

505 COLLEGE S.E. / THE AMBERG HOUSE

Hosts: Deb Cloney & Scott Kammeraad

GREETER: David and Hattie Amberg commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design this uniquely beautiful home in 1909. Wright left for Europe at about this time and placed the project in the capable hands of his talented associate, Marion Mahoney. With a degree from MIT, she was a gifted architect in her own right - the first female to be licensed in her profession in the United States. George Mann Niedecken was hired to design the furniture, rugs and fixtures and may have been responsible for the stained-glass and the mural (now painted over) above the fireplace as well.

The exterior of the home displays characteristics of Wright's Prairie Style, including a strong horizontal emphasis in the low slope of the roof, the extended bands of windows and the use of long, narrow bricks that are set with a mortar technique that draws the eye horizontally along the facade.

There is a respectful use of natural materials inside and out. An interplay of closed-in areas leading to open spaces (compression and release) exemplifies Wright's belief that "architecture is to be experienced, not observed". The Prairie Style architects wanted their buildings to blend with the surrounding environments and planned windows, bays and verandas to create vistas that merge the exterior with the interior. The use of natural light and colors inspired by nature contribute to the overall effect. Integrating the driveway into the design of the house is also a common feature of Wright's architecture.

The Amberg's lived in the home for 15 years. David was prominent in local business and an active member of Temple Emmanuel. Hattie was a daughter of the Houseman Department Store family. Their daughter, Sophie, married Meyer May and they lived in another Wright home just a block away. Hattie and Sophie could wave to each other from their respective verandas.

Other notable families followed the Ambergs - the Herpolsheimers of downtown Grand Rapids department store fame and Theron Goodspeed who was the president of the Stickley Brothers Furniture Company. The home was furnished with the Arts and Crafts Style furniture for which the company was known.

In the 1960's the home was divided into 5 apartments, fortunately without major damage to the original structure. In 1967, the home was purchased by Frank and Linda DeJong. They recombined the three upper level apartments to create their own living space, rented out the two apartments on the lower level and began much-needed repairs. Linda was instrumental in saving not only this home, but was also part of the movement to preserve the entire neighborhood. She spearheaded the effort that resulted in Heritage Hill receiving designation as a National Historic District just in time to prevent the demolition of almost 70% of the homes as part of an "urban renewal" project.

Extensive renovation was undertaken by the next family, the Trammels, in the late 1970's and it continued when noted local historian, Tom Logan, who worked in the health field, and his wife, Anne, purchased the property in 1983. Anne was responsible for the nascent stages of the charming gardens. They were loving caretakers of the home for 30 years.

In 2013, the home was sold to the current owners, Scott Kammeraad and Deb Cloney, who have spent the last several years making this home suit the needs of their family in an artful and craftsmanlike way. They have blended one of the lower floor apartments into the main house, added a half bath and have made major changes in the kitchen, the bedrooms and on the lower

floor. They have also added a two-car garage that perfectly matches the style of the house. Scott is a skilled carpenter and has done much of the work himself, staying true to character of the home. The furniture, including many Stickley pieces, and the artwork that they have chosen complement the beauty of the residence. Frank Lloyd Wright and Marion Mahoney could not have asked for better stewards of their masterpiece.

UPPER LEVEL: The stairway of the close-feeling entry way opens to the light-filled space of the living room, with earth-toned stained-glass, glowing oak woodwork and an inviting fireplace. A huge veranda is to the left and a few stairs up to the right lead to a stunning dining room with an open view to the newly remodeled kitchen. A cozy “contemplation corner” is at the far end. Bands of windows unite the two main rooms, while a change in levels, a ceiling beam and changes in ceiling treatments visually separate them. The kitchen was entirely remodeled in 2016 and it is now a chef’s dream. The owners opened up the space, combining the kitchen, butler’s pantry and servants’ dining area to create what Deb and Scott consider the new focal point of their home.

To the left of the entry stairs is the private area of the house starting with a potting porch and a morning room (now a study) with a distinctive fireplace made of the same bricks as the exterior. At the end of the hall is a bath with original tile that was for the “captain’s quarters” (David Amberg’s bedroom), and Hattie’s room with its own bath that is now the master bedroom. Scott has made even the closets of these rooms into works of art! A third bedroom is across from the master. Classic Stickley furniture, reminiscent of the Goodspeed days, graces these rooms.

LOWER LEVEL: This part of the home was one of the two remaining apartments. There is the original sewing room, a full bath, a boiler room, a laundry room and an exercise room. The largest space is now a card room and a family entertainment area. The remaining apartment is used as a Bed & Breakfast. The tranquil gardens that surround the home are worth a visit.