

Tree 'n sea living



Pete Amos/Sentinel

Restoration efforts paid off for Roger Wilder and Patricia Sambuck Wilder

Ben Lomond mansion receives national nod

RIVERWOOD — a mansion designed in the style of England's "great houses" — has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, an honor held by just one other building in Santa Cruz — the Golden Gate Villa (known as Palace Monte Carlo), thinks Patricia Sambuck Wilder, owner and renovator of both.

Barely visible from Highway 9 in Ben Lomond, Riverwood has known both loving care and neglect in its 70-year history which spans ownership by a retired doctor, development by another doctor as a showcase residence, use as a home for handicapped and mentally disturbed children, and finally, careful renovation by Wilder and her former husband, Roger Wilder, who still resides there.

Listing on the National Register comes after a lengthy application process and is a valuable asset to

any building, says Patricia. First, listing must be merited at the state level, then the case is moved to a federal committee.

Two main benefits of the listing are that the building thereafter is protected from new owners "ruining" it architecturally — no capital improvements may be made out of line with the original architecture — and, since the building becomes a national treasure, it falls into a "nice" tax bracket, says Patricia. Qualifying structures must have been built before 1934.

Riverwood is for sale, with possible buyers on the horizon. "But I hope to open it to public view once again before it changes hands," says Patricia.

Originally called Phillipshurst, the house began in 1913 as a 1½ story bungalow, typical of country homes that dotted the San Lorenzo Valley at that time. In 1923, it was remodelled into a much larger house, known as

Riverwood and designed by a San Francisco architect, Albert Farr.

It can be characterized as "an eclectic American Tudor Manor House," according to Registry forms. The Great Hall in the north wing has a pitched Cotswold roof as seen in England, casement window and French doors with various wall treatments. The Phillipshurst wing, also with a Cotswold roof, has a wrought iron balcony and pair of small, angled Tudor bay windows on the second floor. There is a "tower house," a 2½ story gate tower with stucco facade and crenelated battlements. The south wing includes a large panelled library and continues the Tudor facade.

The house has 10 bedrooms, several kitchens, apartments upstairs and downstairs, three stairways and various large living and sitting rooms. It sits on about seven acres; the front grounds have recently been

planted. Original gardens were laid out by John McLaren, Scottish designer of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

The line of owners has been: Dr. William Alfred Phillips, who purchased the property in 1913 and was the original builder; Dr. William E. Musgrave, a physician and noted scientist, and his wife, the former Florence Moore, daughter of the McCormick-Moore steamship family, a patron of the arts and singer; Theodore Smith, who purchased the property in 1936 and converted it to Blake Hammond Manor, a home for the handicapped (Smith died in 1969 and his family lived on the estate for a few years); and, finally, the Wilders who purchased it with friends in 1977 and set about a monumental restoration project which has been going on ever since.

—MARYBETH VARCADOS