



These owners knew where they were headed when they bought a Berkeley house designed in 1911 by architect Julia Morgan.

BY ARLENE BAXTER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LINDA SVENDSEN



A house of redwood, oak, & stone



TOP: The author's house, designed by California architect Julia Morgan, was featured as an exemplary residence in a ca.1920 postcard.

OPPOSITE: 'Lady Banks' roses (left) and the small guest cottage, viewed from the back of the house.

ABOVE: Owners Arlene Baxter and David Mostardi.

"HOW'D YOU LIKE TO GO take a look at a Julia Morgan house?"

I asked my husband. David was usually game for casual house-touring of historic homes. I should already have seen the house during the Thursday tour with real-estate colleagues, but I'd had my own appointment that week. So we headed out to see the new listing. It turned out to be a house I'd been curious about—one with a real presence on the street, with three gabled windows, a huge front porch, lots of stonework, and out front a 60-foot hedge of pink roses.

We walked up the stairway and into the entry hall, where we were impressed by quarter-sawn oak that covered walls and ceiling. Opening the French doors, we were awed by the great room with its impressive stone fireplace that soars 16 feet to the ceiling. Walls and beamed ceiling were entirely of heart redwood. Opposite the fireplace hung a wonderful Juliet balcony. We looked at each other: "Could this be the *one*?"

Not that we'd been looking for a new home. It would have to be a special Arts and Crafts residence to motivate us to leave our attractive brown-shingle. For both of us, many activities involve issues concerned with the Arts and Crafts movement or its revival by talented artists and craftspeople in this area, many of whom have become our friends. As a



ABOVE: The wood-block print commissioned by David as an anniversary present was designed and printed by Yoshiko Yamamoto of the Arts & Crafts Press; it's the view that would have been seen from the home at the time it was built, before the Golden Gate Bridge existed. **BELOW:** The fireplace features Northbrae rhyolite, a locally quarried stone named for this neighborhood in North Berkeley.



JULIA MORGAN

California's premier woman architect, Julia Morgan (1872–1957), stood only five feet tall, but her stature as an engineer and architect puts her among the giants of the 20th century. Morgan's profession was her life; she was an intensely private person. After hard-won acceptance, she became the first female graduate of the Architecture division of the École des Beaux-Arts in



Paris. Her strength of character would be essential in working with her most famous client, William Randolph Hearst, who commissioned her most famous project at San Simeon. Morgan also designed the "Little Castle," the Berkeley Women's City Club—a beautiful mélange of Moorish, Gothic, and Romanesque elements. Hearst's mother,

Phoebe Apperson Hearst, chose Morgan to design many buildings for the women's organizations of which she was a major patron. Asilomar, the YWCA camp Morgan designed in Pacific Grove, is a California State Monument. In her lifetime, Morgan designed and saw built over 700 structures, including over 100 single-family homes in Berkeley alone. She was skilled in many styles, ranging from the "brown-shingles" so characteristic of Berkeley, to formal classical structures and numerous revival buildings.

RIGHT: The entire stair hall is finished in quarter-sawn oak. **OPPOSITE:** Like the great room, the dining room is finished entirely in heart redwood. Over the mantel, a contemporary painting by Jack Cassinotto.





The great room reminds us of
Asilomar (1913–1937), the
conference grounds in Pacific Grove
designed by Julia Morgan. In both cases,
Morgan combined **redwood** interiors
with a generous use of native **stone**.





TOP RIGHT: A painting by Californian Jack Cassinetto hangs over a Gustav Stickley sideboard. A wood-block print by Frances Gearhart (1869–1958) hangs at right. **OPPOSITE:** The settle is a period piece by Lifetime; bookcase is Gustav Stickley. **GARDEN:** Cymbidium orchids, and roses near the guest cottage. **BELOW:** In the library (with an antique L. & J. G. Stickley table), the paper frieze is by Carol Mead.

real-estate agent who specializes in Arts and Crafts-era homes, I make it a point to look at anything described as a bungalow, brown-shingle, or Prairie style. Sometimes I'm sorely disappointed; but not that day. Upstairs we were treated to beautiful views of San Francisco Bay. In the garden we discovered a charming guest cottage. When we entered the library, David, who collects books of the Arts and Crafts period, was convinced.

We became only the fourth owners of the F.A. Thomas house, designed in 1911 by Julia Morgan. It sits on Arlington Avenue, now a busy thoroughfare but, at the time the house was constructed, a highly desirable boulevard, its median strip planted with flowers. A pamphlet from



the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce, published by *Sunset* magazine ca.1912, included a photo of this house with the caption: "Banks of flowers line the roadways. With its beautiful homes, Berkeley is a vast garden."

We bought our home from a

When we refinished the floors, a dramatic and attractive variation in color emerged, board to board. No one could tell us with certainty what the wood is. Perhaps birch? Perhaps sycamore, or an exotic mahogany. Sadly, all of the original light fixtures

OVER THE YEARS, our furnishings had moved away from the Victoriana I had easily collected at auctions during the 1980s, to more dearly acquired Arts and Crafts pieces. Though we gained 1000 sq. ft. when we moved, our furnishings filled the house. We've

The house is furnished not only with **period antiques**, but also with new work, from lamps to paintings, by contemporary artists and artisans **inspired by** the Arts and Crafts movement.

family with six children who had occupied it for 48 years. The only remuddling they'd done was in an effort to protect the house from their three boys: They'd put Sears paneling on the walls, acoustic tiles on the ceiling, and linoleum on the floor of the back bedroom and adjoining sun porches. When we removed those finishes, we discovered that the jalousie windows installed in the 1960s—the only replacement windows—had probably been leaking ever since. The stucco "skin" was all that held the porch together.

We'd delayed restoring these particular rooms as we awaited an approval (recently granted) under the Mills Act agreement, a tax-reduction act for owners of landmarked properties in certain California cities. Soon we will indeed reframe the porch, and install new wood windows, wood floors, and plaster.



This secretary desk is a period knock-off of a piece sold by Liberty (London). Above it hangs a plein-air painting by contemporary Berkeley artist Wanda Westberg. To the left is a work by Roycroft revival artist Kathleen West.

had disappeared. We have made good progress installing both period fixtures and reasonable reproductions.

added just a few pieces: a comfortable, new Caledonian Studios Morris chair, a period wicker floor lamp.

A focal point is a large piece acquired at auction, which was originally a buffet in the Spanish Embassy in San Francisco [just visible on p. 62]. Its dining-room face is cherry wood, with a copper foil and glass tulip pattern in the doors. I had built the piece into our previous home, but couldn't bear to leave it.

Our long-term plan includes remodeling the small kitchen to better connect it with the breakfast room, butler's pantry, and laundry. We will maintain as much of the period feel as possible, while providing reasonable, usable space, and taking advantage of garden views. We are acutely aware that our role is as stewards, and that maintaining the spirit of Julia Morgan's design is essential. ✦

ARLENE BAXTER is an agent with Berkeley Hills Realty, specializing in Arts and Crafts movement houses. She recently sold a rustic-style Morgan home. Arlene will be at Arts and Crafts San Francisco, August 14–15, at the Concourse Exhibition Center: baxter@pobox.com. ■ DAVID MOSTARDI, the author's husband, is researching Paul Elder, early-20th-century publisher and bookstore owner. He recently curated an exhibition at the San Francisco Public Library about Elder's work and his various shops [paulelder.org], and has published a checklist of Elder's works [artsandcraftspress.com].