

HOME+GARDEN

DESIGN

SUMMER 2023

**Woodside farm
goes green with
fully electric barn**

PAGE 6

**'Completely destroyed'
home becomes modern
oasis in Palo Alto**

PAGE 8

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ON THE COVER

The barn and its second-story apartment at Whiskey Hill Farm use all-electric power. Photo by Magali Gauthier.



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Old Becomes New

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BEFORE



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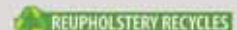
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**Property owner
converts 1953
barn into a fully
electric home
for 7 horses and
family of 5**

BY ANGELA SWARTZ

Woodside's all-electric farm

An air exchanger is tucked away behind a hedge that separates it from a series of horse paddocks at Hilary Bates' all-electric barn in Woodside. Photo by Magali Gauthier.

As new state mandates go into effect limiting gas-powered appliances, one 2,000-square-foot barn near the Horse Park in Woodside is already all-electric.

Hilary Bates, a local architect, owns the Whiskey Hill property, which includes a single-family home, along with a barn that houses seven horses and includes a two-bedroom apartment above that's rented by a family of five. The barn, originally built in 1958 and converted to more efficient electric appliances in 2021, won a 2022 Peninsula Clean Energy All-Electric Leader Award.

In 2022, state officials moved to ban all natural gas-fired space heaters and water-heating appliances by 2030. Similar restrictions will take effect sooner in the Bay Area. In March, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District approved the gradual phase out of gas-powered water heaters by 2027 and space heaters in 2029.

"It was always all-electric because I couldn't run gas down there," said Bates, a former member of the town's Architectural

and Site Review Board, which reviews residential applications for community character, site planning, building design and landscape elements. "Old electric appliances run very inefficiently. ... I realized I could change out the stove and create an all-electric, state-of-the-art building."

The home has a heat pump water heater, an air-source heat pump for air conditioning and heating, a high-efficiency dryer and an induction stove. She also has a 6.4 kWh solar system tied to a Tesla five-battery backup system. She said since she installed the solar panels in 2020, she has not experienced a power outage.

The renovation used the barn's original footprint and foundation, but replaced all interior walls as well as the exterior shell and added double glazed windows, weather stripping and insulation.

"This may be one of the only all-electric multi-use residential, commercial and agricultural buildings in San Mateo County," according to Peninsula Clean Energy. "It not only preserves

Woodside's equestrian heritage and makes best use of the all-electric energy efficiency options available today, it also provides critically needed housing which the state of California is encouraging through recent legislation to promote ADUs (accessory dwelling units)."

Bates is passionate about the move away from gas-powered appliances. She also serves on the board for Menlo Spark, a nonprofit collaboration of local government, businesses and residents working to help Menlo Park adopt measures by 2025 to reach carbon neutrality by 2030. In 2015, she became a credentialed LEED Green Associate through the US Green Building Council, according to her Menlo Spark profile.

The main home still has some gas-powered elements. She has swapped gas-powered water heaters for electric ones and added a 24 kWh solar array. Bates is still waiting for the market to come up with a 48-inch induction cooktop.

Home energy audits and rebates

Anyone unsure how much energy their appliances are using can get a free assessment from groups like Home Energy Analytics (corp.heea.com). This is what Bates used to measure the barn's energy usage because it was on the same meter as the main house.

Bates said there is a labor shortage of highly qualified subcontractors who can install heat pumps. BayREN.org provides an online tool for finding recommended expert energy consultations, services and installations.

Peninsula Clean Energy (peninsulacleanenergy.com) offers a \$3,500 rebate to help San Mateo County residents switch to a heat pump heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system. Peninsula Clean Energy also offers loans of up to \$10,000 for heat pump or heat pump water heater projects.

Redwood City (redwoodcity.org) offers a \$500 rebate for switching to a heat pump.

Woodside's electric codes

Unlike neighboring cities and towns, Woodside opted not to institute bans on gas-powered appliances in 2019. Nineteen of the 22 agencies in the area have adopted so-called reach codes that impose greater restrictions than what the state mandates, according to San Mateo County's electricity provider Peninsula Clean Energy. The town does get its electricity for its municipal facilities from Peninsula Clean Energy's 100% renewable energy, Jan Pepper, CEO of Peninsula Clean Energy, acknowledged to the council in October.

Woodside Mayor Chris Shaw said that, from his point of view, it's important to have backup power because of the common power outages in town. Although gas fireplaces generally work during a power outage, gas stoves and ovens will generally not work because gas appliance ignition is electric, according to the Sacramento Bee. But Shaw and others in town have gas-powered backup generators that will work during outages.

"It has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not each of us has a responsibility to reduce carbon emissions," he said. "It boils down to the simple fact that our utility provider PG&E can not reliably deliver electricity. ... There are going to be multiple power outages every winter. With year after year of wildfires, you count on power going out year-round. We seem to experience more outages than other communities."

