

# Contemporary Bungalow

Detailing and proportion are early 20th century;  
comfort and efficiency are right up to date



**Signature details of a Craftsman-style bungalow.** With an inset front porch, beefy tapered columns and knee braces at the eaves, this Arkansas house reflects common architectural themes from the Craftsman bungalow era. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

BY DAVID M. FRENCH

**B**ruce and Leah MacPhee had been living in their new bungalow-style house for about eight months when a thunderstorm blew through town one April evening. A bolt of lightning struck a tree near the back of the house, so close that to Leah it “sounded like an atom bomb.” Firefighters guessed later that a surge of electricity jumped to a structural steel beam in the rear of the house, touching off a dozen small fires between the first and second floors. Although no one was hurt, little of the house could be saved. Devastated but not defeated, the MacPhees gathered their resources and built a nearly exact copy of what they had lost.

But then the MacPhees had always been sure of what they wanted. They had originally approached me in the fall of 1994 and asked me to design a house for their lot a few miles outside Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas. They are fans of the Craftsman style, and so am I. The MacPhees liked the signature detailing and feel of a classic Craftsman-style bungalow: the low-slope gable roofs; knee braces at open eaves; the fat, tapered columns on wide porches. But they didn’t want turn-of-the-century Craftsman utility and comfort, meaning that plans had to include a well-equipped kitchen, energy-efficient windows, central air conditioning and airy interior spaces (floor plans, p. 104).

As a result, their house is not really a historically accurate bungalow reproduction. Details are decidedly Craftsman in proportion and scale (photo above), but we tried to keep the spaces much brighter than the dark rooms of a typical bungalow. We looked closely at the Craftsman detailing of the early 20th-century architects Charles and Henry Greene as well as our native Arkansas buildings, which are rich in folk tradition, arts and crafts.

## **Big porches are a respite from the heat of summer**

We framed the house in the side-gable style, a typical Craftsman form in which the





**Pull up a chair and sit a spell.** In summer, a full-width porch at the front of the house offers protection from the hot Arkansas sun. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

## COMFORTABLE SPACES IN A PERIOD STYLE

The floor plan for the author's interpretation of a Craftsman-era bungalow provides a large kitchen and an adjoining family room at the back of the house with easy access to a full-width back porch. A first-floor master-bedroom suite gives the owners' children free rein of the second floor.

### SPECS

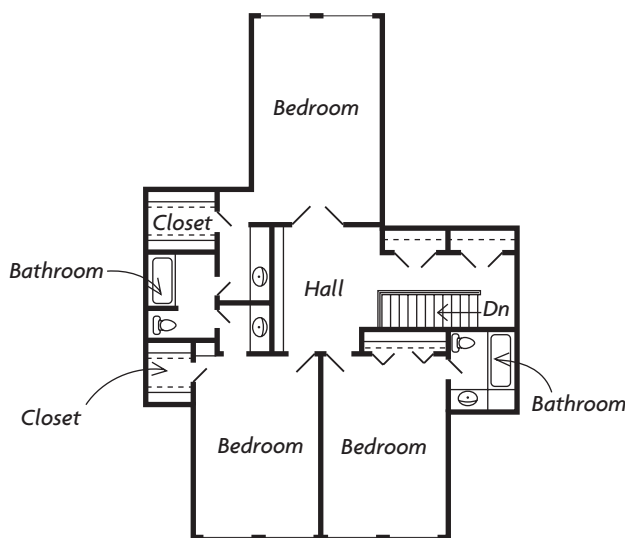
**Bedrooms:** 4  
**Bathrooms:** 3½  
**Size:** 3,400 sq. ft.  
**Cost:** \$76 per sq. ft.  
**Completed:** 1996  
**Location:** Hot Springs, Arkansas  
**Architect:** David M. French  
**Builder:** J. B. Mills Construction

Photos taken at lettered positions.

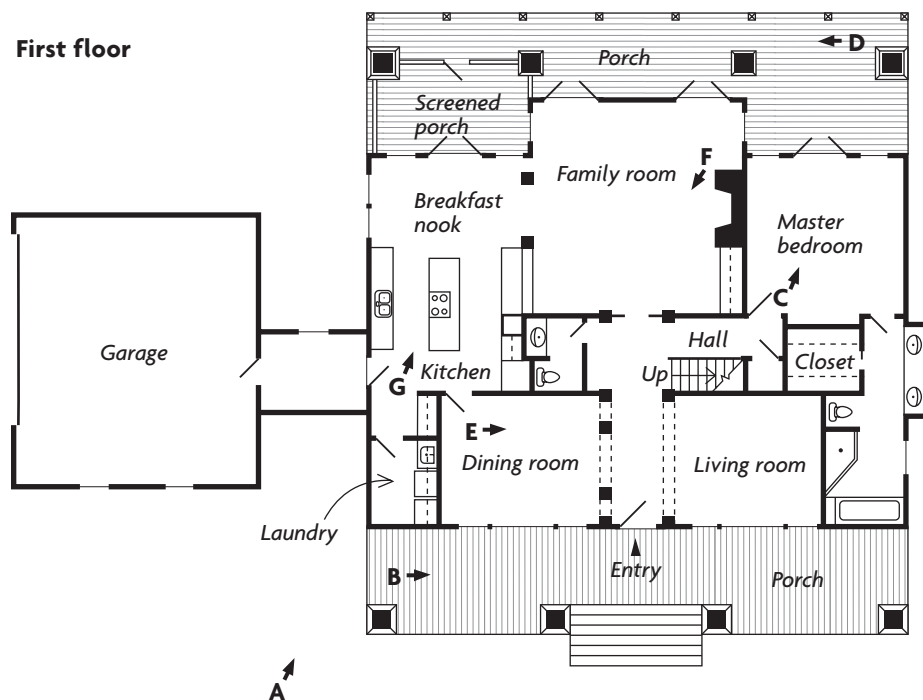
0 2 4 8 ft.

