



# The Bungalows of Gordon-Van Tine

Experience kit houses direct from Iowa.

BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER



**above**

*This handsome and colorful cover from 1927 illustrates the "American Dream."*

**right**

*The graphics in GVT catalogues were high quality; this one illustrates a bungalow model with views of the front façade, terrace and living room.*

IF YOU WERE A TYPICAL YOUNG COUPLE IN THE early decades of the 20th century, you would have been very interested in acquiring your own home. Growing job opportunities in urban areas brought families in from the countryside. Vast new areas surrounding America's cities opened for development due to the building of inter-urban streetcar lines and the affordability of automobiles, such as Ford's Model T. At the time, building lots could be purchased, and an architect and contractor were easily hired to build a new home. However, there were other, more innovative, ways available in order to secure a home. If the young couple happened to be looking through any of the popular magazines of the day, they would have seen advertisements for companies selling a new form of house—ones that came in a kit.





**TICKETS**  
**TRAINS FOR DAVENPORT ON TIME**

**A Day's Time Will Save You Many Dollars**

**SEE for Yourself This Great Organization These Vast Stocks**

**COME TO DAVENPORT**  
Come and see for yourself. Then, you can see at first hand whether our claims are based on fact, or not. But remember, if you can't come to Davenport, that the same immense stocks of top grade material, the same matchless service and unexampled low prices are here for you to take advantage of them. If you do not find things just as we have represented them, we will pay your railroad fare both ways.  
**GORDON-VAN TINE COMPANY**  
Davenport, Iowa

#### above

Gordon-Van Tine was so confident in its products, it ran this two-page spread to encourage potential customers to visit the facilities and meet the staff.

Several companies offered kit options. Sears and Montgomery Ward from Chicago sold kit homes, as did a group of three companies from Bay City, Michigan. One company from Davenport, Iowa, was famous for offering simple bungalows at affordable prices. Gordon-Van Tine, with its sprawling complex of mills and wood-shaping buildings on the Mississippi River, is considered one of the six major players in the kit-house market.

Established in 1865 as the U.N. Roberts Company, when Davenport was one of the largest saw mill centers in the Mississippi Valley, it



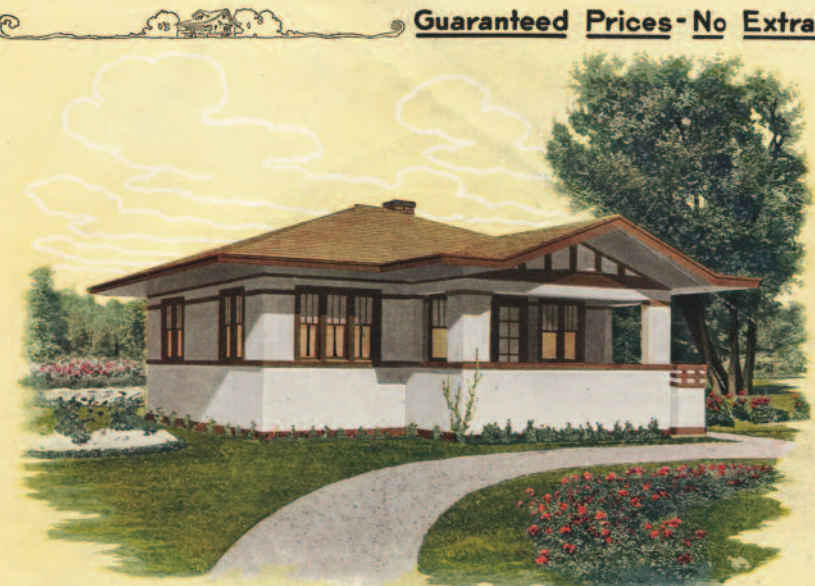
#### above

Gordon-Van Tine began as a millwork company. This illustration is the cover of one of their hundred-page catalogues from the late 1910s.



Gordon-Van Tine is one of the lesser-known kit-house companies  
... but is considered one of the major players.

**Guaranteed Prices - No Extras**



**The Low Flat Lines of a True Bungalow Home**

<p><b>Ready Cut</b> <b>No. 2616</b> (For full description see page 6)</p> <p><b>Not Ready Cut</b> <b>No. 1414</b> (For full description see page 9)</p>	<p><b>\$1090</b></p> <p><b>\$998</b></p>
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**What You Get** For the prices above quoted we agree to furnish all the lumber, lath, shingles, finishing lumber, doors, windows, frames, interior floors and finish, nails, tinwork, finish hardware, complete painting material and convenience features to build this house.

