



# THE HOUSE THAT SAUSAGE BUILT

Bruce Aidells builds the ultimate Craftsman, adhering to a vision he'd had in mind before the land was even purchased

BY JANE POWELL

It started innocently enough — Bruce Aidells bought some English Arts and Crafts furniture from an Oakland antiques dealer and designed his kitchen in Kensington around it. Then he began frequenting the House of Orange, an Alameda antique shop that specializes in Arts and Crafts. He might have stopped there, but a fateful invitation in 1996 to visit Berkeley's Thorsen House with an architecturally inclined friend introduced him to the architecture of Charles and Henry Greene, and he was instantly captivated. He befriended Ted Bosley, the curator of the Gamble House, a Greene and Greene house museum in Pasadena, as well as Jack Stumpf, the chief docent at the house, who, as it turned out, was also a sausage aficionado. Soon Aidells was getting the private tour of the Gamble house (whether bribes of bratwurst were involved is unknown). He began to want a Greene and Greene of his own, but realized that to build one properly would require a good deal of money, which he did not have at the time. He settled for immersing himself in Greene and Greene, buying books, visiting other

Photos by Jeannie O'Conner | Illustration By Paul Madonna





Sausage man Bruce Aidells in his new Craftsman's sausage kitchen, where he envisions encasing wild boar shot by his neighbors near Healdsburg.





houses and museums, and biding his time.

The opportunity came in 2002, when Aidells sold his interest in the eponymous sausage company he started in 1983. He figures the cost of the house came out to 322 miles of sausages. Finally having enough money in his pocket, he began looking for an architect who knew how to design a Greene and Greene-style house. He eventually settled on Greg Klein of John Malick and Associates, even though the company had never before designed a Greene and Greene house. But it was local, and Aidells felt they would be hands-on. Klein had long been a fan of the Greenes, and says, "Their work is unique, and most people think no one does that anymore."

Most people would probably have bought the land for the house before interviewing architects, but Aidells is not most people. So in 2003, with the architect hired, Aidells and his wife, Nancy Oakes, chef-owner of Boulevard, went

looking for land, and found a lovely hilltop site overlooking a valley near Healdsburg.

Aidells had a clear idea of what he wanted — an airplane bungalow (in Arts and Crafts parlance) with a massive roof. (An airplane bungalow is primarily one story, usually with one second floor room or "pop-top" — the name airplane bungalow refers to this room's resemblance to the cockpit of early 20th century airplanes.) He also wanted privacy for the guest rooms, and, of course, a kitchen that would be the center of the house. Klein, says Aidells, "got it in one pass," combining elements from various Greene and Greene houses, including the shallow V-shaped wings of the Pratt House in Ojai, the second-floor sleeping porch of the Blacker House in Pasadena, and the living room of the Thorsen House. In one wing, a

**View out from the front entrance to the bungalow. The shaded corridor provides a break from the intense Sonoma sun; right, the living room with hand picked wood and finishes made to look as if they'd always been there.**

huge kitchen, complete with wood-fired roasting spit, opens into a timber-framed great room, while the other contains guest suites, a library, service areas for laundry, a mudroom, and an extra half bath. A soaring entry hall connects the two wings, with an elaborate stair-

case leading up to the master suite.

Construction began in May 2005, with the garage/guest quarters being completed first, along with the swimming pool. The garage also contains the "sausage kitchen." Aidells knew that many of his neighbors were hunters, and apparently there is a bit of a "wild boar problem" in the area, so he figured the neighbors could bring their game meat over and he would help them turn it into sausage, although he admits this hasn't happened so far.