"It would be irresponsible to tell them you can't have natural gas," Shaw said. "It allows people to cook food, heat their homes, have hot water to take a bath."

Still, Bates said she wishes town officials would do more.

"In Woodside, we have not yet caught up to Portola Valley and other towns of similar lot size and type by developing either a green building ordinance or reach codes," she said. "It's a shame

because during my two years on the town's Architectural and Site Review Board, we approved some very significant estates, with large main houses, multiple ADUs, outbuildings and heated water features. Some projects that came before board committed to going 'all-electric' immediately which is great, while others said they would at least consider it during the design process. That is at least some progress."

Bates said through this kind of work, the board was able to convince staff to now require that owners indicate the location of rooftop solar, which is now required by code.

"PV (photovoltaic) panels can be a major design element in terms of aesthetics, but also the roofscape needs to be considered early on in the design process so there is appropriate orientation and sufficient roof space for panels unencumbered by complicated gables, ridge lines or adjacent trees," she said. "While Woodside has a long way to go, it was a valuable start to awareness and discussion of the issue of electrification which is not going away. There is only so much impact that individuals can make on the issue of building decarbonization; this is where we really need to look to our elected officials to lead the way."

Portola Valley opted to adopt a green building code that includes few exceptions. In October 2022, its Town Council gave the go-ahead to require all new construction to be all-electric. The all-electric requirements apply to all newly constructed buildings and outdoor amenities such as outdoor kitchens, grills, pools, spas, fireplaces, fire pits and outdoor heaters.

It also requires major remodels to be all electric, and adds some new requirements for the installation of a heat pump air conditioner on the replacement, upgrade or relocation of an air conditioner, as well as pre-electrification requirements when replacing or upgrading the main electrical panel.

Portola Valley residents are required to replace their failing gas-powered devices with electric ones under this reach code. Owners of new construction projects which have already received planning approvals may apply for exemption from new green building amendments.

Atherton provides exemptions in new construction for indoor and outdoor cooking appliances, fireplaces and outdoor fire pits that use the fossil fuel. In 2022, it adopted stricter policies than other Peninsula cities for electric vehicle (EV) charging, requiring more level 2 chargers than most cities, including making EV chargers available to accessory dwelling units, guest

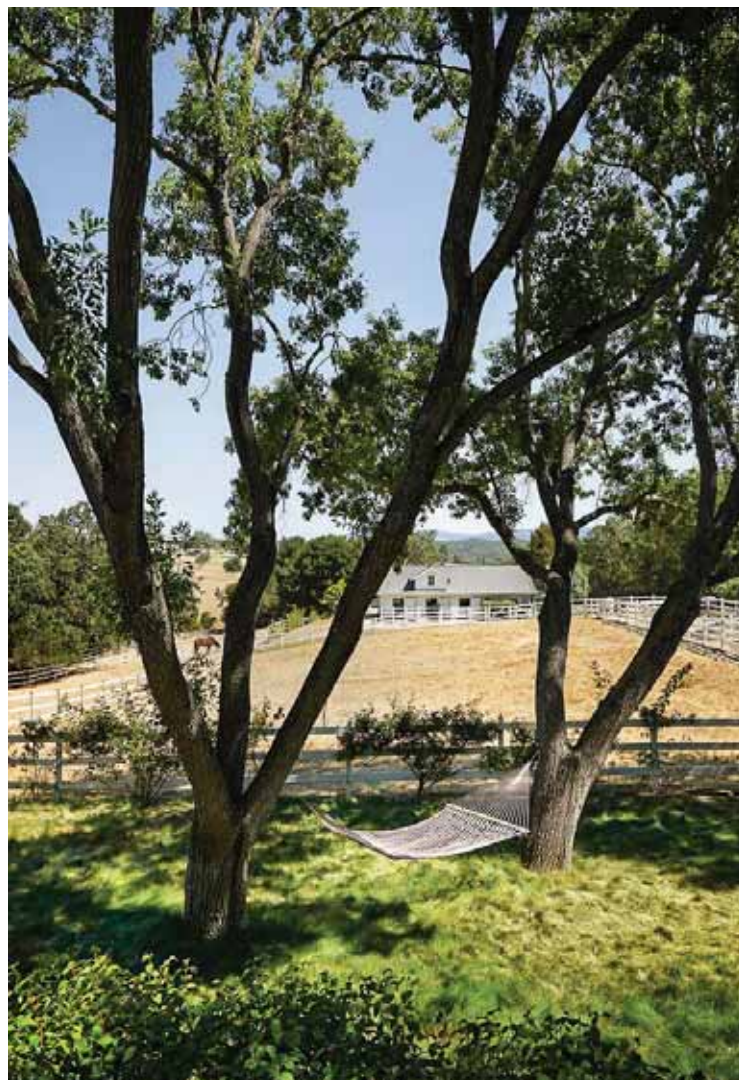
houses and pool houses.

