

Ranch holds glimpse of local history

Architect's famous style lives on locally

By MARIA GAURA
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SCOTTS VALLEY — Screened by redwoods, oaks and the outlandish ruins of the Santa's Village amusement park, the old Hollins polo stables are invisible from Highway 17 and unknown to most city residents.

But the hidden stables have long been known to fans of William Wilson Wurster, the architect who designed them and a score of other Scotts Valley homes. Wurster's Scotts Valley designs helped launch his long, prominent career, and created a style of architecture known as the "Bay Region Style."

The Hollins polo stables are an example of Wurster's early style, and represent a colorful chapter in Scotts Valley history. Built in 1930 for pro golfer and polo player Marion Hollins — developer of the Pasatiempo Golf Course — the U-shaped building held stalls for Hollins' polo ponies, quarters for her trainer and a studio where Hollins stayed when she wasn't at her large Pasatiempo home.

Held in private hands for 60 years, the Hollins polo ranch buildings have become somewhat dilapidated, and the small oak trees planted near the house now tower over it. But the stables are still structurally sound, and may soon be open to the public as the centerpiece of a unique city park. Dividend Development Co., which hopes to build 153 homes on the former ranch property, has offered to restore the Hollins stables and deed them to the city.

Inspired by the simplicity of Early California architecture, Wurster's designs encouraged a healthy outdoors lifestyle, according to San Francisco architect and Wurster historian Craig Hudson.

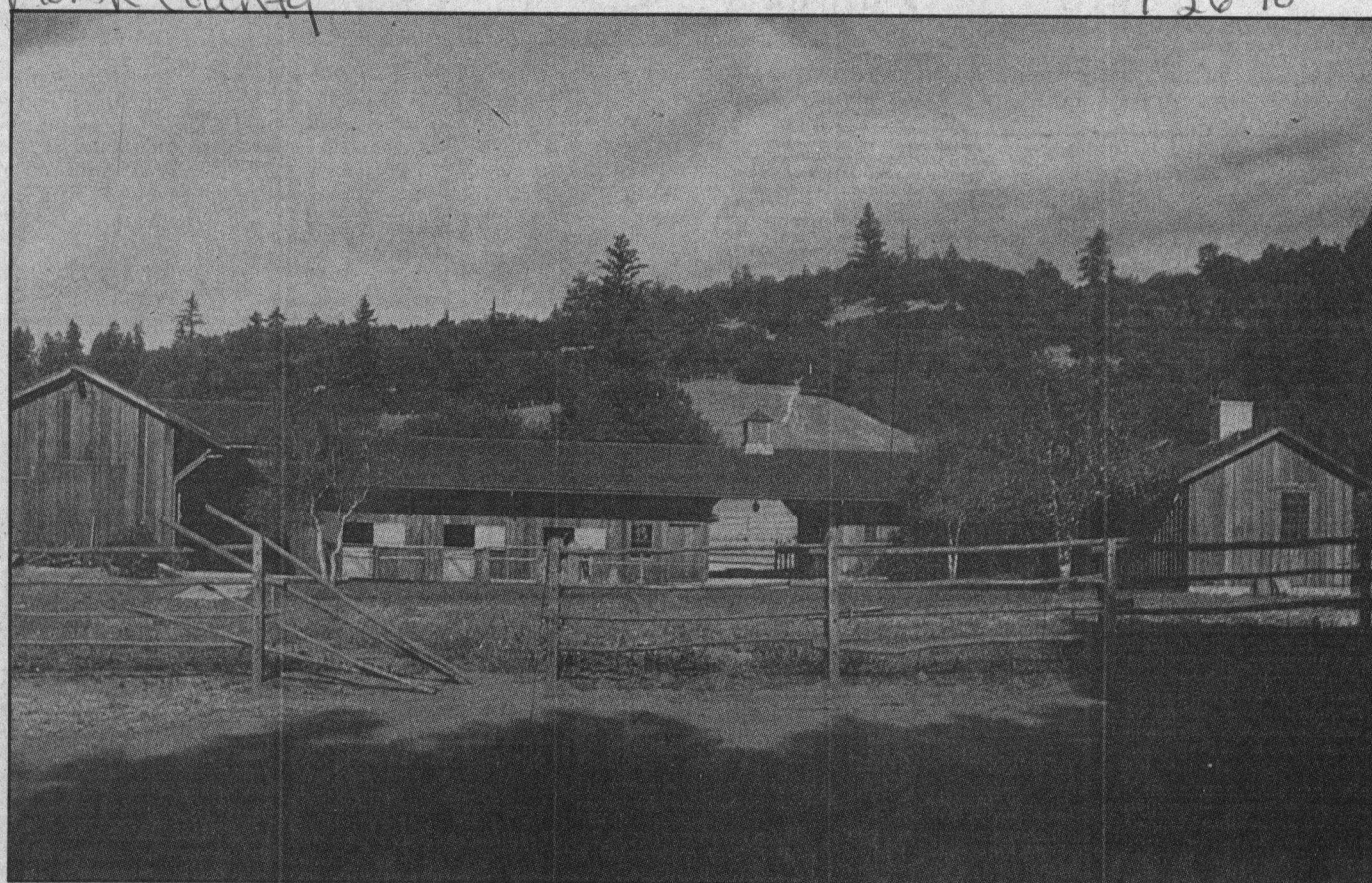
"Wurster considered himself a regional architect and didn't feel he understood other climates well enough to be an effective designer elsewhere," Hudson said. "He was greatly influenced by Monterey-area architecture, with its use of courtyards and simple materials. (His designs) encouraged indoor-outdoor country-style living — he arranged his buildings to form outdoor rooms."

