

OPEN HOMES



Photos by DEANNE FITZMAURICE / The Chronicle

This house in the Claremont area near the Oakland-Berkeley border was designed by William Wurster.

TIMELESS SIMPLE DESIGN

Casual elegance of Wurster house shows his architectural significance

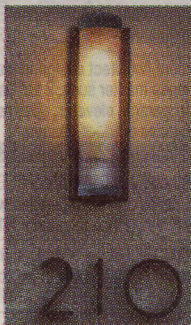
By Heather Boerner
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The market may be tough right now, but homes still sell quickly when buyers come across a gem. Such is the case for the home at 210 Stonewall Road in Berkeley.

Keith Wilson and Jessica Seaton put their vintage William Wurster-designed house on the market at the end of August. Four days later, a deal went into escrow. Seaton couldn't be more thrilled.

"We're so happy, especially given everything you read in the paper about the state of the market right now," she said.

But to be fair, their home comes with an exceptional pedi-



gree.

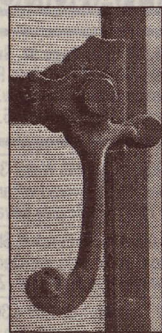
Wurster, whom Wilson called a "much more understated" but just as significant architect as contemporary Frank Lloyd Wright, built more than 200 homes, mostly in the Bay Area, from the 1930s to the 1950s. UC Berkeley's College of Environmental Design is housed in Wurster Hall, named for the architect.

The house's first owners were Henry and Ruth Colby, for whom Berkeley's Colby Street is named. And the house itself has attracted national attention. It has been featured in exhibits by museums of modern art in New York and San Francisco. More recently, it won the Berkeley Architectural Historical Association's award for restoration of the house and

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Classic elegance in the hills

► **WURSTER**
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Cast bronze window handles are used throughout the house.

gardens, designed by Thomas Church.

The house is a picture of casual elegance. From the street, the house appears grand but simple, with few windows on the street-facing side and clean, unadorned lines. Behind the 4-foot-wide red door, the house's quiet elegance starts to become apparent. Most rooms open to a deck or the gardens below. The sunken living room's walls splay out slightly and the focus in almost every room is on the breathtaking views, which include the nearby Claremont Hotel's cupola, the bay and, from the top floor deck, the Golden Gate Bridge.

"Wurster was famous for saying that the house is the frame, not the

picture — but the frame is just as important," Wilson said. "With this house we really avoided a lot of the renovation fads out there right now. Glass tile may be popular today, but passe tomorrow. This house is timeless."

Seaton and Wilson, who are both architects, were dedicated to maintaining the integrity of the house. Over the 5½ years that Seaton and Wilson and their family have lived in the house, they have gutted the top floor family room and deck, removing dry rot and restoring it with white-washed exposed beam ceilings and unobtrusive wood paneling.

Wilson took three years to track down the ribbed glass used to repair the steel-framed windows.

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Photos by DEANNE FITZMAURICE / The Chronicle

The dining room has large windows that let in the sun. Its green walls complement the trees outside.

HOMES

► WURSTER

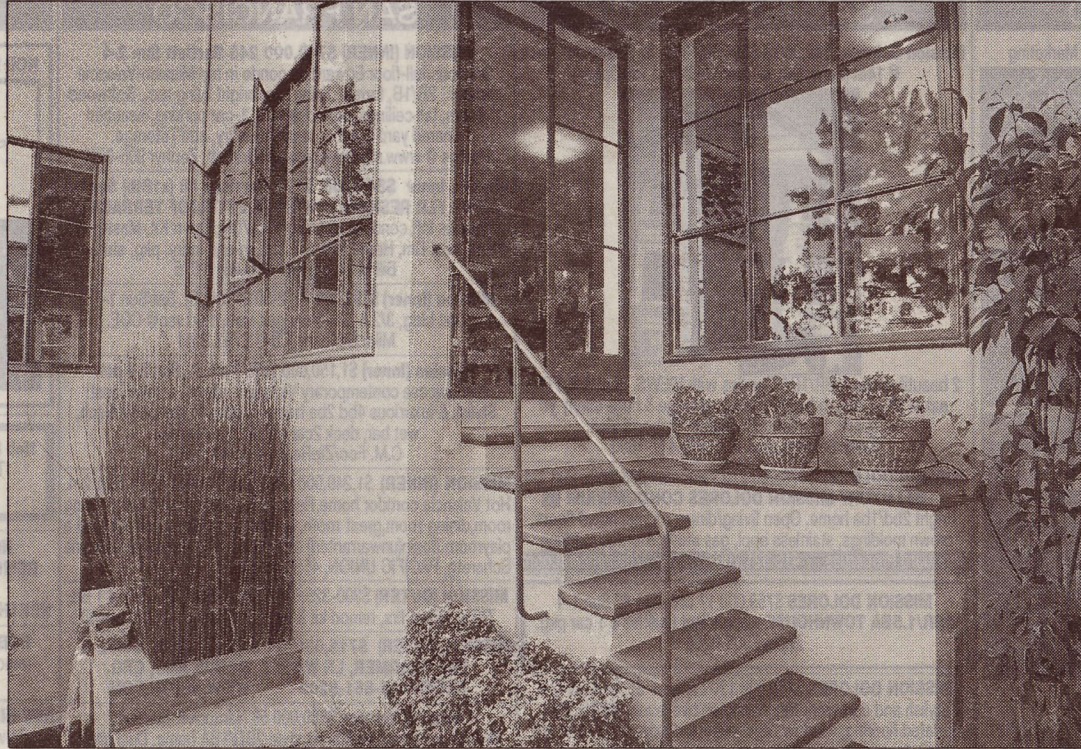
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The couple spent weeks removing the grass wallpaper in the foyer and replacing it with a integral color plaster. They went through dozens of samples before choosing just the right color of muted green to replace the wallpaper in the dining room and complement the color of the trees just beyond the windows.

They also made some changes to the original design of the kitchen. When they moved in, Seaton said, the kitchen “didn’t have a single drawer. After three months, I realized that drawers are important,” she added.

So the couple refinished the kitchen, adding drawers, stainless steel appliances, limestone floors and granite countertops. Likewise, they replaced the fixtures, sinks and toilets in the bathrooms to make them more modern while still fitting with the period of the house.

But they didn’t touch much of the house. It already had four bedrooms on the second floor, a walk-in closet in the master bedroom along with a small bonus room that Wilson uses as a watercolor



DEANNE FITZMAURICE / The Chronicle

The angles and windows of the William Wurster design are displayed near the back stairs.

studio. It also had an elevator, installed by the Colby family. The elevator goes to every floor, including the slightly sunken living

room on the ground floor and into the garage at the top floor.

Seaton and Wilson said they learned something about archi-

tecture from the house.

For instance, Seaton said she knew about passive solar, but had never experienced it until living

210 Stonewall Road

Architect: William Wurster

Year Built: 1931 (restored 2002-07)

Square feet: 4,667

Bedrooms: 5

Bathrooms: 4½

Garage: 2-car

Asking price: \$2.8 million.
In contract after four days on the market. Price not disclosed.

in the Stonewall house. Wurster built the house due north and south. In the summer, that means the sun creeps in only a few inches, keeping it cool. In the winter, the sun floods the house, warming it naturally.

She said she also learned a lot about angles: In every part of the house, everywhere you turn, there is a new perspective, a new, beautiful view.

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