All lumber in standard grades, conforming strictly to the specifications given on pages 10 and 11.  
Complete plans and directions are furnished free with each house.

**OPTIONS**

Each of the following changes or additions to the stock specifications is optional and can be made in this house for the prices shown, if you desire them:


- Fire King Furnace**, complete with all registers, pipes and fittings—ready to install, extra, \$113.00
- Oak flooring**, doors and wood work in living-room—dining-room, extra, \$37.00
- Jap-a-Top slate surfaced asphalt shingles** and solid roof sheathing necessary to lay them, extra, \$29.00
- Quality wall board** with panel strips for walls and ceilings of all rooms, extra, \$111.00
- Electric wiring** for entire house, extra, \$30.00

For further description of these items, see pages 12 and 13.

This is one of the houses which emphasize the truth of the Gordon-Van Tine principle—that small cost homes can be made just as beautiful and attractive as homes that cost tens of thousands of dollars. The low flat lines of the true bungalow are used to wonderful advantage. The level cornice is particularly effective. The plan shows it to be the coziness of honeymoon bungalows. The combined living and dining room is the principle feature, and an arrangement recommended by all the authorities on home building.

There are two chambers, each with a closet. The small hall communicating with the bathroom has a big linen closet in it. The arrangement is particularly good. The kitchen is very thoughtfully arranged. Note that the sink and work table are right under the big triple window, where they are flooded with sunlight. There is room for the ice box in the entry way and the cellar steps lead down from the entry also. This gets away from having the ice man and the delivery boy tramping across the kitchen.

The exterior walls are stucco over Byrkit patent sheathing.



**FLOOR PLAN**

Freeport, Ill.  
Gordon-Van Tine Company, Davenport, Iowa.  
Gentlemen: Our arrival today—here it very nearly unloaded.  
To say that I am pleased or that the lumber is good is putting it very mildly. The material is not only good, but excellent. Had I known that your here boards were of such excellent quality, I would have not bought any finish, as they are good enough for me; the other lumber is far better than I expected. Will send draft tomorrow.  
In conclusion, will say that if I am on this stage of action next year, will visit your St. Louis yards and get another car of lumber.  
Sincerely yours,  
Box No. 7, R. F. D., No. 5, AUGUST SITES

above

*A Prairie Style bungalow model emulates the designs of Frank Lloyd Wright.*

opposite

*Swiss bungalow Model #2618 is shown in one of the few color images in a GVT catalogue.*

received the logs down the Mississippi and its tributaries from the forests of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Roberts reorganized into the Gordon-Van Tine Company in 1906 and became a national specialist in providing building material and ready-cut materials for houses. The corporation operated mills in St. Louis, Missouri; Mississippi and Washington. It first began shipping building supplies through the nation's vast rail system and then offered building plans for sale through a mail-order catalogue in 1912. It was only four years later when it began to offer kit homes in a variety of popular styles. In the 1920s it became the supplier for Wardway Homes of Chicago, which was the Montgomery Ward home division. Catalogues of the period show the same model offered by the two companies with different names and a slightly higher price by Ward. Gordon-Van Tine offered homes in kit form until 1947.

The simple designs of the bungalows of Gordon-Van Tine make them unique. The company offered more elaborate and expensive Colonials and Foursquares but kept its offerings of small homes simple and affordable. GVT, as it was then known, was so sure of its products that it ran advertisements inviting potential customers to visit Davenport to see how the homes were assembled and to view first-hand the "top-grade materials, matchless service and unexampled low prices."

One notable example was Model #2618, a Swiss-inspired bungalow with a front-facing chalet-style gable. The design carried large, overhanging eaves with support brackets, vast expanses of windows and a unique center liv-





**Guaranteed Prices - No Extras**



## A Charming Bungalow of Unique Design

Ready Cut No. 2618 **\$1785**

(For full description see page 6)

Not Ready Cut No. 1398 **\$1674**

(For full description see page 9)

### What You Get

For the prices above quoted we agree to furnish all the lumber, lath, shingles, finishing lumber, doors, windows, frames, interior floors and finish, nails, tinwork, finish hardware, complete painting material and convenience features to build this house.

All lumber in standard grades, conforming strictly to the specifications given on pages 10 and 11.

Complete plans and directions are furnished free with each house.

#### SPECIAL ADDED FEATURES WHICH ARE INCLUDED IN THIS HOUSE WITHOUT EXTRA CHARGE.

Cylinder front door lock. Edge grain flooring downstairs.  
Dome damper, ash trap and mantel shelf for fireplace.

