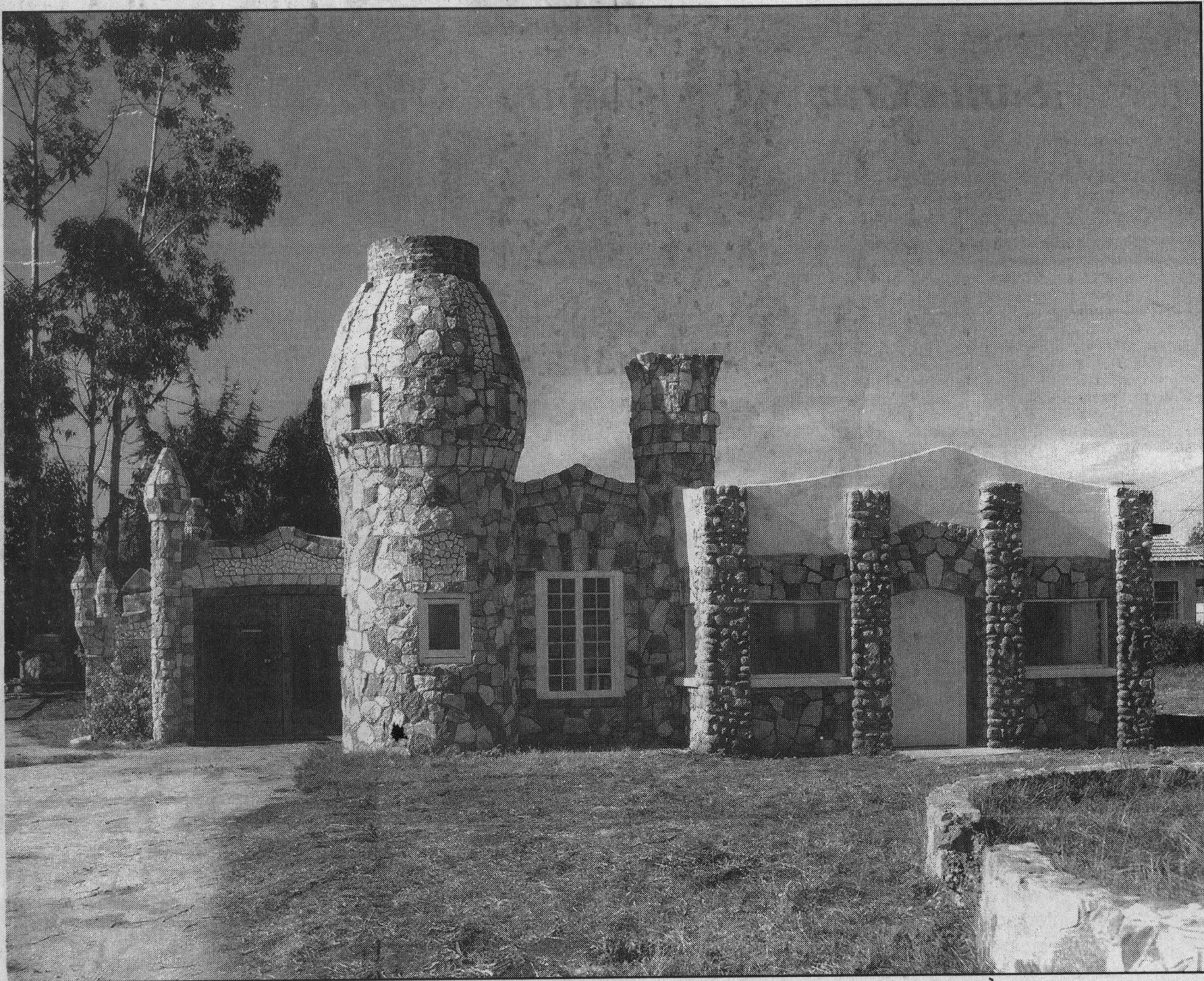


Local news



Covello and Covello

Raymond Kitchen's odd-looking building at 1211 Fair Ave., as it appeared in January, 1957.

