

WHAT'S IT LIKE INSIDE?

A Tour of Bloomington's Most Intriguing Homes

Admit it—there's a house (or two or three) here in Bloomington that you've walked or driven by a hundred times and wondered, "What's that place like on the *inside*? But unless the house ends up on a house tour, or you brazenly knock on the door and ask for a peek, chances are you'll never find out. For this article, *Bloom* editor Malcolm Abrams and I took the latter approach. On a blustery, unseasonably cold April day, we drove the streets of Bloomington and stopped at houses that made us do a double take, knocked on their doors—a copy of *Bloom* and our contact information in hand—and, this being *Bloomington*, we were invited inside!

The homes in this first annual house and garden issue run the gamut of architectural styles—an Art Deco French chateau, a sleek

modernist ranch, the 1830s Thomas Smith house, a tiny craftsman cottage by Bloomington architect J.L. Nichols, and the former home of Dr. Alfred A. Kinsey. In addition to being exquisite examples of Bloomington's diverse architectural heritage, they are—as seen by Steve Raymer's intimate interior photographs—testaments to the welcoming nature of this community. Come inside—we hope you'll enjoy the tour!

By Lee Ann Sandweiss
Photography by Steve Raymer





The palatial Baxter-Chumley house in Elm Heights is faced with sandstone from St. Meinrad, Indiana, has limestone details—window sills, steps, benches, and lions—and a slate roof and walkway. The beautifully landscaped yard, maintained mostly by Beth, has recovered nicely from the spring’s cold snap.

The Castle on the Corner

Lending a breathtaking vision of European elegance to the Elm Heights neighborhood, the “Baxter-Chumley House” was built by the prominent Vonderschmitt family in the 1930s. Owners of the Indiana and Von Lee theaters, the Vonderschmitts were unabashed Francophiles who sent architect Hiram Callendar to France to study provincial manors before he designed their stately home.

“They started building the house in the early 1930s, and it took five or six years to complete,” says Beth Baxter, the current owner with husband Gary Buskirk Chumley. “As far as its style goes, I know it was inspired by the French architecture Callendar saw, but I’ve heard it called several things—French chateau, French Art Deco, French country house.”

Given the size of the house—7,000 square feet, with five bedrooms and six bathrooms—and its lavish architectural detail, inside and out, it’s not surprising that construction took so long. One addition came in the 1950s, when the Vonderschmitts installed a hydraulic elevator. “The elevator was put in after Mrs. Vonderschmitt took a spill down the stairs,” explains Beth. “We use it a lot. I especially find it handy for moving loads of laundry.”

The second owners, Marc and Isabella Musa, lovingly cared for the house for 25 years, making significant improvements such as enclosing the sun porch (which features a stone colonnade), updating the kitchen with new tile and lighting, and having many rooms custom painted. Consequently, Beth, who actually grew up next door, found the house in superb condition when she bought it in 2001.

In October 2002, when Beth and Gary married, they had their spectacular wedding—with a theme they describe as “Old Hollywood Hippie-chic”—at the house. ➔



The Baxter-Chumley family, (from left) daughter Sean, Stardust, Gary, and Beth.

“The decision to marry here stemmed from our love of the house and the ambience we felt it would provide,” says Beth. “For the ceremony we cleared everything out of the living room and it actually looked like a chapel. It was all candle lit, and we created an aisle down the middle of the room with all of the oriental rugs that are runners.”

During the ceremony, a string quartet played on the balcony that overlooks the expansive living room. “At the end of the ceremony, a soloist from the IU School of Music sang ‘Ave Maria’ as we walked back down the aisle,” Beth recalls. “For the reception we tented in the entire back yard and hung chandeliers in each tent. Gary and I had a floor put down so it would be level and covered it with several of our large antique rugs.”

Gary, like Beth, a native Bloomingtonian, has long-standing family ties to Monroe County, as well as Elm Heights. His grandparents, the Buskirks, built the house at 529 S. Hawthorne, while his immediate family the Chumley’s

lived at 532 S. Ballantine. Ironically, Gary now lives in the Vonderschmitt house, while the Vonderschmitt’s old Indiana Theater bears his family’s name because of their generous support during its restoration in the mid-1990s.

