

Are Antiques Still a Good Investment? ■ An Insider's Guide to Berkeley

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The Best of **BERKELEY**

By Arlene Baxter

Photographs by the author, except as noted

Since its early development, Berkeley, Calif., has been a bohemian haven, attracting artists and intellectuals lured by the great weather, beautiful hillside views and an esteemed university. It's the home of the free speech movement and the birthplace of California cuisine.

Berkeley also holds a distinguished reputation for its diverse and distinctive architecture. Forsaking housing tracts, developers encouraged the work of individual architects and designers. Some, such as Bernard Maybeck, Julia Morgan, John Galen Howard and John Hudson Thomas gained world renown largely on the basis of their early homes in Berkeley.

In the broadest definition, the majority of Berkeley houses could be described as Arts and Crafts. Although bungalows and Prairie style houses—many covered in stucco—are quite common, one of the earliest styles was the Berkeley “brown shingle.” Redwood was plentiful during the city’s formative years at the beginning of the last century, and redwood was used not only for roof shingles and siding, but for framing and interior trim. In many significant homes, unpainted redwood covered the walls and ceilings alike. This architecture celebrated natural materials and honest, unpretentious design, and represented the ideal of the “simple home.”

After the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco, citizens crossed the bay in droves to seek shelter in Berkeley, attracted by the newly opened North Berkeley neighborhoods of Northbrae and Thousand Oaks. An efficient interurban train line linked Berkeley, Oakland and San Francisco, making the development of these neighborhoods viable. Berkeley’s population soared from 13,000 in 1900 to nearly 56,000 in 1920, when various revival styles of architecture began to flourish. Our tour of the area will focus on the early years, from just before 1900 until the tragic fire of 1923 that destroyed many homes in the North Berkeley area.

Arlene Baxter is a Realtor in Berkeley, Calif., who specializes in Arts and Crafts homes (thesimplehome.com). She and her husband are the proud owners of a Julia Morgan-designed home from 1911.

Joel Pulatti, from Bernard Maybeck: Architect of Elegance (Gibbs Smith, 2011)



This Bay Area bastion of independent thought boasts a stellar collection of Craftsman architecture



Bernard Maybeck's First Church of Christ, Scientist, completed in 1910.

Top, left to right Julia Morgan's 834 Santa Barbara Ave.; the Arlington Circle's central fountain; the birthplace of California cuisine, Chez Panisse.





The Hillside Club



2960 Linden St.

Keeler, Maybeck and the 'simple home'

Clubs were important centers of social life at the turn of the last century, and Berkeley was home to nearly three dozen clubs and lodges. One of these, the Hillside Club in North Berkeley, would have a substantial influence on city planning, as well as attitudes toward development, building styles, landscaping and even decoration.

Founded in 1898 by a group of approximately 30 women, the Hillside Club's mission was "to protect the hills of Berkeley from unsightly grading and the building of unsuitable and disfiguring houses; to do all in our power to beautify these hills and above all to create and encourage a decided public opinion on these subjects."

Realizing they needed the political clout of men, the members reorganized in 1902, admitting their first males. Architect Bernard Maybeck and his wife, Annie, became charter members, as did Charles and Louise Keeler, and architect John Galen Howard and his wife, Mary.

Keeler became the club's second president in 1903. An eccentric naturalist, playwright and poet of dubious distinction, he was also an advocate for a way of living that celebrated a simple life. Keeler promoted homes that were in harmony with their natural setting and made of honest materials. To Keeler's mind, that material was wood, not "shabby stucco." He had commissioned Maybeck's first residential work in 1895, a shingled house on Highland Place with multiple, steeply gabled roofs. It was one of the first homes in the new interpretation of the Arts and Crafts style in California, and was the site where Charles and his wife, Louise, the ultimate bohemian couple, entertained a community of artists and philosophers in the first years of the 20th century.

Fearing an influx of "stupid white-painted boxes," Keeler wrote *The Simple Home* in 1904, dedicating it to "my friend and counselor, Bernard R. Maybeck." In this small volume he set out what would become the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement in the Bay Area. Paul Elder's San Francisco store, also designed by Maybeck, provided the ideal accessories for the simple home: handmade pottery, copper crafts and artwork—especially Japanese prints.

