

HOME+GARDEN

# DESIGN

FALL 2022

## *Growing up*

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perpendicular  
perspective to life**

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**Meet the professional  
organizer helping Peninsula  
residents declutter their homes**

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## STAFF

**Publisher** Adam Dawes  
**Home + Garden Design Editor** Linda Taaffe  
**Art Director** Kristin Brown  
**Writers** Carol Blitzer, John Bricker, Bo Crane, Elizabeth Lorenz and Heather Zimmerman  
**Photographer** Magali Gauthier  
**Vice President & Chief Revenue Officer** Tom Zahiralis  
**Advertising Sales** Elaine Clark, Connie Jo Cotton and Neal Fine

## CONTACT US

**Embarcadero Media: The Almanac, Mountain View Voice, Palo Alto Weekly**  
 450 Cambridge Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94306  
 650-223-6500; editor@pawebly.com  
**AlmanacNews.com, MountainViewOnline.com, PaloAltoOnline.com**  
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## ON THE COVER

Landscapes go vertical with living walls. Courtesy Getty Images.



# Old Becomes New

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# Classic-modern mashup

STORY BY  
CAROL BLITZER

PHOTOS BY  
MAGALI GAUTHIER

Blossom Valley  
1960s rancher  
transformed  
into couple's  
dream home

Back in 2009, Karen and Geoff McKinley thought they could raise their toddlers in the 1965 home they found in Mountain View's Blossom Valley neighborhood. The location was perfect (near excellent schools), the construction was solid and the bones good.

They mostly overlooked the dated, cramped kitchen, low ceilings and broken-up spaces and concentrated on doing cosmetic changes, removing the shag carpeting to expose oak floors, getting rid of wallpaper and wood paneling, and painting.

After living in the house for 10

years, they were ready to make a change.

"At first, we wanted to do it all, but we didn't have a plan," Geoff said.

"Life sort of got in the way," Karen added.

But with two growing teens, the couple decided to find someone to make a plan: enlarging the main bedroom suite, creating more of an open kitchen/family room and using landscaping to take advantage of the private, pie-shaped lot for more indoor/outdoor living.

"We didn't want ultra-modern or ultra-traditional," Geoff said.

"We now know it's called



transitional: classic elements with modern flair," Karen added.

Architect Tom Carrubba said he "was on the same wavelength," and was able to translate the couple's ideas into a concrete plan.

For the kitchen/family room, that plan included pushing out about 3 feet into the expansive yard and removing the wall separating the two rooms. That made way for a huge Quartzite island

with a prep sink, as well as an all-new GE Monogram double oven and six-burner cooktop, a panel-fronted Subzero refrigerator and a tall, pullout storage cabinet.

The family room dips out another few feet to accommodate a 6.5-foot-long window seat.

"Geoff doesn't like mess showing," Karen said while showing the hidden area with cubbies for each family member, plus charging

stations and a huge food pantry. One unique Geoff-inspired item: kitty litter box behind a cabinet door, with an opening for the two cats and an exhaust fan to get rid of the odor.

The main change to the living room is a wall of glass sliding doors leading outside and a popped-up ceiling, again a boon to the tall folks in the family. The new fireplace insert replaces the wood-burning version.

While the original house was cloaked in browns, yellows and reds, “We shifted gears and adopted cooler, more modern-feeling” tones of mostly grays, Karen said.

While every bedroom got new windows and paint, the main bedroom gained his-and-hers closets and an expanded bathroom with two sinks.

The new outdoor plan radically changed how the family can use the space, with a key element — a covered patio that required a steel support beam in lieu of a post in the middle.

“We’ve had Thanksgiving, Christmas dinners outside during the quarantine,” Karen said.

Highlights include a fireplace that can be viewed from two sides, a built-in

outdoor grill, huge Shademaker umbrellas to shade the seating areas beyond the covered patio, a curved retaining wall, multiple veggie beds, 35 trees (mostly fruit), a trampoline and a half-court basketball area.

The remodel exposed some hard-to-solve problems, Geoff said, pointing to current code requirements to stucco over plywood. “We had to take the outside down to the studs and redo all the stucco,” he said. Plus they found asbestos in joint compounds underneath — that removal added another \$20,000 to the job.

They ended up ripping out electrical, plumbing and roofing and adding air conditioning. They also replaced the wood floors and added crown molding and skylights.

“The house feels brand new,” Geoff said.

