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Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

A Look Through Original Wood Windows

by Robert Farrar

Did You Buy a Fixer Too?

Hey, let's go for a drive in Alameda today and look at the vintage houses. We can compare other homes to ours and see what we need to do to bring our house back to its glory. As we drive along the tree-lined streets, admiring the old Victorians and Craftsman, we find a number of old houses that need some type of work. We also see many homes that have had a lot of work done and they look beautiful! Okay, from first sight, our house needs a little work, but with the internet and a little elbow grease we should be able to fix it up. Does this sound familiar?

One of the things we want to fix or change are the rotted wooden sashes and especially the aluminum windows. Aluminum windows were really big in the 1960s when many owners changed out the old rotted or broken wooden sash windows. A window contractor would take out the wooden windows by removing the wood inner retaining molding, then the parting strip between the sash and cutting the ropes off the windows. The window weights would drop down and be left in the walls, if you're lucky. The sash weight pulleys were often removed or hammered into the frame. Then, with a lot of caulking, the new aluminum window would go in, and with a little luck, the original inside stop molding was reused.

These original double-hung wood windows still retain all their original parts and pieces and are fully functional because they've been sheltered from the elements. Not only they face north, but they are located under a covered porch.

This is still going on. Have you ever gone to a 'Home and Garden Show' at a County Fair? They have many companies that sell "new but not improved" windows that are mostly made out of vinyl. The idea is, and was, that "modern" windows would last many years without any problems. However, none of them look good. The dimension, shape, and maybe most importantly, the color of the old painted window sash is a major part of the overall design. Even the "drops" in the lower corners of the traditional upper double-hung sash are important to the overall look. None of the old or "modern" replacements come close to the beauty of the original wooden sash.

Getting Started

If you want to bring the windows back to their original look there are several approaches and requirements. To replace the aluminum windows or refit rotted wooden windows you can either do it yourself or hire a window company or a contractor. Before you start, either you or your contractor will have to obtain a permit from the City of Alameda Permit Center. Be aware that there are Historical Building Codes pertaining to any house built prior to 1942 that allow an exemption to Title 24 for size of windows and energy efficiency.

A lot of people replace old windows because they hear that they need to update the windows to help with weather issues. You will often see that some of the original wood windows are

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***Wood Windows**...continued from page 1*

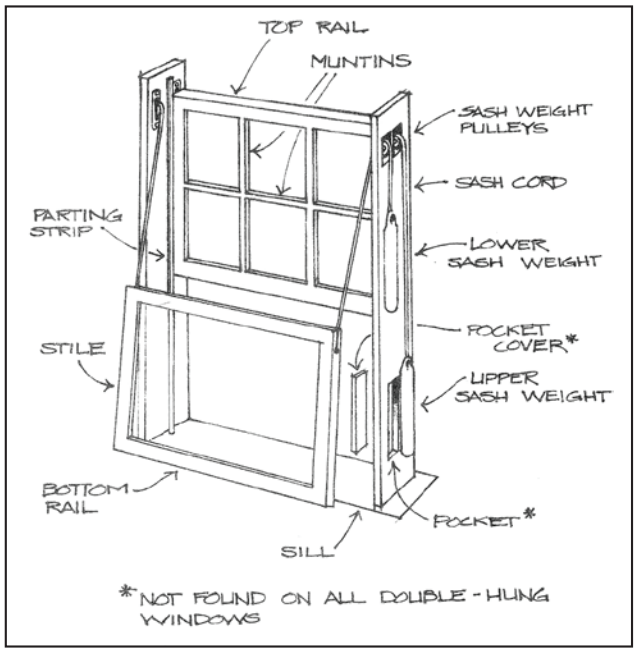
in better shape on the north side of the house. The south and west sides of the house will suffer far more deterioration from the sun and the weather. To be honest, the weather in Alameda is some of the best in the country. Back East, most of the windows in houses are double-paned because of the extreme weather fluctuation during the cold winters and the hot summers. You can have new double-paned windows made that look like original wood windows, but remember that it's more important to have insulation in the attic and basement than it is to have double-paned windows.

