



THE COZY HOMES OF PROSPECT HILL



by **NANCY HILLER** *photography by* **STEVE RAYMER**

The short stretch of Rogers Street that climbs over Prospect Hill offers some of Bloomington's most enchanting views. Under a fresh fall of snow on a dark winter's night, the pear trees sparkle from the candlelight cast through windows of historic homes. The same trees delight us each spring with their billowing white blossoms, a snowy "good riddance" to winter's grey grip.

However lovely it may appear today, Prospect Hill has not always looked so inviting. Those who knew it 40 years ago appreciate that the area was then decidedly "on the wrong side of the tracks." Beyond the imposing homes on Rogers Street, which were built for the families of merchants and judges, most of the area was developed to house railroad workers and employees of the Showers furniture factory. These homes were simple and small—around 1,000 square feet. The oldest cottages date from the end of the 19th century, with newer bungalows built in the 1920s.

By the 1960s many of the original homeowners had moved away or died, and properties were being turned into rentals. Even houses that remained owner-occupied fell into disrepair and the area was considered dangerous.

So how did Prospect Hill become the artful patchwork of modest homes we know today? This story of its renewal centers on one family. In 1964, Bill and Helen Sturbaum, teachers both, bought the now-imposing house at 515 W. 3rd St. While raising five children, the couple invested their time and scarce resources to reverse the area's downhill slide.

To protect their own home, the Sturbaums acquired the house to the east, selling it a few years later to renters they wanted to keep as neighbors. Other homeowners took notice; many, unwilling to have their houses turned into neglected rentals, sold their houses to the Sturbaums when they moved. "At one time or another," Bill

recalls, "we owned all but one house on our block as well as several others in the neighborhood. We rented these houses and when we found a renter who wanted to stay, we sold them the house."

In some cases the houses they bought were in such bad shape they couldn't be mortgaged. Bloomington Restorations, an area nonprofit dedicated to preserving local historic architecture and neighborhoods, made short-term, interest-free loans that allowed essential repairs to be made. Two of the Sturbaums' sons, Chris and Ben, developed such an interest in old-house carpentry through working on these homes that they became restoration professionals.

But there's another twist to the Prospect Hill story. Bloomington has no direct route from east to west across its center. In the 1980s, there was a proposal to remedy this by straightening the portion of West 3rd Street that runs through Prospect Hill. This improvement would have entailed demolition of the Paris Dunning House, built around 1845 for one of Indiana's former governors. The neighbors were appalled—not only by the prospect of having a major traffic route blasted through their neighborhood, but by the proposed destruction of an historic property significant to the entire state.

Anticipating that they would have greater clout collectively than as individuals, the residents organized. Together with Bloomington Restorations and a sympathetic city administration under Mayor Tomilea Allison, they prevailed—with two spectacular results. One is the restored Paris Dunning House, a handsome visual punctuation to West 3rd Street as you approach from downtown. The other is the creation of the Prospect Hill Neighborhood Association, which has revived the area's residential and commercial fabric to create the vibrant, authentic neighborhood we know today.





A Victorian Treasure Rescued

Rick and Joy Harter had been living on Jackson Street when they decided, in 1996, to marry and look for a larger house. They loved living in Prospect Hill but doubted they could afford to stay. One afternoon that December a friend rushed over from a neighborhood gathering with the news that Bill Sturbaum had a house for sale.

The once-grand Victorian at 316 S. Rogers St., built in 1890, had been chopped into apartments and rented out for years. The Harters were able to afford the house only because of its disastrous condition. On their first visit, Joy recalls, "I got within ten feet of the back door and it smelled so bad that I didn't want to go in." But Rick assured her that a deserving home lay beneath the fake-wood paneling and piles of dirt.

They closed the purchase the following March. To stay within budget they understood they would have to do



3

1. Rick and Joy Harter enjoy their home's beautifully restored Victorian porch overlooking Rogers Street with their "pound-hound," Swayze.

2. Rick spent his first summer at the house on extension ladders. He replaced missing siding, then scraped and painted the whole exterior. Over the next few years the Harters landscaped their home's front slope, as well as the entire yard, both front and back.

3. The living room is painted a sultry aubergine. Hanging on the wall is a piece of fused-glass artwork by Dawn Adams. Several ceramic vases by Julia Livingston sit on the coffee table. The 1850 couch (reupholstered) was brought by Rick's family upon emigration from Europe.



