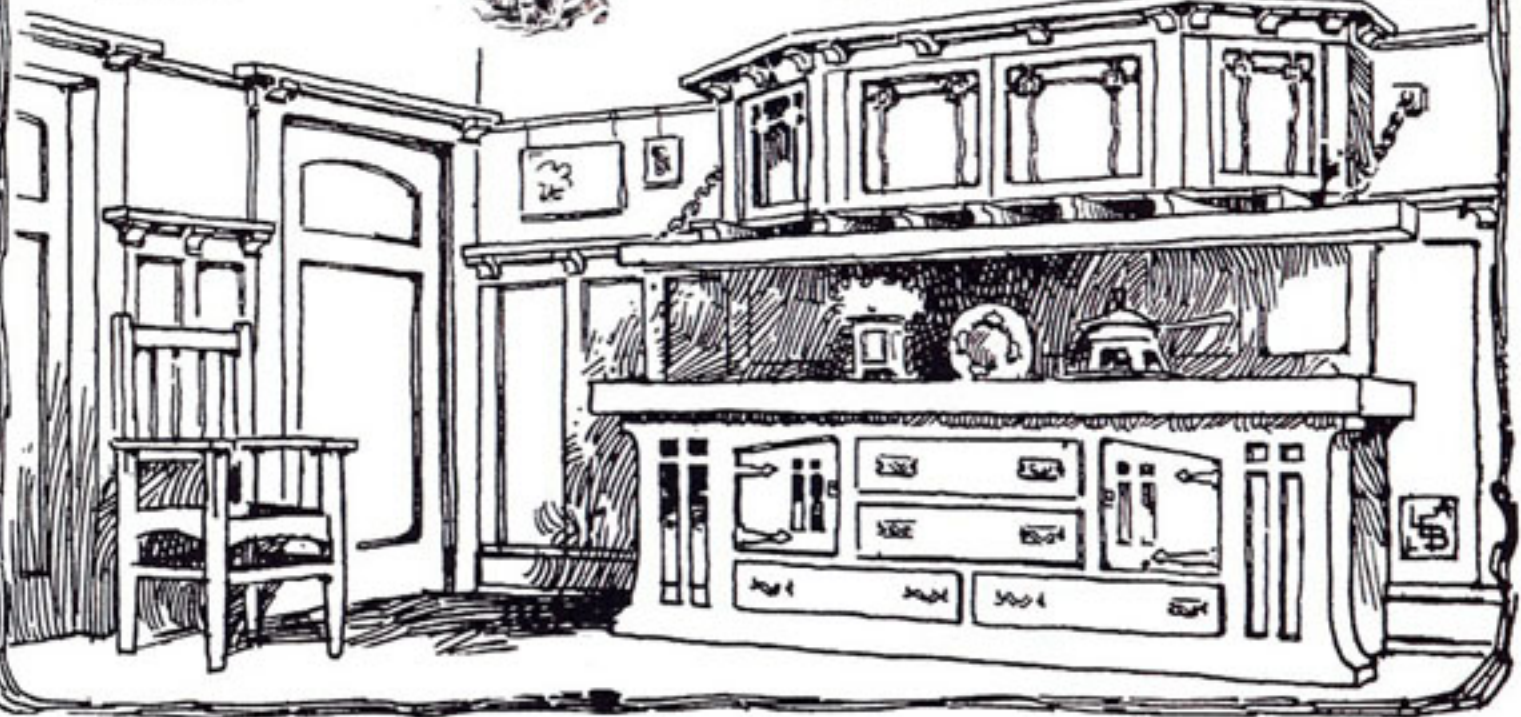


INTERIORS OF
WILSON BUNGALOWS



BUNGALOW BUILT-INS

BY ROB SCHWEITZER

OF ALL THE NOTABLE FEATURES of a bungalow, nothing is more quintessential than its built-in furniture. Many people won't consider a house to be a bungalow without them. In the early years of this century every lumber yard and molding catalog featured numerous examples to dazzle the prospective homeowner. Almost any room in the house could contain built-ins, but the most popular locations were in the kitchen, living room, dining room and entry hall.

The popularity of built-ins reflected the entire bungalow philosophy of economy. Large Queen Anne and Colonial Revival style houses were popular prior to the bungalow era, when economy of space usually wasn't an issue. Rooms were large, with numerous pieces of furniture to hold household and personal items. In these homes, servants were employed to cook, and to maintain the house.

The newly monied middle classes of the teens and '20s had no domestic staff. Fewer than 10 percent of the households had servants. Families wanted a clean, efficient, well-planned home, and bungalows were designed to be just that. Smaller than Victorian homes, they saved on construction costs, allowing a broader economic range of families to purchase them. Built-ins saved floor space and provided an efficient floor plan without butlers' pantries, libraries and office space.

