

BACK IN STYLE: Bungalow Courts



DEVELOPERS are sometimes on the cutting edge of change. About fifteen years ago, founders of The Cottage Company noticed a few things about the housing market. Demographics were changing—single people, childless couples, and empty nesters outnumbered traditional families. Small, cozy, easy-to-maintain houses had a renewed appeal, and the Craftsman style, in particular, said “home” to buyers. City planners began to understand “smart growth” that could site several houses on a smaller existing plot of land. And homeowners and planners alike were attracted to the idea of building what the company

came to call “pocket neighborhoods.”

Recalling the commonplace old bungalow courts of southern California, Jim Soules and Linda Pruitt started The Cottage Company in 1996 and built the first new court, Third Street Cottages in Langley, Washington, in 1998, with architect Ross Chapin. Third Street included eight detached houses, each 850 square feet in a storey-and-a-half, arranged around a green space with detached parking in back. Third Street became the prototype for the revived bungalow court. Since it was built, the Cottage Company has built seven courts in Washington—infill housing of eight to sixteen homes designed so that their

height, bulk, and scale fit into existing communities. Other developers have since built courts in Portland, Oregon, and in Chico, California.

THE BUNGALOW COURT combined two architectural ideas that took root in California in the early 20th century: the small, one-storey house and the old Spanish idea of building around a courtyard. The first bungalow court, as we know it, was designed in 1908 by Pasadena architect Sylvanus Marston. The St. Francis Court was intend-

The view from a porch captures the way the Ericksen Cottages are grouped around a common green. OPPOSITE: Kitchens are roomy in the compact houses; the breakfast nook is reminiscent of the bungalow era.

Bungalow courts, prevalent in California between 1910 and 1930, are being built once more—this time as a smart alternative to multi-family and townhouse development. BY SABRA WALDFOGEL



◀▶ ERICKSEN COTTAGES, 2003

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, WASHINGTON

DEV: The Cottage Company, cottagecompany.com

ARCH: Wenzlau Architects, wenzlauarchitects.com

Developed by The Cottage Company with architect Charles Wenzlau, this court reflects their philosophy of site planning to encourage community while providing privacy. Ericksen has what the developer calls "layers" of privacy, "from the public street to the courtyard to the private yard." The design is deliberate. "People need to come in the front door and walk through the commons." • In addition to the common green space, Ericksen has a community building for parties and celebrations. It also has private back yards for gardens that residents can make their own. "People want the accessibility and focus of outdoor space," architect Wenzlau says. "It's the signature of our work—the courtyard garden element." • Ericksen's eleven houses are all one-and-a-half-storey structures. Their exteriors echo the Craftsman style, and their interior details—built-ins, bay windows, and breakfast nooks—refer to the past without reproducing it.

Photos courtesy Wenzlau Architects & The Cottage Company



The charming, modest bungalows of College Court in Suffolk, Virginia, have been rescued and are now hot properties. College Court (built in 1915) is thought to be the only historic walk-up bungalow court in the East.



MAIN STREET BUNGALOW COURT, 2006 ▼

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

DEV: Greater Metropolitan Housing Corp.
PROJECT MGR: Ron Korsh (612) 378-7985 ext. 13,
rkorsh@gmhchousing.org

Affordable housing is the mission of the Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation, a non-profit Minneapolis developer. When the GMHC acquired two lots on a declining block in northeast Minneapolis, they hadn't planned on building a court.

But project manager Ron Korsh got interested in the work of The Cottage Company, and talked to Jim Soules and Washington architect Ross Chapin, who has designed many of The Cottage Company's projects. The new Minneapolis bungalow court is modeled on the work of The Cottage Company. • The Main Street court has six houses, each 1420 square feet and with Craftsman-style exteriors, grouped around a central courtyard. The interiors don't include period details. Still, each house has the feel of a bungalow, with a living room centered on the fireplace, a galley kitchen, and storey-and-a-half massing. Heating and cooling equipment earned the houses a 5-Star energy rating, and landscaping includes a rain garden. *Photo courtesy GMHC*



▲ COLLEGE COURT, 1915 and 1998 SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA

DEV: Garcia Development LLC, garcia-development-llc.com • DESIGN: Garcia Development LLC

Recently refurbished but built in 1915, College Court is still one of very few bungalow courts or "pocket neighborhoods" on the East Coast. It was built by John Penner, a peanut broker who fell in love with the bungalow court when he traveled to California—so much so that he built his own court when he came home to Virginia. His six bungalows were a unit and could not be sold individually until after he died. As rental properties later in the 20th century, they deteriorated until developer Mickey Garcia bought them. Garcia preserved the A&C exteriors as well as surviving interior woodwork and built-ins. He modernized the kitchens and put in new mechanicals and electrical systems. • College Court is home to single people, but also to young families. Garcia, who lives around the corner, says, "The homeowners are thirtyish. We've got four kids in seven bungalows." The court has attracted people who "want neighbors, who want to be outside." Picnics and impromptu parties are common. Their pig roast attracts a hundred friends and neighbors. "We're the hub for all the young professionals who want to hang out," says Garcia. *Photographs by James Biemann*

ed for well-to-do tourists, with Tiffany lamps and Stickley furniture inside homes with Craftsman exteriors.

The St. Francis Court became a local landmark, and the idea spread in California. Courts were an efficient way to build housing, and took advantage of the local climate. They were seen as especially good residences for single women. People who lived in bungalow courts, then as now, liked their combination of privacy and neighborliness. It was possible to build a bungalow court in any architectural style, and there were

Craftsman courts, Tudor courts, and (particularly in Los Angeles) Spanish Revival and Mediterranean courts.

Few courts were built elsewhere. There were several in Florida, designed as vacation homes, but a bracing northern climate took the pleasure out of an outdoor courtyard. After the Second World War, the bungalow court gave way to the apartment building in California's cities. The court plan devolved into the motel: that is, separate entrances around a common parking space. ■

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▲▶ DANIELSON GROVE, 2005

KIRKLAND, WASHINGTON

DEV: The Cottage Company,
cottagecompany.com

ARCH: Ross Chapin, rosschapin.com

LANDSCAPE: Linda Pruitt, cottagecompany.com
with Todd Paul, City Garden Services, Seattle

A cottage community of sixteen homes, the Grove won the 2007 American Institute of Architects' National Housing Award. Each with a small front garden and back yard, dwellings are individually owned, but colorful gardens, a courtyard, and a community center are common areas. Old evergreens were left standing.

• One-, two-, and three-bedroom homes, 1500–1700 square feet, are built on six different plans, all with good-sized front porches. Details including Dutch doors, checkered linoleum, glass tile, clawfoot tubs, built-ins, and Craftsman trim evoke period cottages.

Photos courtesy Ross Chapin Architects & The Cottage Company



LEFT AND ABOVE: Views from the Danielson Grove "pocket neighborhood" of cottages, built around a common courtyard and landscaped gardens. Interior details suggest a modern update on bungalow and cottage architecture of 100 years ago.

BELOW: A bird's-eye view of the Conover Commons community, where porches are one aspect of the lifestyle (right).



◀▲ CONOVER COMMONS COTTAGES, 2004

REDMOND, WASHINGTON

DEV: The Cottage Company,
cottagecompany.com

ARCH: Ross Chapin, rosschapin.com

With all-organic landscape and independently verified as a 4 Star Built Green community, it consists of twelve two-bedroom cottages in a woodland setting. Chapin and The Cottage Company have just finished an adjoining community of larger homes called Conover Commons Homes.

Photos courtesy Ross Chapin Architects & The Cottage Company