

Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Winners of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Preservation Awards

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5:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Veterans Memorial Building • 2203 Central Avenue, Alameda

Park Station – New Look for an Old Place *by Jerri Holan*

Award Recipients: Dan and Melody Thebeau and Grant Usken, Owners; Norman Sanchez, Architect; Harkness Gardens Landscaping; Orchard Construction; Captive Air Systems; MCM Plumbing; Cunningham Electric; Jeremy West Masonry Construction

The nondescript intersection of Park Street and San Jose Avenue suffered from the typical ills of a suburban commercial district: old and new one- and two-story unremarkable commercial buildings; lots of traffic that was not conducive to pedestrian activity; and for much of its past, it served primarily automotive functions featuring large parking lots on opposite corners. To make matters worse, on the largest corner, a service center originally operated by Big O Tires had been vacant for several years and was a neighborhood eyesore.

What the intersection did have was good visibility, older and newer restaurants, bars and small shops in surrounding storefronts, mature street trees, and



The Park Station Beer Garden, ca. 2026. This former automotive related business corner at Park Street and San Jose Avenue has been transformed into an outdoor gathering place.

handsome, arched brick buildings that needed to be repurposed. All it needed was a creative vision, long-term commitment and access to financing...

Dan and Melody Thebeau had all of the above. The transformation of Big O Tires to Park Station Beer Garden was the brainchild of these former longtime Alamedans. They had eight years of previous experience running a similar venue in Sacramento where they transformed a former automotive shop into

“Sacyard”, a thriving beer oasis there. They saw similar potential here with the deciding factor being a change to Alameda’s General Plan allowing them to transform the parking lot into a grand outdoor space.

After much negotiation, the Thebeaus and their business partners, Grant Usken, et.al., purchased the property from the original owners, the Garfinkle family, and embarked on a process that took about three years to complete.

continued on page 2...

Park Station...continued from page 1

History

David Garfinkle purchased the 1200 Park Street property in the early 1920s and operated a grocery store across the street at 1205 Park Street. In 1922, he built a U-shaped, one-story brick garage on the rear of the 1200 property fronting San Jose Avenue at 2407 San Jose. After successfully patenting a clamp-swing for grocery store price signs, he added a second story to the garage in 1925 and moved his Clamp-Swing Pricing Co. office and manufacturing to the property. In 1928, he built a service station on the northwest corner of the lot at 1210 Park Street. In 1929, to get more space for his expanding company, he filled in the U-shape building, and, in 1937, expanded the building again. A devastating 1956 fire forced the family business to a warehouse on Blanding Avenue, and the company eventually moved to Oakland for larger facilities. (The Garfinkles still operate their Clamp-Swing Pricing Co. in Oakland.)

Around 1983, the entire site was leased to Big O Tires and was operated as a tire service center until 2017 when the City of Alameda elected to not renew its conditional use permit.

Project Details

The newly repurposed complex consists of three buildings: the Tap House (the original clamp-swing factory); the restaurant building (originally a gas station); and a new restroom and service building.

After purchasing the property, unbeknownst to the Thebeaus, major challenges remained before their vision could be realized. First, the owners needed to clean up the property. Because the site had hosted several industrial and automotive uses over the decades, there were expensive remediation complexities which contributed to its long vacancy. In addition, there were unanticipated infrastructure and utility improvements. The current parcel was originally two parcels: the 1210 Park Street service station parcel, and 2407 San Jose Avenue which housed the original factory building. This led to the property having two service entrances – one on each street. When utility upgrades were needed, the duplicity caused major problems with conflicting requirements for each of the different services on each of the two streets.

Another large surprise was accessibility. Of course the new dining and drinking establishments would provide disabled access. Simple enough on a flat lot though the owners. Then they discovered that



Around 1983, the entire site was leased to Big O Tires and was operated as a tire service center until 2017. This image shows the south wall on San Jose Avenue, ca. 1999.

Enlarging the Clamp-Swing Pricing factory, ca. 1929 (top right).

Today the south wall roller door features a mural, the company logo, and an updated color scheme.



both existing public sidewalks had to be completely replaced in order to provide the proper slope for an accessible route from the handicap street parking space. This work added months of delays and additional budget overruns.

Finally, there was the historic brick building itself. A National Register Application deemed it insignificant. However, instead of tearing down the dangerous brick walls to save money, the owners pursued an adaptive re-use strategy to keep the character and ambience of the original building. In spite of high costs, they would retain as much of the brick walls as they could and would augment both buildings with a new active outdoor space.

