

# Greene & Greene Resources for Woodworkers

This is a good time to be a fan of Greene & Greene. The marked increase in interest in their work has led to a corresponding increase in available resources. From books, magazines and classes to the miracle that is the Internet one finds history, analysis, how-tos and, most importantly, photographs. And, of course, if one has the means, a trip to Pasadena unlocks a treasure trove unavailable anywhere else. A picture may be worth a thousand words but a few minutes in the presence of this furniture is invaluable.

## Destinations

### The Gamble House

Any discussion of Greene & Greene resources available to the public has to begin with the Gamble House. The best known of the Ultimate Bungalows, this home was donated to the City of Pasadena and the University of Southern California in 1966 in the interest of historic preservation. Countless thousands have toured the house in the last 40 years. Because the house remained in the Gamble family until it was donated, the furnishings remained largely intact. No bad 1950s remodels marred the remarkable woodwork.

Anyone interested in the Greene & Greene style must make the pilgrimage to this shrine. The house is a spectacular testament to another time. The interior surfaces are encased in wood. Very few people today could afford to purchase just the teak used in this house. Nearly every feature is high art. In particular, the stairway to the second floor is genius. Related to a typical handrail in the same way that a luxury yacht is related to a rowboat, the result is stunning. Even the front door is remarkable, its expertly crafted stained glass depicting a California live oak.

The Greens designed nearly all of the furniture for the house. The dining room table is a marvel of design and execution. The mechanism for extending the top to accommodate leaves is another example of making the mundane beautiful. The entry hall table is a unique piece that is a personal favorite. The master bedroom chiffonier, with its inlays and tsuba-shaped cutouts, is an iconic piece.

While the Gamble House has been well preserved, many other Greene & Greene homes have been less fortunate. Over the decades they have suffered various indignities ranging from routine neglect to removed furniture and fixtures to demolition. The former is easily remedied and the latter can't be helped at all. But if your Greene & Greene home is missing fixtures or original furniture, Jim Ipekjian is the person you should call. Located in the Mecca of Pasadena, Jim's work graces several Greene & Greene temples, most notably the Gamble and Blacker houses. Jim's attention to detail is as obsessive as that of the Halls as evidenced by his work on the Blacker house restoration. The result is furniture that is nearly indistinguishable from original pieces. This makes Jim's recent undertaking very exciting for woodworkers: Jim is guiding a limited number of Details and Joinery tours of the Gamble House. These 2 ½ hour tours highlight construction details of the house and furniture that

most visitors would never get to see otherwise. Reports from the first offerings have been very positive. [www.gamblehouse.org](http://www.gamblehouse.org)

### The Huntington Library

Outside the Gamble House the only place where mere mortals can view a significant number of pieces of Greene & Greene furniture is the Scott Gallery at the Huntington Library. Located in San Marino, a short drive from Pasadena, the Huntington houses a permanent collection of Greene and Greene furniture as well as serving as a stop for traveling exhibitions. Most notably, the Huntington collection includes a recreation of the Robinson House dining room complete with original furniture. A friend once wrote that, based on photos, he had never been impressed with the Robinson dining room. However, when he saw it at the Huntington he was “stunned to silence.” Much of the beauty of Greene & Greene furniture is in subtle details that are revealed only in person. Also in the collection is most of the Thorsen House dining room furniture as well as other pieces from that house. [www.huntington.org](http://www.huntington.org)

### The Thorsen House

The term “Ultimate Bungalow” is not precisely defined. All agree that it applies to the Blacker, Gamble, Pratt and Thorsen houses. Some include the Freeman Ford house. The restored Robinson house certainly merits consideration for inclusion on the list as well. Whatever the list, the Thorsen House is the last of the Ultimates. It also has the most colorful history.

Completed in 1910, the Thorsen house remained in the Thorsen family until Mr. and Mrs. Thorsen died, within three months of each other, in 1942. The current owner purchased it directly from the Thorsen estate by the end of that year. What’s so colorful about that? The current owner is the University of California Berkeley chapter of Sigma Phi. Sigma Phi, as in a fraternity. A Greene & Greene masterwork, one of the outstanding residences in our country, is a fraternity house and has been for 65 years.

