

Old Homes of Fair Oaks

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Johnston House - 7956 California Ave

Rarely are we given a window into the original interior colors of our historic Fair Oaks homes. Unfortunately Kodachrome was not in use until the 1930s! A news article from 1906 sheds light on how this month's Old Home was decorated - a fun find given its current decor.

As background, the Johnston House (or the California House, as its sign says) was built in 1906 on the knoll southwest of the main intersection of town, above today's Home-2-Roost. James R. Johnston was a retired dry goods dealer from Rock Island, Illinois who came to Fair Oaks at age 82 to improve his health. It must have worked as he lived to be

92. Presumably Johnston followed his daughter Rebecca, who was married to Frances Murphy, builder of the 1901 Murphy Building, one of the first commercial buildings of Fair Oaks. The Johnston family retained ownership of the house until after 1930.



In July 1906 *the Sacramento Union* ran a feature article on the home proclaiming "This cottage has a suggestion of the colonial style, yet

with that blending of modern architecture that reveals the taste of the builder and gives emphasis to the attractive points of the natural scenery... The prevailing color is green in the finishing and furnishings, so blended that it shows the design to supplement the gray of summer with suggestions of green grass."

While originally built as a personal residence, the Johnston House was converted into office and retail space sometime after 1960, and has housed a variety of businesses, including a lawyer's office, photography studio, advertising agency, Catholic radio station, Jeannie's Place gift shop, and it's current tenant, Ameriprise Financial Services.



The current owner, Jon Heim, purchased the house in 1993 from Steve Bacon, and has updated the entire structure while keeping the historical flavor. The structure has remained pretty true to its original design with only the east side entry having been expanded into an enclosed porch, eliminating 5 original columns. Heim updated the existing knob and tube wiring, but kept the charming pushbutton switch plates intact. While the doors and window frames remain original, the floor was in poor shape. As Heim installed sturdy new laminate floors, he was careful to float them over the original flooring, in case a future owner wants to do a true historical restoration - the original floor is still there. As he has worked on the home he has kept all period pieces stored safely in the basement. "The main thing I was not able to find were the pillars from the East side of the original home. I am hoping I get a call one day that someone has them!"

As Heim gave us a tour recently of his two-story renovation, I smiled at the color of the carpeting in the finished attic. It's green! Some things have a way of coming full circle.