In addition to being passionate collectors, Beth and Gary inherited many rare antiques and artworks from their respective families. Their possessions have found the perfect home at 501 S. Hawthorne. “Our things look as if they belong here,” says Gary. “We’re always moving the furniture and rugs around.”

Beth and Gary’s future plans for the house include restoring some of the original landscaping and outdoor structures, including the koi pond and gazebo. “I like to refer to this place as a work in progress,” says Beth. “I never tire of considering possibilities. It was my dream to live here, ever since I was a little girl.”

Note: Although the Baxter-Chumley home has been on a Bloomington Restorations Inc. (BRI) tour, it has never before been photographed for public view.

Four massive trussed beams support the living room’s vaulted ceiling. “Every year we get a huge Douglas fir at Christmas-time and my daughter decorates it,” says Beth. The 200-year-old Empire loveseat (under the window) is an heirloom from Gary’s family. Although he has hundreds of antique Oriental rugs, none of them was large enough to cover the living room floor. “I found this one at Qaisar about five years ago,” says Gary. “It’s about 16’ x 32’.”





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1. A dramatic Art Nouveau staircase, purchased in France by the Vonderschmitts, rises toward a painted dome in the front hallway of the Baxter-Chumley home. Local artist Rob Stone painted the interior of the house—a project which took over a year. The palette of dome colors (primarily rose, gold, and maroon) was inspired by the stained glass windows in the turret.

2. Although she has her own place in Bloomington, Beth's daughter Sean, now 26, has a room fit for a princess at her mom's. The walls, painted in shades of pink and mauve by the Musas, are the perfect backdrop for the antique bed, which features wood inlay and a 200-year-old frame. A floral still life painted by the Belarusian husband of Beth's governess adorns the windowsill.

3. Awash in afternoon light, the dining room features twin corner china cabinets and is furnished with a large antique table that Gary purchased in northern Indiana and chairs that Beth found at an antique mall in Bloomington and had reupholstered. A 150-year-old Sarouk rug—one of Gary's favorites—was purchased at a plantation auction in Kentucky. The walls remain a regal gold with fleur-de-lis accents as painted by the previous owners.

4. Original cabinetry remains in the Baxter-Chumley's spacious kitchen. The Musas installed the Mediterranean tile countertop and backsplash in the mid-1990s.



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People Who Live in Glass Houses

When Marcia Busch-Jones and Ted Jones married 25 years ago, they merged their passion for the arts, travel, and modern design, along with their love for each other. In 1982, a year after their marriage, the couple bought their dream house—a 1969 modernist ranch in the vernal Bittner Woods subdivision.

“The inspiration for the house, as we understand it, came from a plan and a series of illustrations by Flansburgh and Associates in *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine,” says Marcia. “The house is nearly a perfect square, and you might describe it as looking like a tic-tac-toe game, with the atrium in the center, though it’s not quite in the center.”

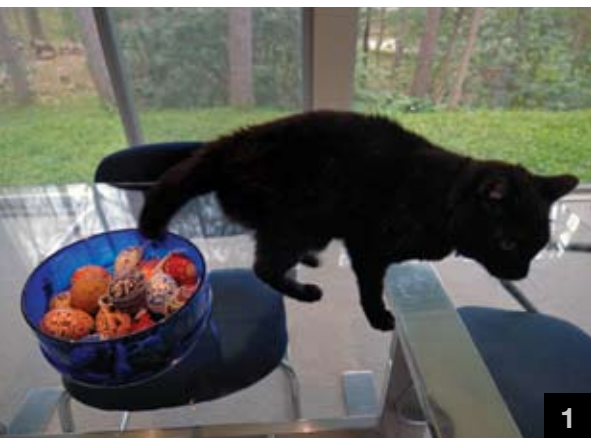
Quite spacious, with 2,500 square feet, 4 bedrooms and 2 ½ baths, the house’s most distinctive feature is the interior glass atrium, where flowering bushes and myrtle put on a



1. Marcia and Ted relax in their open, airy living room—he in a contemporary “bucket” chair; she atop a wooden lacquered elephant—against a backdrop of glass that allows them to enjoy the beautiful outdoor setting year-round. Houseplants thrive in every room, due to the terrific light.

