



SHOW US WHAT YOU'VE DONE

Three Love Affairs and a Bungalow

Amelia Hunter
Martinez, California

“Oh no! What have you done!” were not the words Marc Hunter wanted to hear as he walked his parents through the condemned 1923 bungalow he had just bought on Talbart Street in the northern San Francisco Bay Area town of Martinez on a cold November afternoon ten years ago. And, as rain fell to the floor through the gaping holes in the ceiling, he

admittedly wondered if he'd bitten off more than he could chew.

When a real estate agent had first shown it to him a few weeks earlier, the place had stood empty for years except for a pack of feral cats and some vandals who'd left behind filth, broken glass and drug paraphernalia. A massive overgrowth of ivy threatened to consume it. Even for a seasoned former contractor

with more than 30 years in the remodeling business, it had not been love at first sight.

But during a walkthrough alone—the agent had refused to enter the house, heeding the yellow caution tape blocking the front stairs—Marc saw some things he liked. Most the original interior wood trim was intact; the one missing element was a pair of built-in cabinets that had



OPPOSITE, TOP, MY VINTAGE-INSPIRED HOUSE PORTRAIT; BOTTOM, THE HUNTER HOUSE TODAY. RIGHT, THE “SUNROOM”, WHICH, COINCIDENTALLY, IS THE COOLEST ROOM IN THE HOUSE. MARC HAS HIS COFFEE HERE WITH THE CAT EVERY MORNING.

flanked the fireplace before being removed. Most of the original windows were also still in place, as were the oak floors in the living and dining rooms and the tongue-in-groove Douglas fir in the rest of the house, despite 80 years of wear and tear. The house had been built with care. It seemed salvageable. And in the midst of what would prove to be a colossal housing bubble, with interest rates at an all-time low, he sensed that this might be a chance he couldn't pass up to fulfill his lifelong dream of restoring an old bungalow.

Still, given the craziness of the market, he was prepared to have this bid, like others he'd seen friends make over the past year or so, quickly topped. When his agent called the next day to tell him it had instead been accepted, he understood that his life had changed. He just didn't know yet how much change was in store.

Love Affair #1: Man and Bungalow

For the next two years, Marc's typical weekday was divided into a full-time day job in construction and a second job, also nearly full time, restoring the bungalow. Weekends were spent working 12 to 16 hours a day exclusively on the restoration.

During the first several months, he methodically removed, labeled, stripped, stained and replaced each piece of interior trim. He spent additional months repairing the windows, replacing the broken panes with



After



Before

THE DRY ROT WAS SO EXTENSIVE THAT MARC LOST THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE (THE ORIGINAL SUNROOM), SHOWN HERE BEFORE IT WAS TORN DOWN.



LEONARD HUNTER (LH)

antique cylinder-blown sheet glass from salvaged windows. He reproduced window screens using antique Stanley screen hooks he gleaned from another old bungalow being worked on in the neighborhood.

The kitchen was the room most in need of updating. A breakfast nook with built-in seating had once defined the entryway to the kitchen but had long since been removed. All that remained was a “funky sink with a funky Formica top on it,” he says.

“No shelves, really. There was a California cooler, and the stove.”

The vintage O'Keefe & Merritt stove initially served only to get in his way. Hoisting it up on a furniture dolly, Marc would “push that thing around for years. One day I pulled it all apart, cleaned it and fired it up, not sure if it would work or not.” But like many vintage appliances, the stove was built to last. Today, it works better than any other stove he's used. Especially noteworthy is

the “Grillvator,” an adjustable rack under the broiler that can be raised and lowered with a sliding handle. He’s since had parts re-chromed and the burners re-enameled.