“Although we didn’t add that much square footage, we’re getting so much more from the house and yard,” Karen said. “It’s the home we were waiting for, for a long time.” ■

*Email contributing writer Carol Blitzer at [carolgbitzer@gmail.com](mailto:carolgbitzer@gmail.com).*



Above: The primary bathroom features matte-finish glass tiles meant to evoke the colors of the Caribbean Ocean. Top right: The kitchen includes a large island with a prep sink and a quartzite countertop reinforced so it can extend to accommodate taller people. Top left (facing page): The remodel included raising the ceiling in the living room. Bottom left: The open covered patio was made possible by running a steel beam over the area, which negated the need for a center post.

**Goal of project:** Expand master bathroom, add closet space, enlarge kitchen/family room, add covered porch

**Unanticipated issues:** Asbestos and mold abatement, need to replace outside stucco throughout

**Year house built:** 1965

**Size of home, lot:** 4-bedroom, 3-bath, was 2,625-sq-ft home, now 3,075 sq ft on .35 acres

**Time to complete:** 6 months planning, 18 months construction

**Architect:** Tom Carrubba, square three architecture, Palo Alto, 650-326-3860 x112, [squarethree.com](http://squarethree.com)

**Cabinets:** Precision Cabinets, Pleasanton, 925-634-5552, [precisioncabinets.com](http://precisioncabinets.com)

**Contractor:** Nordin Builders, San Jose, 650-397,0825, [nordinbuilders.com](http://nordinbuilders.com)

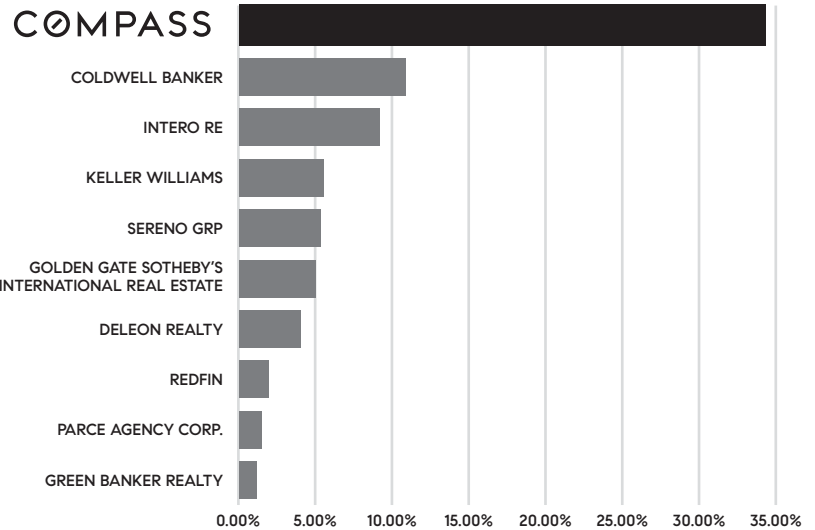
**Countertops, tile:** All Natural Stone, San Jose, 408-544-9600, [allnaturalstone.com](http://allnaturalstone.com)

**Landscape design:** Bonnie Brock Landscape Design, Palo Alto, 650-465-9073, [bbrockdesign.com](http://bbrockdesign.com)

**Plumbing:** Decorative Plumbing Supply, San Carlos, 650-592-3337, [decorativeplumbingsupply.com](http://decorativeplumbingsupply.com)

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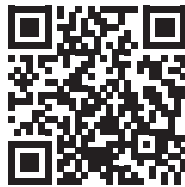
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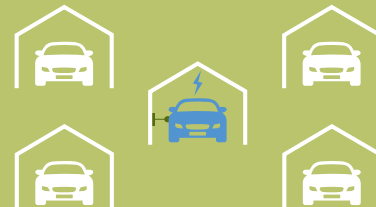


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# FULL HOUSE

Meet the professional organizer who helps Peninsula residents declutter their homes

STORY BY JOHN BRICKER

PHOTOS BY MAGALI GAUTHIER

When homeowners have no idea how to sort through their belongings and get rid of items cluttering up their homes, they call Monica Rhodes.

Rhodes, a professional home organizer who has been helping Peninsula residents declutter their homes for more than two decades, helps residents decide what needs to go, what needs to stay and how they want their home spaces to work.

“There is a sense of accountability that I bring to a space,” explained Rhodes, who operates Ambry Organizing in Mountain View.

Clearing a home of its clutter can do more than provide a clean house. Research suggests that decluttering can have as much of an effect on a person’s well-being as it does on their physical space, according to the nonprofit Mayo Clinic.

