

ISSUE NUMBER 61
THE MAGAZINE PUBLISHED
IN THE INTEREST OF
PRESERVING AND
RESTORING THE
MODEST AMERICAN
20TH CENTURY HOME,
THE BUNGALOW,
AND THE RICH LIFESTYLE
THAT IT AFFORDS

AMERICAN BUNGALOW

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U.S. \$8.95 / CANADA \$8.95



The author and preservationist considers the recent construction of a new Greene & Greene-inspired home in Northern California—and what lessons owners of ordinary bungalows might draw from it.

Learning from GREENE AND GREENE



GREENE

By JANE POWELL

DEEP DOWN, I BELIEVE NO NEW BUNGALOWS should be built until all existing bungalows are restored. I realize this is not practical. For instance, there are areas of the country where bungalows are few and far between, and some people have to live in these places, depressing though that may be. There are also people who own land who wish to build a house on it, and they should not be denied.

And then there are the people who want a Greene & Greene. Almost anyone who has visited the Gamble House has fallen under its spell. The plethora of light fixtures, furniture, stained glass and staircases either reproduced or inspired by the Greenes' designs attests to their iconic achievements.

If you want an original Greene & Greene, there is a small problem: there aren't that many, and all of them are in California—mostly Southern California—and they don't come on the market all that often. (If you happen to own one, then you're familiar with the annoying phenomenon of architecture junkies knocking on the door or taking pictures from the sidewalk, which keeps you from being able to wander out to get the newspaper wearing a ratty bathrobe.) Given this scarcity, many people have opted to build new Greene & Greene-style houses. That's what Bay Area resident Bruce Aidells did.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEANNE O'CONNOR EXCEPT WHERE NOTED



THE FRONT DOOR, EMBELLISHED WITH THEODORE ELLISON'S LEADED GLASS, FRAMES THE DEEPLY SHADED PORCH, WHICH PROVIDES SHELTERED COMFORT EVEN ON 100-DEGREE SUMMER DAYS.



JOHN HALL & ASSOCIATES (JHA)



BITTEN

It started innocently enough. Bruce bought some English Arts and Crafts furniture from an Oakland dealer to furnish his house in nearby Kensington. Soon he began frequenting the House of Orange, an Alameda antiques shop that specializes in that style.

He might have stopped there, but a fateful invitation in 1996 to visit Berkeley's Thorsen House with an architecturally inclined friend introduced him to the architecture of Charles and Henry Greene, and he was instantly captivated. One supposes he could have tried to buy the Thorsen House, except it wasn't for sale and is unlikely ever to be, since it belongs to a fraternity. And living on fraternity row—well, let's just say that's not a path to a quiet, contemplative lifestyle.

So instead, Aidells befriended Ted Bosley, the director of the Gamble House, and Jack Stumpf, the house's chief docent who, it turned out, is also a sausage aficionado. (Yes. That Aidells). Soon Bruce was getting the private tour of the house. He began to want a Greene & Greene of his own, but realized that to build one properly would require a good deal of money, which he didn't then have. So he settled for immersing himself in Greene & Greene—buying books, visiting other houses and museums—and biding his time.



THE CHANDELIERS AND CLOUD-LIFT BEAMS IN THE TIMBER-FRAMED GREAT ROOM EMBODY ARCHITECT GREG KLEIN'S BELIEF THAT CONSTRUCTION OF THE QUALITY PETER AND JOHN HALL DID FOR THE GREENE BROTHERS CAN STILL BE DONE BY TODAY'S BUILDERS.





The opportunity finally came in 2002, when he sold his interest in the eponymous sausage company he started in 1983. With enough money now in his pocket, Bruce and his wife, Nancy Oakes, owner and chef of Boulevard in San Francisco, went looking for land, and eventually found a lovely hilltop site overlooking a valley near Healdsburg.

Then Bruce began looking for an architect who knew how to design a Greene & Greene-style house. He settled on Greg Klein of John Malick and Associates in Emeryville. They had never designed a G&G house, but they were local, unlike other architects he had considered, and he felt they would be hands on. Greg had long been a fan of the Greenes. "Greene & Greene buildings are so well crafted," he says. "Many people assume that this kind of construction can't be done by today's builders. It can."

Bruce had a clear idea of what he wanted: an airplane bungalow with a massive roof. He also wanted a kitchen that would, of course, be the center of the house, and privacy for the guest rooms. Klein, says Bruce, "Got it in one pass," combining elements from various Greene & Greene houses, including the shallow, V-shaped wings of the Pratt House in Ojai, the second-floor sleeping porch of the Blacker House in Pasadena, and the living room of the Thorsen House. A huge kitchen, complete with wood-fired roasting spit, would open to a timber-framed great room in one wing, while the other would contain guest suites, a library and service areas. A soaring entry hall would connect the two wings, with an elaborate staircase leading up to the master suite.

