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FINE LIVING IN VENTURA COUNTY

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Horizon Found

CASA BARRANCA OWNERS
BILL AND ELIZA MOSES



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THE BEST OF MAN
CAMARILLO'S SHIGERU "SHIG" YABU

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE
OUTDOORSY AND UPSCALE IN YOSEMITE

WINES + SEDUCTION



Horizon Found

When Bill Moses discovered Shangri-La at Casa Barranca in Ojai, he dedicated himself to the restoration—and continued growth—of an architectural masterpiece.

BY LAURA HOUT

Far from the glare of 101, off the grid and under the stars, Casa Barranca sits in quiet repose, a rarified remnant of California history, a century-old grand dame veiled in live oaks. Commissioned in 1908 as a winter home by oil magnate Charles M. Pratt, Casa Barranca sits on a ridge overlooking the Ojai Valley, depicted as Shangri-La in the Frank Capra film *Lost Horizon*.

Designed and built by architects Charles and Henry Greene—famous for their Craftsman-style homes—Casa Barranca is the country cousin of the famous Gamble House in Pasadena. One of the most significant landmarks in Ventura County, Casa Barranca was recently named to the National Register of Historic Places. This fall, current owners Bill and Eliza Moses will host a reception in the home as part of the 2008-2009 Greene & Greene Centennial sponsored by the Gamble House.

Renowned as America's finest practitioners of Craftsman-style architecture, Charles and Henry Greene founded their reputation on five buildings, called the ultimate bungalows, which were completed between 1907 and 1909. Extensive publicity in magazines like *House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Architectural Record*, *Country Life in America* and *Ladies Home Journal* fostered a series of pattern books, and the Craftsman-style home quickly became the most popular and fashionable small home built in the U.S. from 1915 to the early 1920s.

"Of the five bungalows, Casa Barranca is perhaps the least well known, but arguably one of the most impressive," says Ted Bosley, curator of the Gamble House. "I believe Casa Barranca is very nearly the epitome of what the Greenes wanted to design throughout their careers."

It was here, Bosley notes, that the architects took full advantage of an extraordinary confluence: wealthy clients who gave them free reign over design, a stunning physical site, and a pair of Swedish craftsman, brothers John and Peter Hall, who could execute their vision.



