

JAPANTOWN

SPECIAL AREA DESIGN GUIDELINES





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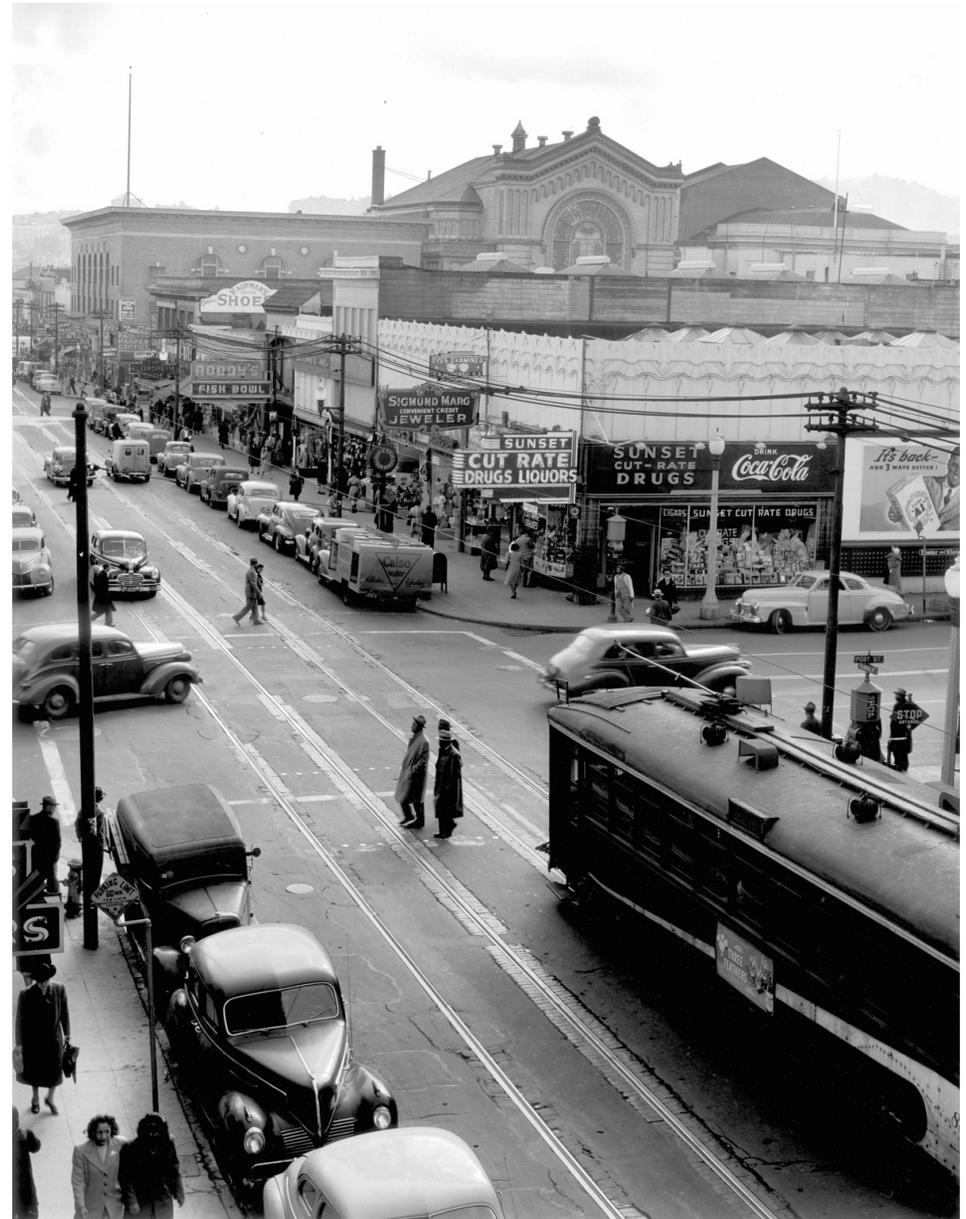
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Post and Fillmore Streets, 1946.

Japantown **Special Area Design Guidelines**

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Japantown History & Context

Japantown is the historical and cultural heart of the Japanese and Japanese American community, a thriving commercial and retail district and a home to residents and community-based institutions.

Japantown's architectural styles and influences span the entire history of the Western Addition, from its beginnings in the 1850s to the present. Following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, displaced Japanese joined many others seeking refuge in the still-standing neighborhood. As the City rebuilt, most refugees left the Western Addition, but the Japanese decided to stay and build a permanent community.

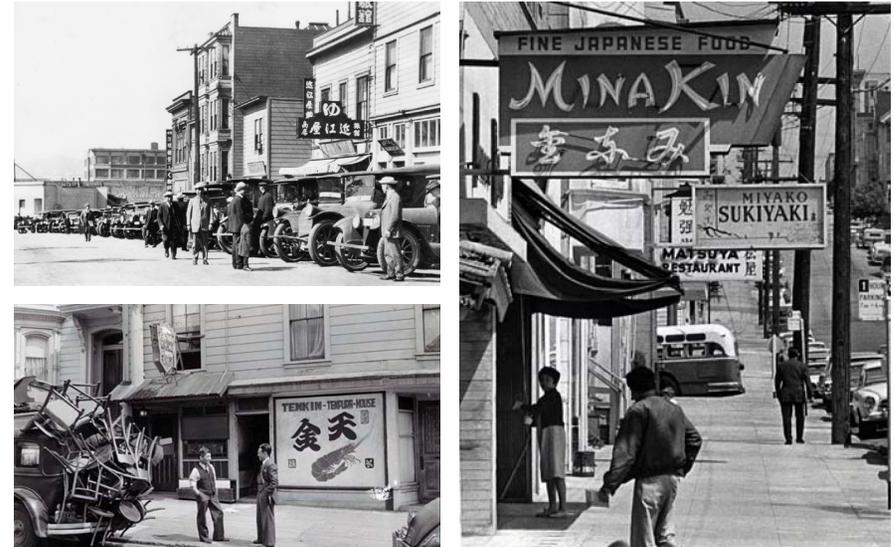
In the Japanese community's first years, most simply occupied the existing, largely Victorian buildings, but a few individuals and organizations were able to purchase real property before the enactment of the State's first Alien Land Law in 1913. By the 1920s, community organizations such as Kinmon Gakuen Japanese language school, began constructing their own buildings. Whether out of frugality or the desire to avoid racial hostility, most buildings, including the Japanese YWCA (1932) and the Buddhist Church of San Francisco (1937), looked more Western than Japanese. Notable exceptions, however, are Morningstar School (1929-1930) at Octavia and Pine Streets and Xavier Roman Catholic Mission (1935).

By 1940, the Western Addition's Japanese American community extended from Steiner to Gough, and California to O'Farrell. In 1942, however, San Francisco's 5,280 Japanese and Japanese Americans were forced from their homes by the wartime internment of the entire West Coast Japanese American population. Japanese Americans beginning to return to San Francisco in 1945 set to work rebuilding their Japantown neighborhood. Only a decade later, however, their world was again pulled apart as Redevelopment, the local Urban Renewal process, having declared the Western Addition "blighted," began the process of remaking the neighborhood.

In 1956, Redevelopment Phase A-1 began the wholesale eviction of residents and businesses and the flattening of entire blocks of buildings on and south of Post Street. By the mid-1960s, the devastation of the once vibrant neighborhood sent shock waves through former residents and beyond. The Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans) property

owners and merchants seeking to maintain Japantown were joined by the Sansei (the third generation) who began working with African American activists to bring the organizing tactics and lessons of the Civil Rights movement to their neighborhood fight. For Japantown, this empowerment led to the birth of new community-serving organizations, an organized effort to protect their physical community base and a willingness to resist the forces pushing people of color out of the Western Addition.

