

S.I.R. REUNION

[SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE]

— Steve Dwyer



PHOTOS: EWA ZIABEK



Gathering of former
Scholars-in-Residence

Everyone in this photograph, except one, has two things in common. They all graduated from the School of Architecture at the University of Southern California and all are former Scholars in Residence at The Gamble House. Yes, everyone pictured, with the exception of Jean Harris, a long time housekeeper (pictured in purple) called one of the two rooms in the Servants' Quarters home for at least one year. How did all these illustrious people come to be at the House one sunny Sunday?

Three former Scholars, Carol Chacon, Ewa Ziabek and Jayna Cooper, conceived the notion of a Scholars' Reunion during the Centennial Year of the House; they are the three on the right of the photograph. With the support of Kori Capaldi, former Scholar Michelle Costamagna (first row in green), and the Internet, they contacted a good portion of the pool of people who lived at the House under the Scholars in Residence Program and invited them to a party at the House that coincided with the launch of the centennial celebrations.

Here is the background on the Scholars Program. The Gamble Family gifted the House to the School of Architecture at USC in September 1966. Coincidentally, I started at the School in that same month and year, and first toured the House in October of 1966. I remember the Docent saying it was the School's intention to have two students from the School live in the House for security reasons. I said to myself, "Cool! Maybe I'll get to do that!" And I did, three years later. The Scholars in Residence Program began in September 1967 and has been in place continuously for 41 years. There are approximately 80 former Scholars out in the world now. Nineteen of them attended the Reunion.

Some of the Scholars knew each other, especially the more recent one, but most were unacquainted with one another; not surprising given the span of years over which they lived at the House. I knew perhaps more than most, because many had been my students at USC and as a Board Member of the Friends of The Gamble House, I get to the House very frequently. Two topics seemed to dominate conversations as the Scholars got to know each other: "which room did you have (the left or the right)?", and "what were you allowed to do then that the current Scholars are not now?" The answers to the second question surprised even me.

Midway through the event, everyone collected on the front steps of the House to take the picture shown here. The oldest Scholar, Ron Altoon, volunteered to explain how the program came to be (top row, the only Scholar with a tie). I have known Ron for years, since we were in School at the same time and he is active in the Architectural Community, but even I did not realize he was the House's very first Scholar in Residence. I was part of the third "generation" of Scholars and I knew that Ron was before me, but he actually started the program. He told us that one day Randell Makinson, then Director of the House, called him up and invited him and a classmate up to the House "to move furniture". Thus began a long history of utilizing the strong backs of the students to move chairs, tables, etc from one part of the House to another. "Indentured servitude" was the phrase Ron used (jokingly). I recall from personal experience coming home from School at night and finding a note taped to the telephone in the Servants' Quarters directing that 60 chairs be moved from the third floor to the basement, and then the next night another note directing that they be moved back to the third floor. I also remember moving the Robinson Dining Room table and chairs from the basement to the Third Floor (but that's another story).

The Scholars-in-Residence Fellowship Program: The Friends of the Gamble House Scholar-in-Residence Fellowship is awarded to two students annually. It is open to 4th & 5th year students in the University of Southern California School of Architecture, and Historic Preservation Masters degree students whose courses lead to graduation that academic year. The fellowship provides residence in The Gamble House for an academic year, in exchange for which the students provide support for events and assist with Gamble House projects.