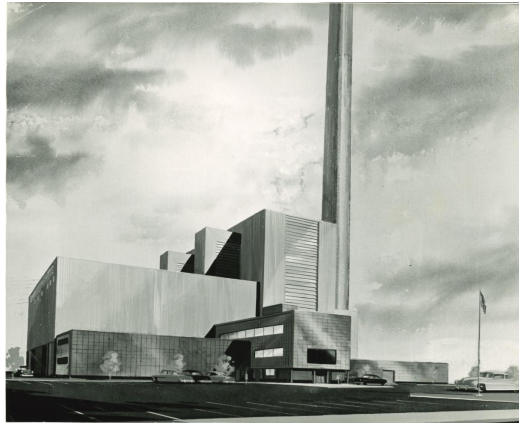# HISTORY CENTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Morro Bay Power Plant

The architect's original concept drawing

Three Stacks by the Rock

They're impossible to miss: three smokestacks towering 450 feet above the bay, providing a man-made counterpoint to Morro Rock. Morro Bay Power Plant is the single most architecturally defined power plant in California representing generally the dramatic era of post-World War II economic prosperity and specifically the spread of cutting edge thermo-electric power generation.
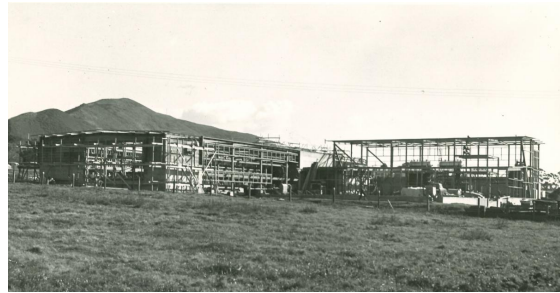
Under construction in March 1954

Designed by the prominent San Francisco architect William Gladstone Merchant, the MBPP is an impressive example of international modernism. In addition to combining the functional needs of the power plant with the forceful geometric ideals of the modern movement, Merchant also used materials in an expressive manner. Aluminum was a signature material reflecting the modern age. Its clear lines reflected machine precision, and aluminum was as commonly used as copper for overhead transmission lines.

The plant consisted of four generating units, the first two of which were constructed 1953-1956, and the final two in 1961-1963. It was the 16th steam plant in the PG&E system, the 6th built after World War II, and the 4th largest in terms of generation of electricity.

MBPP officially stopped producing electricity in 2014, though the stacks are still standing (as of 2020). The plant has changed hands a number of times over the decades, with the final operator Dynegy having been purchased by Vistra Energy. Vistra has indicated a willingness to work with the city on any future potential uses of the site, though its ultimate fate remains unknown.

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For information or to register, [click here](#).

Or you can join the Lighthouse keepers and tour the Point San Luis Lighthouse by [clicking here](#).

Thomas Kessler
Executive Director