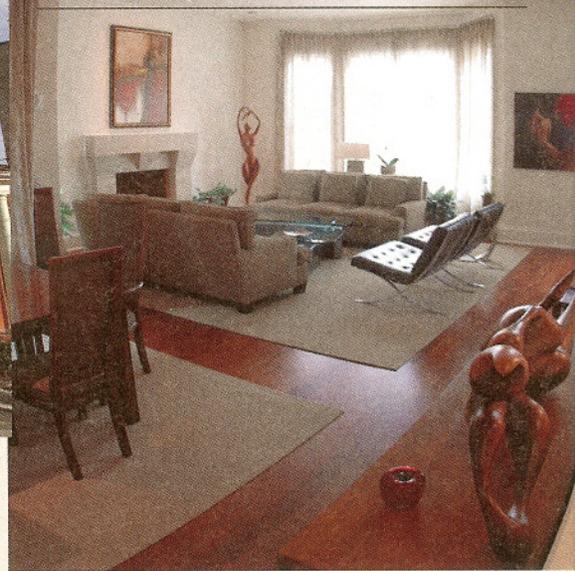




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homes unveiled



LIFE WITH THE SOPERS *in The Brownstones*

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILL JORDAN

Since they moved to downtown Franklin in March, Brent and Ellen Soper have enjoyed living in their historic neighborhood, but they're a little lonely for neighbors on their block.

"Whenever we see lights on at night in our block, we get excited," says Ellen Soper. "It means someone has moved in to the neighborhood. We can't wait until the whole block is full of lights and people."

The reason the Sopers' block is so quiet at night is that they were the first to move into the Brownstones, which are being developed by Bernie Butler of D-9 Development on the block between First and Second Avenues on the north side of Church Street in downtown Franklin. During the day, it's not very quiet. The streets and alleys are filled with carpenters, bricklayers, painters and laymen. Surrounding blocks in the historic neighborhood are a mix of historic homes and businesses.

But only two of the 22 Brownstone style homes are sold, finished and occupied. The Sopers were urban pioneers, and they're still surrounded by construction activity in their 4,100 sq-ft. Brownstone, the second building from the corner of First and Church. The couple had lived in the Forrest Hills area of Nashville but always had their sights

set on Franklin.

"The Brownstone [concept] is unique to middle Tennessee," Brent says. "Rather than having to live in suburbia, you can now move into downtown areas where you can walk to neighborhood businesses, restaurants and coffee shops and support the local district. We also like the historical aspects of Franklin. There's so much history here."

The Sopers already have become active members of the Downtown Neighborhood Association, an organization representing residents of Franklin's original 15-block downtown area. The Sopers also delight in the fact that their children and grandchildren live in or near Franklin in middle Tennessee, and they love having everything under one roof in their new Brownstone.

"We also don't have to worry about a yard, and it's easy to leave when we travel, which is pretty often," Brent says.

Brent, who retired from a career as a radiologist in 2004, has a subtle, ever-present smile and the mellow personality of someone with an arsenal of patience. He's dressed casually in jeans and gray polo t-shirt and sports a salt-and-pepper beard. Ellen also dresses comfortably (with a half-step more formality). Her eyes twinkle when she smiles, and her genuine empathy toward other people has netted friends all over Franklin. Both can be seen walking around

Franklin with their 15-year-old cocker spaniel mix, Tori, and waving to passersby who honk as they drive past.

When the Sopers first moved to Franklin and waited for their Brownstone to emerge from the ground, they rented a house in Westhaven from John and Joy Morris. They also keep a condo in Nashville, where they can stay when they go to town for events and outings.

They say that they enjoyed Westhaven, but their new Brownstone is even more distinctive than the new homes in that neo-traditional neighborhood.

The Sopers have just about every conceivable luxury on the four levels of their new downtown Franklin home. The front door off Church Street opens into a foyer with a long narrow staircase leading to the third level. To the right of the stairway is an elegant but understated den with wood-paneled ceilings and large windows overlooking Church and the open field and woods on First Avenue South.

The front room hints at the décor in the rest of the house. Instead of traditional antiques, the house is furnished with a modern feel, including contemporary art, furniture and architectural detail. Flat screen televisions hang on the walls in many of the rooms, and the entire building is wired with fiber optics for a sound system and wireless Internet.

Down a short hall from the den is a comfortable guest bedroom with its own spacious tiled bathroom across the hall. At the back of the building is a roomy two-car garage. All the cabinetry in the house is mahogany and the floors are Brazilian Cherry hardwood throughout. The ceilings are 11 feet high on the first and second floors and the basement, while the third floor has 10-foot ceilings.

All of the Brownstones have elevators, something that comes in handy after grocery shopping or when carrying a sleeping grandchild upstairs. And Tori is getting on in years and can't climb the steep stairs.

"The elevator makes the house more usable," Ellen says. "But I'll tell you what ... we walk the stairs on purpose and get a lot of exercise that way."

The Sopers' basement is just as elaborately designed as the rest of the building. A home theater houses an 84-inch DLP hi-definition TV with state-of-the-art sound, while the exercise room has professional-grade equipment including a treadmill and elliptical machine. Brent's pride and joy is the basement wine cellar, where some 1,700 bottles of mainly French wines and a handful of Italian and domestic vintages quietly

age in climate-controlled comfort.

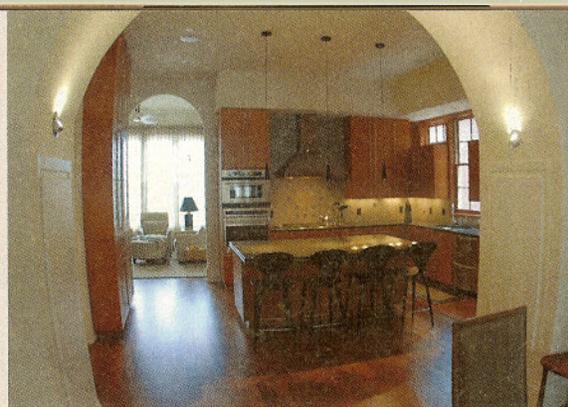
"I've been collecting since the mid-1980s," he says. "I originally had about 3,000, but finally auctioned off about 1,500 of them. It's a fairly reasonable-sized collection. It's hard for me to imagine that I'd ever drink all of them in my lifetime."

Up two flights from the basement is the second floor where the Sopers spend most of their time. Most of this level is a single large open space encompassing a living area, dining area, kitchen and office. Light streams in from the large windows on this level, giving the space a bright, cheerful feel. The Sopers' extensive collection of contemporary art – both paintings and sculpture – adds distinction to this level of the Brownstone. A large archway between the dining area and the kitchen creatively organizes the space.

"We built off the original floor-plan from the architect, but we added our individual touches," Brent explains.

"We wanted to make it ours," Ellen adds.

The kitchen has every modern amenity including two stoves, a heavy-duty hood and in the middle, a granite island with stools. A small sitting room, which doubles as an office space, sits behind the kitchen.



Through another door is a screened-in porch.

"We have the only Brownstone with a screened-in porch and deck," Ellen says, "though everyone here has an amazing amount of outdoor space."

Above, on the third floor, another deck gives Ellen an opportunity to grow herbs and flowers. She has a rain barrel for watering. "This is just a great space for gardening," she says.

The third floor has another narrow hallway that connects the back of the unit to the front, where the shear drapes let in all the light any artist could want. To the back is the master bedroom with an elegant and spacious bathroom complete with Jacuzzi

"We've really got everything we could ever need under one roof here," Ellen says. "It's a perfect place for us." ☺