2 and 3. The Jones' home has a cedar vertical cladding exterior and is nestled among a variety of trees—red pine, walnut, cherry, maple, sycamore, and others. “We tried for years to grow grass under the walnut trees, and finally gave up,” says Marcia. “The vinca seems to be thriving.”





1. People—and cats—who live in glass houses see themselves coming and going.... Bear, one of the Joneses' cats, admires his reflection in the glass dining room table. A vibrant collection of painted Czech eggs fill a cobalt glass bowl.

colorful display in spring and summer. In winter, snow and the stark lines of branches create another 3-D seasonal show.

Situated on a large, lushly green lot, the house is surrounded by many varieties of trees and huge rhododendron bushes, which flank the front entrance. In 2004, when property to the east of their house was sold to developers, the Joneses purchased the trapezoidal-shaped lot adjacent to their original property line to ensure privacy and expand their landscaping options. Since shade dominates the rest of the yard, three new beds feature an array of flowering plants, including peonies, lavender, and roses. "Gardening in a sunny area has opened lots of new opportunities," says Marcia.

The home's interior décor perfectly complements its architectural features. The rooms are furnished with classic examples of modern furniture, as well as whimsical pieces like a sculptural steel cube painted 1965 Mustang red. Marcia, who studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and currently directs Creative Services at Indiana University, favors bold color and clean lines—the better to set off the one-of-a-kind objets d'art she and Ted have brought home from their travels. Among their more dramatic foreign acquisitions is a pair of massive bronze lions from Hong Kong that stand guard in the foyer. "I had to drive to Indy and escort them through customs," recalls Ted, who is retired from a 39-year career with the IU Jacobs School of Music.

Says Marcia, "We have not really changed anything significant about the house, and probably won't. I know it's not contemporary (as in 'current') any longer, but it fits the way we live, and we enjoy the clean lines and uncluttered plan. The wide expanses of glass and white walls with narrow black trim feel like a Mondrian painting."

Though the Joneses plan to stay put, the house has numerous frank admirers says Ted. "Many friends and visitors confide that when we are ready to leave this house...they want it!"

2. A massive bronze male lion—his female counterpart is nearby—greet visitors in the foyer. ("Ted may not know that I pet their heads every night before I trundle off to bed," confesses Marcia.) The glass atrium brings the seasons inside—here a spring showing of azalea and Japanese maple, with a rhododendron ready to pop. The media room is visible on the far side of the glass atrium.

3. Tomato red sofas in the media room pick up the warm hues in the Oriental area rug, purchased in Boston by Marcia's father in the 1930s. Each piece of artwork and mask in the eclectic grouping has its own interesting story and provenance. Marcia's brother took the photo of the famed Gloucester seaman statue (far hallway wall) in a nod to their family's New England ancestry.

4. The Joneses' penchant for classic modern furniture, such as the Barcelona sofa and bucket chair, is evident in their living room. Treasures from exotic travels can be found throughout the house. The twin cinnebar lacquered elephants were brought back from China; the woven wall hanging above the fireplace came from the Ivory Coast.



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An Historic “Fixer Upper”

Before moving to Bloomington in 2003, Heidi Ross and Bill Monahan took a cyber drive-by of a potential dream house they had spotted on the Internet. The academic couple was leaving their historic home in upstate New York to take positions at IU—she in the School of Education and he at the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archeology—and wanted an old house with character. When Heidi and Bill visited Bloomington and saw the Thomas Smith house in brick and mortar, they knew their search was over.

