



THE MODEST MANIFESTO OF THE SANTA LUCIA PRESERVE

By Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

In the Santa Lucia Preserve, roads bend around the tawny haunches of lion-colored grasses and under stands of mature sycamore, oak and pine. This is Northern California as it appeared to the first settlers. The rolling land with soft hills and valleys is undisturbed by signs or shops. Soft sunlight filters through mists rising from the Pacific Ocean. Expansive, unpopulated and unspoiled. Just looking at it raises the question. How do you build a house in such a place?

The struggle between nature and culture is the perennial subject of architecture. The historian Vincent Scully proposed that architecture is

essentially the reflection of humanity's response to the natural world. While Native Americans may have seen man's role as integrated with nature, the history of Western architecture from the Greeks and Romans through the Enlightenment often reflects man's efforts to establish order in an unpredictable environment. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, nature had come to be perceived as a paradise about to be lost. Architects responded with buildings that celebrated the environment. Inspired by Louis Sullivan, they started conceiving organically oriented buildings that were appropriate to their place and to their residents.



This notion of living in harmony with nature is interwoven with the very origins of the Santa Lucia Preserve as a sacred Indian territory. Tom Gray, managing principal of The Preserve, wants to maintain this respect for the land even as it is being settled. As Preserve patrons become custodians of the land, he encourages them to hire architects to build their homes, specifically architects who will be sensitive to the spectacular surroundings.

San Francisco's revered early twentieth century architect, Bernard Maybeck said, "There is something bigger and more worthwhile than the things we see about us, the things we live by and strive for. There is an undiscovered beauty, a divine excellence, just beyond us. Let us stand on tiptoe, forgetting the nearer things and grasp what we may."

Maybeck, like the Greene and Greene brothers of Pasadena, embraced the philosophy and skill of the Arts and Crafts movement. Their homes established continuity between interior and exterior spaces and a refinement of proportion and detail. They are among California's select but



important roster of architects who built with awareness and integrity. In fact, the seeds of contemporary California style can be seen in the early twentieth century Spanish-style mansions of Wallace Neff or Julia Morgan; the rustic ranch houses of Cliff May; the tasteful modernity of Frank Lloyd Wright. These architects have passed into history but they worked in California when much of it still resembled the countryside of The Preserve. Their sensibilities fit seamlessly into the landscape of the present.

A landowner in The Preserve would want to seek out an architect who respects the principles and the aesthetics of such predecessors while developing a personal style. The architectural vocabulary need not be slavishly historic but to draw from the past for what works best today. In any case, a good architect does not build reproductions of a bygone era. The architect need only derive his ideas from tradition, adhering to the basic principles and respecting the larger community while constructing a unique and individual structure.



The Gamble House in Pasadena, California (1908), rear elevation. Architects: Charles and Henry Greene.

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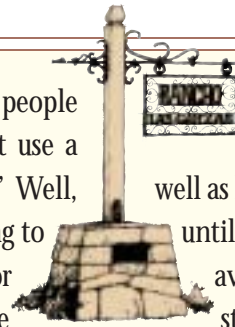
Despite such high-flown ideals, many people may ask, "Why use an architect? Why not use a custom builder or well-trained contractor?" Well, the same question could be asked about going to a lawyer instead of a paralegal, a doctor instead of a nurse practitioner. Architecture is a profession involving years of study and training, which are meant to benefit the client.

Lisa Sullivan, Executive Director of the San Francisco branch of the American Institute of Architecture, insists that there are very practical reasons to employ an architect. "First, you are going to have a better building," she says. "It's about the quality of the space and the relationship between the interior and exterior. Architects are trained to compose a harmony of spaces reflecting a client's particular tastes and conditions."

"There is a psyche to a house by an architect," she adds. "A prototypical plan by a builder won't have a relationship to the site or a relationship to the client. It will be like all the other houses of its type. Vitruvius talks about commodity, beauty and delight. A pre-planned house won't have that."

Some might worry that architects are the ego-maniacs of Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead" determined to force them into an unconventional residence that defies comfortable living. While it is true that such architects exist, it is equally true that there are many more exceptional architects who value the dialogue with the client. A good architect takes pride in creating joyful, livable space with regard for site.

How to find a "good" architect? "Architects tend to speak through their work," Sullivan says. "Look at their portfolios, their experience and if possible, visit the residences they have built." It might help to cast a wide net, including architects from around the country, along with the abundant talent in California. In the end, the choice will involve a certain amount of personal taste as well



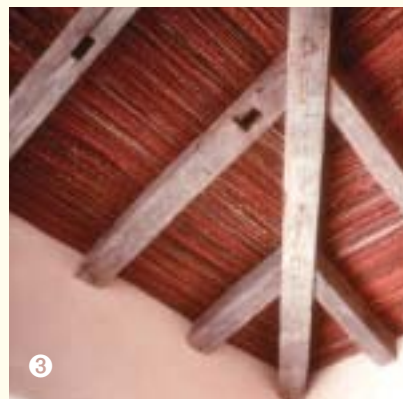
as comfort with the architect's personality. An architect should inspire and educate as well as listen and accommodate. Interview prospects until you feel you have a good fit. "The thing to avoid is saying that you want a particular style," Sullivan adds. "The style needs to be the architect's response to the site and the client's program, which is to say, their list of needs."

One common reservation is that architects are needlessly expensive. This is a misconception according to Sullivan. "Architects save you money," she says. "The savings comes from getting the greatest efficiency in using appropriate materials and getting the client the building they want." Working with an architect can save the client money by avoiding costly construction errors and last minute alterations. There is no substitute



Architects: Appleton & Associates.

