

Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Evanston's double houses

by Jack Weiss, Design Evanston April 19th, 2025



The double house at 1307-1313 Ridge Ave. in Evanston. Credit: Jack Weiss

When Evanston architect Stuart Cohen was walking in his neighborhood in southeast Evanston, he started noticing something unusual. He was seeing residential homes that had two front doors. As his curiosity progressed, he began to notice more. In the end, he found more than a dozen of these unique residences on two streets: Hinman Avenue and Judson Avenue.

In 2013, Cohen was co-author of Design Evanston's first book, *Evanston: 150 Years, 150 Places*, that examined Evanston's notable architecture. He also co-authored a second book, published by Design Evanston in 2020, *Evanston's Design Heritage*, which featured the architects and designers who lived or worked in Evanston. He thought that showcasing the unique and ubiquitous presence of Evanston's double houses would make a good addition to Design Evanston's publishing effort.

He persuaded Kris Hartzell, collections curator at the Evanston History Center, architectural historian and also a co-author of Design Evanston's two previous books, to take on the project with him. Jack Weiss saw it as an opportunity to design his third book for Design Evanston. And he could use the photographic skills, influenced by Walker Evans, that he gained while in graduate school at Yale.

Design Evanston's board agreed, and the project was started.

In April 2024, the team of Design Evanston members began meeting to work on the organization's third book: *Hidden in Plain Sight: Evanston's Double Houses*. Cohen and Hartzell researched and wrote the essays that feature 42 double houses, and Weiss

managed the project, photographed the houses, designed the book, and handled grants and gifts. Now he's handling sales, marketing and distribution.

As the project evolved, an Excel spreadsheet was used to record double house candidates for the book. Cade Sterling, preservation planner at the City of Evanston, suggested several candidates. And more double houses kept revealing themselves as Weiss drove around the city photographing those that had already been identified.

In the end, in addition to the 42 double houses highlighted in the book, another 22 are listed in the book's catalog.

In December 2024, eight months after launching the book project, *Hidden in Plain Sight* went to the printer in South Korea. On April 15, the books were delivered to Evanston.

The authors write about their favorite houses featured in the book:

Stuart Cohen's favorite double houses



1139-1141 Judson Ave. Credit: Jack Weiss

Cohen: “1139–1141 Judson Avenue was the source of the idea that many of Evanston’s double houses are ‘hiding in plain sight.’ It is nearly identical to the house just to the north. While I had made note of the curiosity of two identical Victorian Houses built next to each other, I had walked by these houses for years before I noticed that they were in fact double houses with two separate doorways.

“I saw more and more double houses along Judson Avenue and elsewhere in this area of southeast Evanston. I’ve always felt that the scale and character of Evanston’s residential streets were part of what I love about living in Evanston, and realized the brilliance of the

design of these multifamily houses, which were conceived to fit seamlessly into the fabric of Evanston's streets.



1119-1121 Lake St. Credit: Jack Weiss

“The Prairie style stucco structure at 1119–1121 Lake St. is another favorite. I admire the sophistication of its clear, simple architectural composition and the way the horizontal bands of stucco and roof slide past and behind the four piers that visually organize the front of the house. Remodeled and reconfigured in 1912, this building is truly a precursor of the European modernism of the 1920s with its rows of window forming strips between its vertical piers, with strip windows terminating in glass corners. The strength of the entry porches — which are not attached elements but voids carved out of the building volume — help reinforce the cubic nature of this architectural design.”

Kris Hartzell's favorite double houses



1307-1313 Ridge Ave. Credit: Jack Weiss

Hartzell: “Evanston architect Myron Hunt was a master of the double-house archetype. From 1896 to 1901 he designed eight double houses in Evanston, more than any other architect in the book. I admire Hunt’s ability to design houses that were thoroughly modern and completely suited for domestic living. The house on Ridge stands out because of its impressive size and strategic location but also because its style heralded the emerging Prairie School with its strong horizontality, dominant roof line and cohesive brick exterior.

“The plans of the two homes mirror each other and are connected by a two-story open loggia. Each house has a central section that extends perpendicularly from the main mass. This design of projections and setbacks is balanced and aesthetically harmonious. It also serves to allow more natural light to fill the interior, one of the primary conundrums of double-house design. The house was built for two branches of an extended family and not for speculation or rental income.



416-418 Dempster St. Credit: Jack Weiss

“Each double house in the book demonstrates a unique design solution to the questions of entry points, shared interior wall, compatibility and cohesiveness. The scale should complement the surrounding built environment and provide ample light and space within. A design by architect Albert Feree was so successful it was built twice.

“The first house was built on Dempster Street and faced north, the direction that provides the least amount of natural light. Feree addressed this by designing the windows on a large scale. This was innovative for its time and resolved the issue of dark interiors on double houses. The second iteration, on Judson, faces east. Both double houses have a shared front porch with side-by-side entrance doors. Both have front facing gables and wide polygonal bays. There are subtle variations in the size of the third-story gables on each house and in the second- and third-story window designs. These houses illustrate how the many ornamental characteristics of the Queen Anne style can be used to create both individuality and balance in joining two houses to appear as one.”

Jack Weiss's favorite double house

Hidden in Plain Sight: Evanston's Double Houses



Front cover of *Hidden in Plain Sight*, featuring 1307–1313 Ridge Ave. Credit: Jack Weiss

Weiss: “The cover image for the book was an obsession for me from the start. How many of us see Myron Hunt’s double house at 1307–1313 Ridge, north of Dempster, so often, admire its beauty, and yet not realize that it is a double house?”

“Photographing this Hunt house was a challenge. A straight-on shot is factual but lacks drama. An angled shot might hide the fact that it’s a double house, as my favorite photograph at the start of this story reveals. In the end, the strong, low, horizontal form of the house gave me the perfect rationale to wrap the image around both front and back covers. The book’s team recognized this was an opportunity that none of the other houses presented.

“I began to photograph the double houses almost as soon as the project started in April 2024, just as the trees and shrubs were beginning to leaf out. That was when the cover photograph of 1307–1313 Ridge was taken. I took a break during the summer and well into the late fall as trees and their shadows hid many of the houses’ details. Ironically, it was the photograph of 1307–1313 Ridge that appears on page 78 that became the last image I took in December.

“As work on the book was progressing during 2024 a citywide project was taking hold: work on the comprehensive plan and zoning code, known as Envision Evanston 2045. Two of the most contentious issues that emerged and continue until today are about housing in single-family neighborhoods and affordable housing. We couldn’t have timed release of the book any better as one solution for both issues might be found in the two-family homes like double houses, duplexes, two-flats that already exist hidden in plain sight in every neighborhood in Evanston.

“Unrelated to our effort to highlight Evanston’s double houses, a new organization emerged, *Say Yes to Duplexes*. Dedicated to informing the community about the benefits of two-family homes on single lots, this organization is convinced that “by allowing duplex development again throughout Evanston, we can increase housing options, reduce housing costs, and create more vibrant, inclusive neighborhoods.”

Hidden in Plain Sight: Evanston’s Double Houses is available for purchase at Bookends & Beginnings, Chicago-Main Newsstand, Evanston History Center, and on the Design Evanston website, designevanston.org.

Design Evanston’s “Eye on Evanston” articles focus on Evanston’s design history and advocate for good design in our city. Visit designevanston.org to learn more about the organization.

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