

HOME

& Garden



A Scott Street house overflows with activity – and legend – in anticipation of the San Francisco Decorator Showcase

If these walls could talk

Courtesy Graves family

By Susan Fornoff
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The walls of 2820 Scott St., a storied 1905 Italianate-style Pacific Heights mansion, have plenty to say.

A colorful connection with a queen of Romania. Many years as the Pink Palace boarding-house. A weekly cocktail party with a 15-year run. And, most recently, a drastic and frantic renovation to prepare a canvas for 30 design firms working creative wonders to transform it into San Francisco's 2008 Decorator Showcase by Saturday.

Just before the designers arrived last week, the walls stood up to spill some scoop in an exclusive interview with The Chronicle. Here are the highlights — the ones we could print, anyway.

The Chronicle: This place was a mess just two months ago. How on earth can it have been transformed so quickly? Things just don't happen that way in the Bay Area.

The walls: Quickly? You've got to be kidding. We haven't had a moment of peace since Matt Paige bought us in 2005 and put his father, Ken, to work on this renovation. But, frankly, even with good bones, we needed major surgery. It was 1905 when Eugene and Olive Grace bought the lot and commissioned contractor James A. McCullough to design and build the house. Mortimer Fleishhacker owned us briefly in 1910 and then sold us to Walker Coleman Graves and his wife, Maude. It was 1912 when they started remodeling and adding on the top story — and those were our last significant upgrades until now.

By the time showcase director Delanie Borden moved into the tiny furnace room in the cold basement in February, we had a new foundation, wiring and

plumbing. Paige preserved our ornamental plaster and restored molding, but floors were another story — we needed 10,000 square feet of that alone before we walls could be painted and wallpapered.

Borden's been doing her best to keep the designers from freaking out — originally they were promised April 1 access to their spaces, then April 17, then, well . . . Let's just say that media room design team Gioi Tran and Vernon Applegate might still be banging on the door trying to get in this morning. Their floors weren't done until late last week, which kept them from painting and installing the contents of the biggest space in the house.

Chron: Can you let us in on any of Paige and Borden's secrets?

Walls: Ken Paige, who's 63, has 40 years in working with Bay Area contractors and subs, so he had access to the right resources and — with Paige Glass a fixture on the local scene — enough cash to

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From top of page: It was Maude Graves, inset photo, who set in motion the 1912 renovation at her Pink Palace that created the grand Moorish entry, shown at top as it looked in about 1915, with carved and hand-painted wood ceiling and marble staircase. Photographs above and below show the entry and house as they looked during the renovation supervised by Ken Paige, in entry in photo below.

The Pink Palace, now in mellow yellow

Construction, 1905: Architect and builder James A. McCullough. Owners Eugene and Olive Grace.

Renovation, 2006-2008: Structural engineer Pat Buskovich. Architect Winder Liebes. Contractor Chick Wong. Owner Matt Paige.

Interior decor, coming Saturday: The 2008 San Francisco Decorator Showcase opens with 16,000 square feet of decorated spaces at 2820 Scott St. and operates through May 26, for the benefit of San Francisco University High School. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Tues., Wed., Fri., Sat.; 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Thurs., 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sun. and Memorial Day. Closed other Mondays. Tickets are \$30, \$25 for seniors. See www.decoratorshowcase.org, (415) 447-3115.

- S.F.



Working down to the wire to get designers' canvas ready

► SHOWCASE

From Page G1

speed things along. Borden says he's like the Energizer bunny. Even so, his friends told him, "Yeah, you'll have that house ready in April — next April." In the end, there were workers on the scene seven days a week, sometimes as many as 30 at a time.

Borden says one shortcut that helped was installing parquet floors in most rooms rather than putting down 5,000 strips of white oak as was done in the ballroom — painstakingly, too, with a pattern on the floor reflective of the molding pattern on the ceiling. But Borden's been through this showcase business seven times before and she's got it down. She prints out a checklist every morning (so that she, unlike Paige, isn't waking up at 2 a.m., making little nightmare notes); it was six pages just a couple of weeks ago, now it's down to a short one. Most of the year she enjoys her little garden in Larkspur, but not in the spring. Lately she's been coming in here at 7 or 8 in the morning and locking up at 9 p.m. But things ran even later than she expected — don't even think of trying out any of the kitchen appliances, because some are sure to be mere props.

