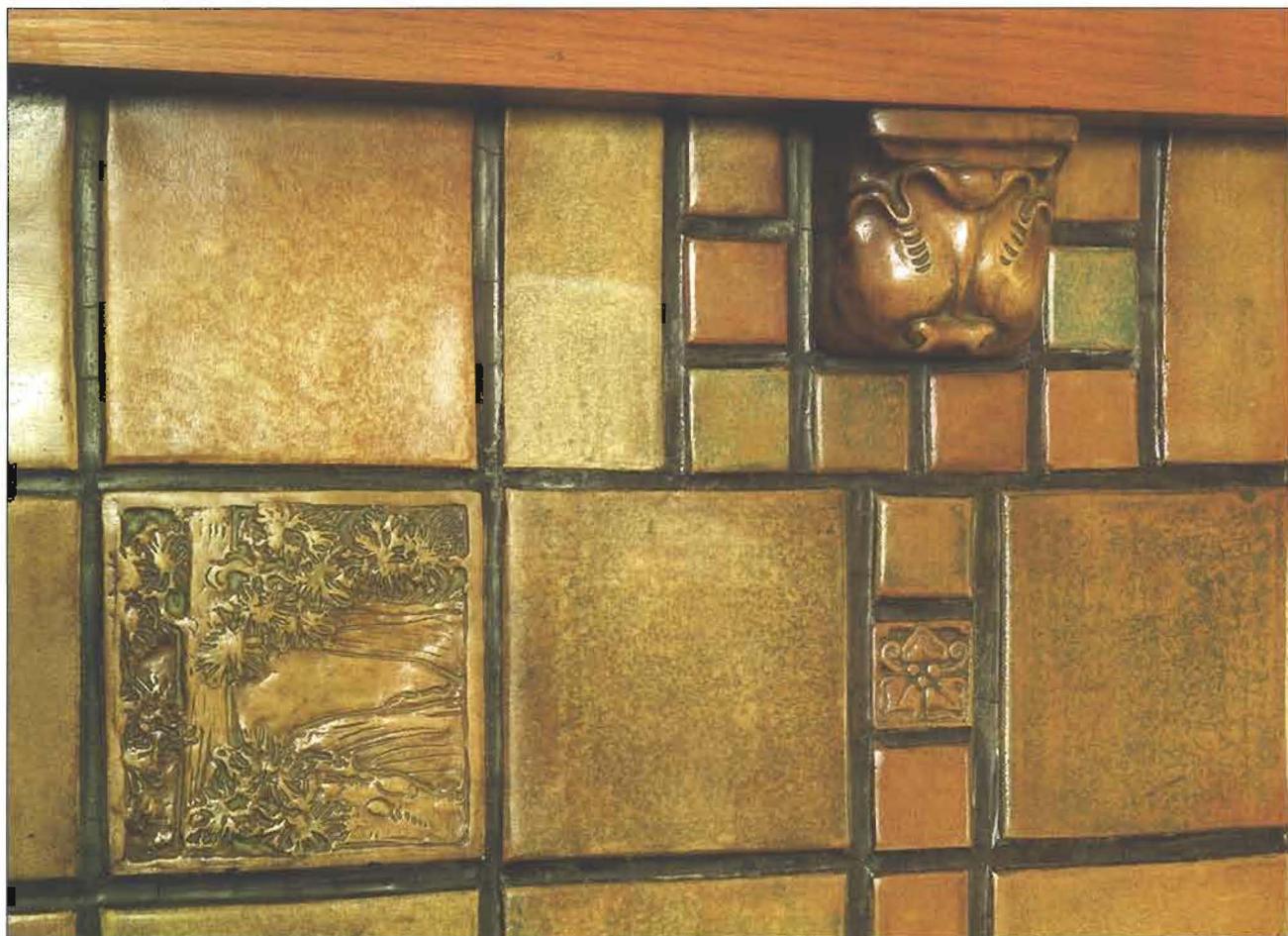


THE ENDURING CHARM OF



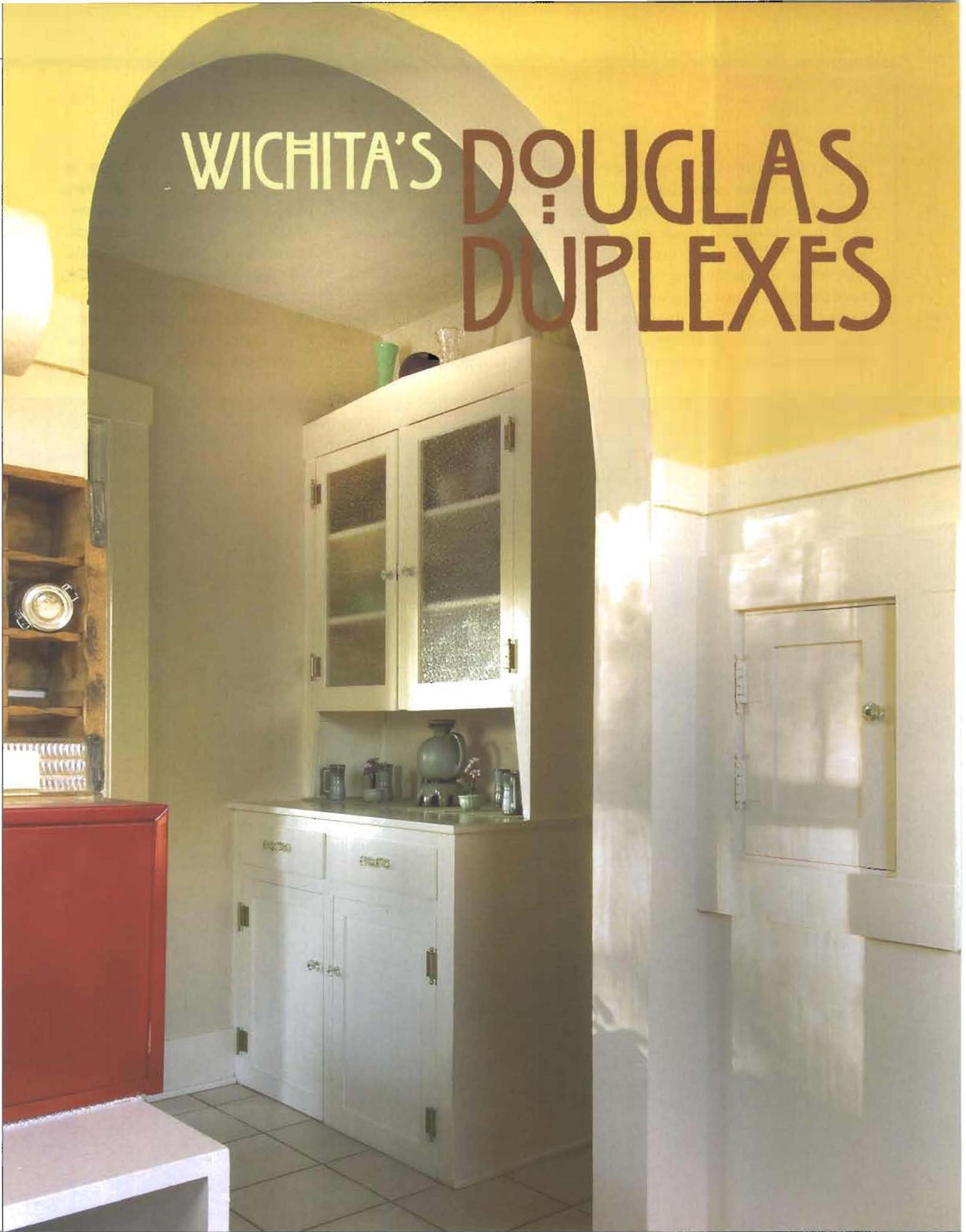
BY KATHY MORGAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF

LIKE MANY TOWNS ACROSS the United States, the heartland city of Wichita, Kansas, has, in recent decades, come to appreciate the rich legacy of Arts and Crafts homes within its city limits and beyond. Homeowners have pulled up years of shag carpeting to reveal pristine hardwood floors, stripped paint from trim to reveal warm oak, and shared the names of long-forgotten architects at local gatherings as they research their house histories. And while some of the re-discovered architectural treasures have been found

in grand homes, many have been hiding in plain sight, in simple surroundings—like the four gorgeous Batchelder fireplaces adorning two modest duplexes on West Douglas Street. These four homes, built by a dentist for himself and his three sons in 1927, have survived the modernization of the surrounding neighborhood remarkably unscathed. Since the late sixties (when the last of the sons moved on to California), the four duplexes have become rental units. Today, they provide comfortable surroundings and a warm,

WICHITA'S DOUGLAS DUPLEXES



inviting hearth to four long-term tenants who truly appreciate the good fortune that has brought them to these unique residences. So far in Wichita, more than 50 Batchelder tile installations have been discovered—to date, a wealth greater than any U.S. city other than Batchelder's home town of Pasadena, Calif. But what is the

reason for this abundance of Batchelder tile in a town more than 1,300 miles from its origins? By all accounts, it must have been an accident of good taste.