“(It’s) an investment in one’s self care and mental health,” said Rhodes, who typically works with about three clients a day to organize their homes. “Visually, (clutter) can bring up emotions of shame, anxiousness and anxiety ... so clients will choose not to host or entertain in their home,” she said.

Clearing out a space can provide mental peace, she added.

“We can choose to relax instead of looking at what’s undone in front of us and what makes us anxious,” she said.

To help clients decide what items they want to keep, Rhodes helps create a vision for their living space and removes or rearranges items that don’t fit that vision.

“As I do an onsite consultation, we walk through their space, and clients share their feelings and what’s not working for them ... and I will share my vision for how to simplify and organize the space differently and efficiently,” she said.

This might include adding extra storage to get rid of that crammed “junk drawer” or rearranging a desk in the study to provide twice as much open space in the room, or installing shelving in

Above: Monica Rhodes, owner of Ambry Organizing, arranges items in a client’s bathroom cabinet in Los Gatos. Right: Toiletries are organized into bins and baskets.

the laundry area to create designated space for things like a mop, broom and cleaning supplies.

“I simplify spaces and set up (organization) systems for all members of the household to follow,” she said.

Each job is a bit different. “It’s totally per client,” she said.

Rhodes said some of her more involved projects have included organizing rooms overrun with items piled on tables, furniture and the floor, and not purposeful to the space.

Wherever someone naturally drops things like mail or small items without thinking, that space can easily become a hot spot for clutter, or what Rhodes prefers to call “busy spaces,” she said.

“I often say, “Don’t put it down; put it away,” she said.

Since the pandemic, Rhodes said she’s seen demand for her services nearly double. She’s booked through the end of this year.

“Families were staying all at home together for the first time and were discovering that they all needed their own space so they weren’t tripping over each other,” she said.

Client Flavia Reseende said she and her husband turned to Rhodes for professional help last January after moving from a rental into a six-room house in San Francisco.

“We were living with boxes and an unclear sense of how the house should work,” Reseende said.



Over a two-day period, Rhodes asked about the couple’s routine and then organized each space to best suit their needs, including making sure that kitchen appliances are easily accessible and items they need to start their day are within an arm’s reach when they wake up, Reseende said.

“Seeing everything where it should be was like ‘welcome to your new life,’” she said “That felt really nice.”



Above: Glasses are organized in plastic bins.  
Left: Cabinet shelves are labeled with the sheet size.



Rhodes said she had never planned to become a professional home organizer. It's a career that evolved naturally after friends kept complimenting her Mountain View home, calling it "beautiful, simple and easy to manage."

"All these questions started coming up," she said. "And then it was, 'Can you come over to my house? Can you share with me how to get there?'"

After having those conversations with friends 22 years ago, Rhodes said, she knew making her passion a career was possible and began to pursue it.

Rhodes said her clientele ranges widely in age and living situation. She often helps young families organize their home space to better accommodate their kids, as well as older people looking to downsize.

Because she often works with couples, or grown

children and their parents, Rhodes said it's important to help family members clearly communicate their vision for the space, find what they disagree on, and then help them come to a compromise.

Some people have specific ideas for projects while others just recognize the messiest areas in their home or have no idea where to start, she said.

Usually, decluttering a home takes more than one visit. Rhodes said she might follow up months later to make sure everything she's set up is working successfully. If young children, for example, have outgrown their space and are taking over the adult areas of the house, she will make adjustments, she said.

For clients who find it difficult to part with items and live in homes with "extremely busy spaces," Rhodes said the process takes small steps at a time and might require many visits.

"Things' are very emotional," she said. "There is a lot of psychology involved."

Rhodes said she gently walks these clients through conversations, sometimes about every single item, to help them determine what they can let go of. Sometimes, the right solution might be for a person to take digital photos of objects so they can free up the house of items but still be able to see them, she said.

"To walk someone through a space and set it up successfully for both husband and wife or the whole family ... it's incredibly rewarding."

For more information about *Ambry Organizing*, go to [ambryorganizing.com](http://ambryorganizing.com). ■

*Associate Editor Linda Taaffe contributed to this article.*

## TIPS TO KEEP **CLUTTER** OUT OF YOUR HOME

It's not just you. Clutter is much more common in American households than one might suspect. In a 2020 survey by home storage manufacturer ClosetMaid, 8 in 10 Americans admitted to having at least one "cleaning black hole" — an area that seems impossible to keep clean or organized on a consistent basis — in their homes, according to the company's blog. In the survey of 2,000 people, respondents said their commonly messy areas include closets, garages and basements.

