

An Inside Look at Fort Point

Two windows

Joseph Hearst,
APSA, PPSA
Danville, California

If you would like to visit a perfect place for making striking HDR images in San Francisco, go to Fort Point. According to the National Park Service it was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers between 1853 and 1861 to prevent entrance of a hostile fleet into San Francisco Bay. Rushed to completion at the beginning of the Civil War, Fort Point was first garrisoned in February of 1861 by Company I, 3rd

U.S. Artillery Regiment. The fort was occupied throughout the Civil War, but the advent of faster, more powerful rifled cannon made brick forts such as Fort Point obsolete. In 1886 the troops were withdrawn, and the last cannon were removed about 1900. The fort was then used for storage and training purposes for many years.

Cannon



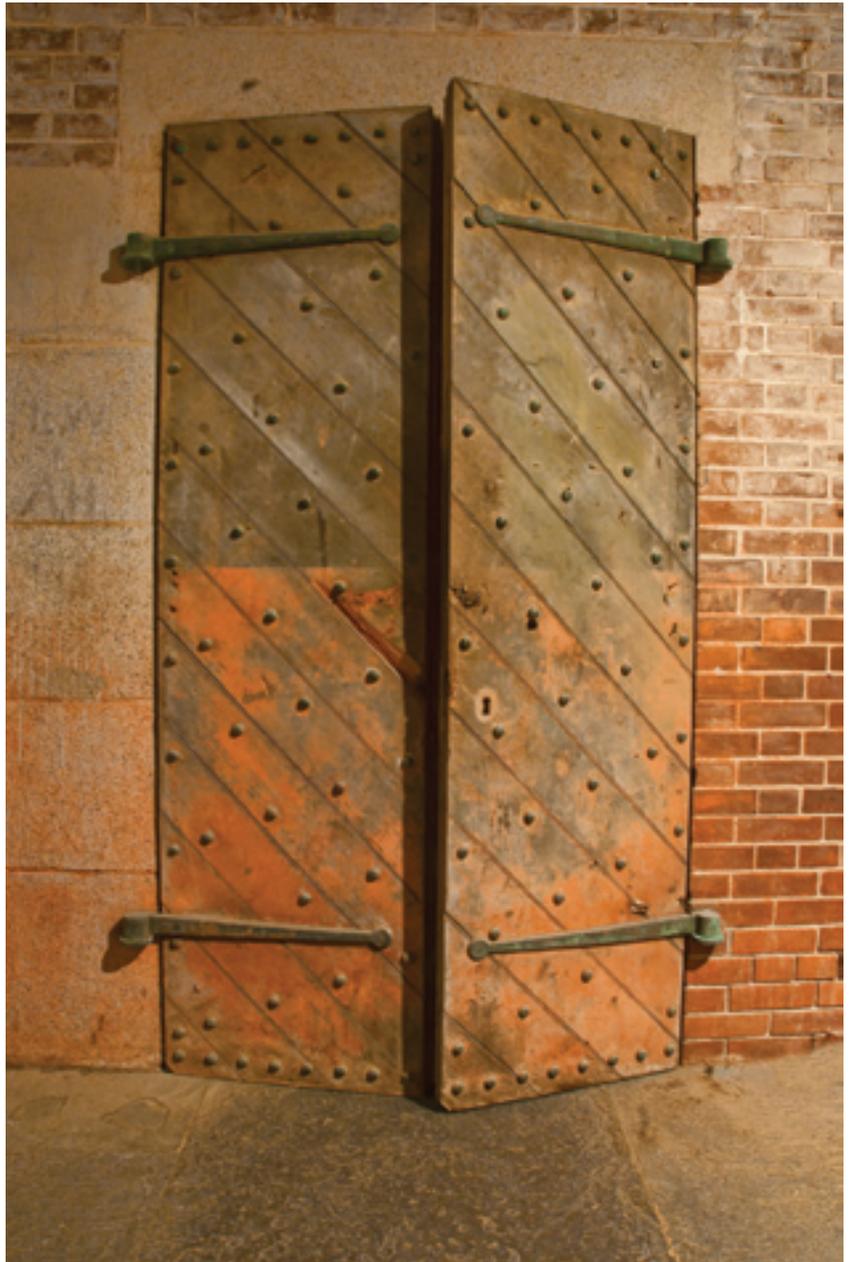
Wikipedia tells us that in 1926 the American Institute of Architects proposed preserving the fort for its outstanding military architecture. Funds were unavailable, and the ideas languished. Plans for the Golden Gate Bridge in the 1930s called for the fort's removal, but Chief Engineer Joseph Strauss redesigned the bridge to save it. The fort is situated directly below the southern approach to the bridge, underneath an arch that supports the roadway. It is now a National Historic Site, and is currently open from 10 AM to 5 PM Friday through Sunday, though it has been closed during high terror alerts. Admission is free. It is best reached by car, or by taxi from the Civic Center BART station.

