historic building rarely seen by the public other than neighborhood residents, the recreation center had been planned by park superintendent John Morley since 1914. In that year, Morley had set aside

the northeast corner of the park for major outdoor recreation grounds. Supported by public desire to provide relief work for the growing number of unemployed families in San Diego, Morley's project was after many years finally funded by the City Council. The public dedication was held on New Year's Day 1933. Spectacularly colorful and richly glazed tile covers the arched doorways leading to and from the lobby and pool area. The tile maker is identified as Calco Tile Manufacturing, pattern no. D6; the decorating technique is referred to as *cuenca*, same as in the Santa Fe Depot, but by a different company. The tiles on the stair risers on the interior were made at Tudor Potteries in Los Angeles.





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