


# Sears' Early Bungalows

Catalog homes were made possible by the nation's largest retailer and the railroad.

BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER

ARISTOCRAT OF BUNGALOWS



**The ASHMORE**

No. 3034 "Already Cut" and Fitted.

**Honor Bilt**

**\$2,870<sup>00</sup>**

**above**  
*The Ashmore model from 1918 had all the style of an architect-designed home.*

THE YEAR 1886 WAS MOMENTOUS IN THE HISTORY OF MODERN RETAILING. IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, Richard Sears and Alvah Roebuck began a mail-order sales operation that changed the way Americans bought household goods for decades to come. Sears had worked as a railroad shipping clerk and saw firsthand the basis for a business that could bring goods of nearly every description to American families from coast to coast.

By 1905, Sears, Roebuck and Company was offering 65 different specialty mail-order catalogs for such items as farm wagons, washing machines, furnaces and paint. Millions more took advantage of Sears' highly accessible home-catalog shopping system that reached even the most remote corners of the nation. Anyone who owned a post office box gained access to the vast storehouse of Sears' products.

In 1895, Sears began to sell building materials through a mail-order catalog that was advertised in popular magazines. Next, the company began to sell house plans as well. By 1908, the company was ready to launch a new business that offered the prospective homeowner the entire house package, from the building itself right down to the rugs and furniture to put in it. At first Sears did not sell what we now call a "kit house" with pre-cut lumber and numbered parts; that innovation came in 1916. And while the company did not pioneer the kit house, what Sears did was to raise the stakes with lavish advertising and grander-styled models and push the industry forward to the point that it was not uncommon for an American family to build a house from a kit. So popular was this method that by 1920 Sears was selling more than 250 homes a month.

It is estimated that Sears housed more than 100,000 families in their homes built between the years 1908 and 1940. The first house catalog contained 22 plans of mostly Victorian-styled homes costing between \$650 and \$2,500. By 1918 the catalog was 146 pages long and offered more than 100 house models as well as summer cottages, garages and barns.

**top**  
*Sears not only sold the house but all the furnishings for it as well. These room views of the Ashmore from 1918 were designed to do just that.*

**right**  
*Sears was fond of showing the spaciousness of their bungalow rooms. This helped sell the house and illustrate the latest style trends in decorating.*

INTERIORS - *The ASHMORE*



*The Living Room, Looking Toward Fireplace*  
Note the Rustic Mantel.



*The Living Room, Looking From Fireplace Nook*  
Graceful Panel Work.



*The Dining Room*  
We Furnish the Built-In Buffet.



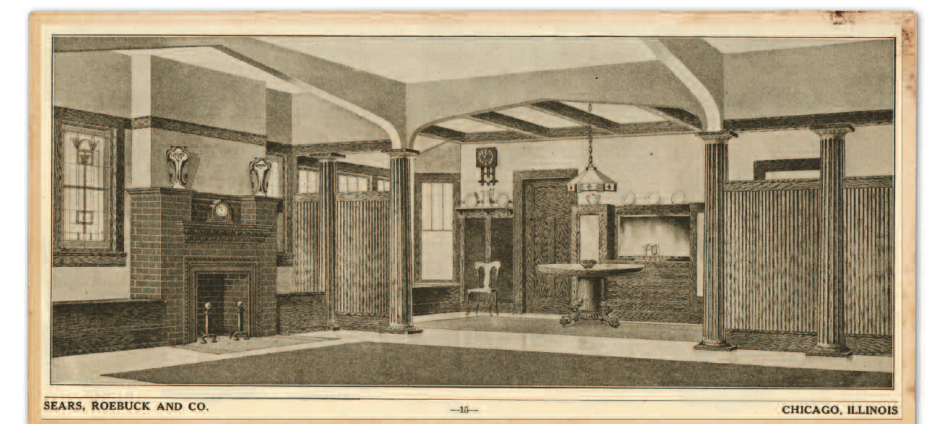
*The Pullman Breakfast Alcove in Kitchen*

**THE** rustic mantel, the bookcase and the elevated fireplace platform in the living room in this strictly up to date bungalow, as well as the graceful panels, indicate refinement and good taste. It would be difficult in a building of this character to embody more attractive features than we show in the interiors herewith presented. Happy is the man who can call a house like this his own.

