

# 2018 Pasadena Showcase House of Design

## House History

High atop a hill in Altadena, this elegant Mediterranean-styled estate is known as “Overlook”, doubtlessly inspired by the view that originally extended over mostly open land with a view of Catalina Island. The house must have been a landmark, with an unspoiled mountain backdrop. There were no other houses visible to the north until the Porter (later Gillette) hunting lodge on Palm Street. The villa was constructed in 1915 at a cost of \$14,000.

### **The Original Owners**

In 1914, two sisters who were widows, Ruth E. (Scarritt) Hargrove and Mary Emma Baker, purchased five and a half acres in the sparsely settled northeast section of the community.

Ruth Hargrove was the second wife of Robert Kennon Hargrove, Southern U.S. Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. After her husband died in 1905, Mrs. Hargrove moved to California.

Mary Emma Baker was the widow of George L. Baker who managed theaters in Portland Oregon. After his death, she became a teacher with the Los Angeles School System.

### **The Community of Altadena**

At that time, Altadena was a rural, unincorporated retreat for retired Easterners and businessmen who worked in Pasadena and Los Angeles. Small orchards, poultry farms and vineyards dominated the west end of town, while open ranch lands still occupied the eastern side. The rustic surroundings of Altadena attracted a number of artists and writers. Eminent American author, Zane Grey was an early Altadena resident.

### **The Architect**

Reginald Davis Johnson was born in Westchester, New York in 1882 and moved to Pasadena when his father, Episcopal Bishop Joseph Horsfall Johnson, was called to head the Los Angeles Episcopal Diocese in 1894. He graduated from Williams College in 1908, studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and traveled extensively through Europe. Ruth and Mary Emma hired the up-and-coming young architect to design a villa in the Mediterranean style-an unusual choice in the Craftsman era and region.

### **The Mediterranean Style of the House**

No one knows who designed the first Mediterranean house in Southern California, but Johnson is commonly considered one of the style’s early advocates. He said it was a perfect marriage of the English charm with the climate, topography and

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“romance” of California. Many of his large houses and structures still stand in Altadena and Pasadena, including All Saint’s Episcopal Church in Pasadena. His work in Santa Barbara includes several landmarks, including the Santa Barbara Biltmore Hotel, La Valencia Hotel in La Jolla and the Santa Barbara Post Office.

The original floor plan had various rooms around a large entrance hall. There was a living room, screened porch, dining room, kitchen, pantry and maid’s room with one and one-half baths downstairs; and four bedrooms with three baths upstairs.

Later owners made extensive renovations to the house, including adding Italian-influenced details. A duplex residence of 780 square feet, probably for the servants, and garage with chauffer’s quarters were also added. Today, the square footage of the main house is approximately 11,000 square feet.

The owners have added contemporary elements to suit their personal taste and lifestyle making it an eclectic blend of unique living spaces.

Altadena today still maintains a casual and country feeling. This pleasant and unique community is no doubt what Zane Grey referred to when he wrote, “In Altadena I have found the qualities that make life worth living.”