The Tap House

While the owners wanted to keep the colorful texture of the old brick walls, the high cost of preserving them required tradeoffs later. New concrete underpinnings and foundations were located

under the brick walls and a steel skeleton was placed inside the walls for the actual structural frame. The wood ceiling remained but was reinforced with additional steel beams. All the new structural elements are visible inside the Tap House and the brick walls are now simply the 'skin' on the skeleton. The electrical system was completely upgraded. And, since there were no mechanical systems in either building, new HVAC systems were designed and installed. The exposed HVAC system in the Tap House was coordinated with new metal lighting throughout which continues the industrial ambience of the automotive building.

The original, existing upper steel transom windows were retained and re-glazed with clear glass. All the lower openings on the south and west walls were retained (or slightly enlarged), but replaced with modern storefront windows. On the west wall, two original metal roll-up doors were replaced with large

continued on page 3...



Artist Demit Omphroy hand-painted colorful murals.

Two original metal roll-up doors were replaced with glass roll-up doors to maintain an inside/outside connection.



Park Station...continued from page 2



Customers are serviced at a walk up window. Colored glass windows are visible to the left from local business Bullseye Glass.

A new full kitchen was built in the "Southie" building. Two doors into the auto service areas were replaced with storefront glazing giving the kitchen some breathing room while allowing it to be seen from the garden.



glass roll-up doors to maintain an inside/outside connection. One existing bay was repurposed into a walk-up order window, and, next to it, another was filled with colored glass (from local Bullseye Glass) for privacy in the breezeway.

On San Jose Avenue, the metal roll-up door was retained for deliveries and repainted to match the beautiful mural inside the Tap House on its north wall which was totally rebuilt from scratch. The colorful hand-painted murals pay homage to the past and present uses of the building and were painted by Demit Omphroy, an internationally renowned artist living in Paris. Originally from Alameda, he is a close friend of the Thebeaus.

The Restaurant & Service Building

The small "Southie" restaurant was much less complicated. A typical service station building, it consisted of a steel frame with attached metal veneer panels. The brick veneer was added later probably to match the Big O tire building. Squeezing a new full kitchen into the tiny service bays was challenging. However, two doors into the auto service areas were replaced with storefront glazing giving the kitchen some breathing room while allowing it to be seen from the garden. The original restrooms were replaced with a simple stucco service

building that spans between the two main buildings. Utilizing simple materials, it contrasts with the highly-textured historic brick walls.

The Beer Garden

The new beer garden is a lovely outdoor space, landscaped with decomposed granite and native plantings. Covered and uncovered wood and metal seating, fire pits, and a performance stage complete the lively ensemble. After dark, heat lamps, fires and soft lighting illuminate the area providing a bright exclamation mark on this end of Park Street. The adjacent neighborhood is slowly improving with new restaurants and other friendly uses bringing more people to the area.

From the Park Station Beer Garden, the bustling intersection of San Jose and Park Street can be seen through transparent fencing. In contrast, mature street trees provide natural screens and a sense of protection and also a feeling that this establishment has been there awhile. It has, it just had a different function. Today, the Elm trees, along with the 100-year old brick building, convey continuity with the past. But unlike Big O, the Beer Garden invites people in to see how South Park Street is changing for the future (maybe one with less cars?). It's just a new look for an old place.

**2026
ALAMEDA
LEGACY
HOME TOUR**



Save the Date
September 20
10 am to 4 pm

**Featuring Alameda's
Fernside Neighborhood**

Stay tuned to
alameda-preservation.org
for upcoming details and
ticketing information.

Tickets will also be available
at the Edison Elementary
schoolyard on the
day of the Tour.

1554 Everett Street Through Time: A House That Refused to Give Up

by Miriam Fox

Award Recipients: Kevis Brownson, Owner; Joan Di Stefano, Di Stefano Studio; Gabriel Wynn-Gould, GWG Sidewall/ShingleCraft; Chris Miller, Meryl & Miller General Contractors.

If 1554 Everett Street could roll its eyes, it would. For more than half a century, this 1899 Pitched Gable Colonial Revival home has politely endured every era's attempt to "improve" it, and then patiently waited for Dave and Kevis Brownson to set things right again.

