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# ALAMEDA ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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March, 2003

## *General Membership Meeting* ***Bungalow Bathrooms***

*Jane Powell, Author and Arts and Crafts Restoration Expert*

**Sunday, March 16, 2003 ~ 7:00 p.m.**

First Presbyterian Church at the corner of Santa Clara Ave & Chestnut St



AAPS is pleased to welcome Jane Powell, author of the newly published book **Bungalow Bathrooms**, at our next General Membership Meeting. Indoor plumbing is the very basis of modern civilization. From the white, sanitary bathrooms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, through the wildly colored tile and fixtures of the 1920s and 1930s, Powell explores the history of plumbing and bathroom design, and suggests practical ways to restore a vintage bathroom, or build a new bath in a period style.

Powell is the proprietor of House Dressing, a business dedicated to buying and restoring old houses, especially bungalows. In 1987, she bought her first bungalow, a minor fixer-upper in mostly original condition. She renovated it in a way that preserved its historic features, then sold it at a profit and bought another. Several houses later it had turned into a career. She is presently working on her ninth bungalow.

Her first book, **Bungalow Kitchens**, was released in May 2000, and has in a short time become the bible of period kitchen restoration. A book about period bathrooms was the obvious sequel. Since the publication of her first book, she has become a nationally-known lecturer and consultant on all aspects of early 20<sup>th</sup> century houses.

She lives with her four cats in whatever bungalow she is currently renovating. In her spare time, she works on historic preservation issues in her hometown of Oakland, California.

# PRESERVATION ACTION COMMITTEE

*Chris Buckley*

## City Council Sets Precedent on Historic Homes up for Demolition in Alameda

At its October 15, 2002 meeting, the City Council voted 3-1 against issuing a Certificate of Approval to demolish the fire-damaged Victorian at 1525 Minturn Street. (See October, 2002 AAPS News).

Mayor Beverly Johnson, Vice-Mayor Tony Daysog and Councilmember Al DeWitt, voted against the demolition, while Councilmember Barbara Kerr voted in favor. (Note: the meeting was before the November 5, 2002 election and subsequent seating of the current City Council. Mayor Johnson and Vice-Mayor Daysog were still Councilmembers at the time of the vote and Councilmember DeWitt was Acting Mayor.)

In another very significant historic preservation success, the Council on February 4, 2003 voted 3-0 to add an 1883 Victorian house at 1423 Morton Street to the City's Historic Building Study List. The building, attributed to George W. Percy, one of the architects of City Hall, was being proposed for demolition by its owner, George Ong, in order to build a new duplex (see October, 2002 AAPS News). Adding the building to the Study List, means it cannot be demolished without Historical Advisory Board (HAB) approval, with possible appeal to the City Council.

Mayor Johnson, Vice-Mayor Daysog and newly-elected Councilmember Frank Matarrese voted in favor of listing the building. Councilmembers DeWitt and Kerr did not attend the meeting.

The case came to the Council after the HAB, on December 5, 2002, voted 3-2 to **not** list the building. AAPS was intending to appeal the HAB decision to the City Council, but this became unnecessary when Mayor Johnson asked that the HAB decision be considered by the Council under the Council's "Call for Review" procedure. The three HAB members, Nancy Gill, Diane Mc Pherson, and Ben Tilos, who voted not to list the building, appeared concerned not so



1423 Morton Street.



much about the building's eligibility for the List than by the fact that the owner had already spent time and money developing the duplex proposal and had submitted it for a design review permit. The three HAB members indicated that it would be unfair to the owner to list the property and not allow its demolition this late in the development process. The building has been vacant for many months and needs considerable maintenance. The owner believes that it is not economically feasible to rehabilitate the building.

AAPS does not agree with the owner's assessment. We believe that the building is economically feasible to rehabilitate and if the exterior were restored, would be a very attractive structure. Prior to proposing demolition, the owner listed the building for sale but rejected offers from buyers who would have rehabilitated the structure. The design work so far on the duplex proposal appears limited only to conceptual plans, rather than construction drawings. Such work should cost no more than several thousand dollars. AAPS does not believe that the owner's loss of this investment if the building were to be rehabilitated constitutes sufficient economic hardship to justify allowing demolition.

