

**One-of-a-Kind Belvedere Estate**  
**308 Golden Gate Avenue**  
**Belvedere, CA 94920**



**Overview:**

Stately 308 Golden Gate Avenue is one of the most admired homes on Belvedere Island for its Italianate villa styling, expansive views, extensive gardens and the gorgeous ceramic-tiled pool. It is located on the desirable warm (east) side of the island and gets all-day sun.

The home is designated as an Historic Property by the City of Belvedere and enjoys a significant property tax reduction (see below).

**Summary:**

Spectacular bay views from the top of Belvedere Island

8 Bedrooms

6 Full Bathrooms (the 2 master bathrooms share a shower), 2 half baths, 1 poolside half-bath.

Beautiful custom-designed kitchen with eat-in breakfast area, balcony and expansive bay view.

Generously sized Master Suite with separate his-and-her dressing/sitting areas, closets and bathrooms with radiant heated floors, a steam shower, and a kitchenette.

8 rooms open onto balconies with bay views.

2 sunrooms

Sauna on the lower level

Wine Cellar

2-car detached garage plus adjacent carport. Additional parking on street.

Extensive multi-level gardens with mature and varied plantings

5 wood-burning fireplaces

Entry courtyard with fountain

Large ceramic-tiled pool with automated cover

Street-to-street lot

Virtually every room in the house is wired with 3 lines of CAT-6 for high-speed, secure broadband communications

Security system with cameras

Exercise/yoga room with mirrored wall and ballet barre

2 laundry rooms

Extensive storage

Two 75-gallon water heaters provide ample hot water for the whole house

Two new furnaces for the main living quarters are less than 2 years old; there is a separate furnace and thermostat for the office/au pair/in-law quarters

Three separate entrances and multiple living spaces can accommodate many variations of home / multi-generational household / home offices.

Whole-house water filtration system with recent addition of a UV anti-viral component delivers purified water to every faucet and shower in the house.

Walk right out your front door to experience Belvedere's charming hillside stairways and winding streets for the ideal combination of outdoor exercise with fresh air and breathtaking views.

From the entire east side of the house, be perpetually entertained by the nesting hawks, barking sea lions, Friday evening sailing regattas and youth sailing school.

The City of Belvedere passed a resolution to underground the utility wires and poles in front of the house, and the utility boxes have already been placed in the ground. The estimated completion date is February 2022.



## **Significant Property Tax Savings through the Mills Act Agreement**

In June 2021, the owners signed a Mills Act Agreement with the City of Belvedere. This entitles the property to enjoy a significant property tax savings for a period of up to 15 years effective July 1, 2022. This benefit results from the home's certification as an Historic Property.

The governing document is the Mills Act Agreement, which is provided in this package. The following explanation summarizes what has been explained to us by the City of Belvedere; however, the buyer should do their own due diligence if they have any questions about what the Mills Act Agreement might mean to their ownership of the property.

The Mills Act Agreement for 308 Golden Gate will take effect on January 1, 2022 and will first apply to the 2022-2023 tax year (which runs from July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.) The County Assessor has provided a preliminary estimate that the Mills Act valuation for 308 Golden Gate Avenue will be \$2,000,000 for the first year; the final determination will be made by the County in the spring of 2022.

On the basis of a \$2,000,000 Mills Act Value, the 1% Basic Tax would be \$20,000 the first year – rather than \$114,950 (i.e., 1% of the \$11,495,000 sales price.) That's a projected savings of \$94,950 in the first year alone.

The Mills Act Agreement is renewable on an annual basis unless canceled by either the Owner or the City. While the City of Belvedere could cancel the Agreement in any future year, the City's current policy is to send a letter of non-renewal to the owner in year 5; the Agreement then continues for another ten years, making for a fifteen-year term all together.

Following issuance of the letter of non-renewal, the valuation of the property would be adjusted that year, and incrementally in each subsequent year, returning the property to normal valuation by the time the Agreement terminates (in year 15, barring prior cancellation by either party.)

The County Assessor has explained to us that the actual valuation of the property, and therefore the tax savings to be realized by the owner in any given year, will depend upon several factors, including the rate of growth in

property values, interest rates, rental income rates and other factors as determined by the County as part of its regular annual assessment process.

Assuming that neither the Owner nor the City decides to terminate the Agreement in the first five years, the value of the Mills Act Agreement could easily approach \$500,000 in property tax savings in the first five years alone, and the total value would only increase with each subsequent year that the Agreement continues in force.

