

Longtime home of former Times publisher is focus of dispute

Two house hunters claim in arbitration documents they were swindled into buying the Windsor Square mansion that served as a command post for Norman and Dorothy Chandler.

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As Los Angeles came of age in the 20th century, a stately Windsor Square mansion served as a command post for the city's most powerful couple.

The longtime home of publisher Norman Chandler, "Los Tiempos" (The Times) was where his wife, Dorothy Buffum Chandler, raised funds to build a nationally recognized music center and where she urged son Otis Chandler to transform the Los Angeles Times into an award-winning newspaper.

Today, the city-designated historic-cultural monument is the focus of an unseemly dispute involving two house hunters who claim they were swindled into buying the compound for more than \$8 million, only to find that it was "rotten to the core," according to arbitration documents.

They allege they were deceived by a media-savvy designer and his broker acquaintance, who used lavish decorations to conceal faulty water pipes, leaky roofs, black mold, raw sewage and dangerous wiring.

Through their lawyer, the defendants deny the allegations.

Commissioned by Peter Janss, whose real estate empire developed Westwood, the century-old Beau Arts estate at 455 S. Lorraine Blvd. features soaring pillars and travertine walls. It was designed by associates of trailblazing female architect Julia Morgan.

"The fact that L.A. is now regarded as one of America's major cultural centers ... all of this was due to what went on in that house," said David Wallace, author of "Dream Palaces of Hollywood's Golden Age." The Chandlers "were people, love them or hate them, with a real vision for making L.A. a major player in America, rather than just the Left Coast."

Years after Norman Chandler's death in 1973, Dorothy Chandler, known as "Buff," retreated from the public eye and into a second-story bedroom. After her death in 1997, interior designer Timothy Corrigan bought the house for \$2 million, according to the Los Angeles County assessor.

"They let the house go to hell," Corrigan said of Dorothy Chandler's hired help in the Otis Chandler biography "Privileged Son." "There was lard dripping from the ceiling and water damage everywhere."

In media reports, Corrigan, a former advertising executive, preached the aesthetic of "comfortable elegance" and showcased extravagant interiors. On the television show "How'd You Get So Rich," Corrigan was said to have amassed a \$50-million fortune and told host Joan Rivers that he owned a 40,000-square-foot country manor in France.

Promotional materials described his sumptuous restoration of the Chandler estate. The grounds were re-landscaped and the house was filled with antiques.

House hunters Joseph Handleman and Courtney Callahan said they fell in love with the building. Arbitration filings provide more details about the conflict: Married, divorced and then remarried, the couple allege they were in the market for a stress-free home. The couple say they told Corrigan that their relationship was too fragile to handle the stress of a "fixer-upper."

Handleman, an heir to a music distribution firm, suffered from a neurological disorder that made him intolerant of disruption and prone to angry outbursts when stressed, according to arbitration documents.

Callahan also has displayed a temper. She was once arrested for scratching Handleman with a butcher knife, according to court documents, and was recorded cursing out the host of the reality television program "Flipping Out."

Assured that Los Tiempos was in good condition, the couple say they agreed to pay \$8.75 million and sold their Summit Circle home to singer Britney Spears for nearly \$7.2 million.

But problems surfaced when the couple took possession in 2006, they claim. Pipes burst, roofs collapsed, gas lines leaked and sewage pooled beneath the house. Although an inspection report gave indications the house was not entirely refurbished, Handleman and Callahan said they trusted Corrigan and their Coldwell Banker real estate agent, Jessica Diana Knox, according to arbitration documents.

In addition to their July 2009 "statement of claims" against Corrigan and Kathleen Scheinfeld, his business partner, the couple in January 2010 filed suit against Coldwell Banker and its agents and managers, alleging fraud by concealment, negligent misrepresentation and breach of fiduciary duty. That matter also went to arbitration. Last summer, an arbitrator dismissed Coldwell Banker and its agents from the case, saying Handleman and Callahan had filed their complaint after the statute of limitations had expired. A Los Angeles Superior Court judge recently upheld the arbitrator's decision.

Bryan Freedman, the lawyer representing Corrigan and Scheinfeld, declined to comment on specifics of the case. However, he stated the following in an e-mail to The Times:

"The fact that claimants have not only sued the sellers of Los Tiempos, but also their brokers, as well as over a dozen contractors whom they hired to work on the property, and have even gone through eight different attorneys in this matter alone, speaks volumes about the credibility of the people filing this case."

Handleman and Callahan claim they have now spent nearly \$3 million on repairs, according to arbitration documents. They also say that they have sold family heirlooms and exhausted a trust fund established for their son. They say they recently stopped paying their monthly mortgage on Los Tiempos.

"Our family," Handleman said in court, "has been decimated."