Construction began in May 2005. The garage and guest quarters were completed first, along with a swimming pool flanked by a large cedar-timbered pergola. The garage also contains the "sausage kitchen," a room with a concrete floor and six-foot-high subway-tile wainscot.

THE AIRPLANE BUNGALOW'S TWO LIVING-SPACE WINGS AND MASSIVE OVERHANGING ROOF EMBRACE A RICHLY TEXTURED, MULTICOLORED HARDSCAPE OF SINUOUS WALKWAYS, GRACEFUL PLANTINGS AND THE WOOD-BURNING OUTDOOR PIZZA OVEN.





(My suggestion to paint the walls blood red was wisely ignored.) Bruce knew that many of his neighbors were hunters, and apparently there is something of a "wild boar problem" in the area, so he figured the neighbors could bring their game meat over and he would help them turn it into sausage. He admits this hasn't happened—so far. But if you think Arts and Crafts is an obscure subculture, let me tell you, we've got nothing on the sausage guys....

As with every building project, there were problems. In a display of regulatory caprice, the county insisted on a gas-burning fireplace for the great room but okayed a wood-burning cooking hearth in the kitchen and in the pizza oven outside. As would be expected of two foodies, there is both an indoor and an outdoor kitchen. The indoor kitchen's focal point is a huge cloud-lift pot rack that hangs over an island so large that one visitor remarked that it looked more a continent.

Bruce was heavily involved during the two years of construction. He picked and placed many of the rocks in the elaborate stonework of the chimney, having the somewhat puzzled masons pick up stones and turn them this way and that, and then deciding where to place them. In this, he was following in the footsteps of Charles Greene, who personally directed the placement of the stones for the James House in Carmel. Bruce said it was the most fun he had, perhaps matched only by



EXCEPT IN THE KITCHEN, WHERE SOMETHING MORE MOISTURE PROOF WAS NEEDED, THE INTERIOR WOOD SURFACES, INCLUDING HERE THE MAHOGANY-PANELED ENTRY HALL AND INTRICATE STAIRWAY, WERE GIVEN A SIMPLE WAX-OVER-STAIN FINISH.



THE AIDELLS-OAKS HOUSE IS SET ON A HILLTOP WHERE THE PORCHES AND ALMOST EVERY ROOM AFFORD VIEWS OF THE SONOMA COUNTY VINEYARDS SURROUNDING HEALDSBURG, ABOUT AN HOUR NORTH OF SAN FRANCISCO.



watching the intricate banister of the stairway being pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle.

He also got involved in picking out the lumber used for the woodwork—mahogany in the entry hall and library, Douglas fir elsewhere. He was very concerned about the finish on the woodwork, wanting it to look as if it had always been there. After many stain-and-finish experiments, a wax finish over stain was chosen, except for areas like the kitchen, which required something a bit more waterproof.

Although Bruce clearly was the driving force in shaping the house (he jokes, "In some ways, it's good to have a wife who works 12 hours a day..."), he did run all the decisions by Nancy, and she had the final say on things like bathrooms, tile and colors.

As for Bruce, a man utterly besotted with his house, it was hard to choose his favorite things, but he finally settled on the cloud-lift pot rack and the chandeliers. And his favorite thing to do? "Float in the swimming pool like a hippopotamus and stare up at the sleeping porch."

What Would the Greens Do (Today)?

By now, you may be excused for thinking, "Great! Some couple with a huge amount of money builds a Greene & Greene-style house. Big whoop. What does this have to do with me and my 900-square-foot bungalow?" (Few of us have a successful sausage company to sell. For those who do, Bruce figures the cost of the house came out to 322 miles of sausage.)





THE HUGE CLOUD-LIFT POT RACK HANGS ABOVE A MASSIVE COOKING ISLAND (DEEMED A "CONTINENT" BY ONE WAGGISH GUEST) THAT BEFITS THE LIFESTYLES OF A PAIR OF SERIOUS FOODIES. NANCY OAKES IS OWNER AND CHEF OF BOULEVARD RESTAURANT ON SAN FRANCISCO'S REVIVED WATERFRONT, AND IT WAS THE SALE OF BRUCE'S OWNERSHIP SHARE OF THE EPONYMOUS SAUSAGE COMPANY THAT HELPED UNDERWRITE THE HOUSE'S CONSTRUCTION.

Well, here are some Greene-friendly lessons for owners of ordinary bungalows.