Although A-1 was largely carried out on Redevelopment Agency terms, community resistance led to the creation of the ILWU's St. Francis Square Cooperative Apartments, with landscaping by Lawrence Halprin, which became a model of multi-ethnic cooperative development, and of the Japan Cultural and Trade Center, which reflected the rise of Japan as an economic and manufacturing world power. The A-1 protests also had a marked effect on the A-2, north of Post. Redevelopment buildings of the 1970s–1980s, such as Buchanan Mall, the JCCCNC, Nichi Bei Kai, JACL, Konko Church and Soto Zen Sokoji Temple, all proudly expressing traditional Japanese architectural influences. Redevelopment's devastation also gave rise to a new movement within the City – historical and architectural preservationists, responding to the loss of thousands of Victorian structures, became a visible and meaningful force shaping the face of San Francisco.



Historic photos of Japantown: storefronts prior to redevelopment

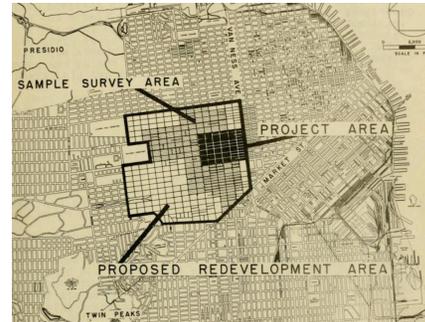
With Redevelopment sunseting in the early 2000s, community-based planning efforts began. From 2000–2001, the 49-member Japantown Preservation, Planning & Development Taskforce began the community planning discussion with their Concepts for a Japantown Community Plan. From 2006–2009, the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (BNP) initiative compiled a trove of data about Japantown, but was ultimately rejected because of its large-scale, high-rise development premise and inadequate community review process. Adopted in 2013, JCHESS built upon BNP's data, but initiated a broader-reaching community review process to create a ground-breaking strategy covering community cultural preservation, land use, transportation, and economic sustainability that became the model for the City's Cultural Heritage Districts program.

The creation of neighborhood design guidelines was one of JCHESS's key preservation recommendations. The JCHESS Organizing Committee and members of its Cultural Heritage and Land Use and Built Form committees began work, including community meetings, on design guideline concepts as early as 2011. Preparation of the design guidelines continued in 2013–2014 during and after JCHESS's adoption. In 2019, with the completion of San Francisco's foundational Urban Design Guidelines, completion of Japantown's Design guidelines was revived.

Complexity of Authenticity

San Francisco's Japantown's physical fabric expresses its layered and complex history of land ownership and control, interior choices and exterior impositions, cultural influences and experiences. When discussing the nature of how it expresses "Japanese" qualities or even "Japantown" characteristics, there are a variety of voices that participate and no singular interpretation or definition prevails. Some voices identify framed structures as reminiscent of Japanese villages of a certain era or storefronts as familiar in Kyoto, but note that these are sometimes expressed as nostalgic but not necessarily "authentic" to Japantown-- a place also deeply rooted in an American experience.

Any new development that proposes a site in Japantown should recognize that the existing fabric is full of variation, and that that is natural to the context for many people in the community. Some buildings in the context may not seem "Japanese" at all-- Victorian houses for examples-- but are still described as essential to the Japantown experience or that others may have exaggerated elements found in traditional Japanese architecture-- decorative



Historic photos of Japantown: mall construction and redevelopment impacts

rooflines for example-- that in the time they were built may have been viewed as authentic or expressed with purpose but may now in the eyes of many residents seem pastiche. One common thread in discussions with community members is that the deeper principles noted in this document are more important than the more superficial matching of style or decoration. Members of the community express the importance of honoring the past and its context but of looking to the future knowing new structures will naturally be more modern.

A final note that this is a neighborhood that has been damaged irreparably by the presumptions of outsiders and that this history is potent and expressed in the built environment as it currently is. These guidelines are intended to articulate a neighborhood voice, but development should be approached with honest questions, sensitivity, and engagement.

Guideline Origin

The Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines began as a recommendation from the Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS) adopted in 2013. JCHESS recommended a proposed strategy to "Create Japantown Design Guidelines." They also support the existing Special Use District under Planning Code Section 249.31 which includes the purpose to: "Encourage the representational expression of Japanese architectural design and aesthetic for commercial, cultural, and institutional uses."

The following Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines were developed in order to encourage culturally relevant architecture in new building and site designs and in renovations and additions to older buildings and sites to support a physically beautiful and socially vibrant neighborhood.

The use of these guidelines is to promote, maintain, and accentuate the authentically expressive qualities of Japanese-inspired designs that contribute to the uniqueness of Japantown. They are intended to help convey the concepts that support and help express the contextual and unique aesthetic and spatial qualities of Japantown. Fundamental goals include:

- » Protect and strengthen the unique qualities and character that make Japantown special.
- » Preserve historically-significant structures and places in Japantown.
- » Support a fine-grained scale of the neighborhood.
- » Enhance pedestrian activity and walkability of Japantown.
- » Promote environmental health and sustainability.

Japantown Design Values

The following were identified as part of the JCHESS and design guidelines process as important community values:

Human-centered Neighborhood design should improve the experience of those who live, visit, and engage in culturally relevant activities in Japantown. It should reflect and support authentic Japanese/Japanese-American culture.

Human-scale Human-scale is an important element to supporting Japantown as a neighborhood commercial and transit area. Projects should maintain Japantown's existing and historic human scale, particularly along Osaka Way/Buchanan Mall, the North side of Post Street, and Sutter Street. Development should encourage fine-grained scale along the street edge and reinforce diversity of detail and texture.

Community-Building and Identity Neighborhood development should encourage gathering and socialization at diverse scales and enhance a sense of community and facilitate communication among residents and visitors who find Japantown a part of their identity or want to learn about or experience Japanese/ Japanese American culture.

Integration, Harmony, and Sensitivity Projects should cultivate balance, enhance a sense of harmony, and encourage sensitivity and care towards others and the environment.

Flexibility, Diversity and Tolerance Projects should acknowledge Japantown's architectural diversity as a fundamental characteristic of the neighborhood. Provide flexibility to accommodate a variety of built forms that enhance and complement the unique urban qualities and character of Japantown.

Openness and Inclusiveness Development should focus on sustaining and enriching authentic Japanese/Japanese American culture through best practices and innovation but it and these guidelines are not intended to exclude those who do not descend from Japanese or Japanese-American ancestry. Japantown has and will continue to have a variety of participants who contribute to its richness and diversity and this mix is considered a strength and part of its contribution to the city. These guidelines are not intended to fix the appearance of the neighborhood in present time or past eras.

Uniqueness While there are expressions of Japanese culture across the globe, San Francisco's Japantown is a specific context and history of Japanese ancestry in a California context. The climate, the people, the other cultural influences and the events of the neighborhood create a distinct hybrid of influences that have resulted in its features. These guidelines are intended to enhance these specificities in light of the overall neighborhood goals.

Cultural relevancy Project designers should consider consulting with community members to establish and reinforce culturally-relevant proposals that embody, assert, reflect and/or symbolize – in abstract or explicit ways – Japanese/Japanese American culture and values. Design – in concept and/or expression -- should possess meaning and relevance to Japantown and/or Japanese/Japanese American culture. Beyond architecture, project sponsors should consider integrating culturally authentic decorative elements, including standards for signage, banners, art, sculpture and other expressions of Japanese/Japanese American identity. This is a complex question and should be done with guidance.

