

Decked Out in Color

Surrounded by exotic vegetation,
this nineteenth-century home
is a welcomed addition
to the neighborhood

By Jeanette Prather

Living in a Painted Lady is a delight for Richard Josephson, co-founder and co-owner of Staff of Life Natural Food Market. The Victorian-era home that Josephson and his wife own in Santa Cruz's Seabright neighborhood dates back to the 1880s. "Technically it's considered faux Dutch-Colonial," explained Josephson. "It's not quite Victorian."

The Josephsons began painting their home in May 2018 and finished the job almost a year later. "My wife chose all the trim colors on the outside of our house," said Josephson. "I chose the body colors, and since there are more than 25 colors in total, we've got ourselves a Painted Lady."

After a bit of research, Josephson found out that the home was a "kit home," the kind often sold in the nineteenth century by companies like Sears and Roebuck. "The original owners either ordered the plans, or both the plans and the lumber to assemble," said Josephson, who fell in love with the home long before he purchased it. "My former, late wife and I saw this house in 1976," he said. "We lived two blocks away with our child and needed a bigger house."

(Spread) Josephson's stylized home boasts a color scheme featuring 25 carefully selected colors.





According to Josephson, the house was not on the market at that time, but the one next door was. "I still loved this house," he said. "One day I got a phone call from a real estate agent that this home was available in an estate sale, so we put in the highest bid to try and scare off other bidders. It worked. I do recall the losing bidders snickering, 'suckers.' And of course the bid at that time was a fraction of what we would pay these days."

Not only did Josephson purchase his home at a screaming deal by today's standards, but he also enjoys having a less-than-two-minute commute to work. "We opened Staff of Life in 1969 across from Day's Market on Seabright, and then moved to the Water Street location in '72," he said. "I've been in business for 50 years with a just plain insignificant commute."

Touring the Josephsons' stylized home is similar to exploring a museum from a distant land. "My wife and I have been married for 36 years," said Josephson. "Luckily we share the same stylistic tastes, so we took our design inspiration from this Victorian and went from there." The final design details developed slowly, over time, he said. "I chose the cartoon design images in each of our stained glass windows, then cut the glass and did the leading," said Josephson, "but they were designed by two fellows in Aptos for \$25 per template, back in the day."

The Josephsons' also chose their collection of eclectic art over time, with each piece coming from locations ranging from Southeast Asia to Santa Cruz. "We've got a few local artists in here like Kent Perry and Bert Levitsky," said Josephson. "Actually, Bert's also a very good friend who uses my garage for his cabinetry shop."

Past the living room and towards the stunning back yard sits a light purple dining room lined with gold trim. In the center of the dining room is an Asian-import trade dining table and chair set which is over a century old. "This piece has a great story," said Josephson. "I went to an antique auction 30 years ago at the fairgrounds, placed a bid for the set and didn't get it because I hadn't met the minimum. I was bummed. I went back the next day and checked to see if it might just still be there." He met the owners, who were relocating the set and intended to sell it in an auction in San Francisco six weeks later. He gave them his business card, just in case. "A few days went by and I got a phone call that they were willing to sell the set to me, so I bought it for the exact amount that I had originally bid," Josephson said.

The image of cranes and shoreline foliage etched into the backs of the dark wooden chairs echoes the stained glass along the walls in the dining room. It also parallels

the external scenery in the Josephson's backyard.

"I really enjoy the look of sprawling, almost unkempt foliage," said Josephson. "When we do garden tours, I definitely cut the plants back a bit, but I really like the wild look." Numerous plant societies and charitable organizations have visited the garden. The last tour was the day before they began painting their house in 2018. Each plant is carefully labeled with an intricate system of organization, both inside and outside the large greenhouse that sits behind a 17,000-gallon Koi pond. "The lot is 60-by-225 feet," said Josephson. "We've got an area in the back named Boot Hill where we strive to revive plants that have for various reason have struggled in the garden."