"In the simple home all is quiet in effect, restrained in tone, yet natural and joyous in its frank use of unadorned material," wrote Keeler. "Harmony of line and balance of proportion is not obscured by meaningless ornamentation; harmony of color is not marred by violent contrasts. Much of the construction shows, and therefore good workmanship is required and the craft of the carpenter is restored to its old-time dignity."

For the next two decades, the Hillside Club and the notion of the simple home would influence the design of streets and houses, retaining walls and civic artifacts. The natural contours of the land were to be followed, and trees and rocky outcroppings



1035 Shattuck Ave.

maintained. Living with nature was an important concept, and homes were supposed to be closely integrated with their natural settings. A Hillside Club publication famously declared, “Hillside architecture is landscape gardening around a few rooms for use in case of rain.”

But it was wood—often rough-hewn, occasionally carved—that these Berkeley buildings would celebrate. Most followed Keeler’s dictum to leave wood natural. “There is a refinement and character about natural wood which is entirely lost when the surface is altered by varnish and polish,” he wrote. Houses clad and outfitted in wood, especially the Berkeley Brown Shingles, gave a character to this city that distinguishes it to this day.

Here are some of my favorite Berkeley structures built between 1895 and 1923. Since most are private homes, please take care to respect the rights and privacy of the residents when you pass by.

Our tour starts, appropriately enough, at 2286 Cedar St.—**the Hillside Club**, symbolic home of the Arts and Crafts movement in the Bay Area. The current building was designed by John White, Bernard Maybeck’s brother-in-law, after the first clubhouse was destroyed by fire in 1923. Construction of this structure began in May 1924, and the club held its first meeting there that August. It is an all-wood building, with a fireplace centered on the southern wall and a raised stage at the far end. Maybeck and Keeler enjoyed theatrical events, and no doubt encouraged the early members to make this part of their tradition.

Northside: Santa Barbara, Shattuck, Summer and Arch

Start at Berkeley’s first public artwork, the Arlington Circle’s **central fountain** designed by John Galen Howard in 1911. (Howard was supervising architect for the University of California.) Four grizzly cubs support an upper basin filled with cascading water. The original fountain was destroyed when a truck lost control in 1958. After many years of neglect, the fountain was restored in 1996. Heading up Marin you will reach Shattuck Avenue, and then Santa Barbara Avenue. Numerous streets in this area were named after California counties as part of Berkeley’s bid to become the state capital, but the town’s lack of legal alcohol doomed the plan to failure. This fountain would have marked the beginning of the capitol grounds.

The 1909 MacKerricher House at **1035 Shattuck Ave.**, an early design by John Hudson Thomas, is significant for its sheer mass and balance. As impressive as it is from the exterior, the original interior details are exceptional: The burl redwood paneling in the living room and entry feature a most remarkable graining pattern. The old-growth tree that produced this material was said to have come from Duncan MacKerricher’s property in Mendocino County, which would become a state park. MacKerricher felled the tree at the birth of his daughter, Edith, who lived in the house from the time of her marriage until her death.

1027 Shattuck Ave., designed by Olin S. Grove in 1914, features shingle and clapboard siding and a clinker brick



830 Santa Barbara Ave.



1200 Shattuck Ave.

Living with nature was an important concept, and homes were closely integrated with their natural settings.

fireplace; the dining room appeared on the cover of this magazine in Fall 2003. To appreciate the diversity of John Hudson Thomas' work, don't miss the 1916 white, Tudor Revival-style house at number **1033 Shattuck Ave.** The Spaulding House next door at **1041 Shattuck Ave.** was designed by Walter Ratcliff in 1910, with a more recent addition atop the garage. The 1913 John E. Gardiner House at **1130 Shattuck Ave.** is a particularly impressive example of John Hudson Thomas' use of carved stucco.

The Flagg House and studio at **1200 Shattuck Ave.** were designed by Bernard Maybeck in 1900 and 1906, respectively, for a prominent classics professor. The house, clad in shingles on the lower levels and board and batten above, was the first

of several chalet designs by Maybeck. The second-story window boxes and the balconies, with their cutout patterns, were recently painted bright colors. Keeler would not have approved, but Maybeck might have! **Live Oak Park**, across the street, is one Berkeley's oldest parks.