Photo by Travis McCormick

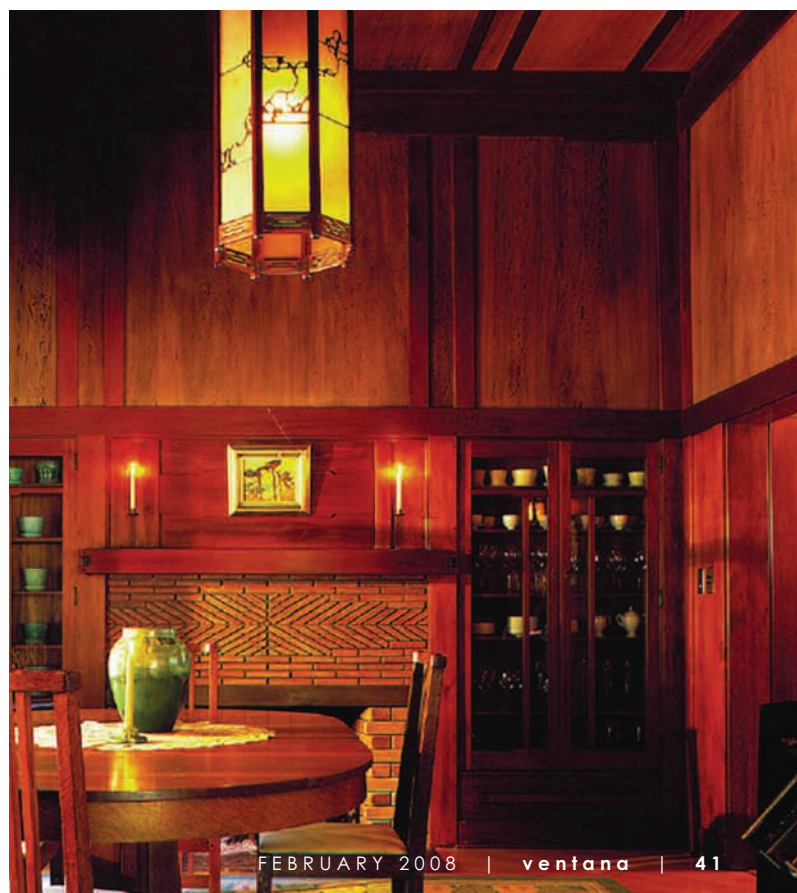




Photo by Travis McCormick



Panoramic views of the Ojai Valley (above) and exquisite details, such as handcrafted leaded-glass light fixtures (right), combine to make Craftsman-style Casa Barranca one of the world's "ultimate bungalows."

"The main physical feature is the land," says Bosley, "with a steep ravine that runs from the base of the Topa Topa Mountains to the valley below." Indeed, the architects' original L-shaped floor plan became more of a V-shaped form to embrace the natural environment. An east-west orientation provides abundant natural light; shady overhangs and stately oaks provide solace from summer heat. Abundant use of natural woods and rough local stone work encourage the home to blend into the landscape organically, while screened sleeping porches create magical tree houses on sultry, orange-blossom-scented nights.

"The Greenes' architecture has been called self-effacing," Bosley notes, and from the outside, Casa Barranca's wood-shingled visage is entirely different than today's mock-Tuscan Villas and Mediterranean McMansions. Multi-gabled rooflines echo the mountains behind, while stone terraces and wood decks merge gracefully into rock-strewn gardens. Situated on 14 acres overlooking Stewart Canyon, the structure melds into the land instead of overpowering it, proving Mies van der Rohe's famous dictum "Less is more."

This self-effacing beauty was not lost on East Coast entrepreneur Bill Moses, who discovered Ojai while visiting friends in 1993. And when his friends alerted him that the house was for sale, Moses didn't hesitate. He moved his family west, left the rat race behind, and has been restoring the house ever since.

"Pratt had the pick of the country and his choice of anywhere in Ojai Valley, and he chose here," says Moses. A collector of Craftsman furniture and art, Moses recognized the home's historic significance. He realized he had a huge responsibility: to restore a masterpiece faithfully. As conservator of a living piece of California history, Moses committed himself to Casa Barranca's restoration with characteristic Wall-Street-investor-turned-cable-TV-executive zeal.

"The house had suffered neglect," he says, "but it hadn't been

"I like to think staying in the house helps people reach their inner goals," Moses says, as the sun pours in like butterscotch flooding the room's rich wood interiors.

altered in any significant way." As it turned out, even something as simple sounding as replacing shingles proved to be a challenge, as the new shingles had to be aged and painted just right to blend in. Inside the home, cedar, oak, Douglas fir, and maple have been burnished to a luxuriant glow, and original elements—such as handcrafted leaded-glass light fixtures—remain intact. Since he bought the home in 1994, Moses has upgraded the plumbing and electrical systems, enlarged a bath and modernized the kitchen. But he's confident Charles Pratt would have no difficulty recognizing his house.

His strict adherence to period style includes the home's furnishings. In the early 1900s, Casa Barranca was filled with furniture designed and built by the Greenes in their workshops. Unfortunately, it was dispersed by previous owners to museums and private collections. Moses, with the help of Isak Lindenauer, a San Francisco antiques dealer, replenished the house with appropriate Arts and Crafts pieces by Greene contemporaries such as Gustav Stickley and Charles P. Limbert.

One of the best things Moses did—beyond his meticulous restoration—Lindenauer says, was to negotiate to buy the land surrounding Casa Barranca. "The sellers wanted to break up the property, and Bill said he'd walk away if the house and land didn't stay together."

