

RUST BELT REVIVAL



PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE, FRIENDLY RELATIONS:

MAKING IT WORK IN CLEVELAND HEIGHTS

BY DOUGLAS J. FORSYTH

IN THE LAST DECADES OF THE 20TH CENTURY, the rustbelt cities of the industrial Midwest and Northeast endured severe economic hardship, as plants closed and legions of middle-class workers lost their jobs, their homes and their futures. More recently, bearing the brunt of recurring recessions, including the Great Recession of 2008, whose impact is still being felt, the region has seemed to be suffering a death spiral. In the midst of this desperate landscape, while the indications of past decline are undeniable, signs of incipient recovery have become unmistakable. For those of us who work and live in the cities or inner-suburbs of Toledo, Detroit, Cleveland, and Buffalo—and thus have an existential stake in the outcome—it is a cautiously exhilarating moment: Are we, at long last, on the cusp of a sustained recovery?

Since mid-2010, employment in the Cleveland area has come roaring back from devastating losses, driven by what the *NEW YORK TIMES* has called “the new urban market trends of the 21st century—health care, higher education, entertainment, good food, new housing and expanded mass transportation.” Some city neighborhoods, including Tremont and Ohio City, on the west side of the Cuyahoga River, are clearly reviving, thanks in part to new restaurants, art galleries, and artisanal businesses. Even east side neighborhoods, long in the doldrums, are showing signs of recovery, buoyed by the growth of the cultural and medical institutions in University Circle.

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS CONTAINS A WIDE VARIETY OF DWELLINGS, RANGING FROM GRAND MANSIONS TO MODEST SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSES, TWO-FAMILY “CLEVELAND DOUBLES” AND APARTMENTS. THE STRIKING 1910 AUGUST VONDENSTEINEN BUNGALOW, BUILT AT 2927 HAMPSHIRE RD. FOR THE CITY & SUBURBAN REAL ESTATE CO., WAS PROBABLY DESIGNED BY ARCHITECT FREDERICK STRIEBINGER AS A DEMONSTRATION MODEL. AN AD IN A LOCAL PAPER IN DECEMBER 1911 PROMISED THAT THE WINNER OF A “BOOKLOVERS CONTEST” WOULD RECEIVE A SIMILAR BUNGALOW, WORTH \$6,000, TO BE BUILT ON NEARBY SOMERTON ROAD BY STRIEBINGER.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF



THE W.F. AND MARY WALLACE HOUSE (RIGHT), AT 2914 HAMPSHIRE RD., WAS BUILT IN 1911. THE WALLACES HELD IT FROM 1911 TO 1913 ON A LAND CONTRACT WITH THE CITY & SUBURBAN REAL ESTATE CO., THE DEVELOPERS OF MUCH OF THE MAYFIELD HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD. THE HANDSOME BUNGALOW HAS BEEN IN THE HANDS OF ONLY THREE FAMILIES IN ITS MORE THAN 100-YEAR HISTORY. THE MODEST, COMFORTABLE-LOOKING ROY W. AND GRACE M. IDEN HOUSE (BELOW), AT 1648 COMPTON RD., NEXT DOOR TO THE AMBITIOUS GLASGOW HOUSE (SEE PHOTO ON PAGE 98), WAS BUILT IN 1913 BY ROY IDEN, A CARPENTRY CONTRACTOR.



THE STORY OF CLEVELAND HEIGHTS

If the Cleveland metropolitan area is going to turn around, the city of Cleveland Heights can be expected to be front-and-center in the revival process. It offers superb early-modernist residential architecture, a lively and diverse cultural scene, and dense formal and informal social networks. These elements have combined, over the rocky urban history of the 20th century, to create an enduring and resilient community that has held itself together in the equally challenging first decade of the 21st and

could serve as one of the crucibles from which the recovery of the metropolitan area, if and when it comes, will flow.

