GENERAL INFORMATION

2015 HISTORIC HOME TOUR

Visitors to Historic Martinez marvel at rich variety of classic buildings and how well kept the vintage homes are in our many downtown neighborhoods. Have you ever walked your dog down a tree lined street and wondered what the interior of these homes is like? Do you love history? Do you enjoy home decorating and gardening? If your answers are “yes” to any of these questions, then don’t miss the 2015 Martinez Historic Home Tour, on Saturday October 10th. Tickets are on sale now at: [www.tinyurl.com/mtztour](http://www.tinyurl.com/mtztour)

Over the last decade The Martinez Historical Society, working with local home owners, has presented annual historic tours of our homes and classic buildings. This has become a very popular regional event, since Martinez has the greatest number of classic homes in the area. Along with the homes we also display a number of beautifully preserved and restored classic cars, a large camera collection, and other historical items. *A 2015 special feature will be the recently restored 1948 Chris Craft speedboat given to Martinez native son Joe DiMaggio by New York Yankee fans. A ride in that boat was a famous part of his 1954 Marilyn Monroe wedding celebration.* JDC note: by special feature, are we referring to an article in the home tour booklet or the boat’s actual presence?

This year we will bring you to a very special part of town. Our eight featured homes are clustered in the compact area which includes only three streets: Highland Avenue, Grandview Avenue and Willow Street. This is a great walking experience, but we also provide shuttles within the neighborhood and to the other locations around town. Most of these homes have not been on prior tours, and many of the homes were built in the popular Craftsman Style. We also include special tours of the 1849 home of Don Vicente Martinez, John Muir’s 1883 Italianate mansion, and the Borland Home, an 1890 Victorian Cottage. The 1927 Veteran’s Hall, the 1937 Shell Clubhouse, and the Shell Alumni Museum are also part of the day’s experience. JDC Note: isn’t it called the Veterans Memorial Building?

One of the best features of the Home Tour is the opportunity to meet some of the home owners who personally speak with visitors, answer questions, and share their experiences in renovating and furnishing their historic homes. In keeping with the maritime tradition of Martinez, one of our hosts is a retired Navy Captain; she and her husband are enjoying their first “permanent home” after a career on the move – “seeing the world!” Along with her home you will enjoy art from this talented painter.

Other homeowners from past tours have said: “I never had so much fun in my life,”; “I really enjoyed entertaining all our visitors today.”; “I love my home and love to have other people see it.” In fact, some homeowners from past years had such a great experience during the Tour that they joined the Home Tour Committee and are now working to plan this year’s event.

Historically, Martinez was the commercial and political center of our county back to its origins as a Gold Rush Era seaport. Last year over 400 people not only learned about the history of Martinez, but also our region and were amazed by the gardens and interiors of eight private homes in the neighborhood centered on Arlington Way. This year we move across town to an area which developed in the nineteen-teens and twenties, and where our youngest home was built in 1941, just before the US entered WWII. JDC note: 490 was the estimated number of attendees.

Last year’s visitors admired the vintage features such as dramatic columns, paneled walls and elegant crown molding. Tour goers were also intrigued by incredible cabinetry, fixtures, and period furniture. This year will be the same, with great features like a speakeasy door and secret room from the Prohibition Era. One of the homes was built by Joe DiMaggio’s uncle in 1937. Joe and Marilyn spent the night there soon after their wedding in 1954, and a copy of their marriage license will be on display in the home.

At the dawn of the 20th Century, Martinez had been a big-money town fueled by river-trade and as the shipping conduit for grain, produce, coal, and lumber. But exponential growth came with the oil boom in the nineteen-teens; several refineries came to town including the giant Shell Refinery opening in 1915. Then World War One and the Roaring 20s continued to fuel growth up into the early 1930s. In the early 1930s the new Southern Pacific bridge brought most rail traffic to the Bay Area through Martinez. This town was booming!

As cars grew in popularity, Martinez flourished with the demand for oil, and became the portal to the north via the Martinez-Benicia Ferry. Classic cars are a big part of our home tour. We try to feature a car or two at every home on the tour and at the Shell Clubhouse. We select cars representative of the vintage of the homes, and typically include cars preserved in vintage condition making our Home Tour one of the best car shows in the area.