There is an appearance of comfort in the dining room. When furnished as shown in the illustration and when lighted in subdued effects, it will present a most cheerful and inviting appearance. The homelike and hospitable suggestions in the exterior treatment are duplicated in every line of the interior.

Long before the "kiddies" are awake, the busy business man is up and around, ready for his eggs and bacon or steaming flapjacks. The Pullman Breakfast Alcove in the kitchen provides a snug retreat where the morning meal can be served. The kitchen range close by makes the labor easy for the lady of the house or maid.

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO. CHICAGO



Anyone who owned a post office box gained access to the vast storehouse of Sears' products.

BUNGALOW MAGAZINE ADVERTISING SECTION



*Modern Bungalow No. 238B.*

**\$1,350 Buys All Material** (Except Cement, Brick and Plaster)  
**to Build This Bungalow**  
Described and Illustrated in the April Bungalow Magazine

For \$1,350.00 we furnish all the lumber, mill work, hardware, interior varnish and painting material necessary to build the bungalow illustrated above.

The \$1,350.00 price includes for framing and dimension lumber and all other materials above described. For \$1,624.00 we will furnish all mill work, hardware, paints and varnishes and all other materials above described, except cement, brick and plaster. This price includes yellow pine framing and dimension lumber.

Allowing a fair price for all carpentry and other labor, cement, brick and plaster, this bungalow can be built for about \$3,550.00, including all material and labor. If you buy material at retail prices you cannot hope to complete this bungalow for less than \$4,200.00. Our price, therefore,

**Saves You About \$700.00**  
After Paying the Freight.

Every house bill we ship is sold with the distinct understanding that the customer must be perfectly satisfied. He has the privilege of returning the entire shipment to us should he not find it exactly as represented, with the understanding that we will cheerfully refund the amount paid us for such material returned, including transportation charges.

For \$1.00 we will furnish a complete set of blue prints (working drawings), typewritten specifications and bill of all the material required to build either one of the bungalows shown on this page, or we will send itemized bill free. Specify, by number, which plans you want.

If you are figuring on a building of any kind, SEND US YOUR BILL FOR AN ESTIMATE. Get our prices before you close any contract or spend any money for lumber, mill work or other building material.

**Book of 100 Modern Homes, Free**  
Our new Book of Modern Homes is free. It illustrates, describes and prices over 100 designs of houses suitable for all sections of the country. Write for it—it is FREE. Ask for Modern Home Book No. 8025E.

In last month's Bungalow Magazine we quoted a price of \$250.00 for the material necessary to build the March Supplement Bungalow, illustrated below. The offer is still open.

