

The La Jolla Woman's Club, 1914 Architect Irving J. Gill

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"Sometimes referred to as the 'missing modernist,' Irving Gill radically redefined the American architectural landscape with his simple, forward-looking aesthetic. During the first decades of the twentieth century, Gill created an architecture defined by straight lines, undecorated surfaces, and modern construction methods. One of his most notable buildings, the La Jolla Woman's Club reflects the architect's trademark aesthetic severity while nodding to the influence of California's mission architecture. Composing a new design philosophy based on the revelation of form and the rejection of ornament, Gill set the stage for the next (more celebrated) generation of modernists, who would continue to experiment with his innovative techniques and straightforward compositions throughout the rest of the century.

Commissioned by journalist and philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps in 1913 (she donated the land and \$40,000), the La Jolla Woman's Club building exemplifies Gill's modern style in its simplified geometry, repetitive arches, and minimal ornamentation. With an emphasis on austere surfaces and flat rooflines, the building takes from California's Spanish traditions as well as Gill's interest in reductive forms. Although more expensive than traditional framing techniques, Gill used his experimental concrete "tilt-wall" construction method to pour and erect the exterior walls in single units, resulting in a technologically advanced and formally straightforward concrete structure. On the interior, the architect (who was obsessed with hygiene) took the undecorated planes of the facade even further, eliminating mouldings, baseboards, and paneling to prevent the collection of dust.



The partnership between Ellen Browning Scripps and Irving Gill remains one of the most important client/architect relationships in American history. Sharing a desire to produce progressive and permanent architecture in Southern California, the pair worked together on a number of significant works including the George H. Scripps Laboratory, the Bishop's School, the La Jolla Recreation Center, and Scripps' own home, South Moulton Villa II.

The La Jolla Woman's Club really is a spectacular building. With its rhythmic arches, stark walls, and pure expression of regional traditions, it is a building far ahead of its time with its simple elegance predating the modern aesthetic that would define California architecture in the coming decades. The property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974."



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