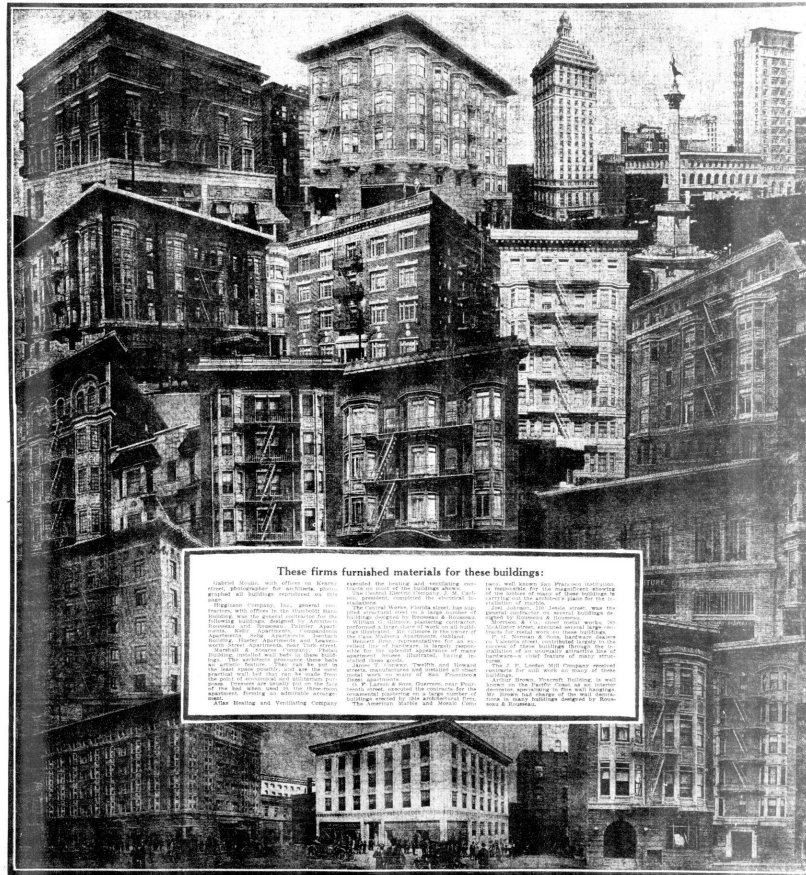


The Rousseau Family: Prolific Beaux Arts-Era S.F. Architects

Lawsuits, Scandals & an Enduring Legacy

STATELY BUILDINGS DESIGNED BY SAN FRANCISCO ARCHITECTS

Rousseau and Rousseau, Noted San Francisco Architects, Have Designed Several Hundred Representative Hotels and Apartments, Some Being Here Shown. All Embody Many Novel and Modern Ideas Introduced by This Progressive Firm.



The Rousseaus were a high society family of [Beaux Arts-era](#) architects who built hundreds of buildings during the reconstruction of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake. They also had their fair share of scandals.

The Rousseau family were integral players in the launch of the [City Beautiful Movement](#) in San Francisco in the early 1900s and are credited with being one of the first firms to build [large, multi-story buildings](#) in town. Their projects often boasted premium amenities such as built-in vacuums as well as quality materials and ornate design details.

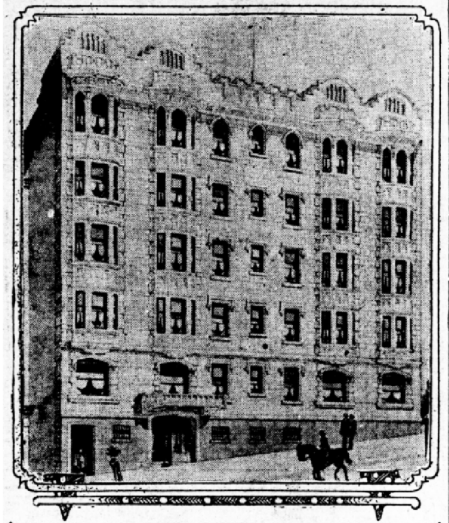


A few of the many residential and commercial buildings designed by the Rousseaus located in the recently designated [Historic Uptown Tenderloin District](#).

