

State of California — The Resources Agency  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
**PRIMARY RECORD**

Primary # \_\_\_\_\_  
 HRI # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Trinomial \_\_\_\_\_  
 NRHP Status Code \_\_\_\_\_

Other Listings \_\_\_\_\_  
 Review Code \_\_\_\_\_ Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 6 \*Resource name(s) or number (assigned by recorder) Buchanan Mall

P1. Other Identifier: Osaka Way

\*P2. Location:  Not for Publication  Unrestricted \*a. County: San Francisco  
 and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)  
 \*b. USGS 7.5' Quad: San Francisco North, Calif. Date: 1956 (rev. 1973)  
 \*c. Address: Buchanan Street btwn. Post & Sutter streets City: San Francisco Zip: 94115  
 d. UTM: Zone: 10 \_\_\_\_\_ mE/ \_\_\_\_\_ mN (G.P.S.)  
 e. Other Locational Data: Assessor's Parcel Number (Map, Block, Lot): N/A

\*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries.)  
 Buchanan Mall comprises a one block stretch of Buchanan Street, between Post and Sutter streets. Development of the Mall was undertaken from 1975 to 1976 and resulted in a pedestrian street flanked by two- to three-story commercial buildings, primarily designed in a Japanese-influenced modern style. The majority of the buildings were constructed around the time that the Mall was developed and are recorded on separate DPR 523 A forms.

Buchanan Mall consists of an open area enhanced with public art. The Mall is paved with a "river of cobblestones", laid in a pattern reminiscent of flowing water, and flanked by walkways of smooth concrete. Two fountains are located on the mall and consist of origami flower forms cast in bronze. They are surrounded by low, circular stone walls. A gate, reminiscent of a mountain temple gate, is located at the north end of the mall and consists of four round concrete piers supporting a tiered, wood trellis. Concrete benches decorated with sculptural relief are located along the length of the mall. Concrete planters are scattered along the mall and small cherry trees line walkways. Metal light posts resembling Japanese paper lanterns that incorporate illuminated signage of Japanese characters also line the walkways. Buchanan Mall is in good condition.

\*P3b. Resource Attributes: (list attributes and codes) HP31. Urban open space

\*P4. Resources Present:  Building  Structure  Object  Site  District  Element of District  Other



P5b. Photo: (view and date)  
View north from Post Street

\*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:  Historic  
1975-1976

\*P7. Owner and Address:  
N/A

\*P8. Recorded by:  
Page & Turnbull, Inc.  
724 Pine Street  
San Francisco, CA 94108

\*P9. Date Recorded:  
July 11, 2008

\*P10. Survey Type:  
Reconnaissance

\*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none") None

\*Attachments:  None  Location Map  Sketch Map  Continuation Sheet  Building, Structure, and Object Record  
 Archaeological Record  District Record  Linear Feature Record  Milling Station Record  Rock Art Record  
 Artifact Record  Photograph Record  Other (list)

# BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

\*NRHP Status Code 7N1

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\*Resource Name or # (assigned by recorder) Buchanan Mall / Osaka Way

\_\_\_ B1. Historic name: Buchanan Mall  
 \_\_\_ B2. Common name: Buchanan Mall  
 \_\_\_ B3. Original Use: Commercial pedestrian mall / open space  
 \_\_\_ B4. Present use: Commercial pedestrian mall / open space  
 \_\_\_ \*B5. Architectural Style: Japanese-influenced modern

\*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations  
 Pedestrian mall and public art constructed, 1975-1976. Flanking commercial buildings constructed, 1971-1982. Corroding steel origami fountains removed, 1995, and replaced with bronze duplicates, 1999. Mall repaired and revitalized, 1999.

\*B7. Moved?  No  Yes  Unknown Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Original Location: \_\_\_\_\_

\*B8. Related Features: None.

