



## 'Moonrise Sculptures' on new San Francisco plaza

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By John King

Heads up, literally: A new plaza is premiering in downtown San Francisco with artwork that is anything but corporate and slick.

The location is the open space alongside 555 Mission, a 34-story office tower developed by Tishman Speyer. The nearly complete high-rise is slick green glass, but the artwork is something else: "Moonrise Sculptures: March, October, and December" by Ugo Rondinone, an enormous trio of mottled aluminum heads that are like goofy cousins to Edvard Munch's "The Scream."

The plaza was fenced Monday but supposedly will open this week, with an austere but inviting design by Hargreaves Associates that includes black granite benches, a tight cluster of ginkgo trees and a wall lined with planter boxes that eventually should form a tall green cliff.

The new plaza is close to two other spaces created in response to the city's open-space requirement for commercial development: the glassed-in hall of 101 Second St. and the bamboo-lined oasis at 560 Mission. Quite a change from decades past when this was South of the Slot, and, as all good San Franciscans knew, *waaay* off the map.

**Stirring the Presidio pot:** If you wanted to see what the big museum proposed for the Presidio would look like if it were moved to a different location, you'll soon get the chance - courtesy of some of San Francisco's most creative architects.

True, Gap founder Donald Fisher still is intent on building a 100,000-square-foot contemporary art museum next to the parade ground at the heart of the Army base turned national park. He's still working with New York's Gluckman Mayner Architects and local firm WRNS Studio, waiting for the Presidio Trust to sign off on the plan.

But in a sign of the controversy stirred by Fisher's offer, the 3A Gallery in *très* cool South Park has invited 10 local architects to present their own ideas for where the collection should be housed.

The ripped-from-the-headlines exhibition is the brainchild of architect Mark Horton, who operates the 3A Gallery in space within his office. Rather than ruffle feathers, there's a practical goal: to tone down the acrimony of a debate that often seems to have more to do with long-held grudges than site-specific complaints.

"The purpose of this process definitely is not to provide actual designs or alternate architects ... (but) to provide a rational and considered discussion of the site selection for the museum within the constraints of the Presidio," Horton wrote in his letter announcing the exhibition.

Besides Horton, architects on board include Leddy Maytum Stacy, Anne Fougeron and Kuth/Ranieri Architects; given the rushed timeframe, we'll see raw concepts rather than polished visions. Some participants might even agree with Fisher that the best place for a large museum is on a site between 1890s barracks and the spot where the Spanish army established a base in 1776.

The exhibition opens Nov. 20 and will run during office hours until Dec. 23 at the gallery, 101 South Park. There also will be a panel discussion on the topic at 7 p.m. Dec. 11, with yours truly as moderator.

**No Soma Grand:** Just in time for the holidays - though it's much too large to place in any stocking - Phaidon Press has published another "It List" of contemporary buildings.

And once again, Northern California barely rates a mention.

With anywhere from a half page to two pages devoted to each of 1,037 buildings completed since 2000, "The Phaidon Atlas of 21st Century World Architecture" (Phaidon; 800 pages; \$195) squeezes in just three San Francisco buildings: the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, the San Francisco Federal Building and a sliver-thin apartment building on Natoma Street designed by Stanley Saitowitz. As for the rest of our region - and every other square mile between Portland and Los Angeles - the map is a blank.

Except for a \$195 price tag that's as hefty as the 20-pound book, the Atlas is an irresistible guide to what's new where. A few observations gleaned from the broadsheet-size pages:

-- Color is in: Whether we're looking at the orange steel walls of the spaceship-like Theatre Agora in the Netherlands, the weave of five shades of blue and red announcing the Gary Comer Youth Center in Chicago or a red aluminum supermarket in Liebnitz, Austria, bright hues have a hip cachet.

-- Cantilevers are cool. A supermarket has a canopy extending over the parking lot. A beach house in Senegal turns the outdoors into an extra room. The Dutch Embassy in Bangkok is a compact structure under a knife-thin sheet of gray steel. They block the sun and rain; they also put on a show.

-- Materiality is making a comeback. No longer is brick reserved for conservative architects being neighborly: Amsterdam has a pair of triangular apartment towers that are masonry-clad,

and a gym in Parnu, Estonia, has a humble but luscious wrapping of brick threaded by glints of blocked glass.

-- Australia has some seriously cool architecture. And if I ever move to Sydney, look for me in the 150 Apartment by Ian Moore Architects - a pair of seven-story structures with orange tile walls and rubber floors. All it's missing is a cantilever.

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