#### OPTIONS

Each of the following changes or additions to the stock specifications is optional and can be made in this house for the prices shown, if you desire them:

Fire King Furnace, complete with all registers, pipes and fittings—ready to install, extra, \$155.00

Oak flooring, doors and woodwork in living-room and dining-room, extra, \$78.00

Jap-a-Top slate surfaced asphalt shingles and solid roof sheathing necessary to lay them, extra, \$35.00

Quality wall board with panel strips for walls and ceilings of all rooms, extra, \$181.00

Electric wiring for entire house, extra, \$19.00.

For further description of these items, see pages 12 and 13.


This charming little shingled bungalow has a number of unique features. The front door is flanked by sidelights, and opens into a large vestibule, provided with a big closet for coats, wraps, rubbers, etc. A duplicate of the front entrance leads into the living room, the center room of the house. This room is featured by a large fireplace.

Practically the whole rear wall of the room is glass, making it unusually light and pleasant. On either side are windows and in the center large double French doors, which open on a brick terrace, an unusually attractive arrangement. This terrace has a brick floor and rail and it serves all the purposes of a porch, but has no roof.


The two chambers are connected with each other and the living room by a hall, from which also the bathroom opens. A complete linen closet also opens from the hall. Note how complete the kitchen is, broom closet, case, work table and everything placed so the work can be done with the least number of steps, and everything furnished complete. The entry way, provides room for the ice box, and yet is outside the kitchen. Two steps lead down to the rear door from the entry. This is one of the most convenient features of the whole house.



**Guaranteed Prices - No Extras**  
Page 91



**Conforms Faithfully to the True Bungalow Type**



**Ready Cut No. 2573 \$1713**  
(For full description see page 91)

**Not Ready Cut No. 1385 \$1593**  
(For full description see page 91)

**What You Get**

All lumber in standard grades, conforming strictly to the specifications given on pages 10 and 11. Complete plans and directions are furnished free with each house.

**OPTIONS**

Each of the following changes or additions to the stock specifications is optional and can be made in this house for the prices shown, if you desire them:

- Pine King Furnaces, complete with all registers, pipes and fittings—ready to install, extra \$153.00.
- Oak flooring, doors and woodwork in living-room and dining-room, extra \$64.00.
- Jap-a-Top slate surfaced asphalt shingles and solid roof sheathing necessary to lay them, extra \$36.00.
- Quality wall board with panel strips for walls and ceilings of all rooms, extra \$121.00.
- Electric wiring for entire house, extra \$14.00.

For further description of these items, see pages 12 and 13.

**Waterville, Wis., August 17, 1915:**

Dear Sir:—Your letter of August 20th received with reference to catalog changes on cut of catalogue page 91 and 92. I am sorry to hear that the changes were so much as to make it necessary to change the price of the house. I am sorry to hear that the changes were so much as to make it necessary to change the price of the house. I am sorry to hear that the changes were so much as to make it necessary to change the price of the house.

I am very glad to hear that you are so interested in the house. I am very glad to hear that you are so interested in the house. I am very glad to hear that you are so interested in the house.

If in the future I shall see anything in the line of building material you wish, I will be glad to see it. I will be glad to see it. I will be glad to see it.

Thanking you again for all favors, I remain,  
Yours respectfully,  
(Signed) A. G. R. BAKER,  
101 Fremont St.

"Not a Knot,"  
West Hills, Wis.  
Gordon Van Tine Co., Devenport, Iowa.  
Gentlemen:—This letter has been sent to you by mail. I am sorry to hear that the changes were so much as to make it necessary to change the price of the house. I am sorry to hear that the changes were so much as to make it necessary to change the price of the house. I am sorry to hear that the changes were so much as to make it necessary to change the price of the house.

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If in the future I shall see anything in the line of building material you wish, I will be glad to see it. I will be glad to see it. I will be glad to see it.

Thanking you again for all favors, I remain,  
Yours respectfully,  
(Signed) A. G. R. BAKER,  
101 Fremont St.

Yours truly,  
GORDON VAN TINE.

Read Pages 10 and 11 For Full Description of Material Furnished For This Home

**Guaranteed Prices - No Extras**  
Page 92



**A New and Appealing Arrangement in this Snug Two Bedroom Cottage**



**Ready Cut No. 2553 \$907**  
(For full description see page 91)

**Not Ready Cut No. 1371 \$838**  
(For full description see page 91)

**What You Get**

All lumber in standard grades, conforming strictly to the specifications given on pages 10 and 11. Complete plans and directions are furnished free with each house.