As with every building project, there were

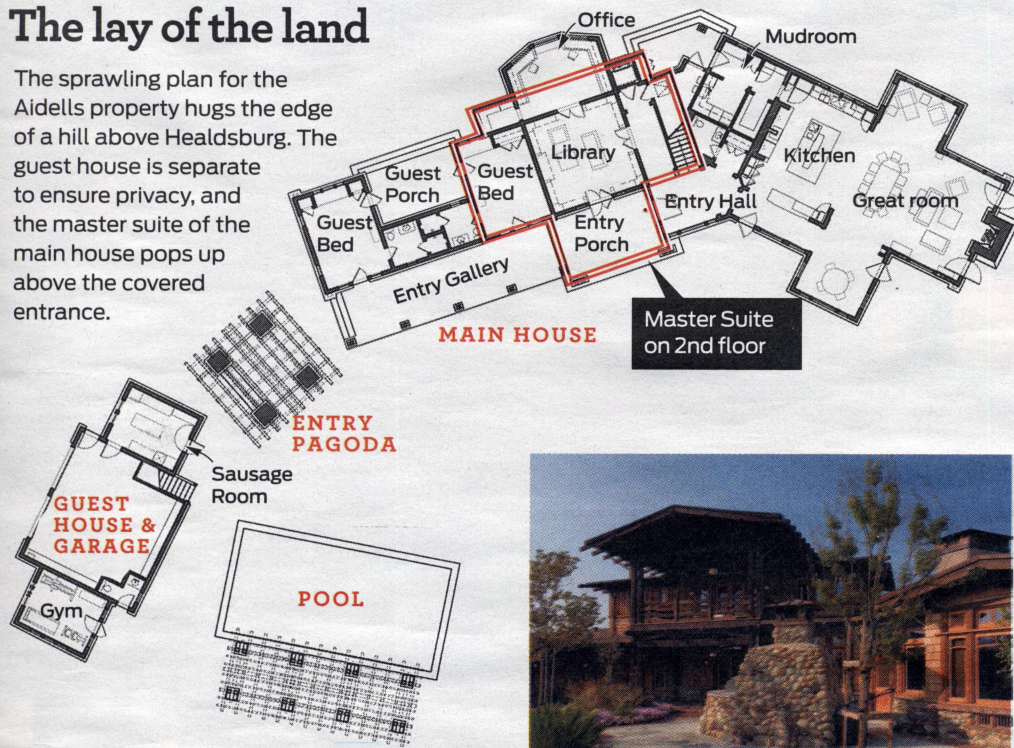






## The lay of the land

The sprawling plan for the Aidells property hugs the edge of a hill above Healdsburg. The guest house is separate to ensure privacy, and the master suite of the main house pops up above the covered entrance.



**Right: The front entrance to the home; below, the pergola and pool overlooking the valley near Healdsburg.**



issues. In a display of cognitive dissonance, the county insisted on a gas-burning fireplace for the great room but OK'd a wood-burning cooking hearth in the kitchen and pizza oven outside. As would be expected of two foodies, there is both an indoor and an outdoor kitchen. The indoor kitchen's focal point is a large pot rack that hangs over an island so big that one visitor remarked, "That's not an island — it's a continent."

Aidells was heavily involved during the two years of construction. He picked and placed many of the rocks in the elaborate stonework of the chimney, having the somewhat puzzled masons select stones and turn them this way and that, and then deciding where to place them. In this, he was following in the footsteps of Charles Greene, who directed the placement of stones for the James House in Carmel. Aidells says it was the most fun he had, and was matched only by watching the intricate banister of the stairway being pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle.

He was also personally involved in picking out the lumber used for the woodwork — mahogany in the entry hall and library, Douglas-fir elsewhere. He was very concerned about the finish on the woodwork,





wanting it to look as if it had always been there. After many stain and finish experiments, a wax finish over stain was chosen, except for areas like the kitchen. He became friends with many of the contractors — one of the masons now lives on the property, and the stair builder is still building furniture for the house. Aidells says, “It was great being around guys that are excited to come to work. The contractor used to thank me daily.”