**Sears, Roebuck and Co., Chicago**  
Please Be Sure to Address Your Correspondence to Chicago

*Modern Bungalow No. 237B.*



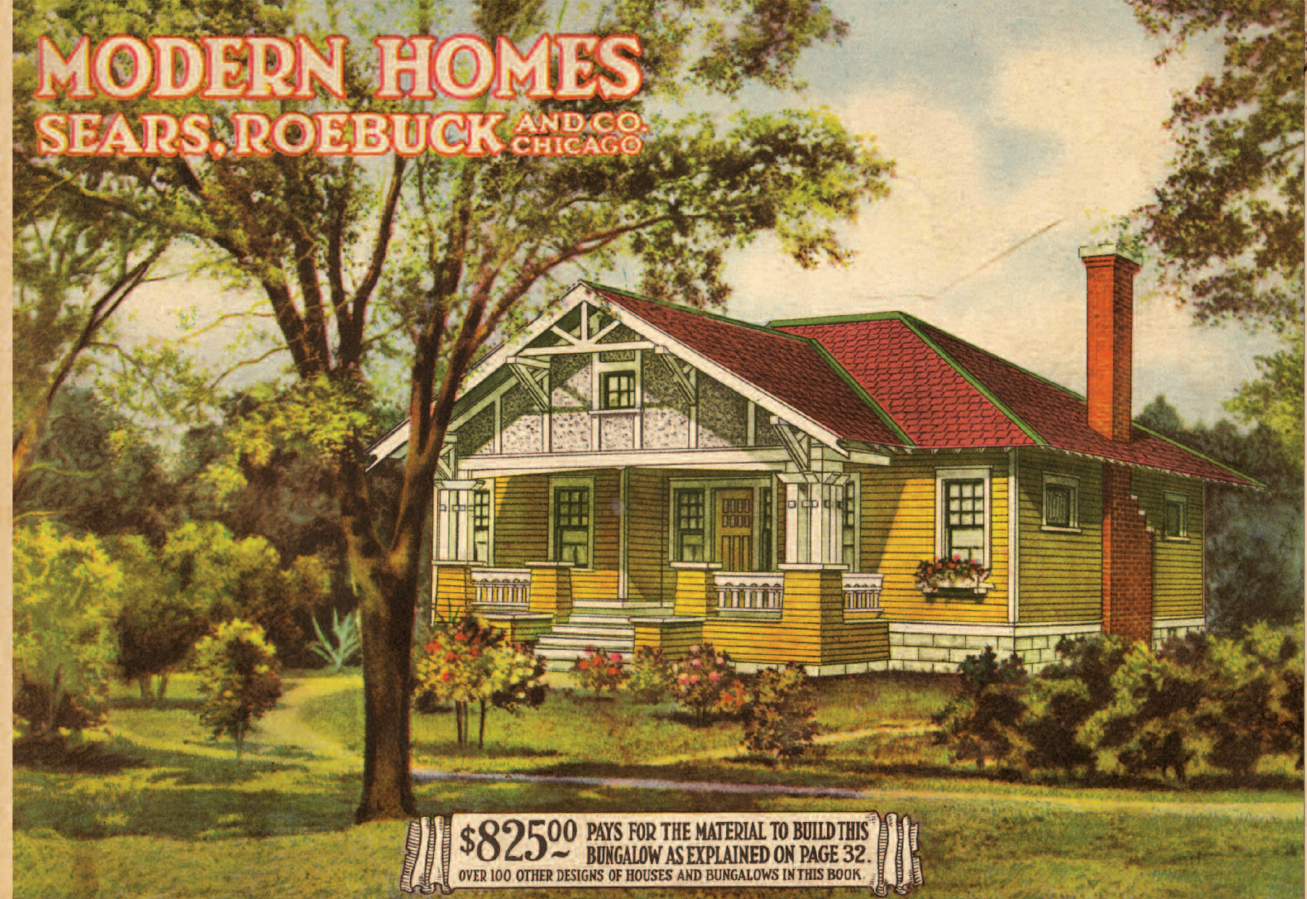
8-A Please Mention Bungalow Magazine When Writing Advertisers

above  
Sears was a master at advertising. This 1914 ad appeared in Bungalow Magazine.

One of Sears'—and the nation's—biggest-selling models was the common bungalow. This compact, affordable house began as a vacation-style home in the 1880s but grew into a major housing type in cities and suburbs in the years before World War I.

In the original Sears *Modern Homes* catalog there are only two models that one could consider a bungalow by our modern definition. Model No. 64 had a sloping front roof and dormer that are considered bungalow characteristics, but no indoor plumbing. Model 126 offered an indoor bathroom and a ground-hugging plan with exposed eave rafters that resembled later bungalows. By 1914, the popularity of the bungalow was clearly shown in that year's catalog. There were 32 bungalows offered, many of them highly styled. Sears also included interior illustrations to show potential buyers how the house could be furnished—with Sears' furniture, paint and wallpaper, of course. The handsome Argyle model offered from 1916 to 1926 was pictured in color for several years as was the popular Elsmore that appeared for 13 years. The Starlight bungalow, first offered in 1913, had sold at least 200 times by 1918. This small bungalow was typical of the starter-level homes offered by Sears. At 24 by 32 feet it fit nicely onto the narrow city lots of the period. On the other end of the bungalow size scale, the Ashmore, at 34 by 52 feet, was elaborate, with a side pergola porch, numerous windows and an Arts and Crafts rustic exterior.

