



Greene & Greene and green

When Andrew and Blenda Wright restored a prized California bungalow, they showcased both history and sustainability

At the beginning of the 20th century, in one of American architecture's great collaborations, Charles and Henry Greene raised Arts and Crafts style to new heights. Their designs combined simplicity and refinement, celebrating natural materials and motifs while exhibiting an intimate awareness of the landscape. Outstretched eaves provided shade, ample windows captured views and ensured cross-ventilation, and broad terraces and sleeping porches embraced the mild California climate. Wood, the original renewable resource, was deployed to dazzling effect, from gleaming, hand-rubbed beams to Asian-influenced joinery and eye-pleasing inlays. In many ways, the brothers' California houses embodied "environmental design" long before the concept came into vogue.

Recently, one of the earliest Arts and Crafts houses designed by Greene & Greene benefited from an ambitious, eco-friendly



restoration. Built in 1903 for a young mother named Mary Reeve Darling, the house marked the brothers' shift from an early, more conventional style to a groundbreaking new form of design.

Andrew and Blenda Wright first looked at the century-old house in the college town of Claremont because of its appealing location on a peaceful, tree-lined street. During that initial visit it was obvious that the aging Darling House required attention. Shingle siding had darkened over time. Multiple amendments and additions, as well as inappropriate plate-

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glass windows, had compromised the original form, and though the foundation remained sound, the timeworn structure needed major alterations to meet seismic and environmental standards.

A retired builder, Andrew Wright was well aware that careful planning was the best way to avoid expensive surprises. So he evaluated both the scope and cost of the project with Hartman-Baldwin Design/Build, a local firm that had remodeled the home's kitchen in the early 1990s. Wright also looked at "a lot of Greene & Greene houses."

Project architect Alan Brookman says, "This wasn't one of [their] grand houses—it had a more rustic feeling, like a lodge, which suited what was then a rural area." (Blenda Wright notes that because the house was built for a divorcée who "couldn't afford a lot of fancy fixtures," the house was consciously simple, not extravagant.) "This was a pivotal project, one of the first times the Greene brothers sketched lighting and furniture designs for a house," Brookman says. "You can see them starting to develop their own Arts

and Crafts vocabulary."

Organized around a central staircase, the Darling House had four upstairs bedrooms tucked under a wide gambrel roof pared away on either side to frame recessed windows. Downstairs, the living room and study flanked the entrance hall through sliding doors that allowed spaces to be "converted virtually into a single room," recalled Mary Darling's son Kenneth.

The versatile living room seems contemporary today, as do the original indoor-outdoor spaces: a sunroom off



The Greene brothers used redwood throughout the interiors of the Darling House. Original details in the entrance hall include the board-and-batten wainscoting and pierced panels screening the staircase. The stained-glass windows are new.



ations, and bring it up to current environmental standards. “For every decision, we asked ourselves what Greene & Greene would do if they were alive today,” says HartmanBaldwin CEO Bill Baldwin. “Everything had to make it through that filter.”

Period-appropriate shingle siding (36 inches tall, with a 12-inch reveal) was sourced in Canada. The new siding and roof went on over closed-cell foam and fire-retardant cellulose insulation, with walls sheathed in OSB wood panels and a vapor barrier. Double-glazing replaced vintage single-glazing, and construction crews reused original window frames wherever possible, only installing custom-built reproductions where the c. 1900 frames were damaged beyond repair.

In the sunroom, multi-pane casements based on the original Greene & Greene latticework replaced plate-glass windows. Artisans also reproduced the front door and replaced damaged flooring stock.

Ample insulation allowed for downsizing the new heating and air-conditioning systems—delivering substantial energy and cost savings. “It’s true that all the new material we put into the house represents a lot of embodied energy,” Brookman says. “But the resulting conservation compensates for that... The goal was not only to save energy but to make the house more comfortable to live in.” The restoration program also cut water use dramatically, with low-flow fixtures and a drip irrigation system.

“Preservation has always promoted sustainability by reusing materials and saving the energy embodied in them,” notes Devon Hartman, Bill Baldwin’s partner. “It’s also increasingly about recycling stuff that would otherwise go into a landfill.” For this restoration, everything that could

be recycled—scrap lumber and metal, cardboard packaging, and so on—went into a dedicated, city-supplied bin for reuse elsewhere. Even the 1921 garage was moved to another property.

