

Carolwood Drive

You can learn a lot about a person by taking a look at his or her personal space. Once you enter the person's home, you might be able to get a peek into his mind. Walt Disney's Holmby Hills home was his sanctuary away from the studio and a place for him to dream about new projects, new ideas. Let's explore what Walt's home tells us about him.

When Walt and his family moved into their home at 355 Carolwood Drive, his mind exploded with new interests—interests so powerful that they led to the beginning of Imagineering, Disneyland, and the desire to build a city of his own. Behind the earthen berm that protected his home from his neighbors, Walt could be with his family, entertain his friends, immerse himself with his hobbies of miniatures and model railroading, and escape the pressures of his movie studio. This allowed him the space to explore other creative ideas.

Birth of a Railfan

Even as a little boy growing up in Marceline, Missouri, Walt was fascinated with trains. Marceline was a rail town created by the Santa Fe Railroad as a refueling station. In 1938, Walt confided, "To tell the truth, more things of importance happened to me in Marceline than have happened since—or are likely to in the future."

Before he was married, Walt's father, Elias, worked for a short time as a carpenter for the Union Pacific installing track from Ellis, Kansas, to Denver, Colorado—so perhaps that set the stage for Walt's fascination with trains. But, to young Walt, it was his Uncle Mike Martin who had the most glamorous job in the world. Uncle Mike was an engineer for the Santa Fe Railroad. He would come to the Disney home, sit with the family on the front porch, and fill the young boy's head with stories about life on the rails. These stories made a profound impression on Walt.

When Walt turned fifteen he decided he would go to work for the railroad himself. He signed up to become a "news butcher," just like his hero, Thomas Edison. A news butcher walks up and down the train aisle selling sodas, apples, newspapers, and other small items. This was also the first time that Walt rode in the cab of a steam locomotive. To get started, Walt borrowed \$30 from his brother, Roy, so he could post a bond, a requirement to getting the job. This loan was the beginning of a long financial relationship between the brothers. By the end of the summer, Walt returned home, somehow having lost all of his profits and the bond money.

Many years later, Walt would learn that some of the Disney animators were also railfans. Ollie Johnson lived in La Cañada, California, and owned a one-inch-scale live steam locomotive. In 1936, Walt visited Johnson and realized for the first time that he could have his own personal railroad. In the late 1930s, Walt bought his nephew, Roy E. Disney, an HO-scale electric train set. HO is the most popular scale of model railroading in the world, with a scale ratio of 1:87.1, which is 3.5 mm to 1 foot. Walt assembled the train and would play with it when he visited his brother's family. This was Walt's first real experience in model railroading, and it most certainly was not to be his last.

Walt's passion for trains was so strong that he occasionally take his wife, Lillian, to the rail yard just to watch the trains moving about. In Katherine and Richard Greene's outstanding book *Inside the Dream*, Lillian said, "We'd stand and watch the rains come in and after they'd go by, he'd watch the vibrations on the tracks." She noted, "I wondered why he did that. [To Walt,] [t]hat was recreation."

High Iron

On October 20, 1945, after Walt had attended a party at animator Ward Kimball's house, Walt was inspired to take his railfan hobby to the next level. Kimball was one of Walt's famous Nine Old Men of animation, a two-time Academy Award winner, who is most famous for animating such characters as Jiminy Cricket, the Mad Hatter, and the Cheshire Cat. He also produced, directed, and co-wrote *Magic Highways USA* and the *Man in Space* segments for the Disneyland television show. A renaissance man, Kimball was a founding member of the incredible Firehouse Five Plus Two, a Dixieland jazz band made up of studio animators that became world famous in its own right. In *The Story of Walt Disney*, Walt went so far as to say, "Ward Kimball is one person that I can truly call a genius."

Kimball owned a house in San Gabriel, a suburb near Los Angeles. When Walt arrived for the party, he learned that in 1938, Kimball had installed a narrow-gauge steam train in his backyard—a full-size 1881 Baldwin "Mogul" (2-6-0) coal-burning steam locomotive from the Southern Pacific's Owens Valley narrow-gauge line that Kimball had restored and decorated with his own artwork on the headlamp and cab. He called his locomotive the *Emma Nevada*, and it ran on Kimball's Grizzly Flats Railroad. He parked the train in an engine house and built 800 feet of track on his property. He was such an avid train buff and so enjoyed inspiring others that in 1990 Kimball donated his train to the Orange Empire Railway Museum in Perris, California, where it can be seen today.