In Palo Alto, developers are required to make all new buildings all-electric. And a new sustainability plan that the City Council unanimously approved in June includes the installation of new electric-vehicle charging equipment near multi-family developments and pilot programs to encourage the installation of electric appliances such as heat pump water heaters for single-family homes and electric HVAC equipment for commercial properties.

Learn more about the barn at peninsulacleanenergy.com/awards-program/whiskey-hill-farm. ■

Email Staff Writer

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Woodside's Whiskey Hill Farm includes a single-family home, along with a barn that houses seven horses and includes a two-bedroom apartment above that's rented by a family of five. All of the buildings have been converted to all-electric energy. Photo courtesy Matthew Millman.

From 'completely destroyed' to modern oasis

Termite-damaged home transformed into retreat with glass walls

BY CAROL BLITZER

A completely destroyed house” is how Maor Greenberg described the Midtown Palo Alto home he and his wife, Rotem, bought in 2020. Between the termite damage, lousy construction and a poor design, he knew he wanted to start from scratch and design the right home for his growing family.

Greenberg, who owns VRchitects and interior design firm Greenberg Design Gallery, as well as Greenberg Construction, worked with architect Dan Hruby while doing his own interior design and construction.

Greenberg’s father is a contractor and his mother a designer, and he’s been working in construction since he was 18, long before earning his degree as a structural engineer.

“I believe that a house should be made for you,” he said, stressing not how a house *looks*, but how well it functions. His strong belief is that architecture, design and construction need to be coordinated from the beginning, starting with basic house design and coordinating interior design long before construction begins.

An indoor-outdoor experience

Greenberg wanted a totally indoor-outdoor experience for his family home. Sitting in the backyard, one can look through the bifold glass doors and see the front yard. Even the fireplace in the living room is see-through: Those sitting in the living room can view the backyard through the fireplace and those enjoying the outdoor seating area can see into the living room — even when the fire is on.

Light was another key element for Greenberg, who designed the



Those sitting in the living room can view the backyard through the fireplace and those enjoying the outdoor seating area can see into the living room — even when the fire is on.



home with natural light in mind. The bedrooms, for example, have lighting that can be adjusted from a white-blue hue to yellow, depending on the mood required.

One needs to “take into consideration your environment, your neighbors, and fit their design with your design,” he said, noting

that he especially liked mature palm trees that were growing on neighboring properties. Alas, he said, one neighbor took one of the trees down, and the other is considering it. To compensate, he added a mature tree in his front yard that offers some shade.

A ‘Laundry Jet’ and modern conveniences

His wife had a few requests: She wanted to be able to see her young children from virtually every room on the first floor; she wanted a round table; and she wanted a laundry room upstairs near the bedrooms.



The game room (which doubles as a guest room, with its Murphy bed) fits that bill. And the round table sits in the dining room nicely.

But Greenberg knew there just wasn't room on the second floor to accommodate a full laundry room, so he added a Laundry Jet, a vacuum-powered chute with a motion-activated port built into the wall. The chute transports dirty clothes or towels down to the first floor within seconds and then shoots them back up to the second floor, when clean.

A kitchen full of hidden surprises

The kitchen was designed so more than one person could cook and everyone could eat comfortably — that meant no standard island. Instead, the island steps down to table height to easily accommodate both adults and children.

While sleekly modern, the kitchen is full of surprises. Many rollout drawers are custom fitted, so there's a perfect spot to place tools, pots, spices, even dishes, as well as a drawer in the island just for onions and potatoes. That leaves the countertops, made of SapienStone porcelain, clear, with spices and oils neatly shelved near the six-burner Dacor range (with a steam oven and a “smart” exhaust



Above: The family wanted a totally indoor-outdoor experience so Maor Greenberg designed the living room with a see-through fireplace that provides views of the backyard. Left: The kitchen features SapienStone porcelain countertops, a six-burner Dacor range and a built-in appliance cabinet. Bottom left, facing page: The see-through fireplace in the living room also can be enjoyed outside in the patio. Top left, facing page: All the floors on the ground level of the Greenberg family's Palo Alto home are concrete. Photos by Boaz Meri courtesy VRchitects.

(continued on page 10)

Thinking of adding a pass-through window?

Although it's ideal to design a pass-through window from kitchen to outdoors at the original construction time, it is possible to retrofit a house — but only if the kitchen faces a backyard, rather than a driveway or fence, noted Maor Greenberg.

Greenberg chose a lift-out window (what he calls a “taco” window, reminiscent of a taco truck), that opens out. Other window designs could include bifolds, or even French casement (which open out like French doors), but they take up more space and create barriers at the sides, he said.

He would have chosen the hydraulic version of his pass-through window, which was made by Optvue, if it had been available at the time, he added.

The best countertop materials, since the counter extends from indoors to outdoors, are quartz, granite or porcelain — all solid choices for holding up outdoors.



