

American Stuccolow



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Large Living in our stuccoed bungalow

The Crowbar Issue Featuring: What Steve Eats, Real Estate News & Notes, Adam's \$11.66 Collect Call, Hammer Time, Fight Club, Alarm Report, Hellos & Hurrays, Feed Lot, Stuccolow Parade, Pool Time, Yard News, and much more!

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Issue 1 Summer 2005 (The Crowbar Issue)

When we first moved to a 1906 bungalow, we got a subscription from my mother to American Bungalow. When the first issue arrived, we were so happy to see all those cute little bungalows and all that cool furniture. But our love affair with American Bungalow soon cooled. It seemed like every issue strayed further and further from our ideas about bungalows. We saw our arts and crafts home as a respite from the freneticism of the world, a haven of simplicity. American Bungalow tried to bring the idea of bungalow into the contemporary age. They suggested wood paneled microwave ovens and special mission-style armoires for large screen televisions. Why live in a modestly sized bungalow when you could live in a supersize McBungalow? Why put your fridge on the back porch when you could remodel your kitchen completely and get a Subzero with wainscoting? Every issue of AB brought us more and more ugliness. Can lights in the ceiling, someone's boring furniture collection, something else we needed to buy for \$5000.00, endless photos of warmly lit, oppressively tasteful interiors, updates on neighborhoods full of gardenias and white picket fences, and ads featuring soulful looking woodworkers standing next to finely polished hunks of mahogany. We were exhausted by the consumerism, sickened by the fantasy, and irritated by the aesthetic. We longed for the minutiae of bungalow living: the alarm going off accidentally, curtains instead of doors in the bathroom, what we can eat in our neighborhood. In the end, what it came down to was this: there was no room for stucco in American Bungalow. So we did what we had to do. We adopted the abandoned ideals of the bungalow, we planted Italian beans in our backyard, and we started American Stuccolow.

American Stuccolow:

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You can't take the "Bung" from a Bungalow, but you can sure get the "Stucco" off a Stuccolow!

by Lisa



For Steve our stucco was more than just an itch to be scratched. It was a gangrenous limb in need of urgent surgery. We had been calling our stuccolow home for over a year, and we had ceased even noticing that it was covered in an unsightly mass of thick concrete. Crazy as it may seem for two people immersed in the practice of aesthetics, we had become accustomed to ugliness. The highly textured surface and dull gray paint was all but invisible to us. One can get used to anything.

Not so for Steve. The stucco affected him in a much more visceral way. He seemed to be physically sickened by its existence. It was a punch in his face, a thorn in his side, a nail in his foot. He practically begged us to let him remove it from our domicile. Financial matters

what they are, we had to say no way. But Steve persisted, and his passion for other people's home improvement led him to begin peeling.

The beautification of our 31st Street stuccolow began suddenly. One day, Roland and Eric drove by in a beat-up tin car and taunted us for having a stuccolow. It was mean of them. They didn't even get out of the car, just shook their heads and remarked on the shameful of our facade. Less than two hours later, Steve arrived out of the blue. His car had broken down and he was stuck at our stuccolow. He thought he'd do some sanding, but there weren't enough tools. So instead, he grabbed a sledgehammer and began to transform our ghastly exterior. Coincidence? Or did Eric and Roland put Karo syrup in his gas tank?

It didn't take long before Adam from down the street joined the project, and soon there were three stucco removers hard at work with sledgehammer, crowbar, and clippers. The stucco was uneven but thick, in some places nearly 4 inches! Beneath, wood siding seemed to be in decent condition. Signs of the original house numbers were revealed. The window frames became visible. Sadly, the aprons beneath the windows had been exterminated.

Removing the first pieces of stucco was heady and exciting, as the house was naked for the first time in many years. The wood looked so happy to see the sun once again. It was like waking up from a long nap.

