



A New and Native Beauty

THE ART AND CRAFT OF GREENE & GREENE

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Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene

The architecture and decorative art designed by brothers Charles and Henry Greene a century ago, mostly in Pasadena, Calif., are now recognized internationally as among the finest of the American Arts and Crafts movement.

Charles Sumner Greene (1868–1957) and Henry Mather Greene (1870–1954) were born in Cincinnati, Ohio. The brothers spent summers on their maternal grandfather's farm in West Virginia, where they helped with farm chores and observed the daily tasks of blacksmithing, carpentry, planting, and harvesting. Enjoying the bucolic outdoors during these years imbued the brothers with a love of nature and a reverence for simplicity that later would manifest in their art.

The family moved to St. Louis, where Charles and Henry attended high school at the new Manual Training School of Washington University. During the three-year course, the boys focused not just on academic subjects, but also on carpentry, metalworking, and similar trades.

For college, Charles and Henry studied at the School of Architecture of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It was while apprenticing with the great architect Henry Hobson Richardson, following graduation, that Charles and Henry became familiar with the Shingle style, commodious shingle-clad buildings then popular in the East, in which materials, whether brick or wood paneling, stone or tile, are used to create a uniform, unembellished surface.

In 1894 Charles and Henry moved to California to join their parents, who had relocated to Pasadena. Their cross-country trip proved fortuitous: While passing through Chicago, they stopped at the World's Columbian Exhibition and encountered their first examples of Japanese architecture. Immediate admiration of the style strongly influenced their later designs.

Once in Pasadena, the brothers were instantly entranced with its natural beauty. Charles wrote, "California, with its climate, so wonderful in its possibility, is only beginning to be dreamed of." Charles, then 25, and Henry, 23, quickly set up shop and in 1894 the architecture firm of Greene & Greene was born. Henry ran the office; Charles, as the firm's primary designer, met with clients. Brimming with ambition, the brothers were soon designing homes for monied clients, many transplants from the Midwest as well. The West Coast's freedom from social and class restraints allowed Greene & Greene to take its architecture in directions inconceivable in the traditional East. Clients willing, their commissions involved not just house designs, but furniture, carpets, lighting, art glass, and landscaping. Indeed, the brothers exerted total control over their projects. To realize their visions, the Greenses gathered around them a number of master craftsmen, perhaps most notably Emil Lange, glass artist; Peter Hall, who served as contractor for most of their work after 1905; and his brother John Hall, who oversaw the firm's furniture mill shop.

In 1899 Henry married Emeline Augusta Dart. Two years later Charles married Alice Gordon White. Both men built family homes in Pasadena.

An Asian influence was first openly expressed in the interiors of the Greenses' James Culbertson House in 1902 in Pasadena. The Blacker House, regarded as their masterpiece, was built in 1907 for a wealthy lumber baron's family and is the first of Greene & Greene's "ultimate bungalows," replete with clinker brick and shingles, porte cocheres that jut out, second-story porches with Japanese



*Charles Greene, ca. 1906.
(Courtesy of Security Pacific
Location/Los Angeles Public
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*Henry Greene, ca. 1906.
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railings, gables and bands of casement windows, terraces, and exposed timbers. The Gamble House, built in 1908 for David and Mary Gamble of Procter and Gamble Co., features beams and broad overhangs to provide shade from the California sun, and recalls the Japanese temples that so fascinated Charles. It beautifully embodies the brothers' exquisite artistic vision and the painstaking craftsmanship that characterized their work.

In 1916 Charles moved, with his wife and five children, to the artistic community of Carmel, Calif., "to ponder life and art." Henry continued practicing architecture, still working with Charles from a distance, but by 1922 the two stopped using the name Greene & Greene. Henry worked alone, and Charles practiced architecture to some degree but increasingly devoted himself to his artistic and spiritual pursuits. For Charles, there was always a tension between art and architecture. In 1915 he wrote, "I seek till I find what is truly useful and then I try to make it beautiful," echoing the words of the famous British Arts and Crafts designer-craftsman William Morris.

In 1948 the Southern California chapter of the American Institute of Architects honored the brothers with a certificate of merit; in 1952 the American Institute of Architects recognized Greene & Greene for its contribution to "the design of the American home."

Henry died on Oct. 2, 1954, in Pasadena. Charles died on June 11, 1957, in Carmel. In the decades that immediately followed, their work lost popular appeal; a surge of interest in historic preservation in the latter part of the century, however, led to a rediscovery—along with celebration and serious scholarship—of their achievements.

This backgrounder is drawn from two principal sources: The Gamble House Web site, www.gamblehouse.org, and from Greene & Greene Masterworks by Bruce Smith and Alexander Vertikoff (Chronicle Books, 1998).