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**THE DAVID IRELAND HOUSE AT 500 CAPP STREET TO OPEN JANUARY 15, 2016  
AS SAN FRANCISCO'S NEWEST CONTEMPORARY ART DESTINATION**



**GIFT OF ARTWORKS AND A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION,  
RENOVATION, AND NEW DESIGN FUEL VISION FOR CITY'S FIRST HISTORIC ARTIST'S HOUSE**

**AT ONCE A RESIDENCE AND SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION, AN INHABITED ARTWORK BLURS ART AND LIFE**

San Francisco, CA, April 27, 2015—The [500 Capp Street Foundation](#) today announced that David Ireland's newly restored home—a century-old building the late conceptual artist transformed into a site-specific, inhabited artwork now widely considered the centerpiece of his career and a loadstar of the Bay Area art community—will open to the public on January 15, 2016 as San Francisco's first historic artist's house.

After completion of a two-year construction and preservation effort that began in 2014, visitors to the David Ireland House will be able to experience the 1886 Italianate-style home and its embedded artworks as Ireland intended, immersing themselves in an enigmatic, 360-degree portrait of one of the West Coast's most important practitioners of conceptual and installation art.

American artist David Ireland (1930-2009) is admired regionally as well as nationally and internationally for a diverse and prolific body of work concerned with the beauty inherent in everyday things and the making of art as a part of daily life. His idiosyncratic, hybrid practice blends sculpture, architecture, painting, and performance, and often draws on ordinary materials such as dirt, concrete, wood, or wire he collected over time. Ireland's best-known work is the house at 500 Capp Street in San Francisco's culturally dense Mission District. Serving simultaneously as the artist's environmental artwork, social sculpture, and residence for 30 years, it embodies his visual language and exists as both a container for his art and an artwork in its own right.

After Ireland moved out of 500 Capp Street in 2004 due to failing health, his family prepared to put the house on the market in order to help with his financial needs. The home's fate became uncertain during the following years. In 2008, San Francisco art collector and patron Carlie Wilmans, granddaughter of late Bay Area philanthropist Phyllis C. Wattis, purchased the building. Soon after she established the 500 Capp Street Foundation, appointing prominent local art patron Ann Hatch and Yale University Art Gallery Director Jock Reynolds—both longtime friends and associates of Ireland—as fellow founding trustees in oversight of the house as a venue for the preservation and study of the artist's work. Ireland passed away in 2009 at the age of 78.

"Ireland's sphere of influence and the importance of his house to Bay Area cultural history cannot be overstated," says Wilmans. "His ideas and creative spirit are ingrained in the artist community here, and it's an honor to lead this collaborative effort to ensure the ongoing life of the space and to extend his legacy."

Developed in collaboration with Jensen Architects and ARG Conservation Services, the renovation and conservation efforts are designed to create public access to the sensitively restored site and to improve conditions for the art without altering the original spaces. It also utilizes the full footprint of the property to provide a new exhibition gallery, study center and permanent archive for Ireland's work, and spaces to accommodate public events and activities related to a planned artist-in-residency program—the heart of the project, according to Wilmans.

"David actively curated 500 Capp Street while he was alive, and we have no intention of placing a bell jar over it now," Wilmans explains. "As a teacher and mentor, he opened his home to many younger artists. The residency program will continue that tradition, remaining a vital catalyst for artistic dialogue and providing resources and inspiration for generations of artists to come."

Since the foundation's establishment in 2009, it has received a gift of more than 2,000 artworks by Ireland from the artist's estate. This major concentration of objects—sculptures, paintings, drawings, prints, and furniture that David made, as well as ephemera, personal papers, photographs, and publications—forms the core of the house's permanent collection and archive, and will be displayed in changing exhibitions. The foundation will seek to grow its collection through the acquisition of additional Ireland works and by commissioning new artworks made in direct response to the house and its contents.

"Ireland is perhaps the most influential West Coast artist you've never heard of," says Jock Reynolds, who oversees the Ireland estate. "For many artists who lived in or visited San Francisco during the 1970s and 1980s, 500 Capp Street—and all that happened within it—came to be a focal point for the artist community. The house pays tribute to David's achievements as the ultimate example of his aesthetic and as one of the most significant contemporary artworks created in San Francisco in the last quarter of the twentieth century."

In contrast to the city's rapidly changing skyline, the rescued Ireland house stands as a truly unique piece of San Francisco's history—one that preserves a particular time and continues as a living space in the same spirit of the original, yet creates something entirely new.

"Ireland's greatest work is 500 Capp Street, a fusion of life and art that is exceptionally rare," adds Gary Garrels, Elise S. Hass Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA, who is among the many local art experts invited by the foundation to consult on the project. "Its significance is rooted in a sense of place and history that the artist absorbed, transforming the ordinary and overlooked into almost magical, even mystical experiences while remaining humble and wry. The art world is extraordinarily fortunate that this treasure will be preserved."

