

the Country Almanac



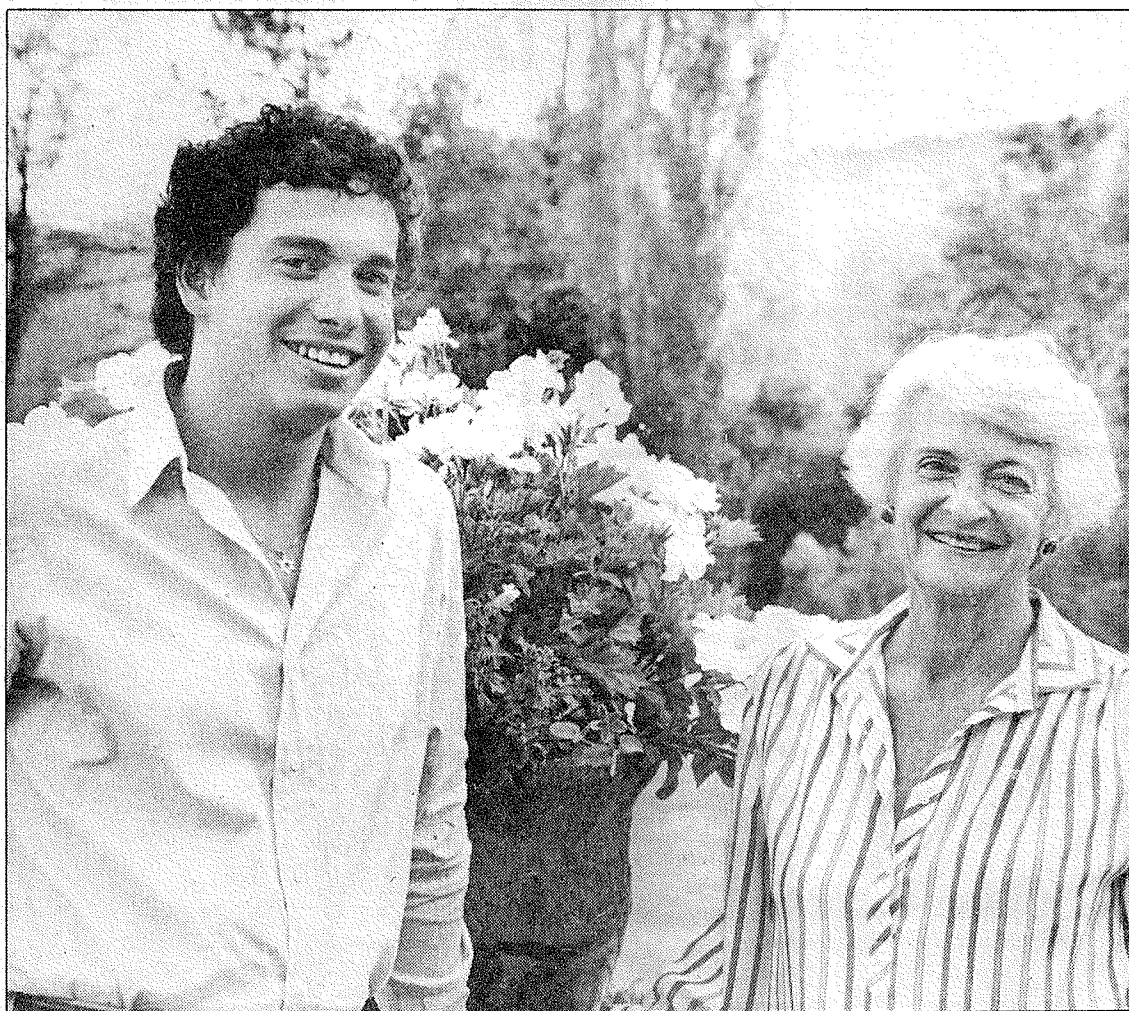
2 September 15, 1982 851-0730 the independent newspaper for Woodside, Portola Valley, Sharon Heights, Atherton, Ladera, Stanford Hills, and Menlo Park



GREEN GABLES, the Mortimer Fleishhacker estate in Woodside, as seen from the lily pond. Every formal

pot and urn was designed by architect Charles Sumner Green. See stories on page 2.

