

Spicer House joins city's elite

Burrowes addition places historic sites, homes at 50

By Joanne Maliszewski
Staff writer

The 62-year-old Eleanor Spicer estate house has a new lease on life.

The one-story residence, designed by famed Michigan architect Marcus Burrowes, is the newest member of an elite group of more than 50 historic sites and buildings in the protected Farmington Hills historic district.

"We're on the right track in preserving the house, and putting it in the district helps us do that. We can preserve and protect the house for the whole community," said Paul Blizman, Farmington Hills Historic District Commission chairman.

The estate house is the only historically designated building on city owned property in the 210-acre Heritage Park, Farmington Road, between 10 and 11 Mile.

The Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Commission's three-year program to restore, preserve and transform the house into a visitors' center for the park does not conflict with the historical designation and efforts to maintain its historical significance, Blizman said.

PUTTING THE Spicer house into the historic district means that any changes to the building's exterior

must be approved by the historic district commission. The requirement doesn't apply to the house's interior. But attempts are planned to maintain much of the house's historic and architectural character, said Dan Potter, Farmington Hills special services director.

"In general, there are three areas that we will try to preserve in its existing state," Potter said.

The areas include the living and dining rooms and library. The parks and recreation commission's plan to re-establish a circular drive in front of the estate house also complements historic preservation efforts.

"In general, we've approved the concept (of the three-year program) already. The circular drive would return it to much like it used to be," Blizman said.

Though the Spicer house, built in 1926, is not as old as many of the historic district's buildings, its eligibility for historic designation and its significance remain in the architecture, said Farmington Hills city councilwoman Jean Fox, a former historic district commission and historical commission member.

The addition of the Spicer estate house to the city's protected historic district completes long-term efforts to include the city's five existing Marcus Burrowes homes, Fox said.

"These buildings could fit in comfortably with the English countryside," she said.

Though Burrowes' style is considered primarily English Renaissance, the Spicer house is somewhat different. "I'd call it arts and crafts — an English-type architecture from the 19th-20th centuries," Fox added.

THE NEARBY Farmington Community Center, also part of the historic district, has family connections to the Spicer house. Eleanor Spicer's father, Lumen Goodenough, bought the 1859 Palmer-Sherman house and added a wing in the early 1900s.

"She (Eleanor Spicer) grew up out there. It became their year-round home," Fox said, of what is now the Farmington Community Center.

Friends of the Goodenough family, David and Martha Gray, had what is now called the Spicer estate house, designed by architect Burrowes, built in 1926. But the couple never lived in the house because David Gray died. Gray's widow gave Eleanor Spicer the house as a wedding gift, Fox said.

The architectural characteristics that are notable in the Spicer estate house are the one-story level and the uncommon two wings. "This is not normal," Fox said. "This house was

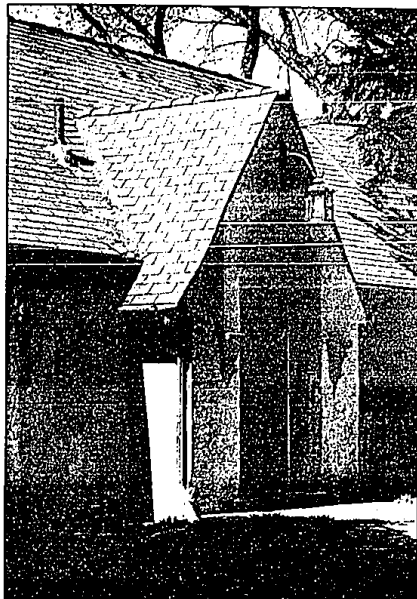
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built to take advantage of that siting — it overlooks that beautiful valley. Marcus Burrowes sited his houses beautifully."

The south wing boasts the bedrooms and the north wing the kitchen and servants quarters. The main rooms feature unusual architectural delights such as the decorative sculpted ceiling in the dining room, English casement windows in the living room and a clock over one of the many interesting doorways.

Also uncommon for the 1920s, when the house was built, are the cathedral ceilings, heavily used in England, Fox said.

"Most of his architecture has shades of English architecture," Fox said of architect Burrowes.



RANDY GORST/staff photographer

A view of the front door at the historic Spicer House in Heritage Park.

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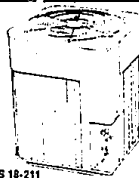
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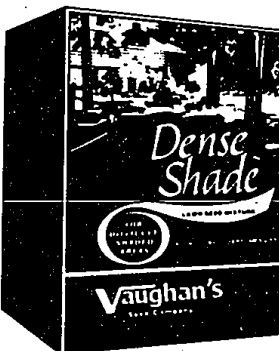
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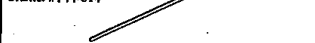


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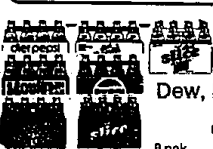
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