

Take your pick: Oklahoma City neighborhoods exude charm, grandeur, style, and sophistication.

Brick by Brick

By Steffie Corcoran

LIKE MOST CITIES IN AMERICA, OKLAHOMA CITY'S neighborhoods started downtown. Homes went up, as homes do, close to work. Then, as soon as John Shartel's franchise for a streetcar system became a reality in 1902, suburban Oklahoma City was born. No longer was it mandatory to build within walking distance of downtown. Now Sooners could hop a streetcar and enjoy the noisy morning and evening commute. In 1920, its busiest year, an amazing 25.5 million passengers rode the trolley rails in Oklahoma City.

Now as then, some Oklahoma City residents yearn to call home a place away from the hustle and bustle, a place not far so much in distance as in feel. The only difference is one of degree. Today's suburbia—typified by remote city additions like Gaillardia to the north, Chatenay to the south—has redefined itself as a community within a community, complete with physical barriers geared to a psychological need for safe haven, security, and apartness.

The inner circle, however, is every bit as engaging. Oklahoma City neighborhoods started near downtown, and twenty-first century homebuyers are flocking back to the area to be a part of something vital, something with a spirit fused of past and present. Shannon Rundell of ReMax First says, "With everything going on downtown, people want to be close to that activity."

Outside or inside the circle, home is home, a combination of emotional and logical choices almost impossible to define or verbalize. These neighborhoods, sacred spaces to those inside their circles, beckon.



The Hills Are Alive

Anton Classen first platted Heritage Hills in 1900. But it wasn't until the streetcars rolled through (establishing Heritage Hills and Mesta Park as the state's first suburban neighborhoods) in early 1902 that the building boom in Heritage Hills really took off, much of it spearheaded by G.A. Nichols. Within months the city's elite (among them Charles Colcord and Henry Overholser) broke ground. For the most part, construction was complete by 1928.

The more than 350 Heritage Hills homes run the gamut in style and size. Modest-sized bungalows are companions to sumptuous mansions (one, built by mule trader William T. Hales, has 20,000 square feet of living space).

The neighborhood's reputation as an aggressive preservation district is in large part responsible for its dignified historic appeal. In the Sixties, commercialization in the area prompted residents to get political. As a result, Mayor George Shirk appointed the Historic

Preservation Commission in 1967, and Heritage Hills was named the state's first such district in 1969.

Long-time residents and those just arrived marvel at the family-friendly feel of the area. It's a beautiful neighborhood, great for walking, gardening, communing, the good life. Looks like all that fighting spirit has paid big: Heritage Hills, once and forever, is a prestigious place to live.

Perle Without Price

Talk about reliving history.

Way back in 1902, Anton Classen began developing the area that has become Mesta

Linwood Place Shows Off

You can almost feel energy sizzling in Linwood Place these days. A striking, tree-filled neighborhood with more than 550 homes, Linwood Place was platted in 1909 at the end of the Linwood trolley line, but most of the construction here took place during the Twenties and Thirties.

Linda Sargent, neighborhood historian, describes present-day Linwood Place as "an eclectic neighborhood both in terms of houses and the people in them." Homes range in size from starter-types of 1,100 square feet to behemoths of 5,000 square feet and more. Walkers (many hand-in-hand), runners, pet-lovers,



Park. The neighborhood was named after Perle Mesta—the quintessential socialite known as the “hostess with the mostess” and daughter of William Skirvin—who as a girl lived in a turn-of-the-century mansion at 700 Northwest Sixteenth. Many of Mesta Park’s 600 homes are colorful prairie school style and craftsman bungalows ranging in size from 1,200 to 5,000 square feet. California’s arts and crafts movement also influenced the striking look of the neighborhood.

Elbow grease has been abundant in Mesta Park for the past several years. Neighborhood association president Bill Lees refers to the “joys and curses of old house living,” adding, “People want to live here because of the uniqueness.”

Mesta Park has a unique collective personality as well. The community is as assorted as its architecture: a down-to-earth, close-knit amalgam of folks who all take preservation seriously but have widely divergent ideas about how to get there.

Frisbee enthusiasts, and roller bladers make their way down the lush Nineteenth Street median (where the streetcars once hummed) and fill Wayman’s Park.

Bigger Isn’t Better

Namesake Israel Putnam got here first, in 1906. The lawyer-turned-realtor was the state legislator who proposed moving the capital from Guthrie to Oklahoma City. Later, anticipating that the capital would end up in western Oklahoma City, he developed Putnam City.

