

# ROSIE THE RIVETER VISITOR EDUCATION CENTER

Richmond California USA

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**Project Location:** Richmond, California, U.S.A  
**Project Start Date:** April 2010  
**Complete Date:** May 2012  
**Project Size:** 12,446 S.F.  
**Customer/Client:** National Park Service  
**Developer:** Orton Development, Inc.  
**General Contractor:** Orton Development, Inc.  
**Historic Preservation:** Preservation Architecture  
**Structural Engineer:** The Crosby Group  
**Lighting Designer:** Architecture and Light  
**Mechanical/Plumbing:** Mechanical Design Studio  
**Electrical Engineer:** SCE Engineers  
**Landscape Architect:** Victory Garden Design  
**Acoustic Consultant:** Charles M. Salter Associates

**Architectural Design Studio**  
Marcy Wong Donn Logan Architects  
800 Bancroft Way, Suite 200  
Berkeley, CA 94710, U.S.A

**Project Architect**  
Marcy Wong

**Architectural Design Studio Profile**  
Marcy Wong and Donn Logan formed the Berkeley, California firm in 1999. The partnership has developed a portfolio of work that reflects the firm's interests spanning issues including architectural expression, technological innovation, cultural manifestation, adaptive reuse, urbanism and planning.

The Rosie the Riveter Visitor & Education Center is the final chapter in transforming Henry Ford's 1931 car factory on the San Francisco Bay waterfront into 21st Century re-uses. During World War II, to mobilize all the industrial might of the United States, President Roosevelt banned the production of civilian automobiles, hence the Ford Plant switched to producing jeeps, tanks, and armored cars. These and other military vehicles were assembled by the famed "Rosie the Riveters", women of all races who assumed critically important jobs in trades that had previously been limited to white males. The Rosie the Riveter Visitor Center - a history museum in an historic building on an historic site, commissioned by the National Park Service - commemorates these women whose legacy is a sweeping and lasting impact on American society's attitudes towards women and racial minorities in the work-place.

The original building was a 12,446 square foot brick and steel structure designed in the 1930's as an "Oil House" that served an adjacent factory which would receive rail-shipped oil that was then stored in the Oil House before it was pumped through an underground tunnel to the boilers next door. Handsome, simple, and unpretentious as industrial buildings of that era tend to be, the existing gable-roofed structure has a central hall with lofty spaces to either side that were naturally conducive to a new life as exhibit spaces for a history museum. The northern room has a raised concrete slab floor with a full height basement below, supported by an integral concrete column grid. The central hall and the corresponding space below it originally contained pumping equipment, which the flanking rooms on both levels held oil storage tanks.

The design approach enhances the building's original character and materials. The existing structure's refurbishments consist of interventions that not only accommodate the visitor center and history museum's program, but also highlight the contrast between original and new architectural texture. The original painted steel roof trusses, the original roof, the board-formed concrete slab and columns, and the articulated brick walls. The upper level is adapted to take advantage of high ceilings and abundant day-lighting for exhibit rooms. The formerly dark, lightless basement vaults are transformed into vibrant classrooms and theatre through contemporary architectural elements and dramatic lighting. The theatre design juxtaposes vividly modern features with the eight-decade old exposed rust-stained concrete columns and beams, and polished existing concrete floors. Throughout both levels of exhibit galleries, theatre, lobbies and other elements, modern interventions recall the building's industrial origins.

On the main floor, openings are created in the brick wall between the upper pump hall and the east room to create a single space that would hold the main entry, information desk, museum store and exhibits. The west room is improved with acoustical material, historic lighting using original factory pendant fixtures with LED lamps, and polishing of the existing concrete floor, to create commodious and flexible exhibit spaces. On the outside, the Visitor Center's landscape design includes a "Victory Garden" with plant species that were common in the World War II gardens.

Working with the existing column grid, the lower level is dramatically converted from a dark, dank, oppressive basement into additional exhibit area, a film theater, classroom, library/break room, and a wide hallway opening onto restrooms and a central stair and elevator. Glass walls make classrooms and library visible from the hallway along the theatre. Expanded metal mesh panels line the walls in the lower level hallway - doubling as an exhibit wall - and the theatre; the material is also used for stair guard rails, echoing the building's industrial origins. Recycled wood planks wrap around the exterior of the theater volume, and are carried to the theatre as well, not only well functioning but also providing warm feelings to the space. The ergonomic benches in the theatre use bright red for "Rosie", the wave shapes alluding to the marine context and the importance of a waterfront site to the original factory function.