Transparency and Permeability Where appropriate, projects should introduce and enhance opportunities for exposing cultural activities, goods, and services through transparency or culturally-relevant ideas of transparency such as screens. Renovations should open up existing monolithic developments to the street to increase porosity and permeability in existing projects. On the exterior, projects should integrate open space with built form.

Continuity Between Old and New Physical antiquity has not come as a crucial value for aesthetic and monumental appreciation in Japanese tradition, which might be due to frequent occurrence of natural disasters. Some preserved examples are not attributed to preference toward material permanency, but can be seen as results of intergenerational communication in succeeding a culture to next generations to come. For example, Ise Grand Shrine is not about preservation of a tangible object, but is rather about preservation of memory and wisdom that all come as a form of ritual. This is an important context to have when working on existing historic resource buildings or building on their adjacent properties.

Sustainability Projects should foster sustainable development that encourages resiliency in natural and human-built systems. Designers should use architectural and landscape materials that are climate appropriate, reduce waste, and employ building systems that reduce energy and water use.

Use of Design Concepts

Japanese art, architecture, and design cultures are recognized not only for the environments, objects, and cultural expressions within its communities inside and outside of Japan, but it for its significant contribution to these disciplines more broadly across the world. As many professionals from outside of the community may be familiar with Japanese design concepts, they may be particularly compelled-- with good intention-- to exhibit or appropriate them within their efforts. When approaching projects in Japantown, first investigate what aspects or concepts from this history may be relevant in guiding new projects.

Like any set of cultural qualities, Japanese/Japantown concepts evolve over time and are affected by changing history and generational experiences. While deeper level historic concepts may guide an approach to new projects, they are only meaningful if used in the appropriate circumstances and without superficial aesthetic expressions; note that they will also have shades of meaning to different aspects of the local community. Here are some examples of concepts that came forward during the community process:

Craftsmanship The Japanese term *shokunin* lacks a literal translation in English but refers to an artisan with a higher level of passion or social consciousness. As *shokunin*, one practices his/her expertise, with pride and precision, using the best quality raw materials, to produce something of the highest craft. While the effort is completed as an individual social and spiritual obligation, the resulting purpose and ultimate product is seen as a contribution to the community as a whole.



Attention to craft



Materiality



Connection between inside and outside



Incorporation of natural elements

Simplicity/Materiality The Japanese language provides numerous words that exemplify details of aesthetics and beauty. *Shibui* originated historically as "sour" but has become more closely associated with the concept of being "understated." While it embodies modesty and naturalness, it also includes a balance of detailed complexity within simplicity-- for example the repetitive texture of slats along a wall or mottled surface on a bowl.

Sustainability Japan's ethos to be in harmony with nature, not to dominate it, makes environmental stewardship an innate value. The Japanese term *mottainai* – while having multiple meanings – is also a common refrain used to decry wastefulness or the irresponsible use of resources that has more recently been used as a slogan to promote reuse and recycling. Opportunities to exceed local benchmarks for sustainable design should be explored including strategies for Net-Zero and Net Positive development.

Resiliency Japan's cultural memory is steeped in natural disaster. The relationship between nature and buildings is also about survival in Japan, where earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, and floods have led to robust and innovative building technologies and where the impact of climate change makes ecological resilience an imperative. In addition to life-safety innovations, resiliency can be advanced through design that builds flexibility, adaptability, diversity and some redundancy of systems into Japantown, that involve people and communities in the design process to enhance social resiliency, and that strengthens and diversifies Japantown's economy as a destination and neighborhood.

Racial & Social Equity Assessment

Advancing racial and social equity is a key priority of the City of San Francisco. Whereas government has played an important role in creating and perpetuating inequities through decades of discriminatory policies and practices at all levels, San Francisco's elected officials and City agencies have taken a leading role in addressing present-day inequities.

The San Francisco Planning Department is committed to eliminating structural racial inequities by examining its policies, plans, and programs to understand their equity implications and proactively designing them to ensure that a person's race does not determine life outcomes, statistically or experientially. In drafting the Japantown SADGs, planning staff considered the following questions when drafting new policies, programs, and processes:

What are the intended racial and social equity outcomes of this particular decision or process?

- » To articulate and honor the expressions of Japanese/Japantown cultural heritage and increase its representation in the development of future architecture and landscape in Japantown.

- » Ensure that the guidelines are attainable for business owners and do not contribute to the displacement of existing commercial or residential tenants or owners.
- » Decrease the amount of community resources utilized, primarily measured in time, in reviewing and responding to project proposals.

Who will benefit from or be burdened by the particular decision or process?

The benefits of government policies, programs, and plans have historically been unevenly distributed--generally away from people of color and other historically marginalized groups. As the City seeks to improve equity outcomes for people of color and other vulnerable populations, government action may result in a shift of the distribution of benefits to a larger proportion of its residents and businesses.

The design guidelines promote cultural preservation, celebration and representation, and a sense of community cohesion/belonging that can

contribute to a reduction on the pressures of cultural displacement or erosion from neighborhoods. By promoting cultural preservation, the design guidelines are also retributive in addressing the injustices exacted on Japantown and Japanese Americans during WWII and Redevelopment.

Are there any unintended consequences?

As is often the case with a racial and social equity assessment, the answers for addressing racial and social inequities are complex and cannot be addressed by a single policy, project, or approach.

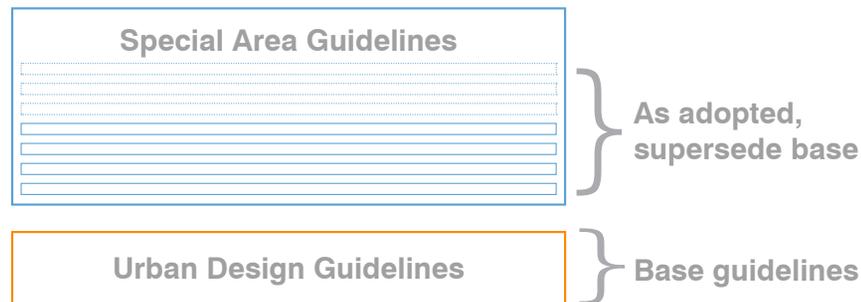
The assessment suggests that the benefits of design guidelines are broadly shared among project applicants, community stakeholders, and the City. Burdens would likely be borne primarily by project applicants, although they have the potential to be significantly offset by the benefits generated. Additionally, most guidelines are specifically written to allow for design flexibility such that their intent can be achieved through multiple methods, and therefore do not necessarily result in burdens for project applicants.

Potential Benefits, Burdens, and Unintended Consequences and Mitigations			
	Description	Stakeholder Impacted	Opportunity to enhance benefit
Benefits <i>The Japantown SADGs should result in...</i>	Clearer expectations from City staff and community during design review, which reduces review time and design costs. This could also address/off-set some of the burdens below.	City staff, project sponsors, community	Consider modifying pre-app meeting application to call attention to these guidelines/how the project addresses them early on in the project.
	Designs that honor the context of Japantown in architecture, landscape, and public space.	City, community	Update guidelines at a future date to demonstrate new examples that continue the guidelines' relevancy.
	Active ground floor character which reinforces pedestrian patronage and business vitality.	City, community	
	Description	Stakeholder Impacted	Mitigation
Burdens <i>The Japantown SADGs could result in...</i>	Potentially somewhat higher construction costs due to higher quality materials and design expectations.	Project sponsors	Look for other ways to reduce costs in the project that do not diminish the public expression or benefits within the project such as through streamlined review.
	Minor limitations on design flexibility.	Project sponsors	Better design and neighborhood cohesiveness should enhance property value.
Unintended Consequences <i>The Japantown SADGs could result in...</i>	Potentially somewhat higher housing or retail rents/costs due to slightly higher construction costs due to higher quality materials and design expectations.	Community	Each site should be reviewed individually to evaluate the scale of those potential burdens and minimize them as is possible.