The land itself has a rich history; in the 1960s, His Divine Grace Krishnamurti gave a series of lectures on the hillside at Casa Barranca. That tradition continues today, reports *Yogi Times*, "as the 'Who's Who' of the California yoga, health, and spiritual communities use Casa Barranca as a backdrop for their private sabbaticals or retreats." In 2002, Moses added a Craftsman-style yoga studio to the property to accommodate family and community gatherings. Moses has flourished in his role of steward of Casa Barranca, says Lindenauer. "He has acted magnetically in conjunction with the house—its wings are like

(clockwise from right) Owners Bill and Eliza Moses bask in the glow of another paradise moment in the gardens at Casa Barranca, where original pieces line the walls and the warmth of rich wood and a crackling fire create a perfect setting to enjoy organic wines made on-site.

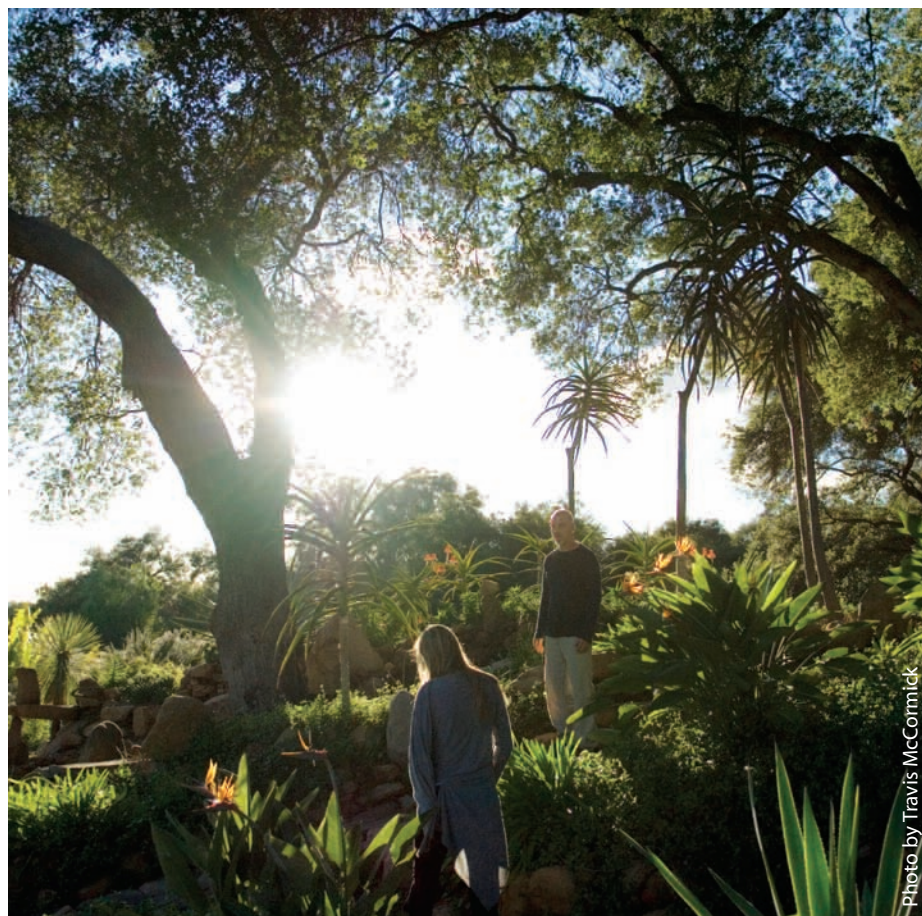


Photo by Travis McCormick



open arms, and Bill is very much like that, welcoming people into the house, sharing its energy and warmth.”

“I like to think staying in the house helps people reach their inner goals,” Moses says, as the sun pours in like butterscotch flooding the room’s rich wood interiors. Outside, the barranca rushes with February rains, snow dusts the Topa Topas, and the house feels like a wooden ship amid a sea of live oaks, succulents, and citrus. “I think the Greens would like that too.”

As part of his stewardship, Moses opens the house periodically for civic and non-profit functions, such as the upcoming Greene & Greene Centennial reception in conjunction with the Gamble House. He also rents the house to groups he’s vetted through close scrutiny of their organizational aspirations and personal interviews. World-renowned Yogis and groups like Patagonia have rented the house; even Arts and Crafts aficionado/celebrities have stayed there, though Moses won’t name names.