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Image 1,
Entry Gate detail:
Bay Area Architects

Image 2:
Michael G. Imber

Image 3,
Ceiling detail:
Lake/Flato Architects,
Inc.

Image 4,
Fireplace detail:
Centerbrook



for experience and a good architect helps the client foresee potential problems. In addition, a trained architect knows when to spend and when to save. Sometimes, concrete is as effective, maybe more effective, than marble and the architect can help with such decisions. All the decisions that save money on maintenance and utilities - whether it is placement of windows, optimum materials or functional drainage - are made in the design stage.

Sullivan adds, "Architects also make you money. Making money comes from using a signature architecture. Anyone who has driven past the Frank Lloyd Wright house in Carmel knows that, though it is tiny, it is worth a fortune because it is by a famous architect."

This last is a commanding argument. Simply put, an architectural home commands a higher figure at resale. Many real estate companies now have entire divisions offering architectural properties. This is not a stylistic designation, like

modern or traditional, but the fact that someone with credentials, education and training built a unique home for the client.

Barry Sloane, Director of Historic and Architecturally Significant Properties at Sotheby's International Realty, says, "Architectural properties always sell at a premium. The minimum increase is ten percent in a flat market and in a good market, more. It means that you have a house with close to perfectly scaled and proportioned rooms, that are a pleasure to live in and easy to resell. Plus, for people who have not lived in an architecturally-designed house; Spanish, Contemporary, English or whatever, the quality of life in a house custom-designed by a good architect means that one will spend decades living at a higher level. Every day, one will be surrounded by a shelter of great beauty, which is an experience like no other. Also, I constantly see children who were brought up by their parents in good architecturally-designed houses and they have an innate taste and



Photograph courtesy of Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

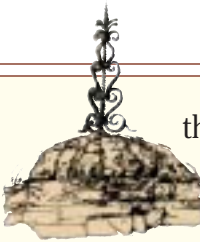
Kaufman House, also known as Fallingwater, Mill Run Pennsylvania. Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright.

style that was inculcated by osmosis.”

“Unique people should have unique solutions,” he adds. “Not an off the rack home but bespoke, made to measure, like the best suits. And for the same reason. They are longer lasting, better looking, good value. So, it is a good financial investment but also an investment in your progeny’s sense of aesthetics and self-worth.”

There is an additional benefit. When a patron commissions a house from an architect, the name remains attached to the property in perpetuity, even after the house is sold. Thus, the patron’s name attains its own legacy as it becomes part of the history of architecture like the Storer house by Frank Lloyd Wright in Hollywood or the Blacker House by Greene and Greene in Pasadena. These names remain the legacy of the client and the architect.

It is true that an architectural home can take time to build. It is not unreasonable to plan up to two years. A contractor may offer to put up a house in six months but the architect is taking the time to familiarize himself with the hopes and dreams of his clients. Instead of turning out the usual fare, he is fine-tuning the design to specific needs. Do his clients need large empty walls for works of art or do



they need extra storage space? Do they want their guestrooms positioned near the master bedroom or on the other side of the house? Would they use a formal dining room or would they prefer an open plan near the kitchen? It takes time to talk over such decisions and consider what is optimal and authentic for each individual.

Plus, the floor plan is just one aspect of an architectural property. At The Preserve, the architect must begin with the site, not the floor plan. The site may be adjacent to the golf course, down by the equestrian center or up on a hilltop with views of the bay. One wants to find an architect who, regardless of style, respects the land and the context. A ranch house is a logical choice for a horse property while a Spanish Mission style might be better for a house on the streambed near Villa Estates. Within a stylistic framework, a good architect will make decisions of distinction, such as choosing to nestle a house into a cranny instead of piling it up on a ridgeline, to arrange the mass of a large house in a way that adds pleasant and varied spaces, to avoid the cliché plate glass window by adding numerous windows with differing view-points and vantages.



Architects: Appleton & Associates.



In short, the investment in an architectural home pays off in terms of its value at resale, in terms of the enhanced value of the larger community and, most importantly, in terms of emotional and spiritual wellbeing, the vital investment in self.

Image 1:
Lake/Flato Architects, Inc.

Image 2:
Walker & Moody, A.I.A.

Images 3:
Michael G. Imber



Architects: Lake/Flato Architects, Inc.

Who has not thought, while traveling around California, how did that happen? How did that overcrowded, uncontrolled mass of housing get erected in the midst of this beautiful landscape? This is the result of commercial real estate planning, envisioning developments as temporary, meant to last just fifteen to twenty-five years. This is in pointed contrast to the philosophy in place at The Preserve.

Miraculously intact after two centuries, the legacy of The Preserve can be maintained and enhanced by those who have studied the best solutions to the development of form in space -- architects who are credited for their work, published, and lauded by their peers. Wright, a transcendentalist renowned for integrating his houses with their sites, referred to "Nature as spelled with a capital N, the way you spell God with a capital G." Wright believed that if mankind were set into the fabric of nature, he would respond positively and grow spiritually.

The Preserve is certainly Nature with a capital N. Unparalleled in exclusivity and value, it deserves the best architecture just as a masterpiece painting deserves a well-appointed room or a gourmet meal deserves a great wine. Homes of architectural

distinction can only enhance The Preserve's legacy for future generations. This extraordinary landscape, when dotted here and there with fine works of architecture, spells added value.

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"We are trying to encourage contemporary architecture that would be appropriate here," says Gray, who conceived The Preserve. "In that way, we all contribute something that endures beyond our lifetimes. You wind up with a unique art form on land that you own, which adds something to the larger culture. It benefits everybody."



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Published by Chamisal Press, Carmel, California