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436 Newman Avenue: Shaping a Home

Donna Castellano

Unlike other residences located throughout the Twickenham Historic Preservation District, houses on Newman Avenue do not come with distinguished architectural pedigrees. The Castellano house at 436 Newman is no exception. Constructed in 1929 from a stock plan, this house is typical of brick bungalows built during this period.

The front porch that stretches across the front of the house indicates that bungalows were designed with families in mind. Originally the structure consisted of a living room, sitting room, dining room, bath, bedroom and kitchen. The home's second owners, Mr. and Mrs. Guy, carved two bedrooms and a bath for their two sons from the attic space.



436 Newman Avenue—The red brick bungalow of Donna and Michael Costellano is typical of the Newman Avenue homes built in the late 1920s. The wide overhangs, the shallow front peak and the brackets supporting the porch roof over brick piers and stepped porch wall reinforce the horizontal facade. Photo by Donna Castellano.

The Castellanos bought the home in 1997 and are only the third family to have lived there.

The house has features characteristic of bungalows. There is no entry foyer. Instead, visitors enter directly into the living room, which has a fireplace, built-in bookshelves, and three cased-arched openings that lead to other parts of the house. It is both an element of its modest square footage and design philosophy that the floor plan has no formal rooms, a reason why people associate the style with warm and cozy environments.

Although neither Donna Castellano nor her husband Michael had ever owned an older home—much less considered restoring an historic home—they bought the house on impulse because it reminded them of their grandparents' houses. Initially, they plotted the changes they would make to the house to update its function. However, as they lived in the house they realized they were molding their life to fit its design. The house's layout drew their family together and forced them to simplify their lives. It is impossible to calculate how many conversations developed because they all occupied the same space, and how those exchanges—those connections—would have been lost had they been able to retreat to separate places.

A lack of closet and storage space challenged them to develop new attitudes toward their belongings. They carried possessions from house to house out of habit, never questioning the value or use of the articles dutifully packed and unpacked with each move. With a commitment to keep only those things they used or loved, they found they had ample storage space.

The Castellanos lived in the house three years before undertaking any significant renovation work. In January 2000 they began a kitchen

renovation and added a laundry room and small den. Built-ins that were common to bungalow kitchens, such as a butler's pantry and window seat, were added. All windows and trim were specified to match the original moldings. The addition respects the design integrity of the house; the kitchen, laundry room, and sitting room are in scale with rooms in the original portion of the structure.

Living in an unreconstructed bungalow still presents its challenges. It is difficult to return to a 1920s bathroom after a stay in a hotel room with a bath that includes a shower and a separate whirlpool tub, double-sink vanities and heated tile floors. Friends warn that as their son enters his teen years the Castellanos may need to build an addition to house his attitude. For the moment, however, the house provides for all of their needs and satisfies many of their wants—and reminds us there is a significant difference between the two.

Donna Castellano has a Master's degree in history and teaches history at UAH. She is a board member of the Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association, directing her efforts toward raising funds for the continuing preservation of the Weeden House.