For those looking to unclutter their homes, here are some tips from professional organizer Monica Rhodes to help get started.

**HAVE A VISION.** Before any work begins, think deeply about what you want from your ideal living space and visualize how you want to reorganize the "busy" areas.

Changing your shopping habits and adopting a "one in, one out" rule, Rhodes said, can help make this process easier. "We have to manage our stuff," Rhodes said. "We don't want our stuff managing us and we want to love everything that we're saying 'yes' to."

**EDIT AND SIMPLIFY.** As you sort through your belongings and rethink how to store and display them, begin to edit and adjust your goals. When you realize your initial vision was unrealistic, Rhodes said, don't be afraid to scale back and simplify. "If it doesn't fit (your space's) scope, then it's edited out or eliminated so your space can be intentional, simplified and beautiful," she said.

**LET GO.** Whether it's decor that was trendy long ago or memorabilia you've held onto for decades, it is important to ask yourself whether an item is still worth the space it takes up. Some people find this to be an emotional process, while others are more nonchalant about it. "There's a lot of emotion with letting go of some items," Rhodes said. "Other people are like, 'It's gone!'"

**FOLLOW THROUGH.** The final step is to get focused and do the work. Even though your original vision may have changed, following through and reaching realistic goals is essential.

Rhodes said most homes have permanently cluttered areas. "Things attract things," she said. "It takes a lot of deliberation to keep a system running efficiently." ■



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# Growing up

Vertical plantscapes bring perpendicular perspective to life

BY ELIZABETH LORENZ

Planted Design installed this living wall behind the pool to add a focal point to the homeowner's backyard. The company works with clients along the Peninsula and throughout the greater Bay Area. Photo by Tony Adams, courtesy Planted Design.

For some, having a large blank wall in a home might be soothing, but others feel the need to fill such spaces with a showstopper like original art, or maybe a gallery wall or a beautiful piece of furniture. But what about a wall of ... plants?

Vertical gardens, essentially landscapes installed on walls with watering systems built in, were once rarely found outside of larger corporate and public building spaces like Google, Symantec or Stanford's Graduate School of Business. Over the past few years, that's changed as more and more residents have started installing "living walls" in their homes.

Habitat Horticulture founder David Brenner, who is known for creating massive living walls at some of Silicon Valley's biggest tech companies, said his work is now focused on installing outdoor and indoor living walls at homes throughout the Bay Area, as well as other settings like the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Residential projects have included everything from installing gardens as high as 16 feet tall to creating small, dramatic walls at the end of a pool area. One Los Altos client tired of staring at concrete in his basement lightwell hired Brenner to create a lush green-on-green mini jungle. Another resident in Mountain View asked him to install a vertical garden that hangs from vaulted ceilings over an open-plan living area.

Brenner got his inspiration to create living walls while studying horticulture at Cal Poly. He spent his junior year abroad as an apprentice in the London Botanical Gardens, studying tropical plants that naturally grow on rock faces. That's when he began to think about plants that grow in unusual ways.

His imagination was sparked the first time he saw a vertical garden in Europe. When he got back, his patient parents let him practice building gardens on the walls of his



Amanda Goldberg, founder of Planted Design, arranges plants in a living wall at a private residence. Photo by Tony Adams, courtesy Planted Design.

childhood home in San Jose.

A few years later, Brenner started his company and began experimenting, helping to restore a moss wall in San Francisco's Academy of Science's basement and later installing a fresh living wall in the museum's piazza.

Brenner said his minor degree in psychology has helped him connect with clients and analyze the innate connection between humans and plants.

"I try to design in a way that's

a little more something you find in nature," Brenner said. There's usually some "rhythm" or "movement," with repetition and textures to lead the observer's eye over the piece. While most indoor walls aren't more than a few inches deep, Brenner uses texture and a "hierarchy of plant depth" to create dimension. With every project, he tries to include one plant he hasn't used before, whether it's Japanese maple, ferns, geraniums or colorful heuchera.

Plant walls, he said, “open up so much more joy in life,” creating a multisensory experience.

Like Brenner, Amanda Goldberg, founder of Planted Design in Emeryville, has always been passionate about plants, but she came at her life’s work from a different direction. She studied industrial design in college, and found herself “always finding ways to make plants more functional. I also was getting excited about integrating them with shelving.”

During her undergraduate years at Syracuse University, Goldberg built a glass-topped desk installed with plants underneath as a class project. Later when studying for her master’s degree in entrepreneurship, she focused on creating functional designs with plants. “I’ve really always liked 3D objects,” she said.

