



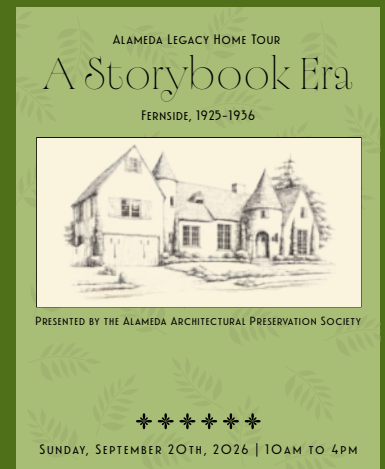
Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

A Storybook Era Fernside, 1925-1936

Alameda Legacy Home Tour
Sunday, September 20, 2026
10am to 4pm

The tour starts at the Edison Elementary schoolyard corner of Versailles and Lincoln Avenues



What is a Storybook Home?

by Robert Farrar and Erich Stiger

If you visit Alameda's Fernside neighborhood and some of the areas around it, you'll notice that many homes there have quaint and quirky features that seem to have been borrowed from colorful historic eras. Broadly considered "revivalist" style homes, they are commonly referred to as "Storybook" or sometimes "Fairytale," "Hansel and Gretel," or "Hollywood" homes. All of these names capture the whimsical and colorful images that these homes evoke.

Storybook homes are immediately recognizable for their dramatic steep-pitched roofs, decorative half-timbering, lead-glass windows, turrets, arched doorways, and handcrafted details with a mixture of wood and metal. Drawing inspiration from old world and colonial-era traditions, these residences blend fantasy with craftsmanship. Stone and brick accents, stucco walls, wrought-iron details, and tall narrow windows contribute to their timeless appeal.

Unlike modern tract housing, no two Storybook homes are exactly alike. Each was individually designed to create a unique character and personality. Reflecting the architectural revival movements popular during the period, they incorporate and sometimes even combine elements of Medieval, Spanish Colonial, and American Colonial styles.

The Storybook movement emerged after World War I, when returning soldiers brought European influences back to America, and comprised a willing market for new, exotic styles. The style first gained prominence in Southern California, particularly in Hollywoodland, a residential development established in 1923 in Beachwood Canyon beneath the

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3000 Gibbons, built in 1926, has an old world flair, but also a "modern," integrated two-car garage.

A Storybook Era...continued from page 1



No two homes are alike in Fernside. The chimney on this Spanish Revival home looks like it belongs in a fairy tale. Images: Erich Stiger.

now-iconic Hollywood sign. During Hollywood's Golden Age, movie studios reinforced and expanded the fad, creating elaborate fantasy settings for films and cartoons that both took inspiration from and inspired the architects and builders who were incorporating the same sense of whimsy and romance into residential design. From the beginning, the Storybook style spread to select communities, with significant concentrations found in Hollywoodland, Piedmont, Berkeley, Carmel-by-the-Sea, and notably, Alameda.

Strolling through these neighborhoods, one imagines the scenes that inspired them, the cottages from childhood fairy tales, the castles, chalets, and provincial estates of old Europe, the missions and haciendas of early California, and the whimsical backgrounds of early animated films. These homes evoke a sense of wonder and nostalgia while preserving a level of craftsmanship rarely found in contemporary construction.

Stepping inside one of these homes, one immediately appreciates the individuality of its design.

Perhaps you will find soaring timbered ceilings, graceful archways, or a balcony reminiscent of Shakespeare's Verona, where one can almost imagine Juliet stepping out to greet Romeo below.

At this year's Alameda Legacy Home Tour, you'll have a chance to do just that. We are presenting a collection of seven architectural treasures built during Alameda's Storybook era (1925 – 1936) in and around the beautiful Fernside neighborhood in the northeastern part of Alameda. Six of the homes are excellent examples of the Storybook era reflecting various revivalist styles (five in the original Fernside tract itself, with one just across High Street in the Waterside Terrace tract). The seventh (also in Waterside Terrace), built at the same time, is a wonderful example of a classic Craftsman, and demonstrates the enduring popularity of that style even as other styles were dominating the landscape.

As you walk through Fernside's tree-lined streets, you can also imagine the area's history as one of the last, large open spaces in Alameda. Fernside was once home to A.A. Cohen's 100+ acre Fernside estate and its magnificent 1870s, Italianate mansion. The

Steep roofs with swooped ends, leaded glass windows with diamond panes, and dovescotes in the gable are whimsical details often found on storybook homes.