B9a. Architect: Rai Okamoto (pedestrian mall) b. Builder: Unknown

\*B10. Significance: Theme Cultural community development Area: Japantown, San Francisco, California  
Open space /

Period of Significance 1971 - present Property Type Commercial Applicable Criteria A/1, C/3  
 (Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity)

Buchanan Mall was constructed as part of the A2 phase of redevelopment that was began by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency in 1966. A2 was the second phase of a federally funded urban renewal program that attempted to alleviate perceived physical blight in the Western Addition. Covering an area much larger than the phase A1 area, the A2 phase attempted a more community-based approach to redevelopment than had previously been undertaken in A2. Based on the widespread objections to unmitigated demolition and displacement enforced by the A1 phase, A2 sought community input, invested in the rehabilitation of existing structures, and concentrated on constructing residential and community buildings with a smaller, neighborhood scale. An urban design study completed in 1963, authored by Van Bourg-Nakamura architects and Rai Okamoto, expressed the need to synthesize the goals of the Redevelopment Agency and the Japantown community. Therefore, plans for the Buchanan Mall area were drafted in cooperation with the United Committee for the Japanese Community. Special consideration was given to the area's historic, cultural, social and visual character to create a plan that would best represent the neighborhood's existing character. (continued)

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP31. Urban open space, HP6. 1-3 story commercial buildings, HP36. Ethnic minority property (JA)

**\*B12. References:**

*Hokubei Mainichi*. "Soko Hardware, a Fixture in S.J. Japantown Community, Closes." 2/20/2008.  
 Japantown Task Force, Data Sheet: Buchanan Mall Gate, 9/15/04.  
 Japantown Task Force, Data Sheet: Rai Okamoto's Rock River & Ruth Asawa's Origami Fountains, 7/18/04. (continued)

B13. Remarks:

\*B14. Evaluator: Caitlin Harvey, Page & Turnbull/  
Matt Weintraub, SF Planning Department

\*Date of Evaluation: May 2009

(This space reserved for official comments.)



### B10. Significance (continued)

In response to community desires, the A2 phase concentrated on preserving the intimate scale of buildings and spaces, on renovating building exteriors to modern standards and consistent with culturally relevant appearances, and on reorganizing spaces and sites to facilitate community activity. One such space was Buchanan Mall, a pedestrian area that the urban design plan compared to "Tokyo's Ginza district in its variety and activity"; Ginza is an area known for shopping and dining, and also features a pedestrian mall.

The segment of Buchanan Street, between Post and Sutter streets, was previously a trafficked city street, open to vehicles and lined by a variety of older commercial, residential and mixed-use buildings. Redeveloped as the Buchanan Mall, this area became an open air pedestrian plaza lined with new commercial buildings designed in Japanese-influenced modern styles. The Mall was designed as a north-south extension of Peace Plaza, an urban open space associated with Japan Center and the A1 phase of redevelopment, which is located to the south across Post Street. Plans for Buchanan Mall referenced Japan Center, aiming to complement the more stylized, larger-scale architecture of the earlier development with a more casual architectural style and village-scale.

In 1976, the pedestrian plaza and public art components of Buchanan Mall were completed and dedicated during a ceremony that included a ritual cleansing performed by a Konko-Kyo priest. Buchanan Mall gained the ceremonial moniker Osaka Way in 2007, in commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sister city relationship between San Francisco and Osaka, Japan. The naming ceremony was presided over by San Francisco's Mayor, Gavin Newsom and Osaka's Mayor, Junichi Seki. As part of the ceremony the mayors pledged to continually promote the business and cultural ties between the cities.

#### Mall Open Space

The open space of Buchanan Mall was planned in the mid-1960s by *Nikkei* architect and planner Rai Okamoto in partnership with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. The urban design plan described the intent of Buchanan Mall as an "urban hallway, linking the various elements of Nihonmachi and designed to be used by walkers only." It was to be "lively and active," but with "contrast to the larger scale, highly stylized development across Post Street to the south [to] be sharp." The original plans for Buchanan Mall included a large metal sculpture to be located at the entrance to the pedestrian mall. The metal sculpture was never installed, however, and the Buchanan Mall gate was created instead. Standing across the north end of the Mall, this gate consists of concrete posts that support a tiered wood trellis structure. It is noted that though it resembles a *Torii* gate, like those traditionally located in front of Shinto shrines, it is actually intended to represent a Japanese garden gate, welcoming visitors to Buchanan Mall's garden-like setting.

The rest of the mall is characterized by a "river" of cobblestones. The cobblestone material itself references historic San Francisco streets, but its irregular, swirling patterns are reminiscent of water in Japanese traditional design. The cobblestone river interacts with the two fountains that stand on the mall and bubble water directly onto the cobblestone surface at their base. The river "flows" from Sutter to Post Street, symbolically uniting Buchanan Mall with the Peace Plaza on the south side of Post Street. Like the fountains, the river of cobblestones was created as public art. The smooth concrete paths on either side of the "river" represent the river banks and were designed to provide passage for pedestrians.