Patriarch Charles M. Rousseau was a Dutchman who graduated from the [École des Beaux Arts](#) in Paris and moved to San Francisco in 1888 by way of St. Louis and New York. He assisted the renowned Arthur Page Brown on projects such as the S.F. Ferry Building before starting his own firm.

Charles M. and his oldest son Charles Jr. were partners for a few years until Charles Jr. left to start his own firm in 1902. His younger brother Arthur then moved up from draftsman to partner.

A five story apartment house being built on Leavenworth street near Ellis by Rousseau & Rousseau for C. E. Knickerbocker. A beautiful building with every modern equipment.



A Rousseau structure at Leavenworth and Ellis. (Photos taken prior to a recent fire in the building.)

Charles M. and Arthur's relationship with Charles Jr. appeared contentious after he left the firm. In 1907, Charles Jr. published multiple news items distancing himself from the "other" Rousseaus who were facing a lawsuit alleging that one of the pair's projects at Turk and Taylor Streets was "lopsided."



News items relating to a lawsuit over an alleged "lopsided" building being constructed by Charles M. and Arthur Rousseau's firm, which prompted Charles Jr. to clarify his position in the matter.

After Charles M. died in 1918, Arthur and his younger brother Oliver, also a partner at the firm, switched to real estate and construction, overseeing large-scale Union Square projects such as the Chancellor Hotel and Hotel Adagio.



Chancellor Hotel and Hotel Adagio, two large-scale hotel projects in which Arthur and Oliver were involved.

Arthur and Oliver kept up a very public playboy lifestyle early in their careers when they both married (and divorced) two prominent socialites. The drawn-out sagas appeared in the local papers for months on end, likely due to the era's fault-based divorce law requiring couples to prove they were the victims "of [cruelty, adultery, or abandonment](#)."



The lengths couples had to go through to obtain divorces in the early 1900s made for scintillating headlines.

Straight and narrow Charles Jr. managed to steer clear of the gossip columns, and Arthur and Oliver eventually got their personal lives straightened out.

Later in their careers in the early 1930s, Arthur and Oliver created a series of modestly-priced yet elevated-in-style, single-family homes in the Sunset located along what's now officially known as the [Rousseaus' Boulevard Tract Historic District](#). Oliver was the mastermind behind the design of the Rousseau Homes while Arthur focused on the real estate side of the business.

At the center of the Rousseau development were two model homes dubbed The Sunset House, located at 1564 and 1568 36th Avenue facing Sunset Boulevard, which was newly built at the time. The development extends along 34th through 36th Avenues from Kirkham to Lawton Streets. The brothers each lived in the development for a few years once it was completed — Arthur at 1500 36th Avenue and Oliver at 1598 36th Avenue.



A stretch of Rousseau Homes along 36th Avenue facing Sunset Boulevard.

[S.F. Richmond Review](#) describes the Rousseau Homes as “representing a uniquely Bay Area version of storybook-style architecture.”

In a [2004 S.F. Chronicle article](#), proud owners of the coveted Rousseau Homes refer to them as “a touch of luxury at a more economical price” and “better built and proportioned, roomier, classier and more ornate than the competition.” Additionally, “[Oliver] put a little charm in every house, and each one is just different enough to make it attractive.”



Arthur lived at 1500 36th Avenue and Oliver at 1598 36th Avenue—both for a brief time.

When one of the Rousseau Homes was up for sale in 2014 for the first time in 47 years, [S.F. Curbed](#) reported on the interior features: “Mediterranean archways or ornate medallions adorn the facades, and the interiors are at once formulaic and romantic, mixing vaulted ceilings and interior patios with sunken living rooms—as though a ranch house had signed up for castle lessons.”

Check out this great [Hoodline](#) feature for an in-depth look at the Rousseau Homes.