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ATHERTON *living*

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Rishan Patel

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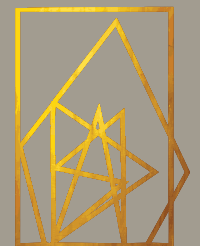
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Hollywood House on the Hill

A Diary of a Loving Remodel and Restoration Project

By Kimberly Reyes | Photos provided by Kimberly Reyes

Clients that I adored had me looking at several homes they owned, all under consideration for renovations. Ascending the hill in the Upper Rockridge neighborhood, seeing a full unobstructed view of the San Francisco skyline, the Bay Bridge, and the Golden Gate Bridge and bay in my rearview mirror, I knew this one was a special project.

As an intuitive interior designer with a background in psychology and everything related to construction, I tend to see the project done when I interact with a space.

The house on the corner lot, full of windows, perched over the neighborhood, was keeping watch and claiming its place. My initial

reaction was, "Old Hollywood House on the Hill." Little did I know how close that was until I started digging into the history of the home and the colorful character that built this custom home over 70 years earlier.

Charlie Dondero lived over 60 of his 100 years in that home. He and his wife hired a recent UC Berkeley graduate to design the house. The architect was published in industry publications for groundbreaking designs and engineering techniques for Charlie's house. I found the original color pencil drawings in the basement. Quite fascinating.

Charlie was born in 1913. He graduated from UC Berkeley, was involved with banking and the financing of the Golden Gate Bridge, and took over his family's construction business that owned the first marble quarry on

the West coast. His company put marble into the War Memorial Opera House, City Hall, many San Francisco banks, famous buildings and the homes of elite clientele. Charlie used much of the leftover materials from these famous projects in his own home, including the signature Pink Tennessee Marble. He founded many social clubs and was a constant host to politicians, actors and famous people of all sorts. The house was meant to entertain.

I found the quarry in Volcano, California which was now a private estate. I looked into the cost of buying marble to bring into the remodel and restoration. Then entered the big question: What do we really want to spend the budget on? Where is the value and will it really make a difference? Sure, it would be kind of cool, but necessary to achieve the ultimate goal? Probably not.

That question often arises when working with clients, "Should we tear it down and start over or completely remodel our home?" The answer is never the same.

I had a feel for the house. The research was done. I knew what the current owners wanted and needed. Now it was my job to honor the past, bring the property up to the standards of the present and make sure that the energy and esthetics would meet the needs for the future.


And the demolition began. People would drive by and ask, "What are you doing to Charlie's house?" I had one neighbor gasp when she saw the dumpsters in the drive overflowing with marble. "So, you are the one pulling all of Charlie's marble out!" Charlie had not lived there for 10 years. It would always be Charlie's house.



Key architectural elements were saved and restored, while others were donated or disposed of. We spent a chunk of the budget to restore the entry. One of my favorite painting contractors is a Certified Master Painter with Fine Paints of Europe. He uses an incredible technique with many, many layers of fine high gloss paint to create the most beautiful finish. It's incredibly labor-intensive and pure art. That entrance can be seen from every angle when you drive by and welcomes every guest that enters. It's worth every penny.

Neighbors gushed when it was done. Charlie's adult son came by to view the completed project. He thanked me for honoring his father, bringing "his" home back to its splendor. The current owners wrote me a letter thanking me for making their home special, seamlessly integrating the new while keeping original elements. They are very happy there and expecting their first son. We see a lot of tears. Tears of gratitude and joy.


Interior designer, author, speaker, and TV Host Kimberly Reyes is the exclusive provider of interior design editorial in Atherton Living and Mountain Home magazines. To learn more, see kimberlyreyesinteriors.com or visit the Kimberly Reyes International showroom/studio in San Francisco.



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