

## Rubbing out Chandler's place?

[1,2,3 Edition]

The San Diego Union - Tribune - San Diego, Calif.

Author: PETER ROWE  
Date: Jul 25, 2004  
Section: LIFESTYLE  
Document Types: PROFILE  
Text Word Count: 1125

### Document Text

*Copyright Union-Tribune Publishing Co. Jul 25, 2004*

On a winding street above the Pacific, a horseshoe-shaped home holds four bedrooms, 4 1/2 baths and a large chunk of San Diego's literary heritage.

6005 Camino de la Costa remains much as it was between 1946 and 1955, when Raymond Chandler lived here. He was already a successful writer, and his mysteries "The Big Sleep" and "Farewell, My Lovely" had been turned into movies. But in this comfortable La Jolla home, Chandler added stories, screenplays and two novels -- "The Little Sister" and his last masterpiece, "The Long Goodbye" -- to his body of work.

Now, this landmark's out-of-state owners are planning a major renovation; call it "The Big Remodel." A second floor will be added, and one new room to the ground floor. Whether the house will still resemble the place where Chandler lived and worked is an open question.

"I think a lot of the basic integrity of the house is still there," said Robert Korch, after reviewing the blueprints for the city of San Diego. "But when you drive by and see the second floor, and maybe go around and see the changes to the exterior, you might feel there has been a loss."

Preservationists are concerned, especially as the plans did not travel the route normally used for properties of such cultural significance.

"This should have gone to the Historic Resources Board of the city of San Diego," said Bruce Coons, executive director of the private Save Our Heritage Organisation.

The city, Korch said, is re-examining the house's pedigree to determine if it should be treated as a historic property.

Howard Gottlieb, the Chicago-area investor whose Glen Eagle Partners Ltd. bought the house last year for \$2.7 million, was called for comment three times last week. Twice, he asked that a reporter call later. The third time, an answering machine recorded a message.

A spokesman for Glen Eagle maintained that Gottlieb and his partners did not know of the Chandler connection. He doubts that this link will impress the investors.

"I don't know how much this will make the plans change," said Barry Katz, Glen Eagle's chief financial officer. "But I am sure the plan is to make it bigger and make it fancier and then sell it for a lot of money."

Still, shouldn't any remodel respect Chandler's years here, years filled with success and despair?

"These are not my plans, they're my boss's plans. Seeing as he's not a fan of film noir nor literature noir, I kind of doubt it," Katz said. "That's not the kind of thing that would go to his soul."

When Chandler moved here from Hollywood, his feelings toward La Jolla were mixed, especially on Sundays.

"I can remember when a Sunday in La Jolla was almost as dreadful as a Sunday in London," he recalled in 1957, writing a guest column for his friend, The Evening Tribune's Neil Morgan. "When the air resounded with silence, and when an unregenerate character like myself was tempted to stand at the intersection of Girard Avenue and Wall Street, and shout."

La Jolla has changed since Chandler's arrival nearly 60 years ago, and so has this 1941 house. The hallways have new wooden floors. The living room has new floor-to-ceiling windows, affording the current tenants -- Manuel "Manny"

Ramos, a lawyer, and his kids - - sweeping views of waves crashing against Bird Rock.

At least once a month, a devotee knocks on the front door and begs Ramos for a tour. But this is no museum. The study where Chandler wrote is now a teenage girl's room. There's no plaque in the bedroom where the author tended to his wife, Cissy, dying of heart and respiratory ailments. The bathroom where Chandler, two months after Cissy's death, tried to shoot himself, is still in use and the bullet holes in the ceiling are no longer visible.

A month after that incident, Chandler sold the house. He moved often in his last four years, roaming from New York to London and back to La Jolla, with frequent stops in hospitals to "dry out." On March 26, 1959, he died in Scripps Clinic. A few days later, he was buried at San Diego's Mount Hope Cemetery.

Ramos has tried to introduce his kids to the man's work, which lifted a maligned genre into the realm of art. "They're not that interested," he admitted. "You can only do so much."

But some nights Ramos opens a book in the living room here and follows Philip Marlowe, Chandler's cynical and noble private eye, down Los Angeles' mean streets. "For anyone who is a writer, this is like a shrine," Ramos said. "Just to be here, in the same place, you get some inspiration."

That's why the remodel needs careful oversight, Coons said.

"To get into a writer's mind, one of the best ways is to sit where he sat, to see what he saw. These places should be designated historic and they should be preserved."

Kevin Weber, the local builder charged with fulfilling Glen Eagle's plans, insisted that the design will not change the home's character.

"It's been remodeled a few times," Weber noted. "We're not replacing the footprint of the house itself."

Plans now call for a 1,550-square-foot addition to the 3,000-square-foot home. The 400-square-foot garage also will be converted into living space. New doors and windows will be installed. A second floor, with a master bedroom suite on one side and a guest suite or office on the other, will cap the project.

Weber noted that the plans will be thoroughly reviewed, and will make a stop before the California Coastal Commission. On July 28, the project will be discussed at an 8:30 a.m. public hearing in the San Diego City Council chambers.

These hearings tend to be dry, technical affairs. But at the heart of this bureaucratic exercise is a difficult question:

By adding to this house, are we losing a chapter of our cultural history?

"This is not a bulldoze or a tear-down by any means," Weber said. "We're going to keep it within the character of the area."

"It will be like a brand new house," Ramos countered. "They can say that Chandler lived here once, on this plot of land. But now you get the feeling of what the house was like when he lived here."

### **[Illustration]**

3 PICS; Caption: 1. Raymond Chandler lived and wrote here for nine years. Does that make this La Jolla house a literary shrine? 2. This publicity shot from the late 1940s or early 1950s shows the author in his study. 3. Chandler's study is now a teen's bedroom. The windows, though, still offer a view of the garden.; Credit: 1,3. Eduardo Contreras / Union-Tribune 2. John Engstead

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

### **Abstract** (Document Summary)

6005 Camino de la Costa remains much as it was between 1946 and 1955, when Raymond Chandler lived here. He was already a successful writer, and his mysteries "The Big Sleep" and "Farewell, My Lovely" had been turned into movies. But in this comfortable La Jolla home, Chandler added stories, screenplays and two novels -- "The Little Sister" and his last masterpiece, "The Long Goodbye" -- to his body of work.

At least once a month, a devotee knocks on the front door and begs [Manuel "Manny" Ramos] for a tour. But this is no museum. The study where Chandler wrote is now a teenage girl's room. There's no plaque in the bedroom where the author tended to his wife, Cissy, dying of heart and respiratory ailments. The bathroom where Chandler, two months after Cissy's death, tried to shoot himself, is still in use and the bullet holes in the ceiling are no longer visible.

3 PICS; 1. Raymond Chandler lived and wrote here for nine years. Does that make this La Jolla house a literary shrine? 2. This publicity shot from the late 1940s or early 1950s shows the author in his study. 3. Chandler's study is now a teen's bedroom. The windows, though, still offer a view of the garden.; Credit: 1,3. Eduardo Contreras / Union-Tribune 2. John Engstead

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.