Continuing a tradition—a Woodside estate



MRS. MORTIMER FLEISHHACKER JR. with her grandson, Marc Fleishhacker, represent the second and fourth generations to live on the family's Woodside estate. Photos by Carol Ivie.

*Plans resurface to
save 'The Hill'*

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*Exclusive men's club
comes out
for Flight Sunday*

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*Wildcats dance their
way to Fitness*

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Four generations made Woodside their summer home

BY MARION SOFTKY

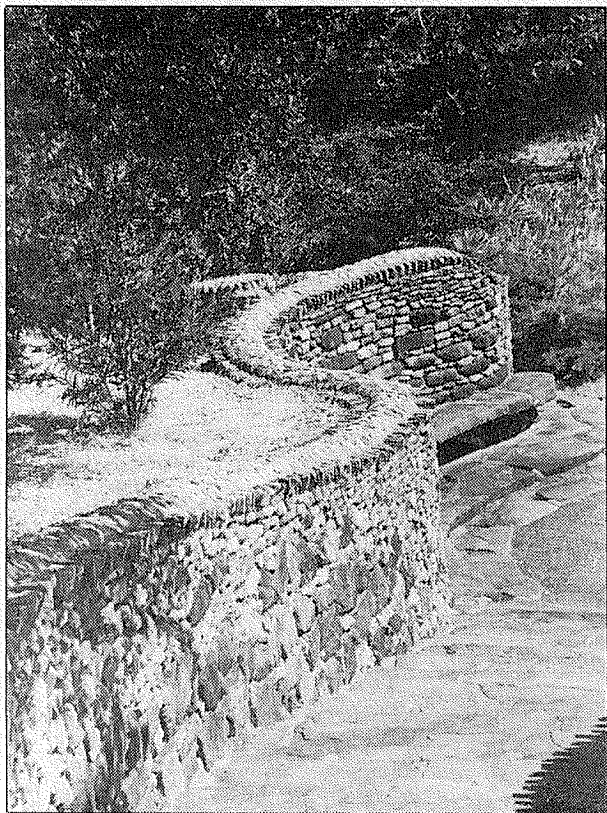
The great country estates which marked the Peninsula for generations around the turn of the century are an endangered species.

Many families that used to summer in Woodside and Atherton have dispersed over the years. As they faced problems of war, depression, inflation, lack of servants, changing lifestyles, their estates have broken up one by one, often going out of the family and being subdivided. Fine old houses have been torn down or converted to such other uses as museums, schools, shops, offices, art galleries.

A notable exception to this trend is Green Gables, the estate of the Mortimer Fleishhacker family on Albion, Woodside. Here three generations of Fleishhackers still make their summer home on 75 beautiful acres with a historic house and formal gardens designed by the famous California architect Charles Sumner Greene.

"I came here as a bride in 1929. I've been coming back every summer for 52 years," says Mrs. Mortimer Fleishhacker Jr., who lives most of the year in San Francisco. "It's said San Francisco is the only city in the world which you leave in the summer to get warm."

A vivacious, charming woman with silver hair, Mrs.



THIS WAVY WALL of carefully selected rocks makes the transition from the urn above to the arches around the Roman pool.

Fleishhacker is seated on a small sofa in the bright, airy room with gleaming antiques and a huge fireplace along the wall. Outside is a spacious view of the formal gardens and the hills beyond.

"Father always loved a view," she comments. She is referring to her father-in-law, the late Mortimer Fleishhacker Sr. who commissioned Greene to build a summer house for his family in 1911. Greene continued to work on the formal gardens and later the Roman pool off and on for the next 22 years.

Now five Fleishhackers live on the estate for parts of each summer. Mrs. Mortimer Fleishhacker Jr. occupies the big house, while her three children—Mortimer Fleishhacker III, David Fleishhacker, and Delia Ehrlich,

'I came here as a bride in 1929. I've been coming back every summer for 52 years,' says Mrs. Mortimer Fleishhacker, Jr.

have family houses nearby. Several of these were designed by William Wurster, another well known architect. Her grandson, Marc Fleishhacker, a student at Brown University, lives in one of the Wurster houses which was formerly servants' quarters.

