



The Illustrious History of...
Villas Encantadoras

by Craig Powell



The Villas Encantadoras is a fine example of the Spanish Revival architecture style that was highly popular in our area in the early-20th century. Its buildings are the work of noted Sacramento builder Frank “Squeaky” Williams, who built many of the finer homes in Curtis Park, Land Park and East Sacramento in the 1920’s through the early 1940’s. Real estate ads of today frequently mention that a particular home was a “Squeaky” Williams’ creation. “Squeaky” was the developer/builder who is responsible for the unique and delightful homes that grace Markham Way, just one block south of the Villas.

Legend has it that Mr. Williams acquired the moniker “Squeaky” because he had somewhat of a high pitched voice. It was a nickname, however, that was apparently only sparingly used to address him directly. His family reports an occasion in which one of Mr. Williams’ employees referred to him by his moniker - and “Squeaky” promptly tossed him out of a nearby window of a house they were



constructing at the time. He was somewhat avante garde for that era: he was known to travel between his construction sites riding a motorcycle. A wonderful photograph of Mr. Williams visiting one of his work sites, sitting astride his motorcycle, appears in the book Curtis Park authored by Curtis Park resident and current Sierra Curtis Park Neighborhood Association President, Dan Murphy, a copy of which is kept in the Tiki Lounge.

Mr. Williams' creations share certain distinctive design elements: small inlaid, offsetting bathroom tiles, vaulted living room ceilings featuring hand hewn wood beams, rounded plaster corners, beautiful oak floors and an abundance of archways in halls and in bathrooms. The Villas also features fire walls between each apartment, a building element that assures safety far beyond the requirements of building codes then or now.



The Villas was built in two phases. The townhouse (2709 21st Street) and the center building (2715 21st Street) were built in 1938 and 1939. The south building (2725 21st Street) was built a year later in 1940. The Villas was one of only two apartment communities known to have been built by Mr. Williams. The other property is a lovely ranch style building located on Riverside Boulevard immediately adjoining the Odd Fellows Cemetery. The Villas Encantadoras was one of the last buildings known to have been built by Mr. Williams in his long and illustrious career as a Sacramento builder. Mr. Williams' adopted daughter designed the unique kitchen of the townhouse with its upper cabinet refrigerators – quite an advanced design for the times.



A few years after construction was complete, Mr. Williams sold the Villas to a larger than life fellow: Dr. Sam Visser, known to one and all as "Doc Visser." The apartments were known for many years as the "Visser Apartments." Doc Visser had a colorful life that included stints as a seaman, a chiropractor, professional wrestler and a coach and instructor at Sacramento Junior College, now Sacramento City College. He made his home in the townhouse apartment and used to maintain his physical conditioning by working out in the sub-basement below.



Two years later in 1941, Doc Visser rented the town house to Mr. Al Johnston who built a lounge in the sub-basement of the building and christened it the “Tiki Lounge.” He used to regularly invite his fellow residents over to the Tiki Lounge on Friday evenings after work to socialize, imbibe cocktails and relax from their week of labor. The original bar in the Tiki Lounge is still in use to this day. The next time you stop in, take a close look at the top surface of the Tiki bar. It is covered in old labels from liquor bottles of early 1940’s vintage lacquered on to the original surface of the bar – a bar built just seven years after the repeal of the hated Prohibition and just months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The Tiki Lounge also had its own slot machine in the 1940’s and early 1950’s. Unfortunately, the slot machine was removed in the 1950’s when, during the reform administration of Governor Earl Warren, the California Legislature outlawed their existence. Shortly after, the Tiki Lounge settled into a long, 40-year hibernation.

During World War II, Doc Visser sold the south building as a separate parcel to Mr. Sam Dison who re-christened that building under the name “Sherwood Arms.” At about the same time, Doc Visser



AT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS rent decontrol hearing Supervisors Elmer (center) and Hoffman, (seated) listen to Mrs. Gladys M. Powell, secretary of the Sacramento Apartment House and Property Owners' Association, present arguments in favor of decontrol.

Council Votes Decontrol; County Postpones Action

DECONTROL of rents in Sacramento County was authorized by a five-to-four vote of the City Council in a special session yesterday. However, before the council's action will have any effect on landlords and tenants in Sacramento, the resolution must be approved by Federal Housing Expediter Tigue Woods.

W. M. Bayless, Sacramento Defense Area rent director, said the federal ruling on the decontrol resolution would probably not be available until at least December 1.

IF THE FEDERAL authorities give landlords a go-ahead signal on decontrol, they must still, according to the city charter, give tenants 30-day notice before raising rents.