Moses, who relies on solar power for electricity and water from artesian springs, says his goal is to create a sustainable, organic, home-based business—and give back to the community. Once a student in Aix-en-Provence, France, one of his passions is handcrafting small lots of Viognier, Pinot Noir, Grenache, and Syrah. In 2004, Casa Barranca Winery became the first certified organic winery in California’s Central Coast region, and has garnered gold and silver medals at the San Francisco Chronicle and Long Beach Grand Cru competitions.

“When I first moved out here, my friends on the East Coast wondered what I was doing,” he says. “Now they’re all looking for their own piece of paradise.”

Steward of the land and conservator of a living piece of California history, Moses, and his growing family, have found their place in the sun. As *Architectural Digest* once reported: “A closer approximation to Shangri-La is difficult to imagine.” ▾

For more information on the Casa Barranca reception and the Greene & Greene Centennial, contact Friends of the Gamble House, 626.793.3334, or visit www.gamblehouse.org. For information on renting Casa Barranca, visit www.casabarranca.com. Casa Barranca wines can be tasted at Local Hero Bookstore, Thursday through Sunday (12 – 6) in the Ojai Arcade. Isak Lindenauer’s shop can be reached 415.552.6436.



Photo by Travis McCormick



The Shining

Certain people and places shine. This is one of nature's incontrovertible truths. And as these exemplars rise above mediocrity, they pull the rest of the world along with them, elevating the standards by which we live.

Consider Casa Barranca in Ojai: Much more than a piece of architectural history, the property is a confluence of nature and structure, of spirituality, eco-consciousness, intricate detail, and immeasurable charms. It has the aura of a sacred place. Owner Bill Moses (page 41) felt the power in 1993 when he was an East Coast city slicker visiting friends in Ojai. Casa Barranca and the local lifestyle affected Moses to his very soul, and in a classic California turnaround he never looked back. Around the time you read this, Bill and his lovely wife, Eliza, will likely have welcomed the newest member of their family. One look at the couple and it's clear—they've found their Shangri-La.

But the places that affect us aren't always so idyllic. Take, for example, the story of Camarillo's Shigeru "Shig" Yabu (page 25), whose lifetime of philanthropy was largely shaped by three years at a Japanese internment camp during WWII. I first heard about Shig from a co-worker who showed me a children's book he'd written. Cute. But the editorial light

bulb didn't flicker until I learned that Shig was the very first executive director of the Camarillo Boys & Girls Club—back in 1967, when it was just the Boys Club.

More impressive, though, was the book I nearly overlooked. In it, a young boy in an internment camp adopts a magpie that's fallen out of a tree. The two become friends, and the camp community embraces the bird, which ironically enjoys freedom within the harsh confines. By now you've probably guessed that "Hello Maggie" is a true story—the story of a person who finds pockets of warmth in cold places, in this case the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming. Fortunately for us, over the past 40-plus years Shig Yabu has shined his warmth upon Ventura County.

As usual, we offer a number of shorter pieces in addition to our in-depth features. We like to think these departments hit home for local readers. Our assistant editor, Maxine Hurt, puts together the Shopping section each issue, and let me tell you—she doesn't just phone it in. She's on the beat in all corners of the county, scoping out goods and keeping the section fresh month after month. For February, the theme, as you'd expect, is Valentine's Day. But to be honest, I find that lifestyle magazines tend to overdo the hearts-and-roses theme, so we limited it to two departments: Shopping and Wine. I consciously avoided a Valentine's Day-themed travel article (submissions of those stack up like commuter cars at the Rincon bottleneck) and instead green lighted a "girlfriend getaway" piece. Sort of a friendship theme to keep the issue from drowning in chocolate and lingerie.

Speaking of drowning, it looks like we're in for a beautiful spring in California. The hillsides are already green and the *barrancas* are flowing. Get out there and enjoy.

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