



# Historic Meridian Park's unique homes to be on display May 30-31

WITH HISTORIC Meridian Park's 2015 home tour rapidly approaching, more information has emerged on some of the homes scheduled to take part in the event themed *Historic Is the New Green – Restoring the Urban Community*.

The Historic Meridian Park Neighborhood Association and Home Tour Steering Committee are planning the neighborhood's biggest tour yet, featuring seven homes, three gardens, welcoming porches, music and more.

The home tour will take place from noon to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, May 30-31.

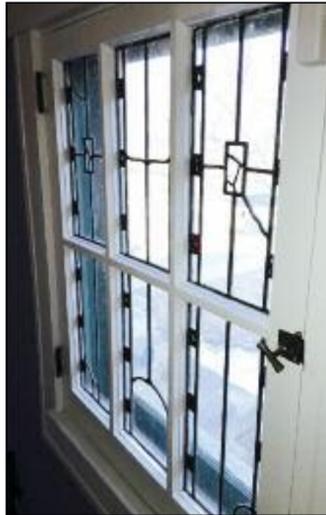
Tour organizers say they're looking forward to sharing the splendor of their Near Northside community with the public for the first time since 2010. In particular, they're excited to shine the spotlight on "green" building practices through creative reuse, landfill diversion and energy efficiency in their neighborhood, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"One of the goals of this home tour was to show prospective homeowners how accessible historic homes can be, and that homes in our urban community should be a consideration for house hunters," said Marketing Chair Jeff Crane. "One great way to show that renovations are within reach is to share some of the 'before' photos. Home tour attendees will see the wonderful story of 'after' for our homeowners, and how much renovation restores community."

The idea of welcoming porches was introduced a few home tours ago, and the committee has kept the tradition alive by giving attendees an inviting place to rest their feet, refresh with a drink of water, and share in friendly conversation before continuing to the next tour home. The welcoming porches are well-received by visitors, and truly highlight the connections that neighbors in this urban community share.

- Kara Haughey

**The Arthur Bohn House, 215 E. 32nd St.** This lovely home was built in 1909 by Arthur Bohn, a partner in the architectural firm, Vonnegut and Bohn. Bohn was also the first resident here, and likely lived in the house until he died in the 1940s. Since 2014, it's the home of Ryan and Sarah Noel, who both feel a strong connection with the house and its history. They once found a letter in the walls, dated 1903, that appears to be a detailed lumber inventory for the building project.

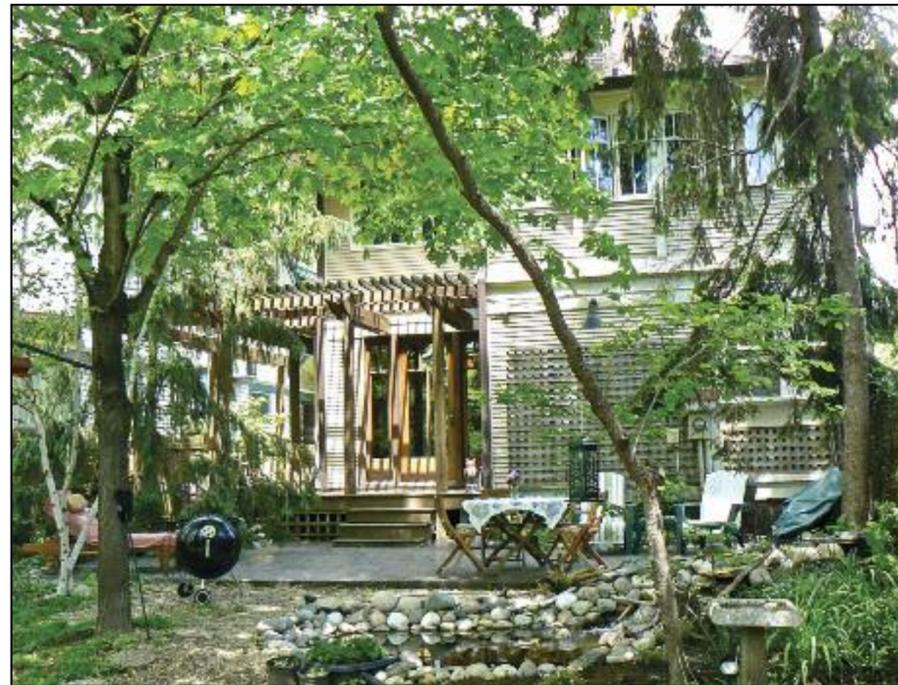


▲ An interior window of the historic Arthur Bohn house which is now the home of Ryan and Sarah Noel.

