

# URBAN FIELD NOTES

## 5 Neighborhood Mosaics

An additive archive of good urban design collectively compiled by San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association members and friends.

**Caseworker:** David Baker FAIA

**CASE  
STUDY #2**

Mosaics, those tessellated pictures pieced together from bits of stone, mirror and colored glass, are an art analog of complex modern urban life. Made of discrete elements that retain their individual integrity yet resolve into a grand coherent picture from a distance, mosaics function much the way a city full of unrelated people and activity generates a particular character. San Francisco values!

Art enriches and notates urban life. Some art, such as dance, is wonderful but ephemeral. Mosaic art is also wonderful, but as close to permanent as it gets in the mortal world. You can still walk on mosaics in Pompeii! While most public art in this city comes in the form of performance, there's something particularly urban — perhaps even very San Franciscan — about mosaic's way of making durable, touchable beauty out of jagged and smashed — often recycled or reused — materials. These projects are delightful, and local in a special way. The Avenida del Rio mosaic marks the path of Mission creek from my house to the Bay. I look at it every day on my home-bound bike commute.

David Baker is a San Francisco architect and SPUR Board member.



**24TH STREET MINI PARK** Children can climb all over this beautiful play sculpture of Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent. Exuberant in the tradition of the Mission, but beautifully crafted, the giant 60-foot-long snake feels almost alive. **Artist:** Colette Crutcher



### DANCING IN THE CURVE OF THE WORLD MURAL

Three dancers taken from life grace the rear wall of this very ugly garage. Activist Tom Radulovich advocates tearing the garage down to replace it with an active mixed-use building. New parking could replace the defunct Brooks Hall and be where it should be, in the heart of the Civic Center, and underground! But save the murals, please. **Artist:** Josef Norris.

**Location:** On the south and east sides of the Performing Arts Garage at the corner of Fulton and Gough.

**Urban Field Notes** is a monthly illustrated feature showcasing an urban design element that adds to the quality of life and interest of the physical environment in San Francisco. This month, we present the findings of David Baker, who takes a look at the visual richness community-based mosaic projects add to the city.

**Why?** Discussions of urban design in San Francisco often tend to focus more on what goes wrong than what goes right. A litany of “gone wrongs” tends to create a community that sees any change as too risky. SPUR is committed to raising the quality of public debate regarding planning and urban-design issues by emphasizing

the positive, and creating a rich visual record of urban design “gone rights” — both past and present, concrete and quirky, aiming to be comprehensive but (hopefully) inexhaustible. We hope that this archive will serve as a resource in future discussions of urban development, growth and change.

**Who?** SPUR invites planners,

designers, architects, activists, artists, historians, poets, residents, business people and daydreamers to contribute to the Urban Field Notes archive. If you have an idea for a Field Notes contribution, or would like to be a contributor, please contact Urban Field Notes Editor and Chief Archivist Jeannene Przyblyski at [fieldnotes@spur.org](mailto:fieldnotes@spur.org).

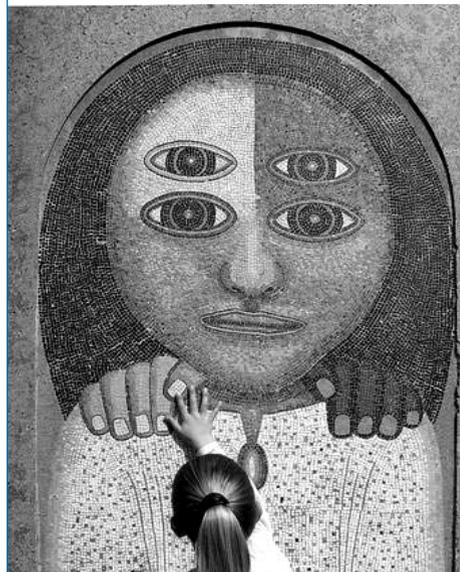


**16TH AVENUE STEPS** As my daughter the L.A. painter said, it’s Hippie Dippy but it’s good Hippie Dippy. This art is integral to what San Francisco is about: diversity and community. The stair starts in the depths of the ocean and rises through the earth to the stars. Inside this grand vision live hundreds of beautifully crafted ceramic creatures. But the best part is Grandview Park at the top of the stairs. From the top of this lump of diatomaceous rock is one of the best 360-degree views of the city.  
**Artist:** Neighbors created these steps with artists Aileen Barr and Colette Crutcher.  
**Location:** Moraga Street between 15th and 16th avenues. [www.tiledsteps.org](http://www.tiledsteps.org)

## MADONNA AND CHILD

An incredible multiracial four-eyed Jesus tiled image gestates in the womb of the Madonna. This is a haunting work, one of the best by the wild iconoclast San Francisco artist **Benny Bufano**.

**Location:** Upper Fort Mason



**AVIENDA DEL RIO** This tile mural on Harrison near 16th Street will mark one end of the Mission Creek Bikeway and Greenbelt, which will follow the path of the now-buried creek. When the Forty-Niners arrived, they filled the creek in and built a railroad on top. Now what remains is a curved urban anomaly of a street cutting through the San Francisco street grid. The trail would follow this scar and bring life and activity to the area, and connect the Mission to Mission Bay once again. **Artists:** Lillian Sizemore and Laurel True. **Location:** 16th and Harrison streets. [www.missioncreek.org](http://www.missioncreek.org)