

The House that Weeks Built

C H R I S T I N A W A T E R S

To even the most casual observer, it is a stately house. With its expanse of lawn rolling almost to the edge of the sea, twin towering palms and terraced Spanish tile roof-lines, the house has soothed the admiring eyes of Santa Cruzans for 75 years. William Weeks had already hit his stride as a leading architect of the California style — the creator of hundreds of unique schools, churches and domiciles — when he went to work in 1909 to design the Iliff residence on West Cliff Drive.

Bearing haunting prophecy of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, its Spanish Mission revival architecture (skillfully balancing influences of neo-Classicism and Art Deco) marks the house as Weeks' residential showpiece. But the true magic isn't revealed until the visitor steps inside and into the warmth of its current incarnation as The Darling House, a seaside bed and breakfast inn owned and graciously managed by Darrell and Karen Darling.

The house yields up its charms only gradually. There is almost too much artistic information to absorb upon first glance. Golden oak — burnished to the point of satin and inlaid with custom marquetry — everywhere assaults the eye. The views of the Pacific — available through every window — dominate the house. During a two-month antique-shopping spree that ensued after purchase of the house in 1983, the Darlings acquired the elegant decorations for each of the eight bedrooms. But the gleaming

white-tiled bathrooms and porcelain plumbing fixtures are originals.

"All the rooms, except the central Spanish Room, have ocean views," Karen Darling says, showing me into the downstairs Rainbow Room. Appointed with turn-of-the-century marble-topped dressers, powdery pink Oriental rug and carved oak king size bed, this room rises to the occasion of its magnificent view of the Santa Cruz Wharf and Monterey Bay. Like each of the distinctive guest rooms, this one sports an enormous walk-in closet, satiny wainscotting, hardwood floors and recessed sink.

Having grown up in the hotel business, Karen Darling admits an intimate acquaintance with the amount of personal attention and non-stop work involved in the inn-keeping trade. Pausing to drink in the incomparable view, she says, "I think people of the community have seen this house as their own home for years. They couldn't really have access to it until we opened The Darling House. We're glad to open what we consider a work of art to the public. But it's a big responsibility," she adds, leading me down the skylit corridor, past an enormous bathroom with its oversized pedestal tub built for two. "Even the bathrooms have beveled glass windows."

With an unerring eye to detail, Weeks designed each room with its own custom woodwork, from ornate hardwood parquet to floorboards, wainscotting and doors. Some rooms are dazzlingly finished,

many in oak and in every case the room's doors are constructed of satin maple, cut from the same piece of wood. Lavishly applied woodwork surely lies at the heart of this house's astonishing artistry.

At the end of the long hallway is the Chinese Room, dangling over the side garden, filled with Chinese antiques and a fabulous carved Chinese wedding bed equipped with a lacy feather quilt. Outside the glass doors is a second floor terrace offering a view through one of the house's several telescopes. So secluded is this terrace that for 20 years next door neighbor Dorothy Cline (of The Breakers) didn't even know it existed. I am directed to notice the copper flashing that soundproofs the house's windows and an ingenious system of drainpipes through which rain water travels to a sophisticated underground drainage system.

The window of one inviting room overlooks the original contractor's house, a separate cottage with bath, kitchen, living and bedroom that is available as a special lodging.

"I think it's just the synthesis of location, the elements and the orientation of the house towards the sea — its combination of design and execution — that makes it special," says Darrell Darling, a Methodist minister currently on leave from his parish duties. From the magnificent Pacific Room, once the Iliff master bedroom, Rev. Darling likes to point out that "you can see the sun rise over the Pacific," an indication of the room's due East view of the Bay and its pounding surf. Here a corner fireplace shares the honors with majestic headboards, floorlength blue draped curtains, blue Oriental rugs and a long oak table bearing another telescope.

"The sunlight is refracted through the many beveled win-

dows into showers of rainbows," Rev. Darling points out, catching a rainbow of afternoon sunlight in his hand for emphasis. "It's a genuine joy to share this house with people."

Lodgers at the Darling House are served a homemade breakfast in the graceful oak-lined dining room with its Art Deco rose tiled fireplace, heirloom furniture from the Darling household and 12-foot bay window, whose oak banquets invite lengthy afternoons of daydreaming. Although the proprietors maintain their personal quarters in the enormous, fully finished, beam-ceilinged basement of the house, it is the first floor living room, now graced by a 12-foot Christmas tree, that seems their favorite sanctuary.

"We instantly fell in love with the house," Rev. Darling says with a smile. "It was more than simply the architecture. The house seems to have a life of its own." This special quality may stem from the close relationship between cattle fortune

and heir William Seward Iliff (whose relatives were trustees and benefactors of various universities and religious colleges) and architect William Weeks, who was, in all likelihood, a schoolmate of Iliff's and who designed many of the buildings sponsored by the Iliff family over the years.

With its graceful synthesis of architectural ideas, breathtaking location and exquisite, hand-crafted detailwork, William Weeks' West Cliff masterpiece is a special house by any standards. Now, as the Darling House, it's become a warm hearth for many to enjoy.

The Darling House is located at 314 West Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz (458-1958). Lodgings (8 bedrooms, 5½ baths) range between \$50 and \$145 and include a home-made expanded continental breakfast. During off-season weeknights, three nights are available for the price of two as well as three rooms for the price of two.



PHOTO: SUZETTE LUCICH

A DARLING COUPLE. Karen and Darrell Darling, welcome bed and breakfast lodgers at the front door of their inn, The Darling House, a seaside showpiece built by William Weeks in 1910.