In reversing the HAB decision, the Council appropriately based their decision on whether the building met the criteria for inclusion on the List, rather than on economic factors or the merits of the new duplex proposal. The Council noted that, under City rules, economic factors are supposed to be considered only for demolition of already listed properties that come to the Council on appeal, rather than for the listing itself. The Council

also noted that it would set a bad precedent to approve demolition after the building had been allowed to deteriorate. This would in effect reward the owner for allowing deterioration.

If the owner wishes to continue pursuing demolition, he would need to go back to the HAB for approval of a demolition permit. As in the case of 1525 Minturn Street the HAB decision could be appealed to the City Council.

AAPS members are encouraged to send thank you letters and/or make phone calls to Mayor Johnson and Vice-Mayor Daysog for their votes in both of these cases, to Councilmember Dewitt for his vote on 1523 Minturn Street and to Councilmember Matarrese for his vote on 1423 Morton Street. Special thanks is owed to Mayor Johnson for her initiative in making the "Call for Review" for 1423 Morton Street.

### **City Considers Broader Demolition Protections for Historic Properties**

A bonus from the 1423 Morton Street case (see story above) is that it dramatized the missing pieces in the City's Historical Building Study List. Structures on the List cannot be demolished, unless approved by the Historical Advisory Board (HAB), with possible appeal to the City Council.



1979 photo from the Planning Dept.



Recent Photo After Fire

Although the List contains about 4,000 historic properties, mostly included as a result of the City's 1979 Historical and Architectural Inventory, there are many other significant properties, such as 1423 Morton Street, that were not on the List. Many of these properties appear to have been excluded because of alterations, which are often easily reversible. AAPS has identified other excluded properties that are unaltered and, in AAPS' judgment, are better than some of those already on the List. These additional properties appear to have simply fallen through the cracks when the List was created.

At its December 5, 2002 meeting, the HAB discussed ways to broaden the List. This effort gained momentum when Mayor Beverly Johnson, concerned over potential "summary demolitions" of buildings like 1423 Morton Street, asked staff to investigate options for broader review of demolitions. Planning Department staff has therefore drafted an ordinance requiring HAB approval for demolition or removal of any building built before 1942.

An earlier version of the ordinance would have required HAB approval for any building over 50 years old but the HAB changed this at its February 6, 2003 meeting to the 1942 cut-off date. The change was partly due to Councilmembers concerns at the February 4, 2003 meeting over blanket demolition protection for 1950's and newer buildings.

The draft ordinance is scheduled for City Council consideration on March 4, 2003.

AAPS is very pleased by the City's prompt and proactive effort to provide better demolition protection for historic properties, with special thanks to Mayor Johnson, the HAB, Planning and Building Director Greg Fuz and HAB Secretary Judith Altschuler.

*The Preservation Action Committee meets at 7:00 pm on the first Monday of each month to address issues important to the architectural preservation of the City of Alameda. Committee meetings are open to all AAPS members. If you would like to attend a meeting or would like more information please call Chris Buckley at 510-523-0411. We are making an impact within the community. It's fun and informative. We encourage all members to GET INVOLVED!*

## "MODERN (adj.): Of, relating to, or characteristic of the present."

Revival or the Arts & Crafts movement. Yet the Missionists and most architectural critics hold on to the "modern" adjective, perhaps hoping that it can still confer some legitimacy on their theories and rationalizations that have been largely discredited over the course of the last two decades.