The ivy-covered garden wall and rounded gate adds to the old world charm found in storybook-era homes like this one.

mansion was tragically destroyed by fire in 1897, but the rest of the property remained mostly intact until the bulk of it was sold in 1925.

Local East Bay developer, Fred T. Wood, along with his business partners, was selected to lead the project. Together, they designed and developed the tract into a modern, master-planned community named after the historic estate, and marketed the nearly 500 finished lots to builders.

Today, this "modern" neighborhood is itself a historic legacy with many of these remarkable residences now just past or approaching their centennial anniversary. Their continued beauty is a tribute to the generations of homeowners who have lovingly cared for them.

The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society proudly celebrates this extraordinary collection of homes and extends its deepest appreciation to the residents who continue to preserve their historic character. We invite you to enjoy this year's tour, experience the charm and fantasy of Alameda's Storybook era, and discover why these homes continue to capture the imagination nearly a century after they were built.

For more information about this year's home tour, please visit alameda-preservation.org



More information on the history of the Fernside can be found in Woody Minor's story "FERNSIDE: Fabulous Place, Fabled History" from the August 2018 edition of the *Preservation Press* available at the AAPS website:
<https://alameda-preservation.org/publications/preservation-articles/>

Additional information as well as Cohen family history and historic photos of the Fernside Estate can be found at the Cohen-Bray House website:
<https://www.cohenbrayhouse.org/fernside-estate>

A Night of Awards

by Lisa Baker

A lively and enthusiastic audience of over eighty people attended the 29th Annual Preservation Awards ceremony held at the historic Veterans Memorial Building in Alameda on June 7th. The evening was dedicated to AAPS giant, Christopher Buckley, the originator of the preservation awards and ardent arborist who recently passed away. Amos White, founder of 100K Trees for Humanity, was present (with trees!) and brought a donation form to plant trees in Chris's memory.

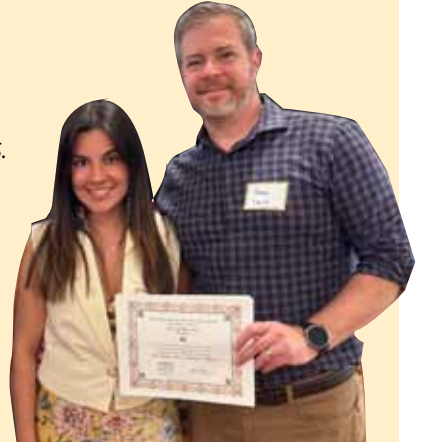
Six properties were honored. Winners and committee members shared before-and-after photos, and told the stories of love, care, attention to detail, and hard work that went into each project, in some cases over many years. All winners received certificates of recognition, as did the many skilled individuals who were part of the process. The property owners also receive a bronze award plaque to be placed on the façade of their building.

Attendees mingled and enjoyed appetizers and libations courtesy of donors and volunteers. Special thanks to stalwart volunteers Sharon Welch and Chris Bermudez, who came in to help with setup. Thanks also to Audrey dePinna for these great photos.

And thank you to this year's Preservation Awards Committee who carefully evaluated nominations, selected winners, wrote newsletter stories for each, and helped with presentations: Jerri Holan, Lisa Baker, Kay Weinstein, Bryan Aamot, Robert Farrar, Miriam Fox, and Megan Larson.



Amos White of 100K Trees for Humanity, and Kay Weinstein, President, AAPS.



1415 Lafayette: Ana and Hans Isern, Owners.



1554 Everett Street: Gabriel-Wynn Gould, GWG Sidewall/Shingle Craft; Juan Garcia, painter; Chris Miller of Meryl and Miller General Contractors; Joan Di Stefano of Di Stefano Studio; Kevis Brownson, owner.

434 Haight Avenue: Ragan and Craig Williams and family, owners; Brad Rivas of BR Concrete; and Lou Kern, master woodworker.



800 Paru Street: Randall Reed and Laurel Williams, owners; Bob Buckter, color consultant; David Moreno, painter; Robert Farrar, refinisher and gilder.

1200 Park Street: Norman Sanchez, architect; and Grant Usken, owner.



1300 Park Avenue: Ivy Merriman, owner.



Photos by Audrey dePinna.

