



# SAVING BEDFORD

BY LESLIE DIXON

NEVER INTENDED TO LIVE IN BEVERLY HILLS, and neither did my house.

Everybody knows that if you want a great bungalow in L.A. you go east, young man—to Hollywood, or Pasadena—so when I brag to historic home junkies that I live in a Greene & Greene in Beverly Hills, I get a dubious sneer.

“No Greene & Greens were *built* in Beverly Hills.”

People love to set me straight. And so, for the hundredth time, I haul out the story.

“It was *built* at the corner of Wilshire and Berendo [in Los Angeles] in 1909 and *moved* to Beverly Hills in the '20s. Look it up, you twit.”

Okay, I don't say 'twit.' And you know what else I don't say? That we're thinking of moving it again.

## A PIECE OF HISTORY

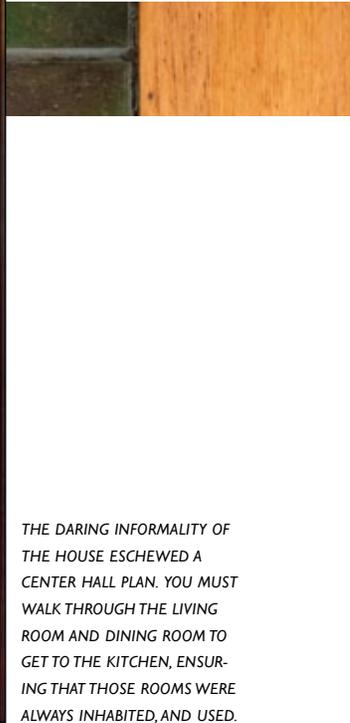
My husband and I never imagined we would become the custodians of one of the Greens' most gracious and livable homes. Like many people, we were Greene & Greene groupies; we lurked around Pasadena whenever one of their homes was open and paid handsomely to ogle the woodwork.





PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF





THE DARING INFORMALITY OF THE HOUSE ESCHEWED A CENTER HALL PLAN. YOU MUST WALK THROUGH THE LIVING ROOM AND DINING ROOM TO GET TO THE KITCHEN, ENSURING THAT THOSE ROOMS WERE ALWAYS INHABITED, AND USED.

We weren't even looking to move. But when this 1909 beauty popped up on the MLS (online real estate listings), fellow G&G groupies started calling.

"Just go see it! What would it hurt?"

You all know that tune. You just want to see the inside, right? And then your life savings goes out the window.

We panicked when our offer was accepted. Though we were much too young to have cardiologists, we actually got chest pains. The same house in Pasadena would have been more affordable, but the gold lamé dirt it rested on, here in Beverly Hills, jacked up the price something fierce.

"Better for resale!" the agent chirped. She would prove to be right, so very right, but with a sinister twist. (More on this later.)

The first person who dreamed of plunking down our house in Beverly Hills was its second owner, silent film star Norman Kerry. He'd bought the place from the man who had commissioned it, Earle C. Anthony, a broadcasting magnate and Packard dealer famed for his good taste in architects (in addition to his Greene & Greene home, his showroom was designed by Bernard Maybeck). Perhaps Anthony relinquished the house because of the rampant commercial development along Wilshire—it was simply no longer a residential neighborhood. Certainly Kerry agreed. He loved the home, but knew, if it were to escape the wrecking ball, the place would have to be moved.



MY GRANDFATHER, MAYNARD DIXON, PAINTED THE OIL OVER THE SETTEE, A RENDERING OF THE BARN AT HIS CHILDHOOD HOME OUTSIDE FRESNO, CA. THE BARN STILL STANDS TODAY.

THE FRONT DOOR WAS MOVED OUTWARD, ENCLOSING WHAT HAD BEEN EXTERIOR SPACE, TO CREATE A BIT OF AN ENTRY AND COAT CLOSETS. (NOTE TELLTALE EXTERIOR PATIO TILE ON INTERIOR FLOOR.)



He engaged the Greens, and the house was dismantled and hauled off to the brand-spanking-new tract of Beverly Hills, where it stands today at 910 N. Bedford Drive.

(How the Greens cut up and moved a 4,500-square-foot home, I don't really want to know. All I can say is, you can't tell.) The house had, and has, a reassuring solidity. From the moment you walk in, you feel solid ground under you; you say, "Ahhh. Well built." The floors don't slant or creak. You look up and see the box pine beams holding everything together like giant toothpicks skewering an hors d'oeuvre. This was proven highly functional in the 1994 earthquake. The house

lurched back and forth, as if by a kid shaking Jiffy Pop. There was zero damage—not so much as a crack.