A pass-through window and bifold door open up the kitchen to the outdoors. Photo by Boaz Meri courtesy VRchitects.

(continued from page 9)

fan). There's a built-in appliance cabinet (with a toaster and other small appliances already plugged in), as well as a Gaggenau coffee maker and cup warming drawer. The microwave doubles as an extra oven.

And the 45-inch sink — actually, an entire prep area — boasts accessories, including a wooden cutting board and sieved bowls.

Greenberg stressed the usability — and fun — in his home. All the floors on the ground level are concrete, coated with what he called “hospital-grade epoxy.”

All the bathrooms feature tankless Axent toilets and epoxy resin sinks. Showers have no thresholds, giving easy universal access.

Waterfall, sauna, other outdoor comforts

The outside was just as important, and thoughtfully arranged, as the inside. Sitting on a corner



The parents wanted to be able to see their children from virtually every room on the first floor, so the home includes walls of glass in the front and back. Photo by Boaz Meri courtesy VRchitects.

lot, Greenberg was able to build a low concrete fence set back 4 feet, with tall greenery providing privacy in front. Walking around the house, one finds a complete outdoor kitchen, firepit, barrel sauna, pingpong table that doubles as a dining table with chairs, comfortable seating area topped

by a louvered trellis — and a trampoline, all visible from inside the home. And behind the seating area is a waterfall wall that extends 35 feet along the back of the property. ■

Freelance writer Carol Blitzler can be emailed at carolblitzler@gmail.com.

Goal of project: After extensive teardown due to poor design, subpar construction quality and termite damage, create a modern, functional home

Unanticipated issues: Pandemic led to delays in delivery of materials, shortages of materials and scarcity of skilled labor

Year house built: 1959, rebuilt in 2022

Size of home, lot: Original was larger than allowed; now 5 bedroom, 5 bathroom, 3,204 sq. ft. on 6,842 sq.-ft. lot

Time to complete: 1 year

Budget: More than \$2 million

RESOURCES:

Architect: Dan Hruby, VRchitects, Palo Alto, 844-349-4411, vrchitects.com

Building contractor: Maor Greenberg, Greenberg Construction, Palo Alto, 650-600-9536, greenberg.construction

Interior designer: Marine Potapinski, Greenberg Design Gallery, Palo Alto, 650-660-0715, greenberg.design

Landscape contractor: Eduardo Reyes, Aravat Landscaping, Palo Alto, 833-499-9767, aravatlandscaping.com

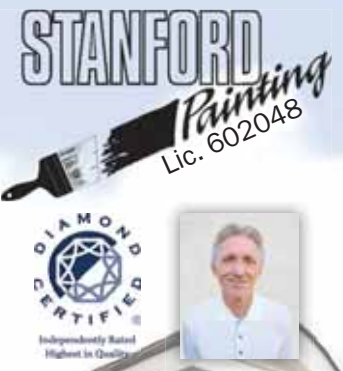
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THE UPS AND DOWNS OF REBUILDING AFTER A DISASTER

From construction delays to filing insurance claims, local homeowners share their 'disaster' stories

BY EMILY MARGARETTEN

Leah Russin shows the stump where a Douglas fir once stood. It fell on her house in March 21. Photo by Gennady Sheyner.

When a massive Douglas fir tree fell on her Palo Alto home during the rain and wind storms this past March, Leah Russin knew the repair work would be extensive. The tree crushed the roof, tore off an eave, severed a balcony and damaged the chimney. It also caused interior damage, as splintered wood punctured the ceiling, leaving openings for rain to fall into the bedroom, study and storage spaces.

What was less clear was when the repair work would actually start. Two months after the storm damage, Russin was still waiting for repairs.

"It's been a challenge," Russin

said, referring to the rigmarole of finding people to address the emergency repairs, let alone the bigger project of rebuilding her home in the Barron Park neighborhood.

Labor shortages are a well-documented trend in the construction industry; California's cascade of winter storms exacerbated the issue, according to Janet Ruiz, director of strategic communication at the Insurance Information Institute, a nonprofit trade association. "We're in a high inflation period so the costs to repair have gone up. And then when you have large-scale amounts of damage in a community, there can be a shortage and delay for repairs due to the availability of contractors," Ruiz said.

Information about the amount of storm damage to homes in California is incomplete.

"People are still turning in (insurance) claims so it's a little early for numbers," Ruiz told this news organization in May. But AccuWeather recently estimated that the total damage and economic loss from the storms was between \$37 billion and \$42 billion, according to an insurance industry trade report.

Mike Johnson, a general contractor who has been building homes for 40 years, described the impact of the storms by the number of houses that he is helping to rebuild. Oak trees fell on two homes in Atherton while another

Palo Alto home sustained damage because of flooding.