Application of the Guidelines

Guidelines are intended to create a common set of expectations related to design that can be used by neighborhood groups, the public, designers, property owners, developers, planners, and the Planning Commission in the creation or renovation of buildings. They address how building design impacts and supports the character of the existing city fabric; importantly, however, they do not change height limits, control land use or tenancy, or impact growth or transportation policy. Development projects must demonstrate compliance with applicable guidelines to be successfully entitled.

The Japantown SADGs apply to parcels in the Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District zoning, (as shown in on page 11) as well as on parcels under the R zoning within the bounds of the Japantown Cultural District if the proposed project includes non-residential uses or for residential projects that include a frontage of 150 feet or longer or 25 or more housing units.



They are intended to work in concert with the San Francisco Urban Design Guidelines (UDGs), which currently apply to this area. While the UDGs provide a broad level of design guidance that is generally applicable to neighborhood commercial districts throughout San Francisco, the Japantown SADGs provide additional guidance that is specifically tailored to local context. Consistency with both sets of guidelines is mandatory in the design review process. Should application of the respective guidelines conflict, the Japantown SADGs supersede the UDGs. Depending on location, other design guidelines may also be applicable and project applicants should consult with Planning Department staff to confirm.

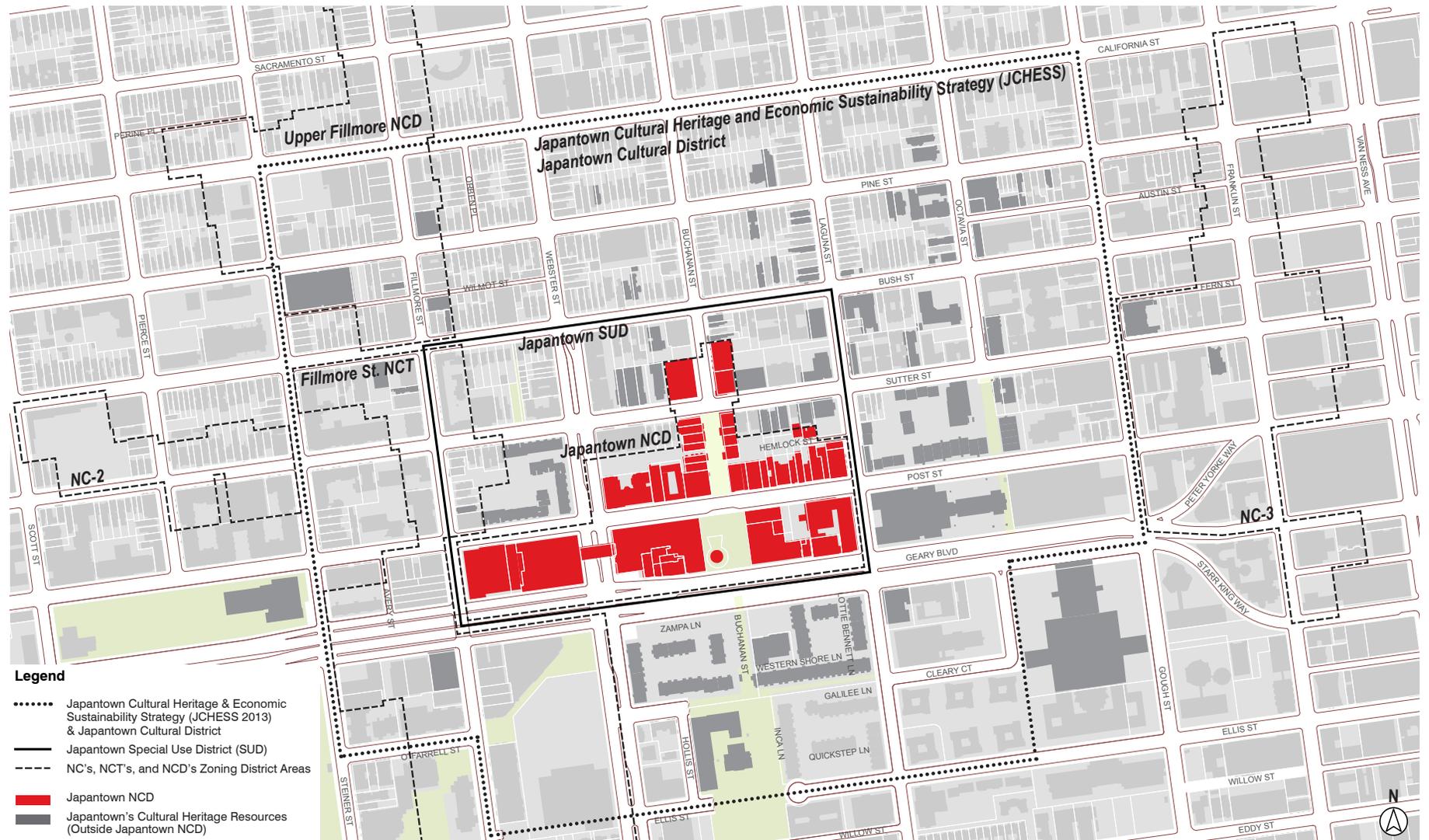
Guideline Structure

Each guideline is described at the top of the page, followed by a sidebar that explains the rationale for the guideline, a range of means by which one might achieve that guideline, and illustrations that further describe its application. The range of means describes important parameters and methods by which a project can meet the guideline, but is not a prescriptive list. Projects may satisfy the guideline by applying one or all of the means or by suggesting something unique to the project that meets the intent. The guidelines are organized to relate and elaborate with more specificity to the relevant guideline in the UDGs. For example, A1.1 of the Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines is related to A1 of the UDGs.

Note that the examples given under each guideline are being shown to exemplify principles of that specific guideline and are not intended to demonstrate compliance with all other guidelines and standards both inside and outside of this document. All examples are found in San Francisco except as noted.

GUIDELINE	RATIONALE	COMMUNITY VOICES	RANGE OF MEANS	EXAMPLE
<p>A3.1 USE NATURAL MATERIALS IN FACADES AND FINISH THEM HONESTLY</p> <p>Craft is a foundational architectural principal in Japanese architecture where generational continuity is based more on handing down technique than physical structures. Natural textures express qualities of time, impermanence, and human-scale.</p>	<p>Stucco and wood are common materials used in Japantown facades at smaller-scales. If they are used at larger scales, they should be designed and dimensioned to work at that size and not just stacked or replicated without intention.</p> <p>Concrete must be designed thoughtfully to include texture, joints, and high-quality components so that it is refined, intentional, and warm in expression rather than haphazard or coarsely detailed.</p> <p>Glass and steel stem closely from natural materials and common in more modern Japanese architecture but they should be used to complement surrounding textures and scales rather than harshly contrast with them.</p> <p>Consider using slender wood slats for screening and shading.</p>	<p>"Use natural materials - but sustainable like bamboo!"</p>	<p>Combine and utilize materials so that they work together as expected: spanning materials should space, panel materials should work in planes, structural materials should hold weight, etc.</p> <p>Material finishes should exemplify their original qualities. Wood should express its fibrous, flexible, and weathering capacity. Stone should have texture and porosity.</p> <p>Consider timber and reclaimed wood, particularly at the ground floor to express structure and textural qualities.</p> <p>Wood siding should be interrupted at intervals and not expand the length of the facade.</p> <p>Large expanses of glass should be used sparingly and highlight the supporting structure as a design element.</p>	 <p>Wood slats help break facades into very fine-grained detailed proportions.</p> <p>Stone should express permanence and texture.</p> <p>Glass is a natural material but should employ its natural characteristics.</p>

Map



Map of Japantown showing the Japantown Special Use District, Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District, and JCHES/Japantown Cultural District.

