



Showing the house

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Designers prepare the Hodge House for Junior League benefit tours.

The yellow house at 74 Mercer Street in Princeton may not have attracted much attention in the past, but it is worth a look now. An army of interior designers and landscape architects recently transformed The Hodge House, which was built in 1823 for the Princeton Theological Seminary, into this year's Junior League of Greater Princeton's Designer Show House.

Thirty-five designers and landscapers from New Jersey and Pennsylvania have donated their time, creativity and materials to the project, which typically raises between \$150,000 to \$200,00 to benefit area charities.

"The designer show house is a means to an end for us. We want to leave something positive behind while raising money to serve community needs," said Amie Thornton, Junior League president.

Proceeds from house tours, which will open Sunday and continue through May 16, fund a number of projects in the Princeton area. A portion of the money from the last Show House was used to build Children's Libraries in the Mill Hill Child and Family Development Center in Trenton and the Fisherman's Mark Social Service Agency in Lambertville. The League donated bookshelves and more than 500 books to each organization. This year's funds will be used to create similar libraries for children at risk as well as other smaller projects benefiting women and children.

Volunteers from the Junior League began their search for this, their 13th Show House, a year ago. "I was constantly on the lookout driving home from work or walking around Princeton and then I saw it," Ms. Thornton said.

When John Gilmore, vice president of business services for the Princeton Theological Seminary, received a call from Ms. Thornton, he was a bit skeptical at first. Then he realized the benefits: "We had no money in our operating budget to fix the house up and it had fallen into major disrepair. This was an opportunity for the Junior League to fix up a house they liked, for us to save money and for all of us to benefit the community at large," Mr. Gilmore said.

The Seminary will be placing a professor and her family in the house sometime this summer. In preparation for the upgrade, the Seminary added air conditioning, wiring and a furnace, and then turned the house over to the Junior League.

A mere six weeks ago the design teams first entered the house to begin their work. What they



found was "uninhabitable," according to one designer. There was peeling wallpaper, chipped paint and unusable appliances. Practically overnight, carpenters, painters, designers and artists created 29 distinct areas featuring unique design twists such as alpaca wool walls that feel like cashmere, an Asian-themed mural, a master bedroom replete with gold-leaf paintings and an Italian outdoor living space called a "loggia."

The Princeton Show House has gained a reputation for attracting top-notch designers who enjoy being part of such a project.

"It has always been a very competitive show house. There are a number of designers here who take decorating to another level," said John Pescatore of Pescatore Design in Loch Harbor. His family has created a room every year since the League began its fund-raiser in 1981.

Romance is the theme of Melinda Kuehne's bedroom design in the master suite. She and her husband-partner, Hal, are recreating their own bedroom in the Show House, the same room that was featured on Home & Garden Television's "Top Ten Most Romantic Bedrooms" in February 2004. The focus of the room is a large canopy bed draped with exotic fabrics, surrounded by gold-leaf paintings and light taupe pigmented walls. The Kuehnes are owners of Gracious Living Interiors in New Hope, Pa., and Gracious Living Home in Lahaska, Pa.

If you wish to combine romance and travel, step onto the back porch or "loggia" and set awhile. "Under the Tuscan Loggia" was created by Lisa and John Hickey for Tuscan Hills, a retail outlet for Italian imports in Princeton. The Hickeys are decorative painters who have been traveling between Italy and Princeton for Tuscan Hills doing design work.

"I wanted to create a place where you would feel warm and conversational. A place where you could sit back and enjoy a good glass of Chianti and great olives and say, 'This is the life I should be living,'" said Ms. Hickey.

Ms. Hickey describes the color scheme of her space as, "coppery terra cotta, earthy green and yellow ochre." These colors are used in three 14- by 5-foot panels featuring Renaissance patterns which replicate the elaborate ceilings the artists saw during their travels in Italy. Antique terra cotta olive jugs, forged iron furnishings and Italian landscape paintings by Ms. Hickey will complete the setting.

On the upper floor of the house is the Hodge Podge, a boutique selling fine furnishings and gifts. Those interested in purchasing items seen in the rooms will find a price list at the entrance to each room. One year someone loved one of the bedrooms so much that she bought the whole room. Twenty percent of the proceeds from these sales benefit the Junior League.

The Princeton Area Junior League's designer Show House will be open April 18 through May 16, 2004. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Friday: noon to 8 p.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday: noon to 5 p.m. (The House will be closed on Mondays.) Children under the age of 12 are not permitted in the Show House. The Café du Soleil, an outdoor eating spot catered by the Lawrenceville Inn, will also be open during Show House hours.

Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door. All proceeds of the Show House benefit the community projects and grants of The Junior League of Greater Princeton.