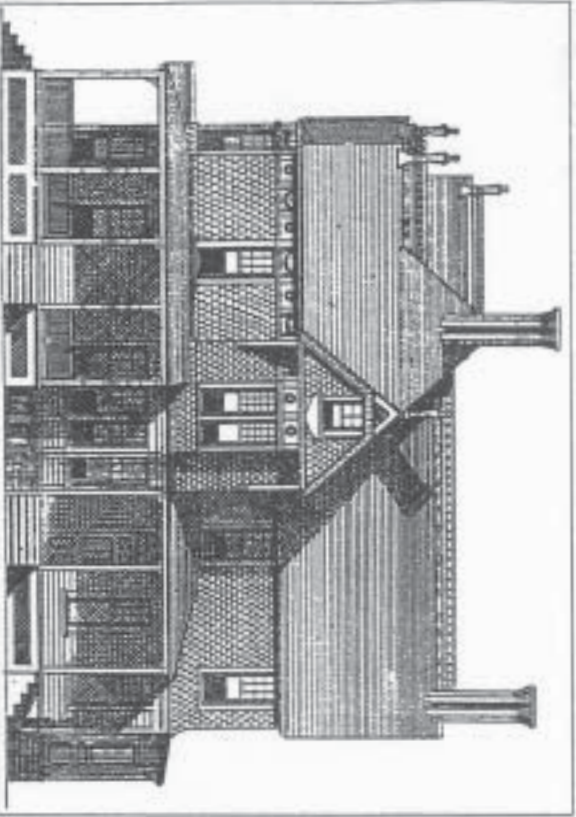
In the field of architecture, there are two predominant themes that can be said to be characteristic of our time. On one hand, especially in the realm of institutional architecture, is Frank Gehry and his deconstructivist, sculptural approach to design. His work is modern (contemporary), but certainly not Missionist.

Opposed to the deconstructivist school, and far more widespread — especially in residential architecture — is neo-traditional design. Because it truly reflects the predominant taste and trend of our times, neo-traditionalism is surely our *Modern Architecture*.

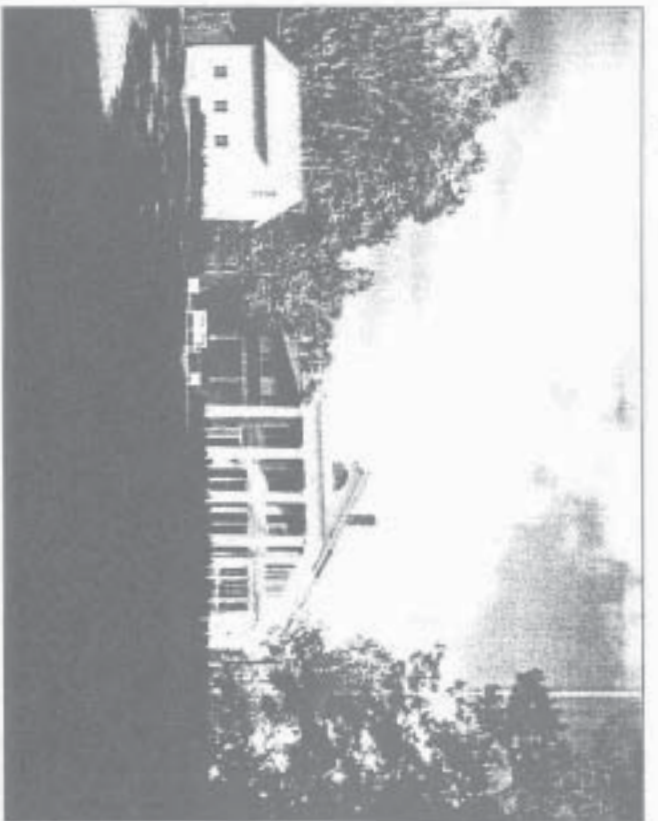
When George and Charles Palliser called their designs "modern" in 1887 (see illustration), they were being quite correct and accurate in their use of the word in the context of the late-Victorian era. And the Pallis-

er historic-preservation movement. Historic preservation took off in this country when it became clear to everyone who hadn't been brainwashed by Missionist polemics that great old buildings were being destroyed to make room for structures that were far less satisfying. When paying clients began to demand that good old buildings be restored — and that new buildings have some of the same visually pleasing characteristics that pre-1940 buildings had — it was then that the design profession began to realize that the International School had become a dead end.