Meanwhile the clan continues to grow. Mrs. Fleishhacker has ten grandchildren. The fifth generation is represented by her first great grandchild, now 17 months old.

For most of the year the Fleishhackers are based in San Francisco where their name is linked to some of the city's most popular attractions. The zoo and swimming pool (now closed) which bear the family name were named after the first Mortimer's brother Herbert, who was city parks commissioner for 30 years.

Asked about her activities, Mrs. Fleishhacker first mentions that she is chairman of the board of the University of San Francisco where, she notes, she is the first woman and the first non-Catholic to hold the post. She also serves on the boards of an imposing number of other cultural educational and international goodwill organizations.

Mrs. Fleishhacker remembers with pleasure her early days on the Woodside estate. She was being courted when the Roman pool was being built where there had previously been a nine-hole golf course.

On their honeymoon, instead of leaving immediately for Europe, the young couple spent their first few days at the Woodside house which her mother-in-law had opened specially for them. "When we came in, we were greeted by a giant bell of white flowers in the entrance hall," she recalls.

Up until World War II there was a full farm on the estate with cows and chickens and squabs and ducks and geese. "When my children were small, they had all of

their milk and butter and eggs from the farm. The chauffeur would drive them up (to their San Francisco residence)," she says.

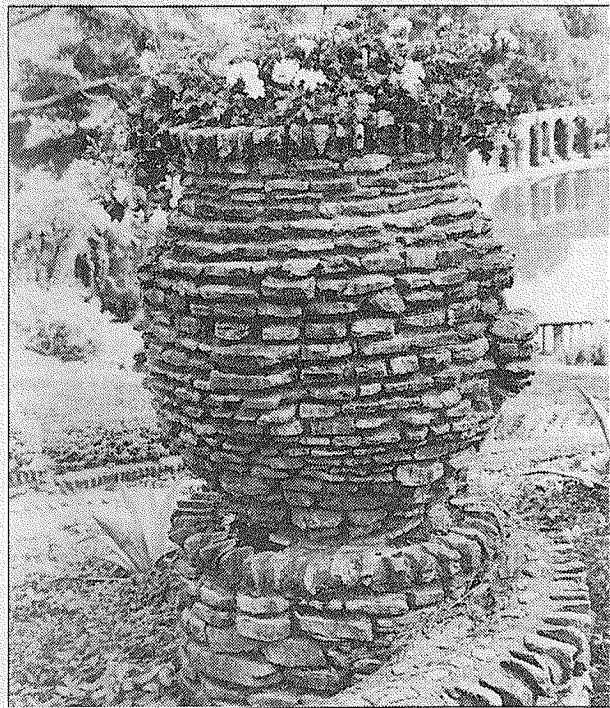
The farm disappeared during the war because the people to run it disappeared. Otherwise life on the estate has changed surprisingly little. Mrs. Fleishhacker still enjoys entertaining. Most recently this year 600 friends gathered for a Fourth of July picnic by the Roman pool.

What next for the Fleishhacker estate?

The Fleishhackers have applied to the Town of Woodside for an unusual subdivision, one that will allow them to preserve the integrity and privacy of the estate. They hope to establish eight new lots around the periphery of the main house and gardens. Under a special agreement, these lots would not have to be developed right away but could be held for family members or to be sold off if necessary in the future.

"I don't foresee wanting or having to sell," explains Marc Fleishhacker. "The main reason for the subdivision is to allow members of the family to live on the lots or to sell land if we're forced to."

Marc himself hopes one day to convert the estate from a part-time to a full-time home. "I enjoy the city but I'm not a city person," he concludes, "I hope someday Woodside will be my first home."



EVERY ONE OF THE DOZENS of urns and flower pots in the formal gardens was individually designed by Charles Greene. This one is made of small reddish rocks which match the materials in the arches at either end of the Roman pool below.

