

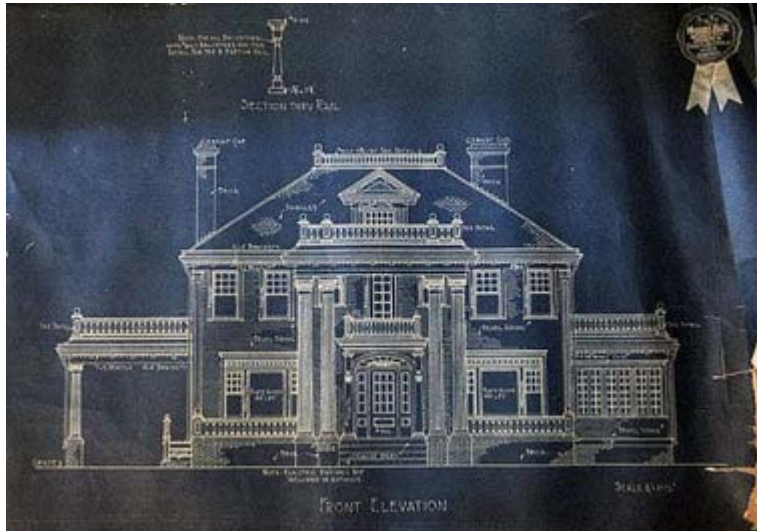
How to tell if you're living in a Sears home

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By



Gloria Wright / The Post-Standard

Lisa Tabor, owner of 1500 James St. in Syracuse, found the original architects drawings in a drawer at the house. The seal in the upper right corner certifies that the house was a Sears kit house. The model is called the Magnolia.

No one knows how many mail-order Sears homes were built in Onondaga County.

Dennis Connors, curator of history at **Onondaga Historical Association**, said he does not know of anyone who has inventoried Sears or other kit houses here.

"Architecturally, there's no way to really tell," he said.

The architects who designed the ready-to-assemble houses sold through Sears, Roebuck & Co., followed the popular designs of the day.

"Sears was not an innovative home designer. Sears was instead a very able follower of popular home

designs but with the added advantage of modifying houses and hardware according to buyer tastes. Individuals could even design their own homes and submit the blueprints to Sears, which would then ship off the appropriate pre-cut and fitted materials, putting the home owner in full creative control. Modern Home customers had the freedom to build their own dream houses," says the **Sears archives website**.

Rosemary Thornton, author of "The Houses that Sears Built," said Syracuse seems to be a treasure trove of kit houses.

After discovering that Syracuse has a rare Sears Magnolia model home, Thornton spent some time online looking at real estate listings in Syracuse. She spotted two Sears Alhambra models, what she believes is a Standish model sold by another home-kit company, Sterling Homes, and a Pasadena model sold by Aladdin Homes.

"You've got the mother lode," she said.

Thornton's advice for figuring out if your home is a Sears home includes:

- Know when your house was built. Sears sold houses between 1908 and 1940, and the houses are most likely to be

located in neighborhoods that were growing during that time.

- When possible, talk to the original owner, relatives of the original owner or neighbors.

"The window of opportunity for finding Sears homes through personal reminiscences is fast closing. The people who built these Sears homes, for the most part, have passed on," Thornton said.

- Check the home's floor plan, exterior dimensions and room size, using a guide to Sears homes such as "Houses by Mail," by Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, or the **Sears website**.
- Look for stamped lumber in the basement, attic or crawlspace. Sears Modern Homes were kit homes and the framing pieces were stamped with a letter and a number. When the lumber arrived on site, that number told you how all the pieces went together.
- Look for shipping labels, which can often be found on the back of millwork or moldings. On the shipping label, look for the address, "925 Homan Ave., Chicago, Illinois," the Sears headquarters in the early 1900s. Also look for stamps or marks, showing that the millwork was shipped from Norwood Sash and Door of Ohio, a supplier of Sears millwork.
- Look in the attic and basement for any paperwork, including blueprints or bills of lading.
- Trace the mortgage records and building permits. Sears was sometimes the original mortgage holder, and sometimes listed as the architect on building permits.
- Look at plumbing fixtures. Plumbing, electrical and heating equipment was not included in the basic kit home but could be purchased separately. From the late 1920s to 1940, Sears plumbing fixtures sometimes were stamped with an "R" or "SR." On bathroom pedestal sinks and kitchen sinks, the mark is on the underside, near the front. On bathtubs, it can be found in the lower corner, on the side farthest from the tub spout.

If you determine your house is a Sears house, you can register it on **searsarchives.com**. The registry is Sears' attempt to create a list of kit homes still in existence.

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