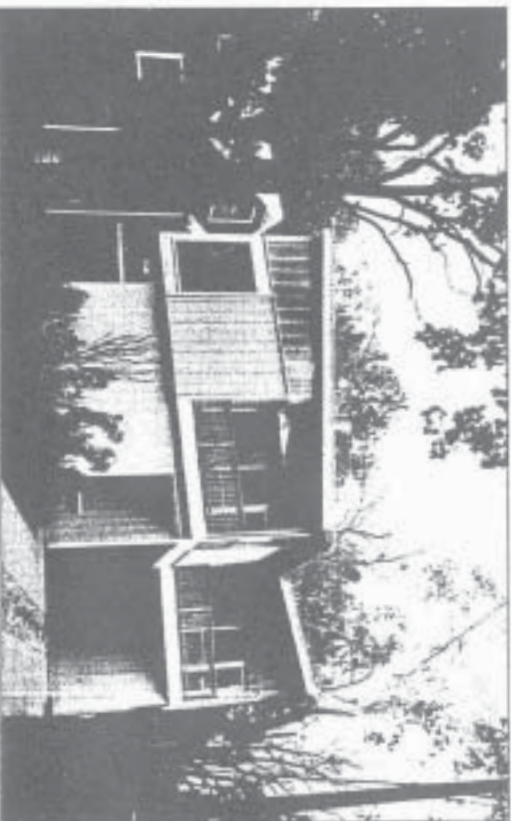
Teaching institutions like the schools of architecture at the University of Notre Dame and the



**"MODERN" IS TIME-DEPENDENT.** "... New & Original Designs in all the Modern Popular Styles" was the description for this house — and 230 others like it — in a residential pattern book published in 1887. The authors, brothers George and Charles Palliser, architects practicing in Bridgeport, Conn., were quite accurate in describing their architecture as "modern," their designs were characteristic of the late-Victorian era in which they lived.



**MODERN ARCHITECTURE.** Bath two years ago by architect Gilbert P. Schaffer III, this residence perfectly expresses the prevalent traditionalist taste of our time. Schaffer originally was looking for an old Great Revival house to restore. When he couldn't find one that suited his requirements, he decided to design and build one from scratch. The jurors in the Palladian Awards competition chose this house as the winner in the New Design & Construction category, citing Schaffer's sense of proportion and exquisite attention to detail. (See p. 12 for more on this project.) Photo courtesy of G.P. Schaffer Architect PLLC



**HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE.** The April 2002 issue of *DWELL* Magazine published this newly constructed residence in Louisville, KY, calling it a "modern house" (and seeming to be surprised that the neighbors were quite upset about it). In fact, this residence is quite correct, being a nostalgic reference to the neo-traditional International Style of the mid-20th century. Photo by Michael Wilson.

## Traditional Building and Period Homes

You will find in this newsletter (pages 4-5) and in future issues, we will be inserting a featured article from the publications Clem Labine's **Traditional Building** and **Period Homes**. For more information on these magazines please call 718-636-0750 or visit their web sites at [www.traditionalbuilding.com](http://www.traditionalbuilding.com) or [www.period-homes.com](http://www.period-homes.com).

TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE IN A NEW WORLD

# The Hijacking of "Modern"

Midway in the 20th century, the term "modern" became attached to the International School of architecture. Even though time and taste have relegated this style to the history books, the Miesians still cling tenaciously to their "modern" adjective. It's time we took it away!

By Clem Labine

I recently heard a highly successful neo-traditional architect use the term "modern architecture" when referring to a building rendered some years ago in the International Style. It was at that moment that the irony struck me: The traditionalist architect with whom I was conversing is the one actually creating *modern architecture* because he is designing in the predominant style of today. Neo-traditionalism is the style that characterizes our age — and thus is truly deserving of the adjective "modern." Yet my architect friend, along with just about all of his colleagues and architectural commentators, continues to allow the Miesians to retain possession of "modern," even though they lost the right to the term at least a decade ago.

The adjective "modern" is totally style-neutral; it merely refers to traits that characterize our present time. Applying the term "modern architecture" to highly geometrical, machine-oriented constructions in the manner of Mies or Gropius is an insult both to logic and the English language. The International Style has become an historical style fully as much as the Colonial

era were far more entitled to call their architecture "modern" than retardaire Miesians are in 2002 when they continue to call their style "modern architecture."

