

ONLINE HISTORY JOURNAL OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Pasatiempo

History and Architecture of a Planned Development

By Daniel P. Gregory



Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History
705 Front Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
www.santacruzmah.org

May 2, 2023

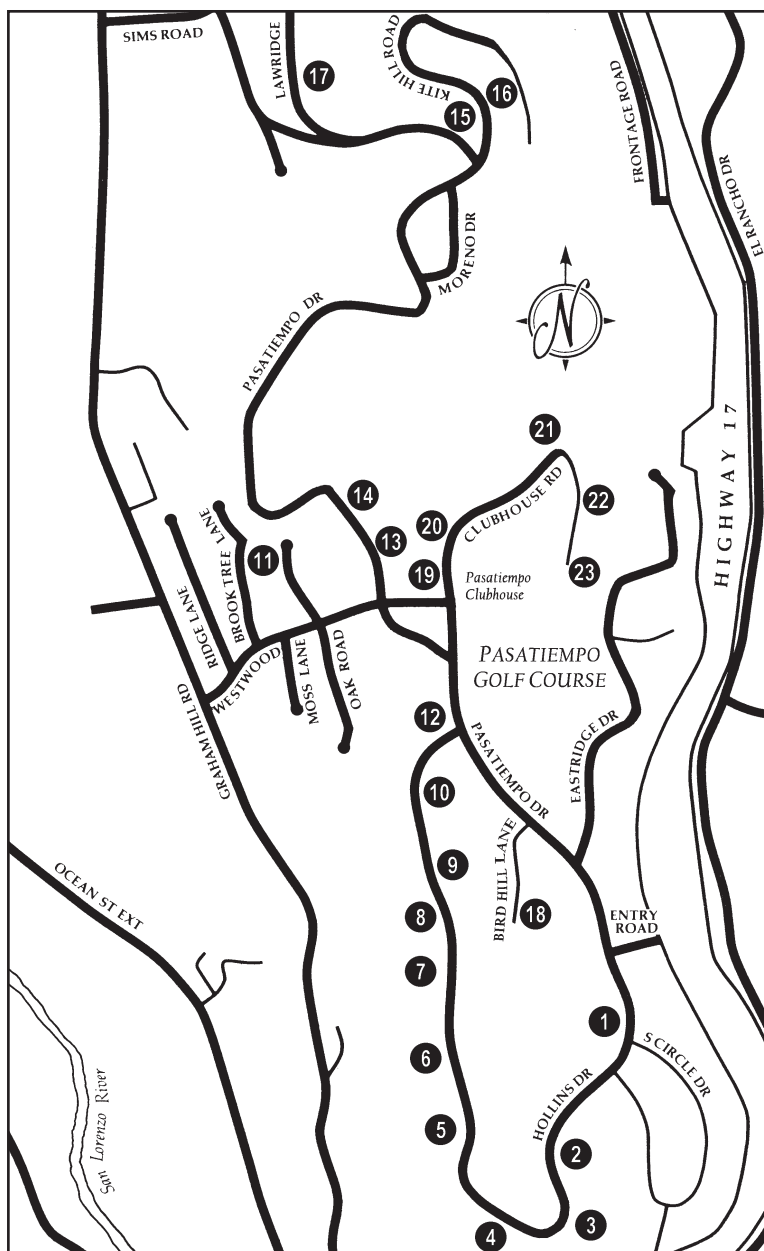
Pasatiempo

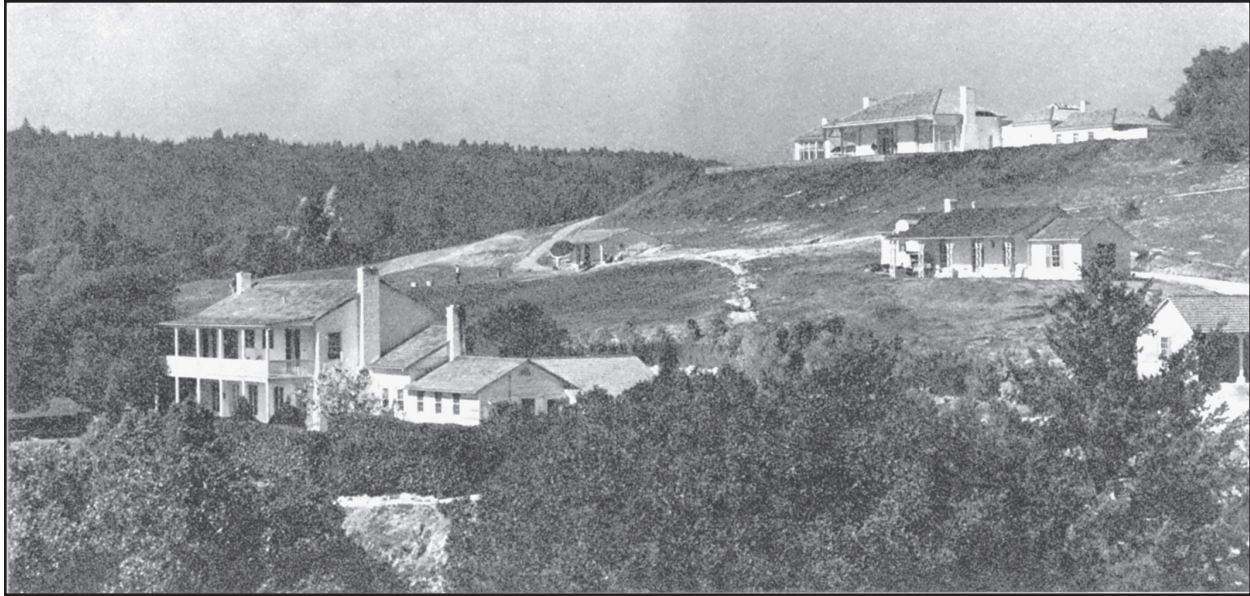
History and Architecture of a Planned Development