Another issue with old windows is poor insulation and air draft. New homes will typically have plastic wrapped around the walls and completely encapsulated windows that don't allow for any airflow. This is to comply with Title 24 energy efficiency and conservation. However, a little airflow drastically reduces the possibility of mold and mildew in a house.

Do it Yourself

Before you start this project or any project on an old house, remember, and this is very important, any work on a house built prior to 1975 can and usually has lead in the paint. Make sure to use the proper respirator and protection. Any scraping of paint should be vacuumed and placed in a sealed plastic bag and properly disposed of.

If you don't have any experience, YouTube is a great resource to help you get started. Search for videos about removing a window, weights and replacing ropes, putting windows back in place, or how to remove and install a window sash. Another excellent starting place is "Rehab Right", a book published by the City of Oakland in 1978 that covers a wide range of restoration issues. The book is currently out of print, but if you search online for the term "Rehab Right" and click on localwiki.org you'll find it available in digital format.



PARTS OF A DOUBLE-HUNG WINDOW
Drawing reproduced from Rehab Right, p. 80.
By Blair Prentice, Graphic Designer, Illustrator and Co-author.
City of Oakland Planning Dept., June 1978.

A Few Additional Hints

Most aluminum windows have been encased with a large amount of caulking. Take a sharp knife or an angle grinder with a flat cutting edge to make a separation between the window and the caulking. It usually takes two people to remove the aluminum window. After it has been removed, scrape, sand, and/or grind off the remaining caulking. At this time you'll be able to see if the pulleys need to be replaced and what shape the access panels are in.

Awning and casement type windows are fairly straightforward, but double-hung windows can be a bit confusing with the ropes, pulleys weights, parting strips, etc. Also, many upper windows have been painted in place. Carefully tapping a putty knife into the former sliding surface and working it the full length of the window will gradually free it up.

If you're fortunate enough to have some original sash that is in reasonable condition, you can strip the paint off and restore any failing wood with penetrating epoxy and sealer. If the wood is rotting or falling apart and you need to have a new window made, save the original "wavy" glass. A window/glass shop will remove the wavy glass and place it in the new window.

If the glazing compound holding and sealing the glass to the wood is failing, but the glass does not need replacing, then carefully remove all the loose stuff and reglaze. This is something of an acquired skill, so have fun. And if you have to remove the glass, be sure to prime the recess, as the glazing compound will adhere better and last longer. Finally prime with two coats and paint with your chosen color.

If you have to replace the ropes on the window and feed them through the pulleys, avoid cheap polypropylene as it rots in the sun and makes poor knots. You need a rope that will make a knot that will just fill the retaining hole on the side of the sash and no more. Too small and it will slip out, too big and you won't get the window in place. Some people put a small finishing nail or screw through the knot into the sash to help keep the knot in place. If your parting strip, sometimes called a parting bead, between the upper and lower sash is missing, it will probably have to be custom milled as the modern stuff tends to be too thin.

Most times the weights are still in the window frame box and it's a matter of removing the access panel built into the original frame to get to them. In some cases it may be easier to remove the interior molding around the window to gain access to the weights rather than disturbing the weight access panel by the parting strip.

If your wooden windows are beyond repair or you are replacing aluminum or modern style ones, you can often find original windows, weights, pulleys, or other vintage hardware at Ohmega Salvage or at Urban Ore, both located in Berkeley. If you own an old house make sure to visit both of these places, just about everything you need to restore your house is there.

Continued on page 3. . .

***Wood Windows**...continued from page 2*

This new wood casement window replaced a rotted double-hung window. The style still matches the original house design but offers a more functional use of the same opening.

They have hundreds of windows, many that are standard sizes.

Wood Window Manufacturers and Suppliers

There are a number of great businesses in the area that can do all of the work for you. If you have old, rotten or unable to use wood sash windows, contact any of the following suppliers for estimates. And, when looking into replacing windows, take a moment to compare prices between the vinyl and traditional wood windows. You might be surprised to learn that wood windows are not only better priced than vinyl ones, but they are made better, last longer and of course, fit in the old houses.

