EDUCATOR’S GUIDE
WELCOME!

We are so glad that you and your students are visiting us. In order to help you and your students get the most out of this experience we have put together this Educator’s Guide as a way to facilitate meaningful discussions with your students.

The photographs included in this guide are to help with way finding and orientation. In the exhibit you will find larger versions of the photographs and actual artifacts in cases. It is recommended that students use the larger images on the wall, or the actual artifacts. In addition, it is recommended that students use the information on the text panels to support or confirm their conclusions.

Also included are some possible guiding questions for each of the areas indicated.

In addition to these questions you will find historical information and teacher notes throughout the guide. This is to help you get a grasp of some key details at a glance and to assist on handling anything that may cause confusion or distraction.

While this guide is organized in a manner that accompanies the curator’s suggested route through the gallery, it can be started in any part of the exhibition. If you have a large number of students it is recommended that you split them into different groups with each starting at a different point. Simply find the relevant page in the guide and start from there.

Again, thank you so much for visiting the San Diego History Center!
Introduction to Irving Gill and the Exhibit
This exhibit chronicles the life, times, and accomplishments of Irving Gill. Although Gill was a transplant from the Midwest he captures the spirit of Southern California in his designs.

Five years after the Civil War, Irving Gill was born into a family of Quakers in Syracuse, New York. Consequently, Gill was immersed in the principles of simplicity, equality, and hard work from an early age. Gill also began learning about the building arts from an early age since his father was both a builder and a farmer.

After apprenticing for 3 different mentors in Chicago, Gill found his way to San Diego. Upon arriving he discovered that much of San Diego’s architecture did not match its unique environment. Over the course of many years he proceeded to develop his own style, while partnering with a variety of other architects.

The style that developed was the result of a variety of influences that included the increasing numbers of people looking for clean lines and quality craftsmanship in reaction to rising industrialization, Gill’s own upbringing, his exposure to people living in tenements, and new innovations in building materials and methods.

Thanks to his many apprentices, which included women, Gill’s distinct style lived on long after Gill himself.

The recommended route, shown on the map, follows the evolution of Gill’s design style as he responded to both the forward-thinking ideals of many Southern California leaders and new technology that allowed him to experiment with new building methods. This guide focuses on four main themes:
• The influences of Gill’s early life upon his work
• The development of Gill’s individual style
• The building innovations which Gill incorporated into his designs
• Gill’s influence on other architects.
Influences in Gill’s Early Life

Quick Notes:
While this image was taken in New York City it was a scene commonly found in many cities, including Chicago, where Gill did his final apprenticeship.

You may also want to point out that Syracuse is in upstate New York and consequently is more rural than New York City.

Note that a tenement differs from an apartment in its lack of amenities, the number of people per square foot, and other poor living conditions.

Guiding Questions:
1. How would going to New York City and Chicago have compared to the town in upstate New York where Gill was raised? (Remember, he was raised on a farm).
2. How do you think Gill would have reacted when he saw the tenements?
3. What kind of influence do you think this would have had on him? Why?

Teachers:
There is a video room just off this first area. It contains a 2 min clip on the (unsuccessful) efforts taken to save the Dodge House. It is available if you choose.
Quick Note:
Gill gained his architectural skills through a series of apprenticeships, rather than through a formal degree program. These photos reflect the three different styles of Gill’s mentors. One of these (the Transportation Building) Gill actually had a hand in working on. Another is representative of the work Gill would have done while apprenticing under Hall (Shingle Style). And the Syracuse Savings Bank is a building built by Gill’s mentor, Silsbee and while apprenticing under Silsbee Gill worked in the building.

Guiding Questions:
1. Compare the three buildings shown on the wall. How are they different? How are they similar?
2. What might account for these differences? (Students should note that the buildings were done by different firms, in different locations, and for different purposes (i.e. residence, private bank, and mass transportation).

Gill’s Mentors and Their Influence

1893 Transportation Building

Shingle Style

Syracuse Savings Bank-Silsbee (1875)
The Evolution of Gill’s Style

Quick Note:
When Gill first arrived here in San Diego he started by building houses in the same style as those he had seen and worked on in the Midwest. Over time he began to drift away from these traditional styles. This was largely due to a combination of client preferences and a growing sense of familiarity with San Diego’s climate, topography, and Spanish Missions.

Guiding Questions:
1. Looking at the images on the walls and the dates they are from. How did Gill’s style evolve after he arrived in San Diego?
2. Where do you think his inspiration came from?
3. How do you think Gill’s clients influenced his work?
Quick Note: Gill was especially concerned with making homes that allowed lower income families to live in clean, comfortable dwellings (A concern that stemmed from his exposure to the tenements and also from watching his mother continuously clean their house). Building materials such as reinforced concrete and standardized lumber allowed him to build homes more efficiently, and consequently for a lower cost. Gill acquired Robert Aiken’s patent for a tilt-wall and made it even more efficient by adding hollow clay tiles, which also helped insulate the buildings from the Southern California sun.

Teachers: You are welcome to allow your students to experiment with the model but please limit the number of students working with it at a time.

Guiding Questions:
1. How did Gill modify Aiken’s patent?
2. Why did Gill make these modifications?

Guiding Question:
What might be some benefits and drawbacks of using a thin wall?

Guiding Question:
1. What are the benefits of using this clay tile?
Quick Note:
During his years as an architect Gill had several female apprentices, which was unusual for the time. In addition, Gill had photos of his work in international magazines and he also wrote two articles on architecture which were published in *Sunset* and the *Craftsman*.

Guiding Questions:
1. Why do you think it was important for Gill to be published in widespread publications?
2. How do you think Gill’s apprentices affected his legacy?

Guiding Question:
Do you think that the increasing popularity and accessibility of cameras had any effect on Gill’s work? How and why?

Quick Note:
The invention of the Brownie Camera by Kodak allowed photos to be taken in greater quantities, at a faster rate, and for a lot less money than previously. As a result, the average person was able to take snapshots of themselves at different locations. It also allowed artists and architects to create better portfolios that were able to be shared more widely. (Photo album is found just before entering final section.)