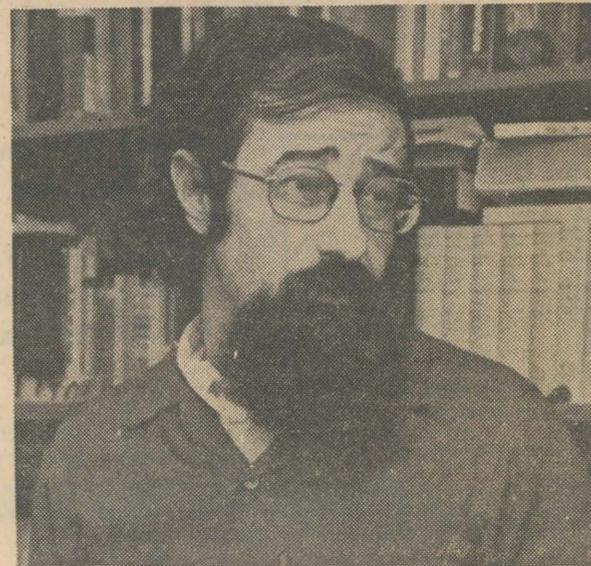




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Tribune Photos by Michael Goulding

Mission furniture is one focal point of Grove House recently relocated at Pitzer College



In the Grove House on the Pitzer College campus, above, are fine examples of Mission furniture and Arts and Crafts period architecture. For Dr. Barry Sanders, at right, it is a showcase for the period pieces as is his own Claremont home where he refurbishes the oak pieces including the chair built about 1909 and the bookcase, once covered with gray paint, built in 1901.

## Craftsman's Hands Revitalize Mission-Period Oak Furniture

By KAY COOPERMAN  
 Tribune Staff Writer

Students walking north on the Pitzer College campus experience a time warp. Behind them stand concrete and glass classroom buildings, circa 1963. Straight ahead, sheltered by the modernistic clock tower, is a large, two-story, brown wood shingled Arts and Crafts Period home, circa 1903, — Grove House.

Primarily responsible for uniting the present with the past is an associate professor of English who has struck that balance in his own personal life.

During his post-graduate days, Dr. Barry Sanders decided the turn-of-the-century Arts and Crafts Period was America's finest and vowed to do his best to integrate its dictates into daily living.

"It's the last movement for quality and aesthetics before America moved into kitsch ... Formica ... cheese box architecture," the 40-year-old instructor said.

The furniture and architecture of the Arts and Crafts followers were "real stuff." Furniture was of solid wood, simple and utilitarian in design. Those making the furniture were craftsmen — they worked on a piece from beginning to end, not in the assembly line method of today.

Sanders admits his interest in the period is an obsession. He spends much of his spare time reading up on the era and its personalities, writing about it, lecturing on it and surrounding himself at home with the furniture and interior decorations enjoyed by his predecessor craftsmen.

Bringing the Grove House to campus in the fall of 1977 to be used as a student center was an extension of Sanders' homelife love for things from the period, an appreciation which he unwittingly has passed on to the Pitzer community.

The Grove House, which opened Feb. 8, also provided him with more room for pieces of so-called mission fur-

niture of the era. Sanders and his wife, Grace, began collecting these pieces in the early 70s, when he began teaching at Pitzer.

How the furniture got its name is a subject of debate, Sanders said. It was either named that because it resembled the solid, heavy pieces furnishing the California Missions — a historic period popular among the craftsmen — or because its makers built the furniture to fulfill a mission of being utilitarian.

Sanders said his interest in mission furniture and the Arts and Crafts Period — and particularly one furniture maker of the day, Gustav Stickley — was triggered by a book salesman from Pasadena.

The man invited then-Ph.D. candidate Sanders to his home to see his collection of refurbished mission furniture.

"I was just fascinated with what he was doing in his house," Sanders remembered.

"I've always been interested in architecture and moderately (interested) in furniture," Sanders said, but the book seller's house became an inspiration.

"I thought if I ever had a house, I'd start to buy that furniture."

Since becoming a teacher, haunting antique stores, auctions and yard sales for the mission furniture has become a way of life for Sanders and his wife. They've even established a nationwide network of people who call them when they've located pieces of the simple and sturdy wood furniture.

Many of the chairs, tables, desks and cabinets filling Sanders' home, located just blocks from campus, were hiding under coats of paint when they were spotted on someone's front porch or in a store being used as a display case.

To restore the pieces to the form they were made to take — natural wood grain — Sanders follows a "reci-

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# Craftsman —

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pe" master craftsman Stickley printed in his magazine published during the period, "The Craftsman."

With his furniture refinishing work, Sanders has become a craftsman himself, and he finds it extremely rewarding.

"What I feel is like I've brought something back to life — that I've rescued this piece from time," Sanders said.

The Stickley refinishing process he used on all of the mission furniture in his home and the pieces he collected for the Grove House involves the use of strong ammonia fumes, which color the wood naturally.

The fumes react with acid in the wood to produce the even, dark brown stain-like coloring characteristic of authentic mission furniture, he explained.

He also uses the old-time method of stripping paint by scraping the piece with a chunk of broken glass. In the scraping process, the glass continuously sharpens itself, Sanders said.

The final process of the refinishing — which can take 25 hours just for a dining room chair — is applying oil containing rottenstone to the wood followed by several coats of floor wax.

Almost all of the furniture Sanders collects — both for his home and for the Grove House — was made by the Stickley Furniture Co.

Sanders is a great admirer of Stickley, having recently written a book about the Arts and Crafts guru.

Sanders said Stickley's "The Craftsman" magazine played an important role in popularizing the style of the period. Stickley described his periodical in a subtitle on the cover as "an illustrated monthly magazine for the simplification of life."

A Mission furniture is characterized by plain lines, little or no ornamentation and is constructed from pieces made to fit together and stay that way without nails.

Stickley made much use of the mortise and tenon method of holding pieces of wood together — cutting the end of one piece to slide into another. When reinforcement was required, wooden dowels or pegs were used.

Sanders said that for Stickley, the sturdy weight of his furniture "speaks of solidarity and stability in life."

Mission furniture is supposed to be very heavy and was not meant to be moved around and rearranged once placed in a room.

Such rearranging "represented to Stickley no stability in the family," Sanders said.

The furniture also is inherently uncomfortable, since plush cushions were strictly forbidden. Other features, such as roomy seats, adjustable reclining chair backs and chair arms wide enough to be used as a writing surface outweigh the disadvantages for Sanders.

"The thing that appeals to me most is the quality," he added.

Sanders' intense interest in the Arts and Crafts Period just naturally, whether by intention or not, was passed on to those coming into contact with him in his classes.

Therefore, when in 1975 it came time for a class project, the suggestion to find a big Arts and Crafts house to move to campus for a student center was not that outrageous.

The large bungalow, which was named Grove house because it originally sat in a citrus grove, was discovered near Pilgrim Place in Claremont just before it was to be leveled to make room for a hospital, Sanders said.

Enough money was raised to get the house onto campus in 1977. It took another two years, filled with uncertainty as to whether the house would ever be opened, before a student's father arranged for the Crosby and Enid Kemper Foundation to donate the needed money last summer.

The house provides room for a coffee house, study and meeting rooms, a small gallery for art displays, a room to board visiting professors or lecturers and the headquarters of the campus Women's Study Center.

Students have worked with Sanders to refinish the furniture in the house. Still needed is further decorating and landscaping.