VESTIGES of Lands End

Cliff House Architecture

Each new remodel dramatically changed the look of the Cliff House. The original 1863 Cliff House was a modest building that looked like the home of a prosperous citizen.

In 1868 the building tripled in size. Two wings were added, and a castle-like archway built over the entrance to the balcony that surrounded the building.

After the original Cliff House burned in 1894, Adolph Sutro built the most extravagant version of this local monument. Sutro’s ornate French chateau inspired Cliff House had eight stories, four spires, countless turrets and decorative moldings, and an observation tower. Although Sutro’s Cliff House, often incorrectly referred to as the Victorian Cliff House, was a must-see San Francisco attraction, many people ridiculed it and thought of it as an architectural eyesore.

Sutro’s Cliff House also fell victim to fire in 1907. Following the fire a third Cliff House was erected by Sutro’s daughter, Emma, and was built in a neoclassical style of reinforced steel and poured concrete.

In 1937 neon signs were erected by new owner George Whitney. The Cliff House was remodeled in 1949 and a “moderne” redwood façade added to the building’s exterior. A third floor dining room was also added. In the 1970s, the redwood façade was painted blue, complete with frothy waves.

In 2004 the Cliff House was once again remodeled in a modern style that accentuates the natural beauty of its surroundings and revives some of the building’s neoclassical elements by restoring the exterior of the 1909 structure and adding a contemporary addition to the north side.