PHOTOS BY JEFF CRANE

## THE SITES, OWNERS (AND HIGHLIGHTS)

- 3363 Washington Blvd. – Jess LaNore (under renovation, great restoration accuracy).
- 215 Washington Court – David Bartley (Garden oasis on unique Washington Court).
- 215 32nd St. – Ryan and Sarah Noel (former home of legendary architect Arthur Bohn, a partner in the Vonnegut firm).
- 3024 N. Penn St. – Josh & Allie Reeves (Shawnee Apartments, Four units in progress).
- 3303 Pennsylvania St. – Lee Smith and Mark Webb (see how a new kitchen fits in a historic home).
- 3302 Washington Blvd. – Mark & Bryan Bigelo-King (a former nursing home, converted back to a family residence).
- 3117 Delaware St. – Ora Triplet (Original woodwork and glass).
- 128 E 33rd St. – Jen Rozelle (where foundation once collapsed; now beautiful home).



▲ The back yard at 215 Washington Court has changed dramatically since Bartley arrived in 1993.

## Courtyard home and garden have a colorful story to tell

BY DAVID BARTLEY

**F**OLLOWING THE COMPLETION of construction in 1912, the Gemmer family was the first to occupy the courtyard home at 215 Washington Court for a significant length of time – 1914 to 1927.

I conducted extensive genealogical research back in 1994 to learn more about the Gemmers, including a trip to the Gemmer family farm in Williamsport. While visiting the local history center in that quaint Wabash River town, I learned about a woman from Connecticut, who had left her name (Ruth) and contact information with the librarians several years earlier after doing some Gemmer research of her own. I contacted Ruth, then in her 90s, and it turns out she was the niece of Fred and Lydia Gemmer. This was the beginning of a phone and letter-writing relationship that produced many wonderful stories from her childhood visits to her beloved relatives on Washington Court. The photo on the piano of Fred Gemmer was given to me by Ruth before her passing.

Many of their best friends have also lived in this house at one time or another. They've even had several of their best couple friends meet in this house and later marry.

The couple has endeavored to accentuate and complement the original elements in their restoration effort. They've been very mindful of the basic grid work and shapes throughout the house when making their choices. The kitchen, for instance, was designed in a very modern and simple style. The crown molding is meant to mimic the shape in the trim throughout the house.

The structure of the home is solid, but absolutely needed some love after having over 100 tenants during the past 15 years. The couple did need to replace one window and repair several others. There was also a fair-

ly large hole in the living room ceiling. The kitchen had been updated at some point, but was designed in a way that made a small kitchen seem tiny. The home was also overgrown by ivy and had numerous dead or dying trees.

Most of the remodeling was in the interest of the couple's style of living, but as a rule, they always tried to make design and color decisions that emphasized and/or complemented some of the unique and beautiful features inherent to the home. Although some of these renovation choices are very contemporary, the design was kept very simple so it wouldn't compete visually with some of the existing architectural/decorative ele-

ing there in the summer of 1947, diligently polishing the woodwork.

Signs of my appreciation for nature and love of the outdoors are everywhere. This, however, was not always the case at 215 Washington Court. When I bought the house in 1993, this Craftsman Foursquare stood on an otherwise empty patch of scrub grass. A "cobra" street lamp glared down on the front yard, and cars regularly made a habit of driving through the back yard to cut the alley corner. There were no flowers and only one tree back then, a lovely old Norway Spruce that rose up beside the sleeping porch in back. Not surprisingly, this magnificent tree was one of the main reasons I immediately fell in love with the house. Since then, I have planted and nurtured a veritable flowering forest around my home – but rarely in straight lines or tidy rows. Curves, slopes, and staggered arrangements create a meandering and peaceful environment. The front garden, interior, and back yard sanctuary seamlessly blend into one another in the Arts & Crafts spirit, yet each area provides a unique experience.

