

Life on the edge: West Cliff Drive

Coastal treasures abound

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SANTA CRUZ — Take in the sunset, the surfers, the seagulls and the seals — is there any more beautiful place in the world than West Cliff Drive?

Now turn your head the other way for another look at the beauty of West Cliff Drive — its houses.

Here, close enough to feel the pounding of the waves through their floors, is an assortment of interesting houses — a couple of log cabins, stone houses, old Victorians and new ones; a red barn, condominiums, and a bed and breakfast.

Small and modest one-story houses, some with weedy yards, sit next to mansions. They both have coveted West Cliff Drive addresses — and that's valuable property. Of the 10 most expensive homes sold in the West Cliff Drive area since 1993, half are on West Cliff. They ranged from \$500,000 to almost \$1.2 million, according to an analysis of multiple listings.

Here's a look at some of the houses.

First some history. To understand West Cliff, you have to think in sections, says Santa Cruz historian Ross Gibson.

The section from what is now the Dream Inn to the Lighthouse Point was prize property. It was called "Newport of the Pacific." Each block was laid out as a single estate. There was no West Cliff Drive; it was a footpath and horse riding trail. The main access came out on Lighthouse Avenue.

Around the turn of the century it became "Cliff Drive." When East Cliff Drive was laid out in 1906, it became West Cliff.

From Lighthouse Avenue to Woodrow Avenue was the forested estate of James Duval Phelan and his father, James Phelan, who founded the County Bank of Santa Cruz and banks in San Jose and San Francisco. It was a grand estate, complete with a Bohemian retreat for artists and writers: John Muir, Gertrude Atherton and Jack London visited there.

The area from between Garfield Park to Woodrow to the cliffs was Vue de l'eau, a trolley park. This is the end of the line for the first electric trolley, put on track by entrepreneur Fred Swanton and James Phillip Smith, owner of what is now Sunshine Villa.



The stone house was built by a mineralogist whose ghost is said to frequent the home.



Work continues to restore the Epworth House.

The Phelan estate is gone now: razed to make way for a conference center that was never built on Lighthouse Field. That's another story for another time.

Back to the houses, starting at the Dream Inn and working west toward Natural Bridges State Park.

• **The Lynch House**, 170 West Cliff Drive: This grand old Italianate home, built in 1877, was the second largest home in Santa Cruz when it was built for a Sedgewick Lynch, a contractor who was one of the original owners of what became the Cowell Ranch. The house cost \$12,000 to build and had four fireplaces.

It had the view until the concrete cube addition of the Dream Inn addition went up in 1972, before regulations limiting the heights of buildings were adopted.

The Dream Inn bought the home, and used it as a hotel and for storage. Last November, the home was sold as part of a package deal with the Clear View Court mobile home park. The new owner, Manuel Vieira, plans to restore the home and use it as a private residence for about a year.

Eventually, Vieira said, the home will have a commercial use, possibly as a coffee shop, banquet room, or for alternative medicine.

• **The Darling House**: 314 West Cliff Drive. William, the step-son of Bishop and Mrs. Warren of Colorado, C.C. Wheeler, built a summer home on the corner of the family property c. 1905-10. The Mission Revival style building is believed to have been designed by William Weeks, an acclaimed Watsonville and San Francisco architect.

The house is now a bed and breakfast owned by Karen and Darrell Darling, who bought it in 1984. The house is almost unchanged, said Darrell Darling. It still has the original light switches, lighting, plumbing fixtures, and hardwood inlays that have never been painted.

Bishop Warren's granddaughter, who spent summers in the house all through her childhood, visited about 10 years ago, he said. She said the house, which their family called "Rockcrest," was precisely as she remembered.

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• **Epworth by the Sea** — northwest corner of West Cliff Dr. and Santa Cruz Ave.

Built in 1887, for C.C. Wheeler, it was purchased a year later by Bishop and Mrs. Warren of Colorado. Mrs. Warren was the daughter of John H. Iliff, a cattle barron whose herds roamed from Wyoming to Texas.

The Warrens expanded the house and gardens. The house was named by Bishop Warren, a Methodist, in honor of Epworth, England, the birthplace of John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church.

According to Sentinel files, the three story, 6,000 square foot mansion was for sale in 1962 for \$21,500.

It was restored in the late 1980s, and the owners rented it for vacation rentals, weddings, corporate conventions and retreats. A portion of the property was sold, and two new Victorians have since been built on it.

The original carriage house and cottage remained part of the original estate.

The home was sold again in 1994 for less than \$1 million to Bill Nordvik and Debbie Fedrigo, formerly of Fremont.

The couple is in the process of restoring it again — new paint, new roof, and new chimneys to replace those damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

• **The Mariolo House**: It's not there yet, but by early 1998, Slatter Construction will have completed a two-story Mediterranean style home for Robert and Harlene Mariolo, Santa Cruz residents. The couple met along West Cliff Drive years ago, and used to park there. "We're going back to our start," said Harlene Mariolo. The land was previously a vacant lot which she describes as "a wonderful space."

