

# Vintage Home renovation tips column *by Marjorie Lewis*



Volume 4  
April 2007

## Win a prize! Details on back

### The Story on Sears



**NOTE: I usually bring useful tips for renovation, but I thought with the summer coming and everyone looking for a good read, how about a story about vintage homes.**

Remember Frank W. Kushel? No? Well, you're not alone. Kushel was a merchandising genius credited with inventing Sears Roebuck and Company's Modern Homes Program, which provided almost 75,000 families homes between 1908 and 1940. Kushel was managing Sears's china department in 1906 when he was given the dismal task of overseeing the dismantling of the catalog company's unwieldy, money-losing building materials department.

#### **MORE VINTAGE HOMES**

By Marjorie Lewis



Sales were down, and there was too much inventory sitting in expensive warehouses. Kushel was convinced that the building supplies could be sold at a profit if storage could be centralized and the goods distributed more nationally and if there was a little extra incentive for buying them. That's when the idea of Modern Homes was thought up.

Most of the houses had two or three bedrooms although some had four or even five. The majority had only one bathroom, and some, especially in the early 20th Century, had none, since many rural and even suburban areas lacked piped-in water and sewers or septic fields. By the 1930's though, quite a few of the larger houses had two full bathrooms and a powder room. Buyer's had their choice of two different "outfits," depending on their tastes and pocketbooks and the requirements of the bathroom layout. Kitchen sinks were included in the specifications.

These ready-cut houses included plans, specifications, and detailed assembly instructions, along with pre-cut and factory-fitted lumber and all other building materials except masonry.

The lumber was stamped with the Sears name and numbered on the ends of the boards to correspond to numbers on the floor plans, so that mistakes in assembly were less likely-though far from impossible, as many extant Sears houses testify by their otherwise inexplicable deviations. Sears estimated that using their pre-cut and fitted lumber could save 40 percents on labor costs.

Of these Ready-Cut homes, homeowners could choose between three various layouts, based on their pocketbooks and personalities. The three different lines of houses were; Honor Bilt, Standard Bults and Simplex.

The Honor Bilt was the highest quality of home offered to purchase. This included more upgrades and deluxe bathrooms and kitchens. The Honor Bilt was a generally larger, more elaborate house than the Standard Bults. The Standard Bults was less expensive than the Honor Bilt. With a lighter frame, the Standard Bults were most often used as a summer cottage. The Standard Bults had a single layer of flooring and the walls were not plastered. The Standard Bults were usually not pre-cut or fitted.

Finally, there was the Simplex. This was a prefabricated, panelized, one storey building that could easily be taken apart. Demountable and portable, it was most often used for garages, summer cottage, cabins and small, utilitarian buildings that the owner might wish to move from place to place

Sears knew its audience well and its designs were those most popular at the time. The styles were deliberately conservative rather than innovative. Beginning with a simplified Queen Anne, Modern Home styles ranged from Arts and Crafts bungalows to various European revivals of vaguely French, English and Spanish (mission) styles.

If you're burning for more information, you can log on to the Sears Archive's popular Modern Homes Website ([www.modernhomes.com](http://www.modernhomes.com)) where users are invited to register their Sears houses and ask questions related to the subject.

This article is a reprint from The Old House Journal, July 2002, written by Shirley Maxwell and James C. Massey



**By Marjorie Lewis**

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# Old house repair tip newsletter

Newsletter for vintage homeowners

Vol. 4, April 2007

**Vintage homes, hats and  
excellent service never  
go out of style!**

**Real estate professional  
since "1987" and top producer  
year after year**

## \*Win a Prize!

Be the *first* to call in with the correct address of the Redlands home featured below



**Since the architecture of this house is so distinctive, the only hint will be it's zip code which is 92373. Good luck on your search**

## Winner of the prior contest:

Congratulations to Philip and Kathleen Rice. They did not have to look very far, as they are the owners of the house. They choose a \$25.00 gift certificate to Lowes as their prize. So make sure you are the first to call with this month's home address for your \$25.00 gift certificate to a local restaurant or store of your choice.



## RESOURCES CARPENTER

Need some repair work on your vintage house, but haven't found the time to complete it? No worries, *Richard Rossassin* is the craftsman to hire. With satisfied customers from all over Redlands including Buena Vista Street and Alvarado, he's definitely the right carpenter for the job. Richard can be reached at (909)528-4604

Dear old house lovers:

If you're looking to remodel your vintage home with a bungalow themed kitchen or bathroom, keep your eyes open for our next issue with tips and reading suggestions.



If your property is already listed with another company, this is not meant as a solicitation