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Gables Galore

By: Jillian Kalonick, TIMEOFF Bucks County

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After a case of home envy at the Bucks County Designer House, inspiration is sure to follow.

The most difficult thing about touring the annual Bucks County Designer House has to be going back to your own humble abode afterward. No matter how beautifully decorated it is, it can never look as great as a place where no one has ever, say, spilled red wine on the carpet, or cleaned muddy paw prints off the floor, or done any other business of human living.

Despite the severe case of home envy it evokes, the 1885 Queen Anne style Victorian house is perfect inspiration for the decorating

urge that often follows spring cleaning. Seven Gables, the 31st annual Bucks County Designer House, organized by the Village Improvement Association of Doylestown, Pa., will be open for tours through May 28. Money raised will benefit Doylestown Hospital



Photo Gallery

Seven Gables, a vernacular Queen Anne-style house built in 1885, is the 31st annual Bucks County Designer House.

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and the group's community projects.

The home, on the corner of West Court and West streets, was first owned in the 19th century by William Fenton Geil, a funeral director who was also a jobber and furniture fitter. Michael Calhoun and Thomas Galt are the current owners of the property, which has undergone a major renovation for its reincarnation as Seven Gables, as shown in the before-and-after pictures in each room.

Nina Elo-Piacquad of Nina at Home LLC in Yardley, Pa., says the chance to design a room from a blank slate is a rare opportunity. As designer of a third-floor bedroom meant for a young lady she calls "Glamour Girl," Ms. Elo-Piacquad took her inspiration from trends from the 1940s.

"I didn't want to do something frilly or over-the-top girlish," she says. "I wanted something more sophisticated. I really love mixing styles... I'm crazy about silver and polished nickel right now, and that was in the back of my mind."

The polished nickel shows up in small details — the knobs on the vanity, studs on the back of a vanity chair and the curtain rod and even details on a pillow. Ms. Elo-Piacquad chose a robin's egg blue for the walls and decided to paint the flooring black for contrast. A vanity sits below a round mirror, typical of '40s style, and a mirrored antique bureau brings a subtle shine to the room.

Ms. Elo-Piacquad fell in love with the antique chandelier in the middle of the room, which is centered by a cobalt blue globe, and used a reproduction Venetian glass chandelier by the bed. The result is a room that's elegant and glamorous without being overdone, and even looks like a place you could actually live in.

"I think it's about selecting objects that you love and the elements that reflect that retro style," says Ms. Elo-Piacquad. "With the circle mirror, I knew I had to have that to bring the '40s element in... Even though you're using different styles and different periods, it's selecting elements to reflect the era that you're trying to evoke. When I saw that fabric for the curtains, I just fell in love with the big paisley and the bold pattern. It's from that era, but the scale of it makes it contemporary. The fabric is cotton/linen, so it's not overly showy. It humbled the room a bit."

Another nod to vintage elements is found in a corner guest bath designed by Beth Shechter and her sister-in-law Donna Schechter. An Art Deco theme is accomplished with black-and-white tile and a 1930s telephone, and a tub original to the house. A small room is made bigger by dramatic drapery that emphasizes the high ceiling.

The billiard room on the third floor, designed by Mt. Lake Pool & Patio of Doylestown, is meant to be an in-house escape. The Hemingway-inspired décor includes wicker furniture, a mural by Masterworks Decorative Painting, details such as Jack Daniels pool cues and books by Papa himself. A flat-screened TV will be playing sports movies nonstop during tours, and a quote by Herodotus stenciled on the wall makes the room's purpose clear: "If a man insisted always on being serious, and never allowed himself a bit of fun and relaxation, he would go mad or become unstable without knowing it."

Norman Kohl of Interior Design & Merchandising Solutions of Doylestown went for a



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cozy, comfortable feel for the living room, while highlighting its architectural details and the Mercer tile fireplace. Tones of brown and blue add to the intimate feel.

"There's a blend of modern and traditional — the traditional elements honor the age and period of the house," says Mr. Kohl. "There are also global items in the room, from India, Africa and Asia, to give it a traveled feeling."

Special to this year's Designer House is a "Creative Corner" in the extensive program book, offering practical decorating and gardening ideas from the professionals who worked on Seven Gables. Special events combine tours of the house with stops at local spots such as the James-Lorah Memorial Home, Byers' Choice in Chalfont and the Mercer Museum.

The 2006 Bucks County Designer House and Gardens, 238 W. Court St., Doylestown, Pa., will be on view through May 28. Hours: Mon. 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Tues.-Fri. 10 a.m.-4 p.m., 6:30-8:30 p.m., Sun. 12:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Visitors admitted up to 30 minutes before closing. Children under 10 not admitted. Tickets cost \$20, \$18 adv., \$15 seniors. The Designer House Café and Boutique is open in the Margaret Mead Carriage House during Designer House hours. For information, call (215) 345-2016. On the Web: www.buckscountyledesignerhouse.org

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