IN MEMORIAM...

by Kay Weinstein

AAPS recently lost three outstanding leaders: James ("Jim") Smallman, Christopher Buckley and Judith Lynch. All three were ardent preservationists, and each one left their mark on Alameda in many unique ways. Each one is irreplaceable, and will be greatly missed.

JIM SMALLMAN left us on December 31, 2025 at age 87. He was a founding member of our organization, then called Alameda Victorian Preservation Society in 1972. He later served as president in 1974. In addition to serving on the board, he served on the Preservation Awards committee. But he was perhaps best known for restoring five Victorian-era homes in the Gold Coast of Alameda.

His first restoration was a Queen Anne at 2242 San Antonio Avenue (built 1891), which he owned from 1971 until 1990. His second restoration was an Italianate at 2246 San Antonio Avenue (built 1880), which he owned from 1977 until 1990. His third restoration was a Queen Anne at 1837 Clinton Avenue (built 1891), which was designed by Joseph Leonard. Jim bought this home in 1978, and restored it after retiring in 2009. It was featured on the Legacy Home Tour in 2010, and received a Preservation Award in 2011.

His fourth restoration was the neighboring Queen Anne at 1833 Clinton Avenue (built 1891), also designed by Joseph Leonard. Jim bought this home in 1978, completed restoration in 2015, and received a Preservation Award in 2015. His fifth was a Queen Anne at 1428 Benton Street (built 1890), that he restored for other owners.

Jim was successful in several careers, including teaching, and was very supportive of others who were restoring their own homes in Alameda. He also served on the board of the Alameda Museum, and was a docent at the Meyers House and Garden.

To read more about Jim and post your condolences, photos and memories visit:

<https://www.troutmanfuneralhome.com/obituaries/james-smallman>



James Smallman in elegant historic dress at the Meyers House and Garden.



Chris Buckley pointing out the oldest building in Oakland at 301 Broadway, built 1857 (photo 2011).



Judith Lynch uses her tape measure to remind friends to stay 6 ft. apart during Covid walks.

CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY, who was often the face of AAPS, left us on May 12, 2026 at age 77. Many AAPS members attended his funeral mass at St. Peter's Anglican Church in Oakland on June 13; a testament to how deeply respected he was.

Chris became active in the early years of AVPS, and remained active through the following decades serving on the board (at times as President), and later on the Plaques committee. A self-described "watchdog," he founded our Preservation Action Committee, and also served on the Historic Advisory Board to the Alameda City Council. And he founded our Preservation Awards Committee which hosts an annual event honoring local preservation efforts. (Our June 7 awards event was dedicated to his memory). He was also known for his own stunning restoration of his Eastlake home at 1017 San Antonio Avenue (built 1883) in the Gold Coast of Alameda.

Chris had an incredible knowledge of architectural preservation and urban planning. He worked for the City of Oakland Planning and Building department for 30 years, and then as a city planning consultant. He was also active in Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association (BAHA) and Oakland Heritage Alliance (OHA).

While Chris was well known for his passion for preservation, he was also passionate about planting and continually pruning as many trees as he could to make our cities better places to live. He was a board member of 100K Trees for Humanity, an organization committed to urban reforestation. Chief Planting Officer, Amos White, has organized a silent auction to find homes for the many remaining trees that Chris had purchased, but did not live long enough to see planted. You can bid on trees for your own yard and they will be planted for you. There is also an option to purchase a Chris Buckley Memorial Tree plaque on each tree. 10% of proceeds will go to AAPS.

To make a bid, please to:

<https://givebutter.com/c/Chris-Buckley-Memorial-Trees/auction>

To read Chris Buckley's obituary and to post your condolences, photos and memories visit:

<https://everloved.com/life-of/christopher-buckley/obituary/?flow=201>

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JUDITH LYNCH left us on June 11, 2026 at age 83. She also had a career in city planning. She was a published author, and an educator with a theatrical flair. She developed the AAPS walking tours, was a president of the Alameda Museum, and started San Francisco City Guides. She co-authored two books: *A Gift to the Streets*, about San Francisco Victorians in 1976; and *Victoria's Legacy, Tours of San Francisco Architecture* in 1978. She had two Master's Degrees from UC Berkeley in Urban Planning and Journalism. She taught Victorian Architecture at Stanford University and San Francisco State University.

