New Torrance Firm Builds Unusal Things

If you're driving in Torrance and happen to glance over your shoulder and see a sign that says, "San Francisco 1 mile," don't believe it.

You're looking in the five-acre "back yard" of Temcor, the Torrance-based fabricator of specialized steel and aluminum projects, and building the hugh steel frameworks for freeway signs is one of the firm's specialties. Temcor is the state's largest producer of freeway standards, and at any given moment, there may be 50 to 100 of the giant signs in various stages of construction in the assembly yard.

Temcor likes to make unusual things. The firm, in fact, does nothing else. Temcor people work on such projects as stressed skin aluminum geodesic domes for theaters, churches, and schools, automated, one-man operated portable rock crushers, and once-in-a-lifetime assignments such as the intricate steel framework for the mobile acoustical baffle in the Los Angeles Music Center.

There are other remarkable projects on the drawing boards . . . projects to be unveiled as soon as Temcor has has built and moved into a new plant earlier this year.

Temcor is the creation of its president, Walter G. Mitchell, a Torrance business figure since 1950. Mitchell purchased the "custom operation" divisions of Mahon-West from the R. C. Mahon Co., a steel and aluminum fabricator based in Detroit. The new company employs some 65 highly skilled workers and it is the "pride in craftsmanship" as well as their talent, according to Mitchell, that enables the company to successfully engage in its unusual ventures. It is because most of the employes live in Torrance or the immediate area that Mitchell decided to build his new plant here.

Building the freeway signposts which guide millions of motorists using the state's super-highways started at Temcor three years ago. Improvements have been so rapid that the cost to the state has time and again been reduced. The big steel catwalks and other appurtenances are tooled in a mammoth workshop. The lettered enamel plates (which are made elsewhere) are added, and then the units are trucked to whatever area in the state they are to be erected.

Temcor sends along a supervisor to see that nothing goes amiss in the final step. So far, there's never been a mistake.

Although the heavy steel pieces are put together on an assembly line, nearly every finished sign is a custom job of a sort. The size of catwalks is not standardized and various other factors contribute to individuality. The signs are designed to last at least 10 years, unless, of course, they are victims of traffic accidents.

The firm can turn out a new sign in three weeks from a special stockpile of parts which are held in reserve for emergencies. Presently the company is making and delivering about 200 of the structures yearly.

The company's geodesic dome division most recently completed the stressed skin aluminum top for the new 1,000-seat Cinerama Theater in Las Vegas, Nev., the first showhouse of its kind in the world. Because of the ease of construction of such a dome —the individual panels are assembled at ground level, then raised into position by a hoisting mast—the theater cost only $350,000, a small fraction of the cost of Hollywood's domed Cinerama Theater, whose top was fashioned of pre-cast concrete panels.

The stressed skin structures are also being supplied by Temcor for churches and schools. This week the units of an entire dome were shipped to the Panama Canal Zone to top a combined cafe and auditorium on the new U.S.-built Junior High School. Mitchell expects that the Las Vegas Cinerama Theater will be the forerunner of perhaps 100 more to be built in this country within the next few years.

Mitchell feels that one of his company's most unusual achievements—and one he'll probably never be called on again to produce — is the acoustical baffle hanging in the Music Center.