After the end of World War I, Wichita's population grew sharply, as did the demand for middle-class housing. Production of the Cessna Comet, the first airplane manufac-

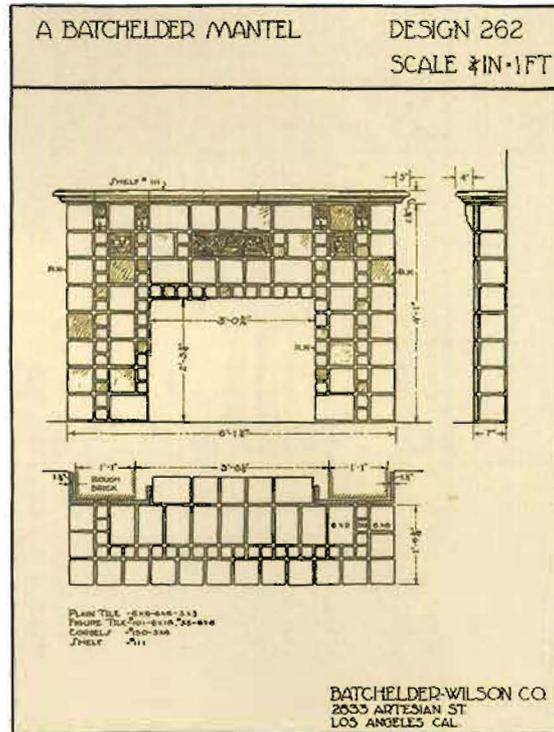
ture in the city, had begun in 1917; the new aircraft industry rapidly grew Wichita's economy. In the new middle-income neighborhoods of Delano, Riverside, New Salem, Uptown and East Front, the bungalow provided an excellent solution for Wichita's workforce. Street after street in new neighborhoods filled with pattern-



book Craftsman-style houses, usually averaging five or six rooms. And while the clapboard-sided or brick-veneer houses varied in their interpretation of piers and porch trim, they maintained the setback, height, size and spatial relationships that established a defining continuity: the comfortable, family-friendly environments of Wichita's burgeoning neighborhoods.

PIONEER HISTORY

These Asian-influenced bungalow duplexes on West Douglas in Wichita's Delano Neighborhood were built in 1927 by Alfred Hatfield as modest but attractive residences for himself and his three grown sons, Reed, A.W. and Toler. Nearly 50 years earlier, as a seven-year-old in 1878, Alfred had



BELOW, THE UNIQUE ROOFLINE AND WELCOMING PORCHES OF THE DUPLEXES CREATE A PLEASING FACADE ABOVE. DESIGN #262 FROM BATCHELDER'S 1924 CATALOG, SIMILAR TO THE DUPLEX HEARTH AT LEFT OPPOSITE, HAND-WROUGHT DECORATIVE TILE AND CORBELS GIVE BATCHELDER FIREPLACES A WARM ELEGANCE





migrated with his family by covered wagon from Illinois to the bustling trade center of Wichita, Kansas, witnessing herds of buffalo and homesteading sodbusters along the way. At the tender age of 16, Alfred apprenticed with several dentists and attended dental school in Kansas City; he returned to Wichita five years later to open his own practice to serve the growing population. Eventually, all three sons would join him in the field of dentistry. The Hatfield Brothers Dental Laboratory served Wichita until Alfred's death in 1969.

In 1911, Alfred Hatfield moved with his wife and sons to a modest home on West 1st Street. Eventually, all three sons brought wives home to live there as well. It was in 1927 that the Hatfield family hired David Crichton, a local builder behind many of the bungalows in the Delano and Riverside neighborhoods, to build the duplexes on Douglas Avenue. There would be four units, one for each of the Hatfield sons to share with their wives and one for Alfred and Alice. One can only surmise the compelling reasons behind the choice of conjoined

homes; clearly, this was a family that valued togetherness. With the duplexes, each couple had their privacy, yet the shared porches and close proximity allowed for daily interactions.

As with many of Crichton's Craftsman homes, the attention to detail is what makes them much more than just modest and affordable. Pierced brick balusters (one duplex in red brick, the other in buff) lend masculine stability to the front porches, while battered wood beams gracefully support their gabled roofs. The tidy wood-shingle siding adds contrast to the



second stories, while the flared ends of the ridgelines and the eave brackets cradle the roof structures. Inside, hand-wrought details and quality materials abound. Well-placed windows allow natural light to filter into the rooms and play across the hardwood floors. Muntins adorn the frosted-glass bookcase doors, and pediment-shaped lintels trim the windows and doors, repeating at the cornices of the built-in cabinets—all evidence of the care taken in designing and finishing these snug homes.

But without question, the crowning glory of each unit is the

fireplace, trimmed in the warm, smoky tones of hand-molded Batchelder tile. These houses weren't built merely to shelter the body, but to nourish the soul.