We are lucky that the folks who stuccoed did a shitty job. Instead of removing the wood siding completely, they put up some tar paper and chicken wire and just stuccoed on top of it. It's still a lot of work to remove the concrete, though. After the euphoria wore off for Steve, Louis kept on it for a few weekends. There's only so much concrete we can put in the trash bin each week, and it's been a month or so since the last few pounds were removed and there are still piles in the driveway.

Anyone want to salvage some vintage stucco? It's original and highly collectible.



Alarm Report

Louis told Lisa to put the alarm on at night while he was out of town. The first morning, she went outside to water the beans and the alarm went off.

When Lisa was out of town, the alarm went off twice, on account of Louis forgetting it was on.

Since we have both been in town, we haven't set the alarm. When the front rooms are done (by the time you read this), watch out!

The front rooms got done (except for paint) and Lisa set the alarm. She forgot that we didn't have a doorknob on the front door. So when she got home, the door had blown shut on account of the wind. She opened the security door with a key, but she couldn't get the wooden door open. She had 30 seconds to get in, but she couldn't make it. She went around to the back of the house and the alarm was already yelling "INTRUDER INTRUDER." She ran inside and pushed the code into the box. By that time the alarm company had called to see if everything was OK. She picked up the phone just as the alarm company woman was hanging up after leaving a message. The alarm company lady didn't leave a message. Lisa called the 800 number but no one answered. Lisa called the alarm company owner on his cell phone, but he didn't pick up. Lisa was thinking that any minute she might be arrested. She called Rick the alarm installer and he didn't seem worried. He is always calm. Finally, she got through to someone on the 800 number.

Hammer Time

by Louis and Lisa

The Guys. In the middle of the biggest project since the pre-move in projects of 2003/2004. Steve Pallrand, friend/contractor/frequent eating companion has undertaken the massive project of dismantling our arts and crafts living and dining rooms, planing and sanding, reconstructing, staining and varnishing, and, if that weren't enough, rebuilding the long ago destroyed inglenook benches. Lisa hates the sounds of the guys...the guys who sand, scrape, carry, discard, rip, vacuum, sweep, and, best of all, tune in radio stations that we would never listen to. All of this constitutes one day-long sound that we call "Hammer Time." I have to admit, I love the guys. I love the idea of the guys. In fact, I would trade in any one or two of my three degrees just to be a guy for the day. Hammer Time would mean a lot.

I would wear my rough leather work gloves, safety goggles, and dust mask all day long. I could listen to La Raza and say really neat things in a language that whitey (that would be Lisa) wouldn't get, and I would laugh a lot thinking how much money these people spent on restoring wood that was perfectly fine when it was painted white.

Steve. Steve Pallrand, Friend, contractor, frequent eating guest has a new hobby: removing stucco from our American stuccolow. The more we feed him, the more stucco he removes. Steve is a machine, and I am not. Although I'm getting the hang of it and am fully cognizant that each square foot of stucco removal threatens the very existence of Amercian Stuccolow. No need to worry. There's probably another 9000-12000 pounds of stucco to deal with. (More next time on stucco removal techniques.)

Big Project: The Wood

After a year and a half of living with unfinished living room and dining room wood, we called Steve Pallrand to get the job done already. We'd had it. We couldn't really move into our house without the wood getting done and our marriage was feeling the effects of unfinished woodwork. We figured that stain and varnish would make us a happier couple. Steve is a perfectionist and it took a really long time. Louis went to Paris and Lisa went to Sweden and still the guys were there sanding, staining, and varnishing. Like all these projects, it always takes longer than you think. The wood is done. The missing inglenook benches have been rebuilt, and it all looks fucking amazing. Best of all, we don't have fight about the wood anymore.

Fight Club

by Lisa

During the wood renovation, the first coat of stain looked too red and I had a conniption fit. I had told Steve in no uncertain terms that I did not want my walls to look like someone had thrown Kool-Aid at them. I did not want RED. We even gave Steve a 77% cocoa chocolate bar so that he knew what BROWN looks like. I accused Steve of being colorblind. The next time he came over, I didn't offer him a slice of fresh peach cobbler made with peaches from the backyard tree. Steve put green colorant into the varnish and the wood turned a deep rich brown and Steve got peach cobbler.



