

BUILDING PROFILER

Architectural Historian Report: The Russ Building



I. Architectural Overview

The **Russ Building**, located at 235 Montgomery Street, stands as a crowning achievement of San Francisco's 1920s skyscraper boom. Completed in 1927, this 32-story **Neo-Gothic** masterpiece was designed by the esteemed architect **George W. Kelham**. For nearly four decades, it held the title of the tallest building in San Francisco, serving as a beacon of the city's financial prowess and a "Gothic cathedral in business clothes."

The building's design is characterized by its dramatic verticality, emphasized by ribbed stone piers and intricate terra cotta cladding. Its E-shaped footprint and tower-podium form allow for maximum natural light, a hallmark of pre-air-conditioning high-rise design.



The Architect

George W. Kelham (1871–1936)

A Harvard-educated architect who trained at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Kelham was a central figure in shaping San Francisco's skyline. He served as the Chief Architect for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition and designed other icons like the PacBell Building and

II. Historical Significance



Courtesy of Dinwiddie Construction Co.

A street in San Francisco looks very much like a street in New York. The Russ Building, San Francisco, California. George W. Kelham, Architect.

Archival view of the Russ Building shortly after completion in 1927, dominating the San Francisco skyline.

Commissioned by the Russ family, the building was constructed on the site of the former Russ House, a famous pioneer-era hotel. Its completion marked a pivotal moment in San Francisco's urban development, symbolizing the city's recovery and ambition following the 1906

the Shell Building.

His work is noted for its elegant fusion of classical training with the functional demands of modern commercial architecture.

earthquake. It was the first building in the city to feature an **indoor parking garage**, catering to the emerging automobile age.

The Russ Building was famously known as the "Center of Western Progress," housing the city's most prestigious law firms, stockbrokers, and venture capitalists for decades. It remains a **California Historical Landmark** and a National Historic Landmark.

III. Technical Specifications

Feature	Detail
Height	133 meters (436 ft)
Floors	32
Architectural Style	Neo-Gothic / Gothic Revival
Construction Materials	Steel frame, Terra Cotta, Brick
Year Completed	1927



Conclusion: A Legacy in Stone

The Russ Building is more than just an office tower; it is a testament to the "Jazz Age" romance of San Francisco. Its jagged stages and central crown continue to inspire urban explorers and architectural historians alike. In a city of glass and steel, the Russ Building stands as a reminder of an era when buildings were designed to be cathedrals of commerce, reaching for the heavens with both ambition and artistry.