

# ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

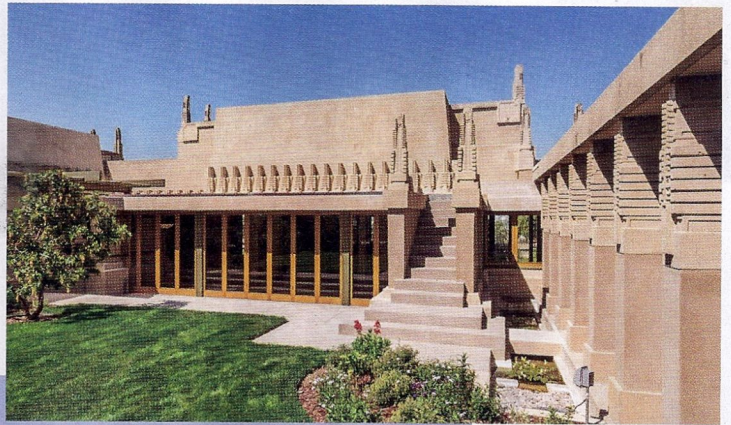
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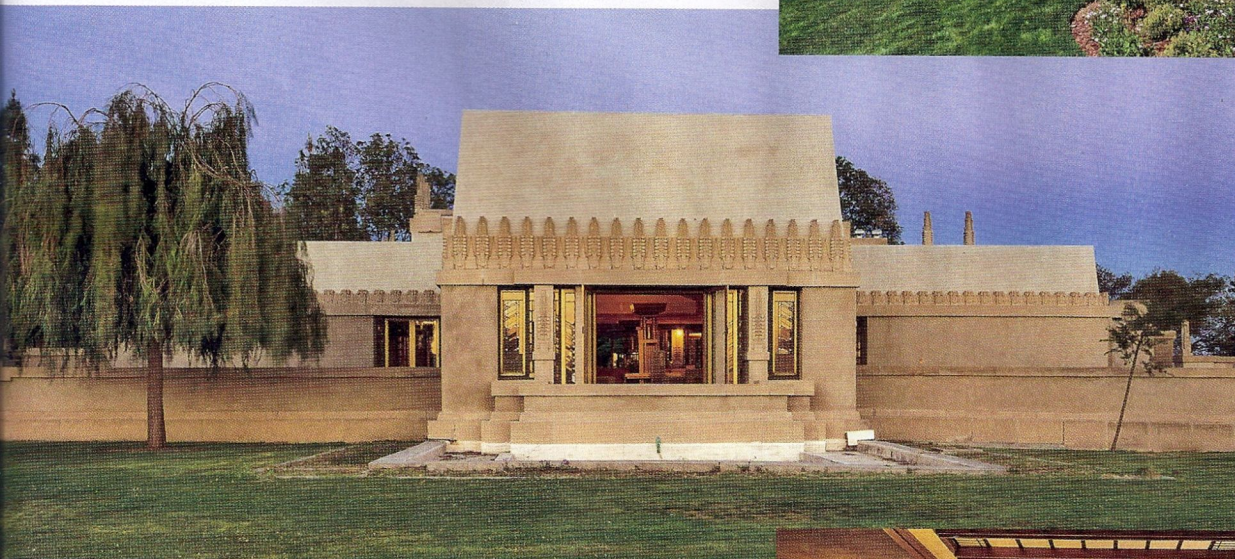
# A Rebirth for Wright's First L.A. Project

BY SARAH AMELAR

WHEN FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT built the Hollyhock House, between 1919 and 1921, he couldn't have imagined it would one day appear as the Piranha Temple in the 1989 movie *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death*. But with this project—his first in Los Angeles—he was clearly beginning to explore the Mayan, or Mesoamerican, themes that would pervade his Southern California work. And, perhaps not coincidentally,



The house surrounds a garden courtyard (above). A stylized version of the hollyhock adorns the roofline (left). The original interior walls shimmered with bronze flecks. The restorers brought back the sheen with cosmetics-grade, crushed mica (below).



he designed the house for a female client with an independent spirit and a passion for the theatrical.

She was Aline Barnsdall, an oil heiress—bohemian, feminist, champion of progressive causes, and producer of experimental theater—and a devoted patron of Wright. For the 36-acre Olive Hill site, in East Hollywood, she hired him to create a campus for avant-garde theater and include her own residence (with ornament inspired by her favorite flower, the hollyhock). But the two clashed when Wright lagged in designing her house—focusing instead on the Imperial Hotel in Japan—and handed off its construction supervision to his relatively inexperienced son Lloyd and employee Rudolph Schindler. Cost overruns mounted, and Barnsdall fired Wright in 1921, before the interior was complete. She later hired Schindler to finish it. She never made the 5,000-square-foot house her home and, in 1927, donated the property to its current owner, the city of Los Angeles. But the Hollyhock's tumultuous history continued as it endured neglect and earthquakes.

The house is now a museum, the centerpiece of the Barnsdall Art Park and a National Historic Landmark. By the time it closed for its recent renovations, in 2011, it needed more than a face-lift. Its leaks were serious, and the exterior, slathered in beige paint, had acquired “the texture of cottage cheese,” recalls the house's curator, Jeffrey Herr. Clues to Hollyhock's past have since emerged, and, when it reopens to the public later this summer, many vanished features will be revived.

The \$4.39 million renovation uncovered original wall surfaces that Griswold Conservation Associates analyzed and replicated. The newly restuccoed exterior matches Wright's sandy-textured, earthy green pigment. “Suddenly, with the authentic color, the house begins to blend with the landscape,” says Herr, “just as you'd expect of Wright.”



The restorers found and recreated a subtle range of interior colors and application techniques. They removed 1970s can lights and reproduced the ceiling moldings Wright used to define rooms even where no walls exist. A row of 14 oak-framed doors was reconstructed, now integrating art glass that Wright drew but never executed. The elaborate water feature that once flowed beneath the house—into pools outdoors and, indoors, beside the living room hearth—has been partially reinstated. The house's leakage has been remedied, its skewed living room resquared, and its seismic reinforcement upgraded.

After it reopens for tours and other programs, the Hollyhock will probably receive a further honor: jointly with 10 other Frank Lloyd Wright structures, it is expected to attain UNESCO World Heritage designation in 2015. ■