Glossary

Adjacent

Near, close, or contiguous.

Articulation

The act of giving expression. In architecture, it is the definition of the formal elements of architectural design. Through degrees of articulation, each part is united with the whole in such a way that the joined parts are put together. The articulation of a building reveals how the parts fit into the whole by emphasizing each part separately.

Appropriate

Fitting or suitable to a particular situation, location, or setting.

Cadence

The flow or rhythm of events, especially the pattern in which something is experienced. This is a common design metaphor for how a series of elements (building detail or urban scale) can express a legible and harmonious rhythm that defines itself as a set. (See: *variation*)

Character

Prevailing existing architectural elements, including building mass, scale, and era they were built.

Comfort

To ease the trouble of. This document uses the word comfort to describe the physical ease—temperature, wind pressure, glare, safety, air quality—of the human body in an outdoor place.

Compatible

Able to exist or occur together without conflict.

Complement

Something that goes well with something.

This document uses this term to express how elements can be adjacent and agreeable in scale, proportion, composition, and type but not identical in style or manner.

Context

Setting. The interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs. Context in urban design parlance typically refers to the physical and cultural environment around a specific site or how a proposed building may be described within its surroundings.

When reviewing a project for contextual compatibility, the Department considers a site's context to include buildings and open spaces immediately adjacent to the subject site, the entire block face on which it sits, the facing block from the site, and the overall block pattern ranging in all directions by two or more blocks. The Department also considers the character of special or unique nearby structures, access to or frontage onto civic places and streets, and important nearby public environments such as neighborhood commercial districts.

Districts

Relatively large sections of the city distinguished by some identity or character. (From Kevin Lynch, [Image of the City](#).)

Edges

Perceived boundaries such as walls, buildings, and shorelines. (From Kevin Lynch, [Image of the City](#).)

Fenestration

The arrangement of windows and doors on the elevations of a building. Fenestration is often examined as a pattern.

Glazing

Glass windows, doors, and walls.

Harmonize

To be combined or go together in a pleasing way. Like complement, this document uses this term to describe how elements can visually fit together, or make meaningful relationships without being identical or duplicative.

Historicism

Reference or influence of patterns or approaches of the past. False or cursory historicism is often used to suggest an unwarranted or excessive regard of the importance of past styles.

Human-Scale

The set of physical qualities and quantities of information characterizing the human body, its motor, sensory, or mental capabilities, and human social institutions. This document uses human-scale to set or describe the size of and relationships between elements.

Inflection

A bend or angle. In urban design, a point of inflection is where a consistent block or street pattern changes often where two streets come together at an unusual angle.

Landmarks

Readily identifiable objects which serve as external reference points. (From Kevin Lynch, [Image of the City](#).)

Mass

A quantity or aggregate of matter usually of considerable size. The act of creating an amount of matter. In architecture, mass is used to describe the three-dimensional volume or shape of a building or part of a building or the act of creating it.

Mid-block open space

Public or private site area, often including multiple lots, left as open space in the center of city blocks. This is typically created by an ensemble of many lots that follow a similar pattern, for example, consistent application and compliance with rear yard requirements.

Modulation

A volumetric regulating according to measure or proportion. A three-dimensional modelling and definition of form that repeats, and supports the overall design. Recesses, projections, or other changes in facade planes, along with windows, materials, patterns and colors, and other similarly scaled elements can be used to modulate.

Parti

The chief organizing thought or decision behind an architect's design presented in the form of a basic diagram and/or a simple statement. A parti often explains a building's form, circulation, program, or overall site strategy.

Program

An architectural program or brief is a statement of a client's requirements. A program typically includes a list of uses, adjacencies, and circulation issues of the project.

Proportion

The relationships of the various objects and spaces that make up a structure to one another and to the whole. These relationships are often governed by multiples of a standard unit of length known as a "module."

Reflect

To give back or exhibit as an image, likeness, or outline. This document uses "reflect" to describe how new elements may seem of the same family or extend a series of similar older elements. It is not intended to imply a mirror-like copy.

Relate

Indicate its connections with (something else). For the purposes of this document, one element relates to another if it expresses aspects of the other's geometry, form, circulation, detailing, materiality, or use.

Scale

A proportionate size, extent, or degree, usually judged in relation to some standard point of reference.

Sidewalk

An elevated paved path for pedestrians at the side of a road and often between the roadway and a building. For the purposes of this document, sidewalks do not include private property or vehicular travel lanes.

Solid / Void ratio

A comparison between the amount of openings or windows to the amount of wall on a facade. A facade may have different kinds or numbers of openings than another but its solid/void ratio could be the same.

Streetwall

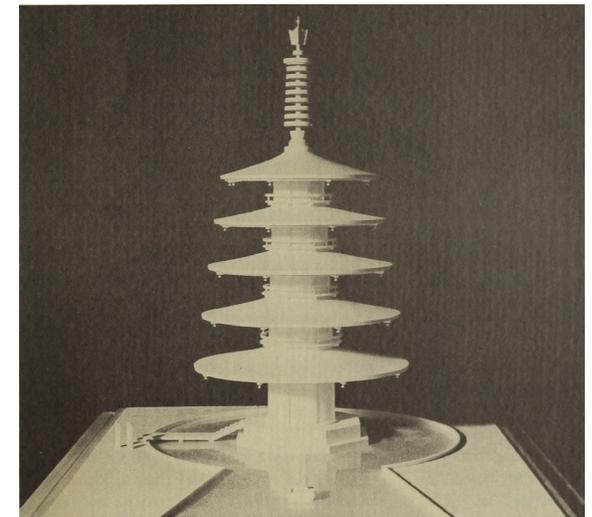
Combined facades of buildings generally built to the property line facing a street or open space. A clear streetwall helps define "the urban room" or the public realm. A consistent streetwall that is visually interesting and active ground floor uses promotes pedestrian activity.

Variation

A change or difference in condition, amount, or level, typically with certain limits. In design, variation describes how adjacent elements can contain different attributes with enough similarity to be recognizable as related. A pattern of variation generally requires the repetition of three or more elements. (See: *cadence*)

Volume

A three-dimensional measure of space that comprises a length, a width, and a height. In architecture, a volume can describe a three-dimensional portion of a building or shaped element.

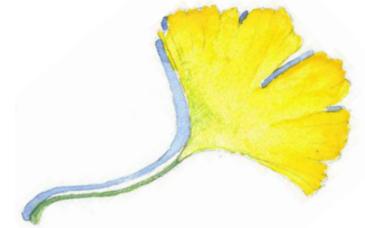


Peace Pagoda model





SITE DESIGN



- S3.1 Use Building Form to Respond to Character, Pedestrian Scale, and Use of Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way
- S4.1 Organize New Development to Support Peace Pagoda as a Visual Landmark
- S5.1 Build to Front Lot Line or Vary Building Front Setbacks Where Pattern Exists
- S8.1 Reinforce Neighborhood "Bowl" Shape

S3.1 USE BUILDING FORM TO RESPOND TO CHARACTER, PEDESTRIAN SCALE, AND USE OF PEACE PLAZA AND BUCHANAN MALL / OSAKA WAY

Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall/ Osaka Way are the primary public spaces by which the neighborhood is defined. Projects that directly relate to these spaces at the ground plane should support them by actively designing with them in mind.

