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Fan Kitchen, Garden Tour

BY JULIE YOUNG

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF

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Two small factors played a big role in the design of Ellen and Orran Brown's backyard gardens on Monument Avenue 5-year-old Read and 3-year-old Drew.

The Browns' sons were inspiration for landscape architect Bryan Puckett. "We told him nothing prickly, something they could run over, and lots of color," Ellen Brown recalled.

The result is a horseshoe-shaped cluster of distinct gardens wrapping around 2230 Monument, one of 10 homes open May 7 for the annual Fan Kitchen and Garden Tour.

A long side yard trimmed in blooming shrubs and flower beds gives the boys space to run. A shade garden has a table and chairs for picnic lunches. A narrow Oriental garden tucked around the other side of the house is full of good hiding places.

The young plantings include azaleas, verbena, coneflowers, Shasta daisies, variegated aucuba and salvia.

The house and gardens occupy two lots. In the rear is a carriage house that serves as a two-car garage and an alley-side parking area equipped with a basketball hoop.

Two years ago, the Browns moved from Short Pump to one of the four Monument Avenue homes built by the prominent Binswanger Glass family. The Brown home was built in 1915 by Moses Binswanger.

Walking through the center hall to the kitchen, visitors will see Art Nouveau- and Arts and Crafts-inspired cut and stained glass in formal rooms, on a staircase landing and in the vestibule. French doors between rooms feature stained glass in a familiar Frank Lloyd Wright design.

"A lot of these homes were built by manufacturers who were showcasing their wares," Ellen said. "All of the Binswanger houses in Richmond have really nice glass."

Fan Kitchen, Garden Tour

WHAT: 10 homes open in six-block area of Monument Avenue and Grace Street

WHEN: May 7, 1-6 p.m.

TICKETS: Ticket locations and other information: call tour hotline at (804) 257-0004 or visit www.fandistrict.org/FWC/index.htm

THE LIST: [Homes open for tour](#)

Hardwood floors in the formal rooms have varying patterns and inlaid border designs. The entry, for example, has diamond-patterned floors and heavy ceiling beams to match. The hexagon-shaped dining room has beams and flooring in that pattern.

A sunken sun room near the kitchen has a cage-style brass elevator that still works. "We think it was added in the '20s," Ellen said. It's a source of entertainment when her sons' friends come to play, she said.

Unlike many large Fan residences, this home was never converted to a rooming house, but it served for a short time as a medical facility, Ellen said. Beside a circuit breaker in the basement is a old typewritten label with "sterilizer" written on it. "It's great that it was residential and was never structurally changed," she said.

The Browns renovated the kitchen from top to bottom. The soaring white cabinets with stained wood trim were crafted to match original ones in the butler's pantry. Countertops are honed granite, which has a matte rather than the traditional high-gloss finish. Backsplashes are subway tile, and the island is a freestanding, functional sculpture on wheels crafted by local artist Maurice Beane.

The back door opens onto a small porch that overlooks bluestone and brick patios and the wraparound lawn. Inside and out, the feel is hands-on comfortable yet sophisticated. "It's just a very modern, family-friendly sort of home," Ellen said.

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