

HOME & GARDEN

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THE BEAUTY OF BUNGALOWS

By SHEILA MULLANE ESTRADA

For weeks, homeowners in St. Petersburg's Historic Kenwood have been scrambling to spiff, shine, paint and hammer their 1920s-era homes in readiness for the neighborhood's first official Bungalow Festival home tour, scheduled for Nov. 6.

"We'll be showing homes that have never been shown before. They will blow people away," said Bob Jeffrey, a preservation designer and president of the Historic Kenwood Neighborhood Association, which organized the tour.

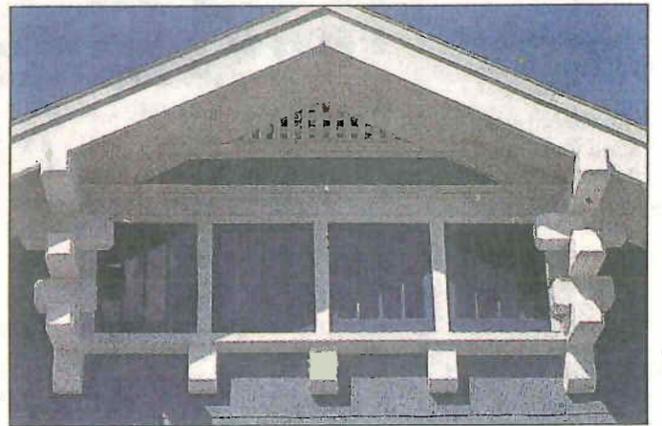
Kenwood was one of the city's first platted "suburbs" (by Charles Hall in 1912) and was completely built out in the city's 1920s boom. The neighborhood has the heaviest concentration of early 20th century bungalows in the state, Jeffrey said.

A bungalow is typically a small, two-bedroom house with a low, sloping roof with wide, shady overhangs, a large front porch and large windows providing the cooling airflow needed for an era before air conditioning.

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Kathy Young's home on Seventh Avenue N displays the classic hallmarks of a bungalow: broad pillars, a deep porch, a low, sloping roof with wide, shady overhangs.



Attic windows of the LaBerge-Gruskin bungalow are flanked by elaborate wooden brackets.



Variation on the theme: This Shingle-style bungalow is the home of Cliff Waters and Joe Stines.

Times photos — CHERIE DIEZ

THE BEAUTY OF BUNGALOWS

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The word "bungalow" comes from the Hindu "bangla," meaning thatched house, and 19th century British Colonialists coined the term to describe the one-story houses with large, encircling porches they found in India.

The bungalow, with its open floor plan, often includes built-in cabinetry, woodworked colonnades, a fireplace and an apartment over the garage or "carriage house."

"When Kenwood was built, if you didn't live in the North Shore or the Old Northeast, this was the place to go," Jeffrey said. "The city built St. Petersburg High School here in 1925."

Bounded by Central and Ninth Avenue N and by Interstate 275 and 34th Street N, the neighborhood retains the flavor of its early years, with narrow brick streets, soaring lines of palms and large, shady oak trees. Mixed among the smaller bungalows are larger Mediterranean and Colonial Revival homes, as well as about 50 similar homes moved there during Central Avenue's commercial boom in the 1920s.

The 19 homes open for viewing next week are representative of the neighborhood's 1,200 homes, of which 1,000 are identified as historic. More than 50 have received official historic designation by the city.

Open-air trolley rides, complete with volunteer guides ready to describe the homes and their place in St. Petersburg history, will be offered from noon until 5 p.m. Nov. 6, originating at Seminole Park (30th Street and Third Avenue N).

In a unique twist to the traditional neighborhood home tour, the festival also features a "Restoration Destination" exhibit in the park. Contractors, real estate agents, and home services and financing agencies will be ready to answer visitors' questions, particularly about how to correctly restore historic homes.

"Over the years, porches have



Hanging cookware frames the view from a kitchen window at the Waters-Stines house, which will be part of next week's tour.

been closed in, hardwood flooring has been covered up or removed, exterior clapboard siding has been covered or patched with plywood or shingles, and large airy windows have been

replaced with jalousies," Jeffrey said. "Many people just go to Home Depot and pick out something on the shelf without thinking if it would look good on the house."



Bungalow isn't the only architectural style in Historic Kenwood. The home of Tom and Debbie Cunningham is Mediterranean Revival.

Today, many companies mass-produce period materials, thereby lowering costs for authentic renovations.

Jeffrey Gilbert is one of many Kenwood homeowners who, Jeffrey says, is hoping to complete renovations on his frame vernacular home at 2100 Burlington Ave. N before next weekend's tour.

"We bought this house because it reminds us of the Old Northeast but without the taxes," Gilbert said this week as he repainted the exterior of his house.

The home was built in 1925, "the same year as the Vinoy," Gilbert said. He has "totally gutted, replumbed and rewired" the house and hopes to replace an original ironwork guardrail and damaged Cuban tiles on the porch, but that won't be done in time for the tour.

Raina Wolfalker is excited about showing visitors all the renovations she has completed at the Burlington House, a six-room boarding house at 2242 Burlington Ave. N. The house has sinks and vanities in every bedroom, a large kitchen and two pantries.

"It's always been a boarding house. I was told the previous owner loved one of his tenants and when she died, he moved North and put the house

up for sale," Wolfalker said. "When I bought it six years ago, it was naked; it looked like a monastery. There were no pictures, no drapes or curtains. It was very unhomey."

Since then, Wolfalker and her husband, Troy, have cleaned and painted and even installed a backyard fountain and fish pond, home to an "exotic white catfish."

The Burlington House cats keep her tenants company, while the Wolfalkers make their house a home, complete with holiday dinners and cookouts for their tenants.

Not all the restored buildings on the Kenwood tour are homes. David Gruskin and his partner Suzanne LaBerge worked out of a St. Petersburg law office until they discovered an intriguing vacant house at 2749 First Ave. N.

"We used to drive by it every day but never noticed it. Then one day when we were out for lunch, we stopped and looked in the windows. The original layout and woodwork had not been changed. We made an offer and here we are," Gruskin said.

The three-bedroom, two-bath Craftsman bungalow, one of Charles Hall's original Kenwood models, was used as a day care center for years. Since buying the home, now a law

office, Gruskin said he has learned it once belonged to a conductor on the famed *Silver Meteor* train.

"The house was built in 1918, and we have restored it back to the way it was in 1918," Gruskin said. "When we removed the carpets and linoleum glued down to the floors, we discovered the original hardwood flooring, and we found the original doors stored away in the attic."

The bungalow also originally had a wide front porch that at some point was closed in. Gruskin reopened the porch, which now serves his office as a break and party area.

Historic Kenwood still has many homes that have not been updated. Jeffrey says they are often snapped up quickly when they come on the market, as prices in the revitalized neighborhood escalate.

"As is" homes that only a few years ago were selling for \$20,000 or \$30,000 are now selling for \$50,000 or more. Rehabbed homes sell in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 range, according to Jeffrey.

"We are excited about our neighborhood," he said. "We want to show it off and hope that some people will come back to buy."

Sheila Mullane Estrada is a freelance writer who lives in Seminole.



Times photos — CHERIE DIEZ

A conference room was glassed in without removing the original woodwork of the 1918 Craftsman bungalow that now houses the law office of Suzanne LaBerge and David Gruskin in the Historic Kenwood neighborhood of St. Petersburg. This is one of the houses open for a tour Nov. 6.