- » Organize entrances and circulation in buildings to front these spaces and activate pedestrian activities.
- » Place common or public open spaces adjacent to these spaces only if they are well defined as separate, supportive, and complimentary.
- » Locate facade elements to support pedestrian scales of the plaza.
- » Use the geometry of the plazas to suggest building footprints.
- » Building form and program should support pedestrian activities and reinforce the human scale of the plaza.
- » Review the Peace Pagoda historic context documents for defining characteristics and features. Design new structures and architecture to support these qualities.

"Keep Peace Plaza area open space"

"Buchanan Mall - intended to create a village sense of place"



Building massing can shape around important volumetric figures such as the pagoda.



The faces of buildings along Buchanan are two stories giving prominence to the volumetric figure along Post. New development can setback to lend this support.



Larger buildings are in the neighborhood but can balance their shapes to focus public space in these two important places.

S4.1 ORGANIZE NEW DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT PEACE PAGODA AS A VISUAL LANDMARK

The Peace Plaza Pagoda is an important visual marker and can be seen from many public vantage points. This guideline is intended to encourage points of visibility but not to restrict development.

"Views to Peace Pagoda need to be preserved. It is a landmark only if it can be seen from afar."

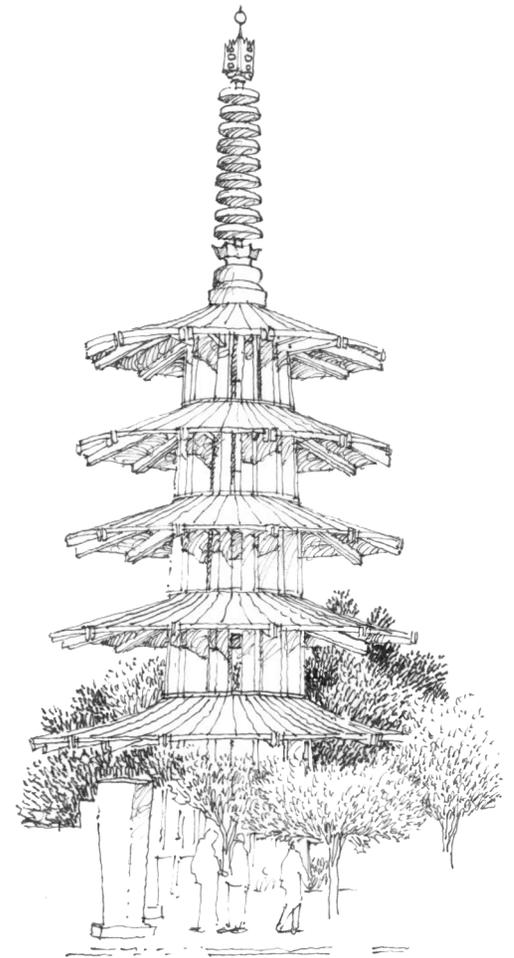


Building edges can shape views from public space to help the pagoda read even if there is larger development.

- » Shape the profiles of vertical building edges to frame views where possible.
- » Mass taller buildings to accommodate visual access of Peace Pagoda from the axis of Buchanan Street, from pedestrians and vehicles on north side of Geary at Laguna, from pedestrians and vehicles on the south side of Geary at Webster, and from pedestrians on the Webster Street pedestrian bridge.
- » Provide setbacks in private development to direct views from the street towards these two locations.
- » Provide publicly-accessible bay windows or rooftop viewpoints in new development that offer views.



Icons in Japantown layer against the backdrop of the city from many vantage points and connect them to the city at large.



The Peace Pagoda is a visual and cultural landmark in Japantown.

S5.1 BUILD TO FRONT LOT LINE OR VARY BUILDING FRONT SETBACKS WHERE PATTERN EXISTS

Setbacks help define the transition between private spaces and public areas and create a varied pedestrian experience. While pulling buildings toward the street is generally encouraged, setbacks for public uses helps to vary the pedestrian experience.

- » In places where variable and pedestrian-scaled setbacks already occur, complement the pattern by providing a small setback for benches, plantings or other publicly accessible and supportive features.
- » In places where storefronts or building faces line up, extend that pattern and provide recessed, alcove entries to provide public engagement with facades.

"Outdoor seating for social interaction"

"Helps keep the streets safe, busy."



A variable and pedestrian-friendly frontage.



Public space can also be found in the furnishing zone that partners with setbacks along the private edge.



Volumetric entries are more inviting.

S8.1 REINFORCE NEIGHBORHOOD "BOWL" SHAPE

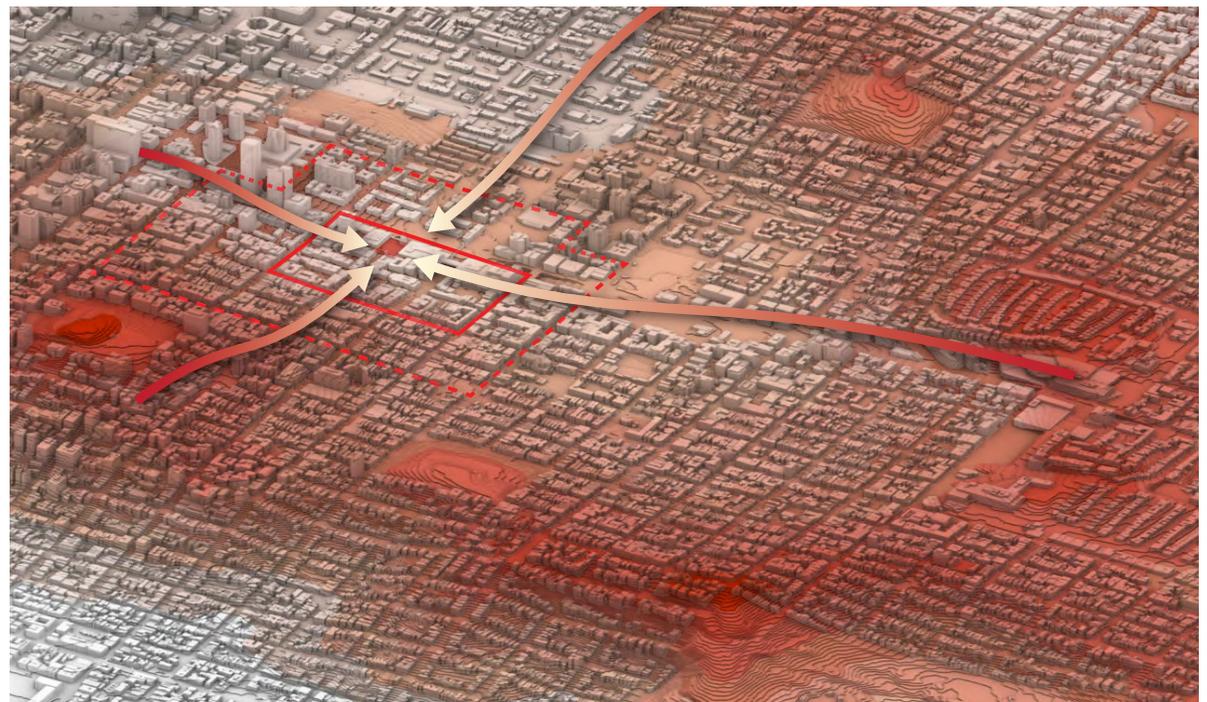
Rather than as a literal intent to shape new development in topography of a "bowl," this is a concept that can be used at different scales or patterns to be evident in how social space is used. .