Integrating all of her interests, Goldberg founded Planted Design less than a decade ago. The company’s warehouse is a plant-filled makerspace where reclaimed or hardwood frames are fabricated for vertical garden projects.

Plants for these gardens are chosen for their shallow roots, compact growth, or leaf color. The roots tend to grow inward and then downward.

Irrigation, obviously essential for plant survival, is surprisingly simple, involving either hand-filling built-in trays or troughs with fresh water, or drip systems with emitters set on timers. Designers assess whether the wall has access to electricity or plumbing before deciding which type of irrigation system to use or whether to include lighting.

Goldberg uses pressure-treated wood for the non-visible parts of her frames, with reclaimed wood or hardwood for the visible parts. Brenner often uses waterproof plastic layers for interior walls before mounting a special felt fabric with holes to put the plants into.

Exterior projects must take into account temperature, sunlight, and other environmental factors. Indoor ones need carefully chosen plants that can thrive without

nightly drops in temperature, drastic changes in lighting or lower humidity.

Planted Design’s largest living wall is a 1,400-square-foot outdoor plant sculpture that follows a fence line. It starts with strawberries and fragrant flowers, goes into a “whole succulent swirl,” Goldberg said, then colorful flowers then a grassy meadow, ending by the home’s pool and outdoor kitchen.

“What I’m most inspired by is not doing the same thing twice,” she said. Price is also a substantial barrier to entry, so she doesn’t foresee living walls being something people could buy in a kit at a big-box store.

Goldberg also creates dramatically colorful moss walls, which are portable works of art using moss.

Inside homes, common plant choices are hearty vibrant pothos, which grow as vines in tropical areas, or bromeliads, which produce large red and orange and pink flowers. Ferns and palms are other go-to plants.

Many vertical gardens, Goldberg said, can be flexible, using a plug-and-play approach where potted plants can be removed and replaced. Each plant’s roots are wrapped in a special felt material before being put into a pocket. Water is circulated using a lower trough from which water is pumped up to reach all of the plants.

Most vertical gardens weigh only about 7 pounds per square foot, so generally interior walls do not need to be retrofitted before the frame is mounted. A basic Planted Design living wall starts at approximately \$175 per square foot, with design, installation and delivery added after that.

For outdoor spaces, Goldberg loves bringing in flowering plants that will attract bees and butterflies, or even things like edible strawberries. The schemes are laid out on a computer, with swirls of color planned to look as natural and organic as possible.

“We see plants as our paint and walls as our canvas,” she said. “I am huge on color. Rainbow is my favorite color.” ■



The living wall installed at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University stretches 61 feet long. Courtesy Habitat Horticulture.

## Looking to add a living wall to your home? Visit these leafy works of art for inspiration.

Whether you’re looking to create a small interior focal point with a few ferns arranged vertically down your wall or are looking to liven up an exterior wall with textures and colors that change with the season, the greater Peninsula is home to a variety of interior and exterior living walls of various textures and sizes on display to the public.

Here’s a list of four local walls to visit for inspiration:

### **Stanford University, Graduate School of Business** *655 Knight Way, Stanford*

Stretching more than 61 feet long and 10 feet tall, this wall was designed to provide a multi-sensory experience to those walking through the campus. It is made of mostly ferns in a variety of shades of green, with pink highlights from *Aechmea fasciata* bromeliads.

### **Essentique**

*2417 Park Blvd., Palo Alto*

Located just inside the front door of Essentique health and beauty store is a 9-by-9-foot leafy work of art installed by Habitat Horticulture, the same company that created the living wall at the San Francisco Museum of Modern

Art, which was reportedly the largest living wall in the country at the time of its installation in 2016. The wall at Essentique features plants in various shades of green and red planted in vertical rows.

### **Park Boulevard**

*2555 Park Blvd., Palo Alto*

Featuring a mix of plants with green, yellow and red hues, this living wall extends 82 feet wide and more than 7 feet tall along the Park Boulevard exterior wall of the 30,000-square-foot building formerly occupied by dating app maker Tinder.

### **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**

*151 3rd St., San Francisco*

This living wall is worth the venture beyond the Midpeninsula. At 150 feet wide and nearly 30 feet tall, this wall is so large, it’s unable to be seen in its entirety from any single vantage point. Designed by David Brenner to reflect the forest floor of California’s woodlands, the wall is filled with 37 plant species in various lush textures and changes different shades of green and other colors with the seasons. ■

—Linda Taaffe



## European taste in Southgate

When a close friend wants to remodel an entire house, this is a great responsibility as a friend, as well as a general contractor. Michael Mok, CEO and co-founder of Bridges MR Development, is frequently contacted by friends for remodeling work. Bridges MR Development worked closely on a major home remodel with Mok's friend who will be referred to by the pseudonym James.