Thomas Smith, one of the original Covenanters (an abolitionist reform Presbyterian sect) from South Carolina, began building the structure in 1828. The Federalist-style brick house—allegedly a stop on the Underground Railroad—was small, only 1,500 square feet, with one tiny bathroom upstairs and virtually no storage.

1. From the outside, one can easily miss seeing the addition.



The house needed TLC and some modern amenities to make it comfortable, and Bill and Heidi decided they were up for that challenge. They loved its two-acre lot adorned with mature trees and a grape arbor, and that the house was only a mile walk from Heidi's IU office.

"Regardless of where we've purchased a home—Michigan, upstate New York, or Bloomington—we seem to be drawn to...let's be charitable...*fixer uppers* with character," says Heidi. "Especially when we've done the renovation work ourselves, well, it's simply a lot of work—and a lot of drywall, plaster dust, and chaos. You must be patient."

Working with Steve Percy of Sierra Remodeling, Heidi and Bill designed and built a two-story addition that provided approximately 900 square feet of much-needed living space, including a beautiful master suite and a half bath downstairs and an office and another full bath upstairs. ➔

2. "Bill built the dining room table from two of the original kitchen floorboards in our New York farmhouse," Heidi explains. The chairs are auction purchases, as is the New York oggestyle clock, circa late-19th century.

3. Heidi and Bill in the kitchen on a leisurely Saturday morning. They converted the functional fireplace to gas, so they could avoid smoking up the room. "We lived in upstate New York with wood stoves and fireplaces so long, we needed a break!" Heidi said. Bill created the snack bar out of the original pine countertop and installed the soapstone countertops and sink himself.

As a visitor moves from room to room in this charming home, one is struck by a sense of warmth and serenity—the effect of being surrounded by well-loved antiques and delicate Chinese artworks and mementos. (Heidi’s primary research interests include education in China, where she has collected many objects during her visits there.)

The couple has found restoring this piece of Bloomington history extremely gratifying. “This house has been added onto at least four times, including our own addition,” says Bill. “We like being part of this procession of life. I think of the generations that have lived in our home and enjoy the realization that we’re just one more couple treading on these well-worn floors.”



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1. A peaceful nook in the new addition upstairs might be dubbed, "Still life with antique sled and Chinese scroll." Purchased in upstate New York, the pine sled is from the mid- to late-19th century. The scroll was a gift from a graduate student.

2. The furnishings from their Greek Revival home in New York perfectly complemented the interior of the Thomas Smith house—including the chairs, settee, and regulator clock in the downstairs parlor. "The large red Chinese bureau is from the mid-1800s, and I actually bought it in Bloomington," says Heidi.

3. A 19th-century cottage style bed picked up at an auction makes the upstairs guest room warm and inviting. The antique quilts and pillows, collected from various sources, are perfect accent pieces.

4. With a decorator's eye for detail, Heidi hung botanical prints on the wall behind a carved bureau holding a late-19th-century ironstone bowl and pitcher filled with dried blossoms from their yard. This arrangement is in the upstairs guest room.



The house as seen from South Rogers Street.

The Little Big House On Prospect Hill

It was a bargain at \$1,800 in 1906.

Of the historic J.L. Nichols cottage, current resident Dan Selvaggi says, “It was considered luxury living for the working man.” And indeed it was intended to be.

In his *Album of Artistic Drawings* (1902), J.L. Nichols, Bloomington’s premier architect of the day, wrote of 310 S. Rogers—the plan for Dan’s and wife Cinde Leistikow’s house—“The artistic effect given by the...clean cut outline, the absence of any vulgar details, like bird cage gables...make it a house admired by all.” Adding that the \$1,800 price tag was negotiable, Nichols wrote, “This can be cheapened down and still give you the same general effect for \$1,200.”

Fine materials, such as oak flooring and plaster walls, add to the impression of the builder having spared no expense. Dan points out that the best materials were used in the most visible, public areas. “The front room floors are oak, but there’s white pine in the bedroom,” he says.

At just 850 square feet, the Prospect Hill jewel seems much more spacious—thanks to its nine-foot high ceilings, and open symmetrical floor plan. The languidly spinning ceiling fans and columned archways contribute to a sense of southern—almost tropical—luxury.