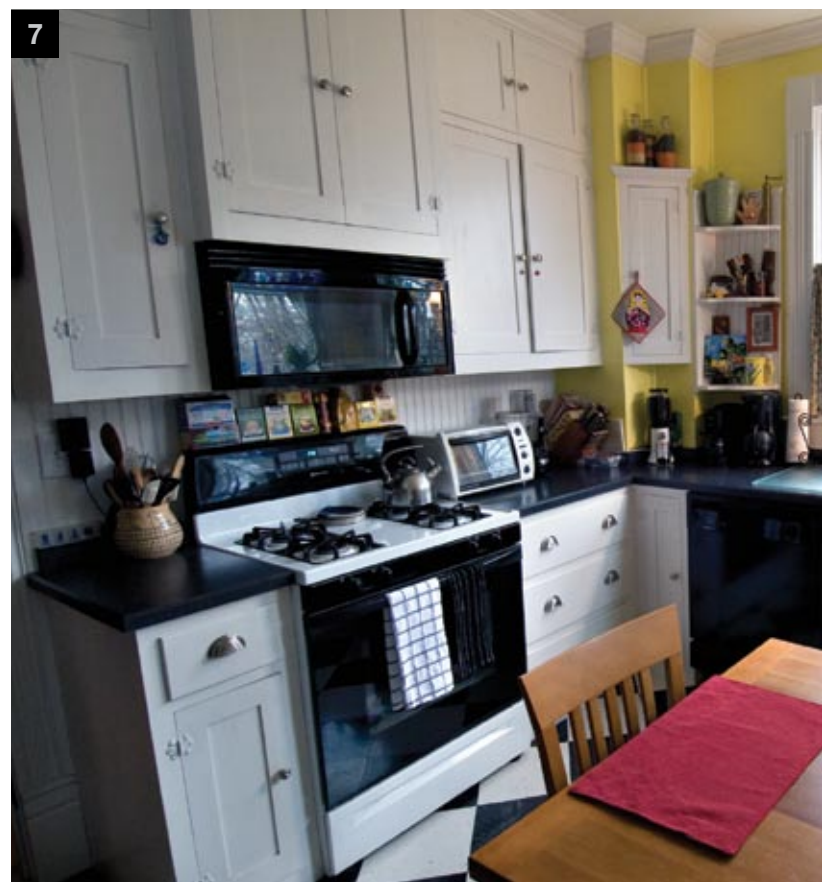
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4. Like the rest of the Harters' home, these small kitchen cabinets built around a disused brick chimney now house a colorful variety of found objects. The palm is just one item belonging to Joy's collection of "anything hand." Joy's parents brought the potholder back as a souvenir of a trip to Russia.



most of the restorative work themselves. Rick groans as he recalls the years of hard, filthy labor. A biology teacher at Bloomington High School North, he spent their first summer in the house on a ladder scraping siding, replacing decorative shingles, and—at long last—applying the paint scheme that now graces the exterior.

One old photo shows his brother and friends black with coal dust from a weekend spent rewiring. Another shows Joy (now executive director of Bell Trace) inching through the shallowest section of the crawlspace to insulate the floor. Each day after work, Joy changed from businesswoman to “stripper,” scraping layers of darkened varnish from the home’s original trim. Rick carved ornate window and door casings to replace missing pieces. For two years they slept in the dining room, while working on the rooms upstairs.



THE ONCE-GRAND VICTORIAN, BUILT IN 1890, HAD BEEN CHOPPED INTO APARTMENTS AND RENTED OUT FOR YEARS.



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5. The Harters have furnished their dining room (which served as their bedroom for the first two years while they worked on the house) with cherry furniture and an Oriental rug purchased at auction. On the wall hang two Haitian primitives that they bought on a visit to Key West.

6. The home's ground-floor windows retain their original upper sashes, which are bordered with stained glass. Rick reproduced original baseboard and door trim, in addition to recreating the staircase's banister. The built-in was made by NR Hiller Design.

7. Rick and Joy gutted the kitchen, which had been fitted with a hodgepodge of cast-off cabinets while the home was a rental. They had new cabinets made in a style sympathetic to their home's architecture. Rick painted the cabinets, as well as the rest of the house—inside and out.

8. This scalloped-edge blind in the dining room frames part of Joy's collection of cobalt blue glass. The two shorter bottles are Wheaton glass from New Jersey, where her grandparents lived when she was a child.



One job they did hire out was cleaning the heating ducts. "The guy who cleaned them held the vacuum a foot above the vent, and a black cloud the same diameter as the vacuum pipe came out," Rick recalls. The couple hired Golden Hands Construction to rebuild the front porch and the backyard barn.

The Harters love their home with passion, not least because they have invested so much of themselves in it. And they don't ever want to endure another hands-on restoration!

8





A House and a *love affair* Renewed

Take one statuesque female flamenco dancer from Terre Haute, add an artistic psychologist of Italian ancestry, and what do you get? In the case of Christina Collins and her husband, Caesar Pacifici, you can count on a home that's both elegant and dramatic.