On the weekends, Kimball would fire up the locomotive and ride back and forth. The October 20, 1945, party was one such occasion. Kimball invited Walt to join him in the cab and let him run the steam locomotive. This was Walt's first turn at pushing the Johnson bar, which is a lever that adjusts the steam engine valve timing and, therefore, the speed. He got a chance to ring the bell and pull on the steam whistle of a real, live steam train. It brought back childhood memories of his days as a news butcher. Once Walt started to play with Kimball's train, he was hooked. Kimball described what came over Walt as "a railroader's 'high iron' in his blood" that "he just hadn't discovered ... yet!"

This party reignited Walt's passion for trains; now he wanted a railroad at his own home! Plus, this dovetailed with Walt's doctors' suggestion that he find a hobby as a way to relax. Walt told his nurse, "Yeah, Kimball is always relaxed. Maybe it's because he's got such a wonderful hobby running that big steam train in his backyard." However, Walt's home at the time was not big enough. That would soon change.

The Chicago Railroad Fair

By Christmas 1947, Walt had set up an electric HO-scale model train outside his office. When Kimball learned of this, he ran into Disney Legend Ollie Johnston's office and said, "There's something up in Walt's office you've gotta see." This became an open invitation for all of the train fanatics at the studio to express their love for the hobby.

Walt had received the train set from Lionel Trains as a gift. In 1934, when Lionel had been on the edge of bankruptcy, Walt granted a license to Lionel to manufacture a small electric handcar powered by Mickey and Minnie. The toy was an immediate hit, sold more than one million units, and saved the day for the toy maker. Lionel continued to manufacture the toy until 1937. There was also a Donald Duck railcar toy that included Pluto. As a thank you, Lionel pledged to give Walt all the model railroad equipment he wanted.

Like many bosses at the time, Walt was very remote from his staff and did not fraternize much with the employees. As a result of his enthusiasm for trains, Walt's relationship with Ward Kimball was an exception. When Walt heard about the 1948 Chicago Railroad Fair, he realized it was an opportunity he could not pass up. Knowing of Ward Kimball's love of trains, Walt called him up. As Kimball recalled, "Kimball, this is Walt. There's a swell train show they're opening in Chicago down by the lake. It's supposed to be the biggest event in railroad history and I want to go." Kimball said, "Wow, I want to see that." As a result of the trip, Walt and Kimball would forge a lasting friendship that went beyond the work at the studio.

The two men traveled cross-country to this massive event. The Chicago Railroad Fair was set up on the lakefront site of the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress World's Fair. More than one hundred thousand railfans were in attendance. The fairgrounds were divided up into themed "villages" representing different tourist destinations and hosted by different rail lines. The different venues included a replica of the French Quarter in New Orleans, a dude ranch, a slice of a national park, and Indian pueblos. Counted attendants and appropriate food added to the illusion.

When Walt and Kimball arrived at the Chicago fair, they were treated like royalty. They were introduced to railroad executives and rode on vintage and modern locomotives. The men rode in the cab of Chicago's first locomotive, *Pioneer*, and they helped the crew fire-up the Baltimore & Ohio's replica of the *Tom Thumb*, America's first steam locomotive. When the men helped run the historic *Dewitt Clinton*, the first steam locomotive to operate in the State of New York, Kimball said it was "one of the greatest thrills of my life. It was like shaking hands with George Washington."

The trip continued after Walt and Kimball left Chicago and traveled to the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village near Dearborn, Michigan. It seemed as if Henry Ford collected one of everything. On display were kitchen appliances, furniture, knives, and guns. It is likely that Walt and Kimball were especially intrigued by the museum's exhibit depicting the history of transportation with bicycles, tractors, planes, trains, and automobiles.

Greenfield Village is a park adjacent to the Ford museum featuring historic buildings that have been moved to this location, restored, and put on display, including Orville and Wilbur Wright's bicycle shop, the original Ford assembly shop, a 1913 Dentzel merry-go-round, and a sternwheeler riverboat. There is an operating steam train that ferries guests around the property. One of the highlights for Walt during his visit was Thomas Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory. As we shall see in due course, this trip would be a critical component to the development of Disneyland.

