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SAN FRANCISCO
THE mightiest architecture critic in San Francisco spoke forcefully on Oct. 17, 1989, when the Loma Prieta earthquake shook the unsightly Embarcadero Freeway to its marrow and unwittingly liberated one of this city's most beloved and historic buildings.

The Ferry Building, on the waterfront at the foot of Market Street, was once the spiritual heart of the city's public life, the Grand Central Terminal of an era when ferries plied the fog-shrouded waters, and getting to and from San Francisco involved water rather than graceful spans of steel. For 30 years before the quake, the terminal, built in 1898 and designed by A. Page Brown, a former McKim Mead & White draftsman, was all but hidden by the freeway, which severed the connection between building and city. Its lighted clock tower — modeled on the bell tower of the cathedral in Seville — was barely visible above the concrete.

The freeway was deemed unsafe and dismantled after a political battle in the early 90's. And in March, San Franciscans will finally be reunited with their waterfront landmark when the Ferry Building assumes



SIGNPOSTS Mosaics on a new wall, above, and in an original floor, inset.

yet another guise. After a three-year, \$90 million preservation effort, it will reopen in time for spring asparagus and fava beans as the Ferry Building Marketplace, the new home of the city's heralded Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market and a yearned-for mecca for the city's food-obsessed culture.

Where baggage and cargo handlers once stood will be Northern California's culinary A-list, including Cowgirl Creamery from Point Reyes, complete with dairy bar; the Acme Bread Company of Berkeley, with on-the-spot hearth ovens; and the Hog Island Oyster Company from the tiny coastal hamlet of Marshall, whose seawater tanks are purified with ultraviolet sterilizers. The anchor tenant will be the farmers' market itself, the holy grail of locally grown organic fruits and vegetables.

The building's architectural liberation, especially the double-height skylight nave with arches recalling Roman aqueducts, is likely to come as a surprise to many who are too young to remember the interior with its marble mosaic floors.

Until the Golden Gate Bridge and Bay Bridge eclipsed ferry traffic in the 30's, the building was the crossroads of San Francisco. From 1885 to 1930, the most direct way to reach the city from points north and east was by water. Over 20 million frenetic commuters and travelers a year hustled up the second-floor gangplanks to waiting rooms, sitting on wooden benches listening for the whistles that would carry them home.

The architecture, though utilitarian, reflected the bay's mountainous grandeur. The building — the only surviving link to the outside world after the 1906 earthquake — was designed as a public gathering space, with a 656-foot hall luminous with natural light. Its tower like a lighthouse, once lit as a beacon for ships, can still be seen for miles down Market Street.

In its shadow have been over a century of parades and protests, including the bloody



DESIGN NOTEBOOK



Photographs by Kim Wozniak for The New York Times

A Waterfront Palace of Produce



RECONNECTED Vendors at San Francisco's farmers' market, above, will move into the lower level of the Ferry Building's soaring nave, left. A freeway came down to reopen it to the city, top.