When James and his family purchased their 1950s home in Palo Alto's Southgate neighborhood, it was almost everything they had wanted. However, the space layout did not meet their lifestyle needs. The home had a good structure, but the layout prevented the family from maximizing their living and storage space. The kitchen lacked the counter space for baking and

the storage space for appliances. The kitchen was separated from the entertaining area, and the HVAC unit adjacent to the kitchen was an eyesore.

James and his wife wanted to reflect their European design taste compared to the home's pastel tiles of the 1970s. They also wanted to create a master suite to separate their bathroom from the hall bath. The garage was a good size, but the location of the washer, dryer and storage space did not leave enough room to park cars.

Over the next 8 months, Bridges MR Development worked with James and the design team to evaluate the design, technical challenges, and finances. The process empowered James and his wife to make good decisions.

Bridges MR Development recommended that James plan for unforeseen events during construction. During this remodel, they found additional pest and termite damage which is common for Bay Area homes.

After 6 months, the family moved into their completely remodeled home. The stunning open kitchen features a Bosch oven, an induction cooktop, a Zephyr hood, Harmoni custom cabinets and Caesarstone quartz countertops. The open kitchen and family room layout gives the family plenty of space to bake bread, play their guitars and enjoy boardgames together. The remodeled bathrooms feature clean subway tiles and cement-like porcelain tiles from Italy and Spain. To create additional storage in the garage, Bridges MR Development





PHOTOS BY WALK IN TOUR

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## WHAT CLIENTS SAY:

*“Bridges MR was amazing to work with to remodel our master bathroom, master closet, and hall bathroom. They were on top of everything, from the big picture to the tiniest details. Bridges MR gave us such peace of mind and a sense that everything would be executed correctly and safely throughout the project.”*

---

created a pull-down attic access to store bikes and ski equipment.

Mok expressed that it was a real pleasure to work with friends. It was not always smooth, but through communication and planning they created a home that the family loves. Remodeling is more rigorous than most new construction projects, so up-front planning between the general contractor and the design team is the key for a successful remodel.

## PROJECT RESOURCES:

### **CABINETS:**

Harmoni Cabinets

### **PLUMBING:**

Grohe, Kohler

### **COUNTERTOPS:**

Caesarstone

### **TILE:**

Tileshop San Jose

### **APPLIANCES:**

Bosch, Zephyr  
University Appliance

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# Birge Clarke brought 'Early California' style to Palo Alto

*His iconic red-tiled roofs, stucco walls, arches and wrought-iron details still define local streetscapes*

BY BO CRANE

*From the ornate Victorians to the early shingle-style Craftsman to the California Colonial look championed by homegrown architect Birge Clark in the 1920s to the mid-century modern Eichlers that began popping up in the 1950s, Palo Alto boasts a hodgepodge of architectural styles that span more than 100 years as well as several notable local architects who helped define the area's cityscape.*

*This column takes a look at architect Birge Clark and the history and significance of his notable Early California-style buildings that can be found in commercial and residential neighborhoods throughout the city.*

Just about everyone who has driven through Palo Alto likely has seen the Spanish-influenced architecture of Birge Clark.

His iconic red-tiled roofs, stucco walls, arches and wrought iron details defined the burgeoning city's Early California style and had so much influence on the look of its commercial and residential streetscapes that Palo Alto has been referred to "as the city Birge built."

During a 50-year span, Clark built 98 Palo Alto houses and nearly 400 buildings in and around the city, including the downtown post office on Hamilton Avenue, most of the buildings on Ramona Street's historic block south of University Avenue, the Lucie Stern Community Center; the old Palo Alto fire and police station (now Avenidas



Birge Clarke.  
Courtesy Palo Alto Historical Association



Courtesy Bo Crane



Courtesy Bo Crane



Courtesy Palo Alto Historical Association



Courtesy Palo Alto Historical Association

Top: Spanish tiles adorn the spiral staircase inside the Hotel President at 488 University Ave. Clockwise from above left: The Dunker House at 420 Maple St. was one of the first two houses built in the Spanish Colonial Revival style in Palo Alto in 1926; The privately owned Norris House at 1247 Cowper St. is one of Clarke's most elaborate designs. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places; Built in 1932, the U.S. Post Office on Hamilton Avenue represents Clarke's deliberate attempt to avoid the classical style associated with government buildings of the period; The old Palo Alto fire and police station now serves as Avenidas senior center.

senior center), and the nationally recognized home of Charles and Kathleen Norris at Stanford University.