After spending so much time with Walt on the trip, Ward said, "Walt Disney was just a down-to-earth farmer's boy who happened to be a genius." Walt would discount this description. He said his success "Was in toy hard work and enthusiasm, integrity of purpose, a devotion to our medium, confidence in its future, and, above all, by steady day-by-day growth in which we all simply studied our trade and learned."

This was only the beginning; over time their mutual interest in trains deepened even further. In 1948, after Walt took another ride on Kimball's Grizzly Flats railroad, he noticed that there was no train depot. Walt offered Kimball a deal to dismantle the train station featured in the 1948 film *So Dear To My Heart* and rebuild it in his backyard. Kimball thought this was a good idea since he was the one who did the research for the art director of the film; a rare book in his collection called *Buildings and Structures of American Railroads* documented pictures of a Victorian "gingerbread" depot on the Pottsville branch of the Lehigh Valley railroad in eastern Pennsylvania that became the model for the 1948 film set. The men agreed to the deal, and Kimball dismantled the three-sided set piece and spent a lot of money making the temporary structure into a functioning building. Later on, after construction for Disneyland had begun, Walt asked Roger Broggie, the head of Disney's Machine Shop, to see if he could get the depot back from Kimball. Kimball said, "Hell no, that's not fair." So Walt used Kimball's blueprints to build a copy, which he installed in Frontierland.

Walt's immersion into the hobby of model railroading was a real boost to his creative juices. After riding in the cab of Kimball's narrow-gauge train, taking the Chicago trip, and forming stronger bonds with the artists who shared this passion, Walt could not get enough of trains. Trains would become the catalyst that would propel him toward new ideas, beyond making movies, such as transportation systems and the built environment, and the best way to integrate them. By the time Walt returned from Chicago, he knew he needed to take this reenergized interest in trains and do something with it. He would start with his home.

Holmby Hills

Walt may have started out with an electric scale model train in his office suite, but now he wanted something more, something a bit larger. He wanted something with a boiler. He was learning about live steam scale locomotives and decided that he needed a proper layout in the backyard of his home. All he needed was property big enough to accomplish this goal. Lillian agreed that buying a new home was a good idea, although her reasons were quite different.

Letting her husband set up a train layout would give him another reason to stay home more often, with fewer trips to the studio.

Walt and Lillian found the perfect location: a five-acre property at 355 Carolwood Drive in the Holmby Hills section of Los Angeles, not far from the studio. They purchased the property on June 1, 1949, and the family moved into the custom-built house in 1950. Walt was so excited that he wrote to his younger sister, Ruth, "I am going to take time out to play with my train." Lillian's plan seemed to be working. What Walt would create at his new home was a very personal, carefully designed, intimate experience that reflected his interests and a place he could share with his friends and family.

Much of the train was laid out in a space Walt called "Yensid Valley!" ensid—Disney spelled backwards—is also the name given to the wizard in the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" sequence in *Fantasia*. Just like Walt, the wizard would raise one eyebrow to Mickey Mouse to show his displeasure. Walt decided to name the locomotive the *Lilly Belle*, in honor of his wife, and to call the system the Carolwood Pacific Railroad Company after the street where they lived. The train traveled the "Fair Weather Route"; other physical highlights along the track included the "Janss Pass" and the "Canyon Vista."

The prototype locomotive for the *Lilly Belle* was a Central Pacific American 4-4-0. Walt's train was built at one-eighth scale with a 7-inch track gauge. The layout consisted of 2,615 feet of track, with enough switching options so that he could travel almost a full mile without running on the same track in the same direction. At one point, the train crossed over a 46-foot-long wooden trestle bridge over a valley while another part of the track passed under the bridge.

Eleven switches controlled the network of tracks, and all of them could be operated electronically from a control board located in Walt's 834-square foot barn, which was also used to store his train. The barn is a scale model of one used in the film *So Dear To My Heart* and reminiscent of the barn from Walt's early days located on the Crane Farm, the 48-acre Disney property in Linn County near Marceline, Missouri. Walt hand-built most of the barn's workbenches.

According to Roger Broggie, the man who ran the Disney Studio Machine Shop, "The first time the locomotive ran was on December 24, 1950." They pulled the train out of the studio's Machine Shop, laid down some track, and gave people rides around the soundstages. The first time the train would make the circuit around the Carolwood property was on May 7, 1951.

