



## Welcome to Carmichael

**Not Your Everyday Mansion: Is the big house in Carmichael really suited to our bigger-than-life governor?**

Last



The Carmichael Mansion in need of a governor

month, local residents were treated to what was probably their only chance to visit the ill-fated governor's mansion in Carmichael. The tour was organized by the Carmichael

Chamber of Commerce with the help of more than 50 volunteers, including CHP officers, sheriff's deputies and docents from the downtown Governor's Mansion who guided 600 visitors lucky enough to get tickets through the house.

Many of us are familiar with the outlines of the house's history, but almost no one has had a chance to see why Jerry Brown refused to live there or why George Deukmejian was willing to. Let's take a quick run through the history of the house-- then take a look inside.

In 1966, then-Governor Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy quickly retreated to the Pollock House on 45th Street in East Sacramento after confronting the realities of living in the decidedly dowdy old Governor's Mansion at 16th and H streets downtown at a time when living downtown was not exactly in vogue. I'm with Nancy on this one. Since state funding for a new house was out of the question, private money was raised to build a new house in Carmichael.

Construction was completed in 1974, just before Reagan left office in early 1975. Jerry Brown famously refused to live in the house, preferring a modest apartment adjacent to Capitol Park.

Matt Franich purchased the property in 1984 for \$1.53 million. Over the next several years, Franich proposed a variety of uses for the property--including a governor's mansion, a country club and a restaurant. He even threatened to turn it into a senior citizens' center before deciding to live in the house and eventually subdividing the property into seven additional parcels to sell individually to homebuyers.



The living room

In the meantime, there was much rancor between Franich, local officials and nearby Carmichael residents. To Franich's credit, he finished construction of the interior of the house, which had fallen into disrepair in the years after Jerry Brown refused to move in. Today, Franich's widow, Pat, has offered Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger rent-free use of the house should he

choose. Or he could buy the house. More on that later.

The building site is spectacular, if only for its southerly views to the river and the Ancil Hoffman golf course framed by a grove of gnarled old-growth valley oaks.

Unfortunately for its use as a governor's house today, the east side of the house is abutted by one-acre building lots that the current owner sold several years ago, potentially raising security and privacy issues.

With an estimated 11,000 to 12,000 square feet of enclosed living space (news reports over time vary) and 10 bedrooms, 11 bedrooms on five acres (originally 11 acres) and 78 French doors, this is not your everyday suburban manse. The house is a contemporary interpretation of the historic California Spanish Colonial mission courtyard house, built around three sides of a massive, 5,400-squarefoot courtyard. The entrance is at the far end of the entry courtyard with all public rooms facing south toward the river view. Four guest suites and two kitchens (the second is a catering kitchen/utility room combination) are arrayed along a long hallway parallel to one side of the courtyard. On the opposite side of the courtyard is the governor's quarters.

The public rooms comprised a massive reception room, a formal dining room and a separate auxiliary dining/reception space. A room adjacent to the reception room, originally designed to serve as the governor's office, is now used as a bar/club room.

As you enter the family quarters, to the left is a large family living room/dining room combination with an adjacent galley kitchen. Other than its generous size, this great room feels like that in any informal suburban house. Four secondary family bedroom suites are laid out in a row beyond the kitchen. The master suite is entered only after passing the governor's wife's closet--here the layout seems a bit strange, at least to me. Oddly separated from the bedroom and the master bath, the closet feels like a staged event.

You enter through over scaled double doors (about 4 by 8 feet each) into an enormous high-ceilinged room, encircled with open shelving and hanging racks, with a glass-topped center island for storage in the center of the room: It's more like a showroom than a closet. Down the hall, the master bedroom has a massive fireplace and access to the veranda and its views to the south. Access to the pool and cabana from the master bedroom is via massive--and mirrored--double doors into the master

bath and then to the outside, in grand fashion, through an additional set of double doors.

In the photographs here, you can see that the architecture of the house and its current decor often work at cross-purposes, especially in the public rooms. The massive beams, cathedral ceilings and expansive window walls are at war with the profusion of French antiques and crystal chandeliers and aqua and pale pink tinted adobe walls. I doubt that First Lady Maria Shriver would approve. But I have to admit that I have a certain affinity for the clean lines of the place, the wood beams, all that glazing, and the masses of adobe brick. In my "if I had all the money in the world" dreams, I'd strip that house of all the antiques, mirrors, chandeliers and carpet, expose the Mexican tile floors, paint the place a neutral color to show off the architecture and fill it with furniture that expresses a simpler early California aesthetic that complements the wonderful natural setting. And then I'd get a drink, sit on the veranda and watch the sun set over the river.

It is improbable to think of a governor's residence today in a suburban community 13 miles and a rather tortured 30- to 45- (or more) minute commute by car to the downtown Capitol. Can you imagine the

Terminator sitting at the Fair Oaks/Watt Avenue intersection waiting patiently to make a left toward Highway 50? If a 12,000- square-foot house was too big for previous ascetic governors, such as Jerry Brown and Gray Davis, it is also most certainly too small for the bigger-than-life Schwarzenegger clan, accustomed as they are to bigger (and posher) digs in Pacific Palisades and Brentwood.

The house itself is a monument to another time and place, and one that Mansion continued from page 36 I'm not convinced responds well to the needs of California's governors, then or now. It was built by private money with close supervision by Nancy Reagan, leading me to believe it was built more to suit the personal style of the Reagans. Loosely speaking, it's a suburban-style house with large--make that very large, and not even close in concept to what today's governor's mansion proposals envision.

The house itself is a monument to another time and place. Are there any lessons to be learned here? My instincts tell me that in our increasingly mobile and cyberspace world a traditional governor's mansion, where a governor and his family would actually live, makes little sense today. Note that governors Schwarzenegger, Davis and

others lived elsewhere and commuted to Sacramento when needed. That's not a dig at Sacramento and what we have to offer-- it's the reality of a huge state where our governors Honorary Carmichael Mayor Donna Detering was one of the docents for the tour. typically have primary residences hundreds of miles away from the Capitol.

What we need is a residence that is more symbolic in nature, one where the governor can host dignitaries and carry on official entertaining duties, and perhaps unpack his bags for the few days per week or month that he needs to be in residence. In that sense, the soon-to-finished restoration of the Stanford Mansion could serve most of those functions (and is designed to do). Or a new governor's mansion could be built downtown convenient to where official functions typically occur anyway. (There's a movement afoot to do just that.)

If I were governor, I'd stay put where I am, at least until the state can get its act together and provide a residence that is conducive to living a private family life and a distinctly separate official one. The Carmichael house missed that mark on both counts.

But wait: What about the house in Carmichael? I've heard the Schwarzeneggers haven't officially said no to buying the property. Apparently, Maria,

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who has toured the house, is a tough negotiator. The public price is \$5.9 million, and the price reportedly offered to the Schwarzeneggers is in the neighborhood of \$3.4 million, though I've also heard of an offer that was something less than \$3 million. The saga lives on...Kerry Phillips welcomes your comments. He can be reached [kcp@surewest.net](mailto:kcp@surewest.net)

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