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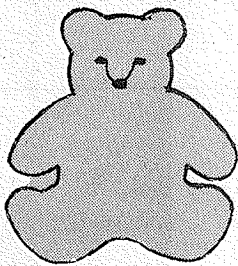
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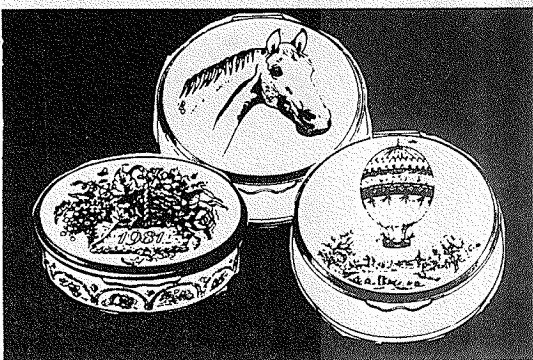
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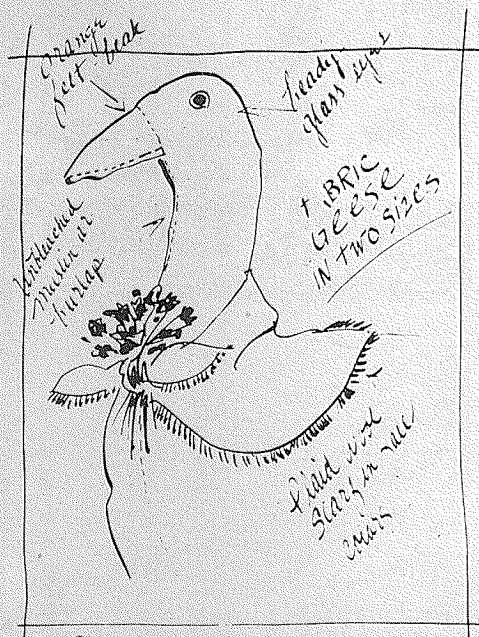
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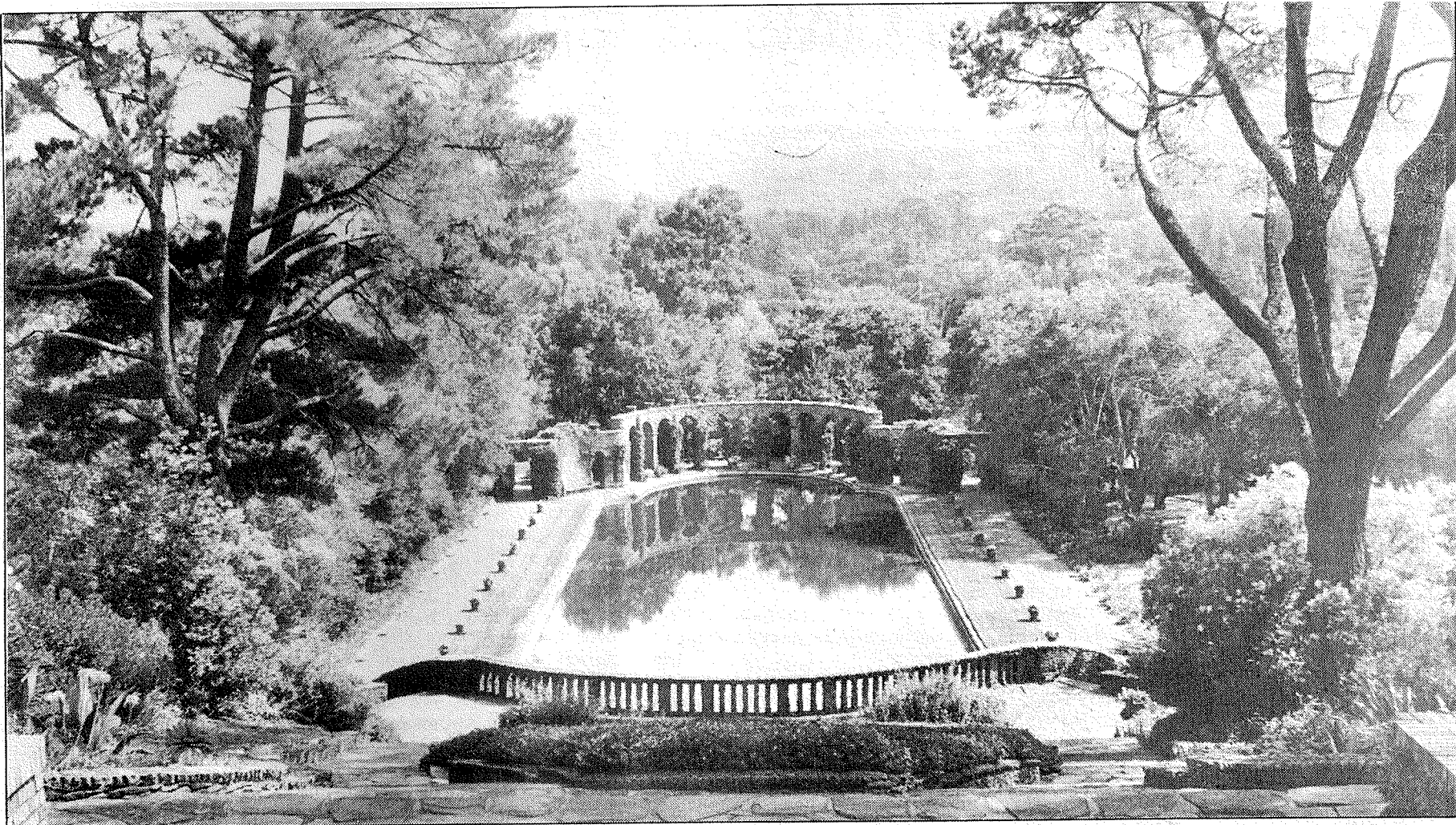
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LOOKING THE OTHER WAY from the house lies the Roman pool with arches reflected in the quiet