By Daniel P. Gregory

Editor's note: This is an adaptation for the Online History Journal of a chapter from the second (1979) and third (2005) editions of The Sidewalk Companion to Santa Cruz Architecture, by John Leighton Chase

The Pasatiempo neighborhood is situated on rolling hills at the northern city limits of Santa Cruz, California, as planned by developer Marion Hollins in the late 1920s. Top-flight designers helped to realize Hollins' visions for the master planning, golf-course layout, architectural style, and gardens. The map below provides a key to item locations.





View of Pasatiempo, circa 1935.

In the foreground is the first clubhouse of 1930. In the background is the main clubhouse of 1935.

One of the early guest homes can be seen between the clubhouses.

(Pasatiempo Clubhouse)

Pasatiempo is a residential golf club development planned in the late 1920s to provide a setting for elegant country living rivaling that of Pebble Beach. Indeed, its developer, Marion Hollins, felt that Pasatiempo surpassed the other resort because, as she maintained, Pasatiempo lay on the sunny side of Monterey Bay. Situated on the oak- and redwood-studded hills above Santa Cruz, with a spectacular view of the bay, Pasatiempo can claim an impressive design pedigree. The landscape architecture firm of Olmsted Brothers (successors to Frederick Law Olmsted) drew up the master plan, and Scottish golf-course architect Alister MacKenzie laid out the course. Architects Clarence Tantau and William W. Wurster designed the club structures and the first houses, and landscape architect Thomas D. Church designed the original gardens.

Pasatiempo is an early monument to the tenets of modern San Francisco Bay Region architecture: that is, to an architecture which combined open floor plans and plain, undecorated surfaces with natural materials, emphatic indoor-outdoor relationships, and a tradition of borrowing from vernacular architecture. Pasatiempo was designed to project an image of refinement and taste, much like other exclusive subdivisions before it: Palos Verdes, Hope Ranch at Santa Barbara, and Pebble Beach.

But here that image did not depend on imported styles. Instead, Pasatiempo produced a new style of its own, based on elements loosely derived from old Monterey buildings and indigenous California barns and farmhouses. Wurster employed thick, whitewashed walls, shingle roofs, double-hung windows, and an occasional pair of shutters to make a modern or new architecture that somehow still looked familiar. The almost stark simplicity of the early houses stood out in the architectural press of the time and brought national recognition: six received AIA and House Beautiful awards. The houses looked modern because they appeared so simple, and yet they did not do away with traditional style altogether. They seemed to capture the ideal image of a modern California where every living room lay outdoors and where Helen Hunt Jackson's "Ramona" owned a house near the second tee.

Pasatiempo was the brainchild of Marion Hollins, a latter-day forty-niner from New York. A famous golfer, she had come to California to work for the Del Monte Properties Real Estate Company at Pebble Beach.

She immediately fell in love with the coast landscapes along Monterey Bay and dreamed of creating her own golfing community across the bay at Santa Cruz.

Hollins was famous for her flamboyant style. In the early 1920s she had made a bet with two New York friends that the first to make a million dollars would give \$25,000 to each of the other two. Shrewd speculation in oil-rich Southern California land (the Kettleman Hills) soon produced her quota. She officially opened her new resort by giving a large dinner party in the first Pasatiempo clubhouse, 34 Clubhouse Road (#23). Toy oil derricks lined the table; under the salad plates of her two friends lay checks for the full amount of the wager.¹

More than just another vivid character out of the Roaring Twenties, however, Hollins was a conservation-minded visionary who wished to preserve the beauty of the land she was developing. No tree could be removed to make way for the golf course without her personal permission. She established small parks along the creek beds and in the heavily forested sections. With Wurster, Church, and her business manager, she drew up a list of protective restrictions which, according to the advertising brochure of 1930, “will go with the land, assuring maintenance to the purchaser of the character of the surroundings as to trees, shrubs, and individuality.”² She even persuaded Church to live at Pasatiempo in order to oversee the homeowners’ landscaping needs. He and his wife lived at 5 Clubhouse Road (#20), in a house designed for them by William Wurster. This concern for total environmental planning was rare at the time.

In fact, the landscape had taken on such importance for Hollins because that is what she was selling. As Wurster wrote in the *San Francisco Call Bulletin*, “It was Miss Hollins’ idea that there should be created here a place for those to live who desire to enjoy the out-of-doors.”³ Outdoor enjoyment meant golfing, hiking, riding, swimming, and tennis. Hollins wanted to create the image of a gracious, recreational way of life. This image, though largely unattainable during the Depression, would capture the imagination of the affluent post-War era and become synonymous with the popular notion of “Western Living.”

