

Steve Jobs' old garage about to become a piece of history

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Steve Jobs' childhood home on Crist Drive in Los Altos, Sept. 24, 2013. (Patrick Tehan, Bay Area News Group)

LOS ALTOS -- When it was all just starting to happen for him in 1977, around the time the venture capital boys began beating a path to his door, Steve Jobs would greet them at the house on Crist Drive wearing his red turtleneck -- the one his mom had washed so many times the color had faded to pink. Neighbors suspected the young man might be slightly deranged.

"When things were really moving, fancy cars would come by the house and he'd come dancing out in his cutoff jeans with his underwear hanging out, barefoot and hippie-like," recalls Joan Tankersley, 87, with a small shudder. She has lived across the street for 60 years from the house where Jobs and Steve Wozniak created the first Apple computers.

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This week, in a first step toward memorializing the modest California ranch-style home, a fountainhead of what became Silicon Valley, the Los Altos Historical Commission reviewed a proposal to designate 2066 Crist Drive a home of "historical significance." If it's added to the registry, the city would issue a plaque if the homeowner requested one, noting the year the house was built and whether it's a historic resource or landmark. Either designation could affect any future attempts at structure modifications.



Steve Jobs, photographed in 1996 in front of the garage where - along with Steve Wozniak in the late 1970s- he invented the Apple computer in Los Altos, Calif. (Diane Cook & Len Jenschel)

So far, the review's only real effect has been to expose a rift between Patty Jobs -- Steve's adoptive sister -- and Marilyn Jobs, their stepmother, who lives in the house. The Historical Commission sent several letters to the house about the planned designation that Patty never received. Now she's unhappy the city proceeded without her involvement. Patty Jobs said she and her stepmother are currently not on speaking terms.

Patty was one of Steve's many helpers, building circuit boards for him in their living room as early as 1975. "I'd get yelled at if I bent a prong," she recalls.

By 1977, Wozniak had designed the Apple II -- the revolutionary forerunner to the personal computer that would change the world, but it was the 22-year-old Jobs who emerged from his family garage to excitedly pitch the new technology.

"I remember ... he came running across the street to say, 'We got color!' " Tankersley said. "We weren't particularly interested and didn't know what the heck he was doing in there."

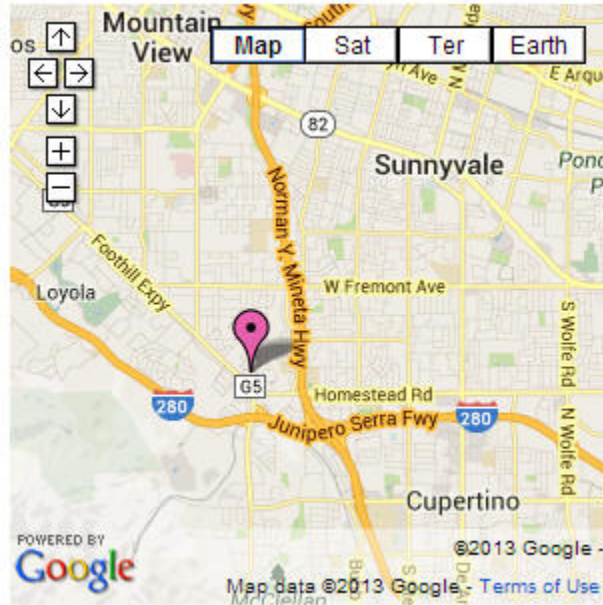
As it turned out, Jobs was inventing the future.

Garages have a mythic place in Silicon Valley lore as places of technological ferment, and the commission's review was the first step toward conferring historic status upon Apple's seedling site. Ron Wayne, a co-founder who helped devise Apple's corporate charter but dropped out before the money rolled in, said Jobs is deserving of enshrinement. "Woz

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created the product," Wayne said. "Jobs was the dynamo that turned it into a corporate empire."

Marilyn Jobs, who became Steve's stepmother after his adoptive mother, Clara, died and his father, Paul Jobs, remarried, has put a small sign in front of the house that says, "All photographs must be taken from the sidewalk!" Pilgrims constantly take pictures with their iPhones. Recently, BJ Singh and his wife, Kristi, of Columbia, Md., did an iPhone search for "Steve Jobs' childhood home" and went to Crist Drive to pay their respects.



"I hope Apple navigation doesn't screw up Steve Jobs' house," BJ said, gently mocking one of the company's most mortifying technological failures. "I thought there would be a crowd. I'm surprised we're the only ones." Kristi, a techno-revanchist who still carries a BlackBerry, declared herself "underwhelmed."

"I was thinking more of a shrine," she said, "or at least a sign saying, 'Steve Jobs grew up here.' "

Next-door neighbor Larry Waterland doesn't fancy having to duck slow-moving Apple groupies. "What a horrible idea," he said, expressing his misgivings about any kind of historic monument to Jobs.

The neighbor moved in 37 years ago, just as Jobs was conjuring up his brain in a box. One day the unshaven young genius came by sporting sandals, long straggly hair and a question: "Do you know anything about computers?" "

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Waterland had just finished his Ph.D. at Stanford in chemical engineering and wanted to put the kid in his place. "You punched cards, put them in a big deck," he said about the mainframe machines of that time. "Steve took me over to the garage. He had a circuit board with a chip on it, a DuMont TV set, a Panasonic cassette tape deck and a keyboard. He said, 'This is an Apple computer.' I said, 'You've got to be joking.' I dismissed the whole idea."

Daniel Kottke, who assembled most of the circuit boards for the first two generations of Apple computers and spent the summer of 1976 sleeping on the sofa in Jobs' living room, also supports special designation. He lives near the legendary Hewlett-Packard garage and said, "I hope there's a plaque on Steve's garage someday. I think it's important to memorialize these things."

Tall, thin and bearded, Kottke had been Jobs' companion on a pilgrimage to India, and was arguably Apple's first employee. "I was the only person who worked in the garage," Kottke said. "Woz would show up once a week with his latest code. Steve Jobs didn't get his hands dirty in that sense."

Kottke said the fledgling company actually was cooked up in the kitchen, where Jobs spent hours on the phone and where he convinced Paul Terrell to take 50 Apple I computers at his Byte Shop in Mountain View for \$500 apiece.

When Apple went public in 1977, Jobs refused to grant Kottke any stock options as a founding employee. "Steve just stopped talking to me," said Kottke, who later received Apple shares as a gift from Wozniak. "Everyone I worked with was becoming a millionaire, and I was working for \$12 an hour. I forgave him 20 years ago, but I can imagine he had feelings of guilt he didn't want to deal with."

"You pass by the house, you wouldn't even know that anything significant happened there," said Sapna Marfatia, an architect and member of the Historical Commission. "It's a very ordinary, everyday person's home. And yet, it changed a whole industry and there was a kind of revolution because of it."

Staff writer Jason Green contributed to this report. Contact Bruce Newman at 408-920-5004. Follow him at [Twitter.com/BruceNewmanTwit](https://twitter.com/BruceNewmanTwit).