The public opening of the David Ireland House is the weekend of January 15, 2016. Online reservations for guided tours and details about opening celebrations and inaugural programming are available at [www.500cappstreet.org](http://www.500cappstreet.org).

### **An Artwork as Big as A House**

“You can’t make art by making art” has become one of Ireland’s best-known sayings and it’s often used to summarize the philosophy that guided his Zen-like, interdisciplinary art practice. Concerned with formal and material invention and in happenings outside the sphere of marketable art, Ireland’s work explores complex questions of creativity, the role of the artist, and the meaning of art.

He boldly began his full-time art career in middle age after taking a circuitous route to his calling. In the two decades between his completion of a Bachelor of Applied Art degree from California College of the Arts (now California College of the Arts) in 1953 and finishing his graduate work at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1974, he followed a winding path through military service, marriage, fatherhood, insurance sales, carpentry, and extensive world travel in Asia and East Africa as a safari guide and importer of artifacts.

In 1975, after a yearlong post-graduation sojourn in New York City, Ireland returned to the Bay Area where he quickly became an integral member of the artist community—which included conceptual-art peers such as Terry Fox, Howard Fried, Paul Kos, Tony Labat, Tom Marioni, and Jim Melchert—and helped establish San Francisco as an important center for conceptual art activity, then flourishing throughout the United States and globally.

He purchased a dilapidated Edwardian home at the corner of 500 Capp and 19th Streets and began implementing a 30-month “maintenance action”: removing window moldings, stripping wallpaper, sanding surfaces, and finally coating the walls, ceiling, and floors with high-gloss polyurethane varnish to preserve and highlight his modifications. His original intent was to clear out the house and use it as studio, but he soon grew to see it in a sculptural way, perceiving his activity as an artistic endeavor more than a simple architectural renovation.

“I reached a philosophical point where I realized that the lively presence I was looking for in my art was here on the walls, as I stripped away and cleaned off the surfaces,” Ireland explained in a 1981 interview. “Why do we have to fabricate a stretcher, a canvas—why not just make art out of an environment? I couldn’t go back to normal work.”

As Ireland slowly transformed the home’s interior, it became known in the art world as the site, source, and repository of his mature work of the 1980s and 1990s. His art and life are so interwoven in the house that it’s difficult to distinguish between the art and non-art—distinctions irrelevant to Ireland who, like many of his peers, sought to deliberately confuse these boundaries.

### **Immersive Environment Redraws the Line between Art and Life**

The David Ireland House and its artist-made interventions showcase Ireland's signature use of everyday materials and his rich sense of humor. Some examples include:

- **Installations that are part of the architecture**, such as *Untitled (The View from This Window, circa 1979)*, a window that Ireland removed and masked over with a copper plate. The work includes a recording of the artist’s voice describing the obscured view. Other pieces document Ireland’s removal of items left behind by the previous owner, including a heavy safe: two bronze wall plaques along the stairwell describe moving mishaps that caused substantial gouges in the plaster (*The Safe Gets Away for the First Time November 5, 1975*; and *The Safe Gets Away for the Second Time November 5, 1975*). Ireland also made round “patties” of stripped wallpaper (*Untitled, circa 1978*)—inspired by the dung patties he saw used for fuel on his travels in Asia—and applied them in the upstairs hallways, running vertically like peas in a pod.

- **Works that give new life to objects left behind by the previous owner by refashioning them into sculptures**, including *Three-Legged Chair* (1978), a non-functional chair with one of the legs sawed off. The work includes an attached notebook containing parallel narratives about the chair’s meaning and history that conflate fact and fiction. A large, freestanding sculpture titled *Broom Collection with Boom* (1978–1988) is made of sixteen worn-out brooms that Ireland wired together in a circle based on extent of wear. A jar containing hundreds of rubber bands from daily newspaper deliveries (*Rubber Band Collection with Sound Accompaniment*, 1977) comes with a tape-recording of rubber bands being removed from rolled newspapers—a meditation on the passage of time and the countless quotidian actions that make up life.
- **Explorations of light reflection in the home**, most dramatically achieved by applying multiple coats of clear polyurethane to the signature saffron-colored interior walls. This final touch not only sealed the cracks and preserved the visible history of changes to surfaces, but also created a luminous sheen and highlighted every nuance of the architecture. A kinetic and slightly unnerving chandelier made from two blowtorches suspended from the ceiling on wires (*Fire Drawing*, n.d.)—just one of the house’s eccentric light fixtures—forms a centerpiece in the upstairs parlor.
- **Sculptures made from remnants of his renovation activity**, such as a jar of sawdust from refinishing the floor, a jar of dust collected from the window frames, a jar of dirt swept from the front doorsteps, and a jar of stripped wallpaper fragments mounted on a wooden pedestal (all *Untitled*, n.d.).
- **Artist-made furniture and an array of eclectic found objects**, including animal skulls and African woodcarvings, as well as combines such as *Untitled (Water Buffalo)*, 1995, and *Three Wheeler*, circa 1979—pieces Ireland fashioned from relics of his early safari experiences.