- » Make efforts to shape or step massing to be sensitive to the ground plane and adjacent existing roof planes along street edges.
- » Develop circulation pathways that focus pedestrian activity in or near the Peace Plaza as the center of the "bowl."
- » Place tall buildings compositionally with low ones so that low buildings can still read as a more continuous fabric with topography.
- » Orient facades or other building features to create a larger pattern of attention towards the main social spaces in the neighborhood.

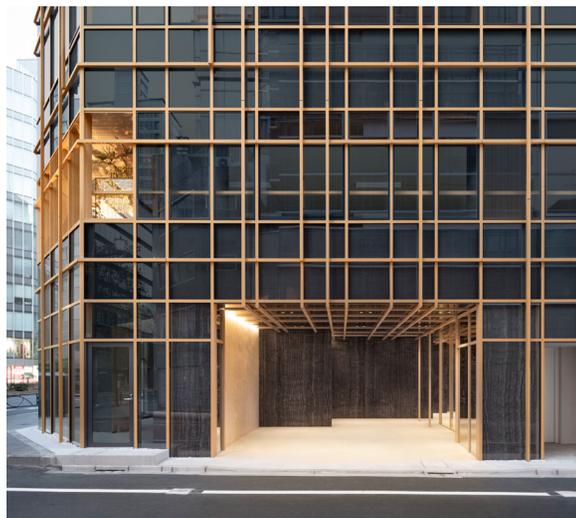
"I like standing on Post and seeing topography - bowl shape of Japantown."



Peace Plaza is a focal and low point within the "bowl." While Geary has acted as a "back" to the neighborhood, Japantown topography welcomes connection across it.



The "bowl" is defined by the shape defined between hilltops of Lafayette Park, Alta Plaza Park and Pacific Heights, Laurel Heights, Alamo Square, and skyline of Cathedral Hill.





ARCHITECTURE



- A1.1** Root Architectural Design Principles in those Found in Japantown
- A3.1** Use Natural Materials in Facades and Finish Them Honestly
- A5.1** Shape Rooflines to Support Building Form and Scale
- A7.1** Integrate Signage with Building Architecture
- A8.1** Use Transparency, Translucency, and Layering at the Ground Floor Facade

Precedents outside of San Francisco

A1.1 ROOT ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN THOSE FOUND IN JAPANTOWN

Japantown was formed by many decisions external and internal to the community, but deep appreciation of Japanese cultural principles is at the core of hopes for future development over "style" or "decoration."

"The mix of old/new, Japanese + Victorian, etc. is unique to SF's Japantown"



Ruth Asawa art work: Origami Fountain and Concrete Bas-Relief Benches

- » Review introduction pages for explanation of an approach to using principles commonly found in architecture, site design, and landscape projects in Japan, parts of the United States settled by Japanese immigrants or by Japanese or Japanese American architects and landscape architects.
- » Buildings are but one element in what is really a landscape and designing them together holistically is a basic value for design.
- » Balance, harmony, and simplicity are fundamental values in Japanese design respected in Japantown. Having projects "fit" into the neighborhood is less a matter of visual alignments and more compositional and comprehensive recognition of respect and naturalness in choice of materials, uses, access, shape, and manner.



Design for the new Peace Plaza, lead by SF Public Works and Rec and Park, uses a "Wave" concept to convey tranquility and softness, highlighting the Japanese aesthetic of craft and simple, subtle, and unobtrusive beauty. A space that is, at its heart peaceful, using natural materials of carefully selected stone.

A3.1 USE NATURAL MATERIALS IN FACADES AND FINISH THEM HONESTLY

Craft is a foundational architectural principal in Japanese architecture where generational continuity is based more on handing down technique than physical structures. Natural textures express qualities of time, impermanence, and human-scale.

"Use natural materials - but sustainable like bamboo!"



Wood slats help break facades into very fine-grained detailed proportions.

- » Stucco and wood are common materials used in Japantown facades at smaller-scales. If they are used at larger scales, they should be designed and dimensioned to work at that size and not just stacked or replicated without intention.
- » Concrete must be designed thoughtfully to include texture, joints, and high-quality components so that it is refined, intentional, and warm in expression rather than haphazard or coarsely detailed.
- » Glass and steel stem closely from natural materials and common in more modern Japanese architecture but they should be used to complement surrounding textures and scales rather than harshly contrast with them.
- » Consider using slender wood slats for screening and shading.
- » Combine and utilize materials so that they work together as expected: spanning materials should space, panel materials should work in planes, structural materials should hold weight, etc.
- » Material finishes should exemplify their original qualities. Wood should express its fibrous, flexible, and weathering capacity. Stone should have texture and porosity.
- » Consider timber and reclaimed wood, particularly at the ground floor to express structure and textural qualities.
- » Wood siding should be interrupted at intervals and not expand the length of the facade.
- » Large expanses of glass should be used sparingly and highlight the supporting structure as a design element.



Stone should express permanence and texture.



Glass is a natural material but should employ its natural characteristics.

A5.1 SHAPE ROOFLINES TO SUPPORT BUILDING FORM AND SCALE

Rooflines have historically varied in Japantown and represent different eras and types of Japanese influence or desired expression. New projects should continue the precedent of expressive roof forms in their design.

"Respect and harmonize with distinctive architectural eras and styles"

- » Consider a variety of roof forms including flat, gabled or hipped roofs (or sections thereof), and features such as overhanging eaves and exposed structural members. If visible, roof forms should use the appropriate high quality material that relates to the style and setting.
- » The integration of such roofs should relate to the scale of the building and used cautiously to avoid appearing superficial. Rooflines and roof planes should be used intentionally to clarify the building's structure and/or inform internal architectural programming of the building areas.
- » Articulate and modulate rooflines and roof planes in order to break down the scale of large, horizontal building masses.



This open metal railing provides visual interest on a flat roof form.



Smaller buildings with shaped roofs can break the scale of a long block face.



Roof shapes vary in residential areas with different historic styles.

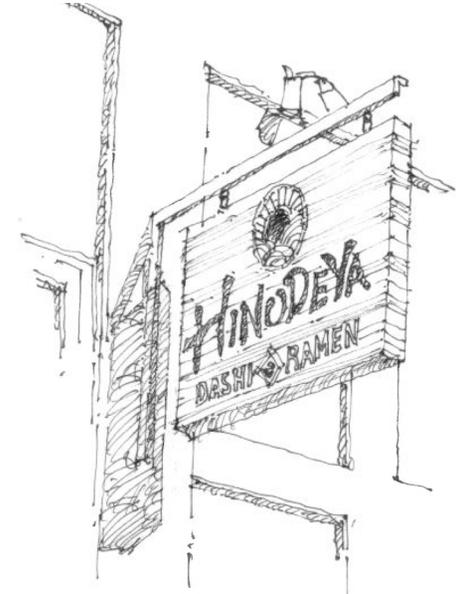


Flat or sculpted modern rooflines help define corners and strong streetwall edges.

A7.1 INTEGRATE SIGNAGE WITH BUILDING ARCHITECTURE

Cultural and commercial expression can be thoughtfully integrated with architecture through the design and communication of signage. Signs can be thought of as smaller "architecture" rather than as incongruous decoration. In Japantown signage is commonly expressed in subtle ways that are integral to the architecture. A variety of signage types are used, reflecting the era of development and the unique character of each business.