Though the house is not in pristine condition, the brothers of Sigma Phi do a remarkable job maintaining it. It is, therefore, in much better shape than one might expect. The fraternity takes great pride in their stewardship of the house and many of the brothers are very knowledgeable about it. In fact, they welcome visitors and give impromptu tours to those who stop by. If you do so, please be sure to make a donation to the restoration fund. In fact, why not make a donation even if you can’t stop by the house? Play a role in preserving a national treasure. [questions@thorsenhouse.org](mailto:questions@thorsenhouse.org)

### The Gamble House Centennial Exhibition

2008 marks the centennial of the Gamble House. A series of events throughout the year will mark the occasion. The cornerstone of this yearlong celebration is an exhibition entitled “A New and Native Beauty: The Art and Craft of Greene & Greene.” Scheduled to open at the Huntington Library in October, this exhibition will put on display 160 pieces of the Greenes’ work some of which have never before been available to the public. After leaving the Huntington in January the exhibition will travel to the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian (approximately March to June) and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (approximately August

to October). Accompanying the exhibition will be a book of the same title. This entirely new work, comprised of 11 essays by experts and scholars, is sure to give fresh insight into the world of Greene & Greene. [Centennial Events](#)

### Craftsman Weekend

Admittedly, a weekend is not technically a destination. But there is no denying that Pasadena Heritage's Craftsman Weekend is an event that merits taking a trip to experience. The schedule includes lectures, bus tours, walking tours and a marketplace of exhibitors including artists and furniture makers. The highlights for woodworkers, however, are the house tours. And in Pasadena, "house tours" are sure to include Greene & Greene. While the Gamble House is open for tours on a regular basis, during Craftsman Weekend the tours are of private homes. In 2007, for example, the marvelous Robinson House was the main attraction. The evening event included a tour of the house and a reception in the beautiful gardens. Watch the Pasadena Heritage website for the 2008 schedule.

[www.pasadenaheritage.org](http://www.pasadenaheritage.org)

### The Lodge at Torrey Pines

While there have been architectural imitators of the Greene's homes there are probably fewer than might be expected considering their historical importance. My theory for why this is so leads us to the Beach Boys. Yes, the Beach Boys. Unparalleled among American rock bands, the Beach Boys produced iconic hits and groundbreaking albums. Yet their songs are covered by other artists only infrequently. Why? Because it is impossible to improve on perfection. Similarly, anyone trying to one-up Charles and Henry is almost sure to fail. With considerable means, however, one can create a building that pays tribute to their style. So it is with the Lodge at Torrey Pines in La Jolla.

Located on the famed Torrey Pines golf course, the lodge draws inspiration from the Gamble and Blacker houses. Though most of the furniture is not Greene & Greene it is arts & crafts and the building is spectacular (aided by a site overlooking the Pacific). The exterior of the guest entrance recalls the porte cochere of the Blacker House. The lobby is very impressive with authentic furnishings including a stained glass front door and sidelights reminiscent of the Gamble House.

### Books

There are numerous books available about Charles & Henry Greene and their work. While all of them are of interest to fans of Greene & Greene, several are of particular interest to woodworkers. The grand dame of this group is "Greene & Greene: Furniture and Related Designs" by Randall Makinson. Though not explicitly a woodworking book this is a valuable resource. Tracing the rapid evolution of the Greene's style, Makinson does a good job of familiarizing the reader with their furniture.

Recently two books have appeared that have changed the landscape for Greene & Greene inclined woodworkers because they are written by woodworkers specifically for

woodworkers. Auburn, Washington based furniture maker Darrell Peart creates exceptional pieces that evoke the Greene's style as well as reproductions of original pieces. His Aurora Media Cabinet is a wonderful marriage of function and beautiful execution. In 2006 Darrell released "Greene & Greene: Design Elements for the Workshop." In this book he shares his experience by revealing his methods for creating many of the elements in the Greene & Greene vocabulary including most of those described above. [www.furnituremaker.com](http://www.furnituremaker.com)