**Love Affair #2:
Man, Bungalow and Woman**

Three years after Marc began the restoration and six months after he had completed it, I entered the picture when I visited the house for the first time. As I approached, a warm glow emanated from a stunning trio of multi-paneled windows one story above the street. A decorative patinated dragonfly impeccably placed in the center of the immaculate redwood gate caught my eye. I stepped from the porch into the sunroom, dominated on three sides by massive windows encased in rich wood trim. Two stained-glass art lamps hung delicately from a hand-hammered base, filling the small space with golden light. The soft green color of the walls was enhanced by the orange-green slate tiles of the floor.



I REALLY LOVE ALL THE COUNTER SPACE IN THIS KITCHEN. BELOW LEFT, THE ORIGINAL KITCHEN SHOWING THE CALIFORNIA COOLER. OPPOSITE, CENTER, THE ORIGINAL FIREPLACE WITH THREE BATCHHOLDER TILES; BOTTOM, OUR COZY LIVING ROOM TODAY SHOWING THE REPLACEMENT CABINETS MARC BUILT.



Two wicker chairs sat askew, with a small matching table between them. The room was perfect.

In the living room, a blazing fire crackled from the wood stove insert. Marc explained that he had lost the original fireplace to irreparable earthquake damage but had saved three decorative Batchelder tiles, now framed and hung in the dining room. A handsome walnut mantel lit on either side by beautiful dichroic glass pendant lamps displayed fine pottery. The soft yellow walls met with a plate rail then continued upward, seemingly disappearing into the coved ceiling.

I was falling in love with the house. It would not be long before I fell in love with Marc, too, and we would marry.

When I visited Marc that first time, the built-in cabinets that had surrounded the fireplace were still missing. He scoured salvage yards for seven years in vain before he met a man with architectural ties to several historic San Francisco buildings who happened to have a pair of doors like that and, generously, gave them to him.

When he began the restoration, he chose to refinish only the fir floors in the bedrooms and kitchen, covering the damaged oak floors of the living and dining rooms with carpeting. In the spring of this year he removed the carpeting and hired a local flooring specialist to inspect them. To his delight, she encouraged him to keep the floors as they were,

explaining that they “will never look new” but will have immense character. She was right.

**Love Affair #3:
Man Meets Community**

Because the scenery from the interstate that borders Martinez is dominated by oil refineries, Martinez is often dismissed as a “refinery town.” Travel about a mile from the freeway, however, and one finds a hidden gem. The quaint downtown features



Resources

- PAINT
Benjamin Moore
- LIGHTS, FIXTURES, HARDWARE :
Rejuvenation, rejuvenation.com
Arroyo Craftsman, arroyo-craftsman.com
Lundberg Studios, lundbergstudios.com
Ohmega Salvage, megasalvage.com
- DOORS
Simpson Door Company
simpsondoor.com
- WINDOW
Pozzi Window Company
(now Jeld Wen Windows & Doors)
- ARTISANS, FLOOR REFINISHING
Lori J. Ortiz Wood Floors
925-788-3599
lori@loriwoodfloors.com
- BOOKS BY AUTHOR JANE POWELL
Bungalow Bathrooms, Bungalow Details Interior, Bungalow Details Exterior, Bungalow: The Ultimate Arts & Crafts Home, Bungalow Kitchens





ABOVE, MY SHANGRI-LA! MARC BUILT THE ENTIRE BACKYARD PATIO WHERE WE ENTERTAIN OUTDOORS ALL SUMMER LONG. BELOW, THE STAINED-GLASS DOORS IN THESE BUILT-IN CABINETS IN THE DINING ROOM WERE MADE BY OUR NEIGHBOR USING A TULIP PATTERN I DESIGNED.



Amelia Hunter lords over the Talbart Street garden and creates vintage-inspired house and pet portraits. See her art at ArtofAmelia.com.

PHOTOGRAPHY: All photos by Ashley Bristol except the following: Before photos: Leonard Hunter "Marc Hunter Port Costa School Letters.jpg" by Lewis Stewart

numerous historic buildings. There is a beautiful waterfront park and restored wetlands area, all bordered by acres of open space.