*That's Louis in the backyard with his fabulous *viaineii* plants. As of this writing, the vines have wrapped onto the electrical wire and they are heading towards the pawn shop. Soon there will be beans on Jefferson!*

Yard News

by Lisa

As our longtime readers know, the stuccolow we call home entered our lives with a luxurious concrete backyard. Concrete yards are good for many things, like hopscotch and bouncing rubber balls. They are not so good for growing vegetables. But we do have some areas where the bare earth is free, and in these areas, we've taken advantage of the great dirt.

This month, Lou planted beans, and just one week later, they're nearly 10 inches tall! The beans are an Italian variety brought over to North America by his relatives when they left Italy in the 1960's. They've been grown since then in Canada, and last year we had the great privilege of growing them here at our stuccolow. Awesome!

In another small patch of dirt, under the orange tree, weeds and mint were removed and seeds for a couple different flowers were planted. A few days

later, some little seedlings appeared on the surface of the fertile earth. It will take a bit of time for those tiny sprouts to mature, so this is an exciting time.

The front yard has a lot going on, too. It's not concrete, but it was full of all sorts of lush grass, jade trees, and various decorative flowers when we moved in. The first thing to go were the jade trees, which were hacked down with saws and shovels almost immediately after we took possession of our stuccolow. The flowers and many plants died easily, as we didn't water for awhile. Then the pair of cypress trees, meeting above the front walkway in an embrace, were sawed down one by one. The intention of the previous owner was obviously to create a lovely cypress archway, but this wasn't something that fit into our aesthetic.

We smothered the lawn with Roundup and black plastic, and then our friend Francisco came by with his energetic crew, and they roto-tilled the lawn and planted our parkway with low-water plants. It's beautiful!

Yard News Update April 22

The parkway plants have been going bonkers. We've had to move some of them because they are just overgrowing onto each other and it's getting to be a dog-eat-dog world of plants on the parkway. All of the plants Francisco planted are still alive. We figured some would go by the wayside, but it's been five months and all are going strong. Lisa transplanted some across the sidewalk onto the front yard. The lavender plant almost died, but then she put a tent over it to protect it from the sun and it lived and is now doing fine. Likewise, a plant with pretty purple flowers looked very unhappy when it was moved. The stems and leaves all drooped to the ground. The flowers were cut off in hopes that the leaves might recover, but they remained droopy for days. Finally, all dead and seriously droopy leaves were removed. It was with much joy and amazement that news of new growth was greeted at our stuccolow. The plant is not exactly prospering, but it's not dead either, and that's a good start.

Fight Club

by Lisa

March 13, 2005 It's Sunday night, usually a prime time to start fighting, but silence rules over the stuccolow. The man of the house is out of town.

Bean report: The stalks in the backyard are taller than Louis and there are signs of flowers.

More on the front yard: Louis has planted six tomato plants in the front yard and they are growing bigger each day. Lisa planted five cucumber plants and three died immediately, leaving two. Lisa planted one eggplant and the leaves don't look so good but there are some purple flowers so maybe there will be some eggplant. Sweet alyssum was planted around the peach tree, along with marigolds. The marigolds were decimated by snails. All their leaves were eaten. Following this, there was a mass snail genocide which took place, sometimes under the cover of darkness. Miraculously, the marigolds

recovered and grew back all their leaves. Nature is amazing. The alyssum did so well, that more were purchased at the evil Home Depot. (OSH didn't have them.)

Daniel came over and asked how we were planning to protect the tomatoes from street urchins and neighbors. The very next day, rows of corn were planted to act as a barrier between us and them. Also, sweet peas are nearly a foot tall, next to the fence. A basil plant was completely eaten by snails.

