



E-NEWS FROM TILE HERITAGE

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Photo by Ray Holley, Healdsburg Tribune.

Mustard 'mit, it looks beautiful!

The typical Sonoma County stew of rain and sun has resulted in a lovely crop of mustard this year, as seen here in a Dry Creek valley vineyard not far from the Tile Heritage Foundation.

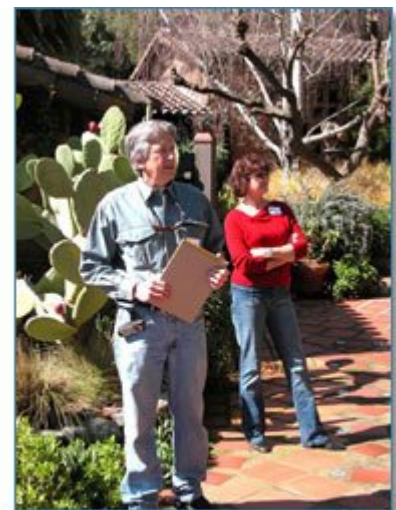


It was quite a group. Rick Conway, in the orange t-shirt, came all the way from Virginia!

Art to Live in!

On Saturday, March 5th, **Darrell and Lauren Boyle** hosted a group of twenty-five tile enthusiasts who gathered at their **Casa Tierra in Saratoga, California**, nestled in the coastal hills west of San Jose. The couple, having lived in the 7,532 square foot, rambling adobe for sixteen years and having raised their

children there, have decided to “downsize,” moving to nearby Los Gatos and putting their home on the market. Longtime members of Tile Heritage, the Boyles hosted a tile tour back in 1994 as part of the THF symposium that year.



Darrell and Lauren Boyle welcome us to Casa Tierra.



Although it was a warm, sunny day, the pool had no takers.

Quoting from Rick Bonetti, the Boyle’s realtor who accompanied us on our sunny Saturday, “privileged visitors are magically transported to an earlier era of tranquility, graciousness and charm.” Nothing could be closer to the truth. “The 1.18 acre property is bounded by a meandering adobe wall and lush vegetation, which shelters it from visual intrusion of neighboring homes and creates a feeling of ‘a world apart.’

“Casa Tierra was hand-built in the 1940s by Maude Meagher and Carolyn Smiley as their residence and the headquarters for the

publication of ‘World Youth,’ an international magazine devoted to children and world peace. Three of the eight fireplaces are faced with printing plates of photographs [they appear to be tiles!] used in the publications.



The family room fireplace is covered in copper printing plates that look like iridescent tiles.

“The proportions, shapes and scale of the interior spaces elevate one’s spirit while maintaining relational intimacy. Rich floor, wall and ceiling textures express handcrafted quality. Solid massing of thick walls and the honest simplicity of natural materials evoke a sense of timeless permanence, integrity and grounding.



Tiles by Raquel Baldocchi of San Francisco.

“Casa Tierra is a treasure of rare ceramic tiles -- a favorite destination for tile historians and aficionados. Colorful handmade tiles decorate the floors inside and outside the home. Most of the glazed decorative tiles were designed by Albert Solon, founder of the famed S&S [Solon &

Schemmel] Tile Company of San Jose. S&S tiles were used on many major landmarks from the Mark Hopkins Hotel and the Steinhart Aquarium in San Francisco to the Hearst Castle at San Simeon.



A reflecting pond of S&S glazed tiles in the courtyard adjacent to the house.

“In addition, large Cathedral Oaks tiles depicting the Monterey coast were used to decorate some of the chimneys in Casa Tierra.” Founded in the Santa Cruz Mountains in 1911 by designers, George Dennison and Frank Ingerson, Cathedral Oaks became a center for the arts, a gathering place for artists, poets, musicians and others. Over the years many tiles were handcrafted there.

The deep, pillowy, terra cotta and earth-tone tiles on the floors in the kitchen and family rooms were made by Handcraft Tile Company of Milpitas.



Rare and unusual tiles produced at Cathedral Oaks adorn the main chimney.



The animals that never lived, designed by Albert Solon.

Founded in 1926 by Florence May Austin, the company has maintained its integrity and continues to produce tiles in the same aesthetic genre today. "The one-of-a-kind tiles facing the stair risers leading from the master bedroom feature colorful Far Eastern mythological beasts. Handcrafted by



Handcraft tiles give a cobblestone effect to the kitchen floor.

himself, these dramatic tiles are "the animals that never lived." We want to thank Lauren and Darrell for their special hospitality and we wish them the very best in their new home, hoping that it too will be graced with handcrafted ceramic tiles.



Handcraft tiles provide contemplative motives to various borders within the courtyard.



Frank Patitucci (right) "conducts" the tour at Handcraft Tile Co.

Still cookin' tiles after all these years...

From the Boyle's we drove the 30 minutes across town to Milpitas where a hearty lunch was served at **Handcraft Tile Company**, hosted by Handcraft owners Shirley Dinkins and Frank Patitucci. The occasion was special in that

Handcraft had weathered a major move, having just recently left the building that had housed the factory since 1931. It was time to celebrate!



An attentive group of enthusiasts takes in the intricacies of hand-making tiles, Handcraft style.



Frank lead the tour of the facility after lunch, demonstrating time and time again that although some of the equipment has been updated



by necessity, the quality of the tiles remains the same. The company specializes in custom work, producing unique shapes, sizes and trim pieces to accompany both its unglazed and glazed field tiles. Quoting Riley Doty from the recently published *California Tile: The Golden Era 1910 – 1940*, “Handcraft tiles emphasize the clay from which they are made. Until recent years all were unglazed, but decorated with matte clay slips. Most of the relief tiles were modeled in a style that produced ‘blunt’ and ‘pillowy’ forms. The charm was in the warmth, simplicity and informality.



The hands that make Handcraft tiles: from right, Salvador Mendez, Arturo Garcia, Cesar Ruiz, and Servando Reyes. Missing: Nicolas Cabrera.

“Most of Handcraft’s production was slip-coated. In this process each tile, after it came out of the mold and dried, was sprayed with a liquid clay slip or engobe. After firing, the face of each tile was held against an abrasive belt or wheel, removing the layer of slip from the highest areas of the relief while leaving the slip intact on the rest of the surface, thus creating a two-tone surface. Features of the sculpted design were highlighted and articulated by this contrast of colors.” Today, most Handcraft tiles are press-molded, many in designs that date back to the



A kiln load of Handcraft tiles.

company’s origins.

Handcraft is the oldest tile manufacturer in California, continually a tradition that began eighty years ago. Shirley and Frank are a remarkable pair, dedicated to maintaining the company’s historic products and production methods, a true reflection of the Arts & Crafts era in tile making. Visit <http://www.handcrafttile.com/>.

Tiles in the Field

We would like to invite THF members to consider organizing similar daylong tile tours in their own areas. Choose a significant historic site and a contemporary tile factory or studio (perhaps your own?) and let us put out an announcement on E-News a couple of months in advance. If the response is even close to the one we received for the March 5th tour, I can guarantee a memorable experience, one that will surely enlighten and inspire.