Getting started: 'It takes time, several weeks to hear back'

Similar to Russin, Johnson noted the slow pace of the rebuilding process, in part because of labor shortages but also because of the back-and-forth of getting estimates from subcontractors and negotiating with insurance companies.

"It takes time, several weeks to hear back, sometimes a month," Johnson said.

The protracted process has already set in for Russin. Eight days after the Douglas fir fell on her

(continued on page 17)

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(continued from page 14)

house, an insurance adjuster came out to assess the damage. Weeks later, Russin still had not seen the estimate for the repair work, but she was concerned about whether it would accurately reflect the cost of construction.

“I’m really hoping that he just puts down the damage that he sees and then somebody else says — they probably have algorithms — ‘here’s how much it is here (in Palo Alto),’” she said.

Navigating the claims process: ‘Think about it as more of a negotiation rather than a fight’

Johnson corroborated these concerns. An insurance agent estimated that it would cost \$5,000 to remove a fallen oak tree from one of the Atherton properties; it ended up costing \$18,000 because the tree had to be taken out piece by piece with a hand truck. Insurance eventually paid for it but not without some negotiation.

This is typical, Ruiz said, and encouraged homeowners to enter the claims process with an open mindset.

“If people think about it as more of a negotiation rather than a fight, they’re able to navigate the claims process more easily,” she said. “The adjuster may give you a bid that you think is very low. You can talk with your contractor and can even have the contractor talk to the adjuster and say, ‘This is why we’re charging these prices, and this is our standard price in Palo Alto.’”

If negotiation doesn’t work, Ruiz added, then it is appropriate to speak with a supervisor. It also is possible to register a complaint with the California Department of Insurance.

Ruiz described the type of storm protection covered by a standard homeowner insurance policy. “It’s trees falling and wind damage to roofs and windows, from the top down,” Ruiz said.

Many people with homeowner’s insurance do not realize they are not protected in the event of flooding;



Left: A home located directly across from the San Francisquito Creek is lined with sandbags in Palo Alto to prevent flooding during this year’s January storms. Below: Pieces of carpet ripped out of the back room of a Palo Alto home that flooded during a string of storms in early January, sit in a pile in the homeowners’ yard. Photos by Magali Gauthier.

flood insurance handles water and mudflow from the ground up. Only about 2% of properties in California are covered by flood insurance, with the majority of homeowners purchasing it through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s National Flood Insurance Program, Ruiz said.

Suzanne Crocker, who has lived in Palo Alto’s Crescent Park neighborhood for 40 years, experienced flooding in her home when the San Francisquito Creek overflowed from the Pope-Chaucer Bridge in 1998. The water filled her basement, rising to within 1 inch of the floor joists, and required mold remediation. When the creek overflowed during the recent New Year’s Eve storm this past December, Crocker’s basement and attached garage flooded again, leaving about

2 to 3 inches of mud in her home and on the walkways and driveway. Although the damage was not as severe as 1998, Crocker struggled to find people to help with the cleanup.

“It took two guys about 6 hours to clean it up, and it cost \$4,000,” Crocker said, which she paid for out-of-pocket.

Tips for forging ahead: ‘Take photos, save receipts, be patient’

To get reimbursed for these kinds of storm events, Ruiz provided some tips. Take photographs of the damage right away, she said. These are needed for the claims process. If there is water damage, dry out the area as soon as possible to avoid mold. And, if there are any temporary repairs, keep the receipts to

submit to the insurance company.

Johnson also emphasized the importance of patience when rebuilding, especially after the supply-chain disruptions of the pandemic. One of the homes he is repairing in Palo Alto sustained rain damage during the New Year’s Eve storm. Water pooled into the house’s foundation and underneath doors. Johnson fixed the floors, stucco and electrical wiring but other repairs have taken longer; he was still waiting in early May for a sliding glass door unit to arrive more than three months after he ordered it.

The cost of construction has risen substantially too, as building materials, like lumber and steel, are in high demand.

“Prices have skyrocketed, everything’s up. And when summer hits, I can see another boom,” Johnson said. He is busy already with all three homeowners deciding on larger remodels to their homes.

Russin intends to renovate, too. For other people who plan on rebuilding damaged homes, she offered this advice: “Start early, pull in all the connections and favors that you have and be very good to your construction workers because they’ll be good to you.” ■

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Designed for grand entertaining, historic English manor has ties to Palo Alto's booze ban

During the 1970s, owner led successful repeal of Stanford's decades-old prohibition

BY PALO ALTO WEEKLY STAFF

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 midcentury 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 Charles K. Sumner and the stately English manor he designed on Hamilton Avenue in the 1910s.

With the exception of a squire mucking about the grounds and the romance of foggy moors, the exterior of the three-story, 1916-era home on the 800 block of Hamilton Avenue in Palo Alto has all the attributes of a genuine English manor: symmetrical gables, a central oriel and a steep-pitched roof with narrow banks of windows and dormers.