The Mills Act Agreement requires the owner to preserve and maintain the property in a manner to “retain its characteristics of historical and architectural significance.” It is noteworthy that the home experienced two extensive remodels (in the 1980’s and again in 2008) prior to its historical certification. Accordingly, in the event a future remodel, we believe the City would most likely be concerned primarily with the exterior look and feel of the property. However, Buyers should contact the City of Belvedere if they have questions about permissible alterations to the property while the Mills Act Agreement is in force.

An owner who wants to make renovations beyond those allowed by the Mills Act Agreement would only need to cancel the Agreement with proper notice being given to the City (i.e., at least 90 days before the automatic annual renewal date), as further explained in the Mills Act Agreement.

In conclusion, the Mills Act Agreement grants a significant financial benefit to the owner, including any new owner, but does not bar an owner from canceling the Agreement and changing the property, provided proper noticing is done as explained in the Mills Act Agreement. A full copy of the Mills Act Agreement is provided in this package. In addition, a buyer of the property may find it helpful to read the explanations provided by the City of Belvedere here:

<https://www.cityofbelvedere.org/DocumentCenter/View/34/Mills-Act-Agreement-Application>

This reference is provided to the Buyer as additional information; however, the Seller takes no responsibility for the explanations and representations made by the City of Belvedere within the document. It should also be noted that the City of Belvedere could change its policy in the future.



## Property Highlights:

### The Kitchen

Probably one of the most beautifully designed and executed kitchens in Northern California. The entire eastern wall opens up at the breakfast area, revealing an enchanting view including two yacht club harbors (San Francisco and Corinthian Yacht Clubs), the Mediterranean-style homes of Corinthian island, San Francisco Bay and Raccoon Straits, Angel Island and a continually-changing panorama of boating activity. The view from this room has been compared to that of coastal Portofino.

All countertops and part of the backsplash are Calacatta Oro marble including the 10'6" x 3'4" center island. This marble could be difficult to obtain today due to the high content of the warm "gold" accent coloration.





Extensive custom cabinetry to meet a large variety of storage needs for dishes, linens, trays, vases, etc.

Two pantries plus a broom closet.

Exterior entrance for kitchen staff.

Appliances include:

“Thermador Professional” range with two ovens, six gas burners and a center griddle.

“Miele Oven & Broiler” – with master chef automated cooking program and rotisserie.

“Miele Steam Oven” – computerized.

“Sharp Microwave Drawer” installed in center island.

Two “Miele Optima Series” dishwashers.

“Sub-Zero 736TZ Refrigerator” with two separate freezer drawers and ice maker.

“Sub-Zero 700BR” two-drawer refrigerator for vegetables and cold drinks installed in the center island.

“U-Line Wine Cooler” installed in center island.

#### Additional Equipment:

Two sinks – one has an “instant hot” water dispenser.

All water in the house (including all showers) is filtered by a high-end whole-house water filtration system which was recently upgraded to include the infrared option designed to kill viruses.

Three-part recycling station built into the center island provides easy separation and out-of-the-way storage for paper, glass/plastic/metal, and regular garbage.

## Master Suite

The third floor received extensive remodeling as part of the 2007-2008 upgrade.

Two-thirds of this floor comprises the owners’ private quarters. This includes:

The generously sized **Master Bedroom** has a fireplace and features dual bedside remote lighting controls. New Marvin windows were installed with STC glass for sound blocking. The spaces between the wall studs were filled with sound-deadening material. All sheetrock was replaced by “Hard Rock” (which is represented as being ten times denser than normal sheetrock). Custom silk drapes include blackout lining. Both his and her closets are separate from the master bedroom, enabling disturbance-free sleep for both parties.





The **Lady's Dressing Room** has its own balcony overlooking the garden. This room opens up to a sunroom with spectacular views to the east, and a fully-equipped breakfast bar including refrigerator, sink, enclosed recycling center and a dishwasher drawer, and a seating area. The dressing room has been pre-wired for a chandelier.

From the Lady's Dressing Room, enter the **Lady's Closet**, which includes locking drawers for jewelry.

The **Gentleman's Dressing Room/Den** has a balcony overlooking the fountain and main entrance to the property.

The **Master Bath** consists of two separate bathrooms connected by a large marble Steam Shower with bay view. The shower comes with separate "His and Hers" preset temperature controls for the "Rain Shower" and Standard Wall Shower heads, respectively. In addition, there is a hand-held shower. There is a marble bench for use during the steam option. The solid-slab Calacatta Oro marble floors have separate in-floor heating elements for both his side and her side of the master bath.

