



SHOW-ME *Homes*



This well-known Columbia home gets its nickname for its Tudor-revival style, which evokes fairy-tale imagery. The home was named as one of Columbia's Most Notable Properties in 2004.

RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT: Nadine Coleman and her husband, O.T., bought the home for fifteen hundred dollars in 1941. The exterior of the home reflected Nadine's passion for gardening.



ALLI INGLEBRIGHT; COURTESY MILLS R. COLEMAN



COURTESY MILLS R. COLEMAN

THE Hansel and Gretel HOUSE

A Columbia home evokes a fairy tale. BY DIANNA BORSI O'BRIEN

SURROUNDED BY cozy gardens, the house at 121 West Boulevard in Columbia looks like something plucked from the pages of a story book. You almost expect Hansel and Gretel to come dancing out of the tiny front door at any minute.

This house, often known as the Gingerbread House, is a short-term lease house with a difference. Kristin and Adam Kaiser bought it in 2011 with two plans in mind: to maintain its historic integrity and to open up the iconic home to as many visitors as possible.

"It's a fun house, and we're delighted we can share it with even more people," says Adam. Between rentals, the Kaisers have offered the home for tours. And while the house looks diminutive, it offers three bedrooms and two baths. The cozy, seven-foot ceilings are a drawback only for basketball players. Offered via Facebook, the house sports an official name: Creekstone Cottage, bestowed for the stones from a nearby creek that decorate the outside and the mantel.

Yet, when this historic home was built around 1911, the sweet cottage wasn't a cottage—and it wasn't even in Columbia.

Like many homes in what was once the frontier, the house began as a log cabin in 1911 only to be transformed in 1935 by Blanche and Arch McHarg into a Tudor-revival style home, leaving almost no visible clues to its log past inside the house. Even the stones on the outside of the house, according to previous reports, serve no structural purpose

and only reflect a popular style at the time.

The allure of the home is undeniable. When it went on the market in 2010, a realtor's open house drew more than three hundred visitors. Mention the Gingerbread House in Columbia, and most people know what house you are talking about.

The draw stems from the combination of its fairy-tale cottage appearance and the impeccable gardens, a transformation that didn't begin until 1941.

Historic preservation consultant Deb Sheals admits the house itself is not an outstanding example of anything and says it is instead an example of how things add up to make a home remarkable.

"It's just so little; it's so cute. And it's the gardens," Deb says. "They've always been immaculately kept."

The house does represent history because it once marked the edge of Columbia, a fact one of its former residents, Mills R. Coleman, recalls clearly.

It was his mother, Nadine Coleman, who planted the beautiful gardens that now lend the house its unmistakable charm. She and her husband, O.T., bought the house in 1941.

Mills recalls his family having to install plumbing in the house, though it already had electricity. Mills, now eighty-seven, says as a fourteen-year-old he was given the job of digging a space under the house for the installation of the house's first furnace.



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The Gingerbread House was originally built in 1911 as a log cabin. Although there is no evidence of this past on the exterior, the interior retains rustic elements such as a stone fireplace.

Mills, who returned to Columbia after a career as a ship captain, also recalls his mother's love for the large stone fireplace, which is still the focus of the living room, and the family's addition of another bedroom. "It was two bedrooms, and then Dad added another bedroom on the south side," Mills says. The piecemeal expansion of the house explains the step down into the kitchen and the back bedrooms.

His family also added the beautiful wide plank floors as well as a detail often attributed to the house's log-cabin origins: the string pull-latch on the door. A string goes through a hole in the front door, which lets someone pull up the latch from outside to open the door. But once the string is pulled in through the hole to the inside of the door, there is no way to pull up the latch and open the door.

"She was great at thinking up such things," says Mills.

The house also has an artifact that reflects his mother's reaction to World War II, which is when Mills served in the military. To stave off her worries about her son, Nadine opened a preschool at the house and called it the Little Female Seminary. Years later, Nadine went on to become a writer and wrote about the preschool in an article, "Borrowed Children," published in the *Columbia Daily Tribune* in 1990. Today there's a school bell in the garden, which Adam says may hail from when the house operated as a preschool.

But it was in the gardens where Nadine left her most memorable mark. In *The Joyful Gardener*, one of the books she wrote, she discussed filling the yard with unusual plants, many of which remain.

In 1957, Herb and Betty Brown, friends of Nadine's, bought the house, and they continued the intensive, artistic gardening and expanded it as well. The Browns also kept the



ABOVE LEFT, CLOCKWISE: A dining room was added to the original log cabin. The Coleman family added a string pull-latch on the front door, a feature reminiscent of its log cabin origins.

TAYLOR BLAIR, ALLI INGLEBRIGHT



Although the home appears to be very small on the outside, there are three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a dining room, and a screened-in back porch.

house in pristine historic condition, resulting in a house that still boasts knotty pine paneling and cozy rooms with low, snug seven-foot ceilings. They did bow to some modern needs and added on a garage, probably during the 1980s.

The Browns honed and shaped the garden setting that makes the home so eye-catching. They were ardent patrons of the arts. Betty was a docent at MU's Museum of Art and Archeology and an active member of the Columbia Art League. Tributes after her death noted how she loved to give tours of the garden and invite painters to set up their easels there, which made the home even better known in Columbia.

In 2004, the house was added to Columbia's Most Notable Properties List, a designation given to properties of historic significance. In 2007, Betty died, and Herb followed in 2010. With their children living out of state, the home was put on the market, and in 2011, the Kaisers bought it.

TAYLOR BLAIR

"It's a fun house, and we're delighted we can share it with even more people."

Kristin was delighted when the property became available. She's always had an interest in historic homes, and in 2009, she served on Columbia's Historic Preservation Commission. With a focus on preserving the house's historic feel, the Kaisers have filled the house with antique or to-scale furnishings, maintaining the scale and sense of the home. The only changes to the house were the addition of new appliances and a few other updates to provide modern comforts.

They've also carried on the artistic vibe started by Betty. The furnishings include local art from the gallery Kristin owns, Christopherson

Art. Works displayed include those of local artists Gloria Gaus, Chris McGee, and Jack Eads.

Beyond these changes, Adam and Kristin continue to make special efforts to maintain the home's fairy-tale feeling inside and out. All the woodwork was maintained.

"We haven't changed that," says Kristin. Outside, they employ a certified botanist to make sure the gardens stay as beautiful as Nadine Coleman and the Browns left them.

"We want to keep that feeling of Hansel and Gretel going."

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