Chris and Caesar may be new to the neighborhood (Chris bought their house at 812 W. 3rd St. in 2005), but their history in Bloomington goes back 30 years, to the time when Chris first lived here. The couple met in 1978 when Caesar's New York-based band played a gig at the Gables. They fell in love and tried to make a long-distance relationship work. But eventually it faltered and both mar-



THE HOUSE'S MODEST FACADE HIDES A STRIKINGLY SPACIOUS INTERIOR.



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ried others, though they kept in contact sporadically as friends.

Chris moved to New York in 1985, and Caesar relocated to Eugene, Oregon, in 1991. They fell out of touch until the late 1990s when Chris found her old flame through a Google search. When she moved here to be closer to her mother, Caesar was among the many friends who received her new address. By now both were divorced and unattached, and Caesar came to town for a weekend reunion. Magically, they picked up their romance right where they'd left off. In November 2006 they were married in the living room of the house that Chris had so painstakingly renovated.

1. The exterior of Christina Collins and Caesar Pacifici's home on West 3rd Street exemplifies the modest architectural style in which the majority of Prospect Hill homes were built. The area was originally developed to house workers employed by the railroad and nearby Showers Brothers furniture factory.

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2. An avid cook, Chris had a wall removed between the kitchen and what had been the home's third bedroom to create a larger preparation area and a most attractive dining space.

3. With its east-facing window, dramatic wall color, and beautiful furnishings, the dining room provides a gracious space for entertaining. Antique stained glass brightens the window. A Mucha print from the couple's honeymoon in Prague hangs on the wall, next to a scarf that was given to Chris by a former dance instructor.

4. The living room at the back of the house greets visitors as a marvelous, large surprise, considering the home's perfectly modest elevation from the street.



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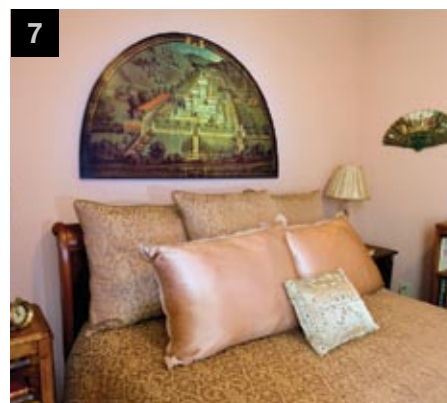
5. A vase displays dried seed heads from a money plant. The niche, located in the house's central hallway, was built by previous owners. Chris painted its interior a different color from the surrounding walls to set it off.

6. With its soft colors and filtered light, this former parlor at the front of the house now makes a comfortable guest room.

7. The arch-topped picture over the bed reproduces a 15th-century plan created by architect Van Utens for his clients, the Medicis. When she lived in her New York apartment, Chris thought of it as her country house.

The couple loves Bloomington, for its warmth and affordable culture. "You could never go see someone like André Watts for free in New York!" marvels Chris. They also love their neighborhood, where several of Chris's student-era friends still reside.

Their house's modest facade hides a strikingly spacious interior, with a living room (added to the house's original footprint) that is "big enough to roll up the carpet and practice dancing." Chris hired Steve Wendt for the interior remodeling, including removing a wall so she could convert a bedroom into a dining room. She had wood flooring installed in the living room, from which French doors lead out to a new screened-in porch. The rooms are painted with intense colors and decorated with such treasures as a Spanish scarf (given to Chris by her flamenco teacher) and a Mucha poster brought back from the couple's honeymoon in Prague.



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THE LIVING ROOM IS “BIG ENOUGH TO ROLL UP THE CARPET AND PRACTICE DANCING.”



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8. The couple had a gas log installed so they would use the fireplace more often. Not surprisingly, it is now a focal point of the house. Elsewhere in the home are several wonderfully sensitive portraits done by Caesar, who is a talented artist.

9. In another corner of the living room sits a handmade rocker next to one of Caesar's five guitars, which he likes to keep handy for when he's struck by the mood to play.



An *artistic* Collaboration

Teresa Miller and Dan Allen both have backgrounds in fine art, and it shows. From the pair of stone lions standing guard at their front steps to their magical, enclosed backyard with its sunken patio of salvaged brick, their home is rich with visual delights inside and out.

They first moved into the 1914 bungalow as renters in the mid-1980s. The house, at 511 W. 3rd St., was the first of the Sturbaums' neighborhood-project acquisitions. After three years, they recall, "Bill and Helen offered to sell the house to us on contract. It was incredibly generous of them and we could not have bought it otherwise."

A decorative screen of silhouetted tools on the porch, fashioned as a gift by a friend, hints at the couple's esteem for craftsmanship, which is visible throughout their home. They have restored the place to painstaking standards, largely with their own hands.

