



The Restoration and Revival of L.A.'s Hollyhock House

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KCET Los Angeles Says:



Built in 1921, Hollyhock House was the first home Frank Lloyd Wright built in Los Angeles but over the decades, Hollyhock House suffered water damage and deterioration. Now after a \$4.4 million restoration, the elegant home is back to its original beauty. Reporter Nic Cha Kim takes a tour of this stunning residence at Barnsdall Art Park now open to public.

Nim Cha Kim for “SoCal Connected Says:

Nic Cha Kim: Built in 1921 by architect Frank Lloyd Wright, Hollyhock House is a National Historic Landmark and the centerpiece to the Barnsdall Art Park.

Nic Cha Kim: Jeffrey, really great to meet you.

Jeffrey Herr: Welcome to Hollyhock House, Nic.

Nic Cha Kim: Jeffrey Herr is the curator of the Hollyhock House and for the last four years, he's led a \$4.5 million restoration. Entering the house is a lot like walking down a tunnel into a temple. The ceilings are so low I was afraid of scraping my head. Wow...so the ceilings are quite low right here.

Jeffrey Herr: It's all part of a typical Frank Lloyd Wright entry way. You have a long, low tunnel that leads you to pretty obscure front doors. These happen to be cast concrete, and then you're inside the house. But it's secret.

Nic Cha Kim: Hollyhock House is Wright's first home built in Los Angeles and it was designed for a woman ahead of her time. Aline Barnsdall was a socialite, an experimental theater producer. This was to be her living room.

Nic Cha Kim: Jeffrey, you know, coming from the entrance where the ceiling was really dropped low, this is quite a release.

Jeffrey Herr: It is. You have that compression of space. But the minute you walk into a Living Room with this kind of ceiling, you get that release which makes the room feel even bigger than it actually is.

Nic Cha Kim: Like most Living Rooms, the fireplace is the centerpiece, but in Hollyhock House, it's especially significant.

Jeffrey Herr: Lots of people put paintings above their fireplaces. This of course is... sort of out does that.

Nic Cha Kim: It's a work of art in itself.

Jeffrey Herr: It is. But now take a look at this. Above it, you have a skylight, so it's this entire theatrical scene, as it were. And of course, it incorporates the four elements: earth, fire, air, and water.

Nic Cha Kim: That's right. Hollyhock House was designed to have water running through it. Frank Lloyd Wright also did something most architects don't do. He designed furniture to complement the house.

Jeffrey Herr: This was designed exclusively for Hollyhock House. If you take a look at the back of the chair, you can see that it doesn't look anything like the concrete Hollyhock but what it looks like is a bit like human vertebrae. Don't you agree?

Nic Cha Kim: It totally does...

Jeffrey Herr: Of course it's the spine of the chair, and you have a visual pun.

Nic Cha Kim: Walking through the inner courtyard, Hollyhock House is just as impressive on the outside as it is on the inside. And Frank Lloyd Wright's unique design can be seen everywhere.

So why is it called Hollyhock House?

Jeffrey Herr: It's called Hollyhock because the Hollyhock flower, which you can see an example of right here, was Aline Barnsdall's favorite flower. She asked Frank Lloyd Wright to use the design in her house and he did in a super way. What he did was make an abstract design and if you look at the capital of this column, you can see the abstraction here. The vertical plant with the square flower blocks coming off each side.

Nic Cha Kim: This whole restoration project started when they wanted to fix some serious leaks and water damage... but it also offered Jeff a rare opportunity.

Jeffrey Herr: It allowed us, though, to do a lot of the restoration of details that had been erased over time. Erased because of damage, erased because of taste.

Nic Cha Kim: That's when they decided to restore Hollyhock House to the original 1921 design. And the hard work paid off.... These doors look really new. Were they part of the recent renovation?

Jeffrey Herr: This is one of the major revelations of this particular restoration was recreating these doors that were removed in 1946. This is a sort of garden house or house garden. You are supposed to be living outside as much as you're supposed to be living inside.

Nic Cha Kim: You know, as much as the entrance sort of propels you in, this door sort of makes you wanna go back outside.

Jeffrey Herr: It does. And in fact, it just disappears. And out we go.

Nic Cha Kim: Let's do it.

Nic Cha Kim: Kate Devine Brady is Aline Barnsdall's great grand-daughter. She teaches art at the Barnsdall Art Center. She's heard stories about her great-grandmother her whole life.

Kate Devine Brady: She was a woman before her times for sure. She was a lot of things but first and foremost, she was a woman with a very strong vision. Her vision was to create an art colony where an artistic community where directors and actors would live together, create together on this hill.

Nic Cha Kim: Aline's dream never realized. As for this house, she never lived in it.

Nic Cha Kim: I've heard Aline's and Frank Lloyd Wright's relationship was quite tumultuous.

Kate Devine Brady: To say the least. I think it was a love-hate relationship. They both had the passion and the drive. They both didn't really want to compromise. I think there may have been a little romance.

Nic Cha Kim: Really? You have to tell me more.

Kate Devine Brady: There are these amazing letters...

Nic Cha Kim: Kate can't confirm the romance so it's all speculation, but that didn't keep Aline from firing Wright in 1921 before Hollyhock was completed.

Disappointed and frustrated, Aline Barnsdall walked away.

Jeffrey Herr: Shortly thereafter, if not even before, she determined to give the house to the City of Los Angeles and 12 acres, which is the top, the crown of Olive Hill and that was to be done as a memorial to her father, Theodore Barnsdall and that's what it is today.

Nic Cha Kim: There was just one condition to the gift. It had to be used as public art park. That means her great-great grand daughter will never get to live there --- either.

Kate Devine Brady: It's a beautiful location, no doubt. I'm just so grateful to work here and to be a part of nurturing her vision. I think it's meant for the people. I think things happen for a reason and it was meant to be for the public for everyone to enjoy.

Nic Cha Kim: As anybody with a house knows, a restoration project is never done. And we're told there's still plenty more to do. But until then, the doors of what was supposed to be a private residence are now open to everyone.