

# Creating a Lasting Legacy at International House

**L**aura Siegel Venning (IH-1968-70) and her husband Robert “Bob” Venning describe their family as “an International House trifecta.” The Siegel and Venning families have roots that span I-Houses (yes, plural!) around the country.

The Venning family’s International House story started when Bob’s mother, Corey Elizabeth Brown Sanderson Venning, resided at I-House Chicago while working on her master’s degree in the mid-1940s. She became one of the first women appointed to the U.S. Foreign Service, and as a child, Bob traveled the world with her on diplomatic assignments.



Laura Siegel Venning and her sister,  
Maria Siegel Watt

The Siegel family’s connection to I-House at UC Berkeley began in the 1960s with Laura’s older sister, **Maria Siegel Watt (IH 1960-61)**. Maria and her spouse, Dennis Watt, participated in the Host Family Program to continue

the family’s I-House connection as alumni. Laura followed in her sister’s footsteps to I-House where she lived both as an undergraduate and while pursuing her master’s in art at Cal. A generation later, in the mid-2000s, Laura and Bob’s son, Daniel, completed the Venning and Siegel family’s International House trifecta when he moved into I-House New York.

Laura’s decision to include I-House in her will reflects their family’s deep connection to the mission of International House and belief in the power of dialogue and cultural exchange as tools for fostering peace. She believes that “by talking to one another, you can get over the grievances.”

Laura lived at I-House during a turbulent time in the world and on the UC Berkeley campus. Like many I-House residents of 1960s and ‘70s, she vividly remembers gathering around the television in the Great Hall to watch the news about the Vietnam War. “There was so much to think about and always lots of people to talk with ...

“I-House was, for us, a haven of sorts,” contrasting sharply with the heated debates elsewhere on campus. “It was a safe place where discussions about things like the war could take place in a respectful and understanding environment.” Though supportive of the spirit of much of the protest on campus, Laura was a firm believer in peaceful protest and used her artistic talent to help silkscreen the protest posters that are now iconic of that era.

Her time at I-House was a formative experience that shaped her worldview, her commitment to peace, and her interest in international cultures. In Bob—who had imbibed the I-House spirit from his mother and from his upbringing as the son of a diplomat—Laura found someone with similar values and interests. Together they have shared a life of service, nature, and a love of adventure and travel.

Laura and Bob have also chosen to support causes that align with their values, with I-House being a part of their philanthropy. Laura says, “We’ve included I-House in our plans simply because we want to make it possible for others to have the experiences and tools needed to create a more compassionate world. It’s important to us both.” ■



Bob Venning and Laura Siegel Venning sitting beneath her painting of the Li River in China installed on the 4th floor I-House Berkeley, resident lounge.

By including I-House in your will or trust, through insurance beneficiary designation or a life income gift, you, too, can leave a lasting legacy to help sustain I-House and its mission for the benefit of future generations. To learn more about planning your gift, please visit [ihouse.berkeley.edu/legacygiving](http://ihouse.berkeley.edu/legacygiving) or contact our Alumni Relations and Philanthropy Office at [philanthropy@ihouseberkeley.org](mailto:philanthropy@ihouseberkeley.org) or 510-642-4128.