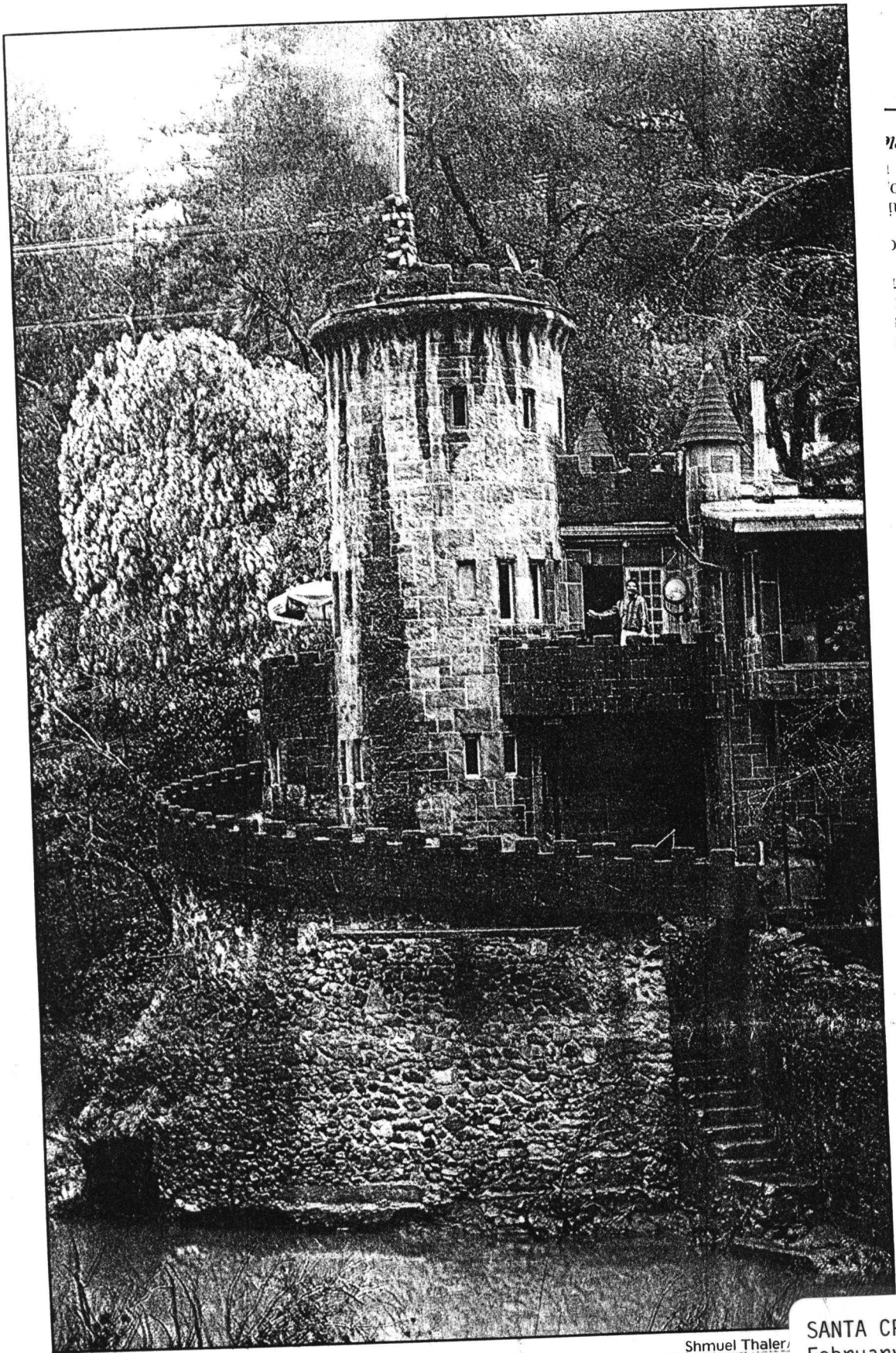


A man's
castle
is his home

'There is a little
magic to it.
... Kind of a
mystical feeling.'

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A wee bit of Scotland endures in Ben Lomond

By ROBIN MUSITELLI
Sentinel staff writer

BEN LOMOND

'TIS HERE IN THE highlands, in the shadow of Ben Lomond Mountain, just a bagpipe jig away from Loch Lomond. 'Tis here, my lass, that you'll find the castle, tucked along on the bend of the river.

No, Dorothy, we're not in Kansas anymore, or Scotland either.