Chez Panisse, on Shattuck Avenue near Cedar Street, is where Alice Waters introduced the concept of California cuisine 40 years ago. Make reservations as close as possible to one month in advance for the prix fixe meals downstairs. The upstairs café is more accessible, and you'll still enjoy the redwood interiors and copper light fixtures made by Kip Mesirow. The facade is an example of the revival of brown-shingled architecture that began in the 1970s with Berkeley's public buildings and continues today—an ideal marriage of wood shingles, wisteria and copper.

The 800 block of Santa Barbara includes **Grotto Rock Park**, one of the more impressive of the rhyolite outcroppings that serve as small neighborhood parks.

Carr Jones is known primarily for his storybook houses. Built in 1914 for the ancestors of the current owners, **830 Santa Barbara Ave.** features a distinctive combination of redwood siding below and shingles above, chalet-style carved balconies, broad eaves and ranks of windows on both floors. Fireplaces occupy prominent positions on the main level, with one flanked by charming inglenook seating. A stone fireplace is also prominent in the downstairs room off the kitchen.

The Carr Jones house at **836 Santa Barbara Ave.** has been extensively updated. The house at number **834 Santa Barbara Ave.** is the work of Julia Morgan—it's one of more than 100 homes she designed in Berkeley alone. Built in 1916 for two women doctors who were early members of the Hillside Club, it includes a study in the front of the house where they saw patients. The upstairs great room features an all-redwood interior with a beamed cathedral ceiling, central fireplace and built-in bookcases. The bedrooms and two bathrooms are downstairs.

The rustic-style home at **2239 Summer St.** sits up off the street, nestled in a wooded setting among similar houses. Designed by Julia Morgan in 1915, the house features a redwood living room with beamed cathedral ceiling, a clinker brick fireplace and walls paneled with burlap. Separate guest quarters are at the back of the house.

Sitting above **the corner of Spruce and Glen** is an excellent example of the many owner-designed shingled homes of the period. The Dempster House, from 1908, combines a polygonal porch, an angled entrance and a polygonal corner tower with a witch's cap roof. The Dempsters were Hillside Club members at the time this home was built, and were clearly influenced by the club's tenets.



1035 Shattuck Ave.

Arch Street

The 1300 and 1400 blocks of Arch Street provide unusually consistent examples of two-story, brown-shingle homes from 1902 to 1914. **1325 Arch St.** was designed for the Schneider family in 1907 by Bernard Maybeck and his brother-in-law, John White. It's distinguished by multiple carved balconies on two levels, and both vertical and horizontal board-and-batten siding.

The Julia Morgan–designed homes across the street, at **1324 and 1320 Arch St.**, are quite different from one another, although both are clad in wood shingles. Occupying a prominent corner lot at **1340 Arch St.** is the Frederick W. Wallace House, designed by John White in 1905. This large home features triple-carved eave brackets and chalet-style carved balconies. It was originally clad in shingles, but was covered in stucco after the 1923 fire.

On and near the campus

A walking tour of the University of California, Berkeley, is a pleasant event, especially if you are visiting on a weekend, when the campus is quieter. Two adjacent buildings are a must-see: **The Faculty Club** (Bernard Maybeck, 1901) features an all-redwood interior with several cozy public rooms. But the great hall is its distinguishing feature. Evocative of a baronial hall, it boasts a fireplace decorated with antlers and a high-pitched, timbered ceiling that rests on short beams, whose ends are carved in the shape of dragons. Next door is **Senior Hall**, a rustic log cabin comprised of two rooms with a central fireplace. Built in 1907,



Maybeck's masterpiece

Bernard Maybeck's 1910 First Church of Christ, Scientist, at the corner of Bowditch and Dwight, is perhaps the architect's greatest achievement, and the only building in Berkeley that has been designated a National Historic Landmark. Maybeck used simple materials—wood, concrete, asbestos panels and industrial steel windows—to magnificent effect. The gothic tracery on the leaded windows is stunning, especially when enhanced by draping wisteria in the spring. But it's the auditorium that inspires awe. It's worth planning your trip to include a free tour of the building on the first Sunday of every month at 12:15 p.m. For more information and interior pictures of this landmark, visit friendsoffirstchurch.org.



