

The 62nd CHRS House and Garden Tour

By **Nina Tristani** - May 8, 2019



Gessford Court SE. Photo: Bill Kohutanycz

The 62nd House and Garden Tour of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS) takes place on Mother's Day weekend, May 11 and 12. Focused on the charming Lincoln Park area, this year's tour features 10 houses and boasts five gardens. It also offers a walking tour of the historic Gessford Court area hosted by the society's historic preservation expert Beth Purcell. The tour headquarters, serving as a refreshment break and offering ticket sales and will call, is located at the Corner Store Arts at 900 South Carolina Ave. SE.

A Varied History

The Lincoln Park area offers a rich history as a base for the tour. For example, at one point the park served as a hospital during the Civil War. In 1862, the square housed Lincoln General Hospital, the Army's largest military hospital in the area, with a capacity of 2,575 beds. It included 20 pavilions, 25 tent wards, barracks, officer quarters and services. Walt Whitman served as a nurse. It was taken down shortly after the Civil War ended. An act of Congress in 1866 named the square Lincoln Park. The historic square serves as a perfect area of focus for the House and Garden Tour.

Each house on the tour offers a unique style. One house reflects the passions of archivist Fynnette Eaton and historian Jim Miller, who made it a celebration of mosaic art. After moving into this 1907 house in 1988, Miller created the mosaics seen throughout the home. Eaton is the muse behind many of them.

Another house on the tour is owned by Linda Mellgren and John Payne, who challenge the tour-goers to find pig figurines. This is the house for the Chinese Year of the Pig. The owners had the original pig figurines on their wedding cake, and those can be seen on the top shelf of the curios in the dining room. Countless others are strewn throughout the house. See how many you can spot!

The house at 245 11th St. SE was built in 1923. The architect, George T. Santmyers, was popular on Capitol Hill. He designed many apartments and hundreds of rowhouses, including many on Capitol Hill, for Thomas A. Jameson and Harry Kite. Jameson was the original owner and builder of the house. The house is a Wardman-type rowhouse and was built along with the entire half-block along 10th Street and C Street as well as 11th Street.

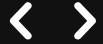
Unique is an overused word, but there is no other house like the award-winning 330 Adolf Cluss Court on Capitol Hill. Carl and Undine Nash bought the uninhabitable, fire-ravaged 1920s Steuart Co. coal and ice warehouse in 2009. They were able to begin renovation only after two years of permit review, during which time the Nashes also successfully lobbied the advisory neighborhood commission, the DC Council and ultimately Congress to designate the then-unnamed alley "Adolf Cluss Court" after the prominent late-19th century architect who also designed Eastern Market.

The home keeps the footprint and form of the Steuart warehouse and incorporates as much of the original material as could be salvaged, including the original bricks.

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Tile is the star in this Capitol Hill beauty. Photo: Bill Kohutanycz

Walking Tour

In addition to visiting the historic and award-winning homes there is a walking tour. The walking tour focuses on Gessford Court (two blocks south of Lincoln Park) and takes place on May 11 at 5 p.m. and May 12 at 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. The Gessford Court houses are typical of 19th-century working-class homes. They have a dining room and living room on the first floor, and upstairs, two bedrooms. In the early days the houses had no interior plumbing; residents carried water from a hydrant in the courtyard and used backyard privies. They relied on kerosene lamps for lighting and a stove for cooking and heating. Over the years, owners modified the houses.

Five Gardens

The Capitol Hill Garden Club collaborated with the Capitol Hill Restoration Society to enhance the green footprint. This year there are five gardens on the tour, each offering its own take on Capitol Hill greenery. They are located at 1000 South Carolina Ave. SE, 224 12th St. SE, 1100 Constitution Ave. NE, 1023 East Capitol SE and 154 11th St. SE.

Tickets for the House and Garden Tour are available for \$35 in advance and \$40 on

the day of the tour. You can purchase tickets at Berkshire Hathaway Eastern Market, Coldwell Banker Capitol Hill, Groovy DC Cards and Gifts, Hill's Kitchen and Labyrinth Games and Puzzles. On the day of the tour tickets may be purchased at the Corner Store Arts or at one of the tour houses.

Nina Tristani is the co-owner of N&M House Detectives (www.nmhousedetectives.com) and chair of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Communications Committee. For more information on this and other issues of historic preservation, visit www.chrs.org.