Cleveland Heights lies to the south and east of Cleveland's University Circle area, which is home to institutions like the Cleveland Orchestra and the Cleveland Clinic that brought the city worldwide fame, on a plateau atop the first substantial ridge south of Lake Erie and the lowest of a series of foothills that reach across eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania to the summits of the

Appalachian Mountains. The Heights was sparsely inhabited until, beginning in the 1870s, a handful of wealthy Clevelanders built summer houses there with views to the lake and to the city. The first streetcar lines were built up the hill from University Circle in the late 1890s, and at that point the area began to develop rapidly. In 1903 it became a village, with a population of about 1,500; in 1921 it became a city, with a population above 15,000. By 1930 the city of Cleveland Heights was largely built out. It had 51,000 peo-



ple, somewhat more than the 46,000 it has today.

In short, Cleveland Heights developed rapidly as a classic street-car suburb during the heyday of the Arts and Crafts movement, and it has perhaps the finest patrimony of Arts and Crafts and Prairie-style houses in the Cleveland area. That makes it distinctive, especially because architecture in Cleveland generally was more conservative in the late 19th and early 20th centuries than it was in, say, Chicago.

In the early 20th century, Cleveland's more daring architects produced some of their most innovative work in Cleveland Heights. William A. Bohnard and Raymond D. Parson, for example, worked together in a successful partnership, building primarily residences, from 1905 to 1932. In 1905 they designed the George Holloway House, in suburban Ravenna, with outspoken Prairie features. This was too much for many of their Cleveland clients, and the duo learned to propose designs to them in a still modernist but some-

what less radical vein, influenced by English architects M. H. Baillie Scott and Charles Voysey. In 1909 in Cleveland Heights, however, they proposed a reworking of the radical features of the Holloway House in their design for the Charles H. and Marie R. Beardslee House, in the Ambler Heights Historic District, which represents perhaps their best work and is one of the finest Prairie houses in the Cleveland area.

Another Cleveland architect, George Kauffman, had built ornate houses in revival styles in the city

and its suburbs in the first decade of the century. In the teens, however, he became entranced with the California bungalow and built a series of residences paying homage to it. One of the finest examples was built for A. C. Glasgow in Cleveland Heights in 1919.

Harlen Shimmin, another successful architect, built theaters, auditoriums, schools and apartments, in addition to homes. The extravagant 1916 Ambler Heights house for H. A. Adams, with its roof shingles that fold around the corners of the house and its theater-marquee eave above the front entry, suspended from steel cables, stands out from the tamer work

he executed in Shaker Heights and elsewhere.

Finally, Frederick William Striebinger, who studied at Columbia and at the École de Beaux-Arts in Paris, is best known for his revivalist structures. But he, too, apparently became interested in the California bungalow before World War I. We infer that he is the architect of the striking bungalow built at 2927 Hampshire Rd. around 1911, in the Mayfield Heights neighborhood, because an ad in a local paper in December of that year promised the winner of a “Book-lovers Contest” a similar bungalow, worth \$6,000, to be built by Striebin-

ger on nearby Somerton Rd.

A number of developers also joined in the local building boom, and their activities left Cleveland Heights with considerable diversity in the character of its neighborhoods and in the size and character of its residential structures. Some neighborhoods, including the Ambler Heights Historic District, consist of winding avenues with spacious lots and immense mansions. Others, including the Mayfield Heights neighborhood, contain more modestly sized houses, including bungalows and Arts and Craft foursquares.

THE 1916 LOUIS M. WOLF HOUSE OPPOSITE, TOP, AT 2227 ELANDON DR., WAS DESIGNED R.M. HULLETT. WOLF WAS PRESIDENT OF THE ADAMS REALTY CO. AND MERCANTILE FINANCE. THE PRONOUNCED HORIZONTAL LINES, PROMINENT ROOF EAVES AND THE ARTICULATION OF THE WINDOWS IN BANDS SUGGEST THE PRAIRIE STYLE.





