

ON THE TOWN: Well-designed: Lutah Maria Riggs Society membership reception

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The membership reception of the Lutah Maria Riggs Society attracted a good number of county residents to El Sueno, the historic home of Robert and Gretchen Loeff.

This was one of the last homes collaborated on by architect George Washington Smith and his protégé, Lutah Maria Riggs. She started as his draftsman, and after his death, she launched her own successful career that lasted nearly 60 years.

Gretchen Loeff, the primal spark of the LMR Society, explained she first learned about Ms. Riggs as she renovated her home. "Architect Bob Easton walked into the bath and said, 'This is a Lutah floor.' From there, I began learning about Lutah and realized she was an unrecognized treasure."

Gretchen called out to the community, starting with others who had Lutah-designed homes, to form the Society, and quickly found Lutah had a following — and now a membership.

A happy conglomeration of architects, landscapers, interior designers, historians, artists and aficionados of Lutah Maria Riggs variously representing the Santa Barbara Historical Museum, Casa del Herrero, the Santa Barbara Architectural Foundation, Lotusland and other institutions snacked on hors d'oeuvres and sipped cabernet (from Loeff Wines, no less!).

The crowd included Martha Gray, Bob and Sylvia Easton, Joe Knowles, Keith Berry, Hilary Burkemper, Rick Ericson, Corinna Gordon, John Woodward, Walter Bortz, Brad Dunning, Edie Calwell, Robert Adams, Elaine Gray, Belle Cohen, John Saladino, Ted Baer and Nancy Caponi.

Robert Adams gave an exciting update about the documentary on Ms. Riggs ("LUTAH — A Passion for Architecture: A Life in Design"), which was an unexpected hit at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival and ended up garnering three additional showings. Mr. Adams informed the crowd that it was just accepted into the Napa Valley Film Festival in November. "This is pretty significant," Mr. Adams said. "Napa Valley has only a 4 percent acceptance rate, so this is an important film festival for us."

The big announcement was that the Santa Barbara Historical Museum will be producing a major exhibit on Lutah to open at the end of October. The exhibit will be in collaboration with the UCSB Art, Design & Architecture Museum, which has many architectural plans and drawings of Lutah Maria Riggs.

Lynn Brittner, executive director at the Santa Barbara Historical Museum, told the crowd that digitized recordings of Lutah's voice will also be heard. She next asked Melinda Gandara, historian and archivist of Lutah Maria Riggs and a contributor to the upcoming exhibit, to hold up the schematic designed by the Historical Museum for the gallery and to showcase elements of the exhibit. Ms. Gandara also spoke eloquently about Lutah's professional style with her clients, describing Lutah's attention to personal details.

Ms. Brittner concluded by stating that the exhibit will be highlighting Lutah's life, her impact on the community, and her architectural achievement. The Historical Museum is interested in hearing from community members who might have photographs, items and artifacts belonging to Lutah.

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Among the guests at the membership reception of the Lutah Maria Riggs Society were, from left, landscape architect Robert Adams; art historian Nancy Caponi, executive director of the Santa Barbara Architectural Foundation; and architect Joe Knowles, a protégé of Lutah Maria Riggs who worked with her early in his career.

ERIN GRAFFY/NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

From left, entertainment attorney Ted Baer and interior designer Rick Ericson celebrate the news that the documentary on Lutah Maria Riggs was accepted into the Napa Valley Film Festival.

From left, interior designer John Saladino, Gretchen Loeff, who founded the Lutah Maria Riggs Society, and landscape architect Bob Truskowski.

From left, Belle Cohen, Corinna Gordon and Elaine Gray at the membership reception of the Lutah Maria Riggs Society.