The **Lady's Bath** is equipped with a wall-mounted, electrified makeup mirror (5x magnification) and a free-standing cast-iron bathtub by Waterworks. The mural over the tub replicates the "Aurora" figure from the famous ceiling fresco "Aurora" which Guido Reni painted between 1613 and 1614, and which can be viewed to the present day in the Palazzo Pallavicini in Rome. <http://www.casinoaurorapallavicini.it/eng/Frescoes.htm>



## Security

The house has a 16-channel video security system which is currently using five exterior cameras focused on the front entrance and three primary gates. Proximity sensors trigger exterior lights at various locations for night-time recording of all visitors.

The property is fully fenced (primarily against the deer population.)

Interior security is extensive and can be reviewed on request. The house was redesigned to serve as a reasonably secure diplomatic or executive residence.

The current owners are reasonably tech-savvy and virtually every room in the house is wired with 3 lines of CAT-6 cable for high-speed, secure

broadband communications. Everything is coordinated through a central server room.

The cabling system allows you to set up secure, hard-wired, real-time video monitoring of virtually all children's play areas – both interior and exterior.

### **Exterior Spaces: Gardens, Patios, Grassy Lawn and Swimming Pool**

Extensive gardens with mature plantings provide year-round greenery and color. At present, these include:

In winter: 3 ornamental cherry trees, magnolias, camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons.

In spring: roses, lilies, sweet jasmine, dogwood, princess flowers, azaleas, rhododendrons.

In summer: glorious and abundant hydrangeas, peaches, lemons, and more roses and azaleas.

In autumn: Japanese maples.

There is an upper brick patio shaded by a magnificent oak tree. The larger curved brick patio with expansive bay view is adjoined by a level grass lawn play area. Plaster garden walls wind down from the large brick patio to the pool area.

There is a private (meditation) garden tucked behind the pool.

There is a half bath adjoining the pool.

The grounds include a goldfish pond.

The magnificent views from both the large brick patio and the pool provide for hours of outdoor enjoyment of the property and are a delight to share with family and guests.



The pool (35' x 16') has been converted to a non-chemical "Salt Water" purification system with a key-controlled automated cover.

**Main Floor (main entry level or Second Floor):** includes Entry Foyer, Living Room, Dining Room, Family Room, Kitchen, Den/Media Room, and powder room with hand-painted wall mural. Hardwood floors throughout this level.

The Dining Room has been pre-wired for a chandelier.

The Living Room includes a Juliet balcony that overlooks the garden.

### **Third Floor (Master Bedroom Level, one level above the entry level):**

In addition to the Master Suite (described above), this floor contains two additional fully renovated bedrooms.

The West bedroom was updated with custom bookcase cabinetry and storage. This bedroom is currently being used as the “Lady’s Office” and has a view of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The East bedroom has an adjoining climate-controlled sunroom with spectacular Bay views.

These two bedrooms are connected by a half-bath which could easily be converted to a full bath by reclaiming part of the space that is currently dedicated to the adjacent laundry room.

(A second full laundry room is available on the lower floor next to the Maid’s/Au pair suite.)

### **Fourth Floor:**

The top floor is currently set up as a multi-functional space for children, teens or guests. Alternatively, it could be used for his-and-her offices, with built-in bookshelves. Each of the two bedrooms has a fireplace and French doors opening onto one large balcony with stunning views of San Francisco Bay. This floor also contains a large bathroom with skylight and double sinks, tub/shower, large cedar closet with deep storage, separate cedar closet for storage of suitcases etc., a desk/homework area with CAT-6 internet wiring, and a separate sitting area.

The roof line could be lifted on the western side, with no impediment to neighbors’ views, to create additional living space and an expanded view of the Golden Gate Bridge.





The view from the top floor balcony extends from the Tiburon hills and yacht clubs to the San Francisco Bay Bridge with its twinkling night-time lighting displays.

### **First Floor:**

The bottom floor has two separate living units, an Au Pair/Maid's room with full bath and private deck. This unit is adjacent to the second laundry room and has its own private entrance.

The second unit on this floor is an in-law suite with two rooms, full bath, walk-in closet, kitchenette and access to its own wrap-around deck overlooking the gardens and bay. It also has its own private entrance. This unit is currently being used by the owners as a working office.

This floor also contains a third full bath with sauna.

And a wine storage room.

And two massive storage areas with a built-in dehumidifier.

### **Additional spaces (with exterior access only):**

A large half-basement **Storage and Tool Room** houses two hot water tanks with water recirculation, and a whole-house water filtration unit designed to purge chemicals and pollutants from the city water source. This system was recently upgraded with an infrared element designed to kill viruses and a wide range of bacteria.

The **Bonus Room** was originally used as a game room on the lower northeastern corner of the house. It has been repurposed as a “Video Production Studio.” It has its own separate entrance and tiled balcony.