Designed by noted Palo Alto architect Charles K. Sumner, whose eclectic work can be found throughout residential neighborhoods in Palo Alto and Stanford, the 25-room estate has retained much of the grand character that defined it as one of the "finest" residences in Palo Alto when it was built 107 years ago, according to local newspaper accounts uncovered by the nonprofit Palo Alto Stanford Heritage preservation group. The private home, which recently sold for \$19.5 million, opened its doors to the public in 1994 during a Designer Showcase home tour but has remained closed



Frank Crist, far left, receives the first legal drink at a downtown restaurant in Palo Alto in 1971 after the city's alcohol ban is repealed. Courtesy the Palo Alto Historical Association.

to the general public ever since.

Surrounded by sculpted gardens, covered walkways, a centrally located pool with a pool house, and a one-bedroom guest cottage, the home sits on nearly three-quarters of an acre in the Crescent Park neighborhood adjacent to a near-identical twin home built at the same time for the same family: Patriarch Robert Ray commissioned one home for himself and the other for his son, for a total cost of \$30,000.

A quarter of a century later, the estate changed hands and became known as the "Crist House" — a name that would be linked to the 1970 repeal of Sen. Leland Stanford's decades-old alcohol ban in Palo Alto.

The 'Crist House' era

In 1942, the Ray family house was purchased by Frank Crist Sr., the Palo Alto lawyer, state Assembly member and community leader best-known for helping to make Palo Alto a town where it's

not a crime to imbibe in "spiritous, vinous, malt or mixed liquors."

It was Crist who brought the final suit challenging deed restrictions implemented by Stanford in 1888 that prohibited the sale of alcohol within a 1.5-mile radius of the university.

Stanford was concerned that

saloons would come to the town that was sprouting up next to his newly founded university, so he encouraged Timothy Hopkins, the original subdivider of the site where Palo Alto now stands, to write a liquor sales ban into the deeds of trust for each property. A few years later, an alcohol ban was written into the town's incorporation documents.

The "dry zone" remained unbroken until December 1970, when a California Superior Court judge agreed with Crist's argument, ruling that the university could not prevent a downtown restaurant from serving alcohol.

In May 1971, Crist toasted the first legal cocktail at a downtown restaurant.

Crist and his wife lived the remainder of their lives in the "Crist House." In the early 1990s, the six-bedroom, five-bathroom, 6,086-square-foot estate was put back on the market for just over \$2 million.



Palo Alto architect Charles K. Sumner built this 1916-era English manor shown here in 2022. Courtesy Bo Crane.

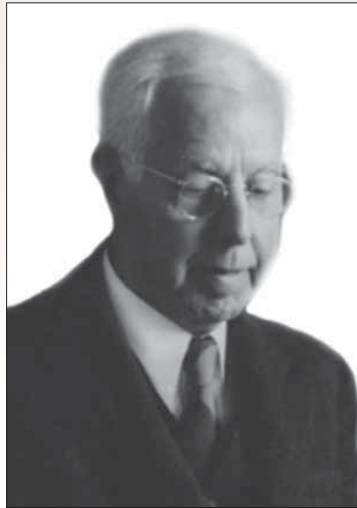
Designed for grand entertaining

The home is among the earliest that Sumner designed in Palo Alto and reflects his emphasis on formality and entertaining, with distinct separations between public and private space and formal rooms large enough to host grand gatherings.

The ground floor features a reception hall flanked by formal dining and living room spaces with window-lined sunrooms that expand each room along either side of the home.

For privacy, the staircase is strategically positioned perpendicular to the view from the front door, a common feature Sumner used to prevent a direct line of sight to the family spaces on the second floor.

The garden and its relationship to the house was an especially important element for Sumner. He believed that every room should



Charles K. Sumner. Courtesy Palo Alto Stanford Heritage.

have windows on two to three sides, when possible, to look out at the gardens. He made certain to incorporate French doors with balconies, decorative leaded glass windows and sunrooms into the

home's design to provide various views of the property and its sculpted gardens.

The man who built the manor

A Pennsylvania native, Sumner graduated from the Columbia University School of Architecture and worked for McKim, Mead and White in New York City, the firm that designed the original Penn Station.

He moved to Palo Alto in 1916, where he spent the bulk of his career designing homes for the upper middle class, including professors at Stanford University. Between 1916 and 1941, he designed more than 50 residences in Palo Alto, including a cluster of six homes along Hamilton Avenue, as well as an additional 20 homes on the Stanford campus.

Sumner worked squarely within the eclectic movement,

incorporating a mixture of elements from many styles into his work. He preferred the English cottage, Tudor and Colonial Revival styles, as well as the occasional Mediterranean Revival structure. After the Spanish Eclectic style swept into town in the mid-1920s, Sumner designed more of his work in this style.

