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The fully restores Maynard Buehler House in Orinda will host the Sept. 13 Fandango fundraiser for restoration of the Moraga Adobe.

ORINDA -- Two beloved Orinda homes listed on the National Register of Historic Places -- the Moraga Adobe and the Frank Lloyd Wright Buehler House, both designed and built by the finest craftsmen of their time -- share a history of vital preservation.

A "Fandango" fundraiser on Sept. 13, hearkening back to a time when ranch hands dropped their branding irons, stashed their ropes and traveled by horseback and two-wheeled ox carts to picnic, play games and dance, will further entwine the two California homes' destinies.

The Buehler House, its 3.5-acre property canopied by mighty oaks and home to some old-growth redwoods, has been returned to its original glory. After the death in 2010 of owner Kate Buehler, who with her husband, Maynard, commissioned the Usonian-style home in 1948 from the renowned American architect, a \$900,000 renovation restored the L-shaped home's signature solid copper roof, custom-made concrete blocks, redwood and gold leaf inset octagonal living room ceiling, trademark radiant-heat flooring system and more.

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On the market for over two years, the Buehler House was recently purchased by Gerard Shmavonian. An avid art collector, his areas of interest range from pre-Columbian treasures and Civil War pistols to 1940s Japanese tin toy boats to 200-year-old Yi Ching teapots and ceramics salvaged from the 15th century Vietnamese Hoi Hon shipwreck. With gardens and a teahouse created by Henry Matsutani, designer of Golden Gate Park's Japanese Gardens, and a workshop, pool house, playhouse and primary residence to maintain, Shmavonian called himself "a steward, good neighbor and patient preservationist" during a private tour in late July.

The other landmark home, on a sun-baked knoll close to the Moraga border in Orinda where owner Joaquin Moraga made his home, was built in 1841. It is believed to be the oldest surviving building in Contra Costa County. Made of simple grass and mud, it was restored and expanded in 1941 and again in the 1960s. But now the privately-owned home stands in a state of disrepair, graffitied, vandalized, neglected. It is the subject of intense negotiations between developers and preservationists. The Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe, with the help of Shmavonian, aim to be the old house's salvation.

The nonprofit group is tasked with raising \$500,000 to buy the building and land -- which will fund half of the \$1 million renovation as part of an agreement with developers J&J Ranch LLC. Plans are to convert the privately-owned adobe into a public museum and learning center.

Shmavonian has made the Buehler House property available for the Fandango fundraiser, where a \$100 ticket includes live music, tapas, bebidas and dancing. A limited number of \$300 tickets provide guests with a champagne reception and a tour of the Buehler House guided by a Frank Lloyd Wright expert.

"Ninety-nine percent of the things I see will come around again," Shmavonian said, leading the way along the home's red-stained concrete entryway. "This home is the 1 percent I see that is once-in-a-lifetime."

Inside, the home's cantilevered all-copper roof, "rifle die-cut-shaped" embellishments, closets in which lights pop on and off as a door opens and closes and meticulously crafted cabinetry nearly outshine the rich, warm glow from redwood that is everywhere. Outdoors, two natural streams flow under footbridges, cascade over a waterfall's one-ton boulders and mingle near life-size sculptures of Chinese warriors.

Bobbie Landers, a founding member of The Friends, echoes Shmavonian's legacy-loving sentiment while speaking of the adobe. She anticipates the time when The Friends' grandchildren will visit the restored landmark home to learn about life during the Rancho era, or perhaps to hold their own community-embracing Fandango. Noting a parallel between Wright's "just enough house and no more" aesthetics and the adobe, Landers said, "Just two rooms were (used) for all their living, and they were built to last."

If asked, it's likely they'd both claim the homes are priceless. Wright's "architecture is life" philosophy, paired with Matsutani's inbred meticulousness and the intense scrutiny of every detail from Buehler (who made most of his fortune by inventing a gun mount that attaches a telescopic sight to a rifle) makes the Buehler House unique among Frank Lloyd Wright homes. The Moraga family home, built by the grandson of San Jose's founding father, is no less a landmark. Restoration on a grand scale will preserve and protect both homes and their history for future generations.

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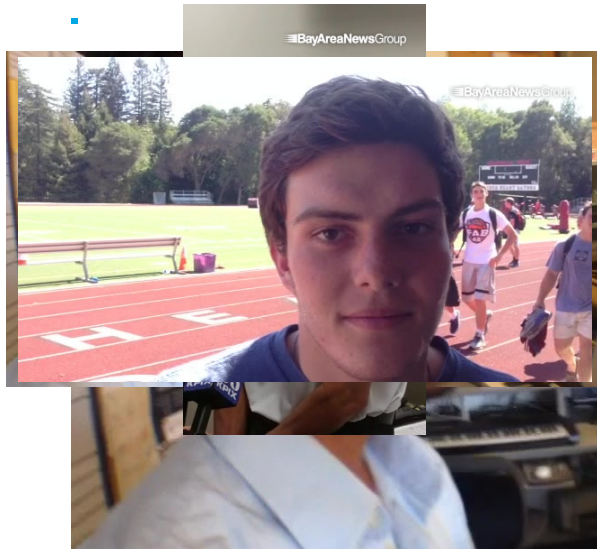
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