For the woodworker who wants to reproduce a piece of Greene & Greene furniture there are many hurdles. Perhaps primary among them has been gathering sufficient information about the original piece. Access to the originals is extremely limited – while it's possible to *view* some pieces, taking measurements is not permitted. Until recently the only option was to attempt to discern dimensions and details from photographs. Fortunately, this situation changed recently when Robert Lang's latest book, "Shop Drawings for Greene & Greene Furniture" was released. With this latest edition in his "Shop Drawings" series (which includes two volumes of Stickley furniture) Bob has provided an invaluable service to the Greene & Greene community. Detailed measured drawings of 22 pieces are now available. Bob also provides helpful information on some of the necessary techniques for making this furniture. [www.craftsmanplans.com](http://www.craftsmanplans.com)

## Classes

A number of talented furniture makers teach classes that include Greene & Greene projects. Here are some of the highlights.

### Tom Stangeland

A measured drawing could have helped Tom Stangeland some years ago. Already a professional woodworker, Tom was introduced to Greene & Greene when a client showed him a picture of a Blacker house chair and asked if he could make it. Tom continues to reproduce that chair to this day. Most of his pieces, however, are his own designs using the Greene & Greene vocabulary. While obviously Greene-inspired, Tom's furniture is not at all derivative. His work is featured in two Greene & Greene suites in Disney's Grand Californian Hotel – a modern arts & crafts temple. Tom teaches a small number of classes for others interested in learning the secrets of constructing this beautiful furniture. One ambitious project students make in Tom's classes is a dining room server.

[www.artistcraftsman.net](http://www.artistcraftsman.net)

### Dale Barnard

Another artisan who teaches Greene & Greene techniques, Indiana-based Dale Barnard has also taken on projects as large as the trim and furniture for an entire house in the style of the Greens. In Dale's classes, students complete Greene & Greene inspired pieces such as wall lanterns (similar to some in the Gamble house), a wall cabinet complete with stained glass doors or a stunning grandfather clock. Dale's own woodworking has been the subject of a segment on HGTV's Modern Masters show, helping to bring the Greene & Greene aesthetic to an audience who might not otherwise be exposed to it. [www.the-cabinetmaker.com](http://www.the-cabinetmaker.com)

### Darrell Peart

While some woodworkers painstakingly recreate the Greenes' designs others pay homage by creating original pieces in the style. Auburn, Washington based furniture maker Darrell Peart is a prime example. Already mentioned above, Darrell's Aurora line clearly evokes Greene & Greene but is distinctly his own. The designs and execution are impeccable. In classes at his shop and at woodworking schools, Darrell shares his expertise with those interested in continuing the tradition. In one of the classes he offers Darrell teaches students how to execute several of the details common to the Greene's vocabulary. In addition, Darrell started the Greene-style-furniture Yahoo group, another valuable resource.

[www.furnituremaker.com](http://www.furnituremaker.com)

### Online Resources

To nearly anyone with a hobby, the internet can be a source of abundant information. For woodworkers there are numerous forums that allow interaction with a large number of like-minded people that simply wasn't possible previously. For Greene & Greene junkies there are the Greene & Greene virtual archive and the Greene-style-furniture Yahoo group. In the virtual archive there are images of hundreds of documents, drawings and photographs that had been available only to scholars. The online archive makes them available to everyone. The images are high resolution and the viewer software allows zooming and panning. In addition to the many furniture photographs are original drawings of many pieces and documents including correspondence and invoices (it is painful to see the prices of these jewels in early 20<sup>th</sup> century dollars). [www.usc.edu/dept/architecture/greeneandgreene](http://www.usc.edu/dept/architecture/greeneandgreene)

While the virtual archive is an outstanding resource it isn't interactive. For that, one needs the Greene-style-furniture Yahoo group, an online community comprised of individuals with a love for Greene & Greene. Members range from woodworking professionals to hobbyists to those just considering taking up the craft. In fact, some members are not woodworkers at all but have an interest in the style and history. An amazingly helpful group of people they repeatedly surprise with the level of knowledge and their willingness to share it. [Greene & Greene Furniture group on Yahoo](#)