It's Ben Lomond, California, where a wee bit of Scotland lives in a castle, complete with turrets, balconies and poems of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns etched in the windows.

Located at the end of Ben Lomond on the west side of Highway 9, the castle is one of San Lorenzo Valley's best known landmarks, even though it's not included on tourist maps.



John "Buzz" Lewis has lived in the castle since 1983. Stone construction and a river 'moat' give it the feel of a fortress.

It's a place where generations of children have envisioned kings and queens and knights in armor, where kids frighten themselves on Halloween, and where wondering tourists slow to a crawl as they drive past.

A handful of the curious have come knocking, but most just stand outside and take pictures, says John "Buzz" Lewis, whose

home has been his castle since 1983.

Those who ask want to know, first of all, what it's like to live in a castle.

"It's kind of wonderful, you know. It is," Lewis said. "There is a little magic to it, especially in the tower room. Kind of a mystical feeling."

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Castle

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It doesn't take much magic to nudge the imagination to the old days of Scotland. The stone-walled "dungeon" room downstairs helps. So do the arched doorways in the house, and the river "moat" out back.

The Santa Cruz Mountains are about as Scottish as any place in the United States. In fact, Ben Lomond was named by John Burns, a transplanted Scot who came to California in the 1860s and named the community after a mountain near his home.

The castle was built in the late 1920s by Robert Howden, who called himself an everyday Scotsman. But his one desire above all else was to live in a castle.

His regular home and business were in Oakland, where he operated a factory that manufactured tiles. But he picked a bend in the San Lorenzo River, where he had spent vacations camping in a tent.

There he built his castle, patterned after those he remembered from his boyhood in his native Scotland.

The three-level castle went together slowly — but with artistry and Howden's early life skills as a stone carver.

He etched panes of glass windows using a hammer and chisel, depicting Scottish scenes and poems of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns.

Some depict poems by "Howden," who Lewis speculates were written by either Robert Howden or a relative.

The outside of the castle looks like stone, but is actually thick stucco.

Howden did mosaics of 14 Scottish highland dogs at the entrance, a mosaic of a guard dog at the door, and of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Paine above the door. The turrets have coats of arms. A front courtyard is made of abalone shells.

The castle has its own graveyard, too. A headstone to "Curiosity" is believed to mark the grave of a cat. In keeping with the tradition, Lewis has added several other headstones — just for looks.

Howden kept his castle until 1937. Then it changed hands several times.

A Santa Cruz doctor, Howard Sullivan and his wife, who owned the castle from 1939 to 1946, remodeled the kitchen and living room.

They wanted Keanstone on the walls, which was used in European castles. Unable to find anyone who could do the work, they contacted Randolph Hearst at the Hearst Castle in San Simeon and he sent a man up who had done his installation, according to past Sentinel articles. They made the stone in the courtyard.

The castle became known as the Weatherly Castle after Ivy and George Weatherly bought it, still unfinished, in 1946.

Lewis has toned down the once-pink exterior for a more rustic, older look and has allowed moss and algae to grow. He also has remodeled the kitchen, and added some thoroughly modern necessities of castle life — a microwave oven and a satellite dish on the tower, for instance.

When he purchased it, the "disappearing" stairway, which was

Ivy Weatherly told people that her husband had a dream about a castle surrounded with water and that she had the same dream. Shortly after, they drove from San Francisco to Santa Cruz through the Big Basin area and spotted the castle.

The couple parked their car, walked to the gate, saw a "for sale" sign, and 10 minutes later bought the house for \$25,000.

They filled it with Scottish antiques and paintings, added a dining room, party room, and food storage cellar, tore out partitions to make small rooms larger and put in retaining walls in the garden.

They also finished the castle, adding the towers, turrets, a disappearing stairway and balconies.

After her husband died, Ivy Weatherly continued to live in the house with more than a dozen cats. She gave tours, and entertained her Tuesday Club.

Lewis, who is retired from his family's garbage business in Sunnyvale, bought the home for \$200,000 in 1983. Another would-be owner had just failed to get approvals to use it as a bed and breakfast.

Lewis intended to move to Hawaii, but noticed the castle as he drove through town on his way to the beach.

really a staircase that could be pulled down like those used for attics, had been covered up, Lewis said.

Over the years, the castle has been featured in several commercials and used in advertisements. In one, Robin Hood scaled the castle walls, and Lewis was one of his Merry Men. It's all part of living in a castle, you know.

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