

## COVER STORY

# Taking the past into the future

STORY BY HUGH GALLAGHER • PHOTOS BY TOM HAWLEY

A school of goldfish dart through the narrow pond under two small waterfalls. Surrounding the pond is a rich field of flowers, 60 different varieties in a crazy quilt of colors. Stone and brick walkways wind invitingly through the small, carefully planned garden. A deep green wooden deck is a platform for viewing the regularly changing show.

This narrow, sideyard oasis is so right for the stately brick Italianate house that it seems it must have always been here. But the garden is a recent addition to the house that has been on Maple Street in Plymouth since 1879.

Suzanne Krueger, an artist and businesswoman, is the latest in a series of conscientious owners who have maintained and improved on the handsome house at 391 Maple built by John Hood. She bought the three-bedroom house in 1991 and immediately began to bring it up to modern standards without violating its original structure or destroying its Victorian appeal. And she added the magnificent garden.

The house, called the Hood-Behr house after John Hood family and Mr. and Mrs. Michael Behr who owned the house before Krueger and helped to renovate it, is now being offered for sale by Weir, Manuel, Snyder & Ranke Inc. Krueger is anxious to move on to tackle another house renovation, a 1906 farmhouse in Beverly Hills.

The house she will leave behind is rich in history and architecturally distinguished.

John Hood was a Civil War veteran. He built the main section of the house in 1879 on land at the edge of the town. The house was adjacent to the town's fairgrounds, which were later destroyed by fire in 1904. A

nearby street is still called Fairground. In 1881 Hood built an addition to the back that probably began as a carriage house but is now used as a family room with a wood-burning stove.

The house has been well preserved, but when Krueger moved in she knew changes were necessary. "I did the major things we expect living in the '90s, new roof, new landscaping, sprinkler system, air conditioner, plumbing, electrical," she said. "When I came to the inside, I redecorated in keeping with the age of the house, tried to stay within the decade."

Krueger approached the house as an art project, an outlet for talents she wasn't using in her work as a manufacturer's rep.

"I'm an artist with a degree in business and art. While I was a manufacturer's rep, I wanted to use my artistic talents and this was my project," she said. "Two years ago I started Victorian Gallery which I sold. I started Decorative Accessories retail shop and then sold my inventory to Sweet Dreams in Northville. Now I'm supplying them my designs for florals and ribbon work."

Krueger's first decision was to maintain the structural integrity of Hood's classic Italianate Victorian house. The design is notable for its hipped roof, four square design, long, narrow windows and beautiful brick work.

A handout prepared for the sale of the house explains the appeal of this 19th century design. "There is a timeless air of good design and good taste about these amazingly 'modern' Victorian houses. Their floor plans are open and informal."

The Hood house enters into a small foyer with a stairway to the



**Stately Victorian:** The Hood-Behr house is notable for its brick work and Italianate design. The front garden complements the architecture.

second floor, originally in dark wood. Krueger has changed the foyer and stairway to white marble with bright floral wallpaper along the stair wall. The living room and dining room have the original hard wood floors. The living room has a formal Oriental rug, but the dining room has a rug covering done by Krueger that mimics the rug but is actually painted canvas covered with 25 layers of varnish.

"I try to look at a house and think what I can do that's different," Krueger said. "I'm from a family of artists. My father was design engineer at Ford."

Krueger's mother was an interior decorator, but it wasn't until Krueger's two sons, Scott and Mark, went off to college that she began to use her artistic talents for interior design.

In addition to the floor covering, Krueger's hand can be seen in stenciling along the coved living room ceiling, the artful placement of Victorian antiques throughout and floral and ribbon arrangements common to the Victorian era.

Krueger said many people have a misconception about the Victorian period that it was dark and heavy. But she said Victorians were actually fond of color and light, which was especially evident in their floral decorations and gardens.

The garden at the Hood-Behr house is off the small kitchen, which was moved inside the house from an outside lean-to in about 1910. The garden is Krueger's special pride and joy.

"It's been a five year project," she said.

Mounds of dirt, stone, brick and wood have been brought in to create

a multi-leveled, twisting and turning environment with stone benches and hidden nooks and crannies.

"Everybody is so enthused about the ponds. I did build them myself and I did dig them myself," Krueger said.

The landscaping also extends to the front of the house, where very formal flower arrangements and mature trees set off the house's red brick.

"I've been interested in gardening all my adult life, but this is the first time I've had an extensive garden and I have the time to do it and study everything I can study," Krueger said.

Krueger is listing the house for \$258,000.

She has recently closed on the house in Beverly Hills.

"This house (the Hood-Behr) is a very sophisticated Italianate Victorian. In Beverly Hills the house is a 1906 farmhouse, not in the high Victorian style, more in the Arts and Crafts motif," Krueger said.

She said she has already made note of the mature trees and shrubbery on her new property and is busy planning what that garden will look like.

**Front Parlor:** Suzanne Krueger decorated this sitting room with a formal Victorian style but without the clutter usually associated with Victorian design.



**On the Cover:** Suzanne Krueger designed and built the garden which features a pond with gold fish, winding walkways and over 60 varieties of flowers. Photo by Tom Hawley.