In addition to his residential work, Sumner occasionally designed office buildings, schools, libraries and churches, including Palo Alto's Spanish Colonial Revival-style College Terrace Library at 2300 Wellesley St. and the mission-style building that once housed Walter Hays School before it was demolished. ■

Portions of this article taken from Palo Alto Stanford Heritage and the article "The (California) English manor" by Diane Sussman that originally appeared in the Palo Alto Weekly on May 6, 1994.

Where to find Charles K. Sumner buildings

College Terrace Library, 2300 Wellesley St.:

With little traffic on the street, few ever pass by what is called Sumner's most important Spanish Colonial Revival work. Built in 1936, the one-story tile and stucco structure features interesting relief decorative patterns over the entrance, tall Palladian windows at either end and wrought iron trusses spanning the ceiling.

Trinity Lutheran Church, 1295 Middlefield Road:

Built in 1928 near Hamilton Avenue and Byron Street, this Spanish Colonial building was surrounded by an expansive courtyard that incorporated Sumner's ideas of light and openness. He believed that a building and its landscaping had to work together. He designed spaces with that in mind, which is why deep front yards and enclosed courtyards are common elements of his work. After 25 years, the building was relocated in 1953 to its current location on Middlefield Road.



1184 Palo Alto Ave. Courtesy Palo Alto Stanford Heritage.



548 E. Crescent Drive. Courtesy Palo Alto Stanford Heritage.

Tudor-style house, 548 E. Crescent Drive:

Built in 1928 for \$15,000, this private residence features the traditional hallmarks of the Tudor style: It has steeply pitched gable roofs, half-timbering on its facade and leaded glass windows.

Spanish Colonial Revival home, 1184 Palo Alto Ave.:

Completed in 1935, this private residence is considered one of the most important examples of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture in the city. Its nearly solid street façade, void of doors, windows or other openings, adheres closely to original Spanish models. The home was built for Leslie Kiler, a noted local landscape architect who designed the grounds at three

Birge Clark-designed homes commissioned by Lucie Stern in the 1900 block of Cowper Street as well as the Lucie Stern Community Center and Frost Amphitheater at Stanford University.

Spanish eclectic home, 1505 University Ave.:

Built in 1926, this private home is notable for its use of beautiful materials. The doors and living room floors are of Honduran mahogany. The fireplace is an elaborate confection of Batchelder terra-cotta tiles, and the arched windows and doors retain their original curved curtain rods. Mission-derived features include the terra-cotta tile floor at its entry and decorative iron grillwork.

—Bo Crane and Palo Alto Stanford Heritage



1505 University Ave. Courtesy Palo Alto Stanford Heritage.

Meet 5 Peninsula residents who have transformed their yards with native gardens



From attracting wildlife to collecting rainwater, here's their stories and tips on how to create your own garden

BY JULIA BROWN

Arise in gardening and home improvement projects brought on by early pandemic shelter-in-place orders also has spurred interest up and down the Peninsula in gardening with native plants that create an inviting habitat for birds, insects, butterflies and other wildlife. While creating such a habitat sounds like a complex, daunting task, it's something that can be accomplished on as small a scale as in flower boxes, containers or in a corner of your home garden. All you need is some native plants and motivation to get started.

We reached out to three Peninsula residents whose gardens were recently featured on the Growing Natives Garden Tour in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties this past spring to find out what motivated their decisions to garden with native plants and what advice they'd give people who are considering doing the same.

She transformed a half-acre into a habitat for wildlife

Elaine Salinger has called San Mateo home for over 30 years and has spent about two decades gardening with native plants.

"When you come to our yard, we have flowers that are blooming; it's just alive with pollinators," she said. "The neighbors' yards look very nice and they're very manicured, but they're dead zones."

Salinger's half-acre garden was created in 2011 and renovated in 2017. The front yard, which was previously covered with English ivy, now features several tall manzanitas and tall Santa Barbara wild lilac. Native plants underneath include canyon sunflower, California fuchsia and many types of buckwheat. The back garden includes a sitting area, a frog pond and a lower hillside that Salinger has been restoring over the last three years by removing non-native invasive species. The hillside is



Above: Elaine Salinger has had a native plant garden for around 20 years. Top: Hummingbirds hover near a feeder in Elaine Salinger and Chris Ketner's San Mateo garden. Photos by Devin Roberts.

now home to a wide variety of natives, from blue iris and yarrow to California dandelions and blue-eyed grass.

The entire yard has been planted in cages to combat gophers. All of the rainwater that falls on the upper part of the yard is captured in a system Salinger's husband Chris Ketner installed; when it rains half an inch, she said, they save at least 500 gallons of water. As a result, they don't use any tap water for gardening. They also use misters instead of a dripper system to conserve water.

"I'm a water advocate," Salinger

said. "You should never let water run off your yard into the storm drain. If you can keep the water on your property, it will feed the trees and plants and minimize the amount of watering you have to do."

A landscaper installed 10%-20% of the plants, but Salinger and Ketner did the rest.