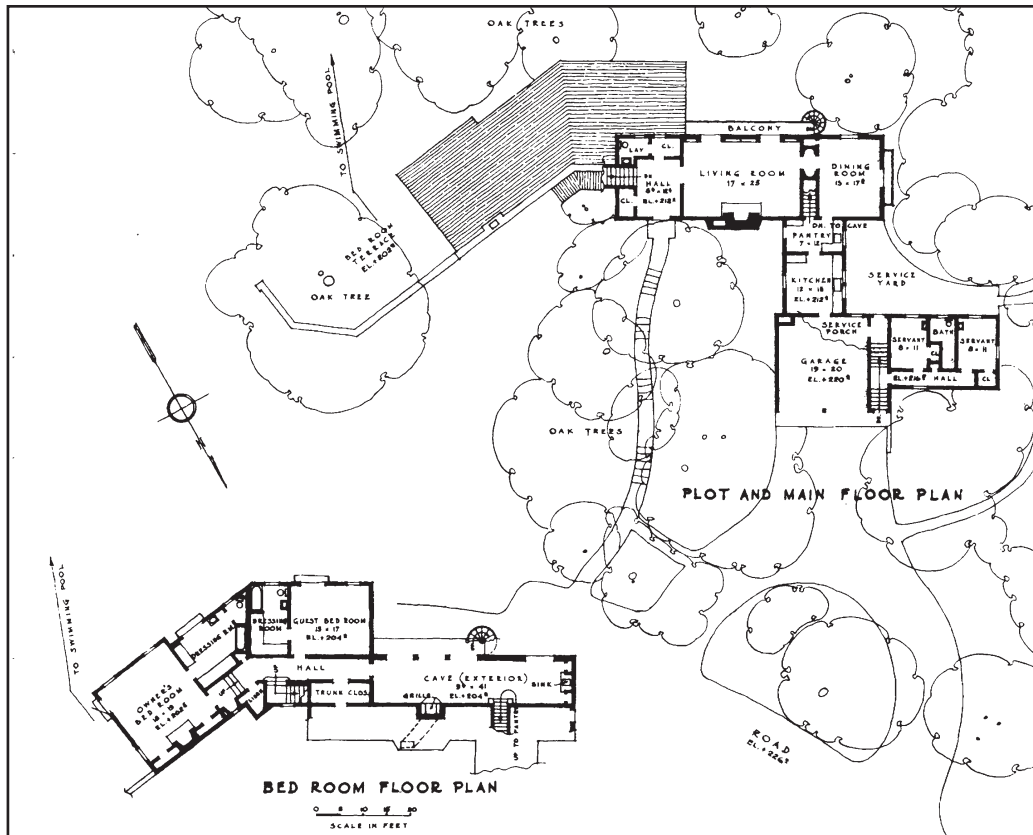
She had not idly chosen the Spanish word Pasatiempo as the name for her resort community. The property had been part of the Rancho la Carbonera, one of the original Mexican land grants, and Hollins was quick to associate her enterprise with the traditions of hospitality and informal, leisurely country living which she felt to be the hallmarks of

California’s earlier age. Since she imagined that many of the houses would be vacation homes, she was interested in setting Pasatiempo apart from the city and making it a “country” resort.⁴

Marion Hollins knew what kind of architecture she wished to see at Pasatiempo, and Wurster was chosen to be the architect for the development because Hollins admired the Scotts Valley house he had designed for the Gregory family in 1927.⁵ She felt that early California architecture ought to have some influence on the house designs. But, to Hollins and Wurster, “early California” did not mean Mission Revival. Wurster preferred instead what he called the “early California warehouse buildings,” such as the simple, board or whitewashed adobe, shingle-roofed structures in Monterey, the Spanish capital of California.⁶ The desire to make use of an early-California style of architecture soon crystallized into a definite policy when, in drawing up the building restrictions, Hollins finally decided to follow Wurster and Tantau’s recommendation that fireproof roofs not be mandatory. Thus it was possible to use shingles on the houses. Wurster had written to Robert Howes, the Pasatiempo business manager, that if fireproof materials were required, “your thought of an ‘early California’ must go by the boards as so much of this depends upon the split wood roofs.”⁷ Even before the lots were sold, both client and architect were thinking in regional terms.

Wurster’s houses at Pasatiempo were done for clients who held similar convictions about the importance of “. . . living in touch with the out-of-doors and being able to secure privacy for outdoor life.”⁸ More than just an isolated development, Pasatiempo helped spawn the California ranch house type, perhaps the ultimate post-war symbol of suburban “arrival.” Though buried in relative obscurity since the late 1930s, Pasatiempo demonstrated that planned suburban development could be done with great sensitivity, achieving a level of quality rarely matched since.

(Note: William Wilson Wurster has been abbreviated WWW in the following numbered items. The reader is asked to remember that all the residences listed are private.)



(5) Plans for Hollins house.
(Daniel Gregory)

(1) **2 Hollins Drive**, Spec house, 1936, WWW. A graceful trellis-arched entry, luxuriant plantings, and bridges across a modest ravine set this house apart from the ordinary house built on speculation.