Thanks to a methodical emphasis on environmental benefits, the Darling-Wright House is the first historic residence in Southern California to earn a GreenPoint rating, a counterpart to LEED certification that recognizes sustainability in new and existing buildings.

Aesthetically, the design team strove to achieve the right tone, figuratively and literally. The exterior stain matches the original shade, discovered behind one vintage light fixture in the old loggia. In the living area, age-darkened redwood

the study; and an open loggia, above the front door, that served as a sleeping porch. (Both were ultimately enclosed with windows.) But the 1903 floor plan had only one bathroom and a modest kitchen. Despite the addition of later bathrooms and unencumbered kitchen space, the arrangement of spaces held limited appeal for present-day residents.

After closing on the house in 2007, the Wrights prepared an audacious restoration plan. They wanted to honor the structure’s rare form and history, correct its dated and inappropriate alter-



ceiling planks had “too many layers of stain and paint to strip,” Brookman explains. “So we had them faux-painted to resemble the ceiling as it originally looked.” The maple used for the kitchen cabinets may seem light compared with the dark woodwork of many Arts and Crafts interiors, but as Brookman notes, it’s the same wood used in the kitchen of Greene & Greene’s acclaimed Gamble House in nearby Pasadena. Stripping the board-and-batten walls upstairs would have been contrary to the architects’ intent, according to project interior designer Su Bacon: “That was all paint-grade wood, not meant to be revealed.” So she had it painted, drawing from a historically correct palette of sage, gold, wheat, and other harmonious hues.

“We wanted to dress up the interiors without losing their essential simplicity,” says Bacon, who has worked on six other Greene & Greene houses. She gave the rooms a mix of Craftsman-style furniture, fabrics, and lighting, much of it inspired by Greene & Greene designs.

Brookman, steeped in Greene & Greene minutiae, says, “Without drawing too much from their later designs, we wanted to reference them, as well as original details.” For example, the living room’s new glass-fronted bookcases, which replaced rickety bookshelves, echo a living room bookcase with cruciform cutouts at the foot of the staircase; the bench between the glass doors was based on one built into the entrance hall.

Such subtle improvements blend seamlessly into the overall design. Out went the odd patch of drywall, surface-mounted wiring, and ill-advised alterations. The front window bays, which rest on boulders, inspired a new one out back. Two smallish bedrooms were combined to make a master bedroom and a walk-through closet leading to a

carefully detailed bath. The master bedroom’s low ceiling was raised a couple of feet, and crowned with rafters encased in box beams modeled on the beams downstairs. And new French doors at side and rear entrances now connect the house to its much-enhanced surroundings.

Outside additions were carefully conceived to complement the style and

feature just outside the sunroom.

Completed late last year, this project “succeeded in being as authentic as possible while making the house more livable,” architect Brookman says. With an unabashed devotion to Greene & Greene—and green design—it has already attracted recognition from local architects and critics.

In a ceremony last spring, the Wrights



The Wrights fitted the guest room (above) with a new Craftsman-style daybed and a reproduction Greene & Greene sconce. The light fixture above the breakfast table (opposite) was fabricated locally, based on a sketch by Charles Greene. It once hung in the entrance hall.

scale of the original structure. Among the typical Greene & Greene touches are large, mortise-and-tenon pergolas supporting wisteria (depicted in new front-door art glass), the “peanut brittle masonry” of chunky stone walls, and the curving, “cloud lift” railing on the rear deck. Both the new garage and the studio behind it seem to share the house’s DNA. What had been an ordinary yard now offers seating areas and focal points, including a burbling water

and the restoration team dedicated a time capsule and then sealed it into an upstairs wall. The capsule contained house plans and photos, as well as a letter from the Wrights to future owners—a fitting flourish for a project that took the long view. As Bill Baldwin says, “This house is ready for the next hundred years.”

Jeff Book has written about design and travel for *Elle Decor*, *Coastal Living*, *the Los Angeles Times*, and *Departures*.