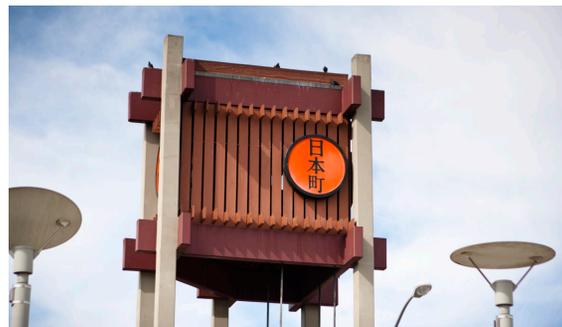
- » Consider sign types that have a precedent in Japantown including window decals, exterior or rear lit wall mounted letters, hand painted wall signs, wall mounted sign boards, projecting signs, awning signs, and hand painted wall signage.
- » Hand crafted signage including hand painted, sculpted and carved are highly encouraged.
- » Projecting blade signs should be modestly scaled. Consider using materials present on the façade to integrate their design with the architecture. Simple, non- ornamented mounting brackets are recommended.
- » All lighting conduit should be concealed.
- » Internally illuminated signage including neon signs are discouraged.



Signage crafted of natural materials is highly recommended .



Signage depth helps it fit into the building form.



Text can be added in an intentionally compositional way.



Sign color and location can fit in balance and still be noticeable and explanatory.

A8.1 USE TRANSPARENCY, TRANSLUCENCY, AND LAYERING AT THE GROUND FLOOR FACADE

Privacy, semi-private, and publicness can layer into a ground floor facade both providing enlivening activity by both provoking interest and curiosity. Storefronts in Japantown are characterized by a fine grain scale that address the pedestrian with elements including varying textures, layering and a pattern of solids and voids.



Landscape elements can help buffer the transition zones between inside and outside.

- » Consider elements that provide transitional spaces between public realm and storefronts such as Engawas (Verandas).
- » Utilize sliding storefront windows where appropriate to the business to encourage openness and transparency.
- » Consider screening elements that provide a sense of layering and depth. Treatments may include wood slats, decorative metals, glass, and interpretations of shoji or paper walls.
- » Expansive, undivided storefront windows are recommended to support window displays.
- » Use deeply recessed alcoves to highlight entries and contribute to façade layering. Entries may face the sidewalk or located on the side.
- » A minimal amount of wall surfaces may be appropriate to frame and give emphasis to storefront windows and maintain pattern of solids and voids. Blank surfaces should be textured and considered for sign placement.
- » Contain storefront elements to within approximately 8-10' in height to maintain the existing pattern that supports a human scale. Projecting signage may extend above to meet clearance requirements.
- » Consider integrating natural elements into the ground floor design including planters or green walls.



Screens, while they can seem more private, also invite light, some view, and variability.



Building recesses associated with screens can provide spatial layering between interior and exterior areas.



Elements of a common Japantown storefront.



P PUBLIC REALM



- P3.1** Create Public Space that Supports Cultural Activities
- P6.1** Balance Areas for Social Activity and Personal Space in Public Space Design
- P7.1** Highlight Sustainability Benefits of Open Space

P3.1 CREATE PUBLIC SPACE THAT SUPPORTS CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Japantown community members reflect that just being in Japantown public space is meaningful because it gives people a connection to others with shared histories, values, traditions, and continuity to the next generations. These "cultural spaces" work for many groups of different ages and provide a background for the events that root Japantown in its history.

"Need performance and event spaces"



Buchanan Mall is an active and vibrant space at the heart of Japantown.

- » Balance amount of plantings with paving to provide softening while maintaining an urban environment that accommodates large crowds.
- » Provide both unprogrammed space for large crowds and smaller, intimate spaces for daily gathering.
- » Incorporate a range of seating options spaced throughout.
- » Consider culturally appropriate species including Japanese Maple, Japanese Flowering Plum, Crape Myrtle, Bamboo, Ginkgo, and Sakura (cherry).
- » Built features should maintain transparency to allow clear site lines across spaces. Walls



The mall interiors provide a sense of "public" space even though it is privately-owned and managed. Common space supports community experience.

above seating height that divide spaces and obstruct visibility should be avoided.

- » Use level changes only where topography dictates. Avoid abrupt changes that create raised or lowered spaces that obstruct site lines.

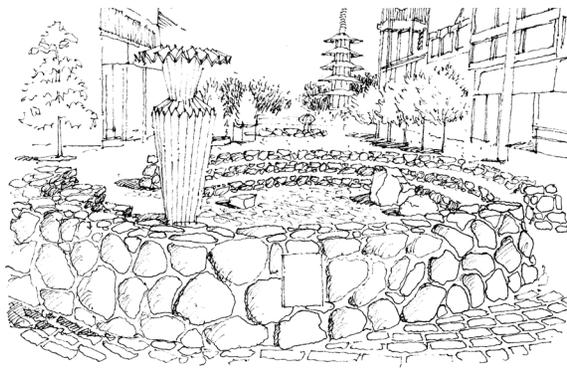


Peace Plaza is a foundation space used as a destination and for large public events, such as the Cherry Blossom Festival.

P6.1 BALANCE AREAS FOR SOCIAL ACTIVITY AND PERSONAL SPACE IN PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN

Public space has a dual role in Japantown, it is both: a place for people to meet, come together, and hold events and a place for personal reflection and respite. Spaces include both intimate, walkable spaces such as Buchanan Mall and the auto-dominated Geary Blvd. Recommendations are intended to enhance the primary spaces while mitigating the impact of challenging conditions.

- » Incorporate nature into the public realm by utilizing natural materials such as stone, wood and metal for paving and built features.
- » Provide both flexible open space for large crowds and smaller, intimate spaces for daily gathering.
- » Artwork that draws upon local Japanese culture and history are encouraged. Built features should promote transparency to maintain clear site lines across spaces.
- » Preserve and maintain existing features that have cultural value to the community including the Ruth Asawa fountain and benches.
- » Maintain abundant sunlight to public spaces.
- » Asymmetric designs that encourage a fluid pedestrian experience are encouraged. Locate built features off center.
- » Coordinate public space design to highlight and respond to building entries and maintain visibility to storefronts.
- » Utilize special paving at crossings to increase crossing safety, highlight district and link open spaces together.
- » Plant continuous street trees at the back of curb to create a buffer from traffic, encourage traffic calming and enhanced pedestrian experience. Coordinate tree placement with utilities to maximize number.
- » Use subtle lighting that accentuates landscape, built features and promotes a safe nighttime environment.
- » Blank walls that front public spaces should be avoided in new development. For existing walls consider murals by community based artists.



Use of natural materials is highly recommended.



Landscape may be for a visual natural experience alone.



The new Peace Plaza design proposal includes a variety of open and shaded areas.

P7.1 HIGHLIGHT SUSTAINABILITY BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE

Sustainability not only has environmental benefits but the visual presence of natural features helps connect people to a fundamental principle in Japanese culture: to provide for future generations.

"Highlight eco-culture and sustainability of Japanese culture"



Adding natural elements in more dense urban spaces helps connect them visually to larger planting areas beyond.

- » Consider use of rain gardens and permeable pavement in landscape design to reduce runoff and demonstrate benefits of sustainable design.
- » Select lighter colored paving materials with higher reflectivity to increase comfort and reduce heat island effect.
- » Use energy efficient, indirect LED lighting for energy efficiency and to support dark sky efforts.
- » Select renewable materials with low embodied energy.



Trees provide a significant spatial and sustainability benefit in otherwise paved areas.

- » Create opportunities for educational and interpretive landscape elements that highlight sustainable practices and planting species relevant to Japantown. This may include items such as play structures, kinetic wind sculptures, and integrated signage.



Planting beds help define usage in open space, buffer people from larger groups, and provide stormwater benefits.

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To be completed.



San Francisco
Planning

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