Russo Doors and Windows located in Oakland has been repairing and making new windows for houses in Alameda for years. And A.G. River in San Francisco also offers double-hung and double-paned windows that can be retrofitted into your existing window opening.

Wood Windows Warehouse in Berkeley is also a complete workshop. They can reproduce any window or design a completely new one. Single-hung, double-hung, casement, with ropes and even the new invisible cables for traditional windows are all available. Contact Chris McKoy or visit woodwindowswarehouse.com.

John L. Staton Wood Windows also in Berkeley, is another complete workshop that has been in business for 43 years. They understand the importance of protecting wood products, and with this in mind, they use a penetration epoxy sealer and two coats of primer, which makes their windows last for many years. They understand the art of restoration work, especially in Victorian homes. They also work on stained glass windows. Contact them at Johnstatonwindows@SBCGlobal.net.

Aluminum windows were very popular and used extensively as an inexpensive waterproof solution when replacing rotted wood windows in older houses.

Any of the companies mentioned above will come to your house, take measurements and create whatever type of window you want. They'll build the windows and install them to make sure they work perfectly. I personally like the new style of original looking wood sash windows with invisible cables. They work just like an old style sash window, but without the ropes that can deteriorate and break. All of the companies stand behind their work! For a list of these and other excellent leads visit our website at www.alameda-preservation.org under the Resources tab.

Conclusion

Just to be clear, I am not a contractor or a builder. My wife and I have owned a Victorian house for 30 years and have done a lot of work on it: new foundation, all new plumbing, electrical, heating, repair or replace windows, new bathrooms and a new kitchen. We took out many aluminum windows and replaced them with original old windows and a couple of new wood windows. We did most of the work, but when I didn't know how to do something, I asked for help. I have also helped out a number of people in Alameda figuring what they need to do to fix problems in their houses. I have on occasion done work for people, and I give out a lot of free advice!

PAC

PRESERVATION ACTION COMMITTEE

GET INVOLVED & MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Together we can make a difference in Alameda's future. Share your ideas and participate! We maintain a Google Group list to advise AAPS members on ongoing issues that could affect historic properties.

For more information please contact

Christopher Buckley at 510-523-0411 or cbuckleyAICP@att.net

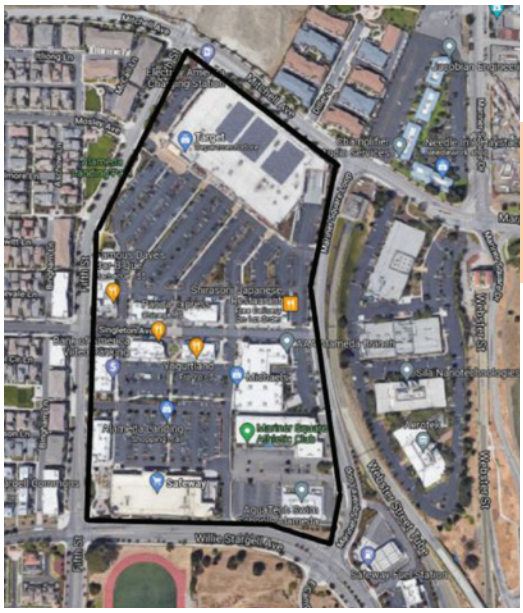
Proposed Zoning for Shopping Center Sites *by Conchita Perales*

At its January 10, 2022 meeting, the Planning Board held a public workshop to review and comment on the Housing Element Update's draft Zoning Code amendments for shopping center sites to encourage multi-family residential development. In addition to many residential zones in Alameda, these sites are being targeted to accommodate the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) for the period 2023-2031 in compliance with State Law.