The first is to embrace what you already have. These days it is difficult and expensive to procure the old-growth wood that was used in most historic bungalows—probably including yours, if it was built before 1925. And preserving an existing building, however modest, is something the Greenes would likely have championed. "There is in wood," Charles wrote, "something that stimulates the imagination, its petalous sheen, sinuous grain, delicate shading that age may give to even the commonest kind."

On my first visit to the Gamble House—in 1987, shortly after buying my first bungalow—I was taken with the proportions, the craftsmanship, the beauty of the wood and art glass. But rather than lusting after a G&G of my own, what I took away from that visit was a sense of just how much of the high-end, architect-designed Arts and Crafts architecture had actually filtered down to the average bungalow.

Though my woodwork was Douglas fir rather than teak, and my fireplace was cast concrete instead of Grueby tile, I still had an inglenook, a sideboard with leaded-glass doors, and windows with an interesting muntin pattern. If you have a bungalow, value the craftsmanship that is already there, rather than desire the craftsmanship of Greene & Greene (which technically is the craftsmanship of the Hall brothers, who don't get nearly enough credit). That being said, if I were ever to give up my fabulous bunga-mansion, the only house I would trade it for is the Duncan-Irwin House.



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Resist the urge to turt up your existing bungalow to mimic a Greene & Greene masterpiece. If you simply must have some G&G in your house, I suggest a reproduction table lamp, perhaps a chair, or, for those with not a lot of money, the lovely woodblock print made by Yoshiko Yamamoto for the Gamble House 2008 Centennial.

If you are building, and you are determined on Greene & Greene, try basing the design on one of their simpler houses, like the Spinks House, in Pasadena, or the Darling House in nearby Claremont, rather than insisting on one of the ultimate bungalows (which are technically not bungalows, anyway). Realize that not every house by the Greene brothers had cloud lifts. Exercise restraint. You don't (or shouldn't) want your house to end up looking like a cartoonish knockoff. Just because one massive five-arm chandelier is good does not mean three are better.



Most Greene & Greene houses, though their detailing is lovely, are fundamentally about light, space and the placement of the house on the site, not about how many pegged scarf joints they have. (Many have no pegged scarf joints at all.) Think seriously about how big it really needs to be, because the bigger it is, the more resources it

uses up, no matter how "green" you build it. At 4,200 square feet, the Aidells house is not small, but it's only one-third the size of the 12,000-square-foot Blacker House.

Again, treat wood with reverence. The old-growth Douglas fir that was one of the cheapest woods available at the turn of the 20th century is now more expensive than most hardwoods. Try to use salvaged wood if you can get it, and make the most of it by using box beams rather than solid timbers.

Nancy and Bruce are serious foodies. If you aren't, then you don't need a kitchen like theirs. And though Charles and Henry actually put cloud lifts on some of their kitchen cabinets, they were



FOR ALL ITS OPENNESS TO ITS SPECTACULAR SURROUNDINGS, THE HOUSE STILL HARBORS QUIET ZONES FOR READING, CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION.





attached with screws; they knew that kitchen cabinets do not need to be furniture. Also note that the Gamble House kitchen originally had linoleum; the maple floor seen there now is actually the subfloor. Linoleum is a completely green product, not to mention


that it resists showing dirt.

And I must harp on this again, as I've done elsewhere: stainless steel is the avocado green of the 21st century. If you can afford a Sub-Zero, then you can afford the fully-integrated model, encased in wood paneling.

Educate your contractors. Many of the crew who worked on the Aidells-Oakes house actually took a trip to the Gamble House to get a better feel for what they were working on. At the very least, get a few G&G books to show them.

Donovan Rypkema has remarked that preservation is often about "the mansions of rich, dead white guys." A lot of the money that paid for those iconic mansions was acquired at the cost of natural-resources extraction or the exploitation of labor. At least Bruce Aidells made his money by providing us with lovely chicken-apple sausage to serve with Sunday brunch.

Finally, it takes a lot of money to run a mansion, so think twice before you lust after one. A 1,200-square-foot bungalow makes a lot more sense.

All of this said, I have no doubt that 100 years from now, the Aidells-Oakes House will be an icon of the Arts and Crafts Revival. 

Jane Powell is a bungalow preservation and design author and consultant. Her "Polemic—Confessions of a Radical Preservationist" appeared in Issue No. 56 (Winter 2007). She lives in Oakland, Calif.



G&G



A FATEFUL 1996 INVITATION TO VISIT THE THORSEN HOUSE IN BERKELEY PROMPTED BRUCE TO EMBARK ON THE GREENE & GREENE EXPLORATION THAT CULMINATED HERE, WHERE HE, HIS ARCHITECT AND A GROUP OF CALIFORNIA ARTISANS HAVE CREATED AN OBJECT LESSON IN LIGHT, SPACE AND CRAFT IN THE LANDSCAPE.