### Second floor

North



### First floor



porches are beneath the main roof, not built as additions to the house. Both front and back porches are an important part of the overall design. A traditional Arkansas house typically features a generous front porch. It is a spot where people can get together and enjoy cool evening breezes, and it offers protection from solar-heat gain on hot summer days (there are plenty of those in this part of the country.)

For the MacPhees, the broad front porch accomplishes both of those traditional tasks (photo p. 103). At the back of the house, a second porch built over a steep bank (bottom photo, facing page) is more private. It includes a small screened area entered from a breakfast nook through a set of French doors. I added another pair of French doors to the porch in the master bedroom (top photo, facing page), and a double set of doors in the family room. In all, there are four separate entrances to the back porch—fully in keeping with a design tenet of traditional bungalows that took every possible advantage of outdoor spaces.

Visually, among the most commanding exterior details are the heavy tapered columns that support the porch overhangs at the front and rear of the house. Other exterior detailing also is distinctively Craftsman in origin: the triangular knee braces at the gable ends of both the main house, for example, and the wide shed dormer at the front of the house. Practical as well as decorative, the braces help to support roof overhangs and exemplifying how early 20th-century designers embraced wood exterior detailing.

Clapboard siding and exterior trim are cypress, a wood that is naturally resistant to mold, insects and rot. Shades of taupe and hunter green, used on the exterior, are classic Craftsman colors. Wood windows are insulated for energy efficiency. Although decidedly modern in this regard, they are designed with a custom muntin-bar pattern to add period detailing.

### Inside, more light than a typical Craftsman bungalow

As much as they liked period details, the MacPhees wanted the inside of the house to be comfortable. As Leah put it, "We wanted everything to be simple and uncluttered so that we would feel like we were living in a house and not a museum." Dining and living rooms at the front of the house are formal areas (photo p. 106), and the back family room is where the family of four spends most of its time (photo top left, p. 107).

Like the outside, the interior of the house draws from the Craftsman style and local





**A first-floor master bedroom.** The owners get a private zone on the first floor with a master-bedroom suite (above) that has easy access to the back porch (below). Photo above taken at C on floor plan. Photo below taken at D on floor plan.







**Interior details match those on the outside of the house. Battered columns are a major visual element on the exterior and are repeated inside to define interior spaces. These columns separate the front hall from the formal dining room. Photo taken at E on floor plan.**

Arkansas building traditions. Much of the interior woodwork is paint grade rather than more expensive stain-grain woods, such as the quartersawn white oak that Craftsman-era bungalows would have seen. This deviation in style not only reduced costs but also helped to make the house's interior spaces much brighter.

Good-size windows help to brighten the interior, too. On the first floor, the tops of the windows are 8 ft. above the floor, in keeping with the proportions of older, high-ceilinged houses. This placement helps to get a good deal of light into the interior of the house. Upstairs, dormers on both the front and back of the house allow ample sunlight into all three bedrooms.

Light-colored walls and trim—pale yellow and taupe walls, white ceilings and white

trim—also contribute to an overall feeling of spaciousness through the house.

### **Interior detailing includes a wide range of materials**

A common practice of the Greene brothers was the blending of different wood species to make spaces look rich and visually interesting. We followed suit. The fireplace mantel, for example, is made from ribbon-grained cherry, complementing the hickory-wood floors. Cherry and walnut were the woods of choice for the front door. Its design was inspired by a photo that Bruce MacPhee had seen of the 1906 Bolton House in Pasadena, California, designed by the Greene brothers.

I detailed the painted kitchen cabinets with some Craftsman-style trim, but the kitchen is equipped with modern appliances to ac-

commodate the MacPhees' frequent entertaining (bottom photo, facing page). Naturally beautiful and durable, the granite countertops are dark, but they make a good contrast with light-colored materials elsewhere in the room.

With heavy battered columns playing such an important visual role on the outside of the house, it seemed natural to use the same approach inside. Tapered columns similar to those on the porch separate major spaces inside the house (photo above). Similarly detailed columns are engaged in the walls to frame openings to the family room and the central hall. □

David M. French is an architect practicing in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Photos by Scott Gibson, except where noted.





**Pocket doors with a theme.** To divide the front hall from the family room at the rear of the house, the author inserted a pair of pocket doors below a stained-glass transom light. Door trim resembles a pair of battered columns. Photos taken at F on floor plan.



**A sunny, un-Craftsman-like kitchen.** Period Craftsman houses often had dark, utilitarian kitchens—one detail the author and his clients decided to skip. French doors beyond the table lead to a screened area of the back porch. Photo taken at G on floor plan.