ANACHRONISTIC ARCHITECTURE—The 1902 Zetterberg house had to be cut in half to be moved to Pitzer College by school's class in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Times photo by George Rose

ART SEIDENBAUM

Saving a Beloved Anachronism

The glue holds after 75 years, invisible behind woodwork and stonework and curving roofs.

People call the place the Zetterberg house although Charley Loop built it in 1902, when the Arts and Crafts Movement was in flower and a Claremont California bungalow could be as big as 12 rooms.

Lawyer George Hamilton bought the property nearly 10 years later and did some redecorating to better house his five children. When Hamilton sold in the Depression, he advertised the citrus grove and the combination barn-garage and a new “alcove lavatory” with orchid tile floors.

The Arvid Zetterbergs took over 286 Valencia orange trees and the palm-lined driveway and the built-in benches. Attorney Stephen Zetterberg grew up in the house; he remembers the way his father whistled to the birds and how the birds appeared; he remembers the solar heating system already installed for the laundry; he remembers walking through the five-acre grove to high school. He remembers sweet smells and deep quiet.

But the crash wrecked the orange business and the Zetterbergs sold portions of the grove to the Quakers and the Christian Scientists for separate houses of faith, keeping the home itself for more than four decades.

Pilgrim Place, the Congregationalists' community for retired missionaries, later bought the remaining Zetterberg property to build a health center. The pilgrims wanted the land, not the residence.

The big bungalow would have been razed and about forgotten if this were the usual California story—another teardown of yesterday in the dubious name of development.

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A Beloved Anachronism

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ment. The Zetterberg house was no ar-
chitectural astonishment, after all, but a
sturdy reflection of its time. New times,
new needs.

New indeed, so suddenly different we
have now begun to spare space for history.
Enter, in the later months of 1975, a
whole fresh cast of characters who would
keep the old Claremont glue.

The Plan to Save the House

Pitzer College English Prof. Barry San-
ders was teaching a course in the Arts and
Crafts Movement. His students began
to handle history, not just read about it. And Pitzer needed a students' center, a place to fold in from the contem-
porary concrete on the rest of campus.

Sanders' students looked around and saw
the Zetterberg house as ideal: the right
age, the careful construction, the nostalgia
of a home they hadn't had.

In came South Pasadena architect Ray
Girvigian to consult. Girvigian is a veteran
of preservation wars, scarred in the mid-
'60s when he and Esther McCoy, now a
state advisory board member on historic
buildings, couldn't save the Dodge House in West Hollywood.

Girvigian consulted and then stayed to plan moving the house
to campus: 'I got carried away by the students,' he allowed two
years later.

In came local historians and residents
who remembered along with Stephen Zet-
terberg. The campaign, on and off campus,
began. Louis Richards Mead wrote the Po-
adena Progress-Bulletin about her child-
hood visits to the luxurious home built by
the Loop family. Ursula Vile wrote a View
story for The Times (May 16, 1976) about
the old house as a down-home, grass-roots
Bicentennial project.

The Money is Raised

The school and the citizens raised $50,0-
000 to cover relocating costs. Pilgrim Place
agreed to sell the house for $1. In came
Thomas House Movers to execute the big
switch down the railroad right-of-way.

The house was too big to transfer in one
piece; it would have to be cut in half and
in two trips. The house was too big
to haul in busy daylight; it would have to
go between midnight and dawn on succes-
sive Saturday nights. The house was too
big to fit under utility lines; lines would have
to be taken down, put up, taken down and
put up again before the job was done.

None of it was easy. The stone chimney
had to be dismantled for transfer. The roof
was bowed from four layers of shingles.

But the switch was done and the effort,
like the house, never came apart complete-
ly. A brand-new student center of similar
size might have cost Pitzer about $300,000.
The Zetterberg will be refurbished as well
as relocated for about $70,000.

The economy of respecting history is
real. So is the present preservation arder.

fornia feelings—a sense of continuity.

Continuity, I confess, was the last thing I
thought about on first sight of the trans-
planted Zetterberg. The house squatted at
its new location next to a modern concrete
clock tower designed by Ed Killingsworth
of Long Beach. The geometry of now,
above the slats of then. Mutt and Jeff, per-
haps, partners but opponents.

Ted Criley, architect for Pitzer's dorms
and classrooms, saw the relationship as
healthy: "Having a little bit from the past
on campus is good." Pitzer is only 14 years
old. It can use a few footings from another
time.

That's sensible. The two landmarks can
be tied together with color if not form. The
enthusiasm for opening something old
among the students is a deeper case for
continuity.

And now the staying power of the house
works still wider. Pitzer is sponsoring a
two-day conference this spring on the
"Politics of Preservation," inspired, in part,
by the school's success with Zetterberg.
The California Council for the Humanities' in
Public Policy is picking up a piece of the
tab. The old house is scheduled to be the
centerpiece of seminars, a case study and
working conference shelter.

I expect the proceedings will be covered
by attorney Stephen Zetterberg in his avo-
cational role as local architectural critic for
the Claremont Courier. All the parts come
together so solidly, with glue set 75 years
ago.