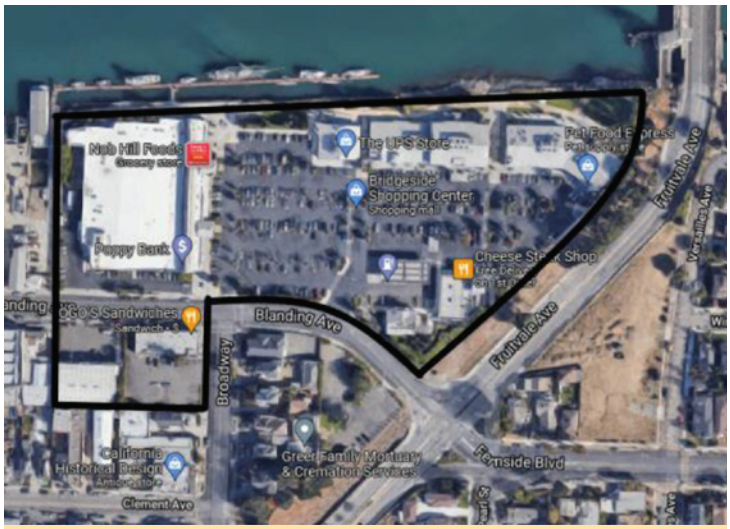
Planning staff developed zoning text for the shopping centers and shared their proposed mapping of the multifamily zone on these sites. AAPS has been advocating housing development of shopping center sites and other underutilized non-historic areas to avoid or reduce the need to upzone residential and historic commercial areas to help meet the RHNA and is generally supportive of the staff proposals. For more information on the staff report and the zoning proposals go to **alameda.legistar.com**, then search "2022-1603" and click on the file# column.

AAPS submitted a letter on behalf of AAPS in response to the staff's proposals, to which Planning Board members and staff generally responded favorably. Some of the AAPS recommendations included the proposal that ground-floor residential uses should perhaps not be prohibited if they do not front a public right-of-way; or that the maximum density and height limits on buildings should vary per shopping center site depending on accessibility or site constraints. To read the letter, get involved, advocate and learn more about current preservation issues, visit **alameda-preservation.org**.

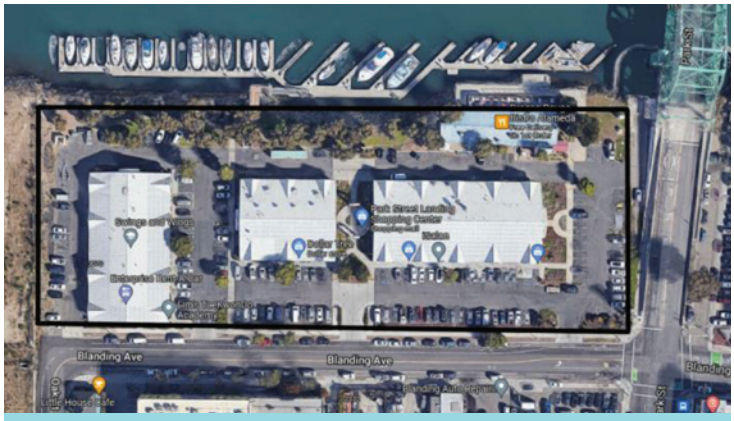
By actively participating in the ongoing planning process, AAPS continues the fight for recognition and respect of the architectural integrity and preservation of Alameda's historic resources.



ALAMEDA LANDING • • • Stargell at 5th



BRIDGESIDE SHOPPING CENTER • • • Blanding at Broadway



PARK STREET LANDING • • • Blanding at Park

MARINA VILLAGE SHOPPING CENTER • • • Marina Village Parkway

OTHER SITES INCLUDED ARE:
South Shore Shopping Center and adjacent waterfront parcels
Harbor Bay Landing Shopping Center

Wedge-ward Ho! *by Judith Lynch*

When the north end of Park Street was developed for homes starting in the 1870s, land was unregulated, and many residences were large with spacious grounds. Thus over 150 years this area grew more desirable. It was quiet and tree lined yet near the North Park train station ensuring reliable transportation on and off the Island. Then about 20 years ago, residents in this small piece of Alameda were concerned about the vulnerability of their changing neighborhood. Naming it "The Wedge," they appealed to the Historic Advisory Board for help. The result was an official HAB document on details of the area. The 10-page report included the hitherto unknown fact that its 12 blocks were the home of a concentrated group of 1870s buildings.

