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CENTRAL NY NEWS

Gustav Stickley III visits his famous grandfather's Syracuse home

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Syracuse, N.Y. -- As a young boy, Gustav Stickley III visited his famous grandfather in his Syracuse home and watched him experiment with new furniture stains, which always had a strong smell.

"I knew he was somebody, but I didn't know how much," Stickley said Thursday outside his grandfather's 117-year-old home at 438 Columbus Ave. "I knew he was somebody of importance."

Stickley, 85, of Red Hook in Dutchess County, returned to his grandfather's home to watch the start of its restoration by the University Neighborhood Preservation Association in partnership with the Onondaga Historical Association.

CNY Builder Services LLC, of Lafayette, began the first phase of the restoration this week. It will include repairs to the siding and trim; window restoration; a new roof; asbestos abatement; and reconstruction of the original front porch.

After exterior work is completed late this year, the house will be turned over to the historical association, which plans to restore its interior and open it to public tours.

Gustav Stickley, considered by many the father of the American Arts and Crafts movement because of his popular mission-style wood furniture designs, bought the home in 1900 and rebuilt its interior in the American Craftsman style after a fire on Christmas Eve 1901.

Stickley went bankrupt in 1915 and retired from furniture making. He continued to live in the Columbus Avenue home, by then owned by his daughter, until his death in 1942 at the age of 84.

His brothers Leopold and John G. Stickley and later the Audi family carried on his furniture making legacy, but original Gustav Stickley pieces are still sought after by collectors.

"He wasn't a good businessman, obviously, but he certainly was ahead of his time," his grandson said.

Though he was just a young boy at the time, Gustav Stickley III said he always looked forward to seeing his grandfather, despite the strong smell of the stains he was mixing up.

"I had no other grandparents," he said. "He was the only one I knew. This was a special treat just to meet him."

He said he did not realize until years later, when he briefly (and unsuccessfully) tried his own hand at furniture making, just how much reverence his grandfather had for wood and making it look just right.

"He would draw his hand over a piece of wood and you could see the reverence in the hand and I never could visualize or even think of what is he talking about until I started to re-do and make originals," he said.

Stickley said he is frequently asked if he is related to the famous furniture maker and does not hesitate to say yes, proudly.

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"It's fun," he said. "In this area, of course, the name is so well known. It's been a lot of fun throughout my life."

Later owners turned the upper two floors of the Columbus Avenue home into apartments, but the first floor is nearly unchanged from Gustav Stickley's original design. It still contains the extensive chestnut wall paneling and oak flooring installed by Stickley.

Walking around inside, Gustav Stickley III said the home looks much like he remembered it, except that it no longer contains its original Gustav Stickley furniture, which was sold off years ago by later owners of the home.

The historical association plans to put replicas of Stickley's original furniture in the home as part of its restoration. (Most original Gustav Stickley furniture is in museums or in the possession of collectors.)

Plans are to turn the upper floors into two apartments and a four-room boutique hotel to bring in revenue for the home's upkeep after the restoration.

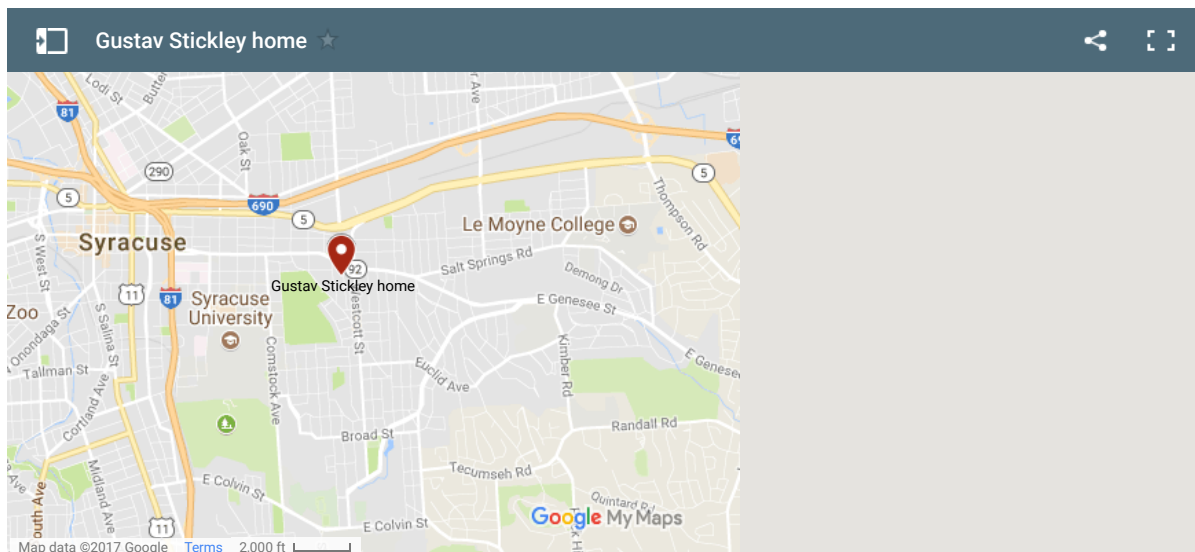
The home, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, won't be cheap to restore. The exterior work will cost about \$650,000. With related soft costs, the total will come to nearly \$800,000.

Interior work will run even more - from \$1 million to \$2 million, with furnishings.

The state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation is providing a \$500,000 grant. The Urban Initiatives Program of the state Housing Trust Fund Corp. is providing \$200,000. The Central New York Community Foundation is giving \$30,000. The William & Mary L. Thorpe Charitable Fund is providing \$20,000. The Arts & Crafts Society of Central New York is donating \$10,000.

In addition, the National Trust for Historic Preservation recently awarded a \$7,500 grant to the University Neighborhood Preservation Association to document the historic interior as it was designed by Stickley.

The [Gustav Stickley House Foundation](#), a nonprofit organization, is also raising money for the home's restoration. Its "campaign for completion" is a drive to raise \$25,000 to complete the first phase of the work. More information can be found on the campaign at the foundation's website, www.gustavstickleyhousefoundation.org.



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