### More Than Mere Nostalgia

The growing success of neo-traditionalism is not based merely on romantic yearnings for a long-ago golden age. Proponents of the International School threw out 2,500 years of accumulated experience of the classical, humanist tradition and declared that they would build a better world by worshipping at the altar of technology. But the mistake of regarding architecture as merely "machines for living" is becoming clearer each day.

People want architecture and the built environment to convey more than technical content. People want symbols and emotional connections; we want buildings that tell us who we are as a people and as human beings. We want buildings that are visually interesting and entertaining. And, most important of all, when it gets down to where we live, we want a residence that says something very personal about us and our values.

It wasn't an intellectual revolution at the schools of architecture that revealed the Miesians were peddling defective theories; it was the phenomenal success of the

University of Miami have been among the leaders in recognizing that a rediscovery of traditional principles is required for preparing "Modern architects" for the realities of the 21st century. And organizations like the Institute of Classical Architecture have been teaching a whole new generation of designers how the principles of classicism can be used as a modern design tool. (See the Spring 2002 issue of *Period Homes* for a profile of the teaching programs of the Institute.)

### They Can Have "Modernist"

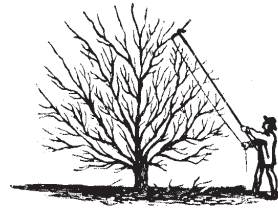
Because the term "modern architecture" has been applied for so long to the works of the International School, we are left with the dilemma of what to call this body of work, now that it is clear that the term "modern" should be transferred to the neo-traditionalists. This writer has settled on the compromise term "modernist."

But from now on, I shall reserve the term "modern architect" for those designers like our Palladio Award winners, Architects such as Gil Schafer (see photo below) are the ones who are really doing the trend-setting work that is "characteristic of the present." They are the modern architects of our time. ♦

## AAPS BOARD MEMBERS 2003

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*Free trees and shrubs in one to fifteen gallon containers are available, including deodara, cedars, lindens, maples, oaks, redwoods, viburnums and more. Call Chris Buckley at 523-0411.*

### AAPS MEMBERSHIP COUPON

*If you would like to join the Architectural Preservation Society or renew your membership, please send this portion back with your payment.*

*Membership Chairperson - Ruth Tillman  
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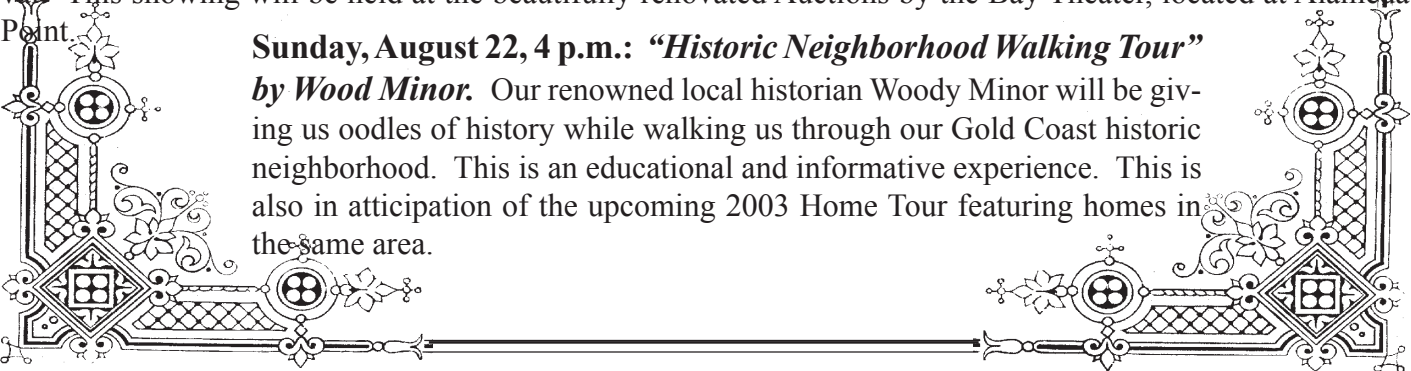
510-986-9232 ~ www.alameda-preservation.org



## 2003 AAPS GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING SCHEDULE

**Sunday, May 18, 2003, 7 p.m.:** *“Façade Restoration” by Skeeter Jones, of Clearheart, in San Francisco* Mr Jones will be discussing Façade Restoration - taking off composition, asbestos, or vinyl siding and shingles, replacing missing ornaments, and asbestos disposal issues. Mr. Jones’ firm, “Clearheart” specializes in Victorian facade restorations. This meeting will also include the 2003 Preservation Awards.