Lillian loved flowers and wanted her personality, as well as Walt's, to become part of the house. She worked with landscape designers Jack and Morgan "Bil" Evans to build a garden on the north side of the house. When Walt rolled out his plans for the track layout, Lillian immediately noticed how the train was due to run right through her new garden. Walt needed a way to get the track all the way around the house, so he figured out a compromise. He would just dig a tunnel and go underneath the flowerbed.

Walt called on Spencer Olin, one of the Studio's attorneys, to draft an agreement between Walt, representing the Carolwood Pacific Railroad, and the rest of the family for the rights to tunnel beneath the flowerbeds. The attorney suggested that Walt did not need to do this since he already owned the property but Walt said, "Lilly has made up her mind that I shouldn't run right through the middle of her garden. She wanted to have a large window put in so her friends can look out at her flowers while they're playing Canasta." He added, "I just want the right to run my railroad."

This would be no ordinary tunnel. Walt wanted to create a bit of drama. He proposed that the 90-foot tunnel be designed with a slight S-curve in the middle, such that a rider would not be able to see the exit when the train first enters the tunnel. For a brief moment, passengers were completely in the dark. In *Inside the Dream*, artist Herb Ryman recalls the foreman on the job suggested it was cheaper to build it straight. Walt's angry retort was, "It's cheaper not to do it at all." As you would expect, Walt got his tunnel the way that he wanted it. He named it the "Rorex tunnel" after Jack Rorex, the construction supervisor who gave him the idea of the S-curve.

A Bigger Train

Walt's backyard miniature railroad provided him many hours of enjoyment. Walt enjoyed the physical work of building the rolling stock—the vehicles for his railway. He was especially proud of the yellow caboose, with its miniature pot-bellied stove. It took Walt almost one year to hand-build that one piece of rolling stock. The details are so precise that it contains a miniature calendar dedicated to Ward Kimball's Grizzly Flats Railroad.

The Carolwood Pacific became a way for Walt to relax and enjoy time with his friends and family. Frequently, people would be invited to the house and take a ride. However, the good times would not last forever; an unfortunate accident put an end to the Carolwood Pacific and set in motion the need for Walt to find another place to play with his train. One Sunday, a guest engineer was running the *Lilly Belle* and went too fast around a curve. The *Lilly Belle* turned over on its side. The whistle broke off of the locomotive and a jet of high-pressure steam escaped. A five-year old girl was attracted to the mayhem and accidentally stepped into the jet's invisible steam. Although the resulting burns were minor, that was enough for Walt. Walt always said of his backyard railroad, "If it isn't fun, lets don't do it." He called Roger Broggie and told him to take the train back to the Machine Shop. Walt would have to play with his trains somewhere else.

According to Kimball, "The Carolwood Pacific Railroad project introduced Walt to the notion of outdoor entertainment. Disneyland made it possible for Walt to have a larger train than the miniature that ran at his estate:" Kimball knew what Walt was thinking. He knew that Walt was going to build a park so that he could "have a full-size steam train... that he could have fun operating himself on the days when the park was closed. That somewhere else would become Disneyland.

From Yensid Valley to Disneyland

Walt had seen how well the berm worked at the Burbank studio, so he had Bill Evans build an earthen berm around the Carolwood property to shield the backyard from the neighbors. As Walt told his daughter Diane, "I built that bank up on the canyon so when I was down there playing with my trains, my neighbors wouldn't be annoyed." Walt was so pleased with the work of the Evans brothers that he asked them, "How about you fellows landscape Disneyland for me?" Although Jack passed on the offer, Bill accepted and became the landscape architect for both Disneyland and Walt Disney World. According to Imagineer and author Jeff Kurtti, "[Bill Evans'] forthright approach and innate understanding of how landscaping fit into the art of place-making was a talent that must have not only pleased Walt aesthetically, but was a godsend to his evolving design and construction of Disneyland."