*Nikkei* artist Ruth Asawa designed the metal "origami" fountains, which resemble flowers of folded paper. She, and her friend and assistant, Mae Lee, hosted origami workshops for the Japantown community at festivals and street fairs for many years, which was the inspiration for the design of the origami fountains on Buchanan Mall. However, even at their initial installation, the fountains experienced pump problems and did not function as designed. In 1975, a period of drought forced the City to turn off public fountains throughout San Francisco, including the origami fountains. The fountains corroded due to disuse and were removed as a safety hazard in 1995. However, at the urging of the community and Ruth Asawa herself, Buchanan Mall was revitalized and replacement bronze replicas of the fountains, created by Asawa, were installed in 1999. At that time they were designated as City Art Pieces by the San Francisco Arts Commission.

Asawa also created the wood and concrete benches located at intervals along the Mall. She enlisted the help of the Buchanan Mall merchants' children in making the relief panels that adorn the benches. Depicting scenes from Japanese fairytales and festivals, the panels were sculpted in dough (one of Asawa's favored mediums) before being cast in concrete.

#### Planner & Architect Rai Okamoto

Rai Okamoto (1927 - 1993) was a Japanese American architect and planner, who worked with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency in 1963 to develop a master plan for the second phase of redevelopment in Japantown. In the 1970s, he was hired to design Buchanan Mall and was responsible for inviting Ruth Asawa to contribute sculptural elements to the design.

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\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Buchanan Mall / Osaka Way

\*Recorded by: Page & Turnbull

\*Date May 2009

Continuation  Update

**B10. Significance (continued)**

Okamoto attended architecture school at the University of Pennsylvania and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He also had a graduate degree in city planning from Yale. From 1960 to 1963 he independently practiced architecture, and then entered into partnership with William Hugo Liskamm, forming Okamoto-Liskamm, Inc., Planners and Architects, which he was connected with until his death in 1993. Both firms were based in San Francisco, with Okamoto-Liskamm having branch offices in Seattle and New York. During the 1970s, Okamoto also served as the director of the San Francisco Planning Department.

In the 1960s and 1970s, both as a private practitioner and Planning Director, Okamoto was involved with urban renewal and redevelopment projects. In 1966, Okamoto-Liskamm, Inc. was responsible for the redevelopment of Oakland City Center, which received an award from *Progressive Architecture* for its master planning design. Most of Okamoto's work is associated with San Francisco, however, and he was a liaison and strong proponent of community involvement with the A2 phase of redevelopment in the Western Addition.

Artist Ruth Asawa

Ruth Asawa (1926 - ) is a second-generation Japanese American artist based in San Francisco. She is best known for her metal sculptural work, including wire sculpture and many fountains that have been installed throughout San Francisco and the Bay Area. She is nationally known for her public commissions and her dedication to furthering arts education. Her work has been exhibited throughout the country at major museums including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the de Young Museum in San Francisco.

Asawa grew up in a farming community in Norwalk, California. She credits the development of her artistic talents to World War II internment, which exposed her to the tutelage of other interned Japanese American artists. After the war, she studied to become an art teacher, but could not secure a teaching position due to lingering discrimination against Japanese Americans. Instead, she went on to study with Joseph Albers of the Bauhaus school and pursued a career as a professional artist.

In the 1960s, Ruth Asawa began receiving commissions to create public art. Some of her best known works include: *Andrea*, the mermaid fountain in Ghirardelli Square (1966); the *Hyatt on Union Square Fountain* (1973); the *Buchanan Mall Fountains* (1976); *Aurora*, an origami-inspired fountain at Bayside Plaza (1986); and the *Japanese Internment Memorial Sculpture* in San Jose (1994). In 2002, she was involved in the creation of the Garden of Remembrance at San Francisco State University, which incorporated boulders from each of the ten Japanese internment camps. These and other major public art works have provided opportunities for Asawa to collaborate with a variety of other artists and craftsmen, including landscape architects, metal smiths, and foundry workers. Many of Asawa's works, including the origami fountains on Buchanan Mall, reference her cultural heritage in form, subject matter and location.