**MODERN HOMES**  
**SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO. CHICAGO**



**\$825.00 PAYS FOR THE MATERIAL TO BUILD THIS BUNGALOW AS EXPLAINED ON PAGE 32.**  
OVER 100 OTHER DESIGNS OF HOUSES AND BUNGALOWS IN THIS BOOK.

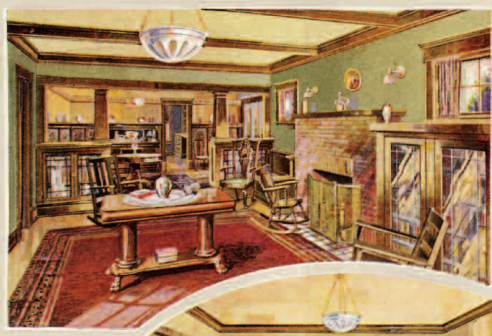

Throughout the early years of the Sears *Modern Homes* catalogs the company offered a wide and changing variety of bungalow styles and types. From starter homes to more elaborate Craftsman-style designs, the Chicago retailer provided the potential home buyer with an enormous number of purchase options. **B**

IMAGES COURTESY OF  
THE AUTHOR.

**top**  
The cover of the 1914 catalog illustrated the popular Elsmore bungalow.

**right**  
Another popular model, the Argyle bungalow, was offered for 11 years. This rare color rendition from 1918 shows renderings of the dining and living rooms.

**The ARGYLE** Honor Bill **\$1,479.00**  
No. 2018 "Already Cut" and Fitted.

**THE ARGYLE** Modern Home is a bungalow whose exterior appearance suggests extra fine interior arrangement and furnishings. The front elevation, as you glance at it, bespeaks richness and comfort on the inside. A glance at the illustrations of the living room and dining room proves this conclusively. Note the bookcase colonnade, the beamed ceiling, the massive brick mantel with the built-in bookcase on the side. Note also the extra depth of the living room and dining room, nearly 30 feet long. "A \$4,000.00 house," you might say, and you would not be very far wrong, if it were built in the ordinary way. Yet by our modern merchandising methods, we are able to furnish the materials so that you can build it for a great deal less.

Our customers are pleased to show their houses to their friends and we believe that the illustrations on this and the opposite page explain the reason why. Our houses are homes of quality—homes that can be built with a big saving in labor, time and money.