When Dave bought the home in 1973, it wasn't just worn — it was muted. Windows were painted shut in flat white. Cheap paneling hid the staircase wall. Doors had been kicked in and patched with thin plywood to mimic 1960s panels. Picture rails had been removed, the kitchen had suffered a clumsy remodel, ceilings wore an unfortunate "cottage cheese" texture, and the staircase had lost more than half its spindles — like the house had been handled roughly and told not to complain.

But Dave saw through the mess. When Kevis joined him, the work became less of a renovation and more of a long-term promise: room by room, year by year, bringing back what made the house itself — carefully, practically, and often with their own hands.

Along the way, there were small victories. During a kitchen update in 1987, Kevis visited the San Francisco Design Center, and, despite not being a designer by trade, was granted entry. She found she could order Westraven tile from Holland, and it was shipped direct from Europe to the house in a crate. A Bay Area tile shop, Art Tile, encouraged her to install it herself, set her up with supplies, and even lent her a tile cutter. With the help of her sister-in-law, Kris, the job went smoothly, and the kitchen came together beautifully — another corner returned to "right."

Outside, the biggest challenge was the siding. The original wood shingles were meant to be stained, not buried under paint. But, by 1939, they had been covered in paint, and, over the subsequent years, accumulated many additional layers. Kevis finally made the decision many old-house caretakers face: if you want the house to look like itself again, you stop patching the past and rebuild it properly.

A new roof in 2007 opened the door to a test: western red cedar shingles on the rear peak, stained to



A black and white photo from the 1979 Historical House Survey.

Side of house after shingles were removed. After years of accumulated paint, the original shingles had to be removed and were replaced by new shingles that were stained as originally intended.



Local artist Joan Di Stefano added stained glass windows to the front elevation.



The restored residence with new shingles stained blue, contrasting painted trim, and art glass visible on the porch.

harmonize with the home's color. The results were so satisfying that the plan expanded with more shingling in 2018, and more again in 2024 until the exterior finally looked crisp and close to its original spirit. Even practical additions followed the same rule of respect. In 2003 - 2004, a major project addressed the chimney, attic, garage, and seismic reinforcing — work that was both ambitious and essential. Special thanks go to Dennis Owens, friend, neighbor, and architect, who designed and supervised that effort with care and vision. Since Dave's passing, Dennis has continued to be a huge help to Kevis, generously offering expert guidance on all her house projects.

It truly takes a village. In 2004, plans included a new 400 square-foot garage, detailed to echo the era and

fit the neighborhood right down to a cross-window motif borrowed from a nearby home.

By late 2025, the finishing touches weren't just structural, they were soulful. Gabriel Wynn-Gould, of GWG, brought craftsmanship to the shingle work. General Contractor Chris Miller, of Meryl & Miller, delivered the staining and painting that pulled the exterior together, and artist Joan Di Stefano added stained glass windows that feel like a signature — quietly luminous, and perfectly at home on the front elevation.

That's the real magic of 1554 Everett Street: not one dramatic reveal, but decades of steady choices made with patience, grit, gratitude and love — until one day you look up and realize the house doesn't just look restored. It looks understood.



The side view of the newly added second floor addition.

New windows were custom created to match the original window design.



Although partially hidden by lush vegetation, the second story addition is visible at the front entrance of 1300 Park Avenue.



View of the deck on the second floor addition.

Finding Home on Park Avenue

by Megan Larson

Award Recipients: Ivy Merriman, Owner; Christopher Gaw, General Contractor; Fred Hyre, Hyre Architecture.

Originally from Hawaii, Ivy Merriman lived in the East Bay for twelve years before moving to Alameda. She visited regularly for work and to shop at Encinal Nursery, and over time, the island won her over. She loved that everything was walkable and appreciated the charm of the historic homes, as she had always loved Craftsman homes. Her previous house had been ultra-modern, and while it served its purpose, it lacked the charm and storybook character she had always longed for.

She decided to move to Alameda and began her search, looking at several homes and even placing an offer on one off Fernside. Losing it was disappointing, though in hindsight, it ultimately led her to 1300 Park Avenue, a Craftsman Bungalow built in 1914 by architects Fletter + Winlund. It wasn't perfect, but it was good enough to live in while she planned a renovation, and, more importantly, it had the exact storybook charm she had been seeking. She moved in and lived there for two years before construction began, which proved invaluable, giving her a true feel for the space and a clear sense of what needed to change.