Another important aspect of Asawa's career has been her involvement with art education and advocacy. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Alvarado Arts Workshop, which eventually spread to public schools throughout San Francisco (1968); the Music, Art, Dance, Drama and Science (MADDS) Festival, a city-wide youth arts festival (1973); and a School of the Arts (SOTA) High School (1982). In 1968, Ruth Asawa was also appointed to the San Francisco Arts Commission by Mayor Joseph Alioto, and in 1974 served on the Commission of Mental Health established by President Carter, advising on the role of the arts. Her public service has also included work with the California Arts Council (1976) and the National Endowment for the Arts (1977). From 1989 to 1997, she served as a trustee of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Buchanan Mall Buildings, Occupants and Uses

The majority of the buildings flanking Buchanan Mall are of a Japanese-influenced modern design. The 1963 urban design plan called for the avoidance of literal imitation of traditional Japanese elements, but approved of ornamentation that was consistent with Japanese construction. It specified elements of ethnic character to be employed in new construction, such as combinations of wood and concrete to resemble timber construction, modular discipline influenced by traditional *tatami mat* modular planning, strong roof forms, and interaction between interior and exterior spaces. These elements are found in the designs of the buildings flanking Buchanan Mall.

Most businesses currently located on Buchanan Mall have a Japanese theme. Several significant businesses were located on the Mall when it was first developed. Today, a number of culturally significant businesses continue to operate in the Mall, including Soko Hardware, Paper Tree, Kimochi, and Benkyodo.

Soko Hardware, located at the southern end of Buchanan Mall, was established in 1925 by the Ashizawa family and is one of the few remaining *Issei*-founded businesses in Japantown. The store has been located at its current site since its opening; however, the current building is a product of the period of urban renewal in Japantown. "Soko" is the Japanese name for San Francisco that was used by the *Issei*. The business has been owned and operated by three generations of the Ashizawa family and in 1951 a branch store was opened in San Jose.

**B10. Significance (continued)**

The San Francisco store is currently run by Philip Ashizawa, the grandson of the original owner, Masao Ashizawa. The Ashizawa family lived in the house located on the same block, at 1644-1648 Post Street – the only building on the block that was not razed during A2 redevelopment.

Paper Tree was established on Buchanan Mall in 1978 by the Mihara family. The family had previously owned a publishing and import business in the 1950s, which was responsible for publishing one of the earliest English-language books on origami. Today, Paper Tree is a store that specializes in selling origami paper and supplies and also hosts instructional workshops. The store's promotion of the traditional Japanese art of origami indicates that it is a significant cultural establishment on Buchanan Mall.

Kimochi, Inc. was established in 1971 as a non-profit, community-based senior care organization that reflects the importance of interaction with, concern, and respect for older generations in Japanese and Japanese American culture. Kimochi was started by a group of *Sansei* (third generation Japanese Americans) who realized that many aging *Issei* required assistance overcoming language and cultural barriers to access public services. Although the organization began operations in buildings that were eventually condemned and redeveloped, Kimochi soon established its first stable location on the Webster Street Bridge between the Kinokuniya and Kintetsu mall buildings in Japan Center. Later, the organization expanded into two other facilities in Japantown, including the former Nichi Bei Bussan department store building located on Buchanan Mall, which serves as the organization's headquarters. In 1983, a residential facility, Kimochi Home, was established at 1531 Sutter Street, and the Webster Street Bridge facility became a social center, Kimochi Lounge. The organization currently provides support for over 3,000 Bay Area seniors, mostly of Japanese ethnicity.

The Benkyo-do Co. is located at the northern end of Buchanan Mall in the only building on the pedestrian plaza that did not result from the A2 project undertaking. Constructed in 1959, the building's period of construction and its relative modernity are compatible with the Buchanan Mall project. The business that is housed in the building is a *mochi* and *manju* bakery that was established in Japantown in 1906. Today, it is run by the third generation of the Okamoto family that established the business and still produces *mochi* and *manju* using traditional methods. This business is considered extremely significant within the Japantown community. (More information can be found on the DPR 523 B form for 1745-1747 Buchanan Street.)

Also located on Buchanan Mall is the headquarters of the Japantown Merchants Association, which is a non-profit organization that supports businesses and merchants by encouraging economic development within Japantown, by promoting local businesses, and by funding community events to increase commercial traffic. The Association also responds to security issues that affect local businesses and sponsors community-betterment operations like litter removal. The Association was founded in 1968 and originally served primarily *Issei*-run businesses. More than 90 Japantown businesses and community-based organizations are now members of the Association.

A few other historic businesses like Nichi Bei Bussan and Honnami Taieido were also located on the Mall when it was first constructed, but are no longer there. Nichi Bei Bussan, owned by the Tatsuno family, was established in 1902 as an American dry goods store catering to Japanese immigrants and later became a martial arts supply shop. Honnami Taiedo was a Japanese department store, which later specialized in Japanese art goods. It was one of the first Japanese American businesses to open after World War II. These two historically significant businesses relocated to the Mall during its initial development. The former Honnami Taiedo store is now Kimochi, Inc.