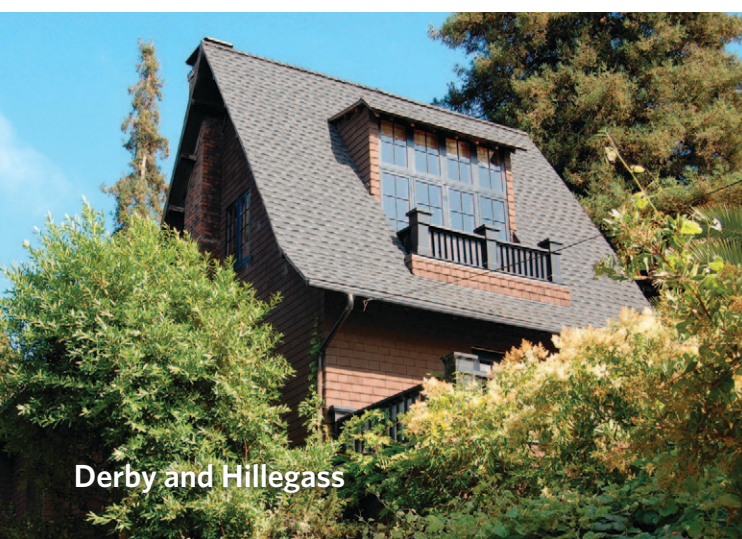
First Unitarian Church



2307 Piedmont Ave.



2960 Linden St.



Derby and Hillegass

it is the oldest extant student building on campus.

Berkeley is home to one of four “ultimate bungalows” designed by brothers Charles and Henry Greene. Situated along Piedmont Avenue’s “fraternity row,” the 1909 Thorsen House at **2307 Piedmont Ave.** has served as the home of Sigma Phi since 1946 (see *Style 1900*, Spring 2011). Japanesque influences are seen in the joinery, lanterns and exposed beams with softened ends. A Chinese “lift” motif is repeated in the windows, doors and bookcases, echoing its use in the Greenes’ Blacker House in Pasadena. The interior details are extraordinary: mahogany scarf joints accented with ebony dowel covers flank hand-painted friezes in both the living and dining rooms. Iridescent leaded-glass light fixtures illuminate fireplaces accented with Grueby tiles and framed by bronze surrounds inlaid with copper. The student residents show considerable respect for this masterwork, and are very accommodating to requests for impromptu tours if you ask politely!

On the southern edge of the campus, at the corner of Bancroft and Dana, is the **First Unitarian Church**. Quite controversial when it was built, this A.C. Schweinfurth landmark features one giant gable above a large circular window bracketed by unpeeled redwood pillars. The street side boasts arched windows between faux buttresses—a kind of architectural pun. Today the building is owned by the University and serves as a dance studio.

Elmwood

On the blocks immediately above and below College Avenue, visitors can enjoy numerous examples of brown-shingled homes, especially in the blocks from Derby through Prince Streets. Maybeck’s Gifford McGrew House of 1900, at **the corner of Derby and Hillegass** across from Willard Park, is an important example of the early Shingle style. All three levels of heart redwood interior have remained remarkably untouched over the years, despite the home’s recent occupation by students.

The long, straight streets of Hillegass and Benvenue Avenues are very different from the winding roads of the hills, but are home to works by many of Berkeley’s most important architects. Besides Maybeck, Morgan and John Hudson Thomas, you’ll find work by A.W. Smith, Walter Ratcliff, Albert Dodge Coplin and a local designer-builder, Leola Hall. Some personal favorites:

2555 Benvenue Ave. (Dickman-Brown House, 1894)

2619 Benvenue Ave. (Sadler House, Julia Morgan, 1905)

2625 Benvenue Ave. (Lindgren-Jones House, 1899–1901)

2628 Benvenue Ave. (Erwin-Rhodes House, 1902)

2631 Benvenue Ave. (Hicks-Havens House, 1901)
 2819 Benvenue Ave. (Mrs. O'Brien House, A.W.
 Smith, 1903)
 2811 Benvenue Ave. (Charles Westerberg House,
 A. Dodge Coplin, 1903)
 2901 Benvenue Ave. (Hicks House, 1904)
 2917 Benvenue Ave. (Lindgren-Chaddock House, 1906)
 2725 Hillegass Ave. (Henderson House No. 1, 1904)
 2827 Hillegass Ave. (Arthur Cole House, 1905)
 2842 Hillegass Ave. (Mead-Fairchild House, Walter
 Ratcliff, 1904)