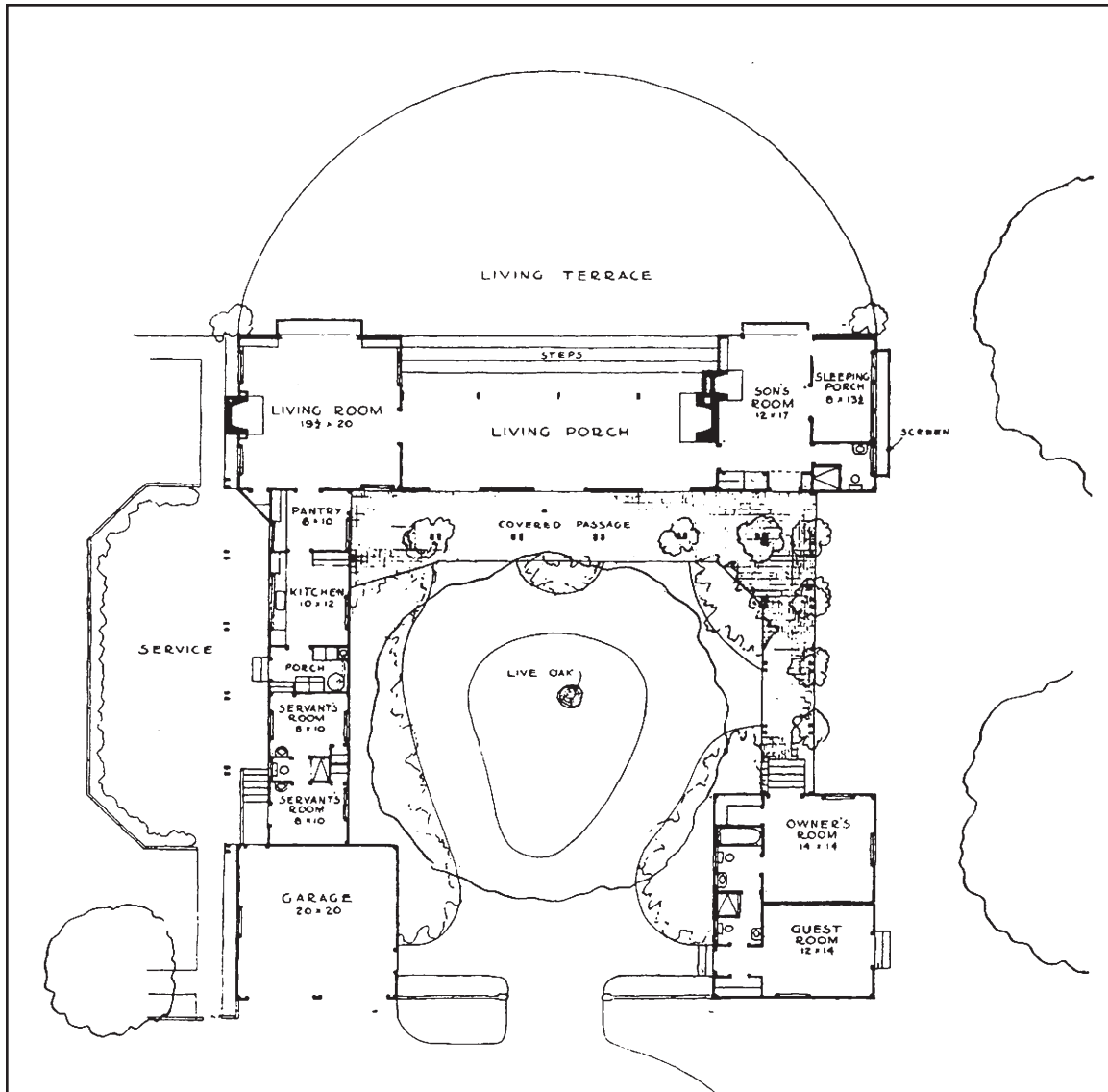
(2) **19 Hollins Drive**, H. W. Bradley house, 1939, WWW. A two-story rectangular box with horizontal siding. The living room is on the second floor. Originally, several Murphy beds were built into the open ground-floor gallery on the south.

(3) **21 Hollins Drive**, D. Palmer house, 1939, WWW. This two-story house on a steep slope was built for respected and successful Santa Cruz contractor Darrow Palmer and his wife, Nina Palmer. Palmer built many of the Pasatiempo structures when he became a partner in the Palmer and Balsiger Construction Company. Palmer and Wurster enjoyed a unique working relationship throughout their lives, and Palmer often influenced the design of a house by advising on the choice of woods or other materials.

(4) **23 Hollins Drive**, E. Berry house, 1935, WWW. A long, low elegant ranch house which won first prize in the House Beautiful competition of 1936. A later owner added a wing to the southeast, designed by Theodore Bernardi, one of Wurster's partners.