Chron: So you don't think this kind of rush renovation is something the average Bay Area homeowner should attempt?

Walls: Not without Paige's contacts and money, and Borden's experience and composure.

Chron: Earlier, you mentioned great bones. What would you say are the house's best vintage features?

Walls: The Moorish grand entry's carved and hand-painted wood ceiling makes a stunning first impression, and the tiled Tiffany fountain in the corner still works, though it has a leak and might not be on during the showcase. The marble staircase is impressive too, but the domed Tiffany skylight above it steals the show. The colorful panorama enthralled glass aficionado Ken Paige, who has been puzzling over the mystery of why some of the skylight's trees look as if they have fallen or been cut.



Courtesy Graves family

From above: The roof deck before its showcase transformation; a view of the Tiffany skylight above the marble staircase; the eccentric former lady of the house, Maude James Graves Loller Caldwell.



ERIC LUSE / The Chronicle



Courtesy Graves family

Chron: Supposedly, the house's more ornate features were added during 1914 renovations in preparation for a visit from Crown Princess Marie of Romania for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Is that right?

Walls: Supposedly, Alma Spreckels arranged for Marie to be the Graveses' houseguest, so a lot of our jewelry was added at that time — the glass dome, but also the lobby fountain, inlaid marble floor and hand-painted ceiling, the big marble staircase and bronze work containing the Romanian ruling family's crest. But Marie never came, supposedly because of World War I.

Chron: You walls sound a little bit skeptical about all this.

Walls: Well, Maude James Graves Loller Caldwell was a bit of a character. Shirley Graves, whose husband, Jefferson, is a grandson of Maude's, says she wore costumes all the time and was herself called the queen of Romania by the local press. Shirley thinks the whole story about Marie's visit is just another San Francisco tall tale.

Maude's a tall tale all by herself — she had a car custom-made in magenta, to match a favorite dress. The once-shingled house (which

the Graveses had stuccoed in a strawberry hue) was known as the Pink Palace, the car the American Beauty.

Chron: What happened to Maude?

Walls: Her first husband died in 1920. She married William Loller in 1923 and divorced him in 1929, by which time she had sold us. (She married Arthur Caldwell in 1932 and sued for divorce the next year, then died in 1936.)

Chron: And what did you do after that?

Walls: Er, well, we, er . . . It's been said that we served as consulate for Gen. Francisco Franco, who would not have been any more welcome in San Francisco during the Spanish Civil War than an Olympic torch would be in 2008. There's no record of that, however, so we'll stick to the official story — we housed the Du Gand family from Colombia from 1928 to 1938. Then Harold Schubert bought us and remodeled us into a guest-house that become known as the Marine View.

He sold us in 1951 to Olga and Walter Lindemood, who also used the Pink Palace nickname and carved out 23 guest rooms. Olga was renowned for the house's Friday night cocktail parties, for which alumni would return. (Two ex-residents, by the way, are volunteer docents for the showcase.) The parties stopped after 15 years, when the neighbors finally complained.

Olga died in 1967, but her daughter and son-in-law, Edith and Claude Reboul, were running the Pink Palace by then.

In 2003, the Marine View/Pink Palace caught the attention of city inspectors, who demanded sprinklers in every room. The owners decided instead to get out of the boardinghouse business and invoke the Ellis Act to oust the old-timers — just another bit of only-in-San-Francisco lore.

And that explains why we were in need of so much TLC when the Paiges bought us. We had termites and dry rot, flunked just about every city code. Now we've got new electrical, plumbing, foundation — and seismic retrofitting. Oh, yeah — and a sprinkler system.

Chron: And what do you like best about the new renovation?

Walls: Personally we like that we were preserved, restored and enhanced with baseboards and moldings. And wait until you see the way the designers have dressed us up in star treatments! But we hear there's also a fantastic roof deck, with ipe wood and green slate flooring and a glass enclosure.

Chron: So, supposedly, eventually this all will benefit not just one family, but one man. Ken says his 38-year-old bachelor son, Matt, will be the resident. Isn't this a bit much for one guy?