Found on the side of the road



Driving down the streets near our stuccolow, we often find other people's trash which we, or someone we know, might want for their own stuccolow project. We were coming home from a Thai restaurant one evening (we always go to the same one on Hollywood Blvd) and we passed by the tiger towel propped against the trunk of a palm tree. We pulled over immediately, turned the tiger over, and were thrilled to see a lovely window, with hardware. There was a larger one too, but no room in the Saturn for that, so we just took the small window.

Does anyone need a window?

Fight Club

by Lisa

May 27, 2005 Friday night and Louis cooked dinner for Lisa, but didn't cook anything for himself because there wasn't anything in the house that he felt like eating. Lisa was happy to eat, but pissed that Louis was sitting at his end of the table looking hungry and claiming to not want to eat, while it was obvious that he wanted food. Lisa felt bad. Louis also felt that Lisa was unappreciative of the food he cooked for her. However, Lisa was just feeling bad about eating in front of someone hungry and didn't want to rub it in that Louis wasn't eating. There was almost a fight, but in the end, we were too tired to go at it. So we went to sleep.

POOL TIME!

by Lisa & Louis



There are three pools within a reasonable distance of the stuccolow. Louis maintains his muscular physique by swimming nearly every day. (Lisa is lazier about swimming).

1. Exposition Park Pool: It's beautiful and outdoors, but we've never been in it due to their wacky schedule.

2. E.G. Roberts Swimming Pool at 4526 West Pico just East of OSH. 323-936-8483. If you can't get to the USC Pool during the early morning or their daytime hours, don't worry. The City of Los Angeles offers you the E.G. Roberts Swimming Pool. For a public pool, it's surprisingly clean, and it's almost never crowded. Usually open until 9pm on the weekdays.

3. USC Pools. Full of coeds who leave us in the

dust. They swim fast and are easy on the eyes. No kids here so pee factor is low. Outdoor in the sunshine. In the late afternoon, the marching band is playing, so you can imagine that you are a champion of some sort. The showers are awesome. Unlimited hot water, and this is very good given that our stuccolow does not have a shower curtain which means that we do not shower at home. Only at the gym.

Bills we pay

by Lisa & Louis

Louis got a phone call from the LA. Times and said yes. Somehow, the bill came to me. It was only 15.00 which is totally worth three months of Sunday papers, just for the amount of fights it will get us per dollar. I like the papers all over the floor and in bed. Louis likes them neatly in

baskets or thrown away almost immediately. The up side to the LA Times over the NY Times is that I don't care if he mercilessly throws sections away before I read them.

I do so want to love my local paper, but let's face it- the LA Times just isn't very good. We tried to subscribe daily, but the garbage piled up too quickly and threatened to destroy our marriage. I long for a better solution. Perhaps the NY Times staff would like to relocate to Los Angeles and produce a paper with less inserts and junk? Other bills we pay: mortgage, gas, water and power, phone, cel phone, another mortgage.

The big whammy: property taxes. We are so grown up!

April 22: Louis gets a cel phone, too. Another bill. Why didn't we get the "family plan"? It's not that much cheaper and Lisa is an only child and doesn't like the idea of sharing minutes

(Collect Call from Adam: \$11.66. Two minutes before Louis and Chuck the carpenter pulled up in front of the condo Adam was listing, Adam called our stuccolow collect and said "I don't need Chuck so tell him not to come." The call was too late and too expensive. If you're wondering why this item is in brackets it's because we're not paying this bill. We're going to discourage collect calls by making Adam pay eleven sixty-six, despite the fact that he complains that 11.66 is too much for a collect call. We agree that it's expensive, but at this point, the argument is between him and SBC. We just want the money.)