**OPTIONS**

Each of the following changes or additions to the stock specifications is optional and can be made in this house for the prices shown, if you desire them:

- Pine King Furnaces, complete with all registers, pipes and fittings—ready to install, extra \$153.00.
- Oak flooring, doors and woodwork in living-room—dining-room, extra \$54.00.
- Jap-a-Top Slate surfaced Asphalt Shingles and solid roof sheathing necessary to lay them, extra \$32.00.
- Quality Wall Board with panel strips for walls and ceilings of all rooms, extra \$86.00.
- Electric wiring for entire house, extra \$10.00.

For further description of these items, see pages 12 and 13.

**Madison, New Jersey.**  
Gordon Van Tine Company, Devenport, Iowa.

Dear Sirs:—Replying to yours of the 28th, and enclosing your check for \$28.12, in which for which please accept my thanks. I will send up the plans which you are shipping with you, and I find that the plans perfectly fit, and will be ready to be shipped with your material, and shall be ready to be shipped with your material, and shall be ready to be shipped with your material.

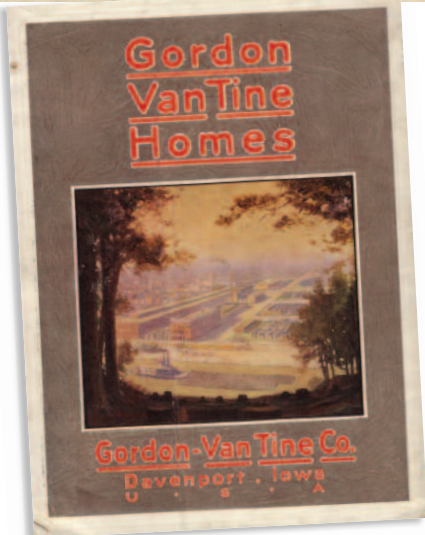
I am very glad to hear that you are so interested in the house. I am very glad to hear that you are so interested in the house. I am very glad to hear that you are so interested in the house.

If in the future I shall see anything in the line of building material you wish, I will be glad to see it. I will be glad to see it. I will be glad to see it.

Thanking you again for all favors, I remain,  
Yours respectfully,  
(Signed) ALVAN L. REYNOLDS,  
101 Fremont St.

Yours truly,  
ALVAN L. REYNOLDS.

Read Pages 10 and 11 For Full Description of Material Furnished For This Home



above

Some of the catalogues carried this illustration of the company's massive woodworking facilities.

ing room plan, all for less than \$1,800. Options included oak flooring for the living and dining rooms for \$78 and an electrical wiring kit for the entire house for \$19.

Bungalow #2646 takes a page out of Frank Lloyd Wright's book with a stunning Prairie Style design for just \$1,000. While the house is 26- by 28 feet in size, it does contain two bedrooms, a kitchen and a combination living and dining room. For 10 percent less, or around \$900, you could purchase model #2553, which was a 24-square-foot plan with an attractive Arts and Crafts-style exterior sporting exposed rafter tails, a wide front porch and a roof dormer.

Gordon-Van Tine not only made the effort to sell prospective buyers a house but addi-

tional items as well. A wide variety of light fixtures that were not usually found locally were offered, as well as complete garage kits in a variety of sizes to hold from one to three autos. Tens of thousands of Gordon-Van Tine homes were built all across America. With easy-to-follow instructions and numbered parts, they were the "best bet" for younger families searching for a starter home. **CB**

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Robert Schweitzer has taught architectural history and historic preservation for more than 25 years. He performs exterior color consulting for a wide range of historical and modern buildings. E-mail him at [robs@umich.edu](mailto:robs@umich.edu) or visit his Web site at [historichousecolors.com](http://historichousecolors.com).



**Guaranteed Prices - No Extras**  
Page 10



**A Bungalow with Breakfast Porch**

**Ready Cut No. 2517 \$1504**  
(For full description see page 9)

**Not Ready Cut No. 1319 \$1405**  
(For full description see page 9)

**What You Get**

For the price above quoted we agree to furnish all the lumber (lath, shingles, finishing lumber, doors, windows, frames, interior floors and finish, nails, tinework, finish hardware, complete painting material and convenience fixtures to build this house.

All lumber in standard grades, conforming strictly to the specifications given on pages 10 and 11.

