

770 Santa Ynez Street



1926 ~ Tudor period style

ARCHITECT: Birge Clark

OWNERS: Martin ~ Raffel

BY ANN CHASE; REVISED IN 2006 BY MARIAN LEIB ADAMS

When Birge Clark—whose father, Arthur, had been a professor of graphic art at Stanford and who grew up across the street from the site of this house—agreed to build the house for Gale and Lois Martin, rumor has it that his mother asked wryly, “What do you think of a son who designs a house that cuts off his mother’s view?”

The specifications for the construction on lot 41 of San Juan Subdivision No. 2 called for a two-story residence with reinforced-concrete walls at least 4 inches thick. Its stucco exterior has redwood half-timbering on the front gables. To give the half-timbering a rustic, handcrafted look, it was to be hewn with an adze. The original colors on the exterior were tan, but since 1955 the stucco has been gray-blue with darker-toned timbering. Wrought-iron lanterns by the front and back porches are old street lamps that the Raffels bought in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1961. All windows are casements. The approximately 4,200-square-foot house cost about \$25,000 to build in the mid-1920s.

The original ground-floor comprised, as it does today, the 7½- by 18-foot entry hall, 21- by 32-foot living room to the left, dining room and kitchen to the right, and a half-bath. Upstairs are four bedrooms, a sewing room, and two baths, each between a pair of bedrooms. The basement contained laundry and furnace rooms.

Several balconies brought in views of the hills: a small west-facing balcony off the living room; a second west-facing balcony along the side of the house off the back of the entry hall; a balcony-deck on the north side of the house off the kitchen and dining room; and a smaller balcony upstairs off a north-facing bedroom.

In the living room, three large windows, each nearly 6 feet tall, give panoramic views of the hills. Floors throughout the entry, living room, and dining room are concrete, scored to resemble tiles. The concrete was painted with a solution of yellow ocher “in a proportion

directed by the owner.” It is believed that this was Mrs. Martin’s idea, and she is said to have done much of the work herself. This is borne out by the architect’s specification that “the owner will paint certain squares and joinings with a different color of finish. The contractor shall cooperate with an owner in doing this special coloring.” After nearly 80 years, the flooring has a lovely sheen and appears indestructible. Other floors are of oak, except for linoleum in the kitchen.

The living room has its original Indiana limestone fireplace and its redwood mantel, as well as a P.C. Lighte & Co. piano that has been in the house since the first owners’ occupancy. A small window in the wooden front door, also original, features a set-in grille with a wrought-iron butterfly design; the grille was specified to be removable.

The leaded-glass light fixtures in the upstairs sewing room and on the stair landing were to be reinforced with “small steel bars as may be necessary to insure rigidity.” The sewing room was outfitted with what was in the 1920s the latest in homemaking gadgetry: a pull-down Peerless ironing board installed in a shallow wall cupboard. It has not survived.

In addition to the house’s four original bedrooms, the Raffels added a bedroom and bath in the basement. A cottage, which the Martins had built at the bottom of the lot, was occupied by junior faculty and students before the Raffel occupancy.

THE OWNERS

Ernest Gale Martin. He was professor of physiology at Stanford from 1916 until 1934.

Martin received a Ph.B. at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1897 and Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in 1904. Before coming to Stanford, he held various positions in biology and physiology at Hamline, 1896–97; Johns Hopkins, 1902–03; Purdue University, 1904–6; Harvard, 1906–10; Sargent School of Physical Education, 1906–14; Simmons College, 1907–08; and Radcliffe College, 1914–16. He was also assistant professor at Harvard, 1910–16; served as research physiologist (temporary), U.S. Public Health Service, 1917–20; was a member of the Sub-committee on Industrial Fatigue, Advisory Commission to Council of National Defense in 1917; and captain, Sanitary Corps, U.S.A., 1918–19.

Before building the house, Martin and his wife, Ruby A. Ticknor, whom he had married in August 1904, had lived on campus at 14 Salvatierra Street and in Palo Alto at 1525 Waverley Street.

Professor Martin died in October 1934, survived by his wife and a daughter, Lois Ticknor Martin. They established a memorial scholarship to be awarded alternately to a graduate student in medicine or geology. The house remained in the family for a time but was also rented until 1955, when the present owners bought it.

Sidney Raffel. He was born in 1911 in Baltimore, received degrees from Johns Hopkins University (A.B. in 1930 and Sc.D. in 1933), and did postdoctoral work in the School of Hygiene and Public Health there in 1933–35. He then came to Stanford Medical School, earning his M.D. in 1943 after several years of combining clinical practice at Duke University with medical studies at Stanford. He was professor of medical microbiology in the Medical School. In 1938, he married Yvonne Fay, who was born in British Columbia in 1909. He bought the house in 1955 for \$30,000 and continues to live here with family members. His wife died in 2001.

The Raffels raised their five daughters here. In 1961, they added a room and bath in the basement, which is often occupied by students, children, and grandchildren. Very few renovations have been made over the years, save the occasional painting of walls for cosmetic purposes. Many memorable parties have been given in this house, and in the garden behind it. The Martins used to play croquet on the lower lawn behind the house, and the gardens were considered a showplace during their tenure. Perhaps because of the house's reinforced-concrete walls, the only damage it suffered in the 1989 earthquake was a fallen chimney.

SOURCES

House plans. In possession of Raffel family.

Martin, Ernest Gale [biographical

information]. *Who Was Who in America*, 1 (1897–1942.

Raffel, Linda. Notes and e-mails to

Marian Adams on house and biographical details of Sidney and Yvonne Raffel (2006).