



PAINTERS' PASSION

TWO ARTISTS' BELOVED WEBSTER GROVES HOME GOES UP FOR SALE

PRICE
\$310,000

ADDRESS
465
FOOTE,
WEBSTER
GROVES

REALTOR
PEGGY SHEPLEY,
314-725-0302

They'd meet for breakfast, then go their separate ways. His studio was upstairs, packed with brushes and paint; he'd carry a lunch there and disappear for the day, seeking northern light under its peaked roof. Her studio took up the downstairs living room, its wide windows showcasing the back yard's colorful flowers and the small bamboo grove, where stepping stones punctuate a winding path away from the brick patio.

The two painters, Arthur Osver and Ernestine Betsberg, lived here for 45 years, until their respective deaths in 2006 and 2007. This home was their sanctuary.

When the couple arrived in St. Louis in 1960, say the trustees, Peter and Paul Shank, they'd planned to stay for a year—the length of Osver's initial Washington University professorship. But they found kinship at the "salon," a monthly meeting of prominent Wash. U. literati, and soon sought a home here. When realtor Saul Dubinsky showed them this Webster Groves house in 1961, it was kismet. The decision to stay irrevocably changed their lives, say the Shanks.

Their Webster Groves home still feels like a farmhouse, a simple, rustic living space for two devoted to their craft. Renovations have only simplified it further, as workers tore out Mr. Osver's extensive hand-built shelving, plus other small

additions, to get the home up to code. It wasn't an easy task; as one worker remarked, "Arthur built these shelves so that they would withstand a nuclear holocaust." Everything had its place here; paint outlines in the garage still show where the couple's tools, from rakes to garden spades, once hung.

The home's smooth walnut banister, newel post and brick fireplace have been in place since 1851, when James and Sarah Dickey had the home built. This may be the oldest house in Webster Groves, where it was recently designated a historic landmark. Unfortunately, say the Shanks, the home's historic designation does nothing to protect it from being torn down by a future owner; provisions in the contract of sale only extend to the first buyer. This frustrates the brothers, who say the home was a center of St. Louis art history; countless artists, novelists, poets and performers have found comfort within its walls.

This simple home ultimately ingrained itself into the consciousness of its inhabitants. While it's said that many of Mr. Osver's works were inspired by the sparks, fire and soot of the steel mills in his Ohio hometown, some of his last paintings were in fact of the redbud tree that framed the upstairs window.

Proceeds from the home's sale will go directly to benefit the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and the ASPCA.

—MARGARET BAUER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT HUGHES, PAUL SHANK AND HERB WEITMAN