

## Step Inside Willis Wonderland, the Extravagant Home of a Valley Artist in a New Pop-Up Book

Allee Willis wrote hits including Neutron Dance and the theme from Friends from her colorful home

CHRIS NICHOLS • 1 HOUR AGO



Willis Wonderland backyard

Photo courtesy Willis Wonderland Foundation

Outrageous songwriter/artist/raconteur [Allee Willis](#) has been gone for five years now, but her colorful world lives on in an extravagant new book: [Willis Wonderland: The Legendary House of Atomic Kitsch](#). The massive tome is an exquisitely crafted tribute to the longtime North Hollywood home of the writer of everything from dance hits like [September](#) and *Neutron Dance* to the theme from TV's *Friends* to the soundtrack for *The Color Purple* on Broadway. The Grammy-winning composer that the *New York Times* called “the queen of kitsch who made the whole world sing” purchased the Streamline Moderne style house in 1980 and spent decades enhancing it with toys and tchotchkes that made her, and her guests smile.



*Willis Wonderland: The Legendary House of Atomic Kitsch Pop-Up Book*  
 Photo courtesy Willis Wonderland Foundation

The original house was built in 1937, one of the first in a neighborhood that was then mostly orange groves. Architect [William Kesling](#) had a distinctive modernist style reminiscent of ocean liners of the time. After Willis bought the home in 1980, she turned the volume up as loud as possible, cranking up the whimsy, fun and wonder with midcentury design classics, personal art and collectibles, mostly from the 1950s and 60s. It's not a surprise that she and Paul Reubens, the late creator of [Pee-wee Herman](#), were good friends. Willis Wonderland, a nickname for the home, seems like it could be a cousin of [Pee-wee's Playhouse](#).



*A page from Willis Wonderland: The Legendary House of Atomic Kitsch Pop-Up Book*  
 Photo by Chris Nichols

Humorist [Charles Phoenix](#) remembers his first time ringing the doorbell. “I stood in awe, basking in the glow,” he writes in his introduction. “The twilight dream scene of tall palms, red and white 1955 Studebaker and bubblegum pink palace was intoxicating.”

The book is nearly as big as a bundt cake and packed with sweet surprises. It allows you to tour the happy home (in miniature) with its creator. You can almost open the cabinets and peek in the closets. There’s Allee playing the drums. There she is in paper doll form, hiding in a chest in the bedroom. There’s a tab or a wheel or a secret analog discovery on every page that allows you to engage in this wacky world.



*A page from Willis Wonderland: The Legendary House of Atomic Kitsch Pop-Up Book*  
Photo by Chris Nichols

“I did a lot of research and looked at a lot of pop-up books to see what was possible,” designer and co-author [Hillary Carlip](#) tells *Los Angeles*. “We found a paper engineer in Paris and an illustrator in Ireland and with me in L.A. it was quite an international team.” Designer [Mike Malkovas](#) has created extravagant pop-up cards, interactive architectural models and a paper Eiffel Tower for Louis Vuitton. “He kept saying pop-ups should be simplified,” Carlip remembers. “And I kept saying I get it, but I can’t because it’s Allee and this house and the collections. The book is on steroids. We had to go all in.”

The book and a recent [documentary film](#) capture a lasting record of the artist and the worlds she created from her Valley home. The house itself was recently listed [for sale](#) and Carlip says she hopes that a buyer can be found who would choose to keep it intact.



*Willis Wonderland living room*

*Photo courtesy Willis Wonderland Foundation*

Proceeds from the book go to the [Willis Wonderland Foundation](#), funding music education for kids. “We did a limited run and they’re going really quick,” Carlip says, grateful at the foundation’s efforts to honor her longtime friend’s memory. “(They) trusted me to do Allee proud.”