



The Residential Work
in Berkeley

of **Five
Women
Architects**

THE BERKELEY ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

Lilian Bridgman

Lilian Bridgman (1866-1948) designed the earliest house on the tour, an 1899 redwood chalet in Hillside Club country which she built for herself with the friendly advice of Bernard Maybeck. At that time she was a high school science teacher with degrees from Kansas and UC, and a published poet. In her forties she returned to UC to study architecture, and was licensed in 1915. The period of rebuilding after the 1923 Berkeley fire seems to be the only time she advertised or used a downtown office. Her buildings and projects show that in common with other post-fire architects, she adopted a tile roofed, stucco Mediterranean style for the Berkeley hills—fireproof, up to date, yet within the picturesque tradition. Only a few of Bridgman's blueprints appear to survive—her designs are preserved mainly in watercolor renderings, and one enchanting clay model.



LILIAN BRIDGMAN HOUSE and STUDIO, 1715 LA LOMA AVENUE, 1899, 1908

Lilian Bridgman's house is approached from the system of pathways, retaining walls, and raised sidewalks installed in 1904-5 by the Hillside Club, of which she was a founding member. The year after the Club was founded, she designed this house with encouragement from Bernard Maybeck (who, incidentally, was not at that time a member: until 1902 it was a women's civic organization). As it neared completion in 1900, the Gazette reported on the "very artistic little chalet... rough boards to the first floor and the balance to be shakes. The interior is exceedingly artistic, ... everything as much of the natural finish as possible." It mentioned "plans by William Knowles": that Oakland architect assisted several of the Hillside Club owner-builders with their specifications and paperwork.

Of the houses on the tour, this is the earliest and also the purest and most elegant expression of Hillside Club ideals, its structure and ornament all based on wood in its natural straight lines and natural colors (violated only by the slight flare of the eaves and the brightly colored trim--an early and widespread heresy, also followed by Maybeck).

Entering the house from a trellised porch on the south side, notice the long iron hinge straps on the front door: Bridgman also designed the ironwork inside, on doors and cabinets including those at the foot of the stairs behind the low partition. Note also the Craftsman light fixture in the dining room, made for the house by the present owner, Elton Davies; and the kitchen only slightly altered from its original size and shape.

The living room is distinguished by rich redwood board and batten paneling, deep beamed ceiling, windows wrapped around the west and south sides, built-in benches and bookcases, and a massive floor-to-ceiling clinker brick fireplace. (Upstairs the wide chimney supports two fireplaces in the bedrooms, branching diagonally off its ends, and there is fascinating geometric interplay of the gabled roof and dormers and the board and battening and ceiling beams.) This house's ornament through pure geometry and materials is in marked contrast to the shingled houses of Julia Morgan and Leola Hall only a few years later with their moldings, plaster ceilings, and applied classical or craftsman ornament. Across the street, incidentally, note Julia Morgan's Hatfield house of 1908, and its garage said to be designed by Lilian Bridgman.

In 1908 Lilian Bridgman designed a cottage at the back of her steep hillside lot, which became her second home, studio, and ultimately her architectural office. Her love of the outdoors is apparent in the treetop siting of the house (this despite the fact that she was lame from a childhood accident), and the way it opens on all sides. It is in some ways a more rustic miniature of the main house. The entrance is again around the side, so that every approach to the house involves a full circuit of its exterior, and the intersecting roof and dormers and the shingled and rustic surfaces repeat themes that had served well in the earlier building.

Inside, the west half of the cottage is a single large, open-beamed redwood living room, with clinker brick fireplace, built-in bookcases and window seats, and half-wall at the foot of the stairs similar to the main house. In contrast to the first house's highly finished paneling, the cottage is single-wall construction with exposed studs and tie beams--note the diagonal wall boards and the big X braces on the north and west walls. Tall, paired casement windows along the whole south and west walls turn the house into a virtual open-air pavilion.

The east end of the cottage is divided into two stories--small kitchen and a recessed porch with Dutch door below, and a tree-house loft of bedroom, bath, and closet, cantilevered out over the living room. Note the trapezoidal openings in the side of the bedroom dormer--the upper window to the outdoors, the lower to the living room, over a little balcony formed by an extension of the stair railing.



CANNON STUDIO,
1629 LA VEREDA
ROAD, 1922



1629 LaVereda was built around 1922 as an artist's studio and residence for Jennie Cannon--one of the artists and teachers who seem to have made up most of Lilian Bridgman's circle of acquaintances and clients. Typical of Bridgman's work are this house's small size and open-beamed rustic quality--both somewhat modified over the years--and the two-story fireplace and generous west-facing windows. The latticed roof edge of uncovered rafters--providing the conventional overhang without cutting off light--occurs on at least one other Bridgman house, at 1404 LeRoy. The selection of exterior finishes, shakes on the main floor, rustic siding below, and board and batten on the upper half story, is also characteristic, not only of Lilian Bridgman but of craftsman houses by other architects--cf. Julia Morgan's 2740 Derby, #6 on the tour.

The house originally consisted of living room, kitchen, and a small bedroom (the present dining area) on the main floor, and studio above. Unique features on the main floor are the cathedral window opening onto a front balcony, the arrowhead-shaped blocks on the roof trusses (also found upstairs), the barn-like front door with storybook wooden latch and gnarled handle, and the flooring--pegged random-width mahogany planks, separated by narrow strips of blue-gray stone.

The studio apparently had its own entrance on the south side of the house: note the heavy Z-braced door with square pegs at the foot of the stairs, and the railing with chalet-style cutouts at the top of the stairwell. Floors and walls have been finished in converting the area from studio to master bedroom. At the west end of the room, following the slope of the roofs above and below, chevron windows flank the fireplace.

At the rear, additions dating from 1968 have almost doubled the size of the house, in a discreetly simplified version of the original style (e. g. open ceilings but without the kingpost trusses). There is a greenhouse-like back stairway, and in expanding the kitchen into the original bedroom area, the mahogany and stone floors were replicated.

LILIAN BRIDGMAN HOUSES IN BERKELEY
A PARTIAL LIST

1715 LaLoma Avenue, 1899
1715A La Loma Avenue, 1908
1236 Bonita Avenue, c. 1920
2629 LaVereda, 1922
1020 Cragmont, 1922-3
2511 Hill Court, 1923
1404 Le Roy, rebuilt 1923-4
3132 Eton (rear studio), 1924
2661-3 LeConte, 1939

