

San Francisco Chronicle

Fort Mason Center contest calls on top designers

S.F. ARCHITECTURE

By **John King** Published 4:00 am, Sunday, May 6, 2012



Photo: Liz Hafalia, The Chronicle



IMAGE 1 OF 9

Flowers surround the harbor with pier 1 of Fort Mason center seen above in the background in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, May 2, 2012.

Some of the world's most in-demand architects are being asked to focus their talents on one of San Francisco's prime stretches of waterfront: [Fort Mason Center](#).

Invitations went out last week to 20 firms on four continents asking if they'd like to participate in a design competition seeking "creative and practical design concepts" for the 13 acres of parking lots and former military buildings that sit midway between Aquatic Park and [Marina Green](#).

Interest so far is strong.

"People are saying they want to respond" and take part, said [Rich Hillis](#), executive director of the center. "It's San Francisco, a wonderful site on the water, with real design challenges thrown in."

The center is like nothing else in the city, a stark campus of three cavernous warehouses on piers and five early 20th century Mission Revival buildings amid 437 parking spaces. A major embarkation site during World War II, it now houses several exhibition spaces as well as venerable Greens Restaurant and such arts-related nonprofits as the [Blue Bear School of Music](#). Bluffs form a green backdrop to the south and east; a panoramic view of the Golden Gate is the marquee attraction to the west.

The 20 invitees are asked to submit written statements of interest and qualifications by June 15; three firms would be selected to participate in a formal competition culminating in an October exhibition and a selection of the winner. Each contender would receive \$20,000 to cover expenses as they craft visions for how the center might be folded into the daily life of the city.

The competition also seeks design concepts for activating the westernmost Pier One, a two-story structure that has sat mostly empty since the 1960s. The center itself opened in 1977 and is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

It is estimated that more than 1 million people visit the center each year. The problem, Hillis said, is that the center has little to offer except views and specific activities or events - unlike such popular destinations as Crissy Field or the Embarcadero.

"We're trying to explore what we can do physically to attract people in, encourage them to linger," said Hillis, who joined the center in September after 15 years working at City Hall on economic and land use issues. "We want to make it so that whenever you stop by, there's something going on."

The 20 firms approached on April 30 include Hood Studio of Oakland and four San Francisco firms: EHDD Architecture, [Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects](#) and two firms that specialize in landscape architecture, [Conger Moss Guillard](#) and SWA.

But invitations also went to a number of innovative firms that, while they haven't left a mark on the Bay Area, are closely watched in today's design world.

The list includes the firm that led the design efforts for New York City's incandescently popular [High Line](#), [James Corner Field Operations](#). SANAA, the Japanese firm whose leaders Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa received the 2010 Pritzker Architecture Prize, is also in the mix.

So are Studio Gang Architects of Chicago and [Bjarke Ingels Group](#), or BIG. The latter was dubbed the "rock-star Danish architecture firm" last year by Fast Company magazine; the former is designer of the much-praised Aqua Tower, 82 stories of rippling concrete in the firm's home town.

The jury for the competition includes two local designers, landscape architect [Andrea Cochran and ROMA Design Group](#)'s Bonnie Fisher; Los Angeles architect [Michael Maltzan](#); GGNRA Superintendent [Frank Dean](#); and [Mark Buell](#), who is chairman of the [Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy](#) and president of the city's [Recreation and Park Commission](#).

While the design proposals must include cost estimates as well as images and site plans, Hillis stressed that this is an ideas competition. The costs are being borne largely by local art patron Ann Hatch and the [Tin Man Fund](#), but there's no budget at present to implement whatever approach might be selected.

"Our intention is to implement some if not all of the ideas," Hillis said. "Obviously, it depends on (long-term) costs and funding sources," including the possible reuse of Pier One.

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Photo: Liz Hafalia, The Chronicle



IMAGE 2 OF 9

Fort Mason building centers seen through a seat sculpture by artist Jefferson Mack at Fort Mason center in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, May 2, 2012.



Photo: Liz Hafalia, The Chronicle



IMAGE 3 OF 9

A view of Fort Mason piers in San Francisco, Calif., looking towards Golden Gate bridge on Wednesday, May 2, 2012.

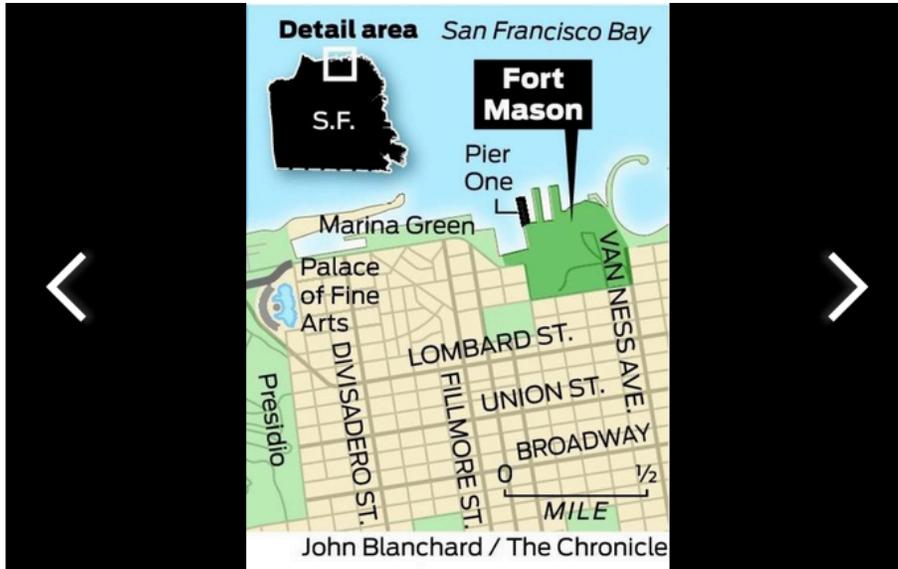


IMAGE 4 OF 9



Photo: Liz Hafalia, The Chronicle

IMAGE 5 OF 9

A seagull crosses between pier 1 (left) and pier 2 (right) at Fort Mason center in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, May 2, 2012.



Photo: Liz Hafalia, The Chronicle



IMAGE 6 OF 9

A view of the piers at Fort Mason center in San Francisco, Calif., looking south on Wednesday, May 2, 2012.



Photo: Liz Hafalia, The Chronicle



IMAGE 7 OF 9

A view of Fort Mason center in San Francisco, Calif., looking towards Golden Gate bridge on Wednesday, May 2, 2012.



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IMAGE 8 OF 9

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