

# Building a new histor

~ Despite its global renown, groups look for landmark status as way to preserve Bay Shore's 'Tile House'

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For a building that architectural historians describe as internationally significant, the Guastavino House in Bay Shore has been a well-kept secret.

"I grew up in Bay Shore and everybody had known about this sort of unusual house on Awixa Avenue," said Susan Barbash, of Bay Shore-Brightwaters Summit Council's Historic Preservation and Restoration Committee. "But I don't think anybody knew what its significance was until relatively recently when the Bay Shore Historical Society brought it to everyone's attention that it was owned by Rafael Guastavino Jr."

He was the son of the founder of a firm famed for constructing tile-covered domed ceilings in noted buildings, including Grand Central Terminal and the Great Hall on Ellis Island.

This week, Guastavino House, also known as "Tile House," will get a lot more attention. Albany-based Preservation League of New York State has selected say the Spanish Colonial-style house for its Seven to Save list, the nonprofit's annual grouping of the state's most threatened historic places. The list will be released Wednesday.

While the league and other groups are worried about the future of the house, which was on the market for more than two years, they are somewhat optimistic after learning a Center Moriches couple recently signed a contract to buy it and



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**Guastavino House in Bay Shore, which is to be on a nonprofit's endangered structures list.**

intend to restore it.

Guastavino built the house on a 1.2-acre lot on Awixa Creek in 1912 and lived there until his death in 1950. It has been owned since 1952 by Josephina Kramer, who, at the urging of the town and preservation groups, last year rejected an offer from a buyer who planned to demolish it and rebuild on the site.

Real estate broker Eric Ramsaid the sale is slated to close in spring. The house had been listed at \$1.95 million but he said he could not disclose the sale price or names of the buyers.

Rafael Guastavino y Esposito was the son of Rafael Guastavino y Moreno, the founder of Guastavino Fireproof Construction Co. who immigrated to the United States from Spain in 1881. The firm operated from 1889 to 1962 and gained international renown for its strong and beautiful vaults and domes.

"Growing national and international interest in the Guastavino firm means that the house has assumed enormous importance," said Charla Bolton of the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, which nominated the house for the Seven To Save list. "While Guastavino is not a household word, the work of the firm is visible in many of New York's best-known historic buildings: Carnegie Hall, Grant's Tomb and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This residential application may be unique in the world, now that the Guastavino residence in Spain has been lost."

Daniel Lane, a Manhattan architectural conservator and expert on the Guastavino, said "almost every surface on the first floor of the house is covered with tile, including ceilings, and most ceilings are vaulted."

Tania Werbizky, director of

technical and grant programs for the league, said "a building of such outstanding significance deserves official recognition as a landmark at the local, state and national level."

Islip Planning Director Gene Murphy said the house would be eligible for town designation as a "planned landmark preservation district" if the owners agreed. That designation would bar demolition or major alterations without town approval but allows different types of uses.

Priscilla Hancock, vice president of Bay Shore Historical Society, who has spearheaded the effort to save the house, said "we found out that in his garage he had a kiln and he apparently did some experimenting with tiles and glazes," she said. "He had 24 patents."

The garage is in disrepair with a collapsed roof. The house is in better shape but needs work.