Though both from northern Indiana, Dan and Cinde have been Bloomington residents since the '60s and '70s respectively and both





1. Cinde and Dan love the color purple. They claim the sofa, purchased several years ago at Elements, also has the advantage of not showing cat hair. The Iranian rug, with magenta and sea green hues, came from Qaisar Oriental Rugs.

2. "It's such a comforting space," says Cinde. "I love how the large windows invite the outside in. The light filtered through the old way glass creates these amazing patterns on the walls and floors."

3. Cinde and Dan's multitude of houseplants—from orchids to Norfolk Island pine—thrive in filtered afternoon light.

4. The fireplace's green glazed bricks look "almost iridescent" in certain light, says Cinde. A pastel by Bloomington artist Lynne Gilliatt hangs above. The hand-painted orange table on the hearth is by Dave Dieg, another Bloomington artist.



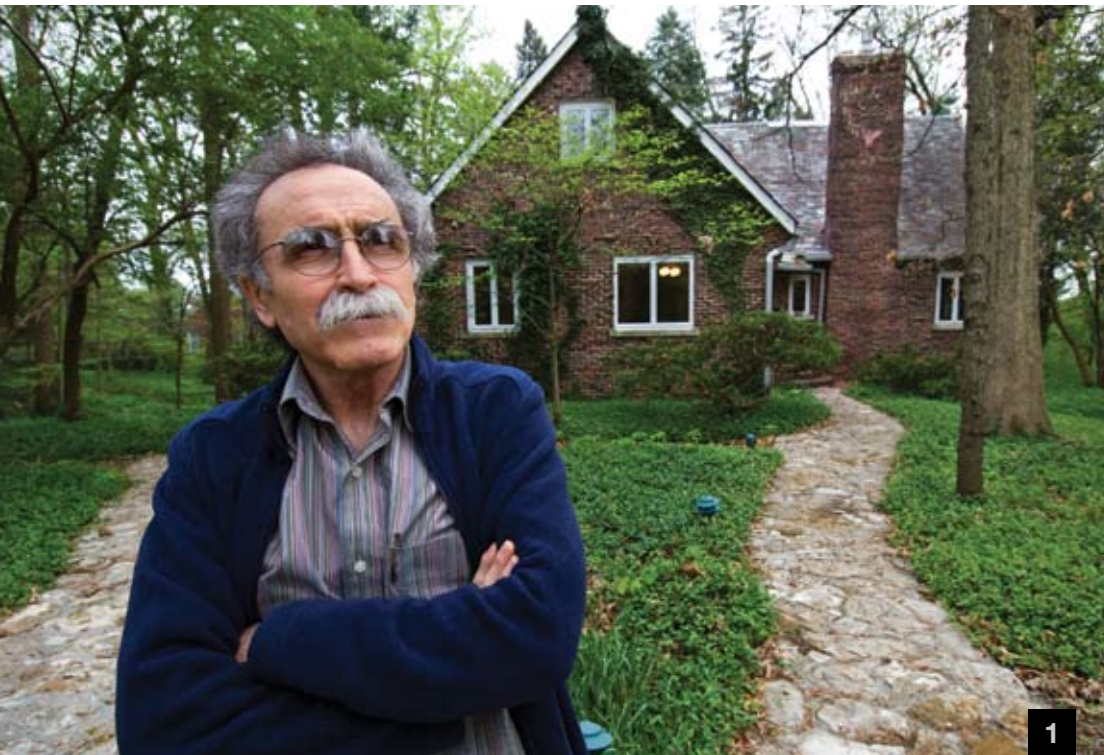
long-admired the house. So, when they had the opportunity to buy it on contract from owner Chris Sturbaum in 2001, they jumped at the chance. The couple was married in the house in 2002.

They have a number of projects in mind to enhance their abode. "We want to frame in the back porch and make that three-season livable space," Cinde says. "There's also a small barn out back that we'd love to restore. Originally, it was probably used as a garage for a buggy or Model T."