Many of Wurster's homes included outdoor sleeping porches and dining areas, and covered open-air corridors connecting rooms.

One of Wurster's most famous homes is the Gregory Farmhouse, a large complex designed and built in 1929 in the hills near Scotts Valley. With its serene whitewashed walls, simple lines and unusual tower, the Gregory home won first prize in the House Beautiful Small House Competition in 1931.

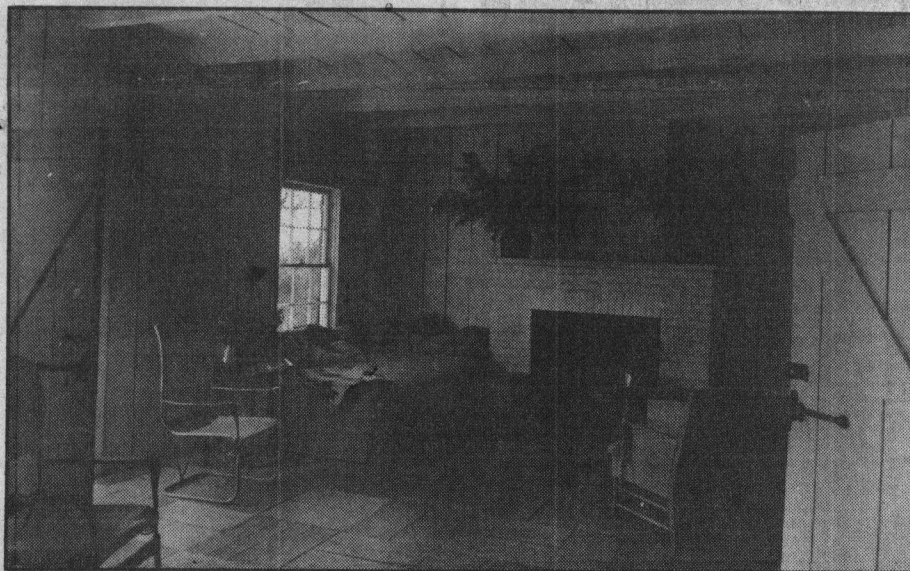
The award was "definitely very important" in boosting Wurster's career, Hudson said. "It was his first big splash."

Early photos of the Gregory Farmhouse show open-beam ceilings, plank doors with lift-latches, plank floors and a courtyard paved with redwood rounds. The open look and feeling is similar to the Southwest architecture style that has become popular in recent years. The home, and two other Wurster-designed buildings on the property,



The old Hollins polo stables, shown here in the early '30s, may be renovated for a public park.

Photos from Roger Sturtevant collection/Oakland Museum



The Gregory Farmhouse in Scotts Valley won awards.

are still owned by the Gregory family.

"The connection between what is considered Southwest and Early California architecture is basically the adobe structure, thick, deep walls and simple wood-rafter framing for the roof structures," Hudson said.

"The differences between the styles, to my mind, are that the Southwest style is more like the Pueblo style, with fairly boxy structures," he said. "The early California buildings have more defined rooflines and porch overhangs, and circulation between the buildings is often outdoors through the porch elements."

Wurster designed and built about 20 homes at Pasatiempo and many of the club facilities, a half-dozen beach houses in Aptos, and several homes in Watsonville and Santa Cruz. He renovated the historic Soquel schoolhouse and designed the original Graham Hill Road pump station and several Santa Cruz

commercial buildings.

Wurster was once commissioned to design a Scotts Valley home for director Alfred Hitchcock, Hudson said. Hudson uncovered the Hitchcock plans while delving through Wurster's office files, now housed in the archives at the School of Architecture at UC Berkeley. Wurster died in 1973 at the age of 78.

"I understand there was a little castle on the property that was to be turned into a caretaker's quarters for the main house," Hudson said, "But it's unclear whether the house was ever built."

Wurster did most of his residential design in the '30s and '40s, then after World War II joined with partners Theodore Bernardi and Donn Emmons and began tackling bigger projects. The firm renovated the old Custom House in Monterey and the Ghirardelli chocolate factory in San Francisco, and built the Golden Gateway Center in San Francisco.

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But Wurster's early work holds a special interest for Hudson, who hopes to take charge of future renovation of the Hollins Polo Ranch.

When he heard news that the Hollins polo stables were candidates for renovation, Hudson called Dividend Vice President Jerry Suich and offered his services. Hudson has drawn up conceptual plans to renovate the stables, and awaits a final decision from the city on its plans for the structure.

Dividend originally planned to demolish the stables, but changed its plans at the request of the Scotts Valley Historical Society and the city's Historic Preservation Commission.

"Now there needs to be a consensus on what the community would like to see the stable buildings utilized as," Hudson said. "It could be a real interesting focal point to both the development and Scotts Valley."