This "elegant sophisticated" style has been dubbed "Italian" since it first surfaced during the 1800s in England. The HAB report was never distributed beyond City archives, but unearthing it two decades later proved eye-opening. The precarious nature of the area and the significance of its antique structures were revealed anew because a portion of current Wedge structures are on large pieces of land and thus vulnerable to rampant development.

What was needed? A new effort in light of current upzoning throughout Alameda, which has companies salivating at the profit opportunities. For example note the ill-named "Homestead" corporation ("Hitch up the oxen, Mom, we are a-headin' West to stake us a claim.") Its slick ad entices property owners "Develop your lot with Homestead to unlock $300k - $1M, **without spending a dollar. 1. Choose** your development option and Homestead will start the lot split process. **2. We Build** design, permit, and build a new unit at no cost to you. **3. Share the Profits;** After the new house is sold we split the profit: you get 80%, we get 20%. *(Bold phrases copied from Homestead advertisement)*."

So calls went out for volunteers to research, design, and produce a booklet that included a walking tour to alert residents, city staff, and preservationists

A past glory of the area on Everett Street, a snippet of an 1870s mansion situated on an estate-sized parcel of land ignored and executed in the 1860s. Image: Woody Minor.

For a 12-block area, the Wedge is replete with many architectural tokens of a significant past, whether this workaday cottage from the 1880s to earlier mansions with grounds and carriage houses. Image: Adele Aced.

to the potential fate of the Wedge and other such vulnerable parts of the Island. A baker's dozen signed up, an astonishing range of talents and interests: a renowned artist, an HAB member, an impromptu gardener, a granddog wrangler, a curious photographer, a historian-author, a reference librarian, a media creator, a book builder, a history enthusiast, a "funny" accountant, Lady Di, and Wren O'Vate (say it aloud for full effect).

Preliminary finds, surmises, and speculations from Wedge-groupies

** I was struck by the mixture of residential buildings with commercial and industrial businesses and the juxtaposition of historical, modern, and 'uninspired' architecture.*

** People walk, bike, or drive through almost by accident. I realized that it is not really on the way to anyplace else, and through traffic gets siphoned off by the tripartite barrier of Tilden, Park Street, and the estuary.*

** I noticed that vintage buildings were often altered in insalubrious ways to accommodate autos, such as orphan add-on garages, cramped dig-downs with toboggan chute driveways, or bay windows and posy gardens replaced with sheds for cars.*

Sidewalk stamps are footfall reminders of yore in the Wedge neighborhood. This one memorializes the local Teamsters Union concrete installers. Image: Dan St. John.

The booklet is a 12 page tabloid replica in the newspaper style of the 1870s. Publication date is sometime this spring, and it will be given out free because all expenses are being paid by an anonymous donor. We can still use help, so if the project intrigues you, mosey around the area and then let us know, **judithlych7@gmail.com**.

TRAVELOGUE

An illustrated architectural travel story inspired by places visited and experiences encountered.

