

FEATURES & BUSINESS

Historic Morse House on 2016 CSL Tour



A view from the front deck of the historic Morse House overlooks Claremont Country Club.

By Patricia Forsyth

Members of the Children's Support League of the East Bay are busy prepping event details in tandem with homeowners whose properties will be on the April 29-30 Heart of the Home tour.

For the willing and generous owners who open their homes and hearts to the charity benefit and ticket holders, now begins the countdown to the tour-day finish. The houses will be picture perfect with awe-inspiring decors and manicured lawns; but at present, the punch cards are full to complete the remodels, refurbishing, and installations still under construction.

Connections between homeowners and local interior designers, stagers, and floral arrangers, many of whom donate product and services for the event, are part of the essential tour prepping to maximize the dazzle

effect on tour days. Invariably, the homeowners take notice that "their home has never looked better" and it's in "ready to party condition." Because, it is ready for a party.

One of the magnificent homes on tour this year is the landmark-designated Morse House in Oakland Hills' upper Rockridge. Owners John Bliss and Kim Thompson were already Oakland residents when they began a 15-year search for a truly grand English Tudor Revival, a style and period they love.

The couple desired a property they could restore and preserve to its original condition, and with the fewer the modern adaptations and remodels, the better, despite multiple owners over the decades. In 2008 they found it – a handsomely sited home on a gentle rise overlooking the Claremont Country Club.

The approach to the home

is up either side of two sets of flagstone steps leading to a deep wraparound porch with dramatic views of the Bay Bridge and Golden Gate Bridge, both of which were under construction at the time the house was built in 1936.

The Tudor home's outer façade has brick veneer façade and slate roof, copper gutters, and many leaded pane glass windows amid large steel-sash windows flooding daylight into the interiors. Fortunately, the home's exterior was sound and needed no more help than what was deferred maintenance. Their plan was both restoration and to make no alteration from its original design. The interiors, however, were in very poor condition, both cosmetically and functionally, according to Bliss.

Thompson and Bliss devoted six years to fixing the interior systems and cosmetic work they could do themselves, including moldings and plaster, painting, electrical and lighting fixtures. Their search was painstaking for custom period tiles manufactured decades ago and local artisans capable of wood and metal reproductions to match original construction. Every find was a celebrated treasure.

The Bliss-Thompson duo was determined to keep to the original room layout, and the maid's quarters are now a laundry and utility room. The butler's pantry is new but styled with 1930s inset doors. In the kitchen they retained the original windows above cabinetry that's new but in 1930s mode; and there's an Inclinor Elevette elevator that services three floors with its fascinating machinery at the lower level. Visitors are playfully challenged to find the third floor elevator door.

Tour-goers will view the fully finished and delightfully furnished home in mostly Hollywood Regency style on all three floors of the Morse House. They will also get a peek into the Train room, which houses a looming terrain for a 1930s O-scale Lionel model train track under the attic eaves previously used for storage.

CSL's annual and 28th consecutive event promises a new and different tour experience every year with all the best features back by popular demand. The tour headquarters is centered at the Piedmont Community Center, where a shopping bazaar comes to life. Outside on the patio tourgoers will be able to enjoy al fresca style lunches with



A butler pantry was converted to a kitchen at the Morse House, which will be on this year's CSL House tour.

Photo by Treve Johnson

crowd-favor food trucks serving freshly prepped meals to order.

VIP Events

Tickets are now on sale at www.ChildrensSupportLeague.org. General admission price is \$45 to tour the Piedmont and Oakland Hills five homes. The VIP ticket price at \$125 adds two more special events at Piedmont homes: the CSL Kickoff party is on Thursday evening, April 28, at a Glen Alpine Road property, and the following morning is a speaker breakfast at the Duck

House.

CSL is a voluntary member-supported nonprofit that awards grants to charitable organizations that help at-risk children in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Since 1988, the tours have raised \$3.3 million. Typically CSL is able to donate a remarkable 96% of its proceeds with only 4% in expenditures.

Volunteers on tour days are always being sought. To apply, see www.ChildrensSupportLeague.org.

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