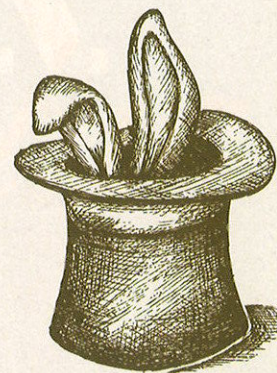


The MYSTERY House

STORY Claudia Moomey
PHOTOGRAPHY Sarah Lemke
DESIGN Nickie Robinson



Omaha Magical Society Restores 1913 Home

There's a historical gem sitting at 3316 Center St., within the Field Club Historic District in Omaha. Built in 1913, the craftsman-style bungalow features a brick exterior with Tudor-inspired elements. Designed for its original inhabitants, magician David P. Abbott and wife, Fannie, the house was built with specific intention. "David Abbott didn't build this as a home," Dave Arch, executive director of the Omaha Magical Society, said. "He built it as a theater."

The front of the house features a large, open patio space framed by thick brick columns. One may also notice a wooden pole at the side of the residence with a birdhouse on top, which was the house's original hitching post.

Performance was at the forefront of the building, as Abbott was a well-known magician in the late 1800s-1900s. Inside, the

foyer is a spacious, square room lined with windows. A set of glass-paned double doors provides a sneak peek into the large, open space that served as Abbott's performance space. The fireplace on the western wall heats a giant, welcoming room where guests could mingle and be enthralled by Abbott's magical acts. >



"Abbott would stand in front of this fireplace to perform his magic. I think he wanted there to be an entrance. The showman in him designed it with a lot of theatrics behind it."

-Dave Arch

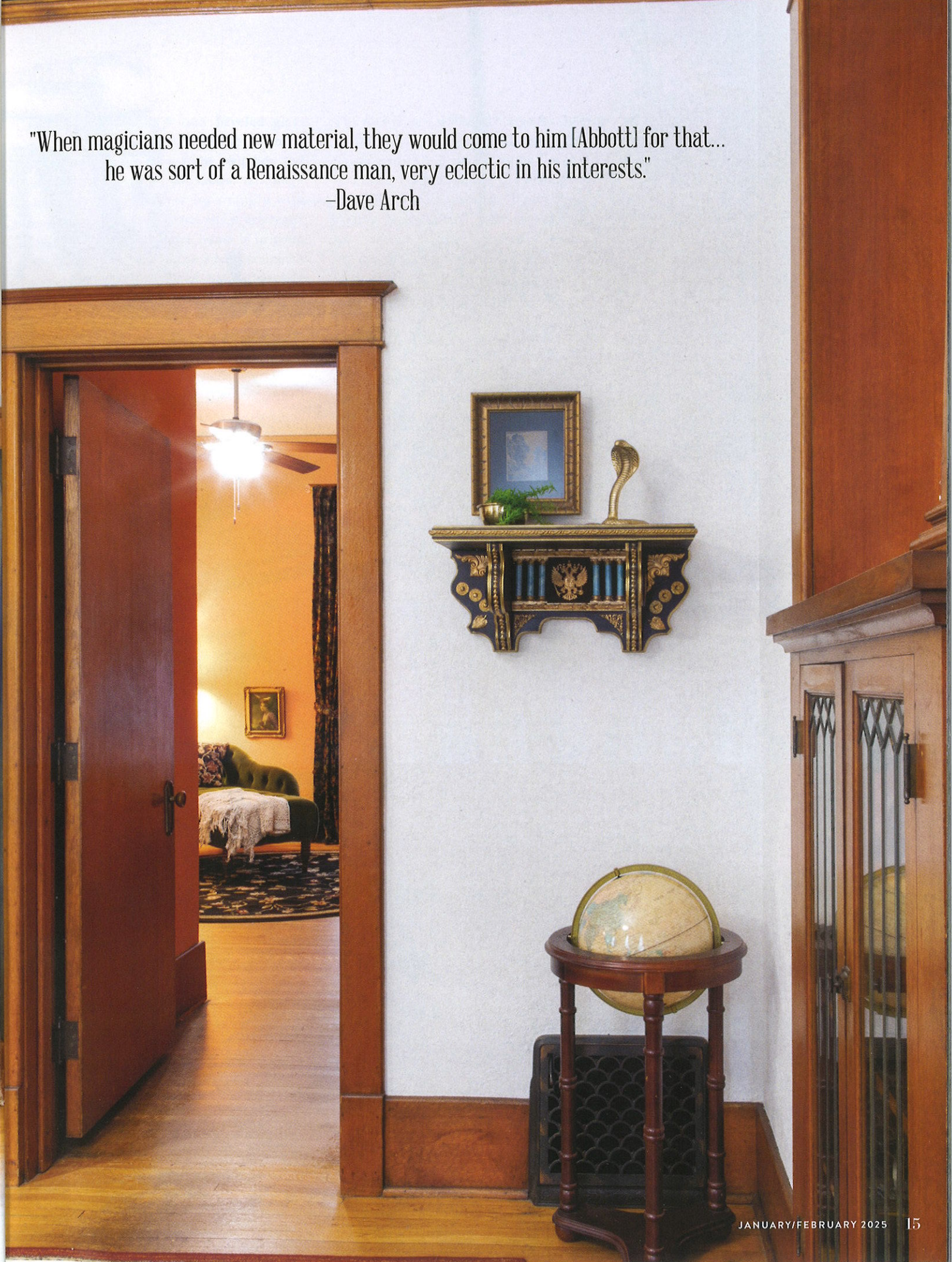
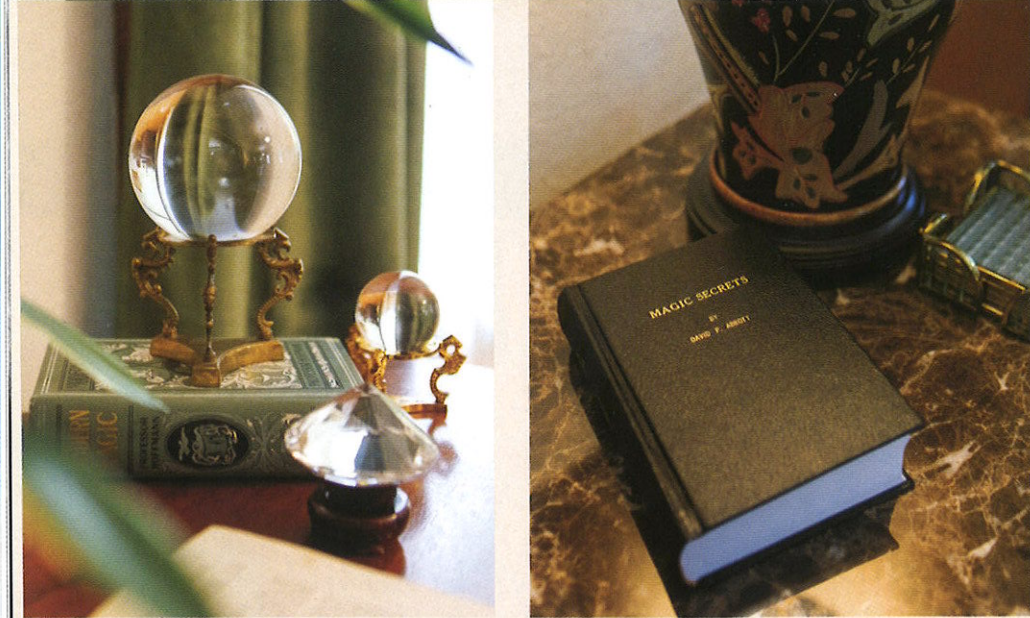
FEATURE