The home had originally been a single-story Craftsman Bungalow. In the 1980s, a previous owner added a bedroom and bathroom to the back of the house. Ivy's vision was to expand it with a second story to meaningfully increase the square footage and create a home where her family could comfortably visit and stay. The patio space she had always dreamed of was part of that vision as well. When construction was complete, the home had grown from a three-

bedroom, two-bath home into a three-bedroom, three-bath, with significantly larger bedrooms and living areas throughout.

Like any renovation, there were bumps along the way. During demolition of the 1980s bathroom addition, they discovered the shower floor had never been waterproofed, leaving hidden rot beneath the home, a serious hazard that had gone undetected for years and became one of several issues that required careful attention as the project progressed.

In addition to those repairs, the design of the second story had to be equally considered. A cascading roofline was required to maintain the design integrity of the existing structure, and custom windows were created to echo the originals at the front of the house and the architectural character of the adjacent homes. The upstairs deck required its own navigation. For Ivy, it was non-negotiable, serving as a sheltered perch above the park for reading, breathing, and exercise, while also nodding subtly to the lanais she had grown up with in Hawaii. Permitting presented real complexity, but by working closely with her architect, she arrived at a solution that is both architecturally considered and unmistakably personal.

Ivy's fingerprints are on every inch of this home. She repurposed materials salvaged during demolition, integrating them back into the new design alongside colors, patterns, and textures that are distinctly her own. The result is a home that honors its history and reflects, unmistakably, the woman who brought it to life.

The rock on the restored chimney is a veneer designed to be indistinguishable from the original river rock.



Severely neglected and in need of extensive repair in 2012.



Front of 424 Haight after completion of restoration.



The second floor addition was carefully designed to seamlessly integrate into the original design and is not visible from the front elevation.

434 Haight Avenue: The Building of Our Home *by Homeowner, Ragan Williams*

Award Recipients: Ragan and Craig Williams, Owners; Ethan Andersen, Drafting Café Architects; Brad Rivas, BR Concrete; Piotr Krasnowski, MPK Builders; Exequil Lopez de Leon, Lopez de Leon Plastering; Oscar Montiel, Oscar Montiel Hardwood Flooring; Lou Kern, Master Woodworker; Marcelo Coti, Essential Craftsman.

Standing on Haight Avenue today, our home at 434 reflects something I'm not sure either of us fully imagined when we first walked through the door in 2012 – a seamless blend of history and modern living, shaped by seven years of my husband Craig's unwavering commitment to getting it right.

Constructed in 1912, the home is a classic example of California Craftsman design, featuring river rock porch piers, cedar shingle siding, exposed rafter tails, a beadboard porch ceiling, and original single-pane windows. Despite being around more than a century, the house retains its defining exterior elements with minimal alteration – something Craig was determined to protect from the very beginning.

We purchased the property in 2012 following foreclosure. It needed a lot of work, but the bones were there, and Craig could see what it could be. He left his position at Bay Ship & Yacht to fully dedicate himself to the project with a clear vision: preserve the home's original craftsmanship while adapting it for our family's modern life. I won't pretend there weren't moments I wondered what we'd gotten ourselves into, but Craig never wavered.

The exterior restoration was approached with a level of care that still impresses me. Craig repointed the river rock porch piers stone by stone to maintain their original hand-laid appearance. The chimney was rebuilt using carefully matched stone veneer. The original windows, including the Craftsman-style four-light transoms, were preserved with their century-old glass intact. The beadboard porch ceiling was restored, rafter tails were recreated to match the original profile, and

cedar shingles were replaced in their original profile. A period-appropriate rain chain replaced a standard downspout, adding a subtle but meaningful architectural detail.

The most significant transformation came with the addition of a second story, which was designed to remain virtually invisible from the street. Set back behind the original roofline and gable, it preserves the home's historic silhouette while giving our family the space we needed. Materials, rooflines, and trim were carefully matched to the original structure – and if you didn't know it was an addition, you wouldn't guess. Reinforced concrete foundations were completed before framing began, ensuring the expansion would stand as long as the original.

Inside, the new upper level includes three bedrooms and two bathrooms, all built to match the original ceiling heights and trim profiles. The custom staircase is one of my favorite features with a large window that fills the space with light. Throughout the home, period-appropriate cabinetry, tile, and fixtures reinforce the Craftsman aesthetic. The original clawfoot tub even made it in – refinished and thoughtfully placed, exactly where it belongs.

