

In 1938, well-known *Los Angeles Times* staff-artist, Charles Owens drew two residential sketches of what he considered to be landmark Los Angeles homes.

The first drawing was of a uniquely designed Russian built home constructed in 1923 which was located in Northeast LA, at 6512 Monterey Road. This home appeared in their column on September 7, 1938.

NUESTRO PUEBLO
SEEWERKER, JOE;Owens, Charles
Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Sep 7, 1938;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988)
pg. 2D

NUESTRO PUEBLO

By JOE SEEWERKER and
CHARLES OWENS



A RUSSIAN ARCHITECT IN ACTION

Some years ago a gentleman with banking connections looked over the thousand and one types of houses which have been constructed in Los Angeles and decided he wanted something different from all of them.

So he imported a Russian architect, showed him a plot of ground in the 6500 block on Monterey Road and told him to go to it.

The result was a house which passers-by still view with awe. Believing he should make some concessions to the warm Southern California climate, the architect stuck a half-dozen balconies on various outside sections of the house, then threw in a few cupolas for good measure.

Inside, remembering the cold of Siberia, he built two huge sunken fireplaces which were—and are—capable of warming a barracks. For a delicate touch he went out and bought a truckload of man-sized grapevines and used the vines in decorating the inner walls. Then

he hired twelve carpenters and kept them busy for three months cutting filigree patterns which he placed where his fancy dictated.

The finished house was surprisingly attractive, but rather startling to anyone entering it unwarned. The present owner, Stanton Fraser, says the result stunned the original owner somewhat so that he did not protest when the Russian architect, imbued with the building fever, pointed to a lot of lumber which was left over and said: "Now I'll build you another house from that."

The second house was as unusual in design and as full of queer gadgets as the first. Built close to the first, it is of Chinese design. Or at least Mr. Fraser thinks it is Chinese.

"The Russian again took up the grape motif," says Mr. Fraser. "Only in the Chinese house he used a growing grapevine to decorate the living-room. He must have had an erotic eye also, because he decorated the bathroom with paintings of nude women."

The second was of "A Hollywood Showplace," and depicted the 1926 Lloyd Wright built home at 5121 Franklin Avenue. It was featured just three weeks later, on October 3, 1938.

NUESTRO PUEBLO
SEEWERKER, JOE;Owens, Charles
Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Oct 3, 1938;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988)
pg. 6

NUESTRO PUEBLO

By JOE SEEWERKER and
CHARLES OWENS



HOLLYWOOD SHOW PLACE

There is an edifice at 5121 Franklin avenue which makes persons from the hinterland stop and stare on their trip to Hollywood.

The edifice—you might call it a mansion, if you favor words like that—was built in 1927 by Lloyd Wright, the architect, for a retired gentleman of means who wanted something different. He got it.

"It's the sculptural style of architecture," explains Mr. Wright.

Sculptural architecture, it seems, fits the building right into the landscape.

One of the striking features of the Franklin-avenue structure is the mass of stone and cement which projects out from the roof line.

"My goodness, I wouldn't want to live in a place like that," one viewer gasped. "That darned stuff might come tumbling down on you while you was trying to open them gates to get in the house."

"Them gates" are huge, iron affairs constituting what would be the door into an ordinary home. There is no danger of the mass of stone and cement tumbling down. The entire building is constructed of steel placed both horizontally and vertically.

The inside of the building is as striking as the outside. One of its features is a huge patio with a fountain in the center. Rooms in the building are built around the patio and the fountain.

The Owens/Seewerker *Nuestro Pueblo (Our Town)* was a popular weekly column in the *Times*. It was a team effort. While the sketches were all prepared by Mr. Owens, his partner, Joe Seewerker provided the research and wrote the historical text.

At the time these two separate articles appeared in their column, neither journalist could have remotely suspected that these two drawings of early-LA residences would soon be woven into and become part of a real-life noir tapestry, which just nine-years later would become part of Los Angeles' darkest and most notorious murder mystery--**The Black Dahlia**.

These two drawings would continue to hold their macabre secret-linkage unbeknownst to anyone, *for another sixty-five years*.