"I love this house for its simple elegance, its old-timey charm," Dan adds. "Its openness is so inviting and imparts a sense of spaciousness that makes such a small house doable for us. Here we are at the 'doorstep' to Prospect Hill... it's just a really sweet place to come home to."

5. "I love the feeling of openness in our house," says Cinde Leistikow, here with husband Dan Selvaggi. "The facets at each end of the front three rooms create this great illusion of roundness and the large entryways with columns are a great accent between the rooms."

The House that Kinsey Built



The house at 1320 E. 1st St., arguably one of the most recognized in Bloomington, was designed by Alfred A. Kinsey, the Harvard-trained zoologist and founder of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Indiana University. Built as his family home in 1927 on a huge lot, the red brick house has been owned by Enrique Merino and Consuelo López-Morillas since 1982.

“The house came available for sale when Mrs. Kinsey died,” says Enrique, a professor emeritus of geology at Indiana University. “We had been looking for a while and saw it before it went on the market.”

Enrique and Consuelo raised two active boys in the house, which features gumwood built-ins and trim, plaster walls, four bedrooms, and two full bathrooms. Over the years, the couple has done a lot of work on the house, but mostly to improve what was already there. Big ticket items include replacing 20 windows, refinishing the floors, replacing pipes and the water main, converting the attic to a large bedroom, and enclosing the porch. The most exotic addition was made in 1991, when Enrique and Consuelo had a tree house built

for their sons, Diego and Miguel, now 26 and 21, respectively.

“We had the tree house built one summer while we were away in Spain, so that it would be a surprise for them upon our return,” says Enrique. “Beyond the tree house, there’s a small pond among the trees. It’s quite clogged with decomposing leaves now, but it was a big deal with our sons.”

Besides sustaining the curiosity of Bloomingtonians over the years, the house piqued the interest of Hollywood back in 2004, when the motion picture *Kinsey* was in production. Actor Liam Neeson, who played Alfred Kinsey, the movie’s director, and scriptwriter came to Bloomington to do research and visited the former Kinsey residence.

“They wanted to get a sense of the atmosphere of where Kinsey lived and worked,” says Enrique. “Liam Neeson was quiet and unassuming, but very pleasant—we have a photograph of him with our son Miguel, as a souvenir of the visit.”

Consuelo, a professor of Hispano-Arabic language and literature at IU, was in Egypt when *Bloom* visited. ✨

1. Enrique Merino stands in front of the legendary Alfred Kinsey house at 1320 E. 1st St. When Enrique and his wife Consuelo purchased it in 1982, the yard was so overgrown the house wasn’t visible from the curb. Excessive vegetation from the lot, now most of the shade-loving landscaping is the result of “a policy of benign neglect,” say the owners. “Quite a few people come by and often tell us how much they like what we have done with the yard,” says Enrique. “What we do is just minimal maintenance: picking up dead branches, raking leaves, and having weeds that grow higher than the ground cover pruned once a year.”

2. When building the house, Alfred Kinsey insisted that the masons use deformed bricks—not only were they cheaper, but he liked their quirky texture. Generous dollops of tuckpointing give the brickwork a gingerbread house appearance, while mature ivy climbs the rugged surface with ease.

3. Consuelo and Enrique remodeled the kitchen in the early 1990s, installing new cabinetry, windows, and knocking out a wall. “I can’t even remember what it used to look like,” says Enrique. “It was dark—that I remember. The whole house was very dark, because Mrs. Kinsey used to wash the walls with teal!”

4. The dining room’s warm simplicity is enhanced by a charming oak dining set found in London, Ontario, where the family lived before moving to Bloomington. The newer windows provide a view of an elegant stretch of 1st Street and the large shaded yard.

5. A vibrant Tunisian rug is the centerpiece of the living room, which features oak flooring and gumwood trim. On the far wall, built-in shelving designed by Alfred Kinsey includes a two-shelf section (under the window) that housed his beloved record collection.