The front garden barely contains an exuberant heirloom garden. In spring, the delicate petals of tulips, columbine, love-in-a-mist, and irises beneath a canopy of treetop blooms in the dogwoods, redbuds, and lilacs gives way to the crop of beautiful flowers you can see now. Roses, garden phlox, hollyhocks, bee balm, loosteirif, and salvia grow abundantly here. The slate patio, which I placed by hand several years ago, is now naturally mortared with moss and provides an open path into this floral gateway to the courtyard. The spacious front porch was closed-in with screens in the 1940s, but I opened it back up to its original state shortly after moving in. This led to enjoying all of the wonderful things only an open porch from this era can provide, including dining al fresco, reading on the porch swing on a rainy day, cooling off in the shade on a hot afternoon, watching a summer storm roll in, and inviting friends



▲ Flowers are found everywhere at David Bartley's home in Historic Meridian Park. PHOTOS BY DAVID BARTLEY

up for a glass of iced tea as they stroll by (or perhaps even an impromptu bottle of wine with neighbors).

As you enter the living room, your eyes are immediately greeted by the warmth and beauty of the quartersawn oak that richly adorns this home. The gentle curve of the staircase extends to one of the many bench seats as the oak floors lead your eyes across to the mantle, bookcases,

woodwork, and trim. All of this is tiger oak, and all of it was painted before I stripped and refinished it.

The living room gives way to the warm comfort of the dining room, also richly adorned with oak. The pocket doors that divide the rooms feature a unique leaded glass design that appears as a reoccurring theme throughout all of the homes on Washington Court. The wood floors, bench seats, oak panels, and ceiling beams provide the ambiance of being in the forest, which is a pleasant atmosphere whether the room is being used for dining, yoga, or music.

When I bought the house, the dining room had a large plate glass window looking out into a barren back yard. This was the work of the former residents, the Axline family.

■ **Historic is the new green.** My family has enjoyed adding fish and aquatic plants to organically enhance this miniature ecosystem. In fact, I maintain the pond year-round, presenting a unique opportunity to see the falls form beautiful ice dams along the stream to the frozen surface, as well as visits from innumerable thirsty wildlife when the temps dip below freezing. Many of the stones in and around this water feature come from the remote reaches of Michigan, Scotland, the Olympic Peninsula, and other favorite travel destinations of my family. The addition of the pond even led to the property being designated as a Certified Wildlife Habit by the National Wildlife Federation. This distinction becomes indisputable every time a Great Blue Heron wades through the pond. The goal all along has been to bring the outdoors in, and vice versa, creating a home environment where the shared elements of wood, stone, and fresh air become one.

One of the initial qualities that appealed to me when I purchased this house was that it still had almost all of its original windows. This is still true today. With an eye toward conservation and historical accuracy, I re-glazed the original windows and had bump-out wooden storms built.

The original steam heat radiators still breathe warmth into the home during cold months, but a ventless gas log also serves as a cozy and practical means of easing the workload on the furnace. It's 99% efficient and does an extraordinary job of keeping the house toasty, especially during transitional seasons. Remarkably, all but one of the homes on Washington Court were built for gas heaters (not wood burning logs) in their fireplaces – a significantly green notion in 1912 when smoke and coal dust filled the air. ■

*David Bartley is a writer/editor for Penguin Random House, focusing on video games. As he likes to describe it, he creates "travel guides to fictitious places." He and his daughter, Bronwyn, a junior at University High School, both enjoy reading and experiencing nature in their free time, and their home and yard are ideal for both activities.*

*David is also a photographer who is able to capture nature by stepping out his back door or "even gazing through the sleeping porch windows." His work, some of which can be seen on the walls of the home, has been exhibited in several venues in Indianapolis and the Midwest.*

## HOME TOUR: MAY 30-31

Advance sale tickets are available through May 29 for \$12 by searching for "Historic Meridian Park" at [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com).

On the days of the tour, tickets will be available for \$15 at Trinity Episcopal Church, 3243 N. Meridian St. The church is the suggested starting point and parking lot for the tour.

**Volunteers still needed.** Those volunteers will receive a free ticket. For more information, email [hmp2015volunteercommittee@gmail.com](mailto:hmp2015volunteercommittee@gmail.com).

**A big thank-you.** The home tour would not be possible without the help, time, and talents of our many neighbors pitching in to make this year's home tour a success. One such neighbor is David Bartley. A writer by trade, David is lending his creative talents to the program book – and the committee could think of no better way to share his storytelling than by featuring a few of his homeowner summaries, sprinkled with a few highlights of the homes you'll see this year!

**For more information** on the home tour, go to [www.historicmeridianpark.org](http://www.historicmeridianpark.org).

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## HISTORIC MERIDIAN PARK HOME TOUR

ments. All of the floors were refinished and every wall was painted, but the majority of the attention was focused in two areas: updating the kitchen and adding a master bathroom on the second floor.

