

# Westside landmark rescued

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SANTA CRUZ — The Kitchen Brothers' Yogi Temple, a Westside landmark, has been saved.

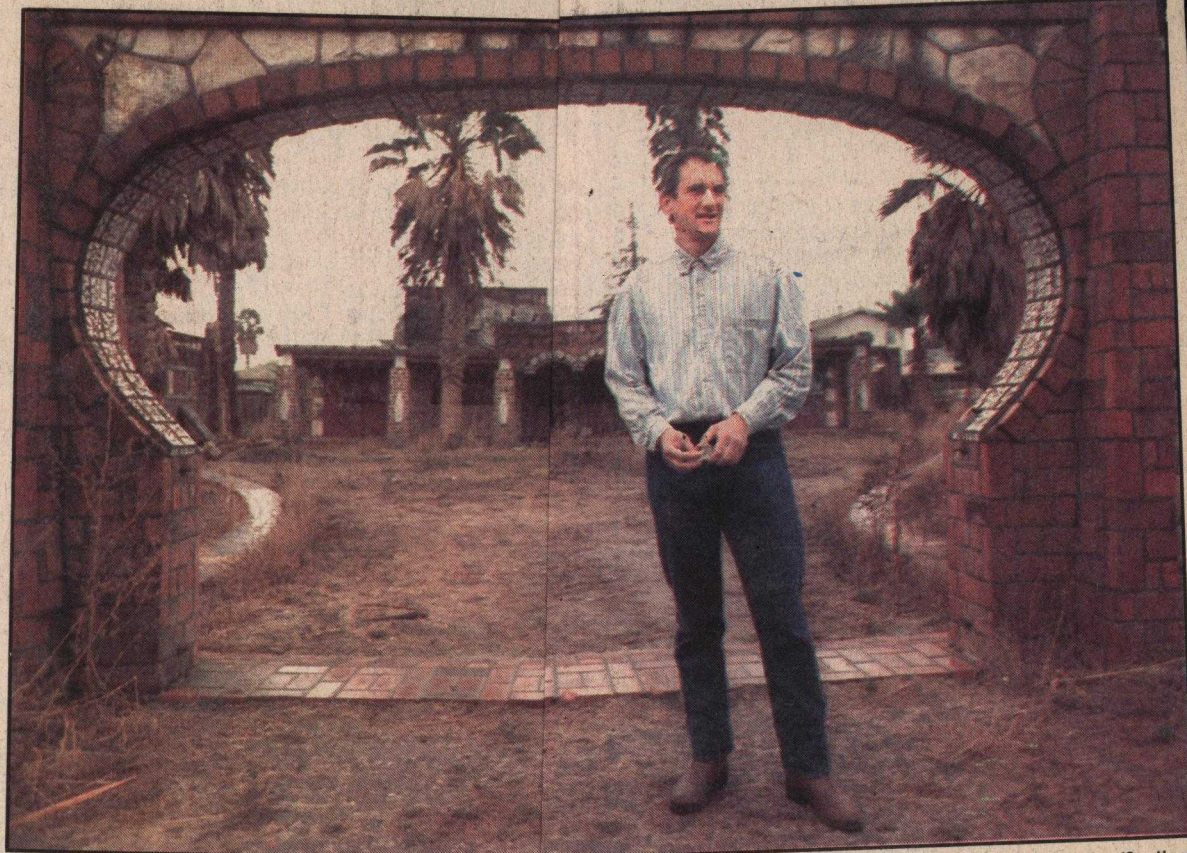
Recommended by city officials for demolition because of the vandalism and arson it has attracted in recent years, the historic site now will be rescued by out-of-town owner Andrew Karim.

Karim said Thursday that he only recently learned the structure was causing problems for city police and firefighters. He agreed to have it secured against arsonists, vandals and transients by sealing the openings they use to get inside and installing motion-sensor-controlled lights.

"We want to be responsible property owners and go to Santa Cruz and take care of matters," said Karim, whose family has owned and loved the structure for 30 years.

When local brothers Kenneth and Raymond Kitchen built their now famous "Yogi Temple" in Westside Santa Cruz in the 1930s, they intended it to be a folk-art interpretation of a Hindu temple.

But several decades later, it has become a palace for transients. Its once-ornate brickwork and inlaid abalone shell mosaics are covered in gang graffiti. The designated city historic site at 519 Fair Ave. also has become a headache for police and fire officials who recently presented the City Council with an emergency ordinance to have the building demolished.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Architect Mark Primack said the Fairvenue 'temple' is inspiring in its creativity.

When members of the city's Historic Preservation Commission heard about the recommendation they said they had not been consulted before the ordinance went to the City Council. Commissioners and community members rallied to save the structure on the basis that it's not structurally dangerous, but needs only to be properly secured against vandals.

Karim, who recently inherited the property from his deceased father, has agreed to pay for the structure to be secured rather than allow it to be destroyed. According to Karim, city officials did not con-

tact him about the recent problems.

"I received no notice from the city about the recent fires and problems with transients," Karim said. He said he only learned there was an emergency ordinance to have it demolished when a reporter called to interview him about it. "Then I had to call city officials to get confirmation," he said.

Karim said he plans to come to Santa Cruz on Monday to meet with contractors and city officials to fix up the property. After repairs are made he will begin looking for potential renters.

"I would like to preserve the structure, because that's what my father intended," Karim said. "He wouldn't have bought the building if he wasn't just in awe of it."

Local architect and city Zoning Board member Mark Primack shares that awe.

"I'm an architect," Primack said. "You go to school to learn to express your talents, but the first thing you run into in the real world is zoning laws and resale value, rather than personal expression."

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Primack said he is inspired by builders like the Kitchen brothers — both brick masons — who placed a premium on creativity and talent. "I don't know about the resale value, but they are phenomenal examples of creativity and the human spirit."

"The Kitchen brothers built all the masonry this side of Santa Cruz before the 1950s. They were part of our historical culture. I was just saying it's draconian to tear the building down, when the way to solve the situation is to make the building secure."

Historic Preservation Commissioner Ross Gibson agreed demolition was uncalled for and said it

was frustrating that the city lists sites as official historic landmarks, and then considers demolishing them without consulting the city's Historic Preservation Commission.

"Their focus is totally on security, not on history" Gibson said. "If you build a city like a penitentiary, it will be safe, but not culturally significant. We must allow the best of our community to flourish."

Fire Marshal Mark Latham, who joined city building officials in recommending demolition, said he and other officials are happy with the owner's new arrangement.

"Crime and fire hazard-wise, we're immediately agreeable," Latham said. Some of the structure's wooden parts will need to be removed because of the fire hazard, but, Latham said, officials are satisfied with the owner's decision to seal the building.

"From the city's standpoint, the most important thing is still to uphold safety," Latham added.

According to owner Karim, he would also like to see the city do its part in upholding safety near the property. "We have responsibilities as owners, but we want to make sure the law does their job and arrests trespassers," he said.

According to the City Clerk's Office, the consideration to demolish the building is still on the City Council's Tuesday agenda, but the mayor will tell the council then of the decision to secure the structure.