What Steve Eats

by Lisa and Louis

Steve started eating little by little at our house. Snacks. Omelettes, ice water, toast, an occasional coffee, grilled cheese, chips and salsa, peaches. The first major meals he ate happened while Lisa was in Sweden. There was a hamburger he ate with gusto after Louis discovered Trader Joe's grass-fed hamburger meat. By the time Lisa arrived home from Sweden, Steve was feeling trapped by our hospitality and he swore off eating at our stuccolow. We took this as a challenge. Louis is of Italian blood and Lisa was raised a Jew, both cultures primarily known for forcing food on people. Instead of respecting Steve's wishes to curtail consumption, the meals became more odiferous and grandiose. Kale and potatoes, pasta with eggplant, red chard with beans, sandwiches, edamame, more hamburgers. The more Steve refused to eat, the more he was taunted with sights and smells in the kitchen which were impossible to resist. In the end, he gave in and did what any man in his right mind would do. He ate. A lot. Like a calf in a feed lot, Steve inhaled whatever was set before him. Bon Appetit, Steve! See you at supptime.

Meals Steve Missed

by Lisa and Louis

A shorter list. Steve had to go to Passover Seder one night and missed ham sandwiches and tempeh reubens, cucumbers, salad, and roasted red pepper.

Where to Eat That Won't Kill You

This is a very short column. There are less and less eating establishments with doorways we will darken. Phat and Juicy Burger has had a sign in the window for months promising that they will be open in 2 weeks after they do some repairs. A phone call on June 1, 2005 to their Inglewood got us the information that they will be reopening next week! We certainly hope so. Tha Wing Joint transformed into Tha Gumbo Shack and now they don't seem to be open at all. Aunt Rosa Lee's makes us feel sick. Burger Palace is only good for fries when Lisa is PMSing. But, aside from the above, there are still some places to eat in our neighborhood.

VEGISOUL- Lisa loves fake meat and there is plenty of it at Vegisoul, the new joint on Jefferson just on the side of Normandie from us, past the skanky no-tell motel. You can show up and order or call ahead. Lunch specials for five bucks come with tortilla chips and a cold drink. Vegi-chicken, vegi-ribs, vegi-tacos. Eat outside on scenic Jefferson or take it home.

Miguelino's on Vermont, just south of the 10 freeway serves fresh pupusas and other Salvadorean food that we haven't tried. We've only had the pupusas and they are greasy and yummy.

Our perennial favorite for ice cream and popsicles is Mateo's, on Pico, just west of Crenshaw in the mini-mall.

People we kicked out of the Stuccolow

By Louis

Nothing to report.

Fight Club

by Lisa

May 28, 2005 Lisa was writing the Fight Club entry for May 27, while Louis was cooking dinner. Louis thought she was misrepresenting the situation of the previous evening and was upset that she had control of the computer so that her side of the story could be heard and not his. Lisa said, "fine, take the fucking computer and write your own goddamn Fight Club." Lisa then said, "I'm not going to wreck my marriage fighting over the text of Fight Club." Louis just shook his head and washed lettuce.

Fight Club

by Louis

May 28, 2005 Lisa is an only child.



Strickly Stickely

**an occasional thought
inspired by
The Craftsman
magazine**

by Louis

In an article entitled “The Living Room, its many uses and its possibilities for comfort and beauty” the editors of the Craftsman write the following:

In creating a home atmosphere, the thing that pays, and pays well, is honesty. A house should be the outward and visible expression of the life, work and thought of its inmates.

When this was written, during the first decade of the last century, the word *inmate* was not necessarily associated with an occupant of a federal or state institution. The word’s use then and its use now are curious accidents of history, especially given that our house, here in Jpark, an area of town most unjustly associated with criminal activity, was encased with bulletproof concrete-based stucco and punctuated by uninviting security bars on the windows, which, by the way, were duct taped shut long before 9-11 spawned Homeland Security. It is also a curious coincidence that we have removed the stucco from the stuccolow’s front exterior, the part of our house that coincides with the entire width of our wide, high-ceilinged living room.

As our incarceration draws to its long-awaited end, I wonder what Gustav would have said if, being resurrected, he caught sight of a stuccoed bungalow, its barred windows, and its painted living room woodwork? What would he have thought of the inmates and their houses, that is the “outward...expression(s) of the life, work and thought” of those inmates? And if he could stop vomiting or laughing for just a moment, what the fuck would he have said about the duct tape that sealed our windows?