Imagineer and Disney Legend Marty Sklar said that "Bill Evans defined Disney theme park landscaping, and trained just about everyone who has created theme park stories in living environments." In *The Making of Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park*, Melody Malmberg explains Evans' approach. She said, "The first consideration was guest comfort—shade and shelter. The second was screening visual intrusions—creating a berm, a ring of earth and vegetation surrounding the park to hide the real world; or using strategic planting that camouflaged a building or electronics or lighting. The third principle was telling a story through landscaping—creating the right look for the setting, from the mixed broadleaf forest of Tom Sawyer's Mississippi River banks to the serene gardens of Japan."

Imagineers Number One and Two

Walt's passion for trains led him toward a creative relationship with two giant talents that would have a profound effect of many of the things that were to come: Roger Broggie and Harper Goff. Broggie was the mechanical genius that took Walt under his wing and encouraged him to build things with his own hands. Goff was an intuitive designer and an artist with impeccable taste. Broggie became a critical player in the development of Disneyland and Disney World and is considered by many Disney historians as the original Imagineer. As Roy E. Disney said, "Any mechanical things you had to do, what you said was, 'Call Roger, he'll know how to fix it.' Without him, Disneyland would never have happened."

Broggie started at the studio in 1939. He helped devise the multiplane camera, which added depth and movement through space to animation. Broggie would rise to the position of vice-president and general manager of Mapo, Inc., the manufacturing and research arm of WED Enterprises. By the time he retired in 1973, he was vice president of research and development for WED Enterprises.

When Walt decided to start his backyard railroad and build a live steam locomotive, he turned to Broggie for help. Broggie taught Walt how to use the various shop tools. Walt took great pride in all of the miniatures that he had built. Imagine those conversations.

Another important figure in the development of Disneyland and other Disney theme parks was Harper Goff. His influence on the design of the theme parks cannot be overstated. Goff was

born in Fort Collins, Colorado, in 1911 and moved to Santa Ana, California with his family in 1920. He began painting as at the Chouinard Art Institute, which later became part of CalArts, the art school founded by Wait. He went on to work at Warner Brothers as a set designer with credits ranging from *Casablanca* and *Sergeant York* to *The Adventures of Don Juan*.

It was only by chance that Goff came to work for Walt Disney who absolutely loved model steam trains and was part of a growing brotherhood that worshiped this hobby. In 1951, Goff was shopping at Basset-Lowke in London—the place to go if you wanted to buy a new scale-model live steam locomotive. He spotted a new engine that he really wanted, only to be told that it was on hold for another gentleman. The shopkeeper suggested that Goff return another day; if the other buyer did not want it, Goff could buy it. To Goff's surprise, the gentleman in question was Walt Disney, and a partnership was born. Walt got the locomotive but Goff got a new job.

Walt asked Goff to sketch out a *True-Life Adventure* short called "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea." Goff had other ideas. He was a huge Jules Verne fan and ignored Walt's direction. He drafted sketches for a live-action film based on the science fiction writer's book. Instead of being mad at Goff, Walt was impressed with what he saw, changed direction, and produced the classic film we enjoy today. Not only did Goff sketch out the film and convince Walt to produce it, he also designed the film's signature *Nautilus* submarine.

Walt's next challenge for Goff was a project he was calling "Disneylandia," or "Walt Disney's America." This is the project that would ultimately evolve into Disneyland. Goff used his hometown of Fort Collins as the model for Disneyland's City Hall, and he was the principal designer for Adventureland. He used his experience as the Art Director for the movie *African Queen* to create the *Jungle Cruise*. When Walt decided he wanted the Golden Horseshoe Saloon in Frontierland to look like the one in *Calamity Jane*, he asked Goff to work on the project. What Walt did not know at the time was that Goff was the Art Director for *Calamity Jane*. Goff simply pulled out his blueprints of the movie set. Watch the film today, and the resemblance is clear.

Goff continued to work on films for other studios; his credits include *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1966) and *Fantastic Voyage* (1971). He later returned to Disney and was the person responsible for the basic design concept for the World Showcase at Epcot Center. It was Goff who first suggested that the pavilions be given equal space along the waterfront and be made up of scale models of iconic, historic structures. He also worked on the Japan, Germany, and United Kingdom pavilions.

In addition to his visual talents, Goff played the banjo in Firehouse Five plus Two with fellow railroad fanatic, Ward Kimball. He was working on Tokyo Disneyland when he passed away in 1993. As a result of Goff's involvement in designing Disneyland, Jeff Kurtz, author and Disney history expert, dubbed Goff the "Second Imagineer."