*Our Special Guest Star is “Joltin Joe” a freshly restored 1948 Chris-Craft U22 Sportsman runabout given to Joe DiMaggio by Yankees fans in 1949, and used to give Marilyn a tour in 1954. Joe was born in Martinez to a large family of Italian fishermen, with many aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. throughout the town and its history. Joe spent a great deal of time here for family events and came here with Marilyn Monroe many times. There are stories of high school boys cutting school to ogle Marilyn on her shopping sprees on Main Street. The U22 speedboats were among Chris Craft’s most successful products, and memorable as Henry Fonda’s boat in On Golden Pond.*

Two factors distinguish this year’s homes from prior neighborhoods: new money from oil and industry, along with a revolutionary design philosophy, Arts & Crafts, commonly known as the Craftsmen Architecture. Three of our homes were built in the nineteen teens, two during WWI, three during Prohibition, and two during the Great Depression. Most would be considered craftsman designs and all have significant influence from the Arts & Crafts Movement.

As with the homes on past tours, there will be vintage features to admire such as cabinetry, arches, tilework, vintage appliances, along with museum quality furniture and decorations. Visitors will also be intrigued by newer additions to the homes that blend in so well with the old. Features range from reproduction push-button light switches, newly fabricated leaded glass cabinets, repurposed historic items, and modern conveniences blended into classic decor.

The use of color in the homes is another noteworthy feature of our tours; so many of us think of the early part of the 20th Century in black & white, but this was a period of vibrant colors and rich textures in the home design and decor. Part of the Craftsman style was the use of local materials in handmade items, shunning the machined bric-a-brac of Victorian design. This brings a more rugged form of elegance and often the juxtaposition of contrasting material and colors.

The area we will tour is on the eastern slope of downtown, which allows for dramatic views of the water, downtown, and the valley ~~which was still farmland when these homes were built~~. Most of the homes are built-into up-sloping lots which give them commanding presence. The homes on the tour also feature attractive gardens, impressive outdoor entertainment areas, dramatic views, and creative examples of gardening with limited water. These are all wonderful opportunities for great photography, and artistic inspiration.

Among the special features will be original blueprints of the 1941 Cape Cod Revival home, a classic Wedge wood stove, a hidden room behind a moving book case, a laundry chute, and a carrousel horse. One of our homes displays a mural painted by the current owner, another has original wall paper from the 1930s, and another has a chair upholstered with a chenille bedspread. Among the features will be claw foot tubs, stained glass windows, old sewing machines, and a doll for the 1980s.

A local camera collector will have a large display of antique and classic cameras at the start of the tour and each home will feature one or more cameras from the vintage of the home. We even have a 1930s Zeiss-Contax camera with telephoto lens, identical to that once used by our favorite favorite-son, Joe DiMaggio, along with a photo of Joe holding the camera. And we have a photo of Norma Jean Baker (later Marilyn Monroe) holding an early 1940s Kodak, along with an example of that camera.

There are still many opportunities to volunteer for this year’s tour on the day of the event -- as docents and ticket takers. To volunteer, contact the Historical Society through its website: [www.MartinezHomeTour.com](http://www.MartinezHomeTour.com) where tickets are also available.

It has become a tradition to include one public building on each Home Tour; for 2015 we will be viewing the Veterans Memorial Hall. This beautiful brick building, at the corner of Ward and Court Streets, was dedicated in 1927. It had the town's first swimming pool in the basement. The pool is still there -- under the present basement floor. The recently restored Hall is the home of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1351.

The Shell Clubhouse, also part of the tour, looks today much as it did when built in 1937. Inside it retains its beautiful Craftsman interior. It will be the starting and ending point for the Tour. Complementary beverages and refreshments will be served during the Tour and restrooms are open to our guests. There is lots of parking, convenient to the building and the shuttles to the other features of the tour.

Our tour is Saturday, October 10, 2015, a day to discover the treasures that make Martinez an amazing small town, preserved right here in modern Contra Costa. Tickets are $30 at the event, or advance discount tickets ($25) can be purchased online at: [www.tinyurl.com/mtztour](http://www.tinyurl.com/mtztour) through links at: [www.MartinezHomeTour.com](http://www.MartinezHomeTour.com) or from the following merchants (cash or check only) :

I’ve Been Framed (411 Ferry Street)

Char’s Flowers (635 Main Street)

Martinez Museum (Court & Escobar Street)

Mountain Grounds (Alhambra & J Street)

Rumain’s Jewelry (510 Center Avenue)

Bagel Street Café (580 Center Avenue)

The UPS Store (the Lucky Shopping Center).

The following sponsors make our Tour possible:

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**Paragraph 15 – Notes to Press**

Note to the Press: The Society will be submitting additional press releases to your office between now and October 10th. The photos of the other homes on the Tour are reserved for illustrating those releases.