Judith was probably best known locally for having taught at several elementary schools in Alameda. She shared her passion for architectural appreciation with her young students taking them on walks to learn about various architectural features and styles, and was known for her Kids and Queen Victoria annual event. She also enjoyed inviting her students to visit her Colonial Revival home that she restored at 1372 Versailles Avenue in Alameda (built 1907). Later she taught Alameda architecture at Mastick Senior Center. She also wrote and edited many articles for the Friends of the Alameda Library newsletter.

Judith had no surviving family, and requested no memorial service. She was fond of the historic Cohen-Bray House in Oakland. Donations in her memory may be made to:

<https://www.cohenbrayhouse.org/>

**Is your
Alameda Architectural
Preservation Society
membership up-to-date?
You can renew
for the year by visiting
our website
[alameda-preservation.org](https://www.alameda-preservation.org)**



Magnetized signs announce the coming of this year's Legacy Home Tour on September 20th.

AAPS's 4th of July Parade Presence Makes the News

by Karen Lithgow

Alex Lithgow's 1976 Cadillac El Dorado convertible showcased again for the third time AAPS's Legacy Home Tour presence at this year's 4th of July parade in Alameda. Dodi Kelleher, AAPS President Kay Weinstein and I joined Alex in the car dressed in our vintage dresses and white parasols.

Each side of the car displayed our attractive magnetized signs with our AAPS logo and name of the home tour along with plenty of flags and bunting. Last year, many in the crowd asked us when the date of the tour was so we fixed that with prominent signs displaying the September 20th date of this year's tour. Luckily the weather was mild and the crowd large and enthusiastic making this a pleasant morning ride.

Along the way we enjoyed seeing the many throngs of young children dressed in red, white and blue, excitedly waving flags and greeting us with cheers. The crowds of people all smiled and waved at us and we were delighted to hear shouts of "love the home tour", "love your dresses and parasols" and "we'll be at the tour"! Some classic car aficionados, recognizing the type of car, also yelled out praises for the El Dorado to Alex.

Our entry also caught the eye of the *Mercury News* and the *East Bay Times* people. A photo of us with a mention of the Legacy Home Tour showed

up in the print edition of the *East Bay Times* and on the front of the online editions for both publications. What great free advertising; we couldn't have asked for anything better!

At the end of the day, I think the most notable comment from our group came from Alex when he said, "You know, when you drive really slowly across town, you realize just how many beautiful homes we have here in Alameda!" Our parade presence reminded people how they can come see the interiors of these beautiful homes for themselves and we hope to have a great turnout this year.



Rolling along in Alex's Cadillac. Clockwise from top left: Dodi Kelleher, Karen Lithgow, Alex Lithgow, and Kay Weinstein.

924 SANTA CLARA AVENUE

We Bought a Fixer Upper Part V: Permits and Progress *by Robert Farrar*

Hurray, we finally received our building permits from the city Building Department, got some good news about our front porch, and got the new foundation and basement structure in place!

We began the permitting process in May 2025 by submitting our preliminary plans to the Planning Department. This kicked off an initial review by the city and discussion on several things including the front porch.

In my previous article, I discussed the front porch and application of the California Historical Building Codes (CHBC). After several months of discussions with City staff, it was determined that, under the CHBC, the original front porch could remain as it was built and would not have to comply with today's building code requirements. The philosophy behind the CHBC is simple: if an original historic feature is still functional, it should be preserved whenever possible.

While the City reviewed our preliminary plans, architect Daniel Hoy, interior designer Amy West of Amy on Design, and I focused on refining the details of each unit. Every aspect had to be carefully planned in advance, including plumbing and electrical layouts, the number and placement of light switches, and whether each would be single-pole, three-way, or four-way switches. We also finalized the layouts for the kitchens and bathrooms, laundry rooms, and how many windows for each basement unit to comply with Title 24 rules (the basement units are new construction, so subject to Title 24).

On August 4, 2025, we submitted the complete set of construction drawings to the city for review. The package totaled forty-three pages and included the structural engineer's report. Since we are relocating several walls, including the primary load-bearing wall in the basement, a structural engineer was required to determine how to safely support the house while maintaining its structural integrity.