(5) **33 Hollins Drive**, Marion Hollins house, 1931, WWW. The exquisitely sited house built for the Pasatiempo developer. This house almost disappears into the gentle, oak-covered southern slope. Only the generous front door and a small round window punctuate the north side. Here Marion Hollins gave her guests, who were often prospective lot owners, a glimpse of the kind of informal but highly civilized life she envisioned for Pasatiempo. This introduction to the development often occurred at alfresco luncheons in the "cave," a room burrowed into the house and the hillside on three sides and open on the fourth.

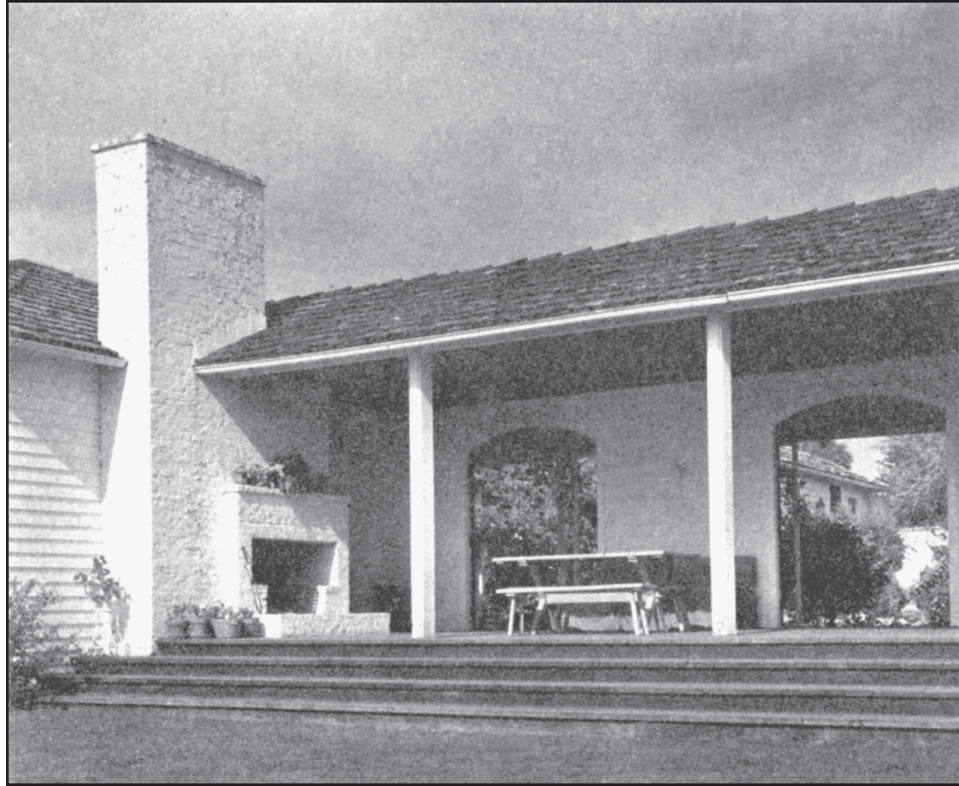
(6) **39 Hollins Drive**, M. Cowden house, ca. 1958, Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons. An elegant shingled box. Not visible from the public road.



(7) Plan of Butler house.
(Daniel Gregory)

(7) **41 Hollins Drive**, Butler house, 1935, WWW. Vincent and Lucy Butler wanted a house which expressed the greatest possible contrast to urban and professional life. Wurster used four detached, more or less square pavilions, arranged around an existing specimen oak tree to establish the four corners of a rectangular inner courtyard. Since it was a summer house, Wurster could do away with interior hallways altogether, providing a “covered passage” to link the pavilions instead.

He could also make the central living space into an outdoor “living porch,” the true summer living room complete with fireplace. The corner living room was to be used only in inclement weather. The outdoor living-room/entrance-courtyard, with its triple set of large double barn doors, recalled the imagery of the Gregory ranch house.



(7) Living porch of Butler house.
(Rob Super)

(8) **51 Hollins Drive**, W. Gallwey house, 1932, WWW. A miniature ranch house with a V-shaped courtyard plan and a slate floor in the living room. Its understated, simple, cottage-like street front sports familiar Wurster ingredients: generous front door, vertical board siding, double-hung windows, a hint of tradition. It was originally intended as a summer house.