There are several exhibits on the ground floor, such as a powder magazine with powder barrels, shells, and tiers of cannonballs. There are also cannons of different types. There is little artificial

lighting on the upper floors, and although there are some archways to the outside, much of the light comes through a few narrow windows and gun embrasures. Even on a sunny day those floors can be quite dark. Therefore a tripod is strongly recommended. When one's eyes adjust to the darkness one can see wonderful colored brickwork and fascinating intersecting arches.

Zoom lenses such as the 18-200mm are satisfactory for most of the compositions one would want to make, though a 12-24mm helps in some cases. Conditions are ideal for 7-to-9-exposure HDR at one-stop increments. The interior images here were made at $f/16$ or $f/22$ at ISO 800 using aperture priority, manual focus, and autoexposure with a Nikon® D300. The shutter speed for the auto exposure was between $1/25$ and $1/2$ second. Topaz Adjust® or similar software can be very useful for creatively enhancing the HDR-processed images by bringing out the details and colors.

From the open top floor there is a fine view of the Golden Gate Bridge from below, and the Fort Point Lighthouse is readily visible as well. The 18-200 lens will work well for those views, although a long lens might be useful for capturing the surroundings. The energetic



Open doors



Barrel and stairs



Hallway



Golden Gate Bridge from Fort Point

photographer can combine this visit with a walk across the bridge to the excellent viewpoint on the north end. If not so energetic, one can drive.

Fort Point is out of the way for visitors to San Francisco, but if they are willing to

make the effort to get there photographers will be rewarded by an opportunity to make some interesting and unusual images. ■

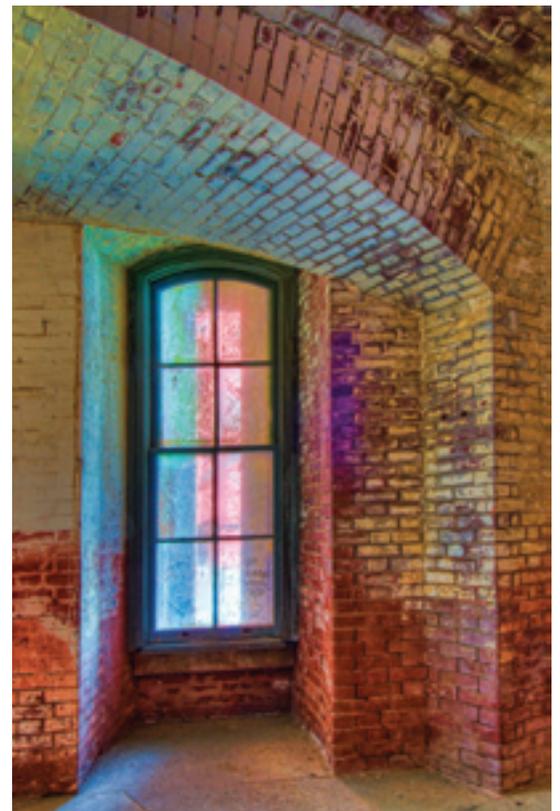
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**Joseph Hearst,
APSA, PPSA**



Lighthouse



Tall window