



Windows, concrete and steel comprise the exterior of Janice Steinhardt's Birmingham loft townhouse, one of six residences featured in the Birmingham House Tour, set for Sept. 17.

BIRMINGHAM HOUSE TOUR

What: 17th annual Birmingham House Tour, featuring six Birmingham houses, a morning lecture with brunch and an afternoon reception with refreshments, to benefit The Community House's outreach programs.

Who: Guest speaker at the brunch is Peggy Kennedy, editor-in-chief of *Victoria* magazine in New York City. Her topic is decorative arts and her other passions, including gardening, travel, literature, fashion and beauty.

When: Tuesday, Sept. 17. Tour runs 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Lecture with brunch, 9:30-11:30 a.m. Afternoon refreshments served 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Where: Headquarters and site of lecture and afternoon reception is The Community House, 380 S. Bates in downtown Birmingham. Three houses on tour are within walking distance.

Cost: \$30 tickets include house tour and afternoon reception; \$60 tickets cover all activities. Tickets are limited and available at The Community House. Call (248) 644-5832.

Let's clean up the refrigerator

I opened the door of the refrigerator and reached in to get a jar of pure honey the other day, and I asked myself, "When was the last time this big monster was cleaned?"

I have to be honest with you folks - I would guess at least a year, even maybe two years.

My wife and I eat out a lot, so I started wondering how long some of the pickle jars and other things had been sitting on the back shelves.

I noticed a medical container that said "aspirin," and I checked the expiration date, which was printed as February 1996. (You may say that if you take an aspirin a day it can prevent a stroke - this bottle couldn't prevent a nosebleed.)

I have made up my mind to clean out the refrigerator; to just let it so clean you will think it just came out of the factory.

I will begin by shutting off the controls, and taking a couple of cardboard boxes and lining each of them with a blanket.

I will empty the contents into the boxes and flip the blankets over the top while I do my job. Some of the items aren't getting a return ticket, but instead will be sitting on the curb next trash day.

I will fill the laundry tub with hot water, reminding myself that a glass shelf must be room temperature before I submerge it into the hot water or I could break the glass.

A brush, a sponge and some disinfectant type soap should do the job of cleaning, with the aid of a little elbow grease.

While all the shelves are soaking in the laundry tub, I will mix a pail of hot water with 2 tablespoons of baking soda per quart of water. I will use this water to wash out the inner walls of both sections of the refrigerator.

I will also wipe off the rubber door seal all the way around, and when it is dry, I will put a dab of Vaseline on the surface of the door seal that runs the vertical length of the hinge side only.

On the inside of the refrigerator door I will pay particular attention to the bottom part of the door seal. Anything spilled

on the inside of the door will travel to here.

If it is something sticky, it causes the door seal to stick to the frame when the door is closed, which is what causes the common problem of a torn door seal. A very expensive repair bill can be prevented by soap and water.

When I get this side by side put back together, Valorie will come home, open the refrigerator door and step back in amazement.

I can just hear her now: "Wow! This is really sparkling clean, and it's so neat that it even looks like there is more room in here!"

For the last year or so I have been involved in meetings with health officials from across the country. It wasn't long ago when facts were revealed to me about the common household refrigerator becoming a very big concern to the U.S. Department of Health in Washington, D.C.

The simple truth is that today's refrigerator doesn't keep food as cold as it should be. I've complained about it for years.

It is a shame that people still think leftover food can be kept in the refrigerator for a period of seven days. That's not true anymore, and the majority of homeowners don't know that the new rule of thumb is a storage period of only three to five days.

Another fact that is alarming is a reversal of how many people suffer food poisoning from eating establishments every year. Today, more cases are reported from individuals who are poisoned by food out of their own refrigerators than by the food they eat in a restaurant.

I believe many unethical things happen in big business and with every passing year we as consumers become a little wiser. With this wisdom we become a little more inquisitive and discover things that we didn't even know existed a few years back.

I honestly feel that appliance manufacturers could have spent more of their dollars on refrigerator temperatures instead of all the bells and whistles you buy today. I predict that day will come and when it does, we will have a healthier population. Stay tuned.

Joe Gagnon can now be heard on WWJ-950 and WXYT-1270. He is a member and past president of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals. His phone number is (248) 455-7281.



Appliance Doctor
Joe Gagnon

WALLS

FROM PAGE C1
LIKE A CIRCLE

What probably resonates most and first with visitors is the open flow of space and living space flexibility. Soaring 20-foot loft ceilings, accentuated by windows of about 18 feet in height, greet you at the door.

Less noticeable is the fact Steinhardt's home has neither interior walls nor structurally contained rooms, both which contribute to the fluidity and sense of spaciousness.

"It's a more social house," said Paris, who has garnered significant attention for the project, including awards from both the American Institute of Architects in Michigan and the

Masonry Institute of Michigan. The house is also featured in the October issue of *Dwell* magazine as an example of an urban townhouse set in a suburban community.

"It flows in a circle," Paris said. "And the kitchen is such a central point. It allows people to congregate and move."

Adjacent to the kitchen is a secondary living space that spills out into a dining space suitable for everyday use and entertaining.

Downstairs, defined living spaces also do double duty. Both convert into rooms for Steinhardt's visiting children - or guests - for privacy, and then seamlessly disappear when unneeded.

Steinhardt's screens, like her enormous windows, suggest privacy needs are momentary and that privacy, in general, isn't overwhelmingly important.

Windows occupy almost 40 percent of the wall space on the south side of the house. And all the windows are treated with simple pull-down shades, which are, by the way, translucent from the inside.

The master bathroom offers even less privacy: planes of glass separate bathtub from toilet and toilet from shower, for example.

"It's three different spaces that are continuous just separated by glass," Paris said. "It's very un-private but for a couple it's fine."

Such characteristics place the townhouse in the category of *The Un-Private House*, the



Janice Steinhardt's minimalist sensibility can be seen everywhere, down to the Kohler fixtures in the master bath.

title and concept of a 1999 architectural exhibit at New York City's Museum of Modern Art.

While the title suggests the key is a lack of privacy, its underpinnings are current living patterns that produce less privacy.

Interestingly, Steinhardt and Paris learned about *The Un-Private House* and attended the exhibit well after making most of their design decisions.

"That their ideas matched up is 'not a coincidence,'" but rather proof of the concept's natural occurrence in the face of 21st century living, said Steinhardt.

Still, discovering that her future home fit into an emerging architectural concept brought affirmation.

"It verified what we were doing," Steinhardt said. "And that we weren't crazy."

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