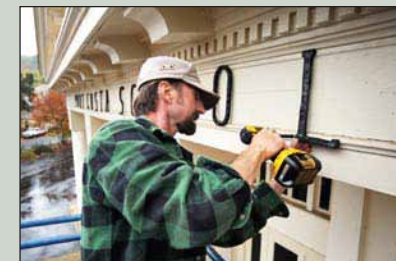
The pedestrian-friendly neighborhood where we live is conducive to a tight-knit community. Throughout the restoration, Marc was approached by neighbors curious about the new stranger in town and what his intentions were with the neglected eyesore. When he made it clear that he planned on restoring the home instead of demolishing it and replacing it with a duplex as the city had hoped, the neighborhood breathed a collective sigh of relief.

The sense of community that had been building over the two-year restoration came to a climax when

Marc was trying out exterior paint combinations. He'd find sticky notes saying things like "way off" or "getting close" attached to the house. When several enthusiastic notes were attached to one particular combination, he knew he had a winner. In 2008 the house was featured in the first annual Martinez Historical Society Home Tour, and to this day, about once every six months, an admiring passerby will knock on the door and request the paint colors. 📷

PORT COSTA: Modest Town, Vast Mystique

BESIDES REMODELING HOMES FOR a living, for the past 15 years Marc has helped with the restoration of the 102-year-old Port Costa School. The tiny town of Port Costa, steeped in history (and mystery), consists of a single street with one hotel and two restaurants, one of which, the Bull Valley Roadhouse, was chosen as one of the world's "70 best new restaurants of 2013" by Condé Nast Traveler.



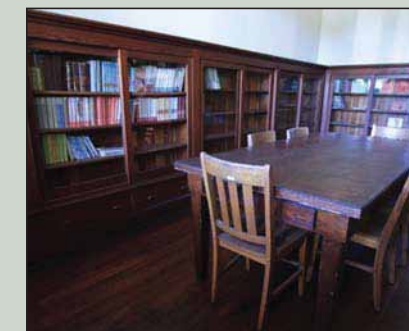
LEWIS STEWART



If the views along Carquinez Scenic Drive leading to Port Costa haven't coaxed one to slow down and take one's time, the tiny single-street town will. With little more than a post office and a handful of shops in the business district, time has seemed to stop in this tiny end-of-the-road destination. Once a bustling, rough-and-tumble port town that shipped out locally grown wheat and grain, the finest in the world, Port Costa housed up to 3,000 inhabitants at the peak of its grain season. Today, only about 200 residents remain.

The Port Costa School, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was purchased in 1988 by the Port Costa Conservation Society, an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization whose main goal is to restore and preserve the building. The school closed in 1966 and today is mainly used for community events such as the Port Costa Car Show.

Perhaps the most renowned business in Port Costa is The Warehouse Café, a funky, maze-like bar, restaurant and "Room of Oddities". Across the street, the venerable Victorian Burlington Hotel, rumored to have once been a bordello, has undergone renovations, and the newly opened cafe serves up one of the best (and fanciest) cups of coffee on weekend mornings. The stately, stone building of the Bull Valley Roadhouse, built in 1897, now serves world-class dinners and brunch. I can personally vouch for their crispy fried green beans, oven-braised pork with polenta and whole roasted black cod.



ABOVE LEFT, MARC REPAIRING THE SCHOOL; RIGHT, THE SCHOOL AS IT LOOKS TODAY, THE MOST AMAZING THING ABOUT THIS SCHOOL IS THAT ALL OF THE WOODWORK IS ORIGINAL AND UNPAINTED. BOTTOM, MY WATERCOLOR "MAP OF PORT COSTA".

Surrounding the town are acres of open space, part of the regional parks system. Bring your dog and hike the scenic loop trail that affords fabulous views from above Port Costa and the town of Benicia across the bay. Cows, coyotes, turkeys and foxes call these hills home.