◀ The Omaha Magical Society, a nonprofit organization, now owns the building, which was donated to them in September 2024 by Teller of Penn & Teller. This partnership with the famous magician is intended to bring the house back to life as a place where magicians and magic enthusiasts can gather and perform.

“Abbott would stand in front of this fireplace to perform his magic,” Arch said. “I think he wanted there to be an entrance. The showman in him designed it with a lot of theatrics behind it.” ▶

“When magicians needed new material, they would come to him [Abbott] for that... he was sort of a Renaissance man, very eclectic in his interests.”

—Dave Arch





FEATURE

◀ Original woodwork and beveled glass paneling stand strong throughout the house, as well as push-button light switches and original hardware on the doors. Although the house was inhabited by a family with four children for 58 years, there are many original features, and the home is in good condition. The second floor has retained a gas lamp that functioned before electricity was in homes. The decor and furniture on display include donated pieces, as well as some staged by designers. The clay tile walls that surround the unfinished basement have kept it intact for over 100 years. "That was a common material in the 1900s," Bob Perrin, a local independent architect, said. "It's made out of clay and it's all extruded, and it's very structurally strong."

The rooms were unusually large for the time period, "about one and a half times what you would expect a bedroom to be," according to Perrin. "You'll notice the ceilings are a lot higher," he mentioned. "It gives you that feeling of grandeur." The closets in each room were also large for the time—a practical measure, according to Perrin. "Closets were big at this time because the clothes were just aired out," he explained. "They wore big dresses and things that were thick and heavy, so they would hang them up to air out rather than washing them." Plenty of space was essential to give worn garments room to breathe. Extra storage space can also be found within. "It wouldn't be uncommon to find a secret door like this in a closet," Perrin said, opening a small panel on the wall. "They stored things back there, like Christmas decorations and stuff." ▶





INTERIORSBYJOAN.COM

402.330.0685 | LINDEN MARKET, 13130 W. DODGE RD., OMAHA, NE 68154
402.488.2600 | 4131 PIONEER WOODS DRIVE, LINCOLN, NE 68506



— Thank You —
Omaha For Voting
ZOOM DRAIN #1

FAST FOCUSED FIXED | zoomdrain.com | 402.979.ZOOM

FEATURE

◀ When famous magicians—such as Harry Houdini, Harry Kellar, and Howard Thurston—came through Omaha on the vaudeville circuit, they would take advantage of Abbott's hospitality and extra space by staying the night. "All the big headliners, or vaudevillians, at the time would always want to come and see what he was working on, because he was an inventor," Arch said. "He invented the floating ball—that trick that's now a classic where it floats and you pass a ring over it." This particular trick was a favorite of Abbott's, and if scrutinized closely, the walls and some decorative columns in the main room reveal small eyelets from which threads would hang to assist in this illusion. "When magicians needed new material, they would come to him for that...he was sort of a Renaissance man, very eclectic in his interests."

The spirit of hospitality will continue in the house in the future. The Omaha Magical Society plans to use the building as a small museum. "It won't be a big, public museum," Arch explained. "Someone is going to live here and we will entertain, that's all...It will be a membership-based thing. Maybe three times a year we'll have a dinner and a show from someone coming through, and then they can use it for smaller private events."

"I think there will be no trouble getting this to be a museum in this neighborhood," Perrin said, confident as a long-time resident in the area. "I think people will be glad, they'll be proud of it...this is an absolute gem."

The organization plans to open the house in summer 2026, perpetually celebrating Abbott and his magical inventiveness. **OMAHAHOME**

For more information, visit theomahamagicalsociety.org.