(In contrast, our neighbor came stumbling out of his 1930's Traditional terrified and in black—all his chimneys had collapsed from within. "Sing Swanee," I cracked. )

By then we had recovered from our sticker shock and were gathering our remaining pennies for a bit of restoration.

*THE ORIGINAL ANDIRONS MANAGED TO ESCAPE BEING 'IMPROVED.'*





The house was structurally in good shape, and had not, in any permanent sense, been ruined. But it hadn't escaped the '70s unscathed. The kitchen and bathrooms gleamed, all right, but with white Formica and stainless-steel sinks. An entire wing of the upstairs had lime-green, "Brady Bunch" shag carpeting. And some jerk we have spent decades cursing had, decades ago, removed the original Tiffany glass French doors, replacing them with ... one guess. Aluminum sliders!

And yet. The huge, original andirons remained in the (also original) tiled fireplace. None of the wainscoting had ever been painted. Most of the original doors and





windows remained, and insanely brilliant little details were intact—every deadbolt was made of spring-loaded *wood*. Even after a century, the doors hung square, and the little bolts slotted right into place like they were installed yesterday.

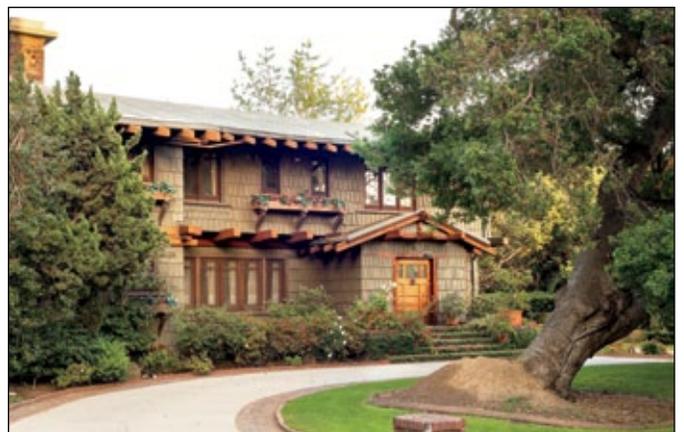
Every time a residual check arrived, we'd fix something. Berkeley woodworker Christopher Wright designed new French doors that looked as though they'd always been there, accented with stained glass by the now well-known Theodore Ellison. Sue Johnson Lamps, also in Berkeley, provided light fixtures that eased our pain that the originals were gone. The pink cement around the pool was tiled over, although, if you have a bitchy eye, you'll see that the pool itself is still one gigantic 1960s kidney.

Twenty-two years passed. We never did fully restore the place; we were too busy living in it, raising a kid, writing the thousands of pages that would become a dozen Hollywood films.

And oh, man, the parties. The house liked parties, both intimate and blow-outs. People walking in for the first time would gasp with pleasure. "It's like a vacation lodge! You just want to be here forever."

But even at the height of our happiness, we knew we would eventually leave. Los Angeles is not our home; the Bay Area was calling me back, and the boys agreed: it was time. Time to relinquish the house to its next loving custodian.

And so we listed it. And many people wanted to buy it. And every single one of them wanted to tear it down.





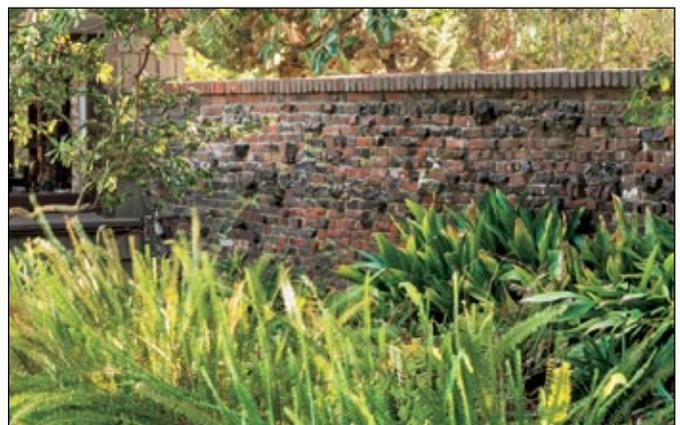
ORIGINAL HORIZONTAL WINDOWS  
FEATURE A REVERSE CLOUD LIFT  
MOTIF, WHICH CONTINUES  
THROUGH THE HOUSE.