"You don't need an expensive landscaper," she said. "Once you remove non-native invasives and put in your native plants you're pretty much done. It's so low-maintenance it's crazy."

Salinger said she has "too many" favorite plants in her garden to

name, but she loves buckwheat and manzanita species.

“It’s so easy to make things grow. The plants have adapted to the soil and weather here and require almost nothing,” she said.

She said people should start by removing non-native plants, then installing big plants and filling in the gaps with smaller ones. Four key considerations are soil drainage, soil type, how much water you’re willing to use and how much sun or heat the plants will get.

“If you don’t have any garden at all, you can have native plants that attract pollinators in containers,” she added. “I love lewisia, ferns (and) dudleya gnoma.”

They added two rain gardens to their front yard

Linden Ellis and her husband, Andrew Clark, moved to their Redwood City home in 2018 as “pretty novice gardeners,” Ellis said.

“We both had experience with vegetable gardens, but we hadn’t really been managing land ourselves,” she explained. “When we moved in, we took a ‘throw mud against the wall’ approach initially trying to figure out what would survive and do well. ... Some of it worked and some of it didn’t.”

After years of planning, they pulled the weeds that dominated their front yard and landscaped entirely with native plants. Their 1,000-square-foot garden features two functional rain gardens lined with colorful boulders. It also utilizes

a laundry-to-landscape gray water reuse system and 100-gallon rain barrels. Native plants include Big Sur manzanita, deer grass, coffee berry, St. Catherine’s lace buckwheat and Verbena lilacina De La Mina.

Ellis and Clark did the installation themselves and consulted with Yerba Buena Nursery in Half Moon Bay on the design.

“One of the things I learned is how much soil you need,” Ellis said. “Our garden was flat in the front all the way to the front yard and she looked at that and said, ‘You need 9 yards of soil.’ ... It totally packed down, and the plants do much better when you have really good soil at their feet.”

Ellis said they gravitated toward native plants because they like California and appreciate that they live in a “biodiversity hot spot.” Impacts of climate change also strengthened her desire to have a garden full of plants and animals.

“Coming from the East Coast, there’s so many species found only here in the Peninsula and in California,” she said. “That made me want to get as many of those species into our proximity as possible. The second motivation was that it’s more cheerful when you have lots of life around you. There’s so many species disappearing from the planet, I just want to be surrounded by lots of animals, and plants are of course the base of that; without the plants you don’t get any animals.”

Ellis said her favorite plants are the two redbud dogwoods, which are a smaller variety of the wild kind.



Jennifer and Brian Dirking sit in their Peninsula garden. Photo by Devin Roberts.

“I’ve never seen one in a native garden before,” she said. “When they drop their leaves their stems are really red, and it looks really natural.”

“We didn’t do anything right on the first try and it was still so fun,” she said. “We learned a lot, we killed a few plants, but we’re getting there.”

They created a ‘restaurant’ for birds, bees and butterflies

Jennifer Dirking and her husband, Brian, had a typical lawn and English box hedge upon moving to the Peninsula in 2007.

“There was no life in it,” Dirking said. “It didn’t sustain any wildlife, butterflies or bees, but we were both working so much we didn’t pay attention to the fact it was an ecological desert from a native plant standpoint.”

Like many during the pandemic shutdown in 2020, Dirking and her husband turned to gardening and reached out to a few garden designers to get the ball rolling. Because of pandemic restrictions, however, they found it difficult to get any professional help, so they started doing their own research. They searched their ZIP code on Calscape.org to see what plants would work best in their region and did the design and installation themselves.

The centerpiece of the 600-square-foot garden is the valley oak tree, which is considered a “keystone plant,” which supports 90% of the

caterpillar species that enable terrestrial birds to reproduce as well as specialist native bee species. Native plants underneath the oak include red flowering currant, iris, Catalina currant and hummingbird sage. The patio is surrounded by monkey flower, manzanita, woolly blue curls and salvia pozo blue.

“It’s been fun,” Dirking said. “We’ve been able to keep adding to it over time. Getting plants in Richmond or Mill Valley has been like field trips.”

She said she especially loves the manzanita, which blooms early in the year and provides nutrition for local bees, and flowering currants that feed caterpillars, which are critical for baby terrestrial birds.

“We have an explosion of birds in our yards and see more caterpillars and moths,” Dirking said.

She adds that the oak tree is the “No. 1 thing people should plant if they want to have biodiversity in their backyard.”

Dirking’s foray into native gardening inspired her to start giving away native plant seed packets on Nextdoor emblazoned with an “Ecogardenista” sticker (also the name of a gardening blog she started in 2021).

She advises anyone who’s looking to venture into gardening with native plants to use Calscape.org, talk to people at native nurseries and watch online video lessons. ■

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One of two rain gardens in Linden Ellis and Andrew Clark’s Redwood City yard. Photo by Devin Roberts.

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