



The Oldest House in Forest Hills: 8247 San Fernando Way Photo provided by Realtor Harry Morgan

The Houses of Forest Hills

A Century of Life

by Judy Whalen

As you pass house after house when walking or driving along the tree-lined streets of our neighborhood, you will notice quite a diversity of architectural styles that reflect our rich history.

Forest Hills' newer homes making their own history into the future incorporate Eclectic, Mediterranean, Classical, Farmhouse Country/Modern, Post Modern and Contemporary styles. Our older homes represent a style progression of designs over the past 10 decades, like Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, Spanish Revival, Mission Revival, European, Traditional, Mid-Century Modern, Ranch and more.

"Home is not a place; it's a feeling and it is that which creates the warmth of our community."

(Excerpts taken from home bio written by 2014-2023 resident, Ron Ballentine.)

This Dutch Colonial style house was built in 1923 by a Dr. Wilson living in Junius Heights or Munger Place who wanted a lake house. This San Fernando

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8247 San Fernando Way - Backyard

Way house was one of the first homes built in the yet to be named Forest Hills neighborhood. Some of the streets had been built, but not the whole neighborhood. Current neighbor Rick Reeves said before the main house was built, the Quarters were used as a “Fish House” and a place to stay. Rick’s pump house was also a Fish House. There were several fish cabins along the ridge and some of them were owned by H.L. Hunt. There were no houses fronting Garland Road/State Hwy 78 (then Bankhead Highway/Hwy 1 1917-1926) at the time, so it was a straight shot from San Fernando down to White Rock Lake.

The new owners would ride their horses over from Junius Heights to gather at the lake with their buddies on the weekend and drink whiskey, play poker and go fishing. Between the driveway and the Reeve’s house there is a buried concrete tub that served as a live well for the fish they caught.

When the house was finally built, automobiles were the new thing. Now going to the country in 1923, six miles from downtown was easier with a different kind of horsepower.

1954-1980 second owners, Mr. and Mrs. Nemec were both musicians. She played the piano and he the clarinet. In the evening you could often hear their music wafting through the neighborhood. Dr. Wilson’s daughter previously had kept horses in stables on the property. John Nemec and his sister, who lived here as children in the 50’s confirmed that there were horse stables on the property when their family moved in.

Between 1980-2004, a major renovation was done by the third owners and extensive landscaping took place incorporating a three-season garden to be used as owner’s training ground to become a landscape architect.

(Save the date! This garden will be featured on the White



8247 San Fernando Way - Fish House

Rock East Dallas Garden Tour May 19th.)

In 2014, Ron Balentine and Julie Dunn breathed more life into this home with another major restoration. The foundation was re-built, where they found evidence of the original foundation, which was made of a Bois d’arc tree. The kitchen was taken down to the studs and re-built. Extensive electrical and HVAC work was done between the main house and the expanded Fish house. The original wood floors and walls were refinished.

The “knob and tube” wiring in the living room and 23 stained glass windows, beautiful crown molding and original ironwork by historic Potter Art Metal Studios of Dallas remain.

Now a sixth family has taken possession of this historical treasure filled with memories. Welcome Jacob and Ashley Moss!

Approaching its 100th year in April, Forest Hills will be looking back through the years and saluting our older homes built in the 20s, 30s, and 40s, which are also celebrating their milestone years.

When was your home built? Have some details of its life in Forest Hills? Information about notable residents, who live or have lived here? Stories, Urban Myths to be told?
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8146 San Fernando Way - 1940

Another home steeped in history is this San Fernando Way house known to many as the Cox house. It was built in 1940 at the approximate cost of \$35,000 for Dallas steel man, W.T. Cox, owner of the Cox Fence Company. You can still find the fencing throughout Dallas. Cox chain link fences are known for their signature rooster embellishment.

Cox used his San Fernando Way house to develop a new type of steel framework with pipe columns welded to cross I-beams. The walls were constructed 19 inches thick and the pipe column area provided a space for insulation, ducts, and built-in cabinets between the exterior and interior stucco walls.

This Spanish Eclectic home was built with many levels. Each bedroom had a private set of staircases. The central section of the home was the living room and gallery with two wings angling out at 45 degrees on either side. Half the huge central fireplace was in the living room and the other half in the adjoining terraced gallery. Lanai steel-framed glass accordion doors were placed beside the fireplace opening the two rooms to each other if needed. Another bank of these folding doors was placed along the back of the gallery, which could fold opened to bring the outdoors



8146 San Fernando Way - 2023

in. Beautiful hand-made Mexican tile was everywhere on the floors, stairs and painted ones were inlaid into walls inside and out like pieces of art. Wood doors throughout were custom carved with intricate designs and figures.

Cox had iron casement windows with ornamental grills, iron accents and light fixtures installed throughout. A basement beneath a basement was built where a 30-foot Artesian well was dug. The house with its playful curved roof angles meandered over the lot because it is said Cox refused to cut down several big trees.



Cox built the original 1935 Dallas Sporangium, using all his steel resources. The legendary wrestling venue was constructed in the shape of an octagon and seated 10,000. In the late 1940s - 1960s it was also home to The Big D Jamboree. Grand Ole Opry entertainers like Johnny Cash and Hank Williams, Sr. performed there. The Rock and Roll of the mid 1950s brought Elvis, Chuck Berry, Ray Charles, Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis. The cost of admission in 1962 was adults, 90¢ and kids 60¢!

The integrity of W.T. Cox's custom home has been beautifully maintained since the 1940's. The only change to the original footprint was an addition of a master bedroom suite, expanded kitchen with family room and a cupola accent nestled in the terra cotta tiled roof.

There have been three residents since 1940, who have updated, and cared for this Spanish styled landmark, all respecting Cox's vision. Nick and Katie Cutri are the latest lucky owners!