Amid the jungle terrain is a selection of eclectic plants like the gigantic Southeast Asian *Cariota Gigas* fishtail palm that stands tall over the other exotic tropical plants. "I like to refer to the foliage archways as 'foliar tunnels,'" said Josephson. With its exotic plants, the entire yard and its Victorian-style greenhouse give the sense of a botanical garden. Sitting next to the greenhouse is a vintage structure that was once used as a mechanic's shop on an adjoining lot and was moved onto the



(Above) A glass Victorian-style greenhouse rests at the edge of the garden that is home to plants that may be sensitive to the Santa Cruz climate.

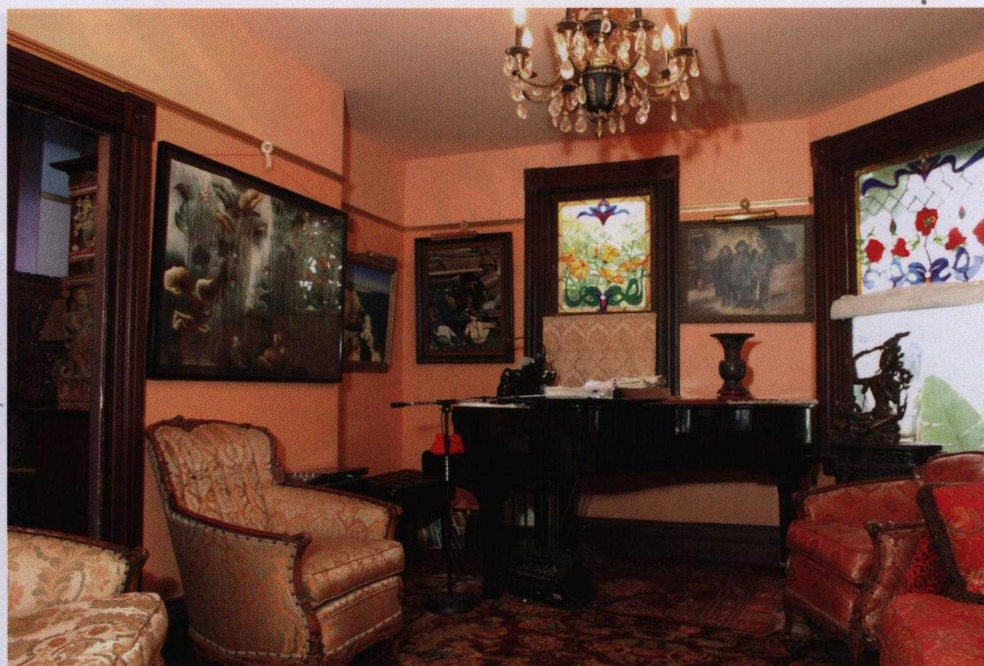


(Above) Being situated on one of the largest parcels in the neighborhood allows area for the Josephsons' unique extensive gardens and their 17,000 gallon Koi pond.