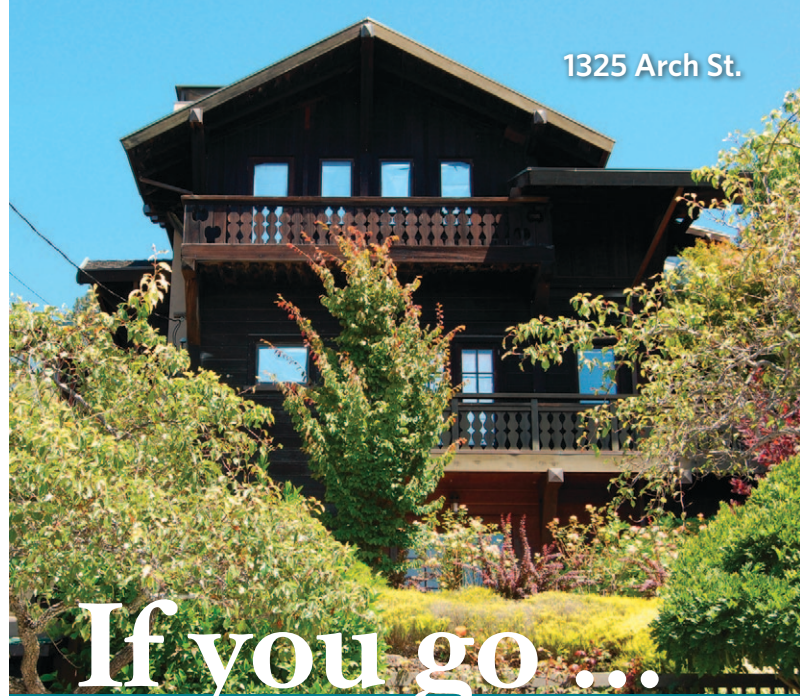
Nearby at 2640 College Ave. you'll find Julia Morgan's
St. John's Presbyterian Church of 1910. Sheathed in shingles
 and horizontal board siding, the interior is unadorned
 redwood with open truss work. It is currently used as a
 community center and theater.

We conclude our tour above College Avenue at the
 Hiram D. Kellogg House of 1902. Originally located on
 another street and moved to **2960 Linden St.**, this house
 is more modest than the others we have visited, consisting
 of two bedrooms plus a loft. A separate cottage was added
 much later, but was done in keeping with the original. The
 shingled exterior features a single gabled roof for the main
 rooms, and a second gable for the loft area that echoes
 the first. The interior is board-and-batten redwood, with
 arched, open-beamed ceilings. The two structures sit in a
 lush garden with an extensive trellis supporting an arche-
 typical wisteria. ❖



2239 Summer St.

1325 Arch St.



If you go ...

Berkeley enjoys a temperate Mediterranean climate that allows
 for pleasant visiting at most times of the year. But the city's
 brown-shingled homes are especially captivating draped in wis-
 teria vines, which tend to bloom from April to early May. This
 is also when the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association
 has their spring house tour (usually coinciding with Mother's
 Day weekend; check berkeleyheritage.org for details). BAHA
 has a wealth of information about these buildings and the
 legacy of the city, and they sell guides on particular neighbor-
 hoods. BAHA is open to the public on Thursday afternoons.

VISIT

The Berkeley Historical Society is also a great resource, and
 offers a series of spring walking tours on Saturdays from
 April through early June; berkeleyhistoricalsociety.org.

Visitors are encouraged to explore the permanent collection
 of Arts and Crafts artifacts and the Arthur and Lucia
 Mathews collection at the Oakland Museum of
 California, 1000 Oak St. in Oakland; museumca.org.

READ

The Simple Home, by Charles Keeler, reprinted in 1979
 by Peregrine Smith

Berkeley Landmarks, by Susan Dinkelspiel Cerny, revised
 edition 2001, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association

Bernard Maybeck: Artisan, Architect, Artist, by Kenneth
 H. Cardwell, 1977, Peregrine Smith

Greene & Greene Masterworks, by Bruce Smith and
 Alexander Vertikoff, 1998, Archetype Press

Greene & Greene, by Edward R. Bosley, 2000,
 Phaidon Press Inc.