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Real Estate News and Notes

By Louis

Are we rich yet?

The skyrocketing real estate market has emboldened us to continue pouring money into our stuccolow. It's like adding jet fuel to a Cadillac. Equity rises, we make improvements that we fantasize will jack up our equity even more, and people spend 500k + on a house in the hood. The Cadillac is speeding along and we dream that it will sustain high speeds effortlessly and go faster and faster and never have to stop for new tires, or a refill, or a red light.

Lisa likes to mention that every time she attends an opening or a party, the only topic of conversation seems to be real estate—which is scary. In the spring of 1929, the fabulously wealthy and business savvy Joe Kennedy was given a stock tip by his shoe shine boy, who turned out to be right. Joe told his partner that when the shoe shine boy is right about the market, it's time to get out of the market, which is what the Kennedy patriarch did—that is many months before the great crash—and which is why his son became president of the United States of America and why the Kennedy family is still really really well off. Needless to say, our real estate acquisitions have slowed to a trickle—actually, aside from this house, we don't own any property, but that is beside the point. If we had money...

If you're feeling cash poor and would like to immerse yourself in the pleasure of equity fulfillment go to the Property Sales and Map section of the LA County assessor's website, type in your address and then click on Recent Sales. <http://assessormap.co.la.ca.us/mapping/viewer.asp>.

Jump around the neighborhood and watch the prices of homes more than double in the past 2 years.



Hellos and Hurrays!

Hello to Lucy, the newest addition to the neighborhood! Lucy didn't bother visiting until she was a good two months old, and then she finally stopped by with her parents, Kim and Jasper. It was great to meet our new neighbor, even if she did fall asleep on Louis' shoulder and didn't have much to say.

Hello and welcome back, Colleen and Eoin! After deserting their home for 17 years of really messy restoration project, Colleen and Eoin are back just in time to enjoy their view of LB's newly facelifted half-stuccolow.

Hurray LB! LB's stuccolow lost its frontal stucco in an incredibly effective aesthetic breakthrough. Although her home is still mostly a stuccolow, it looks like a lovingly painted and perfect bungalow from the street, thanks to some well-placed stucco removal.

Hello to our new neighbor 4 doors down, their names as of now still unknown. Welcome to the block!

Hurray to the recently unstuccoed bungalow on 29th Street. We are happy to see all that wood emerge from beneath the concrete. Welcome to the new owners of the former stuccolow! Enjoy life without stucco.

Hello to the new mini mall at the corner. We pray everyday that once it is finally finished, it will not be housing a smelly fried chicken place, a laundromat where people hang out all day, a stinky donut shop, a 99 cent Chinese food salmonella nightmare, a check cashing place, or a church. We have plenty of that already here in the neighborhood. What we need is a place to buy \$150 shoes, upscale yarn, or organic produce. It is cliché these days to yearn for lattes so instead I will yearn for \$7/box crackers, artisan chocolates, and hydroponically grown baby greens. Down with forty uncers and Doritos! Up with bamboo cutting boards, orchids and sushi knives! Our bourgeois lifestyle is a permanent part of this neighborhood's melting pot, and if our local business people were savvy, we could stop having to drive all the way to West Hollywood for produce.

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Stuccolow Parade

Times are good for the lowly stuccolow. Seems like every week or so, someone's unfurling the chicken wire, mixing the concrete, and increasing their chances of getting termites while at the same time devaluing their property. When we see stucco going up, we think about what a pain in the ass it is to remove. What is it about stucco that is appealing? Going home to a place that looks like a fast food chain? The ability to paint it a hideous pale lime green so it looks like an overfrosted cake? The texture? The opportunity to increase the amount of concrete in our urban environment? Oh, and did we mention devaluing the property?

STOP THIS STUCCO MADNESS!