Walls: Well, Ken and his wife have a house in Lafayette and a penthouse at the Four Seasons, so they don't plan to move in. Luckily, Matt enjoys a good party. He brought in 350 people for a Christmas party right after the family bought the house in December 2005, and really did it up. We hear they paid much less than the \$8.5 million asking price, so there was reason to celebrate.

Chron: One of the comments on SFGate.com said, "Having lived at 2820 Scott for two years during the early '70s, let me assure Matt Paige that his new home has ALWAYS been one hell of a party place. Thank God those walls can't talk." What on earth was going on during those years?

Walls: Millie Robbins reported in a 1968 edition of The Chronicle: "More people seem to know more things about that house than almost any we've discussed before, even if some of the more colorful data leads to the legendary." The house the Lindemoos ran was often referred to as a "residence club" — it was high end, with lots of artists, creative types. Former Gov. Jerry Brown lived here. Many boarders were children of wealthy San Francisco families, so there was plenty of money to fund mischief within these walls.

Chron: I guess this is where we wrap it up.

Walls: Oh, there's more. But you'll have to turn off that tape recorder.

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Spring house tours and plant sales

Bamboo Festival A sale and auction of rare and unusual bamboo species. Members' sale 9:30-10 a.m., public sale 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat. San Francisco County Fair Building, Lincoln Way and Ninth Ave., Golden Gate Park, S.F. (510) 222-9438. www.americanbamboo.org.

Monterey Peninsula House Tour A self-guided tour of five houses with ocean views, wooded settings and beachfront locations. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat. \$40. Various locations in Pebble Beach, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Carmel Highlands and Carmel Valley. (650) 323-6791. www.asidcapen.org.

Neighborhood Gardens of Old Palo Alto Spring Tours Includes a tour of

five private gardens, a plant sale and boutique, a luncheon, garden experts and a tour of Gamble Garden. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Fri.-Sat. \$30-\$40; additional \$15 for lunch. Elizabeth F. Gamble Garden Center, 1431 Waverly St., Palo Alto. (650) 329-1356, Ext. 201. www.gamblegarden.org.

Outdoor Art Club House and Garden Tour Included are six homes and gardens in this annual tour. Tours leave the club from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thurs. \$30-\$35; \$15 for luncheon. Outdoor Art Club, One West Blithedale Ave., Mill Valley. (415) 455-4695. www.outdoorartclub.org.

Paeonia Open Garden More than 120 varieties of peonies are in bloom. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sat., noon-4 p.m. Sun. Free. Paeonia Gardens and Nursery, 190 Montgomery Rd., Sebastopol. (707) 823-6600. www.paeoniagardens.com.

Perfume Rose Harvest Tours Harvest roses and distill them into rose oil and rosewater. Fee includes a two-hour tour and entrance to the Display Garden and Rose Nursery. Reservations required. Thurs.-Sun. \$9.95-\$12.95. Russian River Rose Co., 1685 Magnolia Dr., Healdsburg. (707) 575-6744. www.russian-river-rose.com/tourflyr.htm.

San Leandro Dahlia Society Annual Dahlia Tuber Sale 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat. Root Park, E. 14th and Hays streets, San Leandro. (510) 276-0530.

Santa Rosa Garden Club Spring Plant Sale Annuals, perennials, native plants, herbs, houseplants, more. Guest speaker Dan Lozano talks about propagating and hybridizing at 10:30 a.m. Open 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Sat. Luther Burbank Art and Garden Center, 2050 Yulupa Ave., Santa Rosa. (707) 539-2512.

Secret Gardens of the East Bay A self-guided tour of 11 private gardens. Visitors can meet and talk with many of the designers who created this year's featured gardens. Includes a boxed lunch and an outdoor marketplace offering garden-related wares. Proceeds benefit the scholarship and academic programs of Park Day School. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Sun. \$50. Various locations in Oakland, Berkeley and Piedmont. (510) 653-0317. www.secretgardentour.org.

S.F. Decorator Showcase A four-story Italianate-style mansion in Pacific Heights is open to the public for the first time. Closed on Mondays except on Memorial Day. Benefits San Francisco University High School. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Tues., Wed., Fri., Sat; 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Thurs., 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sun. \$25-\$30. 2820 Scott St., S.F. (415) 447-3115. www.decoratorshowcase.org.

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