Complete plans and directions are furnished free with each house.

**OPTIONS**

Each of the following changes or additions to the stock specifications is optional and can be made in this house for the price shown. If you desire them:

Fire King Furnace, complete with all registers, pipes and fittings—ready to install, extra, \$164.00.

Dark flooring, doors and woodwork in 6-inch rose and olive green, extra, \$60.00.

Decorative glass partitioned breakfast room and solid oak breakfast room to be there, extra, \$10.00.

Ready cut wall board with panel design for walls and ceiling of all rooms, extra, \$140.00.

For further description of these items, see pages 10 and 11.

Our handsome "Van Tine" front door represents the big living room. This door is a feature, both because of its size and its simplicity. From the top of the house, it is marked that every house is a Van Tine house.

The living room is really especially attractive by the two full-length French doors at the rear. These open onto an outdoor porch, which can be used as a summer dining room or a sleeping porch. It is really covered with the most solid porch. The latter provides a place for the car.

The kitchen is modern, bright and a model of convenience. We furnish the hot water tank with each house, complete with doors, drains and fire—all Cut-to-fit ready to use. All modifications are included in the regular price. There are no extra charges when you buy a Gordon-Van Tine house.


A second side screen the whole house. It is helped by windows in each side and the front doors. One or two small rooms could be finished off, if desired.

The outside walls are covered with clear yellow pine up to the full height, and above this with red cedar shingles. These shingles are laid in alternate courses exposed face and seven inches in the weather.



FLOOR PLAN

**Guaranteed Prices - No Extras**  
Page 141



(For Two Cars)

**Ready Cut Garage No. 2609**  
**Not Ready Cut Garage No. 1344**

Size Width, Length	No. 2609 Price Ready Cut	No. 1344 Price Not Ready Cut
8x14.....	\$125.00	\$115.00
8x16.....	133.00	122.00
10x14.....	127.00	119.00
10x16.....	135.00	123.00
10x18.....	142.00	132.00
12x16.....	145.00	136.00
12x18.....	152.00	143.00
12x20.....	160.00	149.00
14x16.....	153.00	144.00
14x18.....	161.00	151.00
14x20.....	169.00	158.00


**Ready Cut Garage No. 2609**  
**Not Ready Cut Garage No. 1417**

Size Width, Length	No. 2609 Price Ready Cut	No. 1417 Price Not Ready Cut
10x16.....	\$227.00	\$211.00
10x18.....	233.00	217.00
20x18.....	241.00	228.00
20x20.....	253.00	237.00

**Garages Also Suitable for Boat Houses**

Gordon-Van Tine garages are good looking, staunch, practical, and made of the very best materials it is possible to buy.

These garages are also suitable for boat houses and are designed for this purpose as well as the housing of cars.



**Ready Cut Garage No. 2611**  
**Not Ready Cut Garage No. 1419**

Size Width, Length	No. 2611 Price Ready Cut	No. 1419 Price Not Ready Cut
8x14.....	\$165.00	\$154.00
8x16.....	171.00	160.00
10x14.....	167.00	156.00
10x16.....	176.00	165.00
10x18.....	186.00	175.00
12x16.....	196.00	185.00
12x18.....	201.00	189.00
12x20.....	209.00	197.00
14x16.....	207.00	195.00
14x18.....	212.00	200.00
14x20.....	218.00	206.00

#### opposite top left

A side-gabled bungalow, Model #2573, which sold for slightly more than \$1,700 in 1920.

#### opposite top right

In the early 1920s, you could still get a house for less than \$1,000.

#### top left

House #2517 was typical of the modest bungalows the company sold.

#### top right

With the dramatic rise in automobile usage, kit companies had a ready-made audience for their garages.

## GET INSIDE THE BOX

Further resources for information on kit houses:

- *117 House Designs of the Twenties* (paperback) by Gordon-Van Tine Co., Dover Publications, New Ed edition, ©1992. Visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
  - *Gordon-Van Tine Co. Architectural Details 1915*. This title is currently out of print, but it is available at used-book dealers.
  - *America's Favorite Homes*, by Schweitzer & Davis, Wayne State University Press, ©1990.
- Visit <http://wsupress.wayne.edu/glb/art/schweitzerafh.htm>.

Gordon-Van Tine items often appear on eBay. Visit these Web sites:

- [lib.umd.edu/NTL/kithomes.html](http://lib.umd.edu/NTL/kithomes.html)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sears\\_Catalog\\_Home](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sears_Catalog_Home)