

Custom-designed living

Jim and Mary Burns are keeping alive their home's original warm spirit

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The Colonial Revival home at 2318 Vermont was custom built for gracious living.

Constructed by Quincy architect Martin Geise, the house was designed for the Moorman sisters, who moved there in 1929. The location was then known as the Morton Farm, and this structure was one of the earliest to appear in the neighborhood.

Upon her death in 1971, Virginia Moorman bequeathed the house to the Presbyterian Church for use as a parsonage. The location proved too distant from the church at 24th and Monroe, and in short order the home was bought by Mary Burns, who has lived there for 31 years.

Mary was immediately attracted to the structure, which is a type not often seen in Quincy. The steeply-pitched gambrel roof was a departure for Geise, who studied with Ernest Wood as a young man and later worked for Harvey Chatten.

Most of Geise's residential work was in the Prairie style, an influence that is reflected in this home's open floor plan and use of bold rectangles. The home is symmetrical, and a dramatic walnut staircase rises directly from the central entry hall. Large windows form the focal point at the top of the stair and are made more striking by lace window treatments.

The second floor features three bedrooms, one of which was unusual-

ly large for its day.

"The sisters shared a 20-foot-by-20-foot room with two large closets," Mary says. "Now we can fit a couch and a television in the room."

On the main floor, a spacious living room on the east side of the entry hall is a favorite place to relax.

"That's where we like to just sit down and end the day," Jim says, especially when there's a fire in the huge brick fireplace.

A Fuego insert is a modern touch that allows the couple to enjoy the flickering flames without creating a chilling draft.

This room is one of the elements that most reminds Mary of her childhood home in Oak Park. "I'm used to this type of house, with a fireplace and walk-arounds on both floors."

Her sense of connection is enhanced by the coincidence that Martin Geise also built Jefferson School, "the first school I taught in," Mary says.

French doors separate the living room from a family room that Jim and Mary created from a screened porch. That project and the remodeling of the kitchen and a bathroom were the only significant changes the home required.

"I'm so glad that the woodwork was never painted," Mary says. "And the dark finish is perfect for the house."

French doors also frame the dining room, which is on the west side of the central hallway. A chandelier in the

entry is original to the home, and the one centered over the dining table was given to Jim and Mary by her parents when they moved out of the home where they raised their family.

Antiques, including a secretary from Mary's great-aunt and a century-old sofa and lamp, accent the style of the decor, which Mary has "tried to keep close to Victorian."

Both Jim and Mary appreciate a house with a sense of history. They have made several visits to Jim's family in Ireland, where the ancestral home — dating from 1660 — still stands, now serving as a turf barn.

A small photograph of the structure hangs in the living room next to a painting of a strikingly similar building. The painting was given to Jim by a friend who had never seen the photograph, a coincidence that lends an entertaining touch of mystery.

Similarly, older houses attract stories of

harmless oddities that just can't be explained, but add color and character. Mary smiles when she recalls the whooshing sound made at times by the wind in the building's back door.

"That's Virginia, our friendly ghost," she says with a laugh. "I like a home that's lived in. Growing up in a home with five brothers and sisters, that's what I'm used to."

In a house custom-designed for style and comfort, the Burns family keeps the spirit of warmth and hospitality alive.



H-W Photo/Michael Kipley

The steeply pitched roof of the home of Jim and Mary Burns at 2318 Vermont resembles that of a barn.