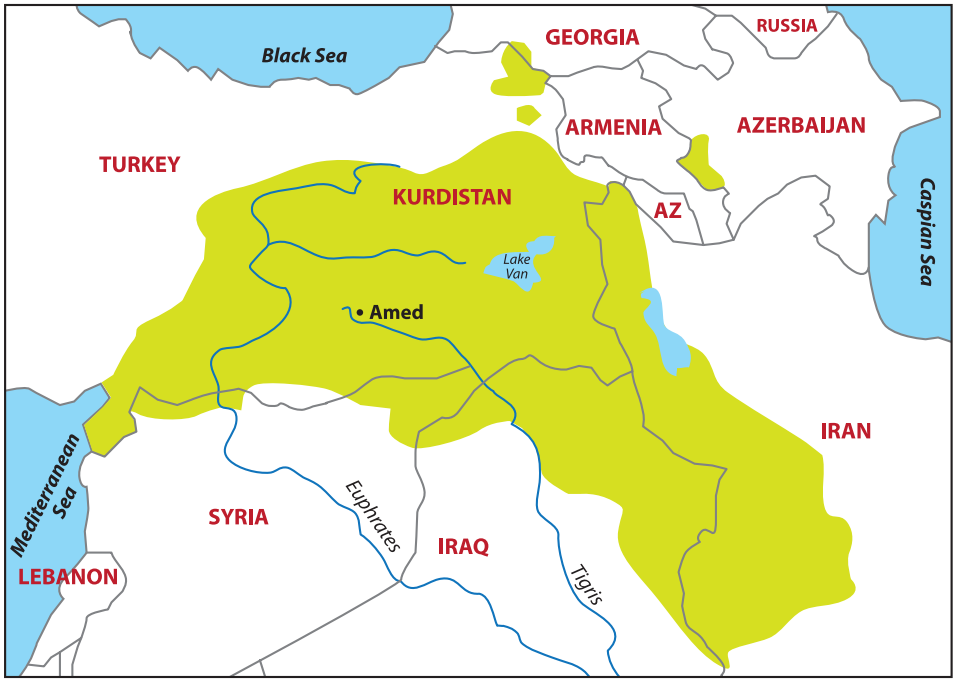
A Kurdish Home Built for Hospitality

by Brenden Sullivan

My wife, Sozdar Gavgasi, is Kurdish. She is number five of eleven children with two brothers and eight sisters. One of her younger sisters was to be married last year, so we traveled back to Kurdistan to attend the wedding. Though weddings are important ceremonies in most cultures, it seems to be the most important familial event for the Kurds, because they are free to culturally express themselves in dress and dance. Some background . . .

The Kurds number somewhere between 30 and 40 million people. Indigenous of the Middle East, they have their own language, history and traditions. Nonetheless, they have been subjected to cultural and physical genocides by their neighbors, the Turks, the Persians and the Arabs. Initially divided between Turkish and Persian Empires, France and Britain doubled their woes (and masters) when they created artificial "state-nations" of Syria and Iraq in the wake of the First World War.

Kurds and Kurdistan may not be on the maps of the Middle East today, but they are there in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Barely tolerated–their language banned, their leaders imprisoned–the ruling circles in the Middle East want the Kurds to be deaf and mute. Will they prevail? Dr. King loved quoting, "Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again!" Maybe the same will happen to the Kurds. (For more information, please visit www.kurdistan.org.)



▲ *Kurdistan (shown in green) is a roughly defined geo-cultural territory in Western Asia.*

The city of Amed, Kurdistan has over 1.7 million inhabitants and most live in condominiums. Images: Brenden Sullivan, August 2021. ▶

Amed is the largest city in Northern Kurdistan, resting on the banks of the Tigris, one of the greatest rivers of the Middle East, and considered by many to be the capital of the Kurdish people. Amed has a wall that dates its origins to the Roman times and a history of being inhabited for at least 6,000 years. Though much of the buildings and architecture have been destroyed, the city wall and some of its buildings have been restored and made museums.

After visiting the homes of Sozdar's family members and touring several districts in Amed, it seemed to me that most of the people lived in gated communities in large condominiums with anywhere from four to six buildings and constructed from around the 1950s to the present day.

Continued on page 7. . .

***TRAVELOGUE**...continued from page 6*

▲ *The center courtyard is covered with basalt pavers with part of it arranged as a garden populated with fruit trees.*

◀ *Cemil Pasha Mansion in Amed, Kurdistan.*

I asked my wife, "Where are all the old neighborhoods and houses?" and she replied, "They do not exist in Kurdistan any longer, because of Turkish oppression and destruction of our communities. Houses are few and far between (less than 1% live in single family homes) and most, if not all, are newly constructed and are located on the outside of the cities." My heart sunk, as I could feel the pain she and millions of Kurds must experience on a daily basis. Home is where the heart is and the Kurds homes have been ruthlessly taken from them decade after decade.

At the heart of Kurdish culture is family, which is front and center when one travels in their occupied lands. Unfortunately, it is not evident in their architecture any longer, but in their hearts, minds, and through the hospitality you experience as a guest in their home or when dining at one of their restaurants– no matter where on the globe.

