EPITOME OF A CRAFTSMAN

The landmark house that Gustav Stickley built in Syracuse is on track to become a museum of the Arts and Crafts era.

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Strolling through the Syracuse home of famed furniture maker Gustav Stickley feels like escaping back to the beginning of the American Arts and Crafts movement he helped to father.

The exterior of the 115-year-old home at 438 Columbus Ave. still possesses its original Queen Anne style. But its interior is a different story.

Stickley rebuilt the inside of the home in 1902 after a fire on Christmas Eve 1901. He turned it into what is believed to be the first home in America featuring the Arts and Crafts style, or as Stickley called it, the Craftsman style.

It’s a style Stickley helped to make famous with his Mission furniture, characterized by simple but sturdy designs and still sought by collectors 73 years after his death.

In fact, the home’s interior looks like it was made from pieces of furniture ripped from Stickley’s old United Crafts furniture factory on Burnet Avenue in Eastwood.

Now, after being vacant for 20 years, the home with a storied past may have a future.

Plans are under way to renovate it and open it to public tours. The
STICKLEY HOME: EPITOME OF STYLE

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University Neighborhood Preservation Association and Onondaga Historical Association are teaming up to turn the home into an Arts and Crafts museum.

TWO FLOORS OF STICKLEY

There’s much to see. The walls are dark stained with the chestnut paneling that Stickley installed after the fire. The ceilings still feature narrow spaced, chestnut beams. The floors are made of chestnut planks. The home’s windows still have wide chestnut surrounds with paneling underneath. A first-floor fireplace is framed by two wood-and- glass doors leading to storage areas. The doors look like they came right off a Stickley display cabinet.

Even closet, bedroom and bathroom doors look like Stickley furniture. Many features the same horizontal and vertical planking found on Stickley dining room tables and chairs.

“It is the epitome of the Stickley style,” said Greg Tropoli, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association. “It’s a very important part of our architectural and design history.”

Details are still being worked out, but plans are to repair the exterior, install a new roof, make structural improvements and restore the interior to its 1902 glory. The home will also be furnished with reproductions of Stickley’s furniture — many pieces will be made by local collectors and museums — and other artifacts from the Arts and Crafts movement.

The plan is to have a major public and academic component, and a revenue-producing component so the facility is sustainable,” Tropoli said. “This will be an historical restoration.”

The project will cost an estimated $2.5 million to $2.6 million, coming from donations, foundations and public sources.

held by the Audis

The Audis, who own the L. and J.G. Stickley Co., a furniture manufacturer, sold it in 1995 for $225,000 to the Audis family. In 1974, the Audis bought the L. and J.G. Stickley Co., the furniture company founded by Gustav’s younger brothers, Leopold and John George, and still make furniture based on the Stickley’s designs in a factory in Manlius.

The home has been vacant since the Audis bought it in 1974. It was expected to be sold in 1995 with the hope of preserving it.

GRANTS AND DONATIONS

The state provided a $500,000 grant in 2012 to help fund the home’s restoration and begun the effort to make it a museum. At the time, the Everson Museum of Art was in charge of the project. However, the museum, facing financial problems and a management transition, pulled out last year.

But the project is back on track.

David Michel, president of the preservation association, said the Audis will donate the home to the association, which will perform the exterior and structural repairs.

The association will then turn the home into a historical association, which will perform the interior restoration and prepare it for public tours, he said.

Both Crawford, a preservation architect and senior associate at Crawford & Stevens, said the project will cost an estimated $2.5 million to $2.7 million.

The $500,000 state grant is still available. Michel said an additional state grant of $500,000 is being sought. In addition, the Central New York Community Foundation has granted the association $50,000 and the Arts and Crafts Society of Central New York is putting in $10,000.

If the additional $300,000 grant comes through, the preservation association will have enough to perform the interior repairs, Michel said. Work on the exterior improvements would start in the spring of 2016 and would take about a year to complete, he said.

A charitable foundation is being formed to help raise the money needed for the interior renovations.