

# RESTORING GUSTAV STICKLEY'S SYRACUSE HOME

BY DAVID RUDD

**F**ROM OUTSIDE, the house Gustav Stickley bought for his family at 438 Columbus Avenue in Syracuse, New York, in 1900, a handsome three-story wood-shingled home in the Queen Anne Style, is typical of its time and place among the country's upscale residential neighborhoods.

Inside, though, is something truly remarkable. In 1902, after a



2015



2018

Christmas Eve fire damaged the original interior of the home's first two floors, Stickley reconstructed them in what came to be known as his "Craftsman Style," thereby creating the forerunner of interior designs for a generation of American homes in burgeoning residential neighborhoods in cities and towns across the nation.

The Stickley family lived in the house on and off from 1900 until Stickley's daughter Barbara Stickley Wiles sold it in the mid-1950s. (Stickley died in 1942.) The house then had a series of owners over the next half-century, including Stickley Partners, Inc. (in which my company, Dalton's, was one of the two partners) until 1996, when L. & J. G. Stickley Company, Inc., the company Gustav's relatives had formed during the Craftsman era, bought the house to prevent it from being dismantled and preserve it for future generations.

The Stickley Company donated the house to the University Neighborhood Preservation Association (UNPA) in 2016. Since then, the UNPA has led a campaign to restore the house, with contributions of funding and other support from an array of contributors and philanthropic supporters, including the New York State Environmental Protection Fund, the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the New York State Homes and Community Renewal Urban Initiatives.



### LOOKING BACK, MOVING AHEAD

This past June, completion of the exterior restoration was celebrated at a gathering at the house by more than 125 Stickley aficionados and historic preservationists.

At the event, Michael Lynch, director of the Division of Historic Preservation of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, put into focus the historical significance of the house. Speaking from the

newly reconstructed front porch, he said "This is a place where genius was revealed. Within these walls, surrounded by an environment wholly of his own creation, Gustav Stickley developed and promoted the Craftsman lifestyle to the nation and the world.

"As one of the birthplaces of the Arts and Crafts movement, this house ranks with the William Morris Red House in the UK, and the Oak Park, Illinois, Home and Studio of Frank Lloyd Wright. This is where the Craftsman style originated. Right here. This is world-class."

### FASCINATING PROCESS

As someone with a long and intimate acquaintance with the house, I found the different steps in restoring the exterior fascinating. A significant part of it was the reconstruction of the original front porch, which had been removed more than 50 years ago. Portions of the original columns were used in reconstructing the porch, and other parts—most significantly the original capitals—were discovered under the old porch and were duplicated with molds to provide exact replicas.

The exterior restoration also included structural stabilization; extensive repairs to the siding, trim, and windows; a new roof; asbestos abatement; and painting the house in the same colors that extensive research determined Stickley himself used. The waviness of the glass in the restored windows affords one a beautiful experience of the light illuminating the 116-year-old chestnut wainscoting with its original dark finish.



### A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

The celebration of the completion of the exterior was hosted by the Gustav Stickley House Foundation and the University Neighborhood Preservation Association. Fundraising is now underway for the estimated \$2.5 million needed for the interior restoration.

Ownership of the house will eventually be transferred to the Onondaga Historical Association, which will oversee the house as a unique museum and guest house that will offer visitors the experience of spending time in its historic living space. The plan is for several guest suites to be created on the second and third floors, with an elevator on the rear of the house to make it fully handicapped-accessible without disturbing the envelope of the original home. The first floor, which will be interpreted the way Gustav created it in 1903, will be used for small events by local organizations and individuals and could also be used for small exhibitions.

Around 1980 an apartment was built in the basement of the house. The foundation sits far enough above ground that the apartment gets natural light, and it

is large enough to be a comfortable space that could accommodate a caretaker who would manage the site's day-to-day care.

The Gustav Stickley House Foundation's immediate undertaking is to raise \$170,000 to complement a \$500,000 grant that has been applied for. This money will be spent on restoration of the first floor and mechanicals for the house including plumbing rough-ins for all floors, a fire suppression system, and electrical, heating, and air-conditioning systems.

Even as the house sits now, however, without much restoration done inside, it is a magical experience.



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