

**DANIEL D. PAUL ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN
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April 28, 2020

Honorable Mayor Sam Liccardo
San Jose City Council Members
c/o Toni Taber - City Clerk
City of San Jose
200 E Santa Clara Street
San Jose CA 95113

SUBJECT: Cesar Pelli and the Bank of California

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Daniel Paul, and I am a Southern California based architectural historian. For the last 15 years, I have researched, presented, and written upon Late-Modern architecture. My 2004 master's thesis focused upon the architecture of Anthony Lumsden and Cesar Pelli- specifically, their development of the Late-Modern glass skin, which became a ubiquitous corporate vernacular over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. Regarding Mr. Pelli, I just finished an article about his work, and that of his firm PCPA, for the Japanese international architectural publication *a+u*, have written about his Pacific Design Center for the Society of Architectural Historians online encyclopedia, and have widely lectured specifically upon his work, including in London at the Architectural Association, and in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts.

The Bank of California is admittedly, unorthodox in the pantheon of Pelli's works, but the design is definitely his. The design is, in some ways, highly similar to another little-known Pelli project- his Security Pacific National Bank branch which he completed in San Bernardino at nearly the same time. It too has a broad, windowless façade, and the crisp, sculpturally handled, sharply cut angles indicating Pelli's 1970s-era work. Perhaps this building's most telltale sign of being a Pelli work is the band of dark reflecting glass- specifically, its elevated facet which reflects the pedestrian view below it. Pelli undertakes a similar maneuver at the Pacific Design Center Blue Building and San Bernardino City Hall. The Bank of California, in its design and completion years, is roughly contemporaneous to both of those better-known works, which Pelli completed as Design Partner for Victor Gruen Associates, where he worked from 1968 until 1976 when he then moved eastward to become Dean of the Yale School of Architecture, and begin his own practice.

For a Pelli design, what's unusual about the Bank of California is the overt brutalism and its symmetry. Not only were both features uncommon in his work of that period, this building serves as their deliberate counterpoint. His better-known designs typically involved an all-over smooth glass skin handled in a lightweight manner upon asymmetrical massing. Little is known about this building, which Pelli apparently designed over two weekends for a friend. Yet just as the Pacific Design Center references Joseph Paxton's 1851 Crystal Palace, Cesar was once again subtly looking to the past in the most contemporary terms possible. Traditional bank architecture is heavy, monumental, symmetrical, and frequently incorporates a prominent entrance: all are present here.

Cesar Pelli would go on to become one of the most prominent and prolific architects of the late-twentieth century: designing concert halls, museums, and most notably- a multitude of skyscrapers, including Petronas Towers of Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, which from 1998-2004 were world's tallest, and San Francisco's Salesforce Tower: one of the last projects completed before his 2019 passing with which he

had direct involvement. How valuable it is to know of, experience, and even and enjoy the formative, lesser-known works this historically significant architect completed much earlier in his career- in this instance now nearly 50 years ago.

It is my hope that the Bank of California building: a truly interesting and unusual Cesar Pelli design- not to mention one with a distinctive back-story, might be preserved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Paul". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Daniel" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Paul".

Daniel D. Paul,
Architectural Historian

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