In addition to commerce and pedestrian activity, Buchanan Mall also supports the regular observance of community events, which reflect the culture of the Japantown community. These include traditional festivals like *Obon*, the summer festival to honor deceased loved ones, which features *bon-odori* dancing. Events associated with the Cherry Blossom Festival and Nihonmachi Street Fair also occur along the Mall. The Japantown Merchants Association and businesses located on the Mall sponsor such events, but most importantly the Mall plays a physical role as a venue for such celebrations.

Evaluation

Buchanan Mall is associated with several important trends and events that have affected the Japantown neighborhood, and the site is also an icon of culturally relevant design by significant Japanese American architects and artists. The establishment of Buchanan Mall may be understood in relation to the growth of the post-war neighborhood and its culture during the period of urban renewal in Japantown, and it also may be recognized for the designs of Rai Okamoto and Ruth Asawa as significant within Japantown and the City of San Francisco.

Buchanan Mall functions today as it was originally designed — as an outdoor pedestrian open space and retail plaza. Therefore, Buchanan Mall retains integrity of association with its original use. The Mall retains integrity of location as none of its elements have been relocated or reoriented, which also indicates high integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. Neither the buildings

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\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Buchanan Mall / Osaka Way

\*Recorded by: Page & Turnbull

\*Date May 2009

Continuation

Update

**B10. Significance (continued)**

flanking the Mall nor the landscape elements of the Mall's open space appear to have undergone many or major alterations, also indicating high integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The setting within which the Mall was constructed, the commercial center of the Japantown neighborhood, remains vital and intact. Therefore, the Mall also retains integrity of feeling.

Buchanan Mall is an example of how the A2 phase of redevelopment in the Western Addition differed from the A1 phase and resulted in a more neighborhood-based design scheme that incorporated community input. As the 1963 urban design plan states, "the only sure way for residents [and businesses] to remain in the area is to be connected in some way with its development." This philosophy resulted in a redevelopment project, Buchanan Mall, that has served the community well and that was more widely accepted and appreciated than was A1 development, because it respected the neighborhood's history, culture, and existing physical traits. Buchanan Mall, as a product of the later A2 phase, may be considered an urban redevelopment design that is sensitive and appropriate to the surrounding Japanese American community, which largely resulted from the Japanese American community's activism.

It is notable that Buchanan Mall was designed by a Japanese American architect and planner, with collaboration from a Japanese American artist, illustrating the strength of cultural ties within the Japantown community. Buchanan Mall fits within the context of Rai Okamoto's broader work, which included other redevelopment and urban design projects. Ruth Asawa is also recognized as a prominent artist and her origami fountains as trademark elements of her portfolio, reflecting both her ethnic heritage and her best known subject matter; metalwork and fountains.

The status code of 7N1 assigned to this site means that it may become eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places when it meets specific conditions. Specifically, the site needs to be reevaluated when it has achieved more than fifty years of age (at the time of this evaluation, the site had achieved significance within the past fifty years, and the requirement for establishment of exceptional significance pursuant to Criterion G had not been determined) and/or when sufficient perspective and research regarding the complex legacy of urban renewal in Japantown has been achieved (in order to fully understand the subject site as well as its relationship to other properties associated with the period). If determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the site is accordingly deemed eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources and for local listing. This property was not fully assessed for its potential to yield information important in prehistory or history, per National Register Criterion D.

**B12. References (continued)**

"A New Look for S.F.'s Bit of Japan," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 23, 1963.

Japantown Task Force, *Images of America: San Francisco's Japantown*. Arcadia Publishing, San Francisco. 2005.

"Japantown Fountains Reawaken," *San Francisco Examiner*, 10/21/99.

"Keeping Japantown Alive," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 21, 1999.

Pease, Ben. San Francisco's Japantown and Western Addition maps; 1910, 1920s, 1940, 1948-49, 1956-59, 1972, 2004.

Ruth Asawa website. <http://www.ruthasawa.com/>

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: 1893, 1899, 1913, 1950.

San Francisco Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan Historic Context Statement, 2009.

Van Bourg/Nakamura, Rai Y. Okamoto, and the SFRA. *Nihonmachi: An Urban Design Study in the Western Addition Area 2*. 1963.