

2015 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards

Robert Pitcairn Jr. House and Reverend A. Moss Merwin House



The Westridge School campus in Pasadena is distinguished by a rich architectural heritage that the school has steadfastly preserved, restored, and maintained. Their restoration and rehabilitation of two significant structures by architects Charles and Henry Greene is a signal achievement and model for heritage conservation in California.

The 1906 Robert Pitcairn, Jr. House, a City of Pasadena Historic Landmark, is an early exploration of classic Greene & Greene design elements, including the introduction of outdoor sleeping porches, a feature that became common in their later masterworks. After decades of deferred maintenance, wear from use and age, and severe deterioration due to exposure, Westridge School realized the need for a comprehensive plan for the Pitcairn house to address deterioration while restoring historic materials. Key elements in the restoration of the exterior included: repair/restore/conservate all exposed framing timbers, wood trim and shingles; structural strengthening of the balcony framing, and restoration of the railings; replacement of non-original deck finish and flashings at the balconies; restoration of exterior windows, with vintage glass replacing broken panes. The restoration team chose to maintain as much historic material as possible. Only six rafter tails out of 120 had to be replaced, and the joints were concealed within the exterior building wall for both structural stability and aesthetics. All of the exterior woodwork received a specialized, two-step painted finish to emulate the original stained finish.

The 1905 Reverend Alexander Moss Merwin House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and benefits from a Historic Preservation Easement, which uniquely applies to the interior as well as the exterior of the house. In the Merwin house, the Greene brothers combined a mixture of styles, joining aspects of both Colonial American design and the brand of Craftsman style architecture that the Greenes were exploring then. At the time of the current rehabilitation project, the Merwin house was largely in reasonable condition, though the kitchen

and master bath had been altered with incompatible modifications. The challenge was to improve contemporary livability of the house while protecting the remaining original interior period features, details, materials and finishes. Key elements of the project included the rehabilitation of the existing kitchen, the adjacent service porch, and the master bath for contemporary use. The exact as-built layout was unknown so the kitchen was not built per original plan, but the kitchen cabinets and countertops were designed to complement original casework from elsewhere in the house. Floors were treated to restore the Greene's original aesthetic in which different finishes and species of wood were used for accent at doorways between rooms on the first floor.

Thanks to the efforts of the Westridge School and its project partners, the Robert Pitcairn Jr. House and the Reverend Alexander Moss Merwin House—two tangible links to the early career of the Greene brothers—have been preserved for present and future generations to learn from and enjoy.

Learn more about the [restoration projects](#).