

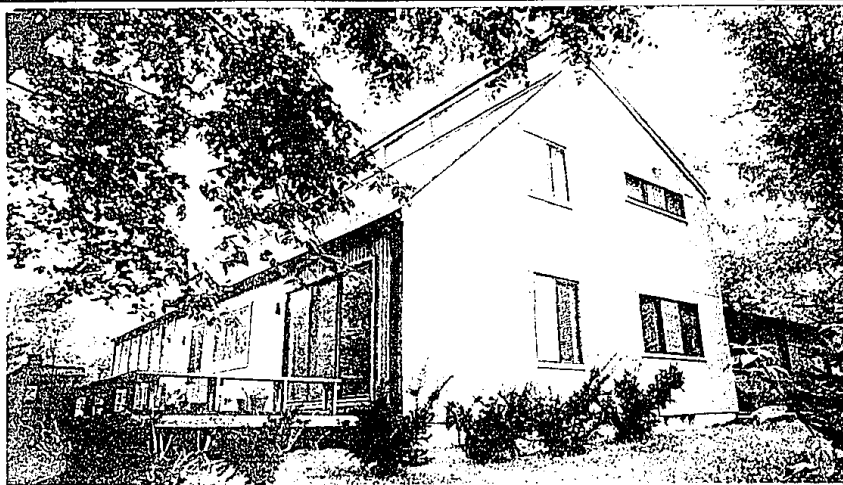
# Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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The house that John Shen designed for his family provides for active solar for the future. Shen's architectural firm, SYJ Associates, has done work for Wayne State University, Michigan Bell and Shifrin-Willens Jewelers.

## Enjoying art together

By Corinne Abalt  
staff writer

IN A WAY, the handmade wall hanging over the fireplace in the John Shen home says it all — this is a family that works together and shares a love of art.

Shen, architect and artist, designed the wall hanging, depicting the great room in which it is located. Shen incidentally designed the house as well some of the furniture and did many of the contemporary paintings which hang on the walls.

Theresa Shen began to actually make the wall hanging, but she is a busy mother of David, Janis and Iris, and librarian at Wayne Community College, so her husband's mother, Pei Ching, pitched in. So did the children.

"It was really teamwork, the whole family worked on it," Mrs. Shen said.

The Shen family all like to be involved in the arts. "Music and art are very important to us; the kids all play two instruments," said Theresa Shen as she walked by the door of the music room, directly behind the great room. Neatly arranged under the grand piano are six violins in cases and a guitar case stands in the corner.

PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS by the children (from a very young age) are framed and displayed.

played with the same reverence given major works in oil by their father.

Both Theresa and John Shen are photographers, she particularly likes to do portraits and both develop their own film in the darkroom in the basement.

Shen designed the house to accommodate the lifestyle and needs of his growing family. Their Chinese heritage is expressed more in the use of space, color and light, than in actual artifacts. Mrs. Shen noted that the only real handmade Oriental art on the walls is in the small main floor study with a beautiful work of calligraphy by her father occupying a prominent place.

In the immaculate kitchen where she said she spends a lot of time, several drawings by the children and an oil painting of fish on a platter by her husband hang above the breakfast table.

Shen designed the matching glass topped side tables and coffee tables in the great room and sitting room because as he said, "It's so hard to find a simple table."

Mrs. Shen made the white canvas covers for the great room sofas and chose soft pastel colors for the throw pillows to coordinate with the poster they bought at the Picasso exhibition in New York City.

His 20th anniversary gift to her is an oil painting hanging in the sitting room. While at first glimpse it may appear to be an abstract, it is

actually four houses that are a part of their lives — his parents house in their ancestral village, a house from her childhood, the house they lived in in Taiwan and their present home.

IT IS A BEAUTIFUL painting in rich oranges, apricots, greens with touches of bright pinks to suggest the peach and other blossoms around their former homes near Shanghai.

There is a formal dining room with a large round table, another work area with desks and files at the head of the stairs.

Because of the bank of clerestory windows, a soft natural light permeates much of the home. When these high windows are opened for the summer and the low ones in the living room far below are opened too, Shen said, "We get very good air circulation," and this often precludes the use of air-conditioning.

Shen said of his house design, "The intention was to provide active solar for the future," adding that solar heating has never come down in price the way computers have.