The ground floor was reconfigured to work better for our daily life while keeping what made it special. The original front rooms and dining room were left untouched – preserving the wood paneling and inlay floors from the original build. The former primary bedroom and bathroom off the back became a family room, laundry area, and quarter-bath. We added custom quarter-sawn Douglas fir countertops to tie

the new and old together and they feel like they were always there.

What defined this project, more than any single decision, was Craig's hands-on involvement. He was the contractor, the project manager, and often the laborer. He worked alongside Drafting Cafe, structural engineers, builders, and skilled artisans – and, in the final twelve months, with Essential Craftsman, Marcelo Coti, whose quality and attention to detail were everything we needed at the finish line. We were living inside the unfinished structure with our four kids for a (somewhat stressful) stretch. That's the part people don't always see – the full commitment it takes to do something like this the right way.

The moment that stays with me most, though, happened outside. A former resident of the house from many years ago stopped in front of the finished home and was moved to tears. I think about that often. It captures something Craig always believed: that doing this work well matters, not just to us, but to the neighborhood and the community.

Inside the house hangs a quote from Theodore Roosevelt's *Citizenship in a Republic*: "It is not the critic who counts. . . The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood." This fits Craig perfectly.

Today, 434 Haight Avenue is our home – expanded but authentic, modern but respectful of everything that came before it. I'm proud of what Craig built. It will be part of not only our family story, but Alameda's story for another hundred years.

800 Paru Street: A Painted Lady at her Finest *by Kay Weinstein*

Award Recipients: Randall Reed and Laurel Williams, Owners; Bob Buckter, Color Consultant; David Romero, Painter; Robert Farrar, Entry Refinisher and Gilder.

We are pleased to present a Painted Lady Award to the Colonial Revival residence with strong Classical Revival elements at 800 Paru Street. The architect of this stately home is unknown. It was built in 1904 by James Willison at a cost of \$12,000. Longtime owners Randall Reed and Laurel Williams worked with Color Consultant Bob Buckter to choose seven wonderful colors. David Romero did a masterful job of painting. Robert Farrar refinished the original front doors, and applied stunning gold leaf details around the house.

Photos of this home were provided courtesy of the owners, David Romero, local historian Woodruff "Woody" Minor, and AAPS member Virginia Neuhoff. The earliest photograph we have of this home is from 1979. Although the photo is black and white, it shows that the house was painted in close to a monochromatic color scheme that did not do justice to its many architectural details. And, given that Colonial Revival

and Classical Revival styles followed the elaborate Queen Anne Victorian style, details abound.

Colonial Revival and Classical Revival styles overlapped historically, and were often blended in residential architecture. Colonial Revival (ca. 1890-1940s) focused on the American colonial-era Georgian and Federal homes. Emphasized were nostalgia, symmetrical brick and clapboard facades, and smaller-scale residential details. Classical Revival (ca. 1895-1950) was more monumental, focused on Greek and Roman temple forms, had massive columns, and was usually featured on institutional buildings. Also, the late 19th and early 20th century architects could take advantage of advancements in building construction technology and better millwork. 800 Paru Street definitely exhibits strong Greek elements in its porch columns and details.

Fun fact: 800 Paru Street was featured on our 2022 Leonardville and Beyond Walking Tour that was

narrated by Denise Brady. It was chosen because it is a beautiful example of Colonial Revival Victorian architecture. On the exterior of this house we see the symmetry that is a key characteristic of Colonial and Classical Revival styles; typically, two-story, rectilinear and formal, with a five-bay facade (window, window, door, window, window).

This Painted Lady is the result of tremendous expertise. All of the architectural features of this house are accented in seven colors: black, dark green, dark turquoise, dark gray, light gray, white and gold. Bob Buckter's approach to color selection is to respect architectural heritage while having the fortitude to try new color combinations. He feels that traditional color schemes can be revitalized, as presented in his recent book, *Bob Buckter: Architectural Color Design*.

Robert Farrar applied the gold leaf details that highlight the elegance of this color scheme. Striking are the ornate Corinthian columns as well as the Anthemion (honeysuckle) motif on the porch. After his refinishing, the double front doors could not look better! The pediment is the crowning glory of 800 Paru Street, beckoning all to admire its beauty.



With a monochromatic color scheme in this 1979 black and white image, few details are visible.



Ornaments along the porch with a touch of gold leaf.

Detail of the pediment above the entrance with gold leaf enhancing the floral motif.