THE 1909 CHARLES H. AND MARIE R. BEARDSLEE HOUSE (ABOVE), AT 2232 ELANDON DR., WAS DESIGNED BY BOHNARD AND PARSSON ARCHITECTS; THIS IS PERHAPS THEIR BEST-REALIZED PRAIRIE HOUSE. THE 1916 H. A. ADAMS HOUSE (LEFT), AT 2185 HARCOURT DRIVE, WAS DESIGNED BY ARCHITECT HARLEN E. SHIMMIN, WHOSE WORK HERE MAY REFLECT HIS EXPERIENCE AS A DESIGNER OF THEATERS AND AUDITORIUMS.



FRANK MEADE, WHO DESIGNED THE KERMODE F. AND DORATHEA GILL HOUSE, AT 2178 HARCOURT DRIVE, WAS ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT ARCHITECTS IN THE CLEVELAND AREA. AS THIS BUILDING SUGGESTS, HE FAVORED HISTORICAL REVIVAL STYLES.

CULTURAL PROGRESSIVES

The diversity of Cleveland Heights’s architecture was soon reflected in the diversity of its population. Several of the early developers envisaged an English-style garden city, with residences for the elite and the upper middle class. Presumably they had the city’s Anglo and ethnic-German elites primarily in mind when the first houses started going up. But by the teens and twenties, Jews were moving into the Heights in substantial numbers, and Jewish cultural and religious institutions soon followed.

In 1927, B’nai Jeshurun, one of Cleveland’s oldest Jewish congregations, built a million-dollar Moorish-Byzantine structure, designed by Charles Greco of Boston and widely known as the Temple on the Heights, becoming the first Jewish congregation to relocate from the city to the suburbs. Others followed; Anshe Emeth Beth Tefilo, or the Park Synagogue, was completed in 1950 on

CLEVELAND: “YA GOTTA BE TOUGH”

BY RAY MCNIECE

CLEVELAND, “THE MISTAKE BY THE LAKE,” long the butt of stand-up jokes, has come back from the dead too many times to count. Local (immigrant) boy Bob Hope coined many of the most stinging punch lines, and his success had countless hack jokesters following suit. The city even renamed a bridge for his stonemason father, the Hope Memorial (Lorain-Carnegie) Bridge, right above where the Cuyahoga River caught fire in 1969. That environmental nightmare is what the Cuyahoga is now most remembered for, but it also sparked the Clean Water Act, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and Earth Day movements across the country. Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman cited the fire as the beginning of American environmentalism.

Could the Forest City be poised for yet another renaissance? If the arts are any indication, it may well come to pass. There are stirrings of the creative class in several distinct neighborhoods, supported in part by the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (CPAC), whose creative-workforce fellowships bestow a score of \$20,000 arts grants annually for artists of all disciplines in Cuyahoga County. The program is funded by Cuyahoga Arts and Culture through a cigarette tax.

Cleveland has also been dubbed the Plum City, a takeoff on the Big Apple in one notable but failed attempt at civic boosterism. So, if a worn-out industrial landscape gives you plums, make slivovitz, as many locals of Slavic immigrant ancestry do. “The Best Location in the Nation” is another of Cleveland’s slogans, and it, too, has some truth to it. Since the days of the Erie Canal, Cleveland has been a transportation hub. It still boasts the largest train yard between New York and Chicago, in Collinwood, where working-class Italians, Irish, Slovenians and African-Americans settled. Nearby North Collinwood’s Arts District is anchored by the Beachland Ballroom, a former Croatian Hall turned alt-rock hipster hangout, and Arts Collinwood, with its Cafe and Gallery, continues to attract artists, musicians and writers who can secure affordable housing through the North East Development Agency.

Cleveland’s burgeoning film industry offers tax credits to lure out-of-state filmmakers, while the Greater Cleveland Film Commission offers training for locals—everything from scriptwriting to directing to becoming a film vendor.

Historic Ohio City, just across from Cleveland (the two nearly went to war in 1836) has become a foodies’ playground and recently opened Ohio City Writers, a creative-writing center for youths from 7 to 17.