It was not until March, 2012 that I chanced upon the Charles Owens drawing, "A Russian Architect in Action." The popular Owens/Seewerker column had inspired a book and the sketch was just one of many included in *Nuestro Pueblo: Los Angeles, City of Romance* (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1940)

In seeing the drawing I instantly recognized the home. As well I should. *It was my paternal grandfather, George Hodel Sr.'s home.*

Grandfather had commissioned a famous Russian architect, Alexander Zelenko to build the home along with a separate "tea house" residence which was given to my father as a present on his 15th birthday. (See separate L.A. Times articles below.)

Though not naming grandfather in the article, Seewerker in his text described him as, "a gentleman with banking connections." (On my father's 1907 LA birth certificate grandfather lists himself as, "a banker.")

BOTH HODEL OWNED HOMES NAMED AS OFFICIAL LA HISTORIC LANDMARKS

Prior to my 2003 publication of *Black Dahlia Avenger*, no public information existed connecting my father to the Black Dahlia murder. Though he was known, investigated and identified by law enforcement as "the prime suspect" all of those records remained secret and locked away in the DA's vault. Not even today's LAPD was aware of his connections to the murder, or that he had been previously investigated in 1945, for the suspected overdose murder of his secretary, Ruth Spaulding.

George Hodel Sr.'s Russian built main residence and the separate Tea House structure specifically designed for his teenage son were constructed in 1922.

His son, George Hodel Jr. was fourteen and had just begun his studies at Cal Tech and within a year would be asked to leave the university due to a sex scandal in which he had seduced and impregnated a professor's wife.

"An Erotic Eye..."

It is believed that grandfather sold the two residences at or near the time of his wife, Esther's death. She died from tuberculosis in 1935.

LA Times Staff Writer, Joe Seewerker in researching the home, interviewed the new owner, a Mr. Stanton Fraser who provided some interesting information. I quote from Seewerker's article:

...

"The second house was as unusual in design and as full of queer gadgets as the first. Built close to the first, it is of Chinese design. Or at least Mr. Fraser thinks it is Chinese.

"The Russian again took up the grape motif," says Mr. Fraser. "Only in the Chinese house he used a growing grapevine to decorate the living-room. *He must have had an erotic eye also, because he decorated the bathroom with paintings of nude women.* "[Emphasis mine]

The article seems to indicate that Mr. Stanton had just superficial knowledge about the former owner, and was clearly unaware that "the Tea House" was built and given as a birthday present to George Junior on his fifteenth birthday in October, 1922.

While Stanton assumes that it was the Russian architect and builder, Alexander Zelenko who drew the erotic nudes in my father's bathroom, I think we can safely assume that he did not. It is much more likely that the actual artist would have been the young teenager, George Hodel who as we know was actively involved in drugs and sexual liaisons and the editing of his own magazine, FANTASIA, which was in young George's words:

"...dedicated to the stranger harmonies...beauty we may find in a poem, a sketch, or a medley of colors; in the music of prayer-bells in some far-off minaret, or the noises of a city street; in a temple or a brothel or a gaol; in prayer or perversity or sin."