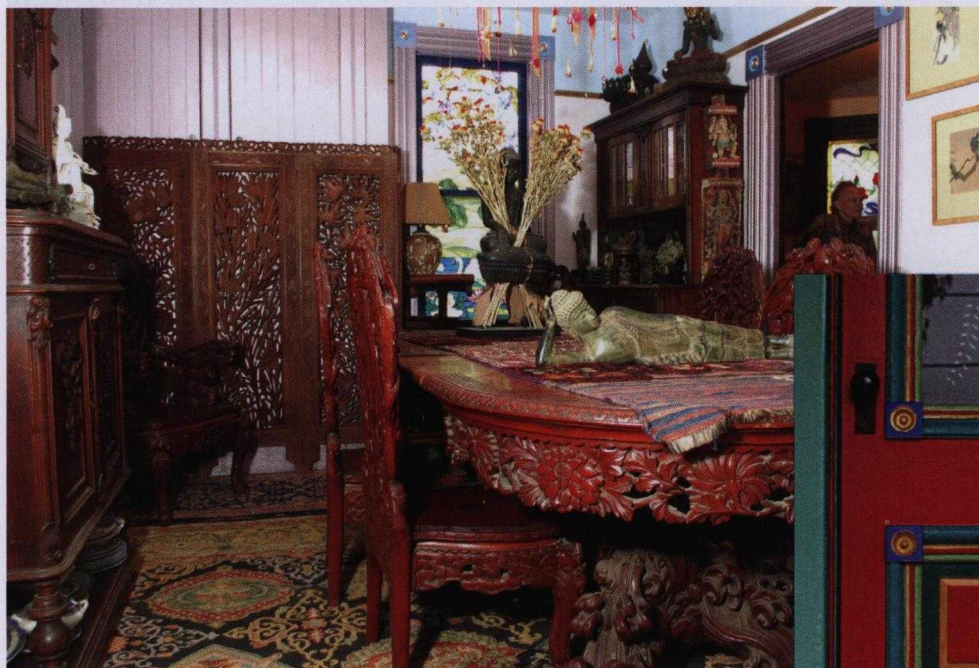
property. "Now it's Bert's [Levitsky] unofficial woodworking shop," said Josephson.

Standing in front of the workshop and looking back toward the Painted Lady, one can see an extensive second story deck that overlooks the Koi pond. "That is an extension of an unfinished attic that we turned into the master bedroom," said Josephson. "My wife's brother is an architect and began drawing on napkins to design the bedroom. I said that I wanted it to look like the rest of the house and he said, 'It'll look more like the rest of the house than the rest of the house.'"

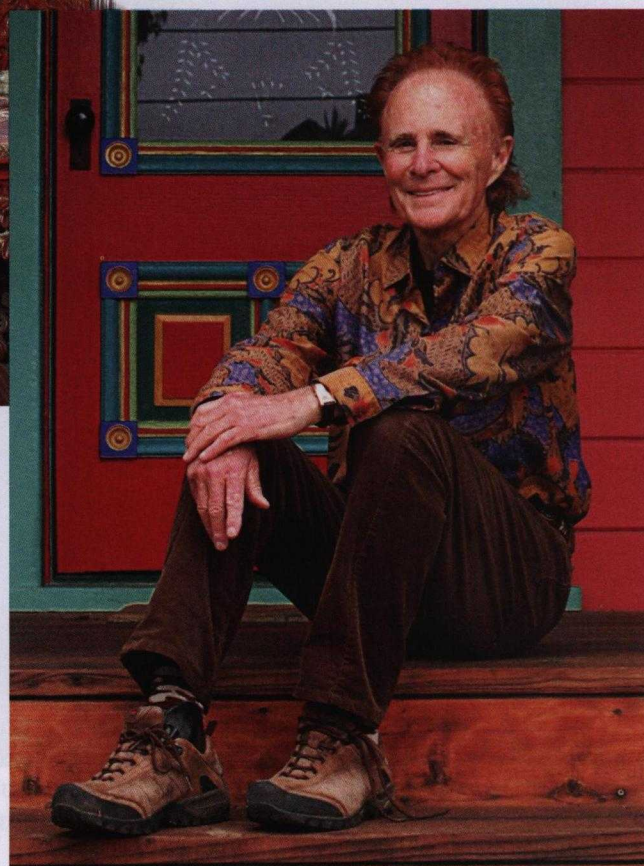
Traveling through the sprawling terrain on the side of the house and moving to the front yard, the site of a future endeavor comes into view. That spot will soon feature a Japanese garden with raked gravel. "We're always working on this house," chuckled Josephson. "It's the project of a lifetime."



(Above) The living room of the historic home is a treasure trove of art and antique furnishings. Being an accomplished pianist, Richard Josephson's piano occupies a large portion of the room.



(Above) Resting on a vintage carpet a hand-carved, antique dining table takes center stage in the home's dining room which is surrounded by a collection of antiques. In the distance is one of the home's leaded stained glass windows created by Josephson.



(Right) Richard Josephson relaxes on his home's front porch in front of its colorful front door.