



670 Oak Street

1926 Craftsman-style Bungalow

Jean LeRoy



Today, it's unusual to buy a house from a catalog. In the first half of the 20th century, however, it wasn't. One of the many products Sears, Roebuck and Co. sold was kits for houses. Sears was not the only company to sell "house kits," or "mail-order houses," and many models and floor plans were offered by these companies.

This home is one such Sears kit house, built in 1926. Its catalog description listed everything the kit included, such as framing lumber, wall lath, the clapboards, asphalt roof shingles, interior millwork, kitchen cabinets, downspouts, varnish for interior doors, exterior paint and more. It didn't include cement, brick or plaster. The catalog page also supplied an illustration of the house and an architectural drawing with suggestions for furniture placement, including the radio—at the time, often larger than an end table.

Though there are other kit houses in Elgin, current homeowner Jean LeRoy maintains hers is the only Sears Del Rey model in the city; she found another in West Chicago.

August and Essie Krausman applied for a building permit for their \$6,600 house in 1926, according to an Aug. 31, 1926, newspaper article listing building permits issued that month. The Krausmans moved to Elgin so August could work at Elgin Sweeper Co., according to August's June 13, 1961, newspaper obituary. The company was founded by his father-in-law and is still in business in Elgin, making the familiar street sweepers that do what their name implies. The couple moved into the house in 1927 and stayed for 14 years. August rose in the company ranks, eventually becoming vice president-treasurer. He retired in 1941. The Krausmans moved to St. Petersburg, Fla., and August remained a company director until his death.

The Krausmans sold their home to George and Beryl Robinson in 1943. George, a printer for the Elgin Courier-News, and Beryl lived in the house until George died. According to his Sept. 11, 1967, obituary, he was a lifelong Elginite. Beryl stayed another year, for a total of 25.



In 1969, Barbara Ackerman and a relative, Myrtle Ackerman, purchased the house. Barbara was a district manager for Field Enterprises Education Corp., publisher of the World Book Encyclopedia; Myrtle was a retired widow. They were followed by David Heiser, a teacher in School District 300, and his wife, Holly, in 1973.

Michael Mooney, a factory worker, and his wife, Linda, were next, from 1975 to 1979. Craig and Terri Henley moved in after the Mooneys. Craig was employed by Northwest Airlines and Terri as a teacher in School District U-46. Later Craig was a student who became a counselor at the Larkin Home in Elgin. They moved out in 1989.

Xenia Wright bought the house in 1991 and lived here until 1999. She was a furniture saleswoman at Ackemann's, a longtime downtown Elgin store.

Don Rhodes and his wife, Kim, owned this house from 1999 to 2003. Don was an automobile salesman and Kim worked for School District U-46.

Jean LeRoy purchased the home in July 2003. She lived about a mile away on Shuler Street and was attracted by 670 Oak's cottage-style architecture. She was looking for a "home with character" in a neighborhood with a friendly feeling, and this one met her expectations.

She was pleased the house would let her use her creativity. She remodeled the kitchen and opened up the wall between it and the dining room. She also has painted every room, partially finished the basement, remodeled the bathroom, replaced the cement driveway and front sidewalk, put on a new roof and painted the home's exterior.

Jean, a store manager for T.J. Maxx, grew up in a new house in Elgin's Century Oaks subdivision. She says she prefers older homes to newer ones, however, and has lived in several older houses. She finds this one a "cozy retreat from the everyday world" and loves its 9-foot ceilings, radiator heat and the fact that she met her fiancé here—he lives across the street.

Jean loves to garden and has created an English-style country garden around her house. Her fiancé has done a lot of work outdoors here as well.

They enjoy sitting in the backyard and enjoying the outdoors, including the koi pond. They are both selling their houses to move into a new home together.

Architcetural Notes

Sears, Roebuck and Co. designers no doubt drew inspiration for this design, called the Del Rey, from Pasadena, Calif.-based architects Charles S. and Henry M. Greene. The Greene brothers are credited with popularizing the Craftsman-type bungalow, which is sometimes referred to as a California-style bungalow.

This distinctive home includes many of the design themes found on the Greene brothers' high-style examples. For instance, note the low-pitched and multiple roof planes with the wide overhanging eaves. Beneath the eaves are exposed roof beams and rafter tails, suggesting the building's structural elements. The curved triangular knee braces supporting the small roof over the front door makes a strong statement about the house's structure and craftsmanship. The tall, French-style windows add a Mediterranean touch. The red brick chimney is a dramatic vertical contrast to the horizontal, narrow-exposure clapboard siding. The three-color paint scheme highlights the building's architectural details with a simple but expertly chosen palette.

The landscaping and matching garage are wonderful accents to this home's setting. This is a great example of how mail-order houses could deliver a high degree of design expertise for a moderate-income buyer. ♦

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