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Contact: Margaret Sullivan
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc.
(847) 272-7400
msullivan@wje.com

Sather Gate Receives California Preservation Foundation Design Award

WJE Engineers, Architects, and Materials Scientists Restore Gate to Its Original Brilliance

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (August 18, 2010) — The California Preservation Foundation will present a Design Award to Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE) for the restoration of Sather Gate, located at the University of California, Berkeley. WJE served as the prime consultant and architect/engineer of record.

The Preservation Design Awards celebrate projects, individuals, and organizations who contribute to the preservation of California. This year marks the twenty-seventh anniversary of the awards, which will be presented Saturday, October 16, at the Getty Villa in Malibu.

Sather Gate was donated to the university by Jane K. Sather in memory of her husband Peder Sather. Designed by John Galen Howard, construction was completed in 1910. Sather Gate is a City of Berkeley Historic Landmark, a California State Historic Landmark, and it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The gate is constructed of granite and concrete columns that support structural steel framing, encased in bronze cladding with cast bronze ornamentation.

The granite columns of the gate are adorned by eight marble panels of bas-relief figures: four nude men representing the disciplines of law, letters, medicine, and mining, and four nude women representing the disciplines of agriculture, architecture, art, and electricity. When the panels were first installed, public outrage over these nude figures led Sather to demand their removal. Sixty-seven years later, they were rediscovered and reattached to the granite columns. There is also a five pointed star with a small inscription below it: "Fiat Lux" (Let There Be Light)—the university's motto.

Corroded steel was visible in a number of locations and portions of the bronze cladding had warped and separated from the internal steel framing, prompting the university to retain WJE to complete an assessment of the gate and to provide repair recommendations. The university made the decision to restore the gate based on its findings in WJE's initial report.

WJE conducted close-up documentation of Sather Gate using a boom lift to document the extent of distress to the bronze cladding components. A cataloguing system was developed to assign unique identifiers to all of the bronze cast ornament and cladding members prior to dismantling the gate. Using original gate framing and laser scanning data, templates were made to enable fabrication of a new stainless steel gate frame structure.

Missing cast bronze elements were recreated and fastened to the gate, including leaf ornament and portions of the lettering. WJE performed scientific research to identify bronze alloys used in the historic construction of the gate cladding, so that substitute materials could be used to best match the historic gate. Every piece of bronze cladding was cleaned and restored.

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The gate piers were retrofit using center coring to improve its seismic performance. Granite elements of the gate were cleaned and repaired. During the installation process, new scaffolding and welding enclosures were established and the bronze cladding was affixed onto the new stainless steel gate frame. Portions of the gate cladding were fastened to the in-place framing and other segments were carefully lifted upright and placed into position.

About WJE

Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE) is an interdisciplinary firm of architects, structural engineers, and materials scientists that specializes in the investigation, analysis, testing, and design of repairs for historic and contemporary structures. WJE focuses on delivering practical, innovative, and technically sound solutions across all areas of construction technology. Since the firm's founding more than fifty years ago, WJE specialists bring the collective experience gained from conducting more than seventy-five thousand investigations worldwide to every construction challenge. WJE combines state-of-the-art laboratory and testing facilities, nationwide offices, and knowledge sharing systems to provide solutions for the built world. For more information, please visit wje.com.

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