**Sunday, June 22, 2003, 7 p.m.:** AAPS will be showing a copy of the comedic documentary **BLUE VINYL**. A Toxic Comedy Look at Vinyl, The World’s Second Largest Selling Plastic. With humor, hope and a piece of vinyl siding firmly in hand, Peabody Award-winning filmmaker Judith Helfand and co-director Daniel B. Gold travel from Helfand’s hometown to America’s vinyl manufacturing capital and beyond in search of answers about the nature of polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Her parents’ decision to “re-side” their house with this seemingly benign cure-all for many suburban homes turns into a toxic odyssey with twists and turns that most ordinary homeowners would never dare to take. The result is a humorous but sobering and uniquely personal exploration of the relationship between consumers and industry in the feature-length documentary **BLUE VINYL**, which won the cinematography award in the documentary competition at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival. This showing will be held at the beautifully renovated Auctions by the Bay Theater, located at Alameda Point.



**Sunday, August 22, 4 p.m.:** *“Historic Neighborhood Walking Tour” by Wood Minor.* Our renowned local historian Woody Minor will be giving us oodles of history while walking us through our Gold Coast historic neighborhood. This is an educational and informative experience. This is also in anticipation of the upcoming 2003 Home Tour featuring homes in the same area.

## OTHER COMMUNITY EVENTS



### **Alameda Museum Lectures 2003:**

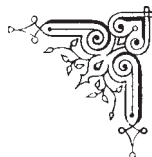
These dynamic slide lectures by prominent Bay Area authors and historians take place at the Alameda Museum, 2324 Alameda Avenue near Park Street, Alameda. Admission is free for members of the Museum; \$5 for others. For information about the lectures, call 510.748.0796.

**Thursday, March 27, 2003, 7 pm:** *“A. W. Smith: Architect”* by Betty Marvin, an Oakland Heritage Alliance member who has made an intense study of Smith and his work.

**Thursday, April 24, 2003, 7 pm:** *“Red Tile Style”* by architect Arrol Gellner, who will present juicy slides taken by photographer Douglas Keister, who illustrated this new book from Viking.

**Thursday, May 29, 2003, 7 pm:** *“Early Berkeley,”* by Richard Schwartz, author of Berkeley 1900, “the first book to approach a true history of day-to-day life in our neighborhoods at the turn of the century,” according to Stephanie Manning of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association.

**Thursday, June 26, 2003, 7 pm:** *“TBA”* by Bruce Bradbury, founder of Bradbury & Bradbury Art Wallpapers in Benicia, California and a renowned rake and raconteur. In the gallery, see an exhibition by the Alameda Art Association.



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## AAPS CALENDAR

**Sunday, March 16, 2003, 7 p.m.:** AAPS General Membership Meeting: "Bungalow Bathrooms" by Jane Powell.

**Wednesday, March 12, 2003, 7:00 pm:** 2003 Historic Home Tour Committee Meeting

**Wednesday, March 19, 2003, 7:30 pm:** Board Meeting

**Monday, April 7, 2003, 7:30 pm:** Preservation Action Committee Meeting.

**Sunday, May 18, 2003, 7 p.m.:** AAPS General Membership Meeting: "Façade Restoration" by Skeeter Jones and Annual 2003 Preservation Awards.

**Sunday, June 22, 2002:** Showing of the film BLUE VINYL.

**Sunday, August 22, 2003, 7 p.m.:** AAPS General Membership Meeting: "Historic Neighborhood Walking Tour" by Wood Minor.

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