WINTERS ARE LONG, BUT CLEVELANDERS ENJOY SUMMERTIME TO THE FULLEST, ESPECIALLY LISTENING TO LIVE MUSIC OUTDOORS AT VENUES ALL OVER THE CITY. PERFORMING ON THE PATIO OF VISIBLE VOICE IN HISTORIC TREMONT IS THE BAND TONGUE IN GROOVE (L-R, NICK MARINO, SALTY MELILLO, RAY MCNIECE AND ANITA HERCZOG).

“THERE’S A BURNING RIVER RUNNING THROUGH MY RUSTY HEART...” *

Just down the Detroit Shoreway is the Gordon Square Arts District, offering durable and affordable housing in an ethnically diverse neighborhood, including the largest Hispanic population in the city. The flagship of the district is the Cleveland Public Theater, which will host seven world premieres this season—six by northeastern Ohio talent. In the forefront of the Community Arts movement, CPT has several outreach programs, including Brick City Theater in the nearby housing development; Y-Haven, a homeless theater; and the Women’s Voices program. Gordon Square also features the newly renovated Capital Movie Theater, the Near West Theater, several new galleries and restaurants, and the Happy Dog, a local music venue where you can get your hot dog done 300 different ways (including sushi and kimchee). Of course there are the old standby bohemian enclaves, Tremont on the West Side and Coventry on the East Side, which continue to thrive. Lake Erie Ink Youth Writing Center is an East Side version of Ohio City Writers, located in Cleveland Heights.

Cleveland Heights is also the home of the Dobama Theater and The Grog Shop, a legendary rock venue. The B-Side, in the basement of that space, presents Lyrical Rhythms every Tuesday. Mac’s Backs bookstore, just down the street, holds weekly readings. The Heights even has its own Poet Laureate to preside over public functions.

Just down the Hill from Coventry, through Little Italy, is University Circle, home of the Cleveland Orchestra, still respected as one of the best in the world. The Cleveland Museum of Art has just added a wing—and it’s still free. Tucked behind Case Western University is one of Cleveland’s hidden gems, the Barking Spider Tavern, a great venue for live, original music. With the Cleveland Clinic’s expansion, the Rockefeller-era mansions that ring this neighborhood are ripe for renovation.

Reports of the woes of this former industrial powerhouse are greatly exaggerated. We locals have been through this before and we have our own motto: Cleveland, ya gotta be tough. Besides, there is nothing quite so beautiful as the first lake-effect snow dusting the rust.

Poet Ray McNiece travels the country performing, teaching and organizing literary events, but he always returns home to Cleveland.

* —excerpted from the author’s 2004 poem, “Love Song for Cleveland” (read the poem in its entirety at raymcniece.com).



ABOVE AND BELOW, ANOTHER POPULAR VENUE FOR POETS AND MUSICIANS IS THE BARKING SPIDER TAVERN, ENSCONCED IN A FORMER CARRIAGE HOUSE NEAR CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY.





Mayfield Rd., by renowned German modernist architect and émigré Erich Mendelson.

Cleveland Heights's success in integrating Jews earlier in the century may have eased its acceptance of African Americans in the 1960s. In 1963, during an era in which racial tensions were growing in the city and white flight was accelerating, a group of Heights residents began to meet informally to discuss integration. In 1964 they formalized their organization as the Heights Citizens for Human Rights. They began an outreach program that included informal coffees and evening meetings. The goal was to encourage racial inte-

gration, a superior school system, quality housing and friendly relations. In 1972 this group dissolved itself into the Heights Community Congress, with professional staffing.

Together with neighboring Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights became one of a group of inner suburbs across the U.S. that successfully integrated in the 1960s and '70s. In 1977 Cleveland Heights became a founding member of the Oak Park Exchange Congress, a federation of inner-ring suburbs dedicated to stabilizing racial diversity. (The federation was named after the Chicago suburb and fellow founding-member municipality, also known for its pro-

gressive architecture.) Cleveland Heights remains a center of Jewish life in the Cleveland area today, but it is a telling sign of the community's changing identity that in 2001 the Temple on the Heights, which had been the first Jewish synagogue in a Cleveland suburb, became the New Spirit Revival Center, serving a non-denominational African-American congregation.