Read Complete Description on the Opposite Page

**SEARS ROEBUCK AND CO. CHICAGO**

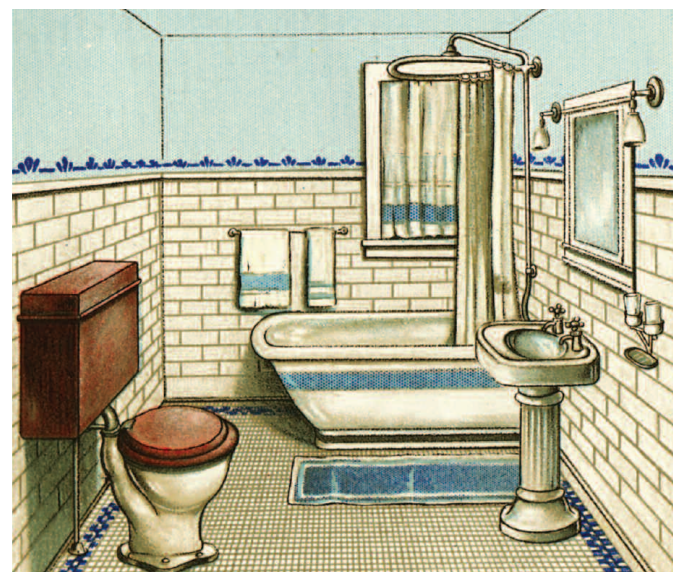
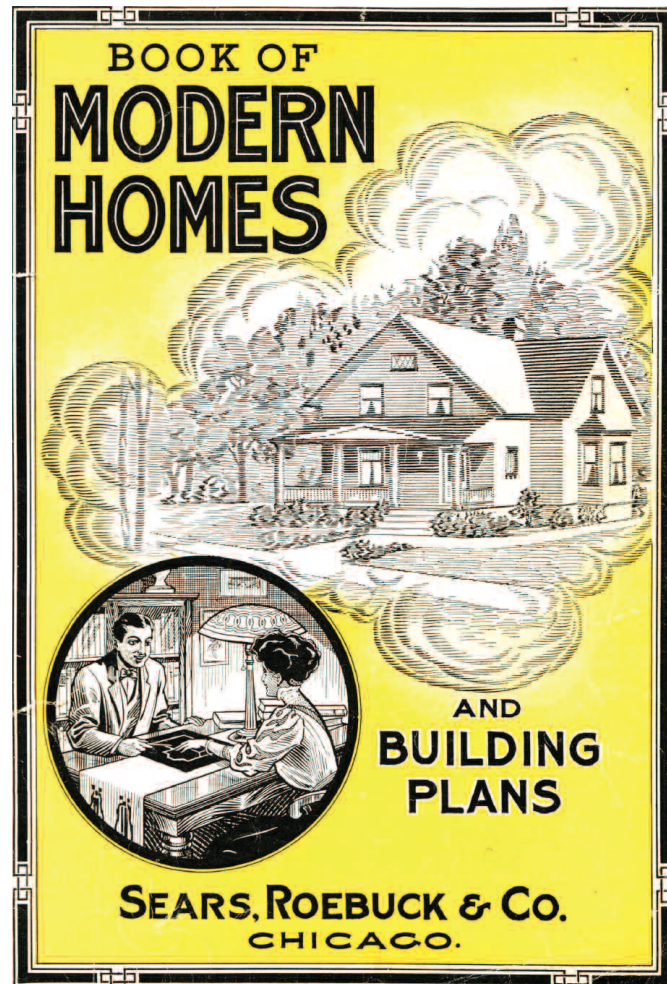
One of Sears' biggest-selling home models was the common bungalow.

**right**

*This 1909 Modern Homes catalog cover depicts a young couple poring over house plans. Many first-time home buyers purchased homes from Sears.*

**bottom**

*The designs in the first catalog Sears offered rarely provided indoor plumbing. But by 1912, elaborate bathrooms such as the one shown here were available.*



## FOLLOW THE SEARS TRAIL

Further resources for more information on these catalog homes.

**Books:**

- *Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company* by Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, Wiley Publishers 1996. Visit [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).
- *Finding the Houses That Sears Built* by Rosemary Thornton, Gentle Beam Publications, 2nd edition 2004. Visit [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).
- *Small Houses of the Twenties: The Sears, Roebuck 1926 House Catalog*, Dover Publications; Unabridged edition 1991. Visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
- *Sears House Designs of the Thirties*, Dover Publications 2003. Visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
- *Sears Modern Homes, 1913*, Dover Publications, 2006. Visit [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).
- *Homes in a Box: Modern Homes from Sears by Sears*, Schiffer Publishing 1997. Visit [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).

**Web sites:**

- [searsarchives.com/homes](http://searsarchives.com/homes)
- [inspect-ny.com/searshouses.htm](http://inspect-ny.com/searshouses.htm)
- [aurora-il.org/communitydevelopment/historicpreservation/sears\\_houses.php](http://aurora-il.org/communitydevelopment/historicpreservation/sears_houses.php)
- <http://64.66.180.31/archive/sears/index.shtml>

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