More than 30 of these structures have been listed on the city's inventory of historic buildings and three are on the National Register of Historic Places. Palo Alto currently is working to establish a history museum in the historic two-story Spanish-Colonial Roth Building at 300 Homer Ave. that Clark designed in 1932 as the original Palo Alto Medical Clinic.

Born in a San Francisco hospital on April 16, 1893, a year

and a week before Palo Alto was incorporated, Clark grew up in Palo Alto, where his father Arthur Bridgman worked as a Stanford professor of art and a freelance architect. After attending Palo Alto High School, Clark graduated from Stanford University in 1914 with a degree in graphic design (architecture wasn't in the Stanford curriculum until the 1950s), and from Columbia University in 1917 with a Bachelor's degree in architecture. After being deployed to France for two years during World War I, Clark returned to Palo Alto in

1919 and secured his first job as an architect, assisting his father with the design of Herbert Hoover's home at Stanford.

Two years later, Clark opened up the only architectural office in Palo Alto, which at the time, had a population of about 5,000, and many streets still had wooden sidewalks.

Influenced by the Spanish Colonial architecture revived for the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego's Balboa Park in 1915, Clark began designing what he called "Early California" or "California Colonial" buildings

throughout Palo Alto. The exterior architecture of this style includes smooth, white stucco walls that mimic how adobe-brick walls were once covered, round-arched openings, recessed windows giving the appearance of a thickened exterior wall, sloped red roofs made from adobe tiles rounded and baked, wrought-iron railings, and front or interior patios often surrounded by a stucco wall.

His Spanish Colonial commercial work began with Addison Elementary School in 1924. The following year, Clark added to the cluster of Spanish Colonial buildings along the Ramona Street commercial district built by Palo Alto architect and artist Pedro de Lemos. The area is now a registered historic district. Clark's noted multi-story Medico-Dental building, recognized by its massive facade, ground-floor archways and elegant ironwork, is among the buildings in this district. Another of Clark's notable Spanish Colonial projects includes the former Hotel President at 488 University Ave., which currently is being converted from apartments back to a hotel. The six-story building boasted a lush roof garden, a beautiful beamed ceiling lobby and a grand spiral staircase that climbed all the way to the top floor.

Among Clark's earliest residential projects is the two-story Spanish Colonial at 470 Coleridge Ave. and the two-story Monterey Colonial with a Mediterranean doorway at 544 Coleridge Ave., both designed in 1923. Other notable Clark homes include the Dunker House at 420 Maple St., the entire block of Coleridge Avenue between Cowper and Webster streets and the 1927-era Norris House at 1247 Cowper St., which has been called his most elaborate design. The nearly 10,000-square-foot house was commissioned for married authors Charles and Kathleen Norris, whose typewriters could be heard by passersby. The house is built

from white stucco with a tile roof, wooden beams and handcrafted ironwork around the windows, doors and balconies.

In 1932, Clark designed the homes at 1950 and 1990 Cowper St. for Lucie Stern, one of the heirs to the Levi Strauss estate, for her own residence and for her daughter, as a get-away from their main Atherton home. The houses once shared a common courtyard and fountain. In Clark's opinion, the houses "represented the peak of his Early California designs within the city of Palo Alto." In 1935, Stern commissioned Clark to design 1928 Cowper St. for her gardener and his wife. She also commissioned him to design the Community Center (now called Lucie Stern Community Center) at 1305 Middlefield Road.

Although Clark's legacy is bound with his Spanish Colonial designs, he also ventured into a variety of other styles for his residential and commercial buildings. On the 1400 block of Edgewood Drive, one can see a variety of home styles he built there between 1936 and 1948, including the Prairie-style house with its flagstone veneer at 1440 Edgewood, which has been described as "Birge Clark meets Frank Lloyd Wright." Another of his homes at 570 Coleridge features a Tudor-style second story. His Streamline Moderne buildings include the former GM dealership (now Wilbur Properties) at 790 High St. and the Sea Scout Building (designed to resemble a ship) at the Baylands. ■

— *Bo Crane is a Palo Alto native and graduate of Stanford University. As secretary of Palo Alto Stanford Heritage, he organizes and leads architectural/historical tours of Palo Alto neighborhoods. He also is a board member of Palo Alto Historical Association and historian for the Menlo Park Historical Association.*