AN URBAN BOHEMIA

In the 1970s, Cleveland Heights developed a countercultural vibe, and it continues to attract artists, musicians, academics and theater people today. One of the Cleveland area's



most important venues for contemporary music, the Grog Shop, is located in the Heights. Nighttown, another music venue, has been named repeatedly by *Downbeat* magazine one of the world's top jazz clubs and figured in its 2011 list of the world's top 150 clubs. In general the restaurant and bar scene in the Coventry area of the Heights rivals Cleveland's more successful reviving neighborhoods.

The Heights also continues to be renowned for the strength of its voluntary organizations. Heights Community Congress organizes the annual Heights Heritage (home) Tours, which have taken place (almost)



THE HOUSE (OPPOSITE) BUILT IN 1920 BY THE YALE CONSTRUCTION CO. AT 2900 EAST OVERLOOK RD. SOLD EVERY YEAR IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, AND IT IS UNCLEAR WHO FIRST LIVED IN IT. IT, AND THE NEARBY M.B. HORWITZ HOUSE (ABOVE), BUILT IN 1923, REFLECT THE GROWING FASCINATION WITH THE CALIFORNIA BUNGALOW IN THE CLEVELAND AREA IN THE LATE TEENS AND EARLY 1920s. THE MODEST COTTAGE (TOP) BUILT IN 1920 BY MARIE BENJAMIN IS LOCATED AT 2882 WASHINGTON BLVD., NEAR THE COVENTRY COMMERCIAL AREA.



every year since 1973 on a Sunday in mid-September; very helpfully, the Cleveland Heights Historical Society keeps the tour information from past years available on its website at chhistory.org. Volunteers also help run the annual summertime Cain Park Arts Festival. Summer street fairs are common in the city's commercial districts, including the Coventry Street Fair, the Cedar Lee Stroll, and the Cedar Fairmount and Noble Nella street festivals.

In the 1960s and '70s, the University Circle institutions that have made Cleveland famous around the world—the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cleve-

land Institute of Music, Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic—stood out as glittering successes in a city whose historic residential neighborhoods were fading. Adjacent Cleveland Heights successfully managed racial integration during this era, and the residential luster and cultural vitality of the Arts and Crafts era still flourishes here, a valuable asset for the Cleveland metropolitan area today. 📍

Douglas J. Forsyth is Associate Prof. of History at Bowling Green State University and lives in Toledo, Ohio. He would like to thank Ken Goldberg, Marian J. Morton, Kara Hamley O'Donnell, Franklin Piccirillo and Christopher Roy for assistance with this article.

THE 1919 A.C. AND EDITH F. GLASGOW HOUSE, AT 1644 COMPTON ROAD, WAS DESIGNED IN 1919 BY ARCHITECT GEORGE KAUFFMAN, WHO HAD EARLIER BUILT ORNATE HOUSES IN REVIVAL STYLES IN CLEVELAND AND ITS SUBURBS. IN THE TEENS HE BECAME ENTRANCED WITH THE CALIFORNIA BUNGALOW AND BUILT A SERIES OF RESIDENCES PAYING HOMAGE TO IT. THIS IS ONE OF THE FINEST EXAMPLES. NOTE THE USE OF RIVER STONE ON THE CHIMNEY, THE OVERSIZED ROUND COLUMNS SUPPORTING THE SUN PORCH ON THE SIDE OF THE HOUSE CONTRAST WITH THE SQUARE PILLARS ON THE FRONT PORCH, AND THE COMPLEX ROOF LINES GIVE THE STRUCTURE VISUAL INTEREST. THE HOUSE ACTUALLY HAS THREE FLOORS, WITHOUT LOSING THE LOW-SLUNG APPEARANCE OF A BUNGALOW.