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sioned the house in 1911.

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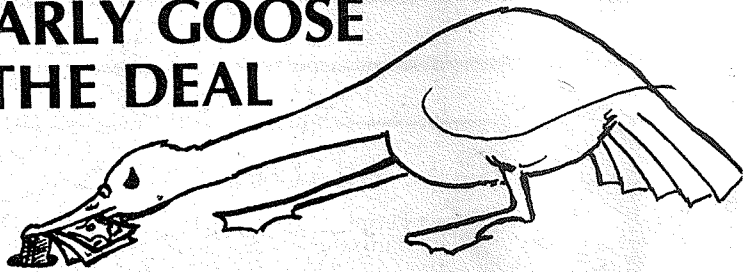
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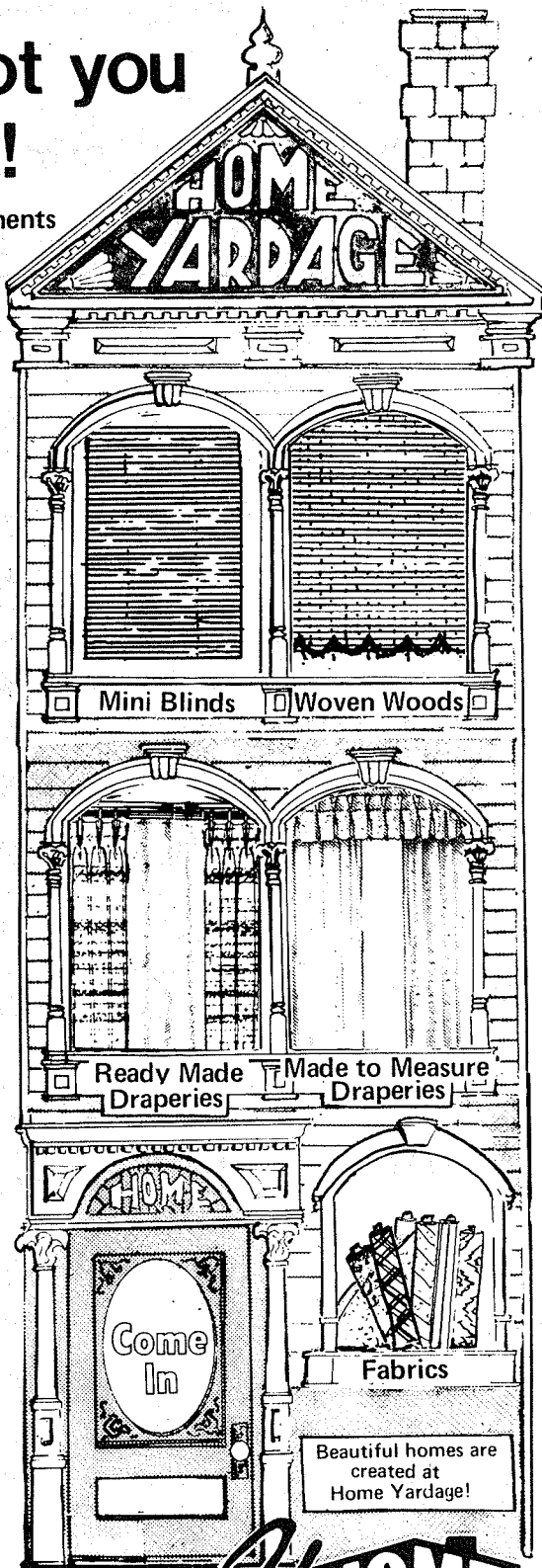
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**HOME
Yardage**

Green Gables was Greene's largest project

BY MARION SOFTKY

Green Gables, the Woodside estate of the Mortimer Fleishhacker family with its 70-year old house and formal gardens, was the largest and most ambitious project of noted California architect Charles Greene.

"The architect's greatest attribute was his ability to match the form of the house to the site," explains Marc Fleishhacker as he stands by the lily pond looking across an expanse of formal lawn toward the large, slightly curving house on top of the knoll. "The whole house slopes down and feeds into the hill. It's very natural."

Marc, who is studying political science at Brown University, is the great-grandson of the banking and paper magnate who commissioned the house in 1911. When Mortimer Fleishhacker Sr. wanted a summer home for his growing family, he searched the Bay Area before settling on 75 rolling acres in Woodside. Then he searched the state looking for an architect.

The Greene brothers had established a reputation for developing ultimate California bungalows in the Pasadena area and were ready to expand their scope. But when Fleishhacker hired the Greene firm, he wanted an English-style country house with thatched roof.

Greene designed and built the house and then spent the next 20 years off and on developing the formal gardens. Both house and gardens show the same sense of detail the Greens lavished on all their projects.

The soft curve of the roof seen from the lily pond results from a unique process of bending redwood shingles and molding them individually onto the roof to resemble thatch. Craftsmen steam the shingles and then nail them onto the roof when wet to give the free form feel of a

thatched roof, Marc explains. The roof is presently being redone by the original techniques, and the only way to tell the new from the old is a slight difference in color and a smoother, less weathered surface.

Reflecting its surroundings, the lily pond still has water lilies in bloom. The carp that used to live there have gone, Marc notes, victims of hungry squirrels.

Turning away from the main house, the visitor encounters a surprise vista. Down a stately flagstone staircase stands a Roman pool reminiscent of Hadrian's Villa near Rome.

Here the Greene way with details of color and materials is particularly striking. Small reddish rocks embedded in concrete to form a rough mosaic start with urns above the flagstone steps. Low walls of the same rock surfaces plunge down the staircase among the flowerbeds in curves like a dinosaur's tail. At the bottom they blend into the same kind of rockwork makes up the curved arches at either end of the shallow pool.

Elsewhere in the gardens are dozens of urns and flower pots, each individually designed for its place.

In another direction is a small rock building with two stories that Greene built as a dairy house shortly after the Roman pool was completed. The lower story was used as a dairy—separating cream and making butter. Above, the open porch with arched windows was intended for Mrs. Fleishhacker to serve afternoon tea. However, the dairy house was too far from the main house and was seldom used for tea. It later gained the nickname, "Greene's Folly."

The outside tour concludes with Greene's swimming pool, now more than 60 years old. The curved pool looks fresh and new and provides a great temptation to plunge into on a warm muggy afternoon.

The interior of the house departs strikingly from the earlier Greene and Greene houses which featured dark, carved and polished woods. The Fleishhacker house is bright and airy. High plaster ceilings are curved, but still have Greene detail in the form of delicate bas reliefs on the ceilings.

"They didn't want dark wood for a summer house. They wanted their summer home to be light," Marc explains. "It is still used as a summer home."

The furnishings are very much the same as they were when Mrs. Mortimer Fleishhacker Jr., who still spends summers in the main house, first came as a bride in 1929. Antiques line the walls, but there is light-colored functional furniture. On the wall of the entrance hall, there is a painting of a clown, reminiscent of one of Picasso's gentler moods. It was painted by Mrs. Mortimer

Fleishhacker Sr. who enjoyed painting in a little studio on the grounds until the day she died.

Outside the ground floor rooms is a broad terrace where the family members still gather on Sunday afternoons. However, the great oak which used to shade the terrace has long since gone.

The one typical Greene and Greene room in the house is the cardroom off the living room which glows darkly with carved and polished wood. Here Greene did everything—the cardtable and chairs, the chandelier, the

Mortimer Fleishhacker Sr.

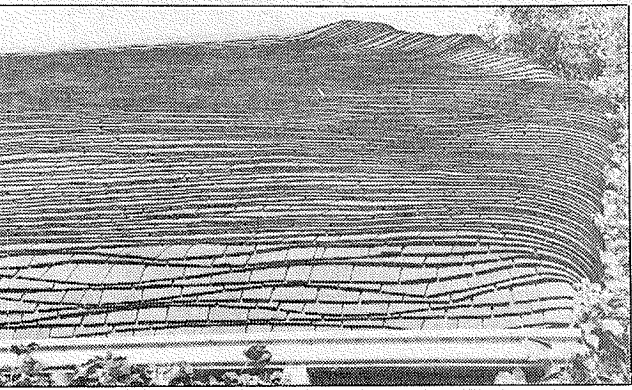
wanted a house

with a thatched roof

carving on panels just below the ceiling, the patterns engraved into the ceiling, and the four panels carved to depict the four corners of the world. A television set in front of the window suggests its present use.

Mrs. Fleishhacker Jr. still remembers when Charles Greene used to stay with them. "He used to come to the table and dream," she recalls. He ate slowly and they ate fast and Mrs. Fleishhacker Sr. had problems keeping meals together. "He would take a bite and just drift away. I guess that's part of being creative."

Much of the information for this article was taken from the book, "Greene and Greene: Architecture as a Fine Art" by Randell L. Makinson, Peregrine Smith Inc. 1977.



Detail from the unique roof on the Fleishhacker house.

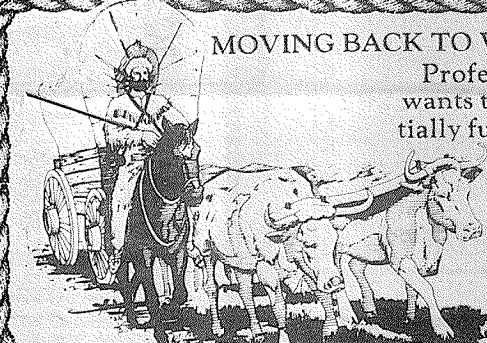
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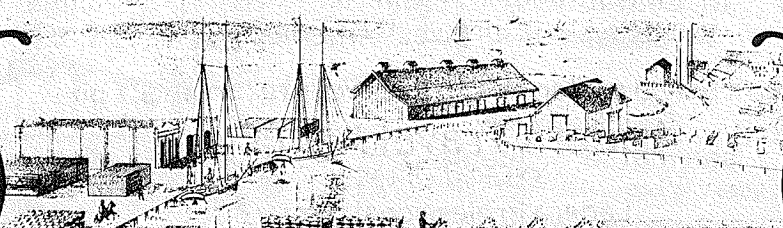
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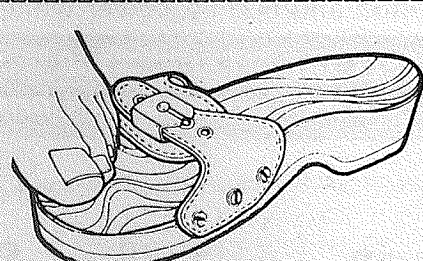
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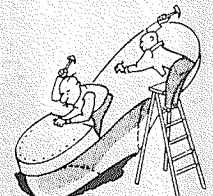
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