

2015 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards

Coit Memorial Tower



Coit Memorial Tower attracts 200,000 visitors annually and offers stunning 360-degree views of San Francisco, the Bay, and four surrounding counties. Built in 1933, it was designed in the Art Deco style by noted San Francisco architect Arthur Brown Jr. as a memorial to volunteer firemen. The reinforced concrete tower rises 180 feet above the peak of Telegraph Hill in San Francisco. The Tower was chosen as a pilot project for the Public Works Art Project during the Great Depression, allowing twenty-six of San Francisco's master artists to adorn the interior walls with colorful murals, most of which were frescos. The rehabilitation project combined museum-quality art conservation and preservation architecture within a singular construction project.

The Coit Memorial Tower rehabilitation project was significant for its successful collaboration between two City of San Francisco agencies: the Recreation and Parks Department which maintains and operates Coit Tower, and the Arts Commission which cares for the tower's murals. Both agencies requested a holistic approach to evaluating the building. Architectural Resources Group (ARG) led the design team in assessing the building with a focus on weatherproofing, accessibility, and the effect the building conditions had on the murals. The condition assessment and building code analysis led to exterior and interior repairs including concrete and stucco, roofing, windows, doors, and interior finishes. Interior and exterior lighting was improved, and modifications were

made to signage, handrails, mural barriers, and stairs to improve accessibility while preserving the historic integrity of the original structure.

Due to Coit Memorial Tower's historic significance, upgrades were designed to avoid impact to character-defining features. Materials were repaired rather than replaced whenever possible, and treatments were designed to be compatible with historic fabric and reversible or re-treatable. Occupancy sensors and natural ventilation were added to interior spaces to promote efficient energy use. Original light fixtures were restored, re-lamped, and re-wired to accommodate more energy efficient bulbs. Repairs were sequenced so that roof and envelope repairs were completed prior to initiating conservation treatments to the murals. Conservation treatments to the interior artwork involved stabilizing sections in poor condition, and visually integrating those areas with the surrounding areas. Additionally, the City has worked hard to balance protection of the murals while continuing to ensure the artwork remains accessible to the public. Solutions for bridging this conflict included installing barrier rails to protect mural surfaces and limiting access to the second floor murals by guided tour only. Repairing the exterior envelope, restoring interior finishes, improving accessibility, and conserving the building's treasured murals, ensures the iconic tower's continued existence as an international cultural destination.

Learn more about [Coit Tower and the rehabilitation project](#).