One interesting challenge involved the original Douglas fir floor and ceiling joists. Although they are now 134 years old, the wood is incredibly dense and remarkably strong. We often refer to it as "ironwood" because it has withstood more than a century without sagging or warping. Unfortunately, modern engineering calculations are based on today's lumber



Basement with rough plumbing and rebar for basement slab.

standards rather than 19th-century old-growth timber. Nevertheless, the City requires a structural engineering report for liability and safety purposes before approving the plans.

Another requirement that has become part of residential construction is California's "Aging in Place" initiative. The State encourages homeowners to remain in their homes as they age, so the plans now include wider doorways of at least thirty-two inches, and grab bars in bathrooms wherever practical.

Nine months later, following several meetings with the City's Building Department, we finally received our building permits on May 5, 2026. To date, a total of \$37,027 has been paid for city permit fees. We were officially approved to begin our project which includes adding two units to the basement, and restoring the historic above-ground structure to its former glory.

The first major project was replacing the foundation.

Rogers House Movers installed a series of massive steel beams throughout the basement to support the house while the original brick foundation was removed. Using heavy timber cribbing topped with steel beams, the entire structure was securely supported so it could not shift during construction.

With the house safely suspended, the contractor, John Jameson, could start removing the original brick foundation. We saved many of the old bricks for reuse around the property, and several people even requested a few for their use.

Once the bricks were removed, excavation began to create space for the new foundation. The replacement foundation measures ten inches thick and seven feet high. Before any concrete could be poured, the City's first inspection verified that all reinforcing steel (rebar) and structural tie-downs were correctly installed.

After passing inspection, we scheduled the concrete pour. It took seven concrete trucks delivering approximately forty-three cubic yards of concrete to complete the new foundation.

Once the concrete had been cured, the forms were removed and interior work could begin.

A new French drain system was installed around both the exterior perimeter and interior of the basement to capture groundwater before it could seep through the foundation walls. Because we excavated the basement to achieve a full 8-foot ceiling height (the original, unfinished basement had a height of 4 feet), drainage became even more important.

Since the basement plumbing now sits below the elevation of the City's sewer main, all wastewater flows into a holding tank equipped with a sewage ejector pump that lifts it into the municipal sewer system. Groundwater collected by the French drain

Concrete being poured for foundation.



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Permits and Progress...continued from page 6



Outside photo of forms for the new foundation.

is routed to a separate sump basin, where it is pumped safely to the street drainage system.

After the rough plumbing for a kitchen and bathroom in each of the two basement apartments was completed, we spread gravel over the subgrade,

installed a 10-mil vapor barrier, and placed reinforcing steel supported by concrete dobies. Following the second City inspection, we poured the basement floor using approximately thirty cubic yards of concrete, finished with a smooth surface.

As I write this article, work is underway on the new concrete retaining wall and rear stairways serving the two basement units. Once this phase is completed, the total cost for the concrete foundation, basement slab, retaining wall, and stairway will be approximately \$235,000.

This cost incorporates many aspects of the work completed by the contractor, John Jameson. That included digging out many tons of dirt to make the two basement units legal height; framing for the new foundation, basement slab, retaining wall and stairway; and sewer lines and rainwater drainage which involves very specialized work. The load-bearing wall also had to be moved and reinstalled to hold the center of the house. This is just part of the total work John Jameson completed in a very timely fashion.

With the structural concrete work nearly complete, we can finally begin framing the basement walls, relocating several walls upstairs, enlarging the

closets, and constructing the new bathrooms and laundry room.

The project continues to move forward, and there is still plenty more to come. Stay tuned!



New foundation, temporary supports, and forms for new footings.

ALAMEDA LEGACY HOME TOUR

SAVE THE DATE!

Sunday, September 20, 2026

10am – 4pm

Calling All Docents!

FREE ADMISSION to the tour in exchange for being a docent on either the early or later shift.

Two shifts: 10am – 1pm or 1pm – 4pm

Enjoy a day of Alameda's finest architecture and finish off with a fun celebration event for docents and homeowners.

To sign up, contact Erich Stiger at estiger@alameda-preservation.org

Costumes admired but not required.



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ALAMEDA LEGACY HOME TOUR

Sunday September 20, 2026
10am - 4pm



Explore the interiors of seven historic
homes Alameda's enchanting
Fernside neighborhood.

AAPS members get \$5 off
your ticket when purchased
online. Scan the code for
member discount:

