

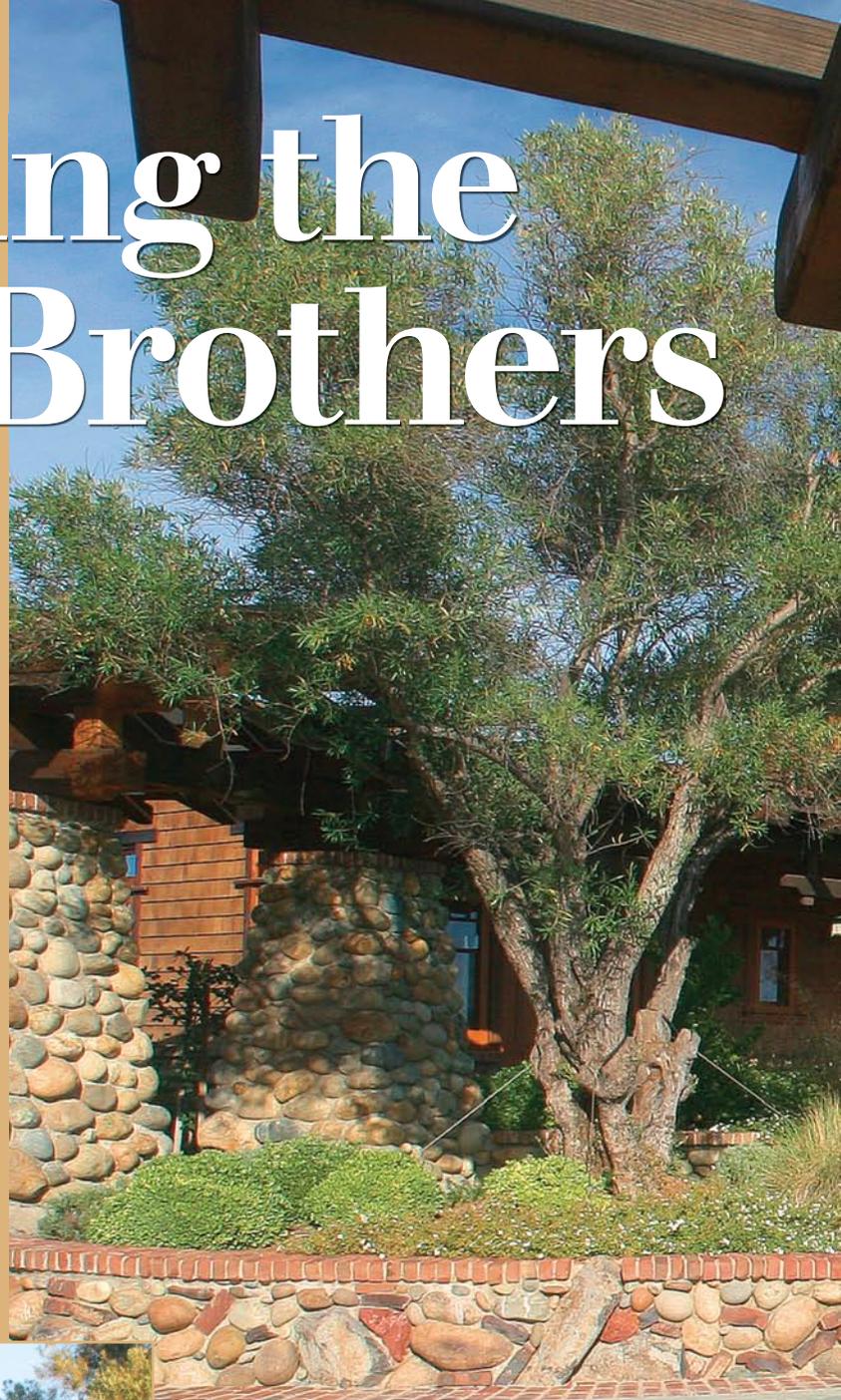
# Channeling the Greene Brothers

A new house builds on the tradition forged by America's greatest Arts and Crafts architects

BY CHARLES MILLER

**T**wenty-seven years ago, when this magazine was in its third year, we got a letter from one of our readers commenting on the houses we were publishing. He wrote, "You need to publish less young and green, and more Greene and Greene."

The enduring appeal of the Greene brothers' work is undeniable (sidebar p. 61), and like oceanfront property, they're not making it anymore. But that doesn't stop people from trying. During my 30 years with this magazine, I've seen lots of projects inspired by their work. Truth be told, only a few of them have even come close to capturing a glimmer of that old Greene brothers' magic. The problem is simple: You can't just cop a couple of Greene brothers' details and expect the design to hold together. In their most memorable houses, Charles and Henry Greene designed *everything*, and the houses were built with exemplary care out of the best



**Porches and pergolas take in the sun.** A timber-frame sleeping porch off the master bedroom crowns the intersection of the two wings of the house (photo above). Below to its left, the entry gallery is akin to a sidewalk café on the way to the front door. The garage (photo left) is topped by a guest room with a balcony. Photos taken at A and B on site plan.





**SPECS**

- Bedrooms:** 4, including guest house
- Bathrooms:** 4 full, 2 half-baths, including guest house
- Size:** Main house, 4230 sq. ft.; guest house, 1020 sq. ft.
- Cost of buildings and site work:** 322 miles of sausage at \$4 per ft.
- Completed:** 2007
- Location:** Healdsburg, Calif.
- Architect:** John Malick & Associates
- Project architect:** Greg Klein
- Builder:** Ken Finley

**AN ARTS AND CRAFTS COMPOUND**

Perched on a hilltop, the house, guest house and garage, and pool define an outdoor courtyard that is laced with flowing pathways and rock-walled planters. An outdoor kitchen off the great room is at the ready for wood-fired pizzas. Photo taken at C on floor plan.

*Photos taken at lettered positions.*

materials. That is why their correspondence with their clients was often about the money.

**It started with antiques**

If you like gourmet sausages, you've probably heard of Bruce Aidells. He's the cheerful bearded chef on the label looking up at you from the sausage cooler in your grocery store's meat department. In the mid-1980s, Aidells got on board the gourmet food train with a sausage startup that caught fire.

A few years later, he and his wife, chef and restaurateur Nancy Oakes, were in the midst of remodeling their kitchen when he paid a visit to a local antique store. There, he found three pieces of English Arts and Crafts furniture—an armoire, a linen press, and a buffet sideboard, all in quarter-sawn oak—that he knew would be right at home in their reconfigured kitchen.

These pieces turned out to be the gateway antiques that led to a full-blown Arts and Crafts addiction. Pretty soon, Aidells was touring the Thorsen House in Berkeley, one of the Greene brothers' "ultimate bungalows." A trip to the Greene brothers' Mecca, the Gamble House in Pasadena, soon fol-





**No skimping allowed**

Lavish attention to detail in subdued, related shapes is absolutely essential to conjuring the spirit of a Greene brothers' house. In the entry hall, fiddleback-mahogany paneling is framed by interlocking battens with eased edges. Stained-glass panels in the door and sidelites recall the native oaks on the ridge. Photos taken at D on floor plan.



lowed. Aidells was hooked on Arts and Crafts, and he didn't want to stop with the occasional sideboard.

In 2002, Aidells sold his share in the company that bears his name and began a new career as a cookbook author. All of a sudden, he had the resources to build the home of his dreams: a country house based on the work of the Greene brothers, with a great room that would include a world-class kitchen. Riding a hunch, Aidells picked a Bay Area architecture firm that had never designed a house like this. But John Malick & Associates of Emeryville impressed Aidells with their track record of completing ambitious houses in a variety of traditional styles. Greg Klein, a principal at the firm, had long admired the Greenes' work. He and Aidells began identifying the elements of various houses that could be extracted and woven into a revival of the Greene brothers' style.

### Drawing on the big bungalows

The hilltop site outside Healdsburg, Calif., overlooks vineyards and oak forests. The main house stretches south as a lazy V to catch the light and views (site plan, p. 56).

The entry gallery takes its cues from a similar covered walkway at the Thorsen House. The grand staircase just inside the front door is adapted from the one at the Blacker House. It leads to an upstairs master bedroom with a timber-frame sleeping porch patterned after the one at the Gamble House. The kitchen pot rack and the trusses in the great-room ceiling take their form from the inglenook in the Gamble House. And so on.

### Structure as ornament

In high school, the Greene brothers spent their afternoons in manual training classes learning the value of handcrafted work as championed by William Morris and John Ruskin. This experience eventually led them to explore the decorative possibilities in meticulously finished structural elements. They took the angular exposed joinery of Craftsman-style furniture and made it their own with supple lines that taper, swell, and curve.

The Greenes were equal-opportunity adapters in their search for inspiration. They found endless ways of mixing the stepped cloud-lift patterns from Chinese furniture and exposed joinery of Japanese temples, both inside and out. The lantern that Klein designed for the dining area is an assortment of signature Greene and Greene moves in wood (photo facing page).

### Don't hide a crack—highlight it

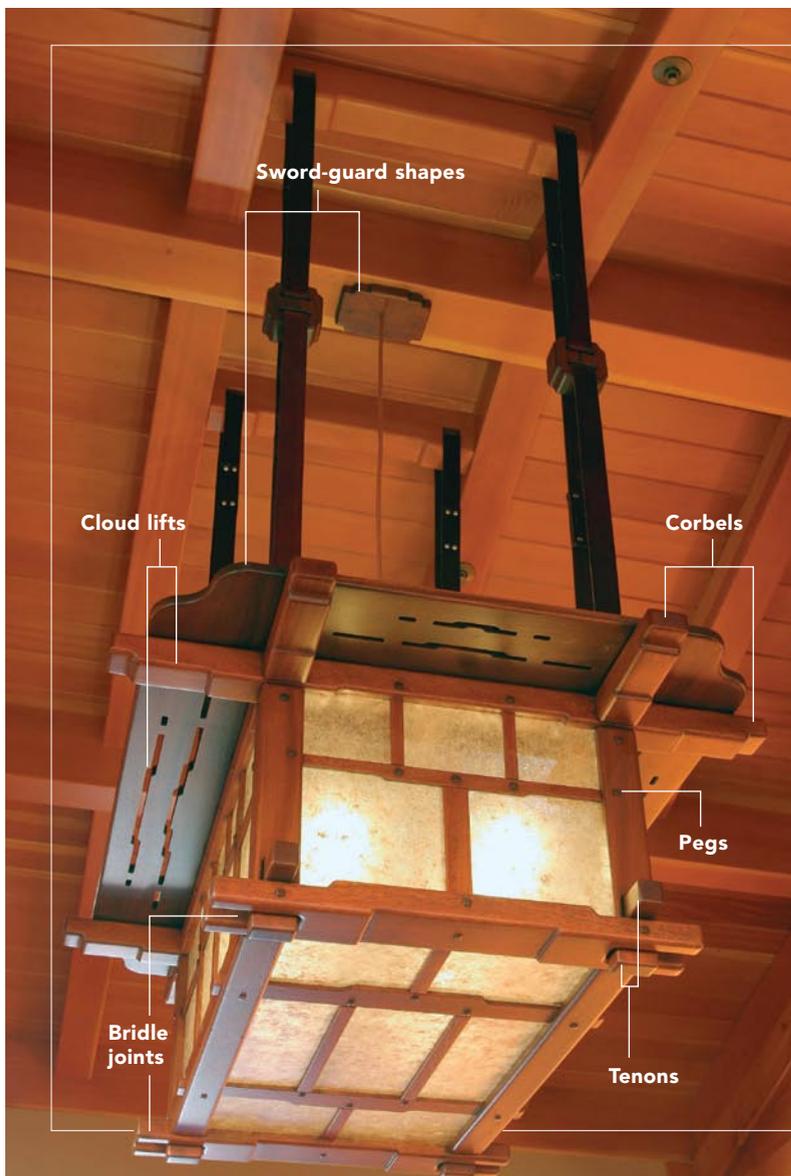
Builder Ken Finley also made the trip to Pasadena to study the Gamble House. Among the most important



For more photos of the house and a list of those who worked on it, visit [FineHomebuilding.com](http://FineHomebuilding.com).

## Raise high the ridge

The dining table is at the center of the great room, under a cathedral ceiling that stretches to the sitting area by the fireplace. Because their masterworks were always more than one story, the Greens never had the chance to play with timber-frame trusses in a cathedral ceiling such as this. Photos taken at E and F on floor plan.



## RELATED SHAPES, ENDLESS VARIATIONS

The great-room light fixtures are studies in Greene brothers' joinery details. These same shapes are repeated throughout the house at larger scales in every architectural element.

lessons he learned is the way the Greens orchestrated layers of wood. At butt joints, intersecting pieces are often of slightly different thicknesses, varying typically by 1/8 in. In addition, the edges and ends of each piece are slightly rounded, even if they meet in the same plane. These two details create shadowlines of differing weights that emphasize individual parts. Done right, they fit together into rhythmic wooden puzzles (photos p. 57).

At the staircase, this layering begins with panels of fiddleback-mahogany veneers glued to sheets of MDF affixed to the stair framing. The veneer panels are framed by solid-mahogany battens, both vertical and horizontal, pin-nailed to the substrate. Walnut plugs cap the screw holes, and ebony splines join cap rail to balusters.

To keep compositions like these from getting too busy, the Greene brothers favored woods that have very little figure, like mahogany and teak. The FSC-certified mahogany used in the Aidells house was selected for its color uniformity and then treated with potassium dichromate to bring out its deep brick-red color. Sanded to 320 grit to make it inviting to the touch and finished with lacquer, the stair takes on a baronial splendor.

### A kitchen befitting an ultimate bungalow

If you page through the floor plans of the Greene brothers' houses and pick out the kitchens, you'll find unremarkable workstations for servants, typically behind at least two closed doors. So there wasn't a model Greene brothers' kitchen worth updating. But this is a kitchen for two professional foodies, and Aidells and Oakes knew exactly what they wanted.

At the north end of the great room, a 6-ft. by 11-ft. island stands like a prodigious lectern between the kitchen and the dining area. On the dining side, the island is a buffet. Above it hangs a timber-frame pot rack with a collection of pots, pans, skillets, and kettles that is worthy of the Smithsonian.

On the business side, the galley-style kitchen is set up like a restaurant cooking line, with the stove, ovens, and a wood-fired cooking hearth sharing the north wall. Opposite, the butcher block counter stretches out like a maple lab table. This is where Aidells tests the recipes that will find their way into his next meat-lovers' cookbook. For a carnivore, it's hard to imagine a better laboratory. □

Charles Miller is special-issues editor. Photos by the author.



**Topped with both skylights and light fixtures.** The galley kitchen is laid out with the fire-power on the left and the prep counter on the right (photo right taken at G on floor plan). The prep sink includes an inset bin for compostables (photo below taken at H on floor plan). Fire-brick in a herringbone pattern lines the stove and wood-fired cooking alcoves. Emblematic materials of the Arts and Crafts era, forged-steel banding and hammered copper, combine in the range hood.





## The Brothers Greene and the ultimate bungalow

Freshly minted architects Charles and Henry Greene set up shop in Pasadena, Calif., in 1894 and quickly became adept at designing houses within the accepted formats. Mission, French provincial, and Queen Anne were all styles that declared good breeding, and proficiency at rendering them guaranteed a steady procession of wealthy clients. The Greenes knew, however, that this path followed a weak twig on architecture's family tree.

As they became intimate with the climate and landscape of Southern California, the brothers found the inspiration they needed to turn their backs on recycled residential forms from Europe. They looked instead to India, where modest dwellings called "bungalows" were perfect models for warm-weather climates. Bungalows had deep eaves to keep the sun off the walls, broad porches for shady places to sit, and plenty of windows for cross ventilation. They were also devoid of applied ornament.

The Greenes reshaped the bungalow into a series of western hybrids that were perfectly at home in a new land. The architects worked native stone into their designs for foundations, columns, chimneys, and paths. The brothers landscaped the houses to blend with the surroundings and used local woods for structure that would be revealed as ornament.

Their timing was perfect. By the turn of the century, prosperous Southern Californians were ready for a change, and the Greene brothers' practice flourished. The years from 1907 to 1910 were the zenith. During this period, they designed seven houses that Randell Makinson, the Greenes' biographer, calls the "ultimate bungalows." Each was a complete composition, with the Greenes designing everything from the patterns of the bricks surrounding the planters to the leaded glass in the lanterns.

During their partnership years, the brothers had well-defined



roles. Henry's even temperament, engineering talent, and organizational skills held the firm together, while Charles's artistic vision and insistent nature shaped the firm's designs. Charles, a diminutive man with a page-boy haircut and a voice that somehow was both shrill and barely audible, pushed the brothers' contractors to the limits of their talents.

Then it stopped. War, the imposition of an income tax, and the fickle nature of style all contributed to the slowdown at the Greenes' office. Their hitting streak was over, and they pretty much faded from view until the 1970s, when Makinson's books on the Greenes' architecture and furniture found a new audience.

The ultimate bungalows stand as the crowning achievements of the Greene brothers and of Arts and Crafts architecture in America. Visit [www.gamblehouse.org](http://www.gamblehouse.org) for a pictorial tour of one of those ultimate bungalows, a list of related reading materials, and additional information on the Greenes.