NUESTRO PUEBLO

Los Angeles, City of Romance

Drawings by
CHARLES H. OWENS

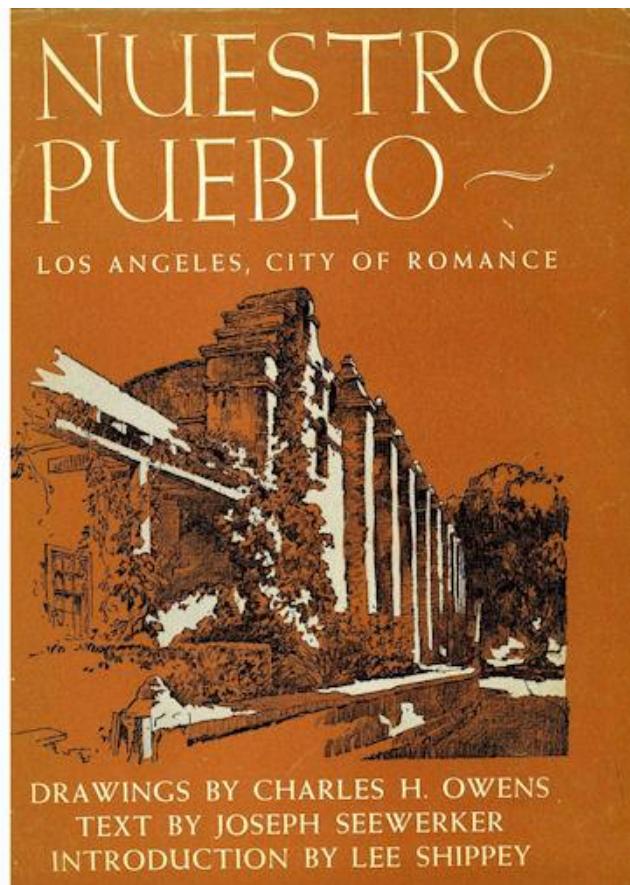
Text by
JOSEPH SEEWERKER

To Charles H. Owens and to Joseph Seewerker, 'Nuestro Pueblo' — 'Our Town' — is Los Angeles, with its famous suburb, Hollywood.

Charles H. Owens is an outstanding figure in the field of American newspaper illustration and his drawings have given authentic Western atmosphere to best-selling books of mountain and desert.

'Nuestro Pueblo' is not only a superb presentation of a fascinating city, but a book of interest to the art student because of the technical treatment at which Mr. Owens is so notably skillful.

Houghton Mifflin Co. 1940



'TIMES' STAFF MEN BASE BOOK ON 'NUESTRO PUEBLO' FEATURE

L.S.
Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Nov 17, 1940;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988)
pg. C6



COAUTHORS—With the text by Joseph Seewerker (right) and drawings by Charles Owens (left) these Los Angeles newspapermen have collaborated in creating "Nuestro Pueblo, Los Angeles, City of Romance," published by Houghton, Mifflin Co.

Caricatures by Salvador Baguer

'TIMES' STAFF MEN BASE BOOK ON 'NUESTRO PUEBLO' FEATURE

NUESTRO PUEBLO. Los Angeles, City of Romance. Text by Joseph Seewerker, and drawings by Charles H. Owens. Houghton Mifflin.

"Nuestro Pueblo," with drawings by Charles Owens and text by Joseph Seewerker, is a book all readers of The Times will welcome, for while "Nuestro Pueblo" was running as a regular feature in this paper hundreds of readers suggested that the sketches should be published in book form.

The drawings are all of interesting and historic places in Los Angeles and the text briefly but effectively tells the story of those places, adding piquant interest and interpretation to the delightful drawings.

Mr. Owens for years has been nationally recognized as one of the ablest of newspaper artists and this book will appeal to art students throughout the country.

Though intended especially for those who love the historic, the romantic and the picturesque, the book seems the answer to the doctor's prayer, as anyone killing time in a waiting room will find it just the thing to enjoy in snatches. One can open it anywhere and find interest.

"Nuestro Pueblo," as all Angelenos know, means "Our Town." Thornton Wilder's beautiful play, "Our Town," proved that all America looks back to some "our town" of its past with affection, because of the familiar things which modernity may have erased. "Nuestro Pueblo" is the "our town" book which preserves many scenes which will stir our memories and awaken pleasant reveries. It deserves all the success our town can give it.

L. S.

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Alexander Zelenko



1871-1953

George Hodel Sr.
(Early photo circa 1904)



1873-1954

Esther Leov Hodel



1873-1937

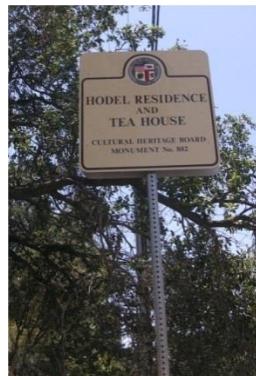
My grandfather commissioned Zelenko to build his Monterey Road home & Tea House in 1922. (The street name at that time was Walnut Hill Avenue.)

Little is known about their personal relationship. The two men were born and died within a few years of each other. Clearly Zelenko was a man of power and position in Russia.