### SERIOUS INQUIRIES ONLY

What had happened while we had been cocooning inside our clinker brick walls was a change to the neighborhood every bit as cataclysmic as the razing of Wilshire Boulevard. Anyone who has picked up a national newspaper recently has read about the destruction of Old Beverly Hills—1920s Spanish homes with hand-painted ceilings were being leveled right and left, replaced by obese French Chateaus. Foreign money was pouring in; buyers wanted newer, bigger, shinier. Nine marble bathrooms. A bowling alley.

Beams? Wainscoting? To these people's eyes, our house was a Medieval hut. A blemish on a buildable lot.

My real estate agent was right. Our lot had appreciated wildly. It had appreciated so much that it was worth far, far more with the house *off* it.





THINK THE GREENES KNEW THEY WERE DESIGNING A PARTY HOUSE?

One potential buyer, a developer with spectacularly bad taste whose buildings inspire screams of rage from long-time residents, wanted the lot so badly he offered to pay \$2 million of the purchase price in unreported cash. I was confused.

“You mean, like, in a *suitcase*?”

That was exactly what he meant. We declined, referring to him afterwards as “ML” for Money Launderer.

Rope Man, another buyer, kept measuring the back yard for an 80-foot pool and vast outbuildings. We didn’t sell to him, either.

As the months passed, and it became clear that every buyer was lusting for demolition, we ran every possible



scenario. Heavy-duty protective landmarking? Certainly possible, even advisable. But, that would create one, tiny problem: It would destroy our net worth. The house would sell, all right, but for a fraction of its value.

Well, we thought, the house had been moved once to escape the wrecking ball. Maybe it can be moved again. Why not? We'll take it with us when we go!

Another problem: Where, in the Bay Area, do you find a half-acre lot? We didn't want to live in Marin, in wine country, down the peninsula with the techies. We wanted to be *in* San Francisco or Berkeley, in "the muck of life," as I call it, in a real walking neighborhood.







I EXPERIENCED MANY TRIUMPHS AND MISERIES IN THIS AIRY ROOM.

Our lone walking destination in Beverly Hills had at least been a fun one: The Beverly Hills Hotel. It was great sauntering over to the Polo Lounge, or walking to one of my own movie premieres. But then the hotel's owner, the Sultan of Brunei, passed laws mandating that adulterous women and gays be stoned to death.

So much for *that* brunch destination.

Finally we rejected the idea of moving the house out of Southern California. We don't have the kind of wealth to bring off something like that without hitch. And we feel, psychically, that it's time to let go.

So where does 910 Bedford stand now? Jury's out. We still own it. We still fear for it. We are just beginning to throw out some feelers, to people in nearby communities where historic homes are treasured—Pasadena, Flintridge, Los Feliz. Where someone might be sitting on a big ol' lot,





WE HAD ALREADY BOUGHT THE HOUSE BEFORE I NOTICED THESE UNIQUE INTERLOCKING CEILING BEAMS. THIS WAS ORIGINALLY AN EXTERIOR PORCH, NOW A BRIGHT UPSTAIRS HALL.



wishing, “Damn, if only I had a Greene and Greene! My life would be complete!”

If you are that person, we will give it to you. For free. Seriously.

You don’t have to care about the house’s history—that the great lyricist Lorenz Hart wrote “Isn’t It Romantic” in these rooms. That Groucho Marx and Maurice Chevalier came to parties here. That Mrs. Doubtfire, Thomas Crown Affair, Hairspray and Limitless were written upstairs in the glassed-in sleeping porch.

You only have to care enough to move it.

All right, that’s a weensy little hitch —Okay, more like one big, complex, engineer-hiring, permit-pulling, structural, bureaucratic and artistic Labor of Hercules. (But not impossible, not as expensive as you might think. And what a reward.)

Surely you’re out there, somewhere. You know who you are.

You’re someone who, reading a real estate ad that boasts: “Marble floors! Gold fountains! Parking for 40!” wants to start screaming.

You’re someone who’d love to sleep beneath fragrant beams, lounge under redwood eaves. Who’d go easy with the white paint. And who’d never get over that pleasure you feel, even after years and years, just walking through the front door.

Call us. We’ll pass the torch. 

*Pending the identification of a suitable site, the City of Beverly Hills has indicated that they will be sympathetic to an application to move 910 N. Bedford Drive to another location.*