## HOW TO IDENTIFY CALIFORNIA COLONIALS

- ☞ Smooth, white stucco exterior walls that mimic how adobe-brick walls were once covered
- ☞ Round-arched openings
- ☞ Recessed windows giving the appearance of a thickened exterior wall
- ☞ Sloped red roofs made from adobe tiles rounded and baked
- ☞ Wrought-iron railings
- ☞ Front or interior patios often surrounded by a stucco wall
- ☞ Often feature two-story block perpendicular to the street with a one-story wing at one side

## WHERE TO FIND BIRGE CLARK BUILDINGS

**U.S. Post Office, 380 Hamilton Ave.:** Built in 1932, this Early California-style post office represents Clark's deliberate and successful attempt to avoid the classical modes usually associated with government buildings of the period. Initially, his drawings were rejected by the United States Postal Service, which deemed the design inappropriate for a federal building. President Herbert Hoover, who knew Clark, reportedly intervened and the design was approved. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Medico-Dental Building, 261 Hamilton Ave.:** Built in 1927 and rehabilitated in 2016, this building served as the corner anchor for the Spanish Colonial Revival commercial row along Ramona Street that is now the Ramona Street Architectural District. Clark designed this four-story business block for the Palo Alto Improvement Company. The building is noted for its irregular pattern, made to look as if it consisted of several buildings developed at different periods of time, even though it was constructed all at once.

**Old Palo Alto fire and police station, 450 Bryant St.:** Originally built in 1927 as the Palo Alto Fire and Police Station, this building is now home to Avenidas senior center.

**Palo Alto Medical Clinic, 300 Homer Ave.:** Built in 1932 as the first permanent home of the Palo Alto Medical Clinic. The building is on the Historic Buildings Inventory. The city is currently working to rehabilitate the building and use it as a history museum.

**Pacific Art League, 668 Ramona St.:** Built in 1926, this stucco-clad building features two pitched roof elements separated by a three-story, flat-roofed tower element, and wrought-iron corner balconies capped with red tile overhangs. The design combines Spanish Colonial Revival, Mission Revival, and Craftsman style features.

**Lucie Stern Community Center, 1305 Middlefield Road:** Built in 1932, the center was commissioned by Levi Strauss heir Lucie Stern. The center features a series of one- and two-story Spanish Colonial buildings built around an entry patio and decorative circular fountain.

**Ruth and Lucie Stern residences, 1950-1990 Cowper St.:** These long, low Spanish Colonial Revival homes were built for mother and daughter Lucie and Ruth Stern. The homes have a massive street facade with wrought iron window grilles. The landscaping treats the two houses as a single entity. In 2015, Ruth's home at 1950 Cowper sold for \$30 million.

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# The secret garden

Filoli estate's previously unseen vegetable garden now open year-round

By Heather Zimmerman

The sprawling 16 acres of gardens at Woodside's Filoli estate have been open to the public for nearly 50 years — or at least most of them have. Visitors now have an opportunity to check out a previously unseen garden that was essential back in the days when Filoli was a working estate: the vegetable garden.

During the summer harvest, Filoli began welcoming its first-ever visitors to the vegetable garden, which is now open year-round. The opening of the garden follows a renovation that included the addition of ADA-accessible berry cages and raised beds, garden plots celebrating

the Bay Area's immigrant communities and a shaded seating area with an outdoor classroom and demonstration space.

"We've seen an increased interest in our visitors' desire to connect with nature through both gardening and food. Filoli's commitment to inclusion, horticultural expertise, and strategic focus on public engagement uniquely positions us to meet our community's needs," said Filoli CEO Kara Newport.

During the fall season, visitors can see the garden grow into abundance, demonstrating beautiful design in an edible landscape. Visit



In August, Woodside's Filoli opened the estate's vegetable garden to the public. Courtesy Jeff Bartee Photography.

often to see how the trees and new garden beds fill with vegetables, herbs and fruits. The season's harvest is used in public programs and is donated to local food banks.

Visitors can taste the fruits of this garden in jams, spice blends and hard cider for sale at Filoli's Clock Tower Shop. And for vegetable

gardeners who might be struck with produce envy on visiting the garden, take heart: the demonstration garden area will also offer growing tips.

*Filoli is located at 86 Cañada Road, Woodside. It is open daily. Visitors must purchase tickets in advance. For more information, visit [filoli.org/visit](http://filoli.org/visit). ■*

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