Westside oddity demystified

Temple-like structures were built by eccentric Santa Cruz brothers

I WISH I HAD a nickel for every time I have been asked about the two unusual buildings on Fair Avenue. Most inquiries are about the wondrous temple complex at 519 Fair (just opposite Plateau Avenue) because it is the most visible and unusual of the pair. Hiding behind the chain-link fence at 1211 Fair is the temple's complement, less ornate perhaps, but another part of the intriguing legacy of the Kitchen brothers.

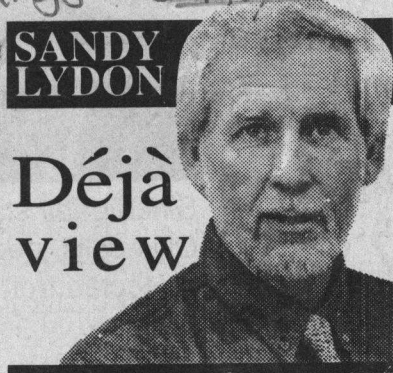
The story of the Kitchen brothers has been around Santa Cruz for more than 50 years. It is with some hesitation that I put my historian's oar into it, but here goes.

The best source for the Kitchen brothers story comes from the good old days when Nikki Silva and Davia Nelson were the "Kitchen Sisters" on KUSP-FM, a local public-radio station. They took their name from the Kitchen brothers, though they had never met either of them. They interviewed a number of people in the neighborhood to try and piece the story together. Based on their interviews and some that I have done, here's what we know.

Once upon a time there were two brothers — Kenneth and Raymond Kitchen. Raymond was a stonemason while Kenneth worked with bricks. Both were masters of their craft, and as often happens, art and blood made

SANDY LYDON

**Déjà
view**



it difficult for them to work together. Put simply, they didn't get along. Also, according to those who knew them, they were a tad eccentric, Kenneth more so than Raymond.

The story comes into focus (as if anything about this story can come into focus) during and after World War II when the two brothers began building their homes on Fair Avenue. Today we will focus on Raymond, who built the edifice in the photograph.

Much of what we know about the building came from a Kitchen sister's interview with Dr. B. Stoller back in the 1970s. Stoller bought the building in the mid-1950s, and apparently commissioned the photograph which you see here. Raymond Kitchen returned to the property several years after

Stoller bought it and from that meeting, Stoller learned what he could about the building.

Raymond received his architectural inspiration from a post card he had received from India, and he attempted to replicate the Indian temple in this building. Neither he nor his brother were religious, apparently, they just liked unusual architecture. (This will be an enormous disappointment to all those who would read something "magical" or "mystical" into the buildings.)

Raymond was particularly skillful at building stone fireplaces (Hollywood personalities often commission him to do so), so the large cylinder in the center was the largest fireplace in Santa Cruz at the time. Stoller converted the fireplace into an office which explains the two windows that appear in the photograph. The circular wall in the right foreground of the photograph was a pond, part of an elaborate water system which Kitchen built both in front of and beneath the building. When Stoller bought the building there was a large cavern which Raymond had carved beneath the building, along with a well.

Stoller filled the water system soon after buying the place. Many people noted that Raymond did most of the work on the building at night, and Stoller was of the opinion that he did so to avoid the gaze of the building

inspectors. Apparently Raymond did not have a permit to do the work.

Stoller removed some of the more ornate parts of the building to make it functional for his business, but since the building was so well put together, costs prohibited him from tearing it down completely.

Both Raymond and Kenneth moved away in the 1950s, some say to the Midwest. But whatever happened to them, they left behind a legacy to that ongoing struggle between individual creativity and city building inspectors everywhere. There's also something very "Westside" about the Kitchen brothers, a spirit which lives out there to this day.

Note: I would appreciate any anecdotes or memories from old-time Santa Cruzans who remember the Kitchen brothers. In a couple of weeks or so, I will share what we know about Kenneth Kitchen, the brickmason brother, and the "temple" he built down the street.

If you have a photograph you would like to see used in this column, or one that you would like some help identifying, send a good photocopy (color copies are best) to Déjà View, Sandy Lydon, care of the Santa Cruz County Sentinel, 207 Church St., Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060. E-mail address: salydon@aol.com. Sandy Lydon is a member of the history faculty at Cabrillo College.