[See samples of his Moscow-built buildings and biography here.](#)

HODEL RESIDENCE

Below are some photographs I took a few years ago, when the residence was vacant and up-for-sale and under application to become a "Los Angeles Cultural Monument." (Northeast historian and community activist [Charles Fisher](#) was the driving force behind securing its approval and certification with the city.)



Hodel Residence & Tea House Cultural Monument No. 802

Hodel Main House- 6512 Monterey Road, Los Angeles



Zelenko - the Artist

Zelenko painted the below mural with the unusual winged creature inside the Hodel residence in 1922. Most unusual. In the lower left of the painting he signed it with the letters "RRO" and a cross. Was did the signage mean and what did his drawing symbolize?

Was it: Whimsy? Fantasy? A Secret Fraternity?

A second mural depicting peacock-like fowl is seen on the upper level in the main house. This drawing also contains a snake-like banner with different lettering.

Anyone with thoughts or an answer as to what these art and or lettering might signify, I would love to hear from you at steve@stevehodel.com



"R.R.O" signage



George Hodel Jr.'s "Tea House" - A present for his 15th birthday. (1922)

Below photos taken by me in 2006 or 2007 show the dilapidated condition of the second "Tea House" residence.

Though built adjacent to the main house on the same property, the city would later give George Jr's house a separate address- 6511 Short Way. (Ironically, as we know, this is the last name of one of George Hodel's most famous victim's, Elizabeth Short, aka "The Black Dahlia.")

The “Tea House” 6511 Short Way, Los Angeles



L.A. Times 1922 article describing Zelenko built George Hodel “birthday present”

BOY'S HOME IS PLANNED BY RUSSIAN
BY ALMA WHITAKER
Los Angeles Times (1888-Current File): Oct 15, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times pg VI

BOY'S HOME IS PLANNED BY RUSSIAN

*Famous Architect Decides
to Remain in City After
Completing Work*

Not many boys can boast that a famous architect came over from Russia to build them a house as a fifteenth birthday present.

This was the distinction which fell upon young George Hill Hodel, who attained his fifteenth birthday on Sept. 18, and who fell on the same day to a beautiful Swiss-Russian residence, high on the hill at 5140 Wilshire Blvd., which was built and completed by M. Alexander Zelenko of Moscow to the day.

M. Zelenko, architect of M. and Madame G. Hodel, was invited to come to this country six years ago by the parents to build a worthy house for their son. The result is a most interesting structure, with three bedrooms, and two oriental outdoor rooms. Terraced gardens lead up to the house, which is a blend of old and modern efficiency although outwardly having all the charm of the old Russian country houses.

Everything inside, including the heating arrangements, work by steam, which warms every room, warms any room. An unusual feature is a sunken fireplace with tile surround, framed in Russian carving.

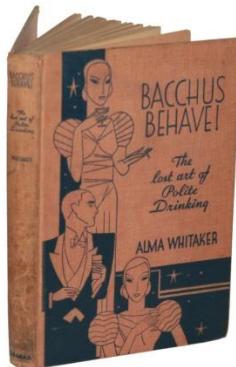
M. Zelenko is a fine artist as well as an architect, and four hand-painted panels of great beauty bear witness to his skill in the main living-room.

M. Zelenko is not a stranger to the United States, having been called to America by the Czar's government in 1913 to visit Europe and America to study education and architecture. His report in book form graces the Russian archives today. When the Bolsheviks took power, M. Zelenko was offered the portfolio of the Ministry of Education, but being one of the few who did not share the Bolsheviks' views, he declined in favor of Maxim Gorky, his friend, who now holds it.

And now he is so enamored of California that he has built a home in the Jolla hills, decorated with faithful detail, where he intends living with his charming wife on Yachats, and never to return to Russia as a subject.

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The above 1922 article on “Georgie Jr.” was written by Alma Whitaker an *LA Times* star-reporter of the 1920s and the author of a then popular book, *Bacchus Behave! : The Lost Art of Polite Drinking*.



Here's an interesting article written by Ms. Whitaker from 1927 which was “above the fold.”

[Alma Whitaker reveals Art Hoax](#)