Refinished front door.



Facade after painting at west corner of Paru Street and Dayton Avenue.

1415 Lafayette Street: A Careful Restoration with New Life Added

by Bryan Aamot

Award Recipients: Ana and Hans Isern, Owners; Tom Schulteis, The Design Collective; Serafin Arriaga, Exterior Restoration and Landscaping; Angela Tamblin, Angela Tamblin Designs; Todd Milne, Milne's Painting.

Sometimes the story of a home begins not with what is built, but with what must first be removed. At 1415 Lafayette Street, that story started with a tree.

A large, mature tree on the left side of the property had, over time, begun to push upward against the front porch. What may have once been a beautiful feature of the landscape had become a structural problem. The roots had lifted portions of the porch, damaging the house and compromising its integrity. Before anything else could be done, the tree had to go.

The removal was no small task. The tree was taken out entirely – roots and all – requiring excavation that opened up the front of the property. But this necessary first step set the stage for what would become a thoughtful and carefully executed restoration.

With the ground cleared, attention turned immediately to the front porch – the defining feature of the home's façade. Fortunately, the right side of the porch had remained largely intact, providing a valuable reference point. Using the intact right side of the porch, along with a newly discovered historic painting of the home, the owners undertook the process of rebuilding the damaged left side to match the original as closely as possible.

The level of detail was impressive. The wood paneling was matched to mirror the original texture and profile. The bannister was recreated to align seamlessly with the existing design. Even the porch flooring was restored with an eye toward consistency, ensuring that the finished result read as a single, unified structure rather than a patchwork repair. The goal was not to modernize, but to restore – to bring the porch back to what it had always been.

Once the structural work was complete, additional actions were needed to repair gutters, plumbing and drainage; these were carefully completed to retain



After updates and repairs, the home received a fresh coat of paint giving the home a renewed presence on the street.



The original carriage house was rebuilt and modified to serve as an ADU.

A new perimeter fence was constructed, featuring wrought iron-style elements paired with stucco columns.



New posts at the base of the stairs were fitted with light fixtures to illuminate the path.

the same look as the original house. Afterward, the house itself received a fresh coat of paint. The new color palette brightened the exterior, giving the home a renewed presence on the street. While some of the subtle depth of the older finish may have been softened in the process, the overall effect is one of vitality and care – a house that once again feels lived in and looked after.

Another thoughtful touch came with the new posts at the base of the front stairs. Once restored, they were fitted with lighting that gently illuminates the path, guiding visitors to the front door.

But the work at 1415 Lafayette did not stop at the main house.

In many ways, the transformation of the carriage house at the rear of the property is just as compelling. Rather than removing or replacing it, the owners chose to retain the original exterior shell – preserving its historic presence – while completely reimagining the interior.

The carriage house was fully gutted and rebuilt to function as a modern living space. Today, it stands

continued on page 9...

1415 Lafayette...continued from page 8



Roots of a tree had lifted portions of the porch upward damaging the house and compromising its integrity. The owners undertook the process of rebuilding the damaged left side to match the original as closely as possible.

as a fully realized cottage or accessory dwelling unit (ADU), complete with both upstairs and downstairs living areas. The old hayloft door was converted into a window. The prior barn doors were broken, but the openings were preserved and upgraded to host new French doors. All electrical systems were replaced, bringing the structure up to current standards, and new windows and a front door were added to improve light, access, and usability. The exterior was then painted to harmonize with the main house, tying the two structures together visually while allowing each to maintain its own identity.

During this phase of construction, additional improvements were made to the property as a whole. The older wood fence was failing; a new perimeter fence was constructed, featuring wrought iron-style elements paired with stucco columns. The design was carefully chosen to complement the architecture of the main house, creating a cohesive boundary that feels intentional rather than imposed. It frames the property in a way that enhances both security and aesthetic appeal.

What stands out most about 1415 Lafayette is not any single feature, but the overall approach. This is

not a project that sought to erase the past or replace it with something entirely new. Instead, it reflects a balance – preserving what could be saved, restoring what had been lost, and thoughtfully adapting the property for modern use.

From the careful reconstruction of the front porch to the adaptive reuse of the carriage house, the work demonstrates a respect for the home's original character while acknowledging the needs of today. It is a reminder that preservation does not mean freezing a building in time, but rather allowing it to continue evolving in a way that honors its history. And that is something worth celebrating.

A Delicious Collaboration Between AAPS and St. Joseph Elementary School *by Kay Weinstein*

AAPS co-sponsored the St. Joseph Elementary School Architecture Tour and Progressive Dinner benefit in the Bronze Coast on April 25, 2026. Three AAPS board members were delighted to serve as docents in three Victorian homes in chronological order!

President Kay Weinstein started the tour in the Colonial Revival residence at 1623 Clinton Avenue, designed and built by A.W. Pattiani & Co. in 1889. We presented the owners with a binder of research and photos of their home. Cocktails and appetizers were enjoyed by all, and carried along to the next home. Corresponding Secretary Shiva Mendez greeted and informed guests at 899 Union Street, known as “Captain’s Corner.”

(L-R) Kasira Riley, Kay Weinstein, Shanna Gaudenti, Megan Larson.

We pointed out the AAPS Historic Building Plaque on their porch. Dinner and libations were served in this Queen Anne residence that was designed and built by Joseph Leonard in 1891. Member at Large Shanna Gaudenti concluded the tour at 929 Lafayette Street, known as “The Curvy Lady” which

had a 2025 AAPS Preservation Award plaque proudly displayed on its porch. Dessert and sweet wines were served in this Queen Anne residence, also designed and built by Joseph Leonard in 1893.

Guests were sent home with our 2025 Alameda Legacy Home Tour guidebook, *Alameda’s Bronze Coast Beauties*, featuring the two Leonard homes. By all accounts, the hosts (who also cooked), docents, and guests all enjoyed a wonderful evening!

Photo collage (L-R) of 1623 Clinton Avenue, 899 Union Street, and 929 Lafayette Street by Megan Larson.



924 SANTA CLARA AVENUE

We Bought a Fixer Upper Part IV: The Fireplace Mantle *by Robert Farrar*

In previous issues, I talked about a dilapidated Victorian home I purchased and am in the process of restoring. As I waited for the city to issue permits for some of the upcoming phases, one of my latest projects involved disassembling, refinishing and reassembling a mahogany fireplace mantle. It had a thick, dark finish in poor condition, and was in need of some major TLC. I had taken apart and refinished a mantle in my own home about 10 years ago, so I had a pretty good idea of how to proceed. However, in prepping for this project, I did some additional research to better understand the historical manufacturing processes involved, and to see if there were any additional restoration techniques I could deploy here.

Historical Context of Fireplace Mantles

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fireplace mantles were typically crafted from high-quality wood such as mahogany, maple, birch, oak, or walnut, and were designed to complement the architectural style of the home. The process was highly organized, with catalogs available for consumers to select their preferred style, wood type, and decorative details. This allowed for a degree of customization while maintaining efficiency in production.

Most of the manufacturers were located in the eastern United States and produced these mantles in large quantities. Given the fragility of intricate wood parts and mirrors, the packaging and shipping process had to be meticulous. Each component needed to arrive intact despite the long journey by train or ship around Cape Horn, as the Panama Canal had not yet opened until 1914.

Assembly and Installation of Mantles

Upon arrival, skilled workers would assemble the mantle, typically using flat head screws located on the back of the main frame. The process was straightforward, designed to facilitate quick installation. Mirrors, often framed with ornate woodwork, were secured with small pieces of wood and nails, similar to modern flat-pack furniture (think Ikea 1890). This modular approach allowed for efficient assembly.

The construction of the chimney was an integral part of the process. Initially, the chimney was built from the bottom up, with a hole left in the center brickwork for ash removal. As the bricklaying progressed, the firebox was constructed, and the



Original fireplace mantle before restoration – note thick dark finish with streaks and cracking.

mantle was integrated into the structure. Large nails were nailed into the house framework while eye screws were embedded into the back of the mantle to facilitate secure attachment to the brickwork. Heavy gauge wire was used to connect the eye screws to nails in the wooden frame of the house forming a tensioned support system that, when twisted, pulled the mantle snugly against the brick chimney. The chimney was then completed by continuing to lay bricks upward, integrating the firebox and ensuring proper ventilation. Many fireplaces were set in the dining room against the same wall as the kitchen. This allowed two flues to be built into one chimney to allow ventilation for both the fireplace and the kitchen stove. This method ensured stability and safety, preventing the mantle from shifting or falling over time.

Design Features of Historical Mantles

Traditional mantles often featured a central mirror surrounded by ornate woodwork, with larger models incorporating additional small mirrors for decorative purposes. Whereas the lower section was secured to the brick fireplace, the top section rested on the lower section and served as a decorative cap. It was secured

with two or four screws or nails, angled into the lathes and plaster in the wall. The design was both functional and aesthetic, with the mirror serving as a focal point and the woodwork adding elegance.

Refinishing and Restoration Techniques

Over time, many mantles have been altered or damaged, often due to attempts at refinishing or accidental wear. Common issues include uneven staining, thick varnish layers, drilled holes for electrical wiring, and surface damage. Restoring a mantle involves careful removal of old finishes and repairs to preserve the original woodwork and design. Sometimes this means removing and disassembling the mantle altogether to better strip the parts.

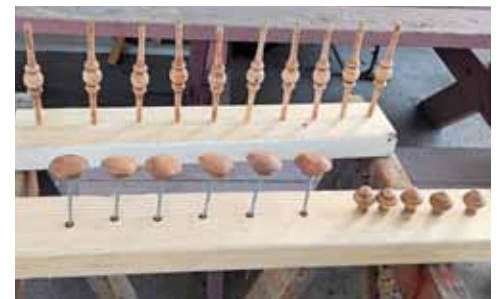
Removing a mantle from the wall requires getting behind it and cutting the wires holding it to the brickwork. Once detached, the back of the mantle reveals numerous screws, both small and large. Small parts are often held with glue, requiring gentle heating with a heat gun to soften the adhesive. Using pliers, the parts can be carefully pried apart, taking care not to damage the wood.

During disassembly, it is essential to document the process thoroughly with photos to ensure that each piece can be precisely refitted in its original position (when completely disassembled, my mantle had 44 parts). The large parts are usually stamped with notches or numbers (mine was notched with Roman numerals), which also helps with the reassembly process.

Stripping and Refinishing

Stripping old finishes involves multiple steps. Initially, a heat gun is used to bubble up the varnish, making it easier to scrape off. It is crucial to control the heat to prevent damage to the wood and always

Small pieces from disassembled mantle carefully organized and stripped.



continued on page 11...

Fireplace Mantle...*continued from page 10*



Side piece of mantle sanded and ready to stain.

operate the heat gun outdoors with appropriate safety gear. After removing the varnish, residual paint or stain can be eliminated with chemical strippers and fine sandpaper, starting with coarse grit (around 100) and progressing to finer grits (up to 400) for a smooth surface. While stripping off the old varnish on mine, it revealed the mantle was made entirely out of Mahogany, a beautiful wood when stained and finished.

Once the surface is prepared, selecting a stain involves testing different colors on scrap pieces or hidden areas of the mantle, like the backside. The chosen stain is then applied evenly with a cloth, and excess stain is wiped off to achieve a uniform appearance. The final protective finish typically involves applying multiple coats of spar urethane satin finish, or your choice of finish, with light sanding between coats to ensure a smooth, durable surface. A finish grit of 1000 wet-dry is what I use. Applying a thick coat can cause streaks or runs, so light, even layers are preferred. Multiple coats –

usually three to four – are recommended for optimal protection and aesthetic appeal.

Final Assembly and Care

After finishing, the mantle is reassembled by matching the notched parts and securing all components. Once reassembled, the mantle is then secured to the wall using long screws into the frame of the house.

Restoring a fireplace mantle is a meticulous process that combines historical knowledge with practical skills. Proper care during stripping, refinishing, and reassembly ensures the mantle retains its original beauty and structural integrity. This process not only preserves a piece of architectural history but also enhances the aesthetic value of the home. Once my restored mantle is re-installed, I expect it will be the focal point of the room for generations to come.



The refinished and reassembled mantel. Once the walls and floors of the parlor are restored, the lower and upper sections will be re-attached to the fireplace.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- *Award Winners
Twenty-Ninth Annual
Preservation Awards*
- *A Delicious Collaboration Between
AAPS and St. Joseph Elementary School*
- *We Bought a Fixer Upper Part IV:
The Fireplace Mantle*

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AAPS SCHEDULE of EVENTS 2026

•
SUNDAY, JUNE 7

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Preservation Awards

Veterans Memorial Building
2203 Central Avenue

•
SATURDAY, JULY 4

START AT 10:00 AM

4th of July Parade

City of Alameda

•
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Alameda Legacy Home Tour

Featuring Alameda's Fernside Neighborhood