

OUR OWN HALL-OF-FAMER

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Every year, more than 700,000 visitors from all over the world make the slow trek up a California Central Coast hill to tour the enormous and extravagant Hearst Castle. They flock to see the ornate architecture, the ancient relics, and the playground where movie stars and political elite socialized with the infamous publisher William Randolph Hearst.

Only a few visitors can accurately name the genius behind the creative engineering and unique building style. We Thetas, however, know it was Omega Chapter alumna and world-renowned architect Julia Morgan.

This year, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and First Lady Maria Shriver chose the prolific female architect to be one of 12 inductees into the California Hall of Fame. Honored along with actor Jack Nicholson, music producer Quincy Jones, and photographer Dorothea Lange, Morgan was selected not only for her creation of remarkable buildings, but also for blazing the trail for future female architects.

In 1890, Morgan was admitted to UC Berkeley as one of its first female civil engineering students and initiated into the Omega Chapter with her sister, Emma. Not intimidated by gender restrictions, Morgan later moved to Paris to try to gain admission to the all-male Ecole des Beaux-Arts. She was accepted in 1898 as the first woman to attend the prestigious school.

Upon completing her studies, Morgan returned to her native San Francisco, where she earned her California architect's license and opened her own office in 1904. She quickly secured commissions to design homes in the Bay Area and buildings in San Francisco.

It was during this time that she worked on several projects for the UC Berkeley campus, including the design and completion of the Kappa Alpha Theta facility.

In 1908, the *Berkeley Independent* reported that the Omega Chapter house was "... the first University of California Greek-letter sorority clubhouse ever erected by a local chapter

in Berkeley." Sadly, the long redwood-shingle building no longer stands.

In a field dominated by men, Morgan succeeded in becoming one of the most prolific architects in American history, designing more than 700 buildings in her 47-year career. Climbing scaffolds and descending into trenches in her skirts, she supervised the construction of schools, churches, stores, YWCA buildings, hospitals, houses, and apartments throughout the western US. Many of her largest structures—including the Riverside Art Museum and the O'ahu Laniakea YWCA (which was the filming location for several *Lost* episodes)—are in use today.

Many of Morgan's earliest client connections came from Theta alumnae living in the Bay Area and Sacramento. The women commissioned houses for themselves and family members and proved to be connections to other clients. Through Theta connections, Morgan became very involved in the building of hundreds of YWCA buildings, which led her to working with Phoebe Apperson Hearst, a major supporter of the women's organization. Phoebe Hearst in turn introduced Morgan to her son, W.R. Hearst.

Julia Morgan spent 28 years working on California's most magnificent building, Hearst's "ranch house" at San Simeon. The work on the Central Coast was no easy task. Every weekend, she made the 12-hour trip by train and taxi to the remote worksite where a small shack served as a studio. The Castle itself is set high in the Coastal Range, so all supplies for the four houses, 56 bedrooms, 61 bathrooms, two pools, movie theater, tennis courts, zoo outposts, and gardens had to be hauled up a steep incline. Morgan also designed an intricate sewage and electrical system not previously seen in California.

Hearst Castle has been a California icon since its inception, symbolizing beauty, engineering genius, and romantic history.



COURTESY HEARST CASTLE © CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

Julie Morgan, Ω/UC Berkeley, and William Randolph Hearst collaborated for 28 years on Hearst Castle.

Julia Morgan is also an icon. Her creations scattered throughout the state and country are fascinating and gorgeous. Her work as the state's first licensed female architect and her focus on building sound structures to combat the waves of an earthquake blazed trails in the architectural industry. And the vast quantity of buildings she designed and created with such care make her the most prolific female architect in the United States.

The California Hall of Fame honors accomplished Californians who have impacted not only the state but also the world. On December 15, at The California Museum in Sacramento, Julia Morgan's grandniece, Ellen, will accept the Spirit of California medal in her place. Morgan's exhibit will sit alongside California Cuisine innovator Alice Waters, Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling, and world-famous children's author, Theodor "Dr. Seuss" Geisel.

The Magazine, in a 1903 article on Morgan's return from Paris exclaimed, "She is one of us! And we are worth far more to ourselves, to our University, to our sister Chapters, and to the great world, because of the influence of this gentle, modest little woman, Julia Morgan."

Editor's note: For more information on the Museum, the California Hall of Fame, and other programs, check out www.CaliforniaMuseum.org. ♦