It’s probably obvious by now that Aidells was the driving force behind the house. He jokes, “In some ways, it’s good to have a wife who works 12 hours a day.” But he did run all the decisions by her, and Oakes had the final say on things like bathrooms, tile and colors. She loves the house now that it’s done. As for Aidells, a man utterly besotted with his house, it was hard to choose his favorite things, but he finally settled on the cloud-lift pot rack and the chandeliers. And his favorite thing to do? “Float in the swimming pool like a hippopotamus and stare up at the sleeping porch.” ♦

*Jane Powell is a restoration consultant and the author of “Bungalow Kitchens” and several other bungalow books. She can be reached at [janepowell@sbcglobal.net](mailto:janepowell@sbcglobal.net).*



**The master bath looks out over the landscape.**

## About Greene and Greene

In 1893, brothers Charles and Henry Greene, educated in architecture at MIT, and working as apprentices in Boston-area architects’ offices, accepted an invitation to visit their parents, who had moved to Pasadena. Seduced by the scenery and sophistication of the town, already a resort for wealthy and sophisticated tourists from the East, the brothers decided to stay, and opened their architecture practice in 1894. On their way to California, they had visited the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where they were captivated by the Japanese building, with its timber framing, exposed joinery and simple plaster walls. They were already fascinated with Asian design through exhibitions at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and their interpretation of the Asian aesthetic eventually suffused their buildings. Their earlier years at the Manual Training High School in St. Louis exposed them to the theories

of John Ruskin and William Morris, luminaries of the English Arts and Crafts movement, and left them with a deep reverence for materials and craftsmanship.

Their early buildings were eclectic, but as they became better known after 1900, they began to explore a simpler aesthetic. Between 1903 and 1909 they perfected the style that now defines their work, culminating in their masterworks, the so-called “ultimate bungalows,” built between 1907 and 1909. These include the Blacker, Ford, Gamble, Pratt and Thorsen houses. Their work has readily identifiable elements: projecting rafter tails, broad porches with structural timberwork, shingled walls, earth colors and Asian-influenced detailing. Yet these disparate elements, though also common to bungalow and other Craftsman houses, merge into buildings that are transcendent when filtered through the brothers’

artistic sensibilities.

Charles became more and more disenchanted with architecture as the years progressed and wanted to devote more time to painting and writing. Though the firm’s work continued, Charles began to withdraw, and in 1916 he moved with his family to Carmel. The brothers did a few commissions separately, and finally dissolved the business in 1922. Their buildings, nearly all of them residential, fell into obscurity for many years. In 1952, they were honored by the American Institute of Architects as “formulators of a new and native architecture.” When the Arts and Crafts revival blossomed in the 1980s, their architecture was rediscovered and now conjures both wonder and adulation. It is, in the words of author Bruce Smith, “some of the finest, most subtly beautiful architecture ever designed and built anywhere.”

—J.P.

## RESOURCES

### Architect

Greg Klein  
John Malick and Associates  
1195 Park Ave., Suite 102  
Emeryville, CA 94608  
(510) 595-8042  
[www.jmalick.com](http://www.jmalick.com)

### Landscape architect

Jonathan Plant and Associates  
1230 Pine St.  
St. Helena, CA 94574  
(707) 963-8313  
[www.jplant.com](http://www.jplant.com)

### General contractor

Ken Finley Construction  
P.O. Box 383  
Healdsburg, CA 95448  
(707) 431-0446

### Cabinetmakers

Creative Cabinets  
3333 Standish Ave.,  
Santa Rosa, CA 95407  
(707) 585-9013

### Stained Glass

Theodore Ellison Designs  
1248 International Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94606  
(510) 534-7632  
[www.theodoreellison.com](http://www.theodoreellison.com)

### Stair fabrication

Frank Blondina Bertram/  
Blondina Handrail and Stair Inc.  
(707) 584-8485

### Finish carpentry

Bruce Wilkinson Acapella Construction Inc.  
(707) 782-0422

### Timber framing

Larry McCanse Palmer Creek Handhewn Wood  
(707) 431-8206

### Masonry

Bob Saling Saling Masonry  
(707) 483-8927