

Katherine Ottesen

These pages are a salute to the very successful life of a very extraordinary person.

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Katherine Ottesen -September 7, 1909 - December 7, 2001

Katherine Ottesen, one of five sisters from a Norwegian immigrant banker, Otto Ottesen, and a Texas southern debutante, Lorine Millet Lane, (a descendant of Josiah Bartlett, the 43rd signatory of the Declaration of Independence), an accomplished and innovative California artist, interior decorator, horticulturist, chef extraordinaire, and family matriarch died at 1:15 A.M. last Friday at Beverly La Cumbre Convalescent Home in Santa Barbara. She was 92

Katherine Ottesen was formerly married to the Hollywood film director and Broadway hit-playwright, Sidney Salkow. Having graduated in art from UC Berkley, Katie began her own Hollywood career by decorating the homes of members of the film industry such as Meredith Wilson ("The Music Man"), Al Jolson, Nelson Eddy as well as her and Sidney's own Southern colonial home in Mandeville Canyon, Brentwood.

Moving with her two children to Rome, Italy in the mid fifties, she gained notoriety in the December 1957 issue of Life Magazine in a multi-page spread entitled American Women Abroad. With the idea of raising her two children close to the land, she rented an Italian villa with 1 1/2 acres on the Via Appia Antica, and introduced local Italian farmers to the American beefsteak tomato, hybrid table corn and the broad-breasted American turkey. The Italians watched in amazement and appreciation.

In the late 1960's, she returned to the United States to restore a 100-year-old Victorian house in St. Helena, California. All her life she painted, but it was in St. Helena that she painted an arrangement of Mariposa Lilies and Diogenes Lanterns in a pale blue bowl that caught President Nixon's eye for his Summer White House. The painting can be seen in The Architectural Digest December, 1969, issue which features a color picture story of the White House West in San Clemente.

Katie achieved her most successful artistic work in her last twenty-five years living in her self-architected Mexican palapa

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on a secluded beach one hour north of Puerto Vallarta where she perfected her unique brush style and infused the rich colors of the tropics into Mexican lifescapes. Shows of this work included the prominent Thomas Bartlett's Gallery in St. Helena, California.

While in Mexico, she worked with the local agricultural cooperatives to foster the growth of exotic Polynesian and Indonesian tropical fruit for export, and was featured in the Rare Fruit Council Tropical Fruit News, in 1992 and 1993. She especially enjoyed the hot weather and a wide circle of friends, part of the Fiesta Americana of the region.

In Puerto Vallarta, Katie turned her extraordinary culinary skills to instructing dessert chefs of several prominent restaurants including hotel Las Palmas and the Puerto Vallarta hot spot, Carlos O'Briens. Often written up in the Puerto Vallarta English newspaper, The Colony Reporter, one friend described Katie as a "Renaissance Woman" and explained it by saying, "She cooks like she gardens, like she plans a house, like she landscapes it, like she designs the interior, like she rescues and restores old houses, like she designs theater stages, like she teaches international gourmet cooking, like she draws and like she paints."

Her last surviving sister, Mary Ponsart, two years older, survives her. Katherine also leaves behind her two children Lori Ann Cleary and Steven Salkow (Pleasanton), her grand children Zoe Cleary and Ryan Comperatore of Santa Barbara, Stephanie DuPuys Salkow and Robert Louis Salkow of Pleasanton, nephew Maurice Lane Ponsart of Fresno and great granddaughter Brianna Rose-Salkow of Livermore.

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