The council vote on decontrol was: **AYES** — Bahnfleth, Hendren, Macaulay, Sayre, and Wood. **NOES** — Cooledge, Geisreiter, Nielsen, and Seymour.

Councilman Seymour said his committee, headed by his

ACTION on rent decontrols in Sacramento County was put over to November 20 at 10 A. M. by the Board of Supervisors last night. The decision was taken after a special public hearing by the board.

Proponents of rent decontrol urged the board to follow the City Council's action in approving a rent decontrol resolution yesterday.

Copper Shipped To Communists

WASHINGTON — (AP) — Senators heard yesterday how more than 3,500,000 pounds of war-useful copper was shuttled around the world from Japan to New York to Communist China before the trade was choked off last July.

Another deal sent more than 12,000 steel boiler tubes to China from the British occupied zone of Germany. All the transactions were handled by American export firms.

Senator O'Connor (D-Md), chairman of a Senate commerce subcommittee which took the testimony, declared that the Chinese

GLADYS M. POWELL, secretary of the Sacramento Apartment House and Property Owners' Association, told the board: "There is no longer a housing shortage in the unincorporated areas of Sacramento County, as there are sufficient units to provide for 29,575 persons in excess of our 1950 population."

Mrs. Powell, basing her statistics on Census Bureau reports and the total of building permits issued by the county during the past year, contended that the basis of the decontrol question is whether or not sufficient housing is available.



sold the north and center buildings to Mr. Al Wagner, a local attorney, who continued with the name “Visser Apartments” for those buildings.

By the end of the WW II, the buildings were reunited under common ownership once again when both properties were purchased by Lee and Alice Worlow. The Worlows lived at 2715 21st Street, Apartment No. 5 from 1944 until 1947, when Alice’s pregnancy led them to move into the larger quarters of the townhouse apartment where they lived until 1962. In 1975, the Worlows sold the Villas to my parents, Maurice and Jenne Powell, who were long-time acquaintances of theirs. Alice Worlow and Maurice Powell’s mother, Gladys Powell, served together as founding members of the Board of Directors of the Sacramento Apartment House Association (now the Rental Housing Association of Sacramento Valley) from 1944 until 1955. They both helped lead the successful fight to convince the Sacramento City Council to repeal war-time rent controls in the City of Sacramento in the late 1940’s. At the time Lee and Alice Worlow purchased the Villas in 1944, the war-time federal Office of Price Administrations limited the rents on one-bedroom apartments at the Villas to just \$45 per month!



Lee and Alice Worlow were loving owners of the Villas. It was Alice who planted the magnificent magnolia tree in the center courtyard which blossoms to this day. She carefully tended the gardens, planting the banana trees, palm trees and grapes that adorn the south courtyard today. In those days, housekeepers and groundsmen lived in a tiny room in the basement of the south building, near the present day laundry room. The room became known as “Benny’s Room” after the name of a long-time handyman and groundskeeper who lived there for many years.



The Villas in the 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s became the most elite apartment address in Sacramento with many notable residents making it their home. United States Senator Thomas Kuchel lived there in the late 1950’s. Sacramento Mayor Clarence Azvedo made the Villas his home, as did Tennessee Williams for a time. It was also the home to business executives, federal and state judges, state cabinet officers, doctors as well as principals, vice-principals and teachers from C.K. McClatchy High School just down the street.



For some years in the 1950’s, the Lee and Alice Worlow operated the Villas as weekly rental apartments with daily housekeeping and other hotel-like services. Up until the 1960’s,

residents could discard their burnable trash by simply placing their refuse into refuse chutes that led to basement incinerators.

In 1972, the State Department of Transportation, which had jurisdiction over 21st Street (it was also known as Highway 160 back then), decided to turn what was once a fairly quiet two-way street into a 3-lane one-way street in order to speed up traffic heading into Downtown Sacramento. The neighbors resented the change almost from the beginning, complaining of increased traffic speeds, noise and dangers to neighborhood children riding to and from school. The activist-oriented neighborhoods of Curtis and Land Parks did what they do best: they organized to fight for a return of 21st Street (and 19th Street) to their original two-way configurations. It only took them 35 years to convince the Sacramento City Council to return the impacted streets to two-way streets. So, in August, 2007 work will begin to change the streets back to the way they were 35 years ago! One added bonus of the change: 21st Street will also have fully striped, dedicated bike lanes in both directions, making it safer for everyone to ride their bikes along 21st Street. These changes are scheduled to be completed in December, 2007

While Lee and Alice Worlow retired to their home in Land Park (where Alice, in her 90's, lives to this day), Maurice and Jenne Powell took up where the Worlows left off. The Powells doted on the property during the almost 20 years that they owned it, with Jenne Powell handling all matters involving interior design from the selection of curtains, the furnishings of the common areas, to the selection of paint colors, appliances and apartment furniture (back in those days many apartments were rented fully furnished). They appreciated the beauty and elegance of the Villas and worked to preserve its "Old World" charm and grace.