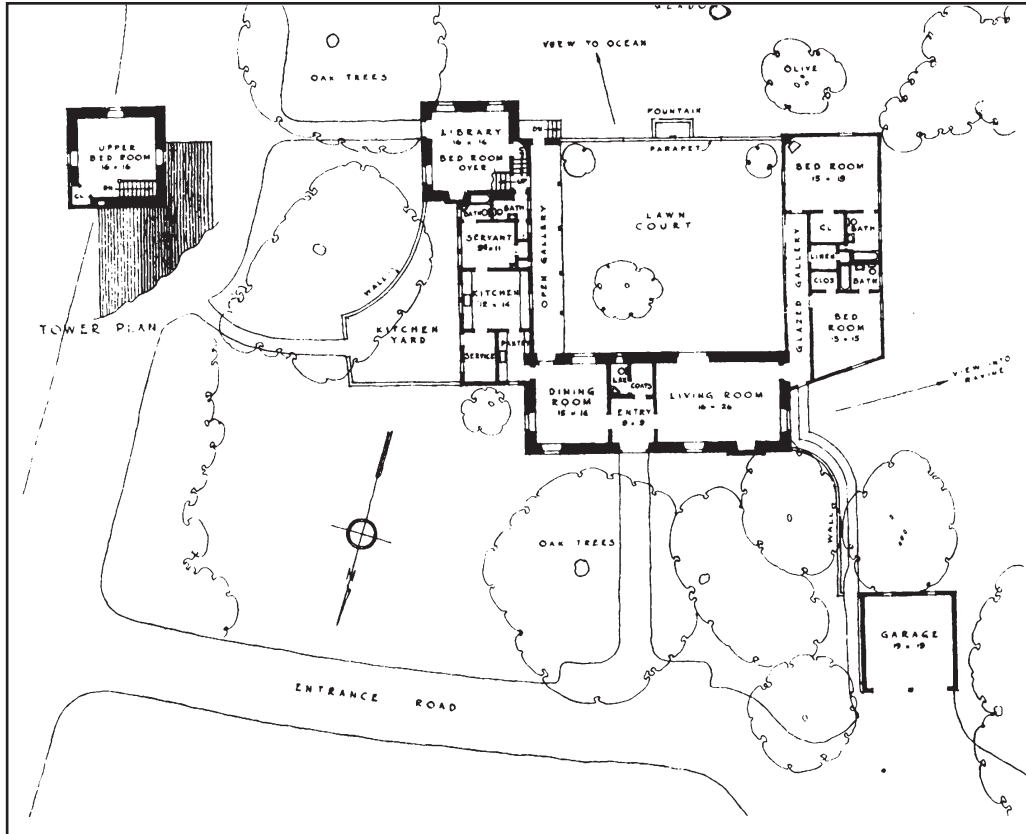
(9) **70 Hollins Drive**, MacKenzie-Field house, 1931-4, WWW. Built for the golf course architect Alister MacKenzie and shortly thereafter sold to the Field sisters, who enlarged it by adding a new living room, also designed by Wurster, in 1934. The house was meant to float at the edge of the golf course so that the owner might claim the fairway as his lawn, which it was in a sense. Wurster treated it in a modified Monterey style.

(10) **80 Hollins Drive**, Grunsky house, 1939, WWW. A simple, refined two-story box.

(11) **10 Brooktree Lane**. Dennis Britton designed this house, completed in 1976, in a manner developing out of the Wood-Butcher houses of the 1960s.

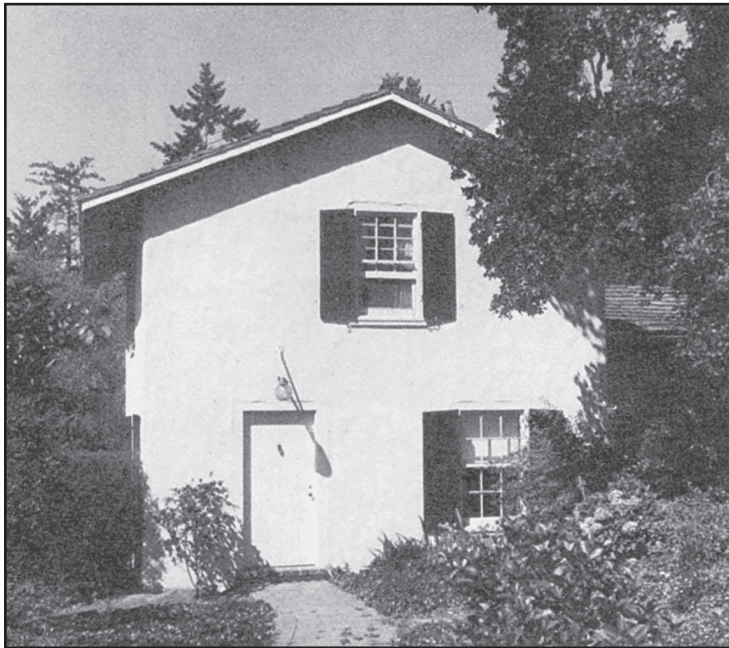


(12) Gallery of Howes-Kaplansky house.
(Rob Super)



(12) Plan of Howes-Kaplansky house.

(Daniel Gregory)



(12) Howes-Kaplansky house, side entrance to library.

(John Chase)

(12) 17 Pasatiempo Drive, 1930, WWI.