Nevertheless, the southern exposure, the protected northern side, the placement of the windows and the excellent insulation all give it an extra measure of comfort in all seasons.

This is a home in which creativity in many aspects of the arts flourishes because all efforts are appreciated and encouraged. The house is arranged to foster creativity, from studios, offices and music rooms to kitchen.

And then, too, there is plenty of room to sit back and enjoy the fruits of their completed creative efforts.



The wall hanging above the fireplace in the great room, designed by John Shen, soon became a family project. He designed the house, did many of the paintings and designed the coffee table.



Theresa and John Shen with daughter, Iris. She was just about to leave for Michigan State where she is a pre-med student. The other two children, David and Janis, were in school.

Staff photos by Rick Smith

## Bearden collages — intimate gems

By Manon Mollgaard  
special writer

Anyone who has seen the exhibition, "Romare Bearden: Origins and Progressions," at the Detroit Institute of Arts, won't want to miss the stunning Bearden collages at the Sheldon Ross Gallery — 21 in all, from 1982-1986.

While the DIA exhibit explores Bearden's canon of work and genres — from the early cubist, Picasso-inspired work, the Abstract Expressionist period, the use of photographic blowups with painted images, the influence and emulation of old Masters such as Bruegel, Ingres, Durer, Holbein and Poussin, the Chinese, "Mr. Wool" period, to the glorious mosaic mural, "Quitting Time" — the Sheldon Ross exhibition presents a wider and much more comprehensive aspect of his latest and best work, the collages.

These small gems (the largest are approximately 2 by 2 1/2 feet) vibrate with color, luminosity and life and illustrate the artist's consummate skill of composition. Whether he is creating scenes from the Caribbean or Charlotte, N.C. (where Bearden was born in 1912), the ambience is distinctly southern — lush, exotic, sensuous.

Combining watercolors, oils, paper cut-out and often, scraps of wallpaper or fabric, Bearden portrays the warmth and familiar domesticity of a share-cropper's cabin, with no intention of dramatizing or neglecting the signs of poverty.

For instance, "Evening" (1985), a 14-by-12-inch interior depicts a woman in a leaf-green dress (one of Bearden's favorite colors), sitting in a living room lit by a kerosene lamp, next to what appears to be a fish swimming in a decorated bowl.

THROUGH THE half-open door leading to the bedroom, with a glimpse of a brass bed, a young, beautiful, black, nude woman is taking a bath with nothing more than a pan of water on the floor.

In another interior (there are many of these in the show), "Morning — Charlotte" (1985) a woman wearing a jacket in the same shade of green is serving breakfast to an older woman seated at the table. The room is colorfully but simply furnished with red-painted kitchen chairs and an old-fashioned iron stove.

Again, through an open door and seated on a brass bed, a nude woman is seen getting dressed. In their simplicity and dignity, Bearden's interiors have the effect of a painting by Vermeer.

"Meeklenberg Garden" (1985) is a brilliant medley of hot, southern flowers, and "Blues at the Crossroads" where an older man plays a guitar to a crowing rooster, is a reminder of Bearden's great interest in jazz and the music he lived and breathed while growing in Harlem in the '20s.

ONE OF THE LATEST collages is "Mother and Daughter" (1986), where a majestic matriarch in a turban and a dress with billowing floral sleeves stands with her daughter, who seems almost restrained in her style of modern dress.

Despite his preoccupation with immortalizing the black experience, Bearden is concerned with art rather than propaganda. In a 1977 interview in The New Yorker, he said, "I have not created protest images. The world within the collage if it is authentic, retains the right to speak for itself."

And indeed the collages do speak for themselves. His work reflects great tenderness for the subject matter, but also has universal appeal. The woman sitting on the porch with her son and daughter in "Meeklenberg Evening" (1984) is Everywoman and Bearden's two portraits, "Portrait of Louise Hightower" and "Mrs. Willie Mae Nicholson," have the look of Byzantine icons.

The present show is the artist's sixth at the gallery, where Sheldon Ross has been Bearden's dealer for many years. It should not be missed whether you have seen the DIA exhibition or not. It continues through Oct. 25. Hours are 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 250 Martin, Birmingham.



RICK SMITH/staff photographer

Romare Bearden's collage, "Meeklenberg Evening," with the woman sitting on the porch with her son and daughter, has a universal

versality about it. Sitting on the porch with the family on a warm evening is a common, cherished memory.