



## 626 Orange Street

1927 Bungalow

Pat Hill



In the autumn of 1927, Michum and Jennie Musikich were issued a building permit. The couple had purchased a home from Sears, Roebuck and Company, and in a few exciting weeks it was scheduled to arrive. All they needed to do before moving in was to assemble it. This was the era of the mail-order, or catalog house. Sears provided everything you would need except the foundation and the manpower to build it. The Musikiches had selected the Sunlight model, one of few dozen then being featured in the Sears catalog. The Sunlight was a modest bungalow-style home with a full-width front porch, two bedrooms and a comfortable layout perfect for a young couple.

The house proved to be a lifelong investment. Michum died in 1967 while still living there. Jennie passed away a few years later. The couple's daughter continued to live in the house until about 1995. That is when Dennis Roxworthy, one of Elgin's legendary home rehabbers, purchased the house. By then the

house had grown old and tired. The front porch had been enclosed and converted into a bedroom, the exterior was clad in well-worn substitute siding and the landscaping was neglected. Dennis gave the house a like-new look with an extensive rehab. Now he needed a buyer to put life back into the building.

Pat Hill's family roots in Elgin go back several generations. She was born and raised here. As a young woman she worked at the watch factory, and as a travel agent, a real estate agent and a full-time mom. Retraining herself for a new career, she took up the study of ornamental horticulture at McHenry County College. She was serving as a member of the Elgin Heritage Commission in 1997 and familiar with Sears houses from Rebecca Hunter's lectures. That is when Dennis Roxworthy came before the group seeking a plaque for the newly refurbished house at 626 Orange St. Before voting on the plaque application, Pat Hill made a site visit. Going beyond the usual visual survey of the exterior, she peeked in



the windows and liked what she saw. It was light and airy, petite but comfortable, in good condition and affordable. "This is my house," she thought. Pat voted "yes" for the plaque application and then contacted Dennis with an offer to purchase the home.

Pat Hill's interest in horticulture was about to take a dramatic turn. Following a visit to Sears' Prairie Stone campus in Hoffman Estates, she became intrigued with the native plants that once grew abundantly around the Midwest. She chose to specialize in landscape designs that featured native species. Pat's yard became a palette to develop ideas from. It was also a classroom for others to learn about the rich plant life of the prairies. Pat's house and yard have been featured in periodicals such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Bungalow Magazine* and in several newspaper articles. She is a well-known lecturer and her blog site, [naturalmidwestgarden.com](http://naturalmidwestgarden.com), is followed by several hundred readers. You can also read her book, *Design Your Natural Midwest Garden*.

Admittedly, a native prairie landscape on a city lot can be a bit startling when first seen. And caring for it is, at times, a bit unconventional. For example, by special permit, she carefully burns the garden beds annually to simulate the fires that renewed the prairies. What begins in the early spring as the remnants of those fires quickly grows into modest-size plants. As summer progresses, some shoot upward while others flourish in the newly created under-story. There is an ever-changing display of flowers blooming in succession. A garden like this needs to be appreciated in the context of the entire growing season. Any single visit is just a blink of the eye. To see the entire garden you have to see its entire cycle and understand the interrelationships of the plant community. What do the neighbors think? Pat says almost all of them are positive about the garden, and many have broadened their garden repertoire to include some native species. Pat says her neighbors are one of the appeals of living where she does. She describes them as friendly, supportive and good companions.

### Architcetural Notes

Even though this house is a simple design, it has several architectural details that add interest and curb appeal. The full-width front porch is the most prominent feature. The porch features ten double-hung windows, with six panes of glass in each top sash. The front door and the side windows are made up of several small panes of the glass. Combined, the porch has 86 separate panes of glass. All these individual panes add texture to the ribbon of windows.

The narrow-exposure clapboard siding makes the house appear longer and wider than it actually is. The shadow lines created by the clapboards add detail to the facade. The gable above the front porch is clad with shingles, which introduces another type of material to the facade. The clipped roof, known as a Jerkin head roof, is another small detail that contributes to the home's architectural character.

In Pat's words, "You can live a nice lifestyle, complete with a little panache and craftsmanship, in small house that is well built." Her Sears home has an airy feel, a three-season porch and nine foot-high ceilings. No wonder they named it the Sunlight model. ♦

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