After Jenne Powell passed away in 1987, my father, Maurice, continued to own the Villas until his own death in 1994. The Powell Family's ownership of the Villas was destined to continue, however, when I assumed control of my family's real property holdings in 1994. For the past 13 years, my family and I have been singularly devoted to the vision of restoring the Villas Encantadoras to its proper role as the most beautiful and graceful apartment community in Sacramento. As a member of the third-generation of his family to provide apartment homes to Sacramento residents, I learned the business from an early age as I accompanied my father on countless late night plumbing calls and as I personally renovated apartments in his teenage years. We take pride in providing apartment homes over the long term – one of our residents recently moved to a nearby retirement home after being served by three generations of the Powell Family in an apartment home spanning 55 years! Several of his existing residents have resided in their current apartment homes for 30 and 40 years. Needless to say, that represents a goodly number of late night plumbing calls!



In 2001, we resurrected the old Villas tradition of hosting informal social gatherings for residents and friends in the Tiki Lounge on occasional Friday evenings, where I enjoy serving as chief bartender for our residents and guests. In the years between the 1950's and 2001, the Tiki Lounge was used variously as a storage area and as a property office. In 2001, however, the Tiki was cleared out and cleaned up and residents were encouraged to keep their eyes open for Tiki-themed items while they were out and about on their travels. In the succeeding years, residents have donated countless Tiki items from all over the world to the Lounge, creating a wonderful Polynesian redoubt.



Three years ago, we created a master plan for the Villas Encantadoras that was the basis for a comprehensive multi-year restoration of the property, which has included installing new carports, driveways, repainting all exteriors, installation of new gutters and downspouts, extensive interior renovations, replacement of steam boilers and hot water heaters, installation of security systems, replacement of lobby and hallway carpeting, construction of a secure bike storage room, reconstruction of the grape arbor, fortifying building foundations, rebuilding of decks, redesign of the

central courtyard, rebuilding the koi pond, commissioning of stained glass features and, most recently, the complete renovation and restoration of the Tiki Lounge, as well as the installation of a state-of-the-art, high speed, Wi-Fi broadband internet connection with coverage over the entire property, a Sacramento first.



Craig Powell



One of the significant changes adopted in these years had to do with the name of the property. From its early days as the “Visser Apartments,” the property’s name morphed into the “Sherwood Arms” sometime in the 1960’s. While a proud and stately name, a prevailing opinion developed among staff and residents that such a name was more fitting for an English manor house or estate, rather than a property reflecting the romantic Spanish Revival architectural style of the early 20th Century. So in 2005, we conducted a renaming contest whereby residents were asked to submit dozens of possible new names for the property. Once all of the proposed names were gathered, ballots were sent out and votes tallied to determine the three most popular new names.

From these top three vote getters, I chose the name “Villas Encantadoras,” meaning “charming villas” in Spanish. The resident who had proposed the winning name, Mr. Tom Cappelletti, was awarded the prize of a bottle of wine of his choice. The following year, Tom agreed to serve as the resident manager of the Villas Encantadoras where his personal warmth and exquisite taste remain an essential part of this unique community to this day.

In addition to Tom, the Villas staff includes Mr. Jerry Thomas, who has been painting the interiors and exteriors of the Villas for the past 10 years (as well as tending carefully to the koi pond and its aquatic residents), and Mr. Danny Walker, who has ably looked after the myriad maintenance needs of the Villas for the past 6 years.

In the summer of 2007, we and his staff introduced to the Villas the most comprehensive array of concierge services available at any apartment community in the Sacramento region, including the Tiki Café, the Tiki Salon, and Housekeeping and Laundry services. See the “Concierge Services” link on this website.





Amid all of these changes and improvements, I have endeavored to advance my vision of restoring, enhancing and preserving the period-specific charm of the Villas Encantadoras, rather than “modifying” or “updating” them. Having witnessed some of the tragic and careless renovation mistakes of some property owners in the 1970’s, when beautiful hardwood floors were covered up with trendy shag carpeting, I believe that the original grace of the Villas Encantadoras is a treasure that should be embraced and protected by this generation for the benefit of the generations that follow. I am pleased to have the assistance of members of that next generation, my sons Matthew, David and Bradley, in sustaining that vision.



Craig Powell



VILLAS
ENCANTADORAS

2709 • 2715 • 2725 21st Street



POWELL

properties l.p.