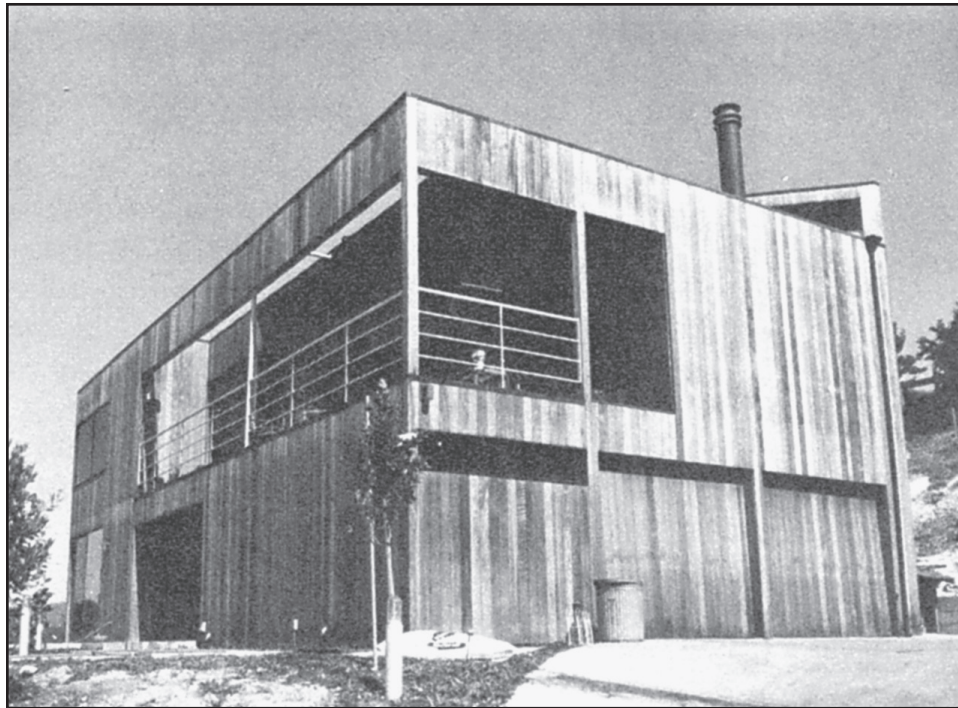
The Howes-Kaplansky house is the classic Pasatiempo house, built to set the keynote for the entire development. It symbolized the new life of the Rancho la Carbonera, the land grant in which Pasatiempo lies. The client was Robert Howes, Marion Hollins's general business manager. This house was designed to evoke the image of simplicity, without being all that simple.

The Howes residence is a grouping of separate units—bedroom wing, living room and dining room, kitchen wing, office—about the central court. Since each wing is never more than one room wide, there are windows on at least three sides of every major room, which makes the rooms appear, from inside, to be set in their own landscapes. This autonomous quality of the wings is reinforced by the use of contrasting materials, such as glass walls next to clapboards.

(13) 30 Pasatiempo Drive, West house, ca. 1953, R. L. Byrd. Built for the owners of West Foods mushroom company, this estate is remarkable for its theatrical integration of house and landscape. The house and its outbuildings are treated as a series of events in a garden: its half-hidden outline of wood and brick reflects the irregular contour of the slope; the garage executes a daring leap over a fern-draped ravine; the timbers still have their bark; and the roof is a lush, sod hanging garden. Byrd's design is one of the few buildings in California which appears to be related both to the pre-World War II Hansel-and-Gretel tradition of architects like W. R. Yelland, Carr Jones, and Hugh Comstock and to the Wood-Butcher aesthetic of the 1960s.

(14) 32 Pasatiempo Drive, R. L. Byrd also designed the Anzalone house next door, ca. 1968, a smaller version of the West house, with a flagstone living room and a kitchen conservatory.

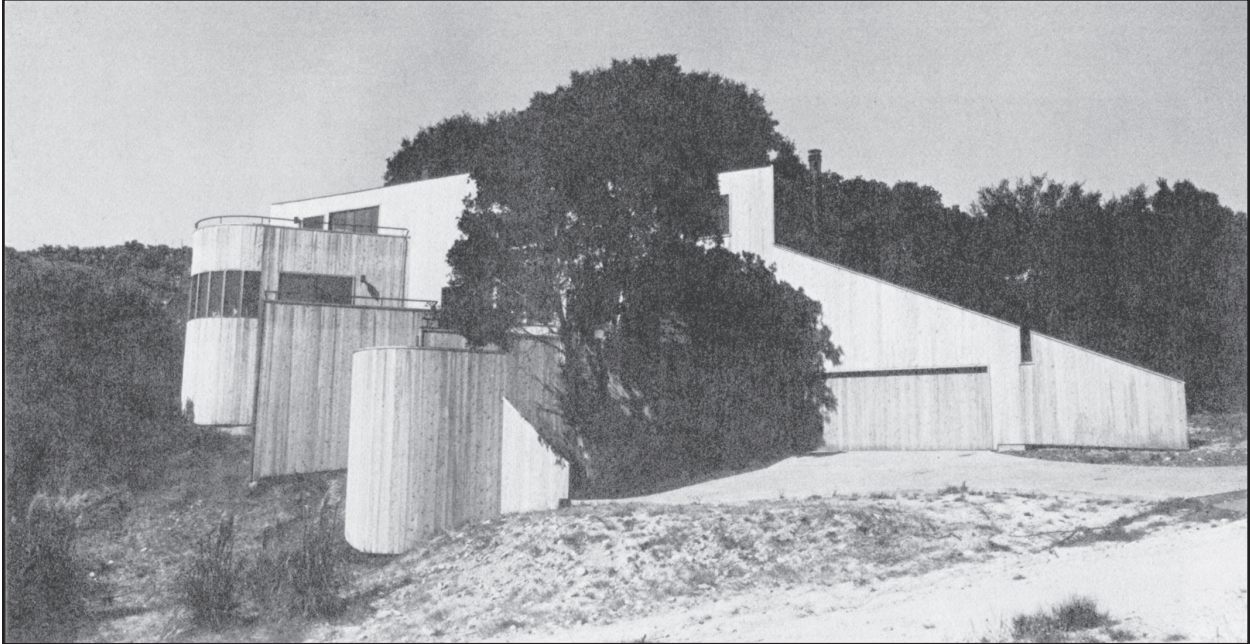
(15) 76 Pasatiempo Drive, Maridon house, 1977, Brian Maridon. A simplified version of the current 1920s Le Corbusier revival, as popularized by New York architect Richard Meier. This tasteful house is unusual for Santa Cruz in the sparseness of its modernity.