## History

The home's first owner was Edward B. Jennings, of the wholesale grocer Hooper & Jennings in San Francisco. The home stayed in the Jennings family for 49 years (from 1907 until 1956), when it was acquired by Admiral Morton D. Willcutts, who enjoyed an illustrious career with the U.S. Navy.

Admiral Willcutts was a surgeon who served at various times as the head of the U.S. Naval Hospitals at Bethesda, MD and at San Diego, CA. He is best known for heading up an inquiry into the sudden and controversial death of the first U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, who plunged to his death from his 16<sup>th</sup>-story room at Bethesda Naval Hospital (with the belt of his dressing gown drawn around his neck.) This occurred during Admiral Willcutts' tenure as head of that hospital and accordingly, it fell to Admiral Willcutts to perform the unenviable task of heading up and signing the official report on the suspicious demise of Secretary Forrestal.

Admiral Willcutts' final position was chief medical officer at San Quentin State Prison, and it was during that time that he owned and lived at 308 Golden Gate Avenue, from 1956-1976.

The home was extensively remodeled in the late 1980's with a new foundation, extensive red brick hardscape, gardens, extensively engineered retaining walls, and a 25' x 16' ceramic-tiled pool. All major retaining walls were secured directly to bedrock. In 2008-2009 the house underwent a major interior renovation plus the addition of three balconies.

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# Golden Gate Av

Preserved 1907 Italian-style home was once owned by Navy admiral who was San Quentin's chief medical officer

By SHAYNE JONES

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A 113-year-old Italian-style villa on Golden Gate Avenue is officially Belvedere's 24th historic property.

The City Council at its April 12 teleconference meeting voted unanimously to approve landmark status for 308 Golden Gate Ave., following the recommendations of the city's Historic Preservation Committee and Planning Commission.

Homeowners Suzanne and James DuMolin have spent countless hours preserving its Tuscan-like grandeur, which includes red brick walkways, herringbone-pattern parquet floors and beamed ceilings.

"I did a site visit to the property, and the DuMolins have done a stunning job," Councilmember Nancy Kemnitz said. "It has been tenderly restored."

The home was built in 1907 on land originally purchased with 10 gold coins, according the original deed shown to the DuMolins when they bought the house in 2006.

Throughout its history, the home has been owned by grocery entrepreneurs, mining capitalists, labor organizers and most notably Navy Adm. Morton Douglas Willcutts, who lived in the house from 1956 to his death in 1976.

According to local newspapers, Willcutts was the chief medical officer at San Quentin State Prison for a decade starting in 1951. He is best known for heading up an inquiry into the sudden and controversial death of the first U.S. secretary of defense, James Forrestal. Records from that period indicate that President Harry Truman had removed Forrestal from his position in March 1949, and the secretary was involuntarily committed to Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland for "exhaustion" soon after.

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# venue villa is newest landmark



ELLIOT KARLAN ARCHIVE / FOR THE ARK, 2021

**This Tuscan-inspired 1907 home at 308 Golden Gate Ave. is Belvedere's 24th historic property.**

On May 22, 1949, Forrestal was found dead after plunging from a 16th-floor window at the hospital with a cord from his dressing gown tied around his neck. Willcutts was in charge of the official government report into Forrestal's death, which

was not made public until 55 years later and disclosed nothing about what caused the fall. Some conspiracy theories

See **LANDMARK, PAGE 12**

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## Landmark, *from page 10*

argue Forrestal was assassinated.

Willcutts is also reported to have removed the appendix of the fiancée of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's son during an emergency surgery in 1937.

One of the DuMolins' neighbors also told them that women used the Golden Gate Avenue home as a meeting place during World War II to roll bandages for the Red Cross as their contribution to the war effort.

The first owner is said to be Edward B. Jennings, of the wholesale grocer Hooper & Jennings in San Francisco, who bought the home for \$5,300. It stayed in the family until Willcutts purchased it.

To qualify as a local landmark, homes must meet at least three of nine criteria set out by the city; the home at 308 Golden Gate Ave. fulfilled six.

"It's overqualified," Kemnitzer noted.

As the owners of a historic property, the DuMolins are now eligible to apply for a tax break under the Mills Act, a locally-controlled tax-abatement program through the state to incentivize the preservation and restoration of historic homes. Under the program, property taxes are substantially reduced for a minimum of 10 years.



VIA CITY OF BELVEDERE

Mills Act approval must come from the City Council at the recommendation of the Historic Preservation Committee.

In a previous interview, Suzanne DuMolin said the couple planned to apply for the tax break but noted their main motivation for obtaining landmark status was to cement the house's place in the community.

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*Reach Belvedere and public-safety reporter Shayne Jones at 415-944-4627.*