



## EARLE B. BERTZ

Architect  
(1885-1948)

The attractiveness and uniformity of the Sea Cliff area is due in no small part to developers Allen & Co. and their primary architect Earle Baldwin Bertz. In his words, “it has always been Allen & Company’s desire to maintain a high standard of structural quality and artistic distinction in the homes it builds.” Bertz had the advantage of some very fine tutors, working as a draftsman for many years in Albert Farr’s office and also briefly for William C. Hays.

Earle Bertz was born on September 7, 1885 and grew up in Pacific Heights. He was the youngest of five children born to Jacob Bertz and his wife Caroline Baldwin. The family lived at 2215 Fillmore and Earle attended Pacific Heights Elementary School (Jackson at Webster) followed by Lick High School. At high school he was very athletic, captaining the football team and winning many track medals. After graduating he apprenticed with Albert Farr for many years, an architect for whom he had great admiration. One of the projects he worked on was the ill-fated Wolf House designed for Jack London in Glen Ellen, which mysteriously burned down shortly before completion and was not rebuilt.

Bertz took his State architectural license exam in August 1914 and was awarded license B817. He married his wife Hazel Congdon in September 1914. He opened his own office in 1918 in the Foxcroft Building at 68 Post Street. Initially he worked for insurance broker and developer John Brickell, but soon began a business relationship with Harry B. Allen, who was to become President of the San Francisco Real Estate Board in 1923 and 1924 and President of the California Real Estate Association in 1927. Allen had financed and built 12 homes on 28th Avenue between Lake and California as early as 1916, but his operations were interrupted by the war and he ceased building until 1919. Some of Bertz’ first commissions from Allen were the groups of adjoining houses on 29th Avenue (154, 160 and 166) and on Lake Street (2701, 2715, 2735 and 2745) all in 1919. Soon after he designed the adjacent homes at 185 28th Avenue, 2700, 2720 and 2740 Lake Street (all in 1920).



2720 and 2700 Lake Street and 185 28th Avenue



The Bertz family home at 165 28th Avenue

From 1920 on, the growth in Sea Cliff was continuous. Between 1920 and 1925 Bertz designed many homes for Allen, including 2801, 2825 and 2845 Lake Street and 2800, 2820, 2840 and 2850 Lake Street opposite, seven homes covering both sides of the block between 28th and 29th all in 1921; 150, 160, 170 and 180 30th Avenue in 1922; 10 homes on both sides of 28th Avenue from 152 to 194 in 1922; 9 more homes closer to El Camino del Mar from 110 to 148 28th Avenue in 1923; 111, 119, 125 and 133 30th Avenue also in 1923; 279, 283, 287, 291, 295 31st Avenue, 25, 45 and 55 Sea View Terrace in 1924; 40 McLaren, 15 and 66 Sea Cliff Avenue also in 1924; 45, 55 and 65 25th Avenue in 1925; 2900 and **2910 Lake Street** in 1926. In 1922 Earle and Hazel moved into 165 28th Avenue, where they brought up their daughters Jacqueline and Sally, and Earle lived for the rest of his life.

Bertz was adept at designing in many architectural styles, and according to one reviewer in 1924, “Bertz studied each precise situation with an artist’s perception, drawing for his effects upon any school or vogue that would produce the most satisfying result; in some instances the English Gothic gave a charming effect to the general vista, in others a Spanish or Italian example was applied with delightful impressiveness ..... the Colonial, the French and other schools were requisitioned for the best they had and the final outcome was the splendid assembling of city homes of divers patterns, all forming part of a most pleasing *coup d’oeil*, without the least unfitness discernible anywhere.”

In addition to Sea Cliff, Bertz designed a major tract of homes for Allen & Co. in 1921 at 701-767 4th Avenue and 2800-2850 Fulton. On Russian Hill he designed 2621 Larkin for the company in 1922. His work may also be seen in St. Francis Wood with several homes, such as 20 and 40 Santa Paula (in 1922), and 140 and 160 San Leandro (in 1923). But four custom-designed Sea Cliff homes in the Italian Renaissance style at 270 Sea Cliff Avenue (1924), 540 El Camino del Mar, and 2900 and 2910 Lake Street (all in 1926) firmly established his reputation.



540 El Camino Del Mar entrance



2910 and 2900 Lake Street

In 1927 Bertz took two of his draftsmen, Albert H. Winter and Charles F. Maury, into partnership with him as Bertz, Winter & Maury, a firm which was to last through to 1935. Together they designed other prominent Sea Cliff homes such as 2949 Lake Street and 250 Sea Cliff Avenue (both in 1929). 250 Sea Cliff Avenue was the 1996 San Francisco Decorator Showcase house.

After the partnership dissolved, Bertz continued to work on many different projects. Real estate investor Martin Stelling was a good client for retail buildings and commissioned Bertz in 1935 to significantly expand the size of 2980 Vallejo Street, a Pacific Heights home with a sweeping Bay view that Stelling had bought from architect Edgar Mathews. Bertz doubled its size, while retaining the charming English cottage appearance of Mathews’ original design. In 1940 Bertz designed a distinctive single-story commercial building at the northeast corner of Sacramento Street and Presidio Avenue for Stelling. During World War II Bertz worked on Government projects in the East Bay, reopening his own office in 1945. He became ill in the Fall of 1947 and died on March 7th, 1948.