• **The Oblates of St. Joseph**: Several large lots adjacent to Lighthouse Field State Park. The house in the middle is the former Rutherglen Terrace, a colonial mansion with a broad veranda, originally built c. 1893. It was



A new home on West Cliff Drive built in the Victorian style sold last year for more than \$1 million.

Photos by Shmuel Thaler

purchased in the 1930s by the Oblates of St. Joseph and is used as a house for the residing priests, oblates of a small order founded by a bishop in northern Italy.

• **The Crawford House**, 986 Westcliff. This is a brand new Spanish colonial style house at the

corner of Woodrow. The \$1 million plus custom home was built for Phil and Jean Crawford. A small house previously on the lot was razed to make way for the two-story, 3,000 square foot home.

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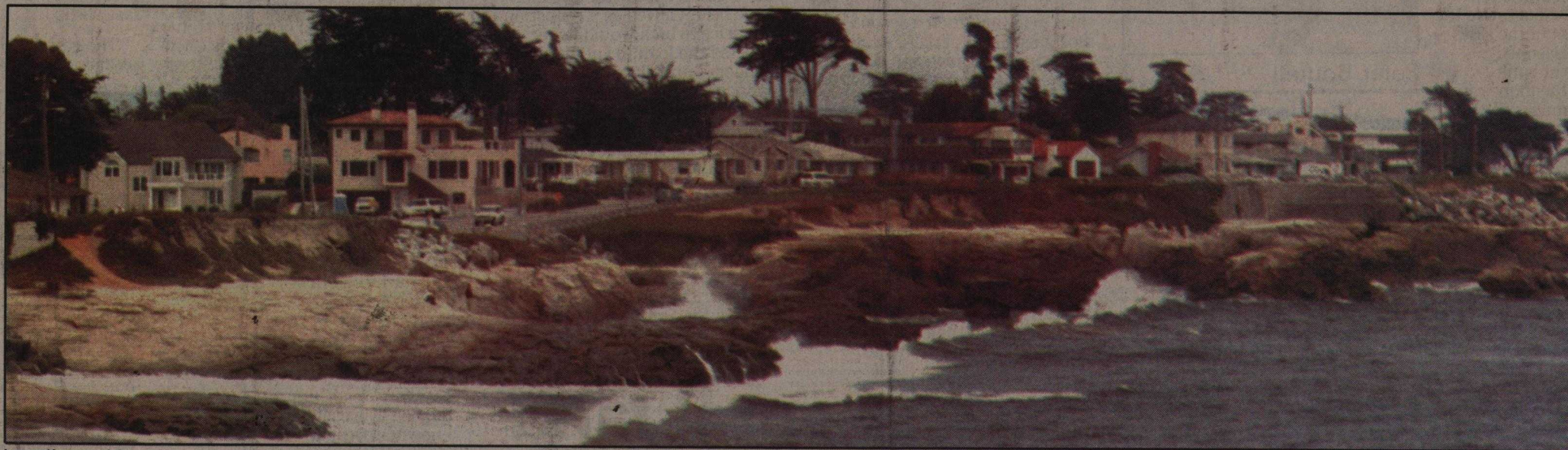
HOME FRONT

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Land's end has it s own kind of beauty, for those looking toward the sunset and for those looking back toward the mansions and modest homes of West Cliff.

East of West Cliff

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Inside, the house has custom tile and hardwood floors of Brazilian Santos mahogany, said designer David Myers.

● **The Triangle House, 1148 West Cliff.** so called because it sits on a pie-shaped lot, wedged between West Cliff, Almar and Sunset. The east corner is also known as Dead Man's Corner — look at the concrete barriers there now, and you'll know why. Originally, it was a Victorian bungalow built in Garfield Park and then moved around 1908, said historian Gibson. In the 1960s, residents glued seashells on the front door.

In the past few years the house has been demolished and replaced with a Spanish-style home.

● **The Stone House, 1802 West Cliff.** A mineralogist named Hall had this stone home, complete with a stone cottage and garage, built in 1941.

He used stones from all over the world in the fireplace: amethyst,

fossils, fools gold, jade, lapis and quartz.

The story goes that Hall sold the home and then bought it back. In fact, the present owners think Hall might still be hanging around his beloved home.

Dyan Welch, who bought the house with her husband Ben, believes the ghost of Mr. Hall still roams around, tinkering with clocks, jewelry and jewelry boxes.

Not that the Welches are complaining: they understand why the ghost would want to stick around the unusual house.

Dyan Welch first saw the house in 1978 when she was working as a real estate agent. She had taken clients to view homes, saw the outside of the house and wrote an offer on the spot. She offered the full asking price — without even seeing the inside.

● **2218 West Cliff Drive.** A new Victorian. Sales records show this home was sold last year for \$1,175,000, the most expensive home sold in the past four years.