### Artful Restoration and Conservation

The 500 Capp Street Foundation has partnered with Jensen Architects, the award-winning Bay Area firm that designed SFMOMA’s Rooftop Sculpture Garden, to create an addition to the existing 100-year-old home that will house a new publicly accessible study center, gallery space, basement archive, and adjacent outdoor terrace with a living wall—elements that extend the architectural language of Ireland’s work through a similar palette of materials while clearly delineating the new and original structures. The plan also includes the installation of an elevator in the home to provide more universal access to the second floor and basement levels.

In collaboration with construction management firm Oliver & Company, Jensen Architects has also reengineered the home’s existing foundation, seismically upgrading the structure and stabilizing the overall environment for Ireland’s installed spaces. “The finishes inside the house are so incredibly delicate that not even a hammer could be used,” says Jensen principal Dean Orr. “So when it came to setting the home on a new concrete foundation, we were fortunate to work with contemporary art collector and contractor Steven Oliver, who is well acquainted with Ireland’s art and attuned to the project’s needs.”

ARG Conservation Services, who recently completed the structural restoration of Coit Tower, will restore the David Ireland House’s interior surfaces to their original appearance when Ireland completed the home in 1978. ARG brings to the project expertise in the philosophy and ethics of conserving vernacular architectural spaces such as Ireland’s house, and is working closely with the architect and contractor to assess vibration impact, clean and protect Ireland’s installed artworks, and sensitively conserve every interior feature, intervention, and piece of historical material altered by the artist’s hand—including testing various methods to restore the most accurate level of sheen to the high-gloss walls.

“Part of Ireland’s work on 500 Capp Street was concerned with revealing the building’s structural history, and in many ways we’re simply continuing the artist’s own process,” says David Wessel, Principal of ARG Conservation Services.

Additionally, the color of the home’s exterior will be restored to its original ‘battleship grey’ using lead-free paint, and the iconic gold leaf signage on the front window and “500” house number will return to original condition.

### **New Publication**

Kicking off the yearlong lead-up to the public opening of the house, University of California Press has published a new illustrated book devoted to 500 Capp Street’s history, Ireland’s engagement with the site, the social scene that developed around the house, and its relationship to other house museums. [\*500 Capp Street: David Ireland’s House\*](#) (April 2015, hardcover; 120 pages; \$29.95) includes a foreword by Carlie Wilmans, introduction by Jock Reynolds, and essays by Constance M. Lewallen and poet John Ashbery.

### **About David Ireland**

David Ireland’s work is featured in collections of prominent institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Smithsonian; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. Ireland’s work is influenced heavily by his travels in Africa and his studies in printmaking and industrial arts at Oakland’s California College of Arts and Crafts (now California College of the Arts), but 500 Capp Street served as his primary source for material and inspiration. In 2004, the Oakland Museum of California organized the first full-scale traveling retrospective of Ireland’s work, which included objects and ephemera related to 500 Capp Street.

### **About the 500 Capp Street Foundation**

The 500 Capp Street Foundation carries on the legacy of late conceptual artist David Ireland by affording a broad audience the opportunity to experience his home and masterpiece as well as his extant body of work. In the spirit of Ireland, the Foundation conducts public tours and events at the David Ireland House, maintains a permanent archive of personal papers, photographs, and publications, and will launch a residency program in 2017.

### **Project Team:**

Architect: **Jensen Architects**; Construction Manager: **Oliver & Company**; Conservators: **Architectural Resources Group (ARG) Conservation Services**; 500 Capp Street Foundation Board of Directors: **Ann Hatch, Jock Reynolds, and Carlie Wilmans**; 500 Capp Street Advisory Board: **Nancy Bechtle, Vincent Fecteau, Courtney Fink, Steven Oliver, and Robin Wright**; 500 Capp Street Foundation leadership: **Carlie Wilmans**, Executive Director; **Matthew Goudeau**, Director of Development; **Jessica Roux**, Director of Operations.



The renovation of 500 Capp Street is supported by a generous grant from San Francisco Heritage’s Alice Ross Carey Preservation Fund.

**Photography Credits (R-L):** David Ireland with dumbbells, 1986, photo by Elisa Cicinelli; upstairs interior, the David Ireland House, photo by Henrik Kam, 2015; David Ireland with dumbbells, 1986, photo by Elisa Cicinelli.

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