Beginning in 1908, grand homes representing diverse architectural styles (including prairie school style; bungalow/craftsman; mission revival; and Spanish, Colonial, and Tudor revival) were erected in a fifty-four-acre area.

The few blocks comprising Putnam Heights were home to Putnam himself; Oklahoma’s fourth governor, J.B.A. Robertson (whose home was the official governor’s mansion from 1919 to 1923); Oklahoma’s first attorney general Charles West; and grocer Henry K. Kamp.

From left to right, At the corner of Fifteenth and Hudson sits this 1916 Heritage Hills residence, home for many years to the bishops and nuns of the Catholic Diocese of Oklahoma; the Overholser Mansion, 405 Northwest Fifteenth, former home to entrepreneur Henry Overholser, is now a museum, preserving the history of Heritage Hills; the childhood home of Perle Mesta is located at 700 Northwest Sixteenth Street in Mesta Park; an arts and crafts-style home on Northwest Nineteenth in Linwood Place.

As deterioration and commercial development threatened in the early Seventies, residents mobilized to get the neighborhood zoned a Historic Preservation district. This designation, achieved in 1972, protected pristine Putnam Heights from rampant commercialization and reckless structural changes. In 1982, all the district's 104 homes were placed on the National Register of Historic Places, making it the city's smallest historic neighborhood.

homeowners and a surge in renovations. "Progress," she says, "is feeding on itself."

The more than 900 homes in the neighborhood (most built between 1915 and 1935) vary widely in styles from Tudor revival to the Spanish homes of Carey Place, mirroring the ethnic and professional diversity among residents. Ranging in size from 1,700 to 5,000 plus square feet, Gatewood offers a market for nearly every potential homebuyer.



Up and Comer

In 1998, the enclave within Gatewood known as Carey Place was put on the National Register. But 1998 was also the year the U.S. Postal Service began installing curbside mailboxes in nearby Pennville without bothering to get residents' input.

Outraged Gatewood citizens got busy, kicking into high gear a broad-based effort to get the entire neighborhood placed on the National Register. Doing so, they knew, would protect homes and businesses from "conveniences" like curbside mailboxes,

Investment Capitol

In 1976 Lincoln Terrace and its 150 or so exquisite homes became Oklahoma City's first neighborhood listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The area dates back to 1918, when John J. Culbertson opened up land south of the Capitol for development.

The majority of the neighborhood's large homes (most between 2,300 and 5,000 square feet, many built by G.A. Nichols) went up between 1918 and 1930. After 1928, black gold lured countless oil men into the

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which would compromise the historic integrity of their beloved properties. John Calhoun from Oklahoma City's planning department speculates that Gatewood will be placed on the National Register by next year (an added bonus: Calhoun lives in Gatewood).

Within the past five years, says Janet Seefeldt, neighborhood association president, Gatewood has basked in a steady influx of new

neighborhood of magnificent Tudor, Mediterranean, Colonial, and Spanish revival homes. The neighborhood has also long been home to medical professionals of all stripes and nowadays nudges up against the OU Health Sciences Center.

Lincoln Terrace homes have remained appealing because of the timeless details that went into their construction: lifetime tile shingle and clay tile roofs, stucco, cut and

carved stone, custom wrought iron, marble, and top-quality wood. Over the last decade, the infection of urban blight and boarded-up windows has been replaced by the spit-and-polish spirit of homeowners who have bought huge homes, often for a song, and are in the process of bringing them back to their original shine and grandeur.

Park Place

Ever wondered about the brick wall bisecting Centennial Expressway and Edgemere Park neighborhood? It was constructed after the neighborhood association sued the state and federal departments of transportation to make sure Edgemere wasn't affected by freeway noise pollution. Today, thanks to a handful of active citizens, things are serene within the quaint little neighborhood of 326 homes, originally developed by Leon Levy in 1926.

Edgemere Park people aren't just political—they like to get outside and have a good time too. Edgemere is one of the few Okla-

Pay Dirt

Talk about prime real estate. Demand is so high for lot space in Nichols Hills that an extraordinary phenomenon has been going on in the north Oklahoma City municipality for the past few years. It's called "teardown"—believe it or not, Nichols Hills wannabes are buying perfectly good homes, demolishing them, and constructing dream homes on the now-empty lots. Doug Henley, Nichols Hills city manager, estimates as many as twenty teardowns have already happened. "The trend continues and will continue," he says.

