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For the love of bungalows

Home style incites devotion from a legion of fans, including Kansas Citians

By Stacy Downs
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The once-humble bungalow is reaching superstar status.

A spate of books and magazines celebrates this home, the model for Arts and Crafts style. Even fan clubs are forming, including one in Kansas City.

"I live on a street with a tunnel of front porches," says Jan Bentley, founder of the Kansas City Bungalow Club, in its ninth month. "It's where everyone in the neighborhood congregates. There's something special about that."

Bungalows typically are small one- or 1 1/2-story houses built mostly between 1910 and 1930. They have low-pitched roofs and a horizontal shape. Tapered porch columns, wide roof overhangs with exposed rafter tails and lots of windows give them charm.

After Bentley moved into her bungalow several years ago, she noticed the house type throughout the city, especially in neighborhoods between 49th and 63rd streets bordered by Oak Street and the Paseo. Bungalows can also be found in Kansas City, Kan., and cities in northeast Johnson County.

Bentley read about how the Twin Cities Bungalow Club in Minneapolis/St. Paul was dedicated to saving bungalows from demolition and thought a club in Kansas City, with a mission of preservation and education, could be popular. She envisioned members gaining ideas by having meetings inside a different bungalow each month and sharing remodeling resources.

The response to the Kansas City Bungalow Club has exceeded Bentley's expectations. More than 100 people have joined so far, and the Historic Kansas City Foundation honored them with a preservation award this year. Future plans include bungalow tours.

"No two are just alike," says John Brinkmann, founder and publisher of American Bungalow magazine, based in Southern California. "Yet most people recognize them when they see them."

The bungalow has its roots in 18th-century huts from the Indian province of Bengal. The British adapted it, then North Americans.

Bungalows vary in different parts of the United States. In Chicago, most bungalows feature lots of decorative glass and brick. In California and Texas, bungalows take on more of a Mission church look with Spanish-style tile roofs and arched doorways and windows. In Kansas City, most bungalows are Craftsman style with beveled-glass windows and partial native limestone cladding.

But what all bungalows share is the philosophy behind them, says Brinkmann. When they were

built, they were economical because they were small and didn't require servants. They also celebrated nature with their huge front porches and use of local materials on the exterior. Inside, they typically featured good-quality woodwork, prominent fireplaces and built-in bookcases.

Like the Arts and Crafts movement, bungalows were a rebellion against the Industrial Age. "Now they're a rebellion against McMansions as people are reviving urban neighborhoods," Brinkmann says.

As appreciation is growing, the property values of bungalows are increasing. David Hardin of Kansas City likes to tell people the history of his bungalow. It was built for \$4,000 in the 1920s. Now it's valued at \$300,000.

"Bungalows are deceiving," says Hardin, a remodeler. "They look small on the outside, but they're roomy and open on the inside."

Bungalows usually have a living room, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor. If there is a second floor, it is usually only big enough for a bedroom, bathroom and storage. Hardin appreciates the informal, comfortable feeling of bungalows inside. He's lived in two and has renovated several others.

Betsy Green of Kansas City bought a bungalow the first day it came on the market. She loved how the quarter-sawn oak woodwork was preserved, including built-in bookcases with beveled-glass doors and a china hutch in the dining room.

"The wood goes great with my antiques," says Green, a professor of communication sciences and disorders at Rockhurst University. "I also like the multicultural diversity in my neighborhood."

The popularity of bungalows waned shortly after World War I. Cape Cods and English cottage-style Tudors became the rage. But the bungalow lived on, sort of. Architects say the ranch, built for decades after World War II, evolved in part from the bungalow, particularly with respect to the roof overhang and open interior floor plan.

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