



**647 W. Sierra Madre
Boulevard
Caldwell/Fairbank House
1907**

**By Joe Catalano and the current owners
2103**

Photo: Sierra Madre Historical Preservation Society

The Caldwell/Fairbank House was saved by a whisker from demolition in 1995, thanks to the current owners who purchased the house, and, along with it, they saved a big part of the legacy of Louis B. Easton, a talented Craftsman designer/builder from the turn of the last Century.

While the better-known Greene Brothers were influenced by Japanese wood building, Easton came from the East with connections to the Roycroft movement and remotely, to Elbert Hubbard and Frank Lloyd Wright. Beautiful woodwork *is* the structure, and the spaces flow easily from room to room. Moreover, the first floor is just one room deep, allowing plenty of light and air to flow through.

The March 1908 issue of *Craftsman Magazine*, published by Gustav Stickley, featured an article with four photographs, describing Easton's design intent, and the construction and features of the house. It was entitled "A California House that is Built Only One Room Deep, to Admit the Greatest Possible Amount of Air and Sunshine."

When the current owners came to Sierra Madre, John Brinkmann, Phyllis Chapman and Judy Webb-Martin were among the first people they met, and they individually convinced them of the house's great architectural value, the Easton legacy, and the historic value of it to the early development of Sierra Madre.

It still involved a huge leap of faith to actually purchase the house because of its condition at the time. "Modernization" damage was thankfully limited, but Easton's stained exterior cedar, redwood and Douglas fir had been painted a ghastly green, and the house had sustained damage in the Sierra Madre Earthquake. This included the river rock chimney and brick fireplaces.

The current owner, however, is one of the best craftsmen that you are likely to meet, and one of the most patient, too. He carefully researches the original details, the materials, and the methods for performing the restoration work. And he goes to great lengths to find the right materials, including authentic old growth woods from salvage yards. The results no doubt would please Easton.

Easton designed and built about 25 homes in and around Pasadena before his health started failing in 1914, but had developed a fine reputation, to the point that even the well-known architect, Myron Hunt (who designed the Rose Bowl and the Pasadena Public Library) hired Easton to build a rustic beach house for his family in what is now Redondo Beach.

Louisa Caldwell and her daughter, Lillian Fairbank, relocated to Sierra Madre from Illinois, and bought the property on what was known then as Central Avenue. It now is of course 647 West Sierra Madre

Boulevard. They began construction with another builder on a Queen Anne style house, but stopped after the foundations were completed. They apparently discovered Easton's work, and asked him to build one of his houses on their existing foundation. So it turns out that one of Easton's best designs, and one of the few remaining, was built on the foundation work for a completely different type of house.

The north side, and some of the south side, of Central Avenue was originally developed with substantial homes including the Lawless Residence by Charles and Henry Greene, built during their "Ultimate Bungalow Period." One of the images from the *Craftsman Magazine* article clearly shows the house surrounded in a grove of mature orange trees. The current owners have replanted this grove.

So now as you drive by the Caldwell/Fairbank House on Sierra Madre Boulevard, which is set way back and surrounded by apartment buildings, the orange grove in front is the first thing you'll see.