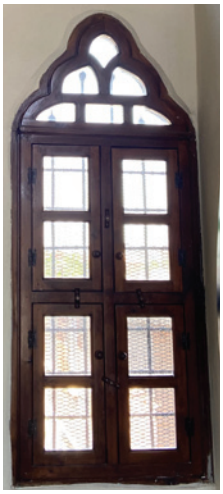
My wife called her sister Netice and husband Umit, and after a brief discussion, she said, "Let's go. . . I want to show you how the Kurds used to live before Turkish occupation and oppression." We then set out on a day trip to Amed's City Center and the Cemil Pasha Mansion, which dates back to the late 1800s.

The Cemil Pasha family mansion was built in 1887 and is said to have been completed in one year. Though larger in scale, it is representative of what middle-class houses were like before Turkish occupation. The restoration effort began in 2010 and was completed in 2014. The building is primarily constructed with the region's natural stone basalt, its unique properties keep the mansion cool in blistering summers and warm in frigid winters. As were most all the houses (and mansions) within Amed pre-occupation, they were shaped and constructed with family values in mind and they played an important role in Kurdish cultural heritage.

The main isolated courtyard in the center is independent within itself and has wings that surround it. The floor of the courtyard provides a connection between the sections of the house and where people spend most of their time during the hot summers. The ground is also covered with basalt pavers and some part of it is arranged as a garden populated with fruit trees. Because of the deforestation in the region, the use of wood is negligible in the construction of residential and commercial buildings.

The mansion was constructed with two separate wings, a haremlik (for females) and a selamlik (for males). Both sections of the building have two floors and a total of 42 rooms. Over 100 people lived together at one time in the mansion, which is demonstrative of the familial lifestyle of Kurdish culture.

Although there were male and female sections at the mansion, the division was not



◀ *The stairwell between the haremlik, female wing, and the selamlik, male wing.*

Handcrafted four-casement wooden window with a unique decorative six panel glass transom.

Continued on page 8. . .

***TRAVELOGUE**...continued from page 7*

based on conservative outlook, but more for privacy. Notably, women were not treated as second class and were not forced into passive positions. When perusing the various photographs of life at the Mansion, women and men are pictured together, in equal standing.

The same was true for property sharing an inheritance. When the family gained property, the baths, trade buildings and homes would be registered under the name of the women. Also, in order to economically protect women who were getting married, significant amounts of jewelry and ornamentation would be gifted to them and each item would be registered with the signatures of members of renowned aristocratic families of Amed. An example of wedding gifts included brooches, earrings, rings, bracelets, necklaces, hairbands, wrist watches and belts made of diamonds, gold, cut diamonds, pearls and pearl-embroidered head scarves to broad cloth cardigans, and from ketefi shawls to furs–all were gifted and or kept in order to protect the bride. This tradition is carried on to this day.

As I walked through the mansion, I realized how the grand hallways not only functioned as main arteries, but they also served as protection, literally wrapping the exterior of the structure like large arms and holding the heart–the living rooms–safe. The arching windows that line the corridors not only afford grand views of the courtyard, but also feed the inner rooms with natural light and fresh air. I could not help feeling that I was being taken care of by the building's very own design, and I could only imagine what life was like here, over a century ago, with more than a hundred occupants at any given time. The mansion's "architectural transparency" gave its inhabitants the ability to view daily life from room to room in real time.

Just like family, hospitality is an important part of Kurdish culture. Cemil Pasha apparently loved entertaining friends as well as travelers. With the advent of railroads, some of these travelers were even English, French or German speaking "infidels"! They too were entertained. Just imagine Kurdish families bustling through halls filling the rooms with family customs and traditions, impressing upon their guests a warm and inviting hospitality.

Unlike the homes I am used to in America, which have formal dining rooms, Kurdish living rooms are used as dining rooms with the simple placement of a cloth or carpet in the center of the room that fits the dining party. It took some getting used to, but after a few short days dining in this style, I quickly saw the wisdom and history in this tradition. There was no mad search for extra chairs, table leaves, or extra tables to accommodate the guests, as the configuration was constantly changing to meet the number of family members or travelers dining on each given day.

Learning Kurdish traditions has been one of the many highlights of getting to know my wife Sozdar. Visiting her homeland not only gives me great insight into her heart, but affords me a greater understanding and appreciation of what family means to her. Touring the mansion, while beautiful and fascinating, made me sad for what has been taken from the Kurdish people–their homes, which through their construction played an important role in expressing the importance of family and being hospitable.