Teresa and Dan have furnished their home in warm, period-inspired style. A vintage couch, comfy chairs, and a ticking antique clock mix well with Oriental rugs and African art. The oak floors retain their decades-old patina. The original layout remains intact, with a small kitchen and a single bathroom—but what inviting rooms they are!





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1. Dan and Teresa have landscaped the slope at the front of their home in a formal style that hints at the richly developed aesthetic visitors will find inside. The pebbled stucco gable is an unusual architectural detail in Bloomington's bungalows.

2. Louis, a standard poodle, is very much a part of the Allen-Miller family.

3. The home retains its original sash windows, which have been lovingly maintained. This pair floods the dining room with light on sunny days.

Describing their home, they say "There's so much about it we adore, but perhaps the most endearing quality is its 'situation.' Being a part of Prospect Hill Neighborhood is really a wonderful thing...the old houses and outbuildings, alleyways, mature trees and shrubs, limestone sidewalks, and above all the incredible mix of people, all of whom share a love of the area. As for the house itself, it combines the convenience of being so close to downtown and the campus [where both work] with a feeling of seclusion the way it's nestled into the hill above street level."

Teresa sums up their feelings this way: "Dan and I met during our art student days and were married just before moving into this house 24 years ago. It is the product of our collective creative efforts and our life together."

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4. Dan and Teresa have not altered the original layout of their home, which has two bedrooms (the second of which they use as an office) and just one bath. But what a bathroom it is! The room is warm and inviting, with handsome Arts and Crafts tile on the floor and walls. The wall-hung cabinets were made by woodworker Harold Jones.



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5. The kitchen is small and very practical, with a U-shaped layout and cherry cabinets made to order by Harold Jones. An adjoining pantry (not shown) is charmingly decorated and provides valuable additional storage.

A Sears *kit home* Restored



After more than 40 years in their family's original Prospect Hill home and with their five children grown and gone, Bill and Helen Sturbaum agreed (though not without a few initial disagreements) that it was time to downsize. The couple had bought a small house up the road, thinking that it would be ideal for Helen's brother. When he found another house, they decided to move in themselves.

The "new" house (built in 1941) at 616 W. 3rd St. had been a rental for years but retained much of its original character. Luckily, the woodwork had never been painted over, the floors were in essentially good repair, and the interior was graced with several lovely arches between rooms.

Still, downsizing from 2,200 to 1,000 square feet was a challenge. Even after giving away many of their possessions to family and friends, Bill and Helen wanted more space. They hired Golden Hands Construction—the company started by their son Chris, whose lead carpen-



ter is their youngest son, Ben—to restore the interior and finish half of the basement. This gave them a second bathroom, a laundry area, and a recreation room where their visiting grandkids could "hang out." They kept the other half of the basement for a workshop and garage. Later, they added a painting studio for Helen on the main floor and a screened back porch, where they spend much of their summers.

While researching his new home's history, Bill discovered its likeness in a book on Sears kit houses. "The Berwyn" was just one of many models sold through catalogs during the early- to mid-20th century. The materials for the Sturbaums' kit house had originally cost \$1,250.

The catalog illustration provided the best possible guide to restoring the house's exterior. Bill and Helen replicated the original shutters, porch post, and even the flower box to create this picture-perfect restoration of a darling, well-built home. ✨



THE MATERIALS FOR THE KIT HOUSE HAD ORIGINALLY COST \$1,250.

1. Helen and Bill downsized from their original Prospect Hill home. The two, along with their sons Chris and Ben, have played a central role in the neighborhood's revitalization.

2. When the Sturbaums bought their house it was covered in white aluminum siding with details painted a screaming blue. The post between the arches at the entry door had been replaced with a flimsy-looking metal support that bore no relationship to the architecture of the house. They had the aluminum siding removed, added shutters and a window box,



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lower box, batten-type shutters and cozy arched entrance make this a friendly home, simple in outline and inexpensive to build the Sears way. Five bright sunny rooms are the most approved bungalow arrangement, bath and bedrooms opening off hall, basement stair under the main roof. The exterior looks equally attractive when finished with beveled siding or wide stained shingles.

and had a new post built according to the picture they found in a Sears house catalog. The home's exterior has since been painted in period-appropriate colors.

3. The Sturbaums' youngest son, Ben, built the dining table of oak and maple, turning the legs on his lathe. A much appreciated screened porch is visible through the windows.

4. The house retains its original windows, trim, and wooden floors. Walking from room to room, visitors will find several of Helen's own paintings, as well as numerous artifacts from her years growing up in India as a daughter of missionary parents.

5. Ever the student of his neighborhood's history, Bill found his "new" home in a catalog of Sears kits and used this illustration to guide the exterior restoration.