G.A. Nichols, one-time dentist and Oklahoma City real estate genius, handpicked the 2,700 acres of sloping terrain for his country club addition par excellence in 1929. Gifted with unusual foresight, Nichols built his "Hills of Homes" with an eye on Oklahoma City's future, and in one fell swoop, landscapers planted 40,000 trees.

Nichols' insistence on a looping, roaming roads system has proved timeless. The oh-so-slow speed limit allows travelers ample time

From left to right, Trees and sidewalks line most streets in Heritage Hills; a Putnam Heights residence on North McKinley; this house on Carey Place in Gatewood exemplifies the Mediterranean and Mexican influences found along the street; a typical mission-style home on Northeast Seventeenth in Lincoln Terrace; this house, located on Northwest Thirty-second in Edgemere, has a parkside view; a stately reminder of Nichols Hills' architectural grandeur.



homa City neighborhoods not laid out on a grid system. Instead, one-fifth of the land in the heart of Edgemere was set aside for the park, the Tudor revival, Spanish eclectic, and Colonial revival homes going up around that centerpiece.

Averaging 1,700 to 2,200 square feet (but reaching as much as 6,600 square feet), most homes in this National Register and H.P. district were built between 1926 and 1940. Imaginative brickwork—stone speckled, skittled, raked, rolled, and many hued—creates an artful canvas of each exterior.

to feast on the elegance of the town's more than 1,800 stately Tudor, Georgian, and French country-style homes and churches.

Under construction or midstream in renovations, Nichols Hills has long been one of Oklahoma's most affluent, visually appealing places to live.

Land Gentry

In 1930 G.A. Nichols, in the middle of developing Nichols Hills on the then-outskirts of town, traded properties and acquired the land on which the Oklahoma City Golf and Coun-

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try Club stood. The country club was hastily razed, and the 160-acre plot of land around it became Crown Heights, a 550-home locale centered around the verdant Shartel median.

Nichols developed the area with large lots and back yards but zero alleys or sidewalks. Something about it worked—Crown Heights has been a hot property in Oklahoma City ever since. Seemingly impervious to the decay and wear and tear of most older neighborhoods, Crown Heights reigns, helped along by its Historic Preservation status and membership on the National Register. Shannon Rundell,

senting a wide variety of architectural styles, including French country, French Normandy, English Tudor, English cottage, and Colonial and Georgian revival.

Another Brick in the Wall

It's a high-end, ultra-secure oddity, this walled-in oasis, a study in contrasts against Oklahoma City's variety-loving neighborhoods. You'll find one architectural style within Chatenay: French-chateausque. Every mortared brick is an identical shade of rose-taupe. Every roof is constructed of the same



From left to right, Crown Heights typifies the many styles of historic homes in Oklahoma City—this house on Northwest Forty-first is a combination of Federal and Georgian styles; also in Crown Heights, this house on Northwest Thirty-ninth mixes Victorian style with prairie craftsman; the clubhouse at Chatenay exhibits the French-chateau style found everywhere in the gated community.

ReMax First agent and member of the Historical Preservation Commission, says, "There hasn't been a time in thirty years when that neighborhood hasn't sold well."

The Walled

Perched on Oklahoma City's northern edge, Gaillardia is OPUBCO Development Company's gutsiest, most expensive venture yet. The 600-acre residential retreat-within-a-city, which will someday number 400 homes, is reputed to be the highest quality development since Nichols Hills. (The name derives from both the state wildflower, Indian blanket, a member of the *Gaillardia* family, and the name of E.K. Gaylord's Estes Park vacation home.)

Gaillardia homes will be built within distinct enclaves, ranging from 2,200 and 4,000 square feet to 6,000 square feet and up, repre-

top-of-the-line materials. Liberal cast stone, standard. Patinaed copper, mandatory.

Paul Odom III, the southwest Oklahoma City developer who's been nurturing this residential love child to gestation for five years, says, "It's an absolutely unique lifestyle we're trying to portray here." Chatenay (named after a Parisian suburb) is a new kind of residential addition, one offering "a carefree lifestyle" which will become an "architectural landmark for this state."

According to Odom, southwest Oklahoma City is the state's most potent growth area, buttressed by outstanding roads, strong employment bases, and a highly regarded school system. The area's ZIP code (73170), he points out, boasts the state's third-highest per capita income. By design, Odom says, Chatenay is "the perfect place to get away from it all without going away too far."