By 1927, Ernest Batchelder had made his mark on Arts and Crafts design in the United States with his earthy, hand-molded tiles. He'd begun making tiles at his home in Pasadena in 1909. His artistry was instantly recognizable; word spread, and the tiles were soon in demand nationwide. In Wichita, Batchelder tile was distributed by the Haines Tile and Mantel Company. His business



TOP, COMFORTABLE PORCHES AND CLOSE PROXIMITY INVITE NEIGHBORS TO SPEND SUMMER EVENINGS TOGETHER. ABOVE, THE BROKEN-TILE FLOORS OF THE PORCHES MAY HAVE BEEN ADDED IN THE 1940S. OPPOSITE, FROM KITCHEN CABINETS TO INTERIOR DOORS, ALL THE UNITS RETAIN THEIR ORIGINAL HARDWARE AND GLASS KNOBS.



grew into a larger factory space in Pasadena, expanding again in 1928 to Los Angeles but he closed his doors for good in the midst of the Great Depression in 1932.

BATCHELDER TILE IN WICHITA

While Batchelder tile attracted many during the height of the Arts and Crafts era, by mid-century, it had fallen out of favor as times and tastes changed. Across the country, unwitting homeowners painted over, tore out or bricked over Batchelder floors, walls, and fireplaces. But in the nineties, as the revival of the Arts and Crafts movement gained momentum and con-



cerned individuals championed architectural preservation, awareness began to spread. In Wichita, architectural historian (and *American Bungalow* contributor) Pamela D. Kingsbury has documented more than 50 local properties with Batchelder tile installations, including residences, school buildings and even a church with a Batchelder drinking-fountain surround.

Kingsbury notes that the proprietor of the Haines Tile and Mantel company, Walter Haines, was a great admirer of Batchelder Tile, and likely recommended it enthusiastically to local builders who visited his showroom. Here,



BELOW, WHILE BUILDINGS HAVE COME DOWN AND GONE UP ALL AROUND THEM, THE DOUGLAS DUPLEXES HAVE SURVIVED THE MODERNIZATION OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD REMARKABLY UNSCATHED. ABOVE AND OPPOSITE PAGE, THE HEARTH IN THIS UNIT FEATURES A MEDIEVAL CASTLE AND SMALLER BOTANICAL TILES



they could choose a fireplace kit from a wide variety available in the Batchelder catalogs.

PLAYING FAVORITES

Of the four different patterns selected for the Douglas duplexes featuring Ernest Batchelder's beloved Dutch scenes, castles, peacocks and trees, Kingsbury says, "Typically, this would have been the choice of the contractor. He would choose the motif that appealed to him, or what Mr. Haines suggested. Mr. Haines represented other tile companies in Wichita, but Batch-

elder was his favorite. He probably talked a lot of contractors into using these tiles."

Robert Winter, architectural historian, *AB* advisor and author of the seminal book, *Batchelder Tilemaker*, agrees, "Batchelder was no businessman, but luckily he had good promoters. He was featured in showrooms in cities across the country."

For several decades, the Hatfields lived comfortably in the duplexes until they left, one by one. In 1964, with the last Hatfield son, Toler, moving to Cali-



ABOVE, THE POPULAR PEACOCK MOTIF. BELOW: "THE FIREPLACE IS A PERMANENT BUILT-IN FEATURE OF A ROOM SAID ERNEST BATCHELDER. "RUGS, WALL COVERINGS, DRAPERIES AND FURNITURE MAY BE CHANGED BUT THE FIREPLACE REMAINS A SOURCE OF PERENNIAL SATISFACTION."





BELOW LEFT, WHITE WOODWORK AND CHEERFUL YELLOW WALLS MAKE A HALLWAY OFF THE KITCHEN SEEM MORE OPEN. BELOW BOTTOM, VIEW FROM THE KITCHEN THROUGH THE BREAKFAST AREA AND DINING ROOM TO THE SITTING AREA SHOWS THE ORIGINAL HARDWOOD FLOORS. BELOW TOP, THE ORIGINAL TILE AND TUB ARE FOUND IN THIS BATHROOM.



fornia, the duplexes became rental properties. Conveniently located along a bus route, the duplexes were occupied by sales clerks, retail store managers, oil field riggers and clerical workers over the years. Amazingly, the units—and the fireplaces—remain in excellent condition. Turnover has been very low; it seems the residents truly appreciate the rarity of such a property on the rental market and have taken good care of their sur-

roundings. Today, they are home to four women who've become good friends, sharing many an evening in each other's company on the pleasant front porches or in front of the fireplaces.

Aside from its warmth and charm, one of the great appeals of Batchelder tile was its affordability. Some of the 4" x 4" decorative tiles were sold in the twenties for ninety cents each. With a fireplace and decorative surround, builders

were able to add beauty and livability to very modest homes without adding greatly to the expense.

Says Winter, "Batchelder tile was not expensive; that made having a fireplace affordable. I think it's wonderful that people of modest means could have a beautiful fireplace. The hearth is the heart of a home." ❧