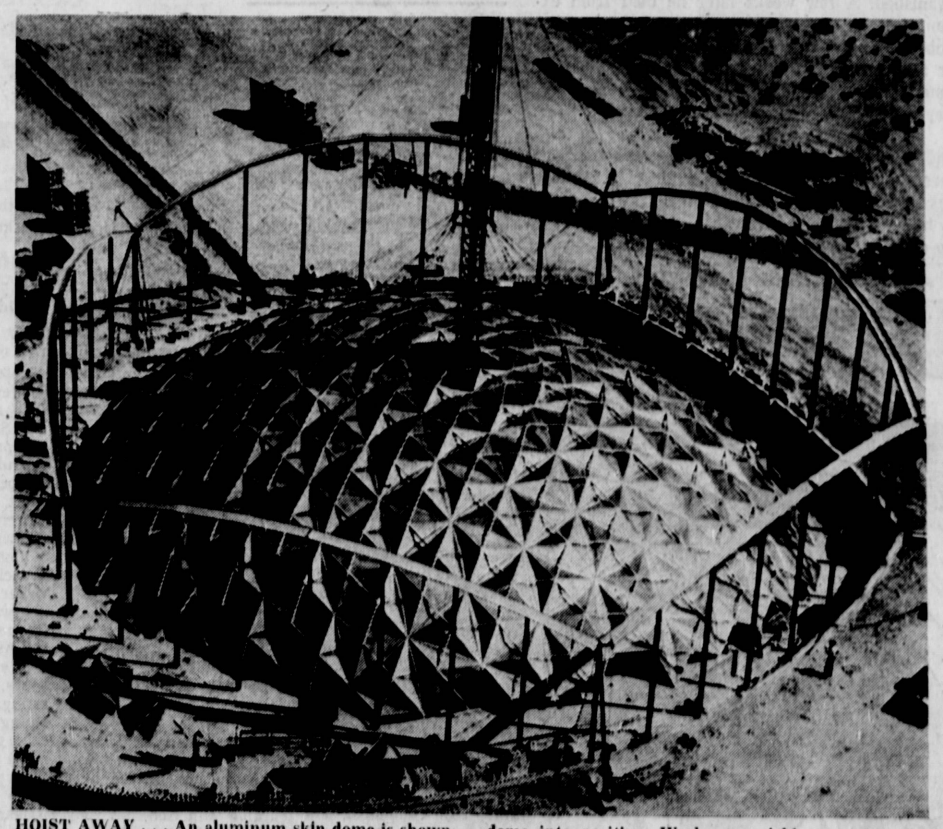
Eighty-five feet wide, 35 feet deep, the steel skeleton had to be fashioned with tolerances of less than one-quarter inch, and no two pieces of its maze of structural tubing are alike. Covered with a hard plastic, it is operated by electric motors to achieve three different positions on the ceiling of the Music Center's auditorium and produces a stereo-like diffusion of sound from the presentations upon the stage.

GETS INSTRUCTIONS . . . Ed Mitchell, a Temcor supervisor gets final instructions from his boss, Walter G. Mitchell (right), before departing with a load of big freeway signs for central California. Temcor, located in Torrance, makes the catwalks and framework for freeway signs. The firm supervises the final installation of the giant signs after fabricating them in the Torrance plant.

CHECKS SIGN . . . Walter G. Mitchell, president of Temcor, checks a freeway sign before sending it away to be placed on the Santa Ana Freeway. Mitchell heads the Torrance firm, which specializes in unusual steel and aluminum construction projects. Temcor is the state's largest producer of the huge frameworks which support freeway guide signs.

QUICK INVENTORY . . . Walter G. Mitchell makes a quick inspection of the Temcor assembly yard in Torrance to be sure he has parts in stock for emergency work. Temcor makes the framework for California freeway signs and must keep parts in stock to make emergency repairs. A complete sign, ruined by freeway accident, can be rebuilt in three weeks from the parts stockpiled, Mitchell says.

MUSIC CENTER SOUNDS . . . Roger Rogers (right), production manager for Temcor, and Walter G. Mitchell, president of the Torrance steel and aluminum fabricating firm, inspect the mobile acoustical baffle which the firm constructed for the Los Angeles Music Center. No two parts in the huge complex are alike, Mitchell said. The baffle gives Music Center audiences stereo sound from presentations on the stage.



HOIST AWAY . . . An aluminum skin dome is shown as it nears final assembly on the ground. Engineers from Temcor of Torrance assembled the huge dome for a 1,000-seat Las Vegas theater, then hoisted the dome into position. Workmen quickly assemble the panels on the ground and bolt the dome into position once it is completed and raised into position.