Keith's magazine, for July 1916, notes that "Built-in bookcases have become decidedly popular with present day builders..." They made the house seem larger and more spacious by not having free-standing book cabinets on the floor. Reading had become a common pastime in the early 20th century. An increased literacy rate, the public library system, and the expansion of the publishing industry contributed to its popularity. Magazines, as well as the classics and romances, were widely read.

In the smaller bungalow plan, a room was seldom designated as the library. The living room, as the center for family life, culture and reading, was considered the house core, and bookcases were best located in that room. Often a reading alcove was made out of a bay window, with a seat and flanking, built-in bookcases. When this alcove was connected to



INGLENOOK, FROM HOMES & INTERIORS OF THE 1920's.



BREAKFAST NOOK, FROM HOMES & INTERIORS OF THE 1920's.

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BUNGALOW & BUILT-INS

the fireplace, possibly at a slight angle to allow for catching the heat and light of a fire, it was called an inglenook. The most common arrangement seemed to be bookcases built in on each side of the fireplace.

Sometimes bookcases were located at an end wall near an exterior door to a terrace or porch, or in a colonnade between the living room and the dining room. Colonnades replaced the double-pocket doors of the Queen Anne house and provided a place to display bric-a-brac, as that fashion from the Victorian era had not totally died out. Bookcases were sometimes placed between the living room and the entry hall. Here they were easily accessible if you wanted to read by the fire or relax on a built-in bench in the hall.

Many of the bookcases contained glass doors to protect the volumes from dust and children. They were made of hardwoods, and stained to match the general colors of the interior wood trim. The authors of that time said they should be located in places where "no other value" can be given the space, not unduly conspicuous, yet decorative.

Other common and highly innovative built-ins were small, recessed – sometimes secluded – nooks. In the living room there was the inglenook. On front porches, flanking benches sometimes adorned a porch or stoop. The most common built-in, however, was the breakfast nook in a corner or small room off of the kitchen.

With the more scientific and thoughtful development of kitchens, all spaces in the bungalow were redesigned to provide maximum efficiency and usefulness. Authors at the time noted it was the first real change in design since the days of their grandmothers. Without servants, and with a job or other activities outside the home, the role of wife and mother had drastically changed since the late 19th century. People seemed to be more mentally fatigued than ever before, with increased civic and family activities.

The faster pace of living necessitated a smaller, more efficient kitchen and eating area. A nook was a convenient place for breakfasting near food preparation: easy to clean up and usually located next to a sunny window. It provided a meal-planning center for sorting out

ingredients and utensils, a place to relax while preparing meals, and a place for children's play close to the watchful eye of mother. One catalog of the early '20s showed a breakfast nook painted dark green with yellow trim, while another was pictured in black with red trim.


In the dining room, sideboards and china cabinets were replaced by built-in buffets. Since family members had to set and clear the table, a convenient place to store the meal plates and tableware was essential. Numerous large drawers were available for napkins and table linens. Glass-doored shelving provided room to store china and to show-off fancy items like silver and china serving pieces.

Every area of the house used built-ins. Closets appeared in entry halls and bedrooms. This era was the first to see a closet in each bedroom, plus linen closets. Today we use storage systems which help expand the available closet space with shelving, racks and hanging devices. In the bungalow era the same type of "closet expanders" were available from companies like

"Batts System of Wardrobes" of Grand Rapids, Mich. No sooner did the closet appear in the average house than it was filled up and in need of better organi-

zation and expansion. Batts addressed this need by cutting down on closet size to form a "compact, space-saving, economical, sanitary arrangement." Batts noted with some pride that homeowners "saved 50% on tailors' bills" for pressing clothes by using their system, which eliminated wrinkles.

As Arts and Crafts style homes were replaced by newer designs in the late '20s and into the '30s, the built-ins remained. Colonial, Cape Cod and Williamsburg style houses incorporated

the built-ins but added a Colonial touch. Woodwork began to be painted, and new types of storage evolved. During the Depression, buffets became corner cupboards and breakfast nooks became pantries. Bookcases were left off of new home designs as radio and television replaced reading. But the foundations for our modern storage systems, from closets to kitchens, had their beginnings in the bungalow era. As today's bungalow owners know, the need for economy never fades. 

"Built-in bookcases have become decidedly popular with present day builders..."
Keith's magazine, July 1916



COLONNADE WITH BUILT-IN DESK, AS FEATURED IN *HOMES & INTERIORS OF THE 1920's*.