(15) Maridon house.
(John Chase)

(16) 36 Kite Hill Road, Schwartz house, 1977, Gary Garmann. A tribute to the Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull & Whittaker cut-out vertical box of the '60s and the curved forms of the New York architect Charles Gwathmey by a young Santa Cruz architect who had lived in MLTW's McElrath house on Meder Street. The interior has the large volume of vertical space one associates with MLTW houses, but the organization, configuration, and relationship of the spaces lack the refinement, complexity, and style of MLTW houses.

(17) 12 Lawridge Road, Dunmire house, 1972, Tom Williamson. The Dunmire house consists of a series of boxes arranged on several levels around a central three-story tower. It was designed to accommodate the wood-frame doors and windows collected by the family. The exterior mimics the turn-of-the-century work of Berkeley architects such as Bernard Maybeck and John Galen Howard.



(16) Schwartz house.
(John Chase)



(17) Dunmire house.
(John Chase)

(18) 7 Bird Hill Lane, Scott house, 1935, WWW, is a modified French-style house with hipped roofs and distinctive formal entrance portico framed by symmetrical pavilions. The house occupies one of the most important sites at Pasatiempo: on the knoll between the second and third fairways, directly in front of the main entrance. Marion Hollins had intended to sell the entire knoll as one lot for one grand estate. The effects of the Depression forced her to subdivide it into what is now Bird Hill Lane. The Scott house shows that the aristocratic restraint of Wurster's Pasatiempo work had the potential for hauteur. It is important to remember that Wurster received some of his training at the distinctly upper-crust Eastern firm of Delano & Aldrich, and that the restrained Regency-style Smith house at Berkeley is contemporaneous with the masterful simplicity of the Gregory ranch house.

(19) 3 Clubhouse Road, Randall house, ca. 1960, Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons. A late example of the modernized board-and-batten tradition and the second Wurster house for this Santa Cruz family.

(20) 5 Clubhouse Road, Church house, 1931, WWW. Built for the resident landscape architect and his wife, this house has a frontier-style fireplace in the kitchen, conversation pit in the living room (one of the very first), and a large shed-roof studio, which was Church's office.

(21) 20 Clubhouse Road, main clubhouse, 1935, Clarence Tantau. A large, rambling house in a modified Monterey style, commanding a spectacular view over the golf course to the bay. The main room is a grandly proportioned salon with a fireplace at each end.

The entrance facade has the same concern with arrival and entrance that characterized the more consciously pretentious houses built in Los Angeles during the 1960s. The separation of the building into hipped-roof pavilions in the French manner and the emphasis on, and height of, the entry have become the hallmarks of this Beverly Hills Regency look.

(22) 28 Clubhouse Road, caddy house, 1930, WWW. Though completely altered, this residence contains the original caddy house, once an extremely simple two-room, whitewashed board structure. According to photographer Roger Sturtevant (whose photos made Pasatiempo famous), the architecture was either praised for its refreshing simplicity or damned as a shack (not visible from the road).

(23) 34 Clubhouse Road, first clubhouse, 1930, Clarence A. Tantau. A simplified Monterey-style, two-story house distinguished on the south by a finely proportioned two-story veranda. The garden was designed by Thomas D. Church (not visible from the road).



(21) Pasatiempo main clubhouse of 1935.

(John Chase)

Notes

- 1 Interview, Lucy Butler, (Wurster client), September 1979.
- 2 Pasatiempo brochure, Wurster Papers, Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design.
- 3 “Story Book House Fits Outdoor Life,” *San Francisco Call Bulletin*, September 26, 1931, [available on microfilm at San Francisco Public Library].
- 4 Elizabeth Church, “Pasatiempo”, *California Arts & Architecture*, June, 1931, p. 41.
- 5 Interview, Donald and Josephine Gregory (Wurster clients and friends of Marion Hollins) September 1979.
- 6 Letter, Wurster Papers, Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design.
- 7 “Story Book House Fits Outdoor Life,” *San Francisco Call Bulletin*, September 26, 1931, [available on microfilm at San Francisco Public Library].
- 8 *Ibid.*

About the Author

A longtime magazine and website editor, Daniel P. Gregory holds a PhD in Architectural History from UC Berkeley, and is the author of *Cliff May and the Modern Ranch House*, and most recently, *The New Farm: Contemporary Rural Architecture*.

Editor's Note: Many thanks to the author for providing the biographical information above, and also the source reference information for the Notes. Except for a few minor copy edits, the article text in this article edition is unchanged from the original 1979 version. Page layout and format have been adjusted to Online History Journal standards.