I will leave you with my hope that though their land and homes have been taken, the traditional hospitality practice will be carried on for generations to come. The Cemil Pasha family (and Kurds alike) had three rules as hosts, which we can all learn from: One, they were not supposed to ask their guests their names. Two, they were not supposed to ask them where they were from. And finally, three, it was forbidden to ask them when they would be leaving! Long live the loving Kurds and their traditions embedded in family and generosity.

Hallways of the mansion wrap the exterior of the building, inviting large amounts of natural light into the rooms.

Colorful decorative wood ceilings in two of the living rooms.

The Trend in Victorian Minimalism

by Joyce Boyd

When I heard that our neighbor, who had just purchased a Victorian on our street, wanted to paint his house black and white, was remodeling and was a minimalist, I envisioned one of the terrible paint jobs done by flippers on the island who wouldn't know paint placement if it bit them, walls torn down for an open concept and a kitchen decorated for a Scandinavian home.

Victorian-era decorating is the polar opposite of today's modern styles. It was a time of heavy, ornate furnishings, oversized everything, and a penchant for knickknacks. The resulting style is romantic, complex, warm, and dramatic, dripping with opulence and excess; basically, enough to make any minimalist shudder. When you live as a minimalist, you strive to only use things that serve a purpose. It is about living simply and having only what you need to go about your daily life. For instance, some people may start a no-spend challenge or only fill their home with items they absolutely need. How was this guy going to meld these styles? The answer is that he did it beautifully and preserved his old home.

Navin Agrawal had traveled for four years – Africa, Italy, Turkey, and South America being among his destinations. When he started his travels he had a lot of suitcases, but as he shed all the things he was carrying, he found freedom. He heard a Ted Talk on minimalism, and he came to see all this stuff we have as a burden. It took time to buy and care for our stuff, time we could spend on what was important to us instead, and it had negative environmental consequences to boot. Navin wanted to keep the core identity of the Victorian but add a modern sensibility.

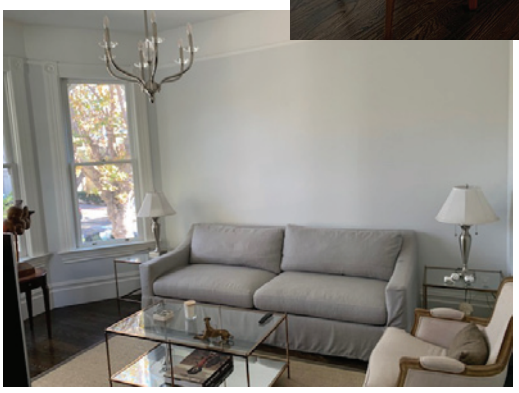
He purchased 1529 Mozart in October 2017 and got to work. He hired well known colorist, Bob Buckter, to select his black, white, grey, and gold-leaf color palette and paint placement. The painted house is lovely as you can see in the picture. He got to work adding back missing exterior detail, installing hardwood floors, replacing vinyl windows with wood windows, and adding picture railings. He thought the cozy rooms and pocket doors gave options for living and declined to go open concept as suggested by his contractor. He remodeled the kitchen and bathroom going for a classic style of marble, white cabinets, beadboard and Victorian style fixtures. Like so many Victorians, Navin had a ground floor rental unit to which he also applied the same aesthetic.

It was in the decorating that Navin could fully express his minimalism. He loves organic, natural, light, airy and uncluttered. What Navin did is the heart of preservation for me. He kept the house intact and used the ephemeral – decorating – to express what he values. I felt such a calmness in his house. Everything was stripped down to the essentials in this beautifully restored Victorian house.

Above: Navin Agrawal consulted with colorist Bob Buckter on a minimalist color scheme for his Victorian house.

Above: The simplicity in the layout, colors and materials is evident in the remodeled kitchen.

Above: There are no distractions in the dining room, everything is pared down to a minimum.



Left: The living room is also pared down to minimal elements.

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