Ryan and Sarah eliminated a powder room to expand the kitchen, then opened a pass-through window to the dining room. This provided a view of the stained glass windows in the dining room from the kitchen. The sink was also moved to the south-facing bank of windows. The lower cabinets are made of walnut (interestingly, there is a large walnut tree in the back yard).

The couple converted a small bedroom into a master bathroom. They added a closet and expanded another, as well as creating a doorway to the balcony sewing room on the south wall.

Among the couple's favorite features are the green tiled fireplace and inglenook. The support beams at the front of the home also have a fantastic profile. There are complimentary supports on the fireplace in the living room. The art glass in the entry is a particular highlight. In addition all the original built-in bookshelves and cabinets are adjustable and are made in a uniquely skilled Craftsman fashion. Ryan and Sarah also adore all of the wonderful art glass throughout their home, including the stained glass windows in the dining room, the leaded glass French and pocket doors, and the leaded glass featured on the dining room's built-in cabinet.

■ **Historic is the new green:** This family's renovations efforts have focused on preserving the original features and reusing materials in creative ways. Most of the old kitchen cabinets (not original) are now being used on the third floor. Doors and trim that were removed when a wall was closed were repurposed as closet doors in the master bedroom. Antique brass curtain hardware found in the basement now serves as towel hooks in the new master bathroom. The door they added to the sewing room was reclaimed and restored. The support beams for the new pass-through bar in the dining room are from a deconstructed antique player-piano. Even a dying Ash tree in their yard was milled into large planks of wood for use in and around the house in the near future. On top of all of this, all of the home's original light fixtures and hardware are being reused. The only new lights they've added are the energy-efficient recessed LED kits in the kitchen.

Ryan holds a degree in graphic design from Anderson University and is the creative director at Borshoff, a Downtown advertising and public relations firm. He has also created and patented a line of stationery for wine bottles called POP Greetings. Sarah attended the University of

**The Triplet Home, 3117 N. Delaware St.** What better way to welcome back the long-awaited home tour than by featuring long-time Historic Meridian Park resident Ora Triplet, who bought the 1911 house in 1974. Ora said one of her favorite things about the home was the entry hall and dining room. When she bought it, the home was in excellent condition, and there is no better example of this than the

woodwork featured in the dining room. Known for her work and service in the community as an advocate for senior citizens, she has been active on the neighborhood association board, and helped craft initiatives to get more neighbors involved in meeting and getting to know their elderly neighbors.



▲ Ora Triplet has called Historic Meridian Park home since 1974.



▲ Ora Triplet's home is one of the stops on the Historic Meridian Park Home and Garden Tour. ◀ The dining room. PHOTOS BY L. VAVUL

Not only is Ora a living legend within Historic Meridian Park, but she received city-wide recognition by the mayor who proclaimed April 22, 2007, officially "Ora Triplet Day" in the city of Indianapolis.

Most recently, Ora organized the

first neighborhood Christmas tree-lighting. Neighborhood kids and adults alike enjoyed the event she planned last December, which was complete with hot chocolate, a fire pit, good cheer and carols.

- Kara Haughey

## HISTORIC MERIDIAN PARK HOME TOUR

Kentucky and graduated in 2001 from Anderson University. Since 2002 she has worked for JDRF, a non-profit that funds research for type 1 diabetes research. Sarah currently serves as national director of Industry Partnerships, as well as on various committees at Tabernacle Presbyterian Church. The couple have two children, Simeon, 6, and Juliet, 1.

**The Rozelle Home, 128 E. 33rd St.** When Jen Rozelle signed the contract and placed her deposit last year, this house was already under renovation by the Mapleton-Fall Creek Development Corp. The siding and roof had been completed, but the interior was



▲ The Rozelle family at their 33rd Street home as it appears today. PHOTO BY JEFF CRANE



▲ The 'before' photo of the Rozelle home. PHOTO BY L. VAVUL

stripped down to the original studs and basic plywood floors. The rest of the renovation occurred later in 2014. Since then, Jen has added a large lofted garden shed (which she uses as a home studio for her art), done some landscaping, and built a fence in the back. Jen's favorite part of her "new" historic home is the charming and sun-drenched front porch, and its close proximity to the neighborhood's new Pocket Park right across the street.

■ **Historic is the new green:** During the renovation, all of the plumbing, heating, and electrical work was upgraded to be